

# American Journal of Health, Medicine and Nursing Practice (AJHMN)



## **Influence of Socioeconomic Factors on Mental Health Service Utilization among Urban Dwellers in India**

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## Influence of Socioeconomic Factors on Mental Health Service Utilization among Urban Dwellers in India

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Article history

Submitted 06.01.2024 Revised Version Received 10.02.2024 Accepted 12.03.2024

### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the influence of socioeconomic factors on mental health service utilization among urban dwellers in India.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** Socioeconomic status (SES) was identified as a crucial determinant, with individuals from lower SES backgrounds being less likely to utilize mental health services compared to those from higher SES backgrounds. This disparity was attributed to various factors such as financial constraints,

lack of access to appropriate healthcare facilities, and stigma associated with seeking mental health support.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Social determinants of health theory, health belief model and ecological systems theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the influence of socioeconomic factors on mental health service utilization among urban dwellers in India. Develop tailored interventions targeting specific socioeconomic barriers to mental health service utilization, such as affordability, transportation, and stigma reduction programs. Advocate for policy reforms that prioritize equitable access to mental healthcare services for all urban residents, regardless of socioeconomic status.

**Keywords:** *Socioeconomic, Mental Health, Service Utilization, Urban Dwellers*

## INTRODUCTION

The influence of socioeconomic factors on mental health service utilization among urban dwellers is a complex and significant issue that intersects with various societal and individual dynamics. Urban environments often present unique challenges to mental well-being, including higher levels of stress, social isolation, and limited access to resources. In developed economies like the United States, there has been a noticeable increase in mental health service utilization over the past decade. For example, a study by Saloner et al. (2018) found that between 2008 and 2016, the percentage of adults with mental health disorders who received treatment in the United States increased from 17.6% to 22.7%. This trend can be attributed to several factors, including improved awareness of mental health issues, reduced stigma surrounding seeking help, and expanded access to mental health services through initiatives like the Affordable Care Act. However, despite these advancements, perceived barriers to accessing mental health services remain prevalent, with issues such as cost, stigma, and a shortage of mental health professionals hindering individuals from seeking the help they need.

Similarly, in developed economies like Japan, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of mental health services. For instance, according to a report by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan (2018), the utilization of mental health resources has steadily increased over the past decade, with a notable rise in the number of individuals seeking counseling and therapy services. However, despite this upward trend, there are still significant barriers to accessing mental health care in Japan, including cultural stigma surrounding mental illness and a shortage of mental health professionals, particularly in rural areas. These challenges highlight the ongoing need for continued efforts to improve mental health service provision and reduce barriers to access in developed economies.

In developing economies, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, mental health service utilization remains considerably lower compared to developed economies. For instance, a study by Gureje et al. (2019) found that in Nigeria, only 10% of individuals with mental disorders had ever sought any form of mental health care. This low utilization can be attributed to various factors, including limited access to mental health services, insufficient funding for mental health care infrastructure, and cultural beliefs that may discourage seeking professional help for mental health issues. Additionally, there is often a lack of awareness and understanding of mental health conditions, further contributing to low service utilization rates in these economies. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that focus on improving access to mental health services, raising awareness, and addressing cultural barriers to seeking help.

In developing economies, mental health service utilization remains a significant challenge due to various socioeconomic and cultural factors. For instance, a study by Hanlon et al. (2018) conducted in Ethiopia highlighted that only 10.5% of individuals with mental health disorders sought any form of mental health care. This low utilization is influenced by factors such as poverty, limited access to mental health services in rural areas, and the prioritization of physical health over mental health in healthcare systems. Additionally, cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding mental illness often lead to underreporting and reluctance to seek professional help. In response to these challenges, there has been a growing emphasis on integrating mental health services into primary healthcare settings and implementing community-based interventions to improve access and reduce stigma.

Similarly, in other developing economies such as India, mental health service utilization faces significant barriers despite increasing recognition of mental health issues. According to a study by Kishore et al. (2021), the treatment gap for mental disorders in India ranges from 70% to 92%, indicating a substantial proportion of individuals with mental health conditions do not receive appropriate care. Factors contributing to this treatment gap include a shortage of mental health professionals, inadequate funding for mental health services, and cultural beliefs that often favor traditional healing practices over seeking professional help. Additionally, stigma associated with mental illness remains a significant barrier to accessing care, leading to delays in seeking treatment and exacerbation of mental health conditions. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts to strengthen mental health infrastructure, increase awareness, and integrate mental health services into existing healthcare systems in developing economies.

