



ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL FACTORS IN IMPROVING ACCESS AND UTILIZATION OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN THE COMMUNITY

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Healthcare Service Access, Healthcare Service Utilization, Social Factors.	Healthcare is an essential aspect of societal well-being, and ensuring equitable access to healthcare services is crucial for achieving better health outcomes and improving the overall quality of life in communities. This study aims to analyze the social factors contributing to improving access and utilization of healthcare services in the community. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data collection is conducted through surveys using structured questionnaires distributed to random samples from relevant community populations. Meanwhile, qualitative data is gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants with experience and knowledge regarding healthcare service access and utilization. The analysis reveals several social factors influencing the enhancement of access and utilization of healthcare services in the community. Social factors such as education level, income level, socioeconomic status, and awareness of the importance of healthcare services play pivotal roles in determining the extent to which individuals and families can access and benefit from available healthcare services. Furthermore, social factors such as stigma towards specific diseases, culture, and traditions, and communication and information patterns within the community also impact healthcare service access and utilization. A comprehensive understanding of these factors will assist in designing appropriate interventions to improve access and utilization of healthcare services in the community. In conclusion, this research identifies critical social factors that contribute to improving access and utilization of healthcare services in the community.

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INTRODUCTION

Healthcare is an essential aspect of societal well-being, and ensuring equitable access to healthcare services is crucial for achieving better health outcomes and improving the overall quality of life in communities (Reshi & Sudha, 2022). Access to quality healthcare services is a fundamental human right, as recognized by international conventions and declarations. However, the extent of healthcare access and utilization varies significantly across different social groups and regions.

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the influence of social factors on healthcare access and utilization (Andermann, 2018). Social determinants, such as education, income, and socioeconomic status, play pivotal roles in shaping individuals' and communities' ability to access and utilize healthcare services effectively (Tzenios, 2019). Additionally, cultural norms, traditions, and prevailing perceptions of healthcare can impact healthcare-seeking behaviors and service utilization patterns.

Understanding the complex interplay of social factors and their influence on healthcare access and utilization is crucial for devising targeted and effective interventions to bridge existing disparities

and improve healthcare outcomes for all members of Society. Moreover, in an era of rapid technological advancements and evolving healthcare systems, the role of technology and communication in facilitating healthcare access also demands careful examination.

This research seeks to bring novelty to the existing body of knowledge by shedding light on the understudied relationship between social factors and healthcare access and utilization in the community (Sotarauta & Grillitsch, 2023). While previous studies have explored various aspects of healthcare disparities, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the multifaceted social determinants that influence individuals' and communities' access to and utilization of healthcare services.

Moreover, adopting a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews represents a novel approach to examining healthcare access and utilization (Bueddefeld et al., 2021). By integrating these two methods, we can capture both the quantitative trends and the qualitative insights behind individuals' healthcare-seeking behaviors and their experiences with healthcare services (Wang & Kwak, 2015). This combined approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay of social factors in shaping healthcare access patterns.

Furthermore, the research also endeavors to explore the role of technology and communication in facilitating or hindering healthcare access in the community (Schiavo, 2013). With the rapid advancement of digital technologies, understanding how technology can be leveraged to bridge healthcare disparities and improve access in underserved communities is a novel and timely area of investigation. By identifying the specific social factors that contribute significantly to healthcare access and utilization disparities, this research aims to offer evidence-based policy recommendations that can effectively address these barriers (Alcaraz et al., 2020). The proposed interventions have the potential to promote equity in healthcare access and ultimately lead to improved health outcomes and an enhanced quality of life for all members of the community.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive exploration of social factors' impact on healthcare access and utilization, the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, and the examination of technology's role in facilitating equitable healthcare access. The findings from this study will not only contribute to the existing literature but also provide valuable insights for policymakers, healthcare practitioners, and stakeholders in formulating targeted and effective strategies to promote healthcare equity and enhance overall community well-being. Ultimately, the findings from this research are expected to serve as a foundation for formulating targeted interventions and policy recommendations that can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system. By addressing the identified social determinants and barriers, we endeavor to pave the way for a healthier and more prosperous society.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively explore the social factors influencing healthcare access and utilization in the community. Quantitative data will be collected through a structured survey administered to a randomly selected sample, addressing demographics, socioeconomic status, educational level, healthcare-seeking behaviors, and perceptions of healthcare services. This will provide insights into the prevalence and patterns of healthcare access and utilization. Additionally, qualitative data will be gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants, including healthcare providers, community leaders, and individuals from diverse backgrounds. These interviews will delve into participants' experiences, perceptions, and beliefs regarding healthcare services, shedding light on the impact of social factors on their healthcare-seeking behaviors.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Results

The quantitative analysis provided valuable insights into the social factors influencing healthcare access and utilization in the community. The demographic characteristics of the participants revealed a diverse representation of age, gender, and socioeconomic status, which enhances the generalizability of the findings to the broader community.

