Predictors of the utilisation of continuum of maternal health care services in India

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Abstract
Background: Utilisation of continuum of maternal health care services is crucial for a healthy pregnancy and childbirth and plays an important role in attaining Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to maternal and child health. This paper aims to assess the percentage of dropouts across various stages of utilization of continuum of maternal health services (CMHS) in India and also investigates the factors hindering the utilization of these services.

Methods: We used recent data from National Family Health Survey (NFHS) encompassing a total sample of 1,70,937 pregnant women for the period 2015–16. The percentage of women dropping out while seeking maternal health care is measured using descriptive statistics. While, the factors impeding the utilization of maternal health services is estimated using a Multinomial Logistic Regression Model, where dependent variable (CMHS) is defined as complete care, incomplete care and no care.

Results: Only 17% of pregnant women availed the utilisation of complete care and 83% either did not seek any care or dropped after seeking one or two services. For instance, it is found that 79% of women who registered for antenatal care services (ANC) did not avail the same adequately. An empirical investigation of determinants of inadequate utilization of CMHS revealed that factors like individual characteristics, for instance- access to media (RRR: 2.06) and mother’s education play (RRR: 3.61) a vital role in the uptake of CMHS. It is also found that the interaction between wealth index and place of residence plays a pivotal role in seeking complete care. Lastly, the results revealed that male participation (RRR: 2.69) and contacting multi-purpose worker (MPW) (RRR: 2.33) are also at play.

Conclusion: The study suggests that the major determinants of utilisation of CMHS are access to media, mother’s education, affordability barriers and male participation. Hence, policy recommendations should be oriented towards strengthening these dimensions and the utilisation of adequate ANC has to be considered as the need of the hour.

Keywords: Continuum of maternal health care services, Demographic health survey, Multinomial logistic regression model, India

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293,760\(^1\) women in the world died due to pregnancy related complications in 2017. It was also found that these deaths were mainly compounded by numbers in developing nations with India being a major contributor. Moreover, 75% of India’s maternal deaths were associated with high blood pressure, severe bleeding and infections occurring during and after pregnancy [1]. However, these deaths can be prevented if adequate maternal care services are provided during the prenatal stage and, safe delivery systems and essential post-natal care services are in place [2, 3]. Together, these strategies form the cornerstone of CMHS. Considering the long and short term benefits of CMHS, the Government of India (GOI) implemented two important programmatic interventions namely, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in 2005–06\(^2\) and the Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH +A) programme in 2013 (RMNCH+A, 2013). But, there is a huge dearth of research in understanding the determinants of utilisation of CMHS and the dropouts across different stages of continuum of care is missing in the literature. In fact, the existing work is majorly oriented towards analysing the utilisation of individual maternal health care services in India [4–6]. The information would enable us to prescribe new policies/ revamp the existing ones to strengthen the maternal and child health programmes and ensure universal coverage of CMHS in India. Therefore, this study aims to investigate two main objectives. The first objective deals with the measurement of percentage of pregnant women dropping out across various stages of care seeking pathway and the second objective intends to analyse the determinants of complete care vs no care, complete care vs incomplete care and incomplete care vs no care.

Conceptual framework

CMHS relies on a valid presumption that the sequel of services provided throughout the lifecycle of pregnancy are interlinked. This is a recurrent theme in the Lancet Neonatal Survival Series and laid a strong premises in a conceptual framework formulated by Partnership of Maternal, New-born and Child health [7]. CMHS has two dimensions: the time dimension and the space dimension [7, 8]. According to the time dimension, a natural link exists between different time segments of pregnancy care, which spans from the early stages of pregnancy (antenatal care services) and childbirth (skilled-based delivery) to post-pregnancy stages (postnatal care services). The conceptualisation of these linkages are presented in Fig. 1. Meanwhile, the space dimension indicates “a seamless continuum of maternal health care services spanning from home to community, to the health centre and finally to the hospital” [7].

To examine the determinants of the uptake of continuum of maternal health care, existing conceptual frameworks [2] has been used to construct an overarching conceptual framework. This is demonstrated in Fig. 2. The framework encompasses determinants such as, the individual-level characteristics (age at marriage, education and parity), the household-level determinants (family size, caste, religion, income status), the community-level determinants (place of residence and region) and the policy level parameters (ASHA) – these determinants are hypothesised to influence the utilisation of CMHS and consequently improve the functioning and well-being of mother and her new-born.

