“Understanding the Awareness, Perceptions and Attitudes of Punjab residents towards NEMT services: A Qualitative study”

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Abstract—The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of Punjab residents towards Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) services. The study utilized in-depth interviews with a sample of Punjab residents to gather information on their awareness, understanding, and experiences of NEMT services. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and patterns in the data. The findings of the study suggest that while there is some awareness of NEMT services among Punjab residents, there is a lack of understanding of the services available, their cost, and how to access them. Participants expressed a range of perceptions and attitudes towards NEMT services, with some viewing them positively as a helpful resource for those with mobility or transportation challenges, while others were skeptical of the quality and reliability of the services. The study highlights the need for increased education and awareness about NEMT services among Punjab residents and the importance of addressing the concerns and perceptions of potential users to promote greater use of these services.

Index Terms—Punjab residents, NEMT (Non-Emergency Medical Transportation) services, Awareness, Perceptions, Attitudes, Qualitative study, Healthcare transportation, Patient transportation, Access to healthcare services, Healthcare equity, Health disparities, Patient experience, Healthcare utilization, Healthcare accessibility, Healthcare affordability.

I. INTRODUCTION

Access to healthcare services is a critical aspect of ensuring the well-being of individuals and communities. One important component of healthcare access is transportation, especially for individuals with limited mobility or those living in rural areas. Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) services are designed to provide transportation to medical appointments for individuals who are unable to get there on their own. In the state of Punjab, India, there has been a growing interest in improving access to healthcare services, particularly for underserved populations. However, little is known about the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of Punjab residents towards NEMT services. Understanding these factors can help healthcare providers and policymakers to design and implement effective strategies for improving access to healthcare services. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of Punjab residents towards NEMT services and to identify the factors that influence their utilization of these services. By shedding light on these important issues, this study aims to contribute to the development of more equitable and accessible healthcare systems in Punjab, India.

In Punjab, India, the lack of transportation is a major barrier to accessing healthcare services, particularly for those living in rural areas or with limited mobility. NEMT services are an important solution to this problem, as they provide transportation to medical appointments for individuals who are unable to get there on their own. However, despite the potential benefits of NEMT services, there is limited information on the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of Punjab residents towards these services. The purpose of this qualitative study is to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the factors that influence the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of Punjab residents towards NEMT services. Qualitative research methods, such as focus groups and interviews, will be used to gather data from a diverse sample of Punjab residents, including those who have used NEMT services and those who have not.

The study aims to identify the barriers that prevent Punjab residents from utilizing NEMT services, as well as the factors that facilitate their use. The findings of this study will have important implications for healthcare providers and policymakers in Punjab, as they seek to improve access to healthcare services for all residents, particularly those in underserved communities.

By understanding the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of Punjab residents towards NEMT services, this study aims to contribute to the development of more equitable and accessible healthcare systems in Punjab, India. It is hoped that the findings of this study will inform the development of targeted interventions to increase the utilization of NEMT services and improve healthcare outcomes for all residents of Punjab.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Access to healthcare services is a critical component of ensuring the health and well-being of individuals and communities. In the state of Punjab, India, there has been a growing interest in improving access to healthcare services, particularly for underserved populations. One significant barrier to accessing healthcare services in Punjab is transportation, particularly for those who are elderly, disabled, or living in rural areas. Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) services have been proposed as a
solution to this problem, but little is known about the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of Punjab residents towards these services.

A few studies have explored the use of NEMT services in India, but most have focused on specific populations, such as patients with chronic diseases or elderly patients. A study conducted by Lalwani et al. (2019) in Mumbai, India found that the use of NEMT services was associated with increased healthcare utilization and improved health outcomes among patients with chronic diseases. However, the study did not explore the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of patients towards NEMT services.

Another study conducted by Gudlavalleti et al. (2017) in Andhra Pradesh, India, found that lack of transportation was a major barrier to healthcare access among elderly patients. The study recommended the use of NEMT services to improve access to healthcare services for this population, but again did not explore the attitudes and perceptions of patients towards NEMT services.

A study conducted by Muniyandi et al. (2018) in Tamil Nadu, India, found that lack of transportation was a major barrier to healthcare access for patients with tuberculosis. The study recommended the use of NEMT services to improve access to healthcare services for this population, but did not explore the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of patients towards NEMT services.

There is a significant gap in the literature regarding the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of Punjab residents towards NEMT services. Understanding these factors is crucial for the development and implementation of effective strategies to improve access to healthcare services in Punjab. This qualitative study aims to fill this gap by exploring the factors that influence the utilization of NEMT services among Punjab residents, including their awareness, perceptions, and attitudes towards these services.

Altogether, the literature suggests that NEMT services have the potential to improve access to healthcare services for underserved populations in India, but more research is needed to explore the factors that influence their utilization and to identify barriers to their implementation. The proposed study will contribute to this growing body of literature and provide valuable insights for healthcare providers and policymakers in Punjab.

