

# Involvement of NGO in the Care of Indigent Patients in Emergency Department: A Systematic Review

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## Abstract

**Background:** Indigent patients those who lack financial means, social support, or stable housing often present unique challenges in emergency departments (EDs). Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emerged as critical stakeholders in providing holistic care for this vulnerable population, addressing medical, psychosocial, and logistical needs. **Objective:** This systematic review examines the extent of NGO involvement in the care of indigent patients in EDs, focusing on their roles, challenges, and impact on patient outcomes. **Methods:** A systematic literature search was conducted across PubMed, and Google Scholar using keywords such as “indigent patients AND emergency medical care” AND “non-governmental organizations”. Peer-reviewed articles, reports, and case studies published in the last few years were included. The data were synthesized to identify trends in NGO participation, their strategies, and their integration with healthcare services. **Results:** The review identified three primary roles of NGOs in ED care: (1) provision of immediate relief services, such as food, clothing, and temporary shelter; (2) facilitation of long-term support through rehabilitation programs and legal aid (3) advocacy for policy reforms to ensure sustainable care. Successful collaborations were marked by well-defined roles and effective communication between ED staff and NGOs. Challenges included inconsistent funding, lack of training, and gaps in care coordination. Evidence highlighted that NGO involvement improved patient satisfaction, and enhanced access to follow-up care. **Conclusion:** NGOs play a vital role in bridging care gaps for indigent patients in EDs. Strengthening partnerships between healthcare institutions and NGOs through training, funding, and policy support can optimize outcomes for this vulnerable population.

**Keywords:** NGOs, indigent patients, emergency department, healthcare access, systematic review.

## Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations have significantly impacted the provision of healthcare for vulnerable populations all over the world, including indigent patients who, due to various reasons, find accessing care much more challenging <sup>[1]</sup>. Emergency departments have, therefore become a point of care, providing instant care often with no other avenue for treatment available. This remains a relatively understudied area of overlap between ED care and NGO involvement, particularly concerning indigent patients, who often are under served by financial, social, and systemic barriers <sup>[2-4]</sup>.

Indigent patients face financial constraints, lack of documentation, and stigma that all hinder their access to timely and quality healthcare. NGOs help overcome these challenges through financial assistance, advocacy, and supplementary healthcare services. They have played a significant role in bridging gaps in healthcare delivery, offering free or low-cost services, and ensuring that socioeconomically weaker groups receive equitable care <sup>[5,6]</sup>. For instance, NGOs have been instrumental in setting up community

health programs, running mobile clinics, and facilitating access to emergency medical services for vulnerable populations, as evidenced in multiple studies across low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and high-income settings <sup>[7,8]</sup>.

In the emergency setting, NGOs tend to team up with hospitals and care providers to facilitate logistics of patient care, such as transportation, shelter post-treatment, and follow-up care. Such collaborative efforts have proven to result in better outcomes for homeless and undocumented patients within emergency care. For instance, in Bangladesh, NGOs like BRAC have significantly improved the delivery of services for the vulnerable through community participation and targeted healthcare interventions <sup>[7,9]</sup>.

The financial input of NGOs also cannot be underestimated. They reduce the cost burden of care on indigent patients and the health system by subsidizing care and advocating for policy change. A review of NGO involvement in universal health coverage brings out their role in providing resources, training personnel, and filling gaps left by governmental and private sectors <sup>[10]</sup>. Not only does this enhance the access of health care but also overall health care systems

in a resource-poor setting. NGOs do have several challenges despite these contributions such as lack of funding, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and sustainability of interventions. Besides that, there is also the issue of NGO services integration into the formal health care system to ensure a continuum of care and prevent duplication of effort [11].

This systematic review will discuss the extent and impact of NGO involvement in the care of indigent patients in EDs. Through the synthesis of diverse evidence, the review seeks to identify best practices, challenges, and opportunities for improving care delivery to this underserved group. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, healthcare providers, and NGOs on strategies to enhance collaboration and optimize outcomes for indigent patients in emergency settings.

## Aims and Objectives

**Aim:** To systematically review the involvement of NGOs in the care of indigent patients in emergency departments, evaluating their roles, challenges, and impact.