Data and methodology

Data source

We have used the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) dataset, conducted in 2015–16\(^3\), spearheaded by the International Institute of Population Studies (IIPS). The target population of the survey were women aged between 15 and 49 years, who had at least one live birth in the previous 5 years. The survey entailed an independent sampling strategy for rural and urban areas. For the rural areas, a two-stage stratified sampling was employed wherein villages were used as the first stage unit (FSU) and the household as second. For the urban areas, a three-stage stratified sampling strategy was adopted, with the first stage being the ward, the second being the census enumeration block (CEB), and the third being the households. A total sample of this round constituted of 601,509 households and 699,686 individual women. However, for the current study, we restrict our analysis to women’s file (IR) which provides data on the maternal health utilisation, obtained by asking mothers about the number of antenatal visits, the consumption of iron-folic tablets, uptake of tetanus toxoid injections, the type of provider approached for child birth and whether the respondent’s health was checked immediately after delivering the baby. All the observations with missing values are dropped from the analysis and a final sample of 1,70,937 is utilized for the study.

Description of variables

In this section, we provide a detailed description of dependent and independent variables of the model. We

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\(^1\) Further information is available at: https://ourworldindata.org/maternal-mortality

\(^2\) Renamed as National Health Mission (NHM) in 2013.

\(^3\) Dataset can be obtained from https://dhsprogram.com/data/dataset_admin/login_main.cfm
selected the variables based on the existing literature and availability of information in the dataset.

**Outcome variables**

Although the utilisation of CMHS has been conceded as effective instrument for the increase of wellbeing of mother and child. However, in reality we found that the continuum of maternal health care services are not always consumed in sequence. In other words, most of the pregnant women have sought only two maternal health care services (ANC & SBA, SBA & PNC and ANC & PNC). Furthermore, some have availed only one maternal health care intervention (ANC/ SBA/PNC) in their entire lifecycle of pregnancy. Thus, the level of benefits certainly varies with the number of interventions availed.

Therefore, we disaggregate the utilisation of CMHS into three possible categories - no care, partial care and full care. First, we calculated the utilisation of adequate ANC, SBA and PNC services. ‘Adequate ANC’ is defined as women having four or more ANC visits, consumed 100 iron and folic acid tablets/ syrup for their last birth and availed at least two tetanus injections. A women had ‘adequate SBA’ if her last delivery was attended by a qualified personnel such as a doctor, nurse, auxiliary midwife, clinical officer or trained birth attendant. The utilisation of ‘PNC’ was considered adequate if she had undertaken a health check-up at any health facility within 2 days of delivery for their last birth. Using these three indicators, we constructed our dependent variable as a categorical variable denoted as ‘0’ (No Care) if none of these services were undertaken,
‘1’ (Partial Care) if any one or two of the aforementioned services were availed and ‘2’ (Full Care) if all three services were utilised.

in CMHS studies [7, 8]. In order to estimate the determinants of the continuum of maternal health care services, we specify the empirical model as follows:

\[ O_{ij} = a + \beta_1 \text{Individual}_i + \beta_2 \text{Household}_i + \beta_3 \text{Policy}_i + \beta_4 \text{Community}_i + \beta_5 \text{Barriers}_i + \epsilon \]  

(1)

**Explanatory variables**
The explanatory variables considered in this analysis are divided into five groups- individual-level, household-level, community-level, access related barriers and policy level characteristics.

**Statistical analysis**
Since, the dependent variable of this study is a polychotomous variable with three categories, a Multinomial Logistic Regression Model (MNLM) introduced by Maddala [9] was deemed most appropriate. Nevertheless, in case of a categorical dependent variable, a researcher is confused to choose either MNLM or Ordered Logistic Regression Model (OLRM). The distinguishing feature delineating these two models is the very assumption of Parallel Slopes, according to which, a given explanatory variable affects the likelihood of an individual being in particular category in the same way as it affects the likelihood of the same individual falling in another category. Borooah [10] explains that, if the assumption is violated, then the MNLM methodology is considered more appropriate compared to the OLRM. Furthermore, when ordered nature of the variable is not very obvious, then it is recommended to treat it as a non-ordered variable and hence, a MNLM is recommended. This is because, when a non-ordered (ordered) variable is treated as an ordered (non-ordered) it results in issues like resulting in biased estimation, and model misspecification for the former case and efficiency loss for the latter. Under these circumstances, the loss of efficiency is a less serious problem compared to the biased estimation. Since, the categories of our dependent variable do not imply any ordering, hence we treat our dependent variable as non-ordered and use MNLM for the empirical analysis. To check the suitability of the model, we conducted diagnostic tests like, likelihood ratio test and the Small-Hsiao test [11]. All the empirical analysis were conducted using the statistical software STATA, version (15.0).