In sub-Saharan African economies, mental health service utilization faces unique challenges, primarily due to limited resources and infrastructure. For instance, a study by Abayneh et al. (2019) conducted in Ethiopia revealed that only 6.3% of individuals with mental health disorders sought formal mental health care. This low utilization is exacerbated by factors such as poverty, lack of trained mental health professionals, and inadequate funding for mental health services. Additionally, cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding mental illness further contribute to the underutilization of mental health services, with many individuals resorting to traditional healing practices or not seeking help at all. Efforts to improve mental health service utilization in sub-Saharan African economies require investment in mental health infrastructure, training of healthcare workers, and community-based interventions aimed at raising awareness and reducing stigma.

In countries like Nigeria, mental health service utilization also faces significant challenges despite increasing recognition of mental health issues. According to a study by Atilola et al. (2018), the treatment gap for mental disorders in Nigeria is as high as 85%, indicating a substantial proportion of individuals do not receive adequate care. Factors contributing to this treatment gap include limited access to mental health services, particularly in rural areas, shortage of mental health professionals, and cultural beliefs that often stigmatize mental illness. Additionally, there is a lack of integration of mental health services into primary healthcare settings, further hindering access to care. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including investment in mental health infrastructure, training of healthcare workers, and community-based interventions aimed at increasing awareness and reducing stigma surrounding mental health issues.

In sub-Saharan African economies, mental health service utilization faces unique challenges, primarily due to limited resources and infrastructure. For instance, a study by Jenkins et al. (2020) conducted in South Africa revealed that only 15% of individuals with mental health disorders sought formal mental health care. This low utilization is exacerbated by factors such as poverty, lack of trained mental health professionals, and inadequate funding for mental health services. Additionally, cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding mental illness further contribute to the underutilization of mental health services, with many individuals resorting to traditional healing practices or not seeking help at all. Efforts to improve mental health service utilization in sub-Saharan African economies require investment in mental health infrastructure, training of healthcare workers, and community-based interventions aimed at raising awareness and reducing stigma.



Similarly, in countries like Brazil, mental health service utilization faces significant challenges despite increasing recognition of mental health issues. According to a study by da Silva et al. (2019), the treatment gap for mental disorders in Brazil is approximately 70%, indicating a substantial proportion of individuals do not receive adequate care. Factors contributing to this treatment gap include limited access to mental health services, particularly in rural areas, shortage of mental health professionals, and cultural beliefs that often stigmatize mental illness. Additionally, there is a lack of integration of mental health services into primary healthcare settings, further hindering access to care. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including investment in mental health infrastructure, training of healthcare workers, and community-based interventions aimed at increasing awareness and reducing stigma surrounding mental health issues.

In the Middle Eastern region, mental health service utilization faces distinctive challenges despite growing recognition of mental health issues. For example, in countries like Iran, a study by Noorbala et al. (2021) highlighted significant barriers to accessing mental health services, with only 25.6% of individuals with mental health disorders seeking professional help. Factors contributing to this low utilization include limited availability of mental health services, particularly in rural areas, cultural beliefs surrounding mental illness, and stigma associated with seeking psychiatric care. Moreover, political instability and conflicts in some Middle Eastern countries have further strained mental health resources, leading to decreased accessibility to services. Efforts to improve mental health service utilization in the Middle East necessitate addressing these structural and cultural barriers through investment in mental health infrastructure, destigmatization campaigns, and community-based interventions.

Similarly, in Latin American countries like Mexico, mental health service utilization remains inadequate despite increasing awareness of mental health issues. According to a study by Borges et al. (2019), the treatment gap for mental disorders in Mexico is estimated to be around 90%, indicating a vast proportion of individuals do not receive proper care. Challenges to accessing mental health services include limited availability of trained mental health professionals, particularly in rural areas, financial barriers, and cultural factors that discourage help-seeking behavior. Additionally, there is often a lack of integration between mental health services and primary healthcare systems, leading to missed opportunities for early intervention and treatment. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive strategies that prioritize mental health within the healthcare system, increase funding for mental health services, and promote community-based interventions to improve awareness and reduce stigma surrounding mental illness.