### Objectives:

1. Assess the roles and services provided by NGOs, including medical, psychological, and other legal support.
2. Evaluate the impact of NGO involvement on patient outcomes, ED efficiency, and healthcare costs.
3. Identify challenges such as funding, staffing, and coordination with formal healthcare providers.
4. Highlight research gaps to optimize NGO contributions for this underserved population.

This review aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, healthcare providers, and NGOs.

## Methodology

This systematic review adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The search was conducted across electronic databases like PubMed, Google Scholar. The combinations of keywords were employed to maximize relevant results: “indigent patients AND emergency medical care” AND “non-governmental organizations”. The searching and screening were done by two independent reviewers on date 17 December 2024. Results showed PubMed: 19 results, Google Scholar:520 results.

### Inclusion Criteria:

- Articles published between 2000 and 2024.
- Peer-reviewed journal articles, case studies, and systematic reviews.
- Studies focusing on NGO interventions in EDs or with indigent populations.

### Exclusion Criteria:

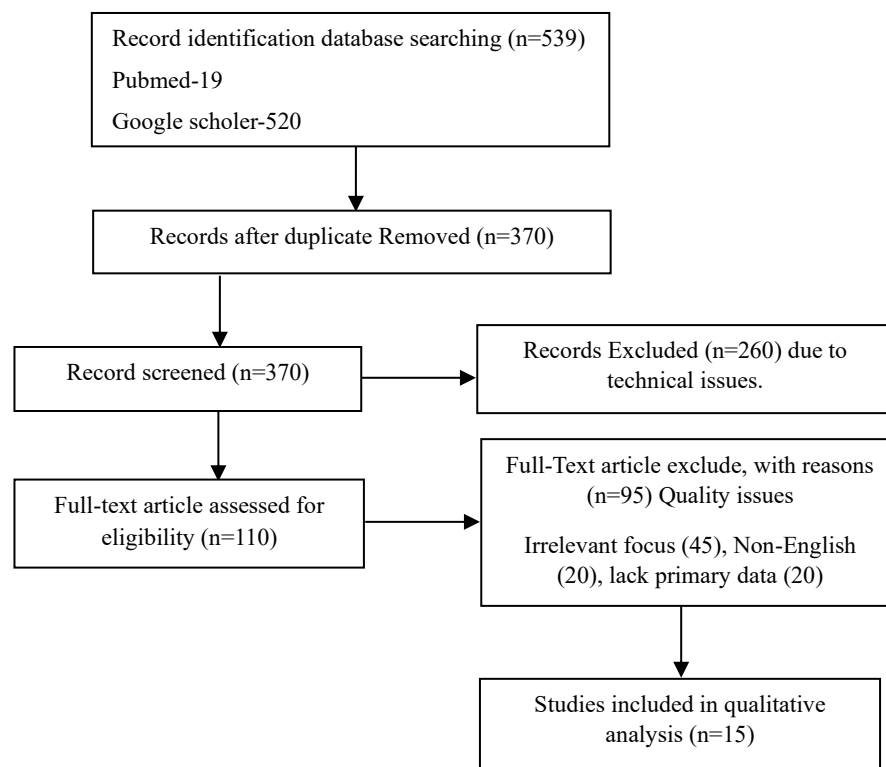
- Non-English publications.
- Articles lacking primary data or focused on unrelated interventions.

### Data Extraction and Analysis:

Titles and abstracts were screened by two independent reviewers. Full-text analysis was performed on 110 articles, of which 15 met the eligibility criteria. The review process followed PRISMA’s four-step approach: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Results were synthesized thematically.

This methodology ensures a comprehensive and unbiased review of the NGO roles in the emergency care of indigent patients.

Prisma Flow chart



## Results

This systematic review involved 15 studies, which provided insight into the role of NGOs in the care of indigent patients in emergency departments (EDs). NGOs are critical support systems in EDs because they address the specific needs of indigent patients. NGOs offer free or discounted medical care, mental health services, and basic diagnostics [10,11]. NGOs also provide patient transportation, temporary shelter, and post-treatment care. NGO community outreach programs increase the understanding of the availability of health resources among the vulnerable [12,13]. NGO-based interventions positively impact the accessibility of health care as well as the experience of patients by reducing wait times to emergency care facilitated by NGOs; improved post-discharge follow-up and shelter assistance that ensures quicker recovery, improved psychological rehabilitation through trauma-informed care practices [14]. Important barriers identified for the NGOs involved in these studies included resource limitations, such as available funding and coordination with formal health systems in terms of staffing; cultural as well as logistical barriers to serving marginalized populations [15]. Successful strategies featured include partnership frameworks between NGOs and health systems of the government, use of mobile health units and community health workers trained to increase access by new technologies like metaverse in healthcare management [16,17].