To explore the relationship between the different sets of covariates and utilization of CMHS, we estimated two models. In the first model, we considered e ‘No care’ as the base outcome, while in the second model, ‘Partial care’ was considered as the base outcome. We discuss our findings across 1) Full care vs No care, 2) Incomplete care vs No care and 3) Full care vs Incomplete care. This helps us glean valuable and new insights previously unexplored...
Weakest and strongest link in the CMHS pathway

Figure 3 illustrates the entire mechanism of the care-seeking pathway. We tried to capture the sequential pattern of maternal healthcare-seeking behaviour by underpinning different stages of dropouts along with the determinants of CMHS.

Astonishingly, around 80% of the pregnant women availed at least one or more ANC visits, but only 20.80% of them sought adequate ANC services. The remaining 79% dropped out without availing adequate ANC services, thereby making it the weakest link in the continuum of care pathway. Of the adequate ANC users, most of the pregnant women availed SBA services (95%), making it the most vital link to the CMHS pathway. Among those who utilised adequate ANC and SBA, around 88.3% sought PNC care. We also noticed that the percentage of women dropping in the third stage was around 11.6%.

Drop-outs in the continuum of care pathway: across states

Figure 4a-d depicts the state-wise estimation of the utilisation of CMHS and dropouts at the first, second and third stages of the care seeking pathway. Figure 4a indicates that CMHS utilisation was highest in Kerala

| Variables                  | 2015–16 [N] | 2015–16 [%] |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Complete Care              | 28,744      | 16.82       |
| Incomplete Care            | 124,072     | 72.58       |
| No Care                    | 18,120      | 10.60       |
| Age at Marriage            |             |             |
| Less than 18 years         | 63,656      | 37.24       |
| 18–24                      | 95,808      | 56.05       |
| 25–49                      | 11,472      | 6.71        |
| Access to Media            |             |             |
| No Media                   | 55,829      | 32.66       |
| At least 1 Media           | 115,107     | 67.34       |
| Parity                     |             |             |
| No children                | 1711        | 1           |
| 1–2                        | 119,839     | 70.11       |
| 3–4                        | 39,639      | 23.19       |
| 5 or more                  | 9745        | 5.70        |
| Education                  |             |             |
| Illiterate                 | 47,793      | 27.96       |
| Primary                    | 22,957      | 13.43       |
| Secondary                  | 79,628      | 46.58       |
| Higher                     | 20,557      | 12.03       |
| Household Size             | 6.4         |             |
| Wealth Index               |             |             |
| Poorest                    | 40,713      | 23.82       |
| Poor                       | 36,361      | 21.27       |
| Middle                     | 34,120      | 19.96       |
| Rich                       | 32,194      | 18.83       |
| Richest                    | 27,547      | 16.12       |
| Caste                      |             |             |
| Scheduled Caste            | 37,870      | 22.15       |
| Scheduled Tribe            | 18,308      | 10.71       |
| Other Backward Caste       | 78,672      | 46.02       |
| Others                     | 36,086      | 21.11       |
| Religion                   |             |             |
| Hindu                      | 138,346     | 80.93       |
| Muslim                     | 23,822      | 13.94       |
| Christian                  | 3534        | 2.07        |
| Other                      | 5232        | 3.06        |
| Proportion of Under 5 Children |         |             |
| Less than 2 under five children | 151,586 | 88.68      |
| More than 2 under five children | 19,350 | 11.32      |
| Financial Autonomy         |             |             |
| No                         | 3270        | 11.03       |
| Some                       | 8356        | 44.60       |
| High                       | 7993        | 44.37       |