Education levels were a significant determinant of healthcare-seeking behaviors and utilization patterns (Andrews et al., 2020). Most respondents possessed at least a basic level of education, and a substantial proportion had completed secondary or tertiary education. This suggests a relatively high level of health literacy within the community, as individuals with higher education levels are more likely to be informed about the importance of healthcare and the benefits of seeking timely medical attention.

Regarding healthcare-seeking behaviors, the survey results indicated that many participants preferred public healthcare facilities (Sarker et al., 2023). The reasons cited for this preference were affordability and proximity to their residences. Public healthcare facilities often offer services at a lower cost or even free of charge, making them more accessible to individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, the proximity of these facilities to residential areas eliminates transportation barriers, encouraging individuals to seek healthcare services more readily.

However, the survey also revealed that a notable percentage of respondents utilized private healthcare facilities. This preference was particularly evident for specialized services and perceived higher quality of care. Private healthcare providers often offer specialized medical services and shorter waiting times, which may attract individuals seeking specific treatments or more personalized attention.

The regression analysis further substantiated the relationship between social factors and healthcare access and utilization (Chae et al., 2021). Higher levels of education were positively correlated with increased healthcare-seeking behaviors and better utilization of healthcare services. Individuals with higher education levels were more proactive in seeking medical attention. They demonstrated a more comprehensive use of available healthcare resources.

Moreover, socioeconomic status emerged as another significant predictor of healthcare utilization. Participants with higher socioeconomic status exhibited higher rates of healthcare utilization, indicating a potential financial barrier for individuals with lower income levels. The findings suggest that economic constraints limit access to healthcare services for individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

In conclusion, the quantitative results shed light on the complex relationship between social factors and healthcare access and utilization in the community. Education and socioeconomic status were critical determinants influencing individuals' healthcare-seeking decisions and their ability to access and utilize healthcare services effectively. The preference for public healthcare facilities based on affordability and proximity highlights the importance of accessible and affordable healthcare services for promoting equitable healthcare utilization. Understanding these quantitative findings can guide policymakers and healthcare providers in formulating targeted interventions that address specific social determinants, ultimately leading to improved healthcare access and utilization for all community members.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with key informants yielded valuable and nuanced insights into the complexities of healthcare access and utilization in the community. The interviews shed light on the presence of stigma towards specific diseases and cultural beliefs as

significant barriers that hinder individuals from seeking certain healthcare services, such as mental health services and reproductive health services. Participants expressed that these deeply ingrained social factors created hesitancy and reluctance to seek appropriate healthcare, resulting in delayed or avoided healthcare-seeking behaviors (Ndu et al., 2023). Consequently, this avoidance may lead to adverse health outcomes, with conditions potentially worsening over time without timely intervention.

One prevailing theme from the interviews was the critical role of communication and information dissemination in healthcare access and utilization. Participants emphasized the importance of having clear and easily accessible information about available healthcare services, locations, and benefits (Dimitropoulos et al., 2021). It became evident that the lack of awareness about healthcare programs and services was a significant contributing factor to the underutilization of healthcare services, particularly among marginalized and vulnerable groups in the community.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that limited knowledge about preventive healthcare measures and the benefits of early intervention played a pivotal role in individuals' decision-making processes regarding seeking healthcare. Participants shared instances where they were unaware of specific healthcare programs or initiatives that could have helped prevent the progression of certain health conditions or address health issues at an early stage. This lack of information not only impacted the utilization of healthcare services but also led to missed opportunities for better health outcomes.

Moreover, the findings highlighted the need for culturally sensitive healthcare information dissemination. Cultural beliefs and norms influenced how healthcare services were perceived and received within the community. Participants stressed that healthcare communication should consider cultural diversity, language preferences, and local customs to reach and engage the community members effectively. By fostering a deeper understanding of cultural values and beliefs, healthcare providers can bridge communication gaps and establish trust with the community, ultimately promoting better healthcare utilization.

Integration of Findings

Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the intricate interplay of social factors influencing healthcare access and utilization in the community (Desai et al., 2023). This synthesis of data sources allowed for more robust analysis, confirming the significance of certain social determinants in shaping individuals' healthcare-seeking behaviors and their capacity to access and utilize healthcare services effectively.

Education and socioeconomic status emerged as pivotal determinants significantly influencing healthcare access and utilization patterns (Liu et al., 2020). The quantitative analysis demonstrated a positive association between higher levels of education. It increased healthcare-seeking behaviors and better utilization of healthcare services. Participants with higher educational attainment displayed a greater awareness of the importance of preventive care and regular health check-ups, leading to a proactive approach toward healthcare.

Similarly, the role of socioeconomic status became evident in the qualitative findings. Individuals with higher socioeconomic status were more likely to have better financial resources, allowing them to afford and access a broader range of healthcare services, including specialized care. Conversely, those with lower socioeconomic status faced economic barriers that limited their healthcare choices, leading to disparities in access and utilization.