The review highlights the crucial role NGOs play in enhancing care for poor patients in EDs. However, there is a need to address systemic barriers and collaborate between NGOs and healthcare providers in order to ensure sustainable and effective interventions.

## Discussion

The role of NGOs in the care of indigent patients in EDs becomes an essential feature in reducing healthcare disparities. Indigent patients often encounter various socio-economic barriers and, therefore, have to rely heavily on NGO support for the basic health services they require. The systematic review will illustrate the multifaceted roles of NGOs, the challenges they face, and the outcomes of their interventions to enhance care for vulnerable populations [7,9,18]. NGOs play a very significant role in bridging gaps in access to healthcare for indigent patients through direct medical services, logistical support, and advocacy. Their interventions often compensate for systemic shortcomings, such as limited public healthcare resources or other barriers. For example, NGOs offer reduced cost treatments and mental health services to ensure indigent patients get care in time. Moreover, their logistical support, for example, transportation, temporary shelter, and follow-up care, meets the critical non-medical needs that impact patient outcomes. These contributions underscore the holistic approach NGOs take in addressing the multifaceted challenges of indigent populations [19]. The review shows that Nongovernmental organization involvement can result in tangible improvements among patients. The indigent, patients supported by NGOs have fewer delays in attaining emergency care, as well as better recovery, through support after discharge; and the psychological well-being of patients increases through trauma-sensitive approaches to care [20]. Such findings show effective NGO interventions, not only when it comes to immediate medical needs of patients but in the long run, when they are being integrated into society.

### Challenges Faced by NGOs

Despite their critical role, NGOs encounter numerous challenges in delivering services to indigent patients. Limited funding remains a

primary obstacle, restricting the scalability and sustainability of their initiatives. Additionally, NGOs often struggle with inadequate coordination with formal healthcare systems, leading to inefficiencies in care delivery [21]. Cultural and logistical barriers also hinder their outreach to marginalized groups, highlighting the need for more inclusive and adaptive approaches. These challenges should be addressed with systemic reforms, such as better integrating NGO services in public health frameworks and better financial support [22].

## Recommendations for Best Practices

A very key review of successful NGO involvement has identified the best practices through which such NGOs may design effective interventions. Among key practices are partnership between NGOs and government health systems, conducting services on mobile clinics, and fully training NGO staff on trauma-informed care and emergency responses. These approaches enhance the effectiveness and sustainability as well as scalability of interventions by NGOs [21-23].

### Policy Implications

This review finding necessitates policy interventions in enhancing the role of NGOs in EDs. Governments and health care institutions should form formal partnerships with NGOs to integrate their services into the general healthcare system. Financial incentives, capacity-building programs, and regulatory frameworks can further enhance the role of NGOs in addressing operational challenges and expansion [23].

### Medico legal Implications

The involvement of NGOs in the care of indigent patients in emergency departments raises medico legal issues such as ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and non-discrimination. Cooperative frameworks must not contravene health regulations and should not expose liability. To hold NGOs accountable and transparent, their actions must be documented. Furthermore, NGOs should meet medico-legal standards to protect patient's right and assist health institutions in the delivery of equal care [24].

## Conclusion

NGOs play an indispensable role in providing care for indigent patients in emergency departments, addressing both medical and socio-economic barriers. While their contributions significantly improve patient outcomes, addressing systemic challenges is essential to ensure sustainable and impactful interventions. Policymakers, healthcare providers, and NGOs must work collaboratively to create a cohesive and inclusive healthcare system that prioritizes the needs of vulnerable populations.

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## Ethical clearance

Since the article is systematic review without involvement of human or animal, hence no need of ethical clearance.

## Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

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## Author contributor-ship declaration

RRS: Conceptualization, PKY: Original Draft Preparation, SS: Methodology, Writing, PS: Review and Editing.

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