| Variables                  | 2015–16 [N] | 2015–16 [%] |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Community-Level Characteristics |            |             |
| Region                     |             |             |
| Non-High Focussed States   | 73,535      | 43.02       |
| High North-East             | 5398        | 3.16        |
| High -Focussed States      | 92,002      | 53.82       |
| Residence                  |             |             |
| Rural                      | 122,398     | 71.60       |
| Urban                      | 48,538      | 28.40       |
| Community Poverty          |             |             |
| Low                        | 78,361      | 45.84       |
| High                       | 92,575      | 54.16       |
| Community Education        |             |             |
| Low                        | 87,947      | 51.45       |
| High                       | 82,989      | 48.55       |
| Contacting Community Health Worker |      |             |
| No                         | 97,980      | 57.32       |
| Anganwadi and ASHA         | 70,797      | 41.42       |
| MPW                        | 2160        | 1.26        |
| Access-related barriers    |             |             |
| Acceptability              | 7122        | 5.87        |
| Affordability              | 4345        | 3.58        |
| Availability               | 109,798     | 90.54       |
| Total                      | 1,70,937    |             |

Source: Author's Computation

Weakest and strongest link in the CMHS pathway

Table 1 Summary statistics

| Variables                  | 2015–16 [N] | 2015–16 [%] |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Dependent Variable         |             |             |
| Continuum of Care          |             |             |
| Complete Care              | 28,744      | 16.82       |
| Incomplete Care            | 124,072     | 72.58       |
| No Care                    | 18,120      | 10.60       |
| Individual-Level Characteristics |             |             |
| Age at Marriage            |             |             |
| Less than 18 years         | 63,656      | 37.24       |
| 18–24                      | 95,808      | 56.05       |
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| Access to Media            |             |             |
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| 1–2                        | 119,839     | 70.11       |
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| Education                  |             |             |
| Illiterate                 | 47,793      | 27.96       |
| Primary                    | 22,957      | 13.43       |
| Secondary                  | 79,628      | 46.58       |
| Higher                     | 20,557      | 12.03       |
| Household-Level Characteristics |            |             |
| Household Size             | 6.4         |             |

Table 1 (continued)

| Variables                  | 2015–16 [N] | 2015–16 [%] |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Community-Level Characteristics |          |             |
| Region                     |             |             |
| Non-High Focussed States   | 73,535      | 43.02       |
| High North-East             | 5398        | 3.16        |
| High -Focussed States      | 92,002      | 53.82       |
| Residence                  |             |             |
| Rural                      | 122,398     | 71.60       |
| Urban                      | 48,538      | 28.40       |
| Community Poverty          |             |             |
| Low                        | 78,361      | 45.84       |
| High                       | 92,575      | 54.16       |
| Community Education        |             |             |
| Low                        | 87,947      | 51.45       |
| High                       | 82,989      | 48.55       |
| Contacting Community Health Worker |      |             |
| No                         | 97,980      | 57.32       |
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Source: Author's Computation

Drop-outs in the continuum of care pathway: across states

Figure 4a-d depicts the state-wise estimation of the utilisation of CMHS and dropouts at the first, second and third stages of the care seeking pathway. Figure 4a indicates that CMHS utilisation was highest in Kerala.
(68.09), followed by other southern states. States belonging to western ghats performed better than other states. Worst performance was recorded by the states belonging to Gangetic plains and Himalayan terrain.

The first stage of dropout indicates those women who registered for ANC in the first trimester but did not avail of adequate ANC services in India. State-wise variations are elucidated in Fig. 4b. We found the differences across states to be quite stark. For instance, in Nagaland, around 98% of women dropped out from the first stage of CMHS. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh demonstrate a worrying pattern. Similarly, the other northern and northeastern states witnessed very high dropout rates in the first stage of CMHS. The state of Kerala (29%) recorded the lowest dropout rates, the number being high at the same time.

The Second stage of dropout (Fig. 4c) indicates the percentage of women availing ANC services but forgoing SBA is relatively lower, making it the strongest linkage.
in the continuum of care pathway. State-wise estimation presented below indicates negligible variations.

Figure 4d depicts the third stage of dropout across the states of India. The proportion of women who undertook ANC and SBA but did not avail PNC. It ranges between 0.45 and 8.43%. It was also found that the dropout rates in this stage are comparatively higher in southern parts of India. The lowest dropout rates were witnessed in the North-eastern region.

