Title: Maternal Education and Patients Perceived Barriers to Cleft Care in India: A Multi-Site Study.

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Introduction
Orofacial clefts are one of the most prevalent birth defects worldwide with an incidence rate of 1 in 700 live births. India has the world's highest burden of unrepaired clefts estimated at over 200,000 patients. There has been minimal literature published on patient perceived barriers to cleft surgery in this population.

Aims:
To better understand the impact of maternal education level on a cleft patient and their families' perceived barriers to receiving care at four cleft centers in India.

Methods:
Patient survey instruments covering maternal education and perceptions of obstacles to cleft care were administered from August 2019 to January 2022 at cleft care centers in Srinagar, Mumbai, Durgapur, and Bangalore. Descriptive statistics and analysis were used to evaluate the study population.

Results:
Among 869 mothers, the most common barriers reported were financial (80.4%), family opinion (15.4%), fear (12.2%), and medical mistrust (9.3%). Although financial burden was the predominant variable regardless of education, we found a significant difference in the type of primary barrier reported by education of the mother ($p < 0.001$). There was a higher percentage of mothers with a primary or less education who reported family opinion (15.3%), medical mistrust (13.0%), and fear (6.1%) compared to mothers with a secondary education (7.9%, 8.9%, and 5.3%, respectively).

Conclusion:

This study identifies barriers to cleft care in India and their associations with maternal education level. Barriers such as family opinion, medical mistrust and fear decreased as maternal education increased, suggesting that these barriers are modifiable through education. Augmenting the provision of maternal educational workshops could help address these barriers and improve access to cleft care.