

Cross-sectional multinational study evaluating the social determinants of health in patients seeking elective surgical care

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Background: Social determinants of health (SDOH) significantly influence health outcomes across medical disciplines, yet their role in elective general surgical care remains largely underexplored. The impact of SODH exists globally, however there are differences in how SODH manifest amongst various communities and cultures. General surgeons can learn from primary care specialties and utilize screening tools to recognize social challenges specific to their communities.

Objective: This study investigates SDOH among patients seeking elective surgery in two culturally and economically distinct settings—Memphis, Tennessee, USA, and Carmona, Cavite, Philippines.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey using the American Association of Family Physicians (AAFP) Social Needs Screening Tool—translated into Tagalog for Filipino participants—was administered to adults presenting for elective surgical care at a tertiary medical center in Memphis, Tennessee, USA and on short term surgical missions in Carmona Cavite from February 2023 – February 2024. Institutional review board and research committee approval was obtained from both institutions. A total of 190 respondents (91 Memphis, 99 Carmona) participated. Key variables included food security, access to healthcare, utilities, childcare, employment, education, financial stability, and interpersonal safety.

Results: Findings revealed higher levels of food insecurity, financial distress, utility threats, and unmet childcare needs in the Carmona cohort compared to Memphis. In contrast, Memphis respondents showed greater employment stability and educational attainment. Both groups reported instances of interpersonal harm, though rates were slightly higher in the Philippines. Notably, 92% of Filipino patients requested assistance with social needs compared to 22% in Memphis.

Conclusions: SDOH significantly differ between surgical patients in Memphis and Carmona, underlining the importance of contextualized, location-specific interventions. The study advocates for the integration of validated SDOH screening tools in surgical settings and prioritization of social support services, particularly in underserved international contexts.