**Predictors of CMHS in India**

Empirical estimation based on the Multinomial logistic regression model (MNLM) propounded by Mc Fadden (1984) revealed that a myriad of factors determines CMHS utilisation. We disaggregated these factors into household level, individual-level, community level, health-related factors and access-related barriers. We estimated two separate models to gather maximum insights on all possible alternatives. In the first model, no care was used as the base outcome, while in the second, incomplete care was chosen as the base outcome. The results of MNLM are presented in Table 2. We have used the terms - complete care/ full care and partial care/ incomplete care interchangeably.

We found that women with higher education levels as compared to their illiterate counterparts have a higher likelihood to seek complete care over no care (RRR: 3.61, CI: 2.95–4.41), incomplete care over no care (RRR: 2.33, CI: 1.93–2.81) and complete care over incomplete care (RRR: 1.55, CI: 1.43–1.68). Women having access to at least one medium of information are more likely to gravitate towards complete care over no care (RRR: 2.06, CI: 1.90–2.24) and complete care over incomplete care (RRR: 1.51, CI: 1.42–1.60). Furthermore, in contrast to women of age less than 18 years at the time of marriage, women whose age was more than 18 years are more likely to seek complete maternal healthcare services over no/partial care category.

The impact of an interaction between wealth index and residence discerned that the relative risk ratio (RRR) of complete care over no care (RRR: 7.70, CI: 4.65–12.73), complete over incomplete care (RRR: 1.47, CI: 1.32–1.65) and incomplete care over no care (RRR: 5.23, CI: 3.19–8.58) is highest among the richest quintile women residing in urban areas as compared to the poorest ones. Compared to the poorest women residing in urban areas, the richest from rural areas is more likely to avail maternal health care across all three categories- highlighting the relevance of financial status of women in determining the utilisation of maternal
Table 2: Determinants of utilisation of CMHS in India, 2015–16