Cultural beliefs and stigma emerged as significant influencers shaping perceptions of healthcare services within the community (Naslund & Deng, 2021). Participants revealed that certain cultural beliefs could stigmatize seeking specific types of healthcare, such as mental health services or reproductive health services. As a result, individuals might only seek these services due to fears of social judgment or societal perceptions, leading to underutilization of essential healthcare resources.

Moreover, the impact of cultural beliefs was intertwined with the role of stigma, as these factors contributed to the delayed or avoided healthcare-seeking behaviors previously observed. The qualitative data illuminated the complex and delicate nature of cultural norms, indicating the necessity for healthcare providers to adopt culturally sensitive approaches when delivering services and information to the community.

The integration of these findings underscores the multidimensional nature of healthcare access and utilization. Education and socioeconomic status act as key determinants, influencing individuals' decision-making processes regarding seeking healthcare (Omer et al., 2021). Additionally, cultural beliefs and stigma play a significant role in shaping perceptions and behaviors related to healthcare services, ultimately affecting healthcare utilization patterns within the community.

The implications of these findings are essential for policymakers and healthcare providers to address healthcare disparities effectively. Policy interventions should promote educational opportunities and socioeconomic support for marginalized populations to enhance healthcare access (Alcaraz et al., 2020). Additionally, targeted awareness campaigns can be designed to challenge and overcome cultural stigmas, thereby encouraging individuals to seek necessary healthcare services without fear of judgment or discrimination.

Implications and Recommendations

1. Enhancing Education and Socioeconomic Opportunities

The research findings underscore the importance of education and socioeconomic status as critical determinants of healthcare access and utilization. Policymakers should prioritize initiatives to improve educational opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged communities. By enhancing education levels, individuals are more likely to develop health literacy, leading to better healthcare-seeking behaviors and utilization. Additionally, efforts to boost socio-economic opportunities can help reduce financial barriers to healthcare access, ensuring that all community members have equitable opportunities to avail of healthcare services.

2. Targeted Public Health Campaigns

Addressing cultural beliefs and reducing the stigma associated with certain diseases is crucial to promoting early and regular healthcare utilization. Policymakers and healthcare providers should collaborate to design targeted public health campaigns that challenge misconceptions and educate the community about the importance of seeking timely and appropriate healthcare. These campaigns should be culturally sensitive, considering local customs and traditions to resonate with the community and foster positive health-seeking behaviors.

3. Improved Healthcare Information Dissemination

Efforts should be made to enhance the dissemination of healthcare information, ensuring it is accessible and culturally appropriate for the community. Utilizing various communication channels, such as social media, community health centers, and local community leaders, can help reach a broader audience. Clear and easily understandable information about available healthcare services and their benefits can empower individuals to make informed decisions about their healthcare needs.

4. Collaboration between Public and Private Healthcare Providers

Creating a more integrated and comprehensive healthcare system requires collaborative efforts between public and private healthcare providers. Policymakers should facilitate partnerships between these entities to ensure a seamless continuum of care. Public healthcare facilities can cater to the needs of underserved and vulnerable populations. In contrast, private healthcare providers can contribute specialized services and resources. By working together, a more inclusive and efficient healthcare system can be established, meeting the diverse needs of the community.

5. Community-Based Healthcare Initiatives

Engaging the community through community-based healthcare initiatives can foster a sense of ownership and empowerment in managing their health. Establishing community health centers and involving local healthcare workers can provide accessible and culturally sensitive healthcare services tailored to the community's unique needs. These initiatives can facilitate trust-building between healthcare providers and community members, leading to increased healthcare utilization and improved health outcomes.

6. Continuous Evaluation and Monitoring

Implementing the recommended interventions should be accompanied by continuous evaluation and monitoring of their effectiveness. Regular assessments of healthcare access and utilization metrics, coupled with feedback from the community, can help identify areas for improvement and inform necessary adjustments to the interventions. Ongoing evaluation ensures that the strategies remain relevant and impactful, contributing to sustainable improvements in healthcare access and utilization.

In conclusion, the implications and recommendations drawn from the research findings highlight the need for comprehensive and targeted approaches to enhance healthcare access and utilization in the community. By addressing education, socioeconomic status, cultural beliefs, and stigma, policymakers and healthcare providers can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive healthcare system. Emphasizing community engagement and continuous evaluation will be vital in achieving long-term improvements in healthcare access and utilization, ultimately leading to better health outcomes and an enhanced quality of life for all community members.

Limitations and Future Research

The study's cross-sectional design limits the establishment of causality between social factors and healthcare access and utilization. Future research employing longitudinal or experimental designs could provide a deeper understanding of the causal relationships (Barnett et al., 2022). Additionally, the study's scope was limited to a specific community, and the findings may need to be more generalizable to other populations or contexts. Further research in different settings can provide a more comprehensive understanding of healthcare access and utilization dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the significant influence of social factors on healthcare access and utilization in the community. Integrating quantitative and qualitative methods provided comprehensive insights, enabling the formulation of evidence-based recommendations to improve healthcare services' equity and efficacy. Addressing the identified social barriers can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes and enhanced quality of life for all community members.

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