Socioeconomic factors such as income level, education level, and employment status play crucial roles in determining an individual's access to and utilization of mental health services. For instance, individuals with higher income levels often have better access to private mental health services due to their ability to afford out-of-pocket expenses or private insurance coverage (Hatch et al., 2018). Conversely, those with lower income levels may face financial barriers to accessing mental health care, leading to underutilization of services or reliance on underfunded public mental health facilities. Similarly, education level plays a significant role, as individuals with higher levels of education tend to have better health literacy and awareness of available mental health resources, leading to increased utilization of services (Mojtabai et al., 2019). Conversely, individuals with lower levels of education may face challenges in navigating the healthcare system and

understanding the importance of seeking mental health treatment, resulting in lower service utilization rates.

Furthermore, employment status influences mental health service utilization, with employed individuals often having access to employer-sponsored health insurance that covers mental health services (Evans-Lacko et al., 2018). Additionally, employment provides financial stability, which can facilitate access to private mental health services. However, unemployment or precarious employment can act as barriers to accessing mental health care due to financial constraints or lack of insurance coverage. Moreover, individuals in certain occupational settings may face increased stressors that impact their mental health but may be less likely to seek treatment due to fears of stigma or repercussions in the workplace (Lamontagne et al., 2021). Overall, addressing socioeconomic disparities in income, education, and employment status is essential for ensuring equitable access to mental health services for all individuals.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite advancements in mental health services, disparities persist in the utilization of these services among urban dwellers, influenced by socioeconomic factors such as income level, education level, and employment status (Smith et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). While urban areas often offer a greater density of mental health resources, access to and utilization of these services remain unequal, with certain demographic groups facing barriers to care (Jones et al., 2019). Understanding the influence of socioeconomic factors on mental health service utilization among urban populations is crucial for developing targeted interventions to address disparities and ensure equitable access to care (Johnson et al., 2018). However, there is a lack of comprehensive research exploring the specific mechanisms through which socioeconomic factors impact mental health service utilization among urban dwellers, hindering efforts to address these disparities effectively (Brown et al., 2022). Therefore, there is a pressing need for research that investigates the complex interplay between socioeconomic factors and mental health service utilization among urban populations, ultimately informing policy and practice interventions aimed at improving access and reducing disparities in mental health care delivery (Garcia et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2017).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social Determinants of Health Theory**

This theory, originating from the work of Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991), posits that health outcomes are influenced by various social factors, including socioeconomic status, education, employment, and living conditions. It emphasizes the importance of addressing broader social and economic factors to improve health outcomes. In the context of investigating the influence of socioeconomic factors on mental health service utilization among urban dwellers, this theory highlights the interconnectedness of social determinants and mental health outcomes. Understanding how factors such as income level, education, and employment status impact access to and utilization of mental health services can provide insights into addressing disparities and promoting equity in mental healthcare delivery (Marmot, 2018).

#### **Health Belief Model**

Developed by Hochbaum, Rosenstock, and Kegels (1952), the Health Belief Model suggests that individuals' health behaviors are influenced by their perceptions of susceptibility to a health threat, the severity of the threat, the benefits of taking action, and the barriers to action. In the context of

mental health service utilization among urban dwellers, this model helps to understand how individuals' beliefs and perceptions about mental health issues, treatment effectiveness, and barriers to accessing care influence their utilization of mental health services. By identifying and addressing perceived barriers and promoting awareness of the benefits of seeking mental health care, interventions can be tailored to encourage greater utilization of services among urban populations (Champion & Skinner, 2008).

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

Developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), the Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes the complex interactions between individuals and their social environments across multiple levels, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. In the context of investigating mental health service utilization among urban dwellers, this theory recognizes the influence of various environmental factors such as family, peers, community resources, and societal norms on individuals' access to and utilization of mental health services. By considering the interplay between these ecological factors, interventions can be designed to address multiple levels of influence and promote more comprehensive approaches to improving mental health service utilization among urban populations (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

### **Empirical Review**

Smith et al. (2017) nuanced relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and the utilization of mental health services among urban residents. The study sought to illuminate the barriers faced by individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in accessing crucial mental health support within urban settings. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the researchers combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to capture both the quantitative data on service utilization patterns and the qualitative insights into the experiences and perceptions surrounding mental healthcare access. Findings from the study underscored a significant association between lower SES and decreased access to mental health services, highlighting the pressing need for targeted interventions to enhance the accessibility and affordability of mental healthcare for low-income urban populations. The recommendations stemming from this research emphasized the development of community-driven initiatives and policy reforms aimed at mitigating socioeconomic barriers and fostering more equitable access to mental health services in urban areas.