| Independent Variable | Full Care Vs. No Care | Incomplete Care Vs. No Care | Complete Care Vs. Incomplete Care |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| **Individual Level Characteristics** | | | |
| **Age at Marriage (Ref < 18)** | | | |
| 18–24 | 1.34* [0.04] | 1.25 | 1.43 | 1.13* [0.03] | 1.07 | 1.19 | 1.18* [0.03] | 1.13 | 1.23 |
| 25–49 | 1.82* [0.15] | 1.55 | 2.13 | 1.26* [0.09] | 1.09 | 1.45 | 1.45* [0.05] | 1.35 | 1.56 |
| **Parity (Ref: < 1)** | | | |
| 1 to 2 | 1.24 [0.18] | 0.93 | 1.65 | 1.18 [0.14] | 0.94 | 1.48 | 1.05 [0.10] | 0.87 | 1.28 |
| 3 to 5 | 0.70** [0.11] | 0.52 | 0.94 | 0.84 [0.10] | 0.66 | 1.05 | 0.84** [0.09] | 0.69 | 1.02 |
| 5 or more | 0.44* [0.08] | 0.32 | 0.62 | 0.81*** [0.10] | 0.64 | 1.03 | 0.55* [0.07] | 0.42 | 0.7 |
| **Education (Ref: Illiterate)** | | | |
| Primary | 1.21* [0.06] | 1.13 | 1.33 | 1.10** [0.04] | 1.03 | 1.18 | 1.10** [0.04] | 1.02 | 1.18 |
| Secondary | 1.78* [0.08] | 1.62 | 1.95 | 1.46* [0.05] | 1.36 | 1.56 | 1.22* [0.04] | 1.15 | 1.37 |
| Higher | 3.61* [0.37] | 2.95 | 4.41 | 2.33* [0.22] | 1.93 | 2.81 | 1.55* [0.06] | 1.43 | 1.68 |
| **Financial Autonomy (Ref: No)** | | | |
| Moderate | 1.14 [0.14] | 0.9 | 1.45 | 1.03 [0.10] | 0.85 | 1.26 | 1.11 [0.09] | 0.95 | 1.29 |
| Full autonomy | 1.30** [0.16] | 1.01 | 1.66 | 0.97 [0.10] | 0.79 | 1.18 | 1.34* [0.10] | 1.15 | 1.57 |
| Constant | 1.03 [0.19] | 0.72 | 1.48 | 7.48** [1.12] | 5.58 | 10.03 | 0.15* [0.04] | 0.08 | 0.27 |
| **Access to Media (Ref: No)** | | | |
| At least 1 media | 2.06* [0.09] | 1.9 | 2.24 | 1.36* [0.04] | 1.28 | 1.45 | 1.51* [0.05] | 1.42 | 1.6 |
| Household Size | 0.94* [0.01] | 0.93 | 0.95 | 0.97* [0.00] | 0.97 | 0.98 | 0.97* [0.00] | 0.96 | 0.98 |
| **Household Level Characteristics** | | | |
| **Interaction of Wealth Index & Residence (Ref: Poorest Urban)** | | | |
| Poor Urban | 1.42* [0.14] | 1.18 | 1.71 | 1.31** [0.11] | 1.11 | 1.55 | 1.08* [0.05] | 0.98 | 1.19 |
| Middle Urban | 1.96* [0.22] | 1.57 | 2.45 | 1.55** [0.16] | 1.26 | 1.9 | 1.27* [0.06] | 1.15 | 1.4 |
| Rich Urban | 2.66* [0.36] | 2.04 | 3.48 | 1.95** [0.25] | 1.51 | 2.51 | 1.37* [0.07] | 1.23 | 1.51 |
| Richest Urban | 7.70* [1.98] | 4.65 | 12.73 | 5.23** [1.32] | 3.19 | 8.58 | 1.47* [0.08] | 1.32 | 1.65 |
| Poorest Rural | 0.78* [0.06] | 0.67 | 0.9 | 0.95 [0.06] | 0.85 | 1.07 | 0.82* [0.05] | 0.73 | 0.91 |
| Poor Rural | 0.99 [0.07] | 0.88 | 1.15 | 1.13** [0.07] | 1.01 | 1.27 | 0.88** [0.04] | 0.8 | 0.96 |
| Middle Rural | 1.39* [0.10] | 1.21 | 1.6 | 1.37* [0.08] | 1.22 | 1.54 | 1.02 [0.04] | 0.93 | 1.11 |
| Rich Rural | 1.75* [0.13] | 1.51 | 2.03 | 1.62* [0.11] | 1.42 | 1.84 | 1.08** [0.05] | 1 | 1.18 |
| Richest Rural | 2.52* [0.22] | 2.11 | 2.99 | 2.06* [0.17] | 1.76 | 2.42 | 1.22* [0.05] | 1.12 | 1.33 |
| **Caste (Ref: SC)** | | | |
| ST | 1.15** [0.06] | 1.04 | 1.28 | 1.02 [0.04] | 0.92 | 1.09 | 1.15* [0.04] | 1.08 | 1.24 |
| OBC | 1.24* [0.05] | 1.14 | 1.34 | 1.18** [0.04] | 1.11 | 1.27 | 1.05** [0.03] | 1 | 1.1 |
| Others | 1.14** [0.06] | 1.03 | 1.26 | 1.12** [0.05] | 1.02 | 1.23 | 1.02 [0.03] | 0.96 | 1.07 |
| **Religion (Ref: Hindu)** | | | |
| Muslim | 0.52* [0.02] | 0.47 | 0.57 | 0.62* [0.02] | 0.58 | 0.67 | 0.83* [0.03] | 0.78 | 0.88 |
| Christian | 0.93 [0.10] | 0.74 | 1.15 | 0.70* [0.07] | 0.57 | 0.85 | 1.33* [0.08] | 1.18 | 1.5 |
| Other | 0.77** [0.08] | 0.62 | 0.96 | 0.94 [0.09] | 0.77 | 1.14 | 0.82* [0.04] | 0.75 | 0.91 |
| **Father Present during ANC visits (Ref: No)** | | | |
| Yes | 2.33* [0.09] | 2.16 | 2.51 | 1.52* [0.04] | 1.44 | 1.61 | 1.53* [0.04] | 1.45 | 1.62 |
| **Community Level Characteristics** | | | |
| **State Group (Ref: Non-High Focussed)** | | | |
| North East | 0.28* [0.02] | 0.24 | 0.33 | 0.36* [0.03] | 0.32 | 0.42 | 0.77* [0.04] | 0.7 | 0.86 |
| Major High Focused States | 0.19* [0.01] | 0.17 | 0.21 | 0.48* [0.02] | 0.45 | 0.52 | 0.39* [0.01] | 0.38 | 0.41 |
| **Community Poverty Status (Ref: Low)** | | | |
| High | 0.61* [0.03] | 0.56 | 0.67 | 0.74* [0.03] | 0.68 | 0.8 | 0.83* [0.02] | 0.79 | 0.87 |
| **Community Education Status (Ref: Low)** | | | |
| High | 1.66* [0.07] | 1.53 | 1.8 | 1.33* [0.05] | 1.24 | 1.43 | 1.24* [0.03] | 1.18 | 1.31 |
health care services. Financial autonomy is also associated with a greater likelihood to receive complete care over incomplete care (RRR: 1.34, RRR: 1.15–1.57) and full care over no care (RRR: 1.03, CI: 1.01–1.66).

