

Abstract

Cancer is a major public health challenge in India, with Assam bearing one of the highest burdens in the country. The districts of Barpeta and Dibrugarh report low screening uptake and late-stage diagnoses, despite ongoing awareness initiatives. This dissertation, conducted at **Integra Ventures Services Pvt. Ltd.**, evaluates the impact of the Assam Cancer Care Foundation's (ACCF) community outreach, patient support interventions, and caregiver sensitization programs on cancer awareness, health-seeking behavior, and caregiving practices.

A **mixed-methods design** was adopted, integrating quantitative surveys, Knowledge-Attitude-Practice (KAP) questionnaires, in-depth interviews (IDIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). The study engaged **352 respondents** (139 in Barpeta and 122 in Dibrugarh) along with qualitative participants, including cancer patients, caregivers, frontline workers, and program coordinators. Quantitative analysis focused on awareness of cancer risk factors, screening uptake, treatment adherence, and caregiver preparedness, while qualitative insights explored socio-cultural barriers, stigma, accessibility challenges, and systemic gaps.

The results indicate persistent **gaps in awareness and preventive practices**. Only 42.3% of respondents had adequate knowledge of early signs and symptoms of common cancers. Screening uptake was critically low: 18.7% of women reported cervical cancer screening and 22.5% underwent clinical breast examination, despite service availability. Health-seeking delays were notable, with 61.2% of symptomatic individuals waiting more than three months before consulting a provider, leading to advanced-stage presentations. Lifestyle risk factors also contributed significantly, with tobacco use (37.8%) and alcohol consumption (21.4%) prevalent, particularly among men.

At the same time, ACCF's interventions demonstrated measurable impact. Through **137 awareness camps**, 4,903 individuals were sensitized. ASHA-led door-to-door campaigns screened over **300,000 people**, with 68,037 referred for further evaluation at Health and Wellness Centres. More than **3,345 caregivers** were trained on cancer care, treatment side effects, home-based support, and financial assistance schemes. Patients reported benefitting from diagnostic and treatment support that helped reduce out-of-pocket expenses.

Qualitative findings reinforced that stigma and cultural beliefs remain major barriers, often discouraging early care-seeking. Community leaders and frontline workers highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive communication, better referral tracking, and coordination with self-help groups to sustain engagement and ensure follow-up.

In conclusion, ACCF's community outreach and support programs have contributed to strengthening cancer awareness, screening participation, and caregiving practices in high-burden districts of Assam. However, structural barriers such as geographic inaccessibility, stigma, and limited service uptake continue to impede timely detection and treatment. To improve outcomes, sustained multi-sectoral approaches are required, emphasizing **culturally adapted strategies, expanded caregiver training, enhanced referral systems, and integration of financial protection schemes**. These findings provide actionable evidence to guide future cancer control strategies in Assam and other similar socio-cultural contexts.