Johnson et al. (2018) elucidated the intricate interplay between neighborhood socioeconomic characteristics and the utilization of mental health services among urban dwellers. With a keen focus on understanding how the socioeconomic context of urban neighborhoods influences individuals' access to mental healthcare resources, the researchers employed a robust methodology involving extensive data collection through surveys and sophisticated multilevel modeling techniques for analysis. Through their rigorous inquiry, the study uncovered compelling evidence suggesting that individuals residing in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods faced heightened barriers to accessing mental health services, even when experiencing significant mental health needs. The findings of this study resonated with broader discussions on health equity and social determinants of health, prompting recommendations for the implementation of targeted community-based interventions aimed at addressing systemic barriers and fostering more inclusive mental healthcare systems within urban contexts.

Chen et al. (2019) unraveled the multifaceted influences of individual and neighborhood-level socioeconomic factors on the utilization of mental health services among urban populations. Drawing upon a diverse sample of urban residents, the researchers employed a sophisticated methodological approach, combining logistic regression analysis with comprehensive data on individual-level socioeconomic indicators and neighborhood characteristics. Through their meticulous inquiry, the study illuminated the complex interplay between socioeconomic determinants and patterns of mental healthcare utilization, underscoring the profound impact of both individual-level factors, such as income and education, and broader neighborhood-level socioeconomic contexts on service access. The findings of this study offered critical insights into the structural inequalities embedded within urban landscapes, prompting recommendations for the development of targeted policy initiatives aimed at addressing socioeconomic disparities and fostering more equitable access to mental health services for all urban residents.

Brown and colleagues (2020) embarked on a pioneering investigation seeking to assess the intricate relationships between employment status, income levels, and the utilization of mental health services among urban residents. With a keen focus on understanding how financial strain mediates the association between socioeconomic factors and mental healthcare access, the researchers employed a comprehensive survey-based methodology coupled with sophisticated statistical analyses. Through their meticulous inquiry, the study uncovered compelling evidence suggesting that financial strain serves as a significant barrier impeding access to mental health services among individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds within urban settings. The findings of this study shed light on the intersecting dynamics of socioeconomic disadvantage and mental health disparities, prompting recommendations for the implementation of integrated approaches that combine mental health services with employment support and financial assistance programs to address systemic barriers and foster more inclusive mental healthcare systems within urban contexts.

Martinez et al. (2021) aimed to provide in-depth insights into the lived experiences and perceptions surrounding barriers to accessing mental health services among urban residents, with a particular emphasis on socioeconomic factors. Through their qualitative inquiry employing in-depth interviews and rigorous thematic analysis, the researchers delved into the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in accessing crucial mental healthcare support within urban landscapes. The findings of this study illuminated the pervasive nature of barriers such as stigma, affordability constraints, and lack of awareness, shedding light on the complex interplay between socioeconomic disadvantage and mental health service access. The insights garnered from this research underscored the urgent need for targeted interventions aimed at dismantling systemic barriers and fostering more inclusive mental healthcare systems that prioritize equity and accessibility for all urban residents.

Zhang and colleagues (2022) aimed to assess the impact of health insurance coverage on the utilization of mental health services among urban dwellers, with a particular focus on individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Leveraging comprehensive administrative healthcare data, the researchers conducted a meticulous analysis of service utilization patterns before and after the enrollment in health insurance programs. Through their rigorous inquiry, the study uncovered compelling evidence suggesting a significant increase in mental health service utilization following the acquisition of health insurance coverage, particularly among individuals from lower-income neighborhoods. The findings of this study underscored the critical role of



health insurance coverage in mitigating barriers to mental healthcare access within urban contexts, prompting recommendations for the expansion of insurance coverage and the implementation of targeted outreach programs aimed at increasing awareness and utilization of available mental health services among underserved urban populations.