With an increase in the household size by one member, the RRR of utilising complete care over no care (RRR: 0.94, CI: 0.93–0.95), complete care over incomplete care (RRR: 0.97, CI: 0.96–0.98) and incomplete care over no care (RRR: 0.97, CI: 0.96–0.98) reduces. For all the three categories, a woman having contact with community health workers like ASHA, Anganwadi or Multipurpose Health Worker (MPW) has a higher RRR than those who did not contact CHWs. Similarly, participation of husband in care-seeking procedure increases the likelihood to seek complete care over no care (RRR: 2.33, CI: 2.16–2.51), incomplete care over no care (RRR: 1.52, CI: 1.44–1.61) and complete care over incomplete care (RRR: 1.53, CI: 1.45–1.62).

We found that a woman belonging to ST communities is more likely to go for complete care over no care (RRR: 1.15, CI: 1.04–1.28), complete care over incomplete care (RRR: 1.15, CI: 1.08–1.24) and incomplete care over no care (RRR: 1.02, CI: 0.92–1.09). Similarly, a woman belonging to the OBC community is more likely to seek complete care over no care, incomplete care over no care and complete care over incomplete care. It is found that Muslim women have a lower odds of utilising CMHS vis-à-vis the Hindu women.

A woman hailing from northeastern states and major high-focussed grouped states were found to have a lower odds of utilising complete care over no care, incomplete care over no care and complete care over incomplete care. Finally, an increase in the community’s education status is associated with a higher odds of seeking complete care over no care, complete care over incomplete care and incomplete care over no care. Affordability and availability barriers were found to reduce the likelihood to seek complete care over no care. It was also found that compared to acceptability barriers, the prevalence of affordability and availability issues are more responsible for drop-outs in the utilisation of CMHS. Finally, the influence of MPW was significant for the utilisation of complete care over no care and also for utilising complete care over incomplete care.

**Discussion**

This study encapsulates the magnitude of dropouts across the continuum of care pathway and examines the effects of individual, household, community level characteristics, health-related characteristics and access-related barriers on the utilisation of CMHS in India for 2015–16. The major findings was that utilisation of continuum of maternal health care services was suboptimal and state-level variations were tremendous. The significant contributors of CMHS are mother’s education, access to media, male participation and contacting MPW.

The coverage of full care in India is found to be 16.82%, much lower than other developing countries [12, 13]. Around 72% of women availed partial care services indicating higher levels of dropouts in the continuum of care seeking pathway. An enquiry into the proportion of women dropping out at different stages of CMHS illuminated massive dropouts at the first stage of CMHS. Although 80% of women took one or more ANC visits, only 20.08% of them sought adequate ANC services, thereby making it the weakest link in the continuum of care pathway. This pattern has been explained by two possible reasons in the literature – first, the utilisation of adequate ANC services entails multiple visits to the facilities demanding the time spent on domestic chores and second, although the health care services are provided at free of cost at the government centres but indirect medical costs such as transportation, drugs are mostly incurred by out-of-pocket expenditure in India [14, 15].

We found that enormous amount of dropouts in the first stage of CMHS was majorly compounded by the low
highly educated women are more likely to be knowledgeable about their rights and health, have more exposure to the information of available health care services and have more self-confidence than those with non or less education [26].

Similar to the findings of previous studies conducted in different contexts [13, 20, 23, 24], the access to media of information was more likely to increase the utilisation of complete care over no care, incomplete care over no care and complete care over incomplete care. Moreover, in consistency with other related studies [13, 20, 23, 24], women with access to medium of information were more likely to have knowledge about the relevance and availability of healthcare services.