Objectives:
1. To explore the level of awareness of NEMT services among Punjab residents.
2. To identify the factors that influence the utilization of NEMT services among Punjab residents.
3. To examine the perceptions of Punjab residents towards NEMT services.
4. To explore the attitudes of Punjab residents towards NEMT services.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on first-hand data collected by the researcher in an ethical manner. The research was conducted in two districts of Punjab state in 2023. The data collection method employed for the study was a structured questionnaire prepared by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions, which were designed to capture the relevant information pertaining to the research objectives.

The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a widely used method for identifying recurring themes and patterns in the data. Thematic analysis involves coding the data, categorizing it into themes, and interpreting the patterns and relationships that emerge. The Nvivo tool was used to support thematic analysis, which allowed for efficient data management and analysis.

IV. FINDINGS

The findings of the study suggest that there is a low level of awareness of Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) services among the residents of Punjab. While some participants had heard of NEMT services, many others were unaware of such services. Lack of information, lack of NEMT services in the state and limited advertising were identified as major reasons for the low level of awareness.

The study also found that there were several perceptions and attitudes towards NEMT services among the participants. Some participants perceived NEMT services as expensive and were hesitant to use them, while others perceived them as reliable and convenient. Participants who had used NEMT services in the past generally had positive experiences, but some had concerns about the quality of service and the qualifications of the drivers.

Additionally, the study identified several barriers to accessing NEMT services. These included lack of information, financial constraints, and limited availability of services in some areas. Language barriers were also identified as a significant barrier, particularly for non-Punjabi speakers.

Regarding cultural and social barriers, participants had varying opinions about the potential factors that prevent them from using NEMT services in the future. On the positive side, participants found NEMT services to be convenient, accessible to specialized
medical care, and offering increased independence for patients. However, the cost of these services emerged as a significant concern for participants, suggesting that NEMT services should be more affordable and accessible to all. Participants also recommended that NEMT services should be easier to schedule or book, highlighting the importance of effective communication and transparency in transportation arrangements.

After conducting the survey and analyzing the data using thematic analysis with Nvivo, it is clear that there is a lack of awareness about NEMT services among younger age groups. This highlights the need for increased education and outreach efforts to target this demographic.

Moreover, the survey revealed that the availability of service and the medical condition of the patient are key factors that influence the decision to opt for NEMT services. Service providers should prioritize making these services more accessible and convenient for patients.

Overall, the findings of this qualitative study highlight the need for increased awareness and accessibility of NEMT services in Punjab. To address the barriers identified, it is recommended that efforts be made to improve advertising and information dissemination, increase the availability of services, and ensure that drivers meet minimum qualifications and standards. Furthermore, efforts should be made to address language barriers and make services more affordable to ensure that all residents of Punjab have access to NEMT services when needed.

Finally, the survey findings suggest that patient involvement and feedback are essential for the development and improvement of NEMT services. Many participants reported feeling that their needs and concerns were not being taken into account in the development of NEMT services.

Figure 1 Implication of Perception of participants towards NEMT services

V. SUGGESTIONS
The study's results provide insight into several potential areas of improvement for NEMT services in Punjab. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Increase awareness of NEMT services: Many residents in the study were unaware of the availability of NEMT services, which resulted in low usage rates. To address this, targeted outreach and education campaigns are recommended to raise awareness of NEMT services and their benefits.

2. Improve the accessibility and affordability of NEMT services: The study revealed that several residents encountered barriers to accessing NEMT services, such as cost and lack of availability. To improve accessibility, partnerships with local organizations and subsidies may be considered. Additionally, measures should be taken to ensure that NEMT services are affordable for all residents.

3. Involve stakeholders in the development of NEMT services: According to the study, many residents felt that their needs and concerns were not considered during the development of NEMT services. As a result, it is recommended that residents and other stakeholders be included in the planning and development of NEMT services to ensure that they meet the needs and preferences of the community.
4. Develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks for NEMT services: The study found a lack of data on the effectiveness and impact of NEMT services in Punjab. It is recommended that monitoring and evaluation frameworks be developed and implemented to assess the impact of NEMT services on residents' health, well-being, and quality of life. This will provide valuable information for future improvements and modifications to NEMT services.

Implementing these recommendations can help to improve the awareness, accessibility, and affordability of NEMT services in Punjab and enhance the overall quality of life for residents.

VI. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the study highlights the importance of NEMT services in improving access to healthcare for residents of Punjab. The findings suggest that while there is some awareness of NEMT services among residents, many are still not using these services due to various barriers. These barriers include cost, lack of availability, and concerns about safety and reliability.

The study also found that residents have diverse needs and preferences when it comes to NEMT services, and that there is a need to involve them in the planning and development of these services to ensure that they are designed to meet their needs and preferences. Additionally, the study highlighted the need for monitoring and evaluation of NEMT services to assess their impact on residents' health, well-being, and quality of life.

Based on these findings, several recommendations were made to improve NEMT services in Punjab. These recommendations include increasing awareness of NEMT services through targeted outreach and education campaigns, making NEMT services more affordable and accessible, involving stakeholders in the development of NEMT services, and implementing monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of these services.

In conclusion, the study provides important insights into the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of residents towards NEMT services in Punjab. The recommendations made in the study can serve as a guide for policymakers and healthcare providers to improve access to healthcare for residents and ensure that NEMT services are designed to meet their needs and preferences.

REFERENCES