Lee et al. (2023) synthesized existing literature on the complex relationship between socioeconomic factors and the utilization of mental health services among urban populations. Employing a rigorous methodological approach involving comprehensive search strategies and sophisticated meta-analysis techniques, the researchers meticulously examined the collective evidence base to elucidate patterns and trends across diverse studies. The findings of this systematic review revealed consistent disparities in mental health service utilization based on socioeconomic status, with individuals from lower-income backgrounds and disadvantaged neighborhoods facing heightened barriers to access. Drawing upon these insights, the study underscored the urgent need for targeted interventions aimed at addressing structural inequalities and fostering more equitable access to mental healthcare services within urban landscapes, emphasizing the imperative of policy reforms and community-driven initiatives to promote health equity and social justice for all urban residents.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Research Gap:** Johnson et al. (2018) highlighted the association between socioeconomic factors and mental health service utilization among urban dwellers, there appears to be a gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms through which socioeconomic disparities manifest in mental healthcare access. Future research could focus on unpacking the specific pathways through which socioeconomic status influences access to mental health services, considering factors such as stigma, cultural beliefs, and healthcare system structures.

**Contextual Research Gap:** The study primarily focused on urban settings, neglecting the contextual nuances that may exist within different urban environments (Brown et al. 2020). There is a need for research that examines how socioeconomic factors intersect with other contextual variables, such as race, ethnicity, and cultural norms, to shape mental health service utilization patterns. Additionally, studies could explore variations in service access and utilization across different urban neighborhoods, considering factors like neighborhood resources and social cohesion.

**Geographical Research Gap:** The studies predominantly focus on mental health service utilization within urban areas, overlooking the experiences of individuals residing in rural or peri-urban regions. Future research could explore the unique challenges faced by rural populations in accessing mental health services and examine how socioeconomic disparities manifest in these settings (Zhang et al. 2022). Additionally, comparative studies between urban and rural areas could provide valuable insights into the differential impacts of socioeconomic factors on mental healthcare access across diverse geographical contexts.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Conclusion

The investigation into the influence of socioeconomic factors on mental health service utilization among urban dwellers reveals a complex and multifaceted relationship. The studies reviewed collectively underscore the significant impact of socioeconomic status on access to mental healthcare within urban settings. Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds consistently face barriers to accessing crucial mental health support, including affordability constraints, lack of awareness, and stigma associated with seeking help. Moreover, neighborhood-level socioeconomic characteristics further exacerbate disparities in mental health service utilization, with residents of socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods facing heightened barriers despite significant mental health needs. While the studies highlight the pressing need for targeted interventions and policy reforms to mitigate socioeconomic barriers and foster more equitable access to mental health services, there are notable research gaps in understanding the underlying mechanisms, contextual nuances, and geographical variations in mental healthcare access. Addressing these gaps through further research efforts is essential to inform the development of effective interventions that prioritize equity and accessibility for all urban residents, ultimately promoting improved mental health outcomes and well-being within urban communities.

### Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

#### Theory

Conduct longitudinal studies to explore the dynamic nature of socioeconomic influences on mental health service utilization over time. This would contribute to the development of theoretical frameworks that elucidate the pathways through which socioeconomic factors impact access to mental healthcare. Explore interdisciplinary perspectives, integrating theories from sociology, psychology, economics, and public health to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions between socioeconomic status and mental health service utilization. Investigate the moderating and mediating factors that influence the relationship between socioeconomic status and mental healthcare access, such as cultural beliefs, social support networks, and healthcare system structures. This would enhance theoretical models that account for the contextual nuances of urban environments.

#### Practice

Develop tailored interventions targeting specific socioeconomic barriers to mental health service utilization, such as affordability, transportation, and stigma reduction programs. These interventions should be informed by community engagement and participatory approaches to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Implement integrated care models that address both mental health and socioeconomic needs simultaneously, such as co-located services for mental health, primary care, employment support, and financial assistance. This holistic approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of socioeconomic factors and mental health outcomes. Foster collaboration between mental health providers, social service agencies, community organizations, and policymakers to create comprehensive support systems that address the diverse needs of urban populations. This collaborative effort would facilitate the delivery of wraparound services that address the root causes of mental health disparities.

## **Policy**

Advocate for policy reforms that prioritize equitable access to mental healthcare services for all urban residents, regardless of socioeconomic status. This may include policies aimed at expanding Medicaid coverage, increasing funding for mental health programs, and implementing parity laws that ensure equitable insurance coverage for mental and physical health services. Promote initiatives that address social determinants of health, such as affordable housing, quality education, and employment opportunities, as integral components of mental health policy agendas. Investing in upstream interventions that address socioeconomic inequalities can prevent mental health disparities from occurring in the first place. Advocate for the allocation of resources to underserved urban neighborhoods with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, ensuring that mental health services are accessible and culturally responsive to the needs of these communities. This targeted approach to policymaking can help reduce disparities in mental healthcare access and outcomes.

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