

## DOCTORAL THESIS

# Predicting Bangladesh Women's Intentions to Use Health Services During Pregnancy and Childbirth: The Role of Communication and Social Factors

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## **ABSTRACT**

Effective patient-provider communication (PPC) is a key factor in fostering patient adherence to recommendations and facilitates the appropriate utilization of health services, especially during pregnancy when regular consultations and monitoring are necessary. However, there is limited research examining the specific elements of communication within PPC that influence women's intentions to utilize maternal health services. This knowledge gap is particularly significant in a developing country like Bangladesh, where inadequate utilization of maternity care leads to poor health outcomes, including maternal deaths. Understanding the reasons behind the underutilization of health services from a communication perspective is vital, as most existing research focuses on economic, system-level, or healthcare access-related factors.

This study explores the effect of task-oriented, instrumental communication and affective, care-oriented communicative behaviors in patient-provider communication (PPC) as distinct elements influencing women's intentions to utilize maternity care services. Task-oriented communication revolves around solving problems and addressing medical concerns, while care-oriented communication focuses on nurturing empathetic, respectful, and emotionally supportive interactions. Each facet of physician-patient relations brings its own perspective and purpose to the communication dynamic. The study introduces a conceptual framework proposing that both communication dimensions, directly and indirectly, influence intentions to use maternity care. Patient activation, trust, and satisfaction serve as immediate outcomes of PPC that may mediate the relationship between communication and intentions. Furthermore, the study recognizes the role of perceived social norms and support as external social factors that could influence intentions and their potential associations with communication elements linking intentions. The choice of clinical and social factors is driven by their conceptual and contextual relevance to communication and health service research.

A sample survey among 311 pregnant women who had received consultation in any public or private health facilities in four districts of Bangladesh was conducted. This study adopted a convenient cluster sampling approach to include respondents from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas in the selected districts. Independent sample t-tests, pair-sample tests, and correlation analyses were performed to present descriptive statistics. To test the proposed conceptual model, a partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was undertaken using SmartPLS software. As an extension of the structural validity, a multigroup analysis using Bootstrapping technique was also conducted.

Results found that pregnant women with higher education, living in urban areas, and belonging to a family with a reasonable income preferred to seek consultations in private health facilities. Both task-oriented and care-oriented communication did not directly influence intentions to utilize maternity services. Patient activation and trust played integral roles, with varying degrees of full mediating effects between the two communication elements and intentions. A key insight from this study was the dominant influence of the care elements across all three mediators that reflect respondents' yearning for care. Both social factors positively influenced intention, but perceived social norms exhibited greater explanatory power. The most significant mediator that emerged was perceived social norms, especially in connecting care elements with intentions. The multigroup analysis showed that care elements had a more decisive influence on all associations, particularly among individuals receiving care at public facilities.

The theoretical contribution of this study is that it extends to provide a more refined and nuanced understanding of the relationship between communication elements, clinical outcomes, social factors, and behavioral intentions regarding maternity care. It highlighted the importance of blending care elements with the treatment-based approach to enhance patients' active participation, trust, and satisfaction, leading to better patient adherence. The

strong association between perceived social norms and communication elements linking intentions strengthens the role of social aspects shaping maternal health service utilization. The practical implications of this study provide important insights for healthcare providers, educators, healthcare institutions, and policymakers to enhance communication strategies for boosting pregnant women's compliance to continue to utilize maternal health services. A focus on communication training emphasizing psychosocial care during consultations, institutional support for implementing standardized consultation procedures, and integration of patient feedback with active participation oversight could enhance physician-patient interactions. By incorporating awareness-building efforts into consultations and implementing communication campaigns to promote the use of maternal health services, health providers can effectively engage with the local community, and mobilize social support for promoting the utilization of maternity care in Bangladesh.