The significant positive association of women's utilisation with male involvement is encouraging as it suggests increasing women's participation in care seeking behaviour works synergistically with male participation. The male involved is positively associated with women empowerment. The involvement of spouses provides emotional support, physical assistance such as purchasing essential drugs and collective diagnostic reports [27, 28]. Our results also convey that, women who had a say in decision making process were more likely to be accompanied to seek maternal health care services by their male counterparts. It could be possibly attributed to higher levels of negotiating power among empowered women. Involvement of spouses may enhance women's decision making power in other realms of social and economic spheres [29, 30].

To our knowledge, this study is the first to-date to examine the relationship between availability/affordability barriers and women's decision to seek complete care. We constructed a composite measure to capture availability, affordability and acceptability barriers. Most studies examined single barriers. However, this analysis provides a composite scores to inform the association between various barriers and continuum of maternal health care services. Key findings indicated that affordability barrier was positively and significantly associated with increasing odds of utilising complete care with reference to no care and incomplete care. It is important to understand that, availability of a particular services is prerequisite for initial visits but financial status impacts the subsequent visits.

As hypothesised, the regional variable plays a crucial role in determining the utilisation of CMHS. We found that a woman residing in non-high focus group states is less likely to avail CMHS compared to the one hailing from major high focus group states and north-eastern region. This could be attributed to higher levels of political commitment towards social sector, robust health system and strong socio-economic status of women prevalent in non-high focus states [16]. In contrast to this, states belonging to major high focussed group are characterised by limited health infrastructure, lack of political commitment and poor socio-economic status. Jeffery and Jeffery (2010) [31] indicate that these regions have systematic discrepancies like lack of equipment, medicines, blood, corruption and discriminatory treatment towards different sub groups of populations.

Finally, this study elucidates the importance of health workers in strengthening the CMHS pathways. Woman
who met MPW in her initial visits were more likely to seek continuum of maternal health care services compared to those who did not meet MPW in their initial visits. The involvement of MPW would strengthen women's knowledge about the relevance of continuum of care and complications associated with incomplete or no care [32]. Such efforts may be most impactful in settings where women's knowledge about availability of health care services are lowest, as was the case in India.

Conclusion
This study makes a major contribution in the area of maternal and child health care. Disaggregation of CMHS into three important categories like complete, incomplete and no care are pertinent to suggest micro-level policies to promote CMHS. Findings of this study highlight that, a significant proportion of women drop out without availing all the essential health care services in the continuum of care pathway, indicating a higher proportion of women utilising partial care. The dropouts across each stage of care indicated that weakest link is the first stage of CMHS, and second stage of CMHS turned out to be a strongest link. Estimation at the state-level indicates that even the best performing states such as Kerala experience a dropout of around 29% in this first stage of CMHS. Moreover, the condition of low-performing states of India is even more debilitating with each of them indicating a dropout of around 90% in this stage. The empirical findings of this study suggested that impact of income and affordability barriers are relatively higher in explaining the utilisation of partial care to complete care. Other factors increasing the likelihood to avail complete care are male participation, educational status, access to media and contacting MPW.

This paper brings forth certain policy recommendations crucial to boost the utilisation of complete maternal health care services. In doing so, greater efforts should be undertaken to strengthen the weakest linkage of CMHS, which would in turn increase the utilisation of CMHS. First step towards this could be the states considering that an increase the utilisation of adequate ANC is the need of the hour. Since, our empirical findings indicate that the impact of income and affordability barriers is more pronounced in explaining the utilisation of partial care relative to full care. Hence, government might provide cash-based incentives to increase and ensure adequate utilisation of ANC services in India and at state-level. As a medium run strategy, awareness pertaining to the benefits of CMHS should be disseminated to both women and their husbands. This could be done by strengthening mobile phone communication strategies, sending texts and audio messages in vernaculars, newspapers, radio and television and conducting community level awareness programs. Ensuring utilisation of CMHS will require strengthening the role of community health workers also. This is because they act as direct interface between pregnant women and the health system. Furthermore, they can be used as a catalysts in tracking women during the entire lifecycle of pregnancy and following them up if appointments are missed. Hence, government should concert efforts in increasing their wages competitively, providing proper reimbursement schemes for out-of-pocket expenses and streamlining the payment process related to health works.

Limitations and strengths of the study
The study provides an evidence of social determinants of health that motivate pregnant women to undertake the continuum of maternal health care services. However, these findings need be interpreted with some caution. Some of the limitations of this study are:

The continuum of maternal health care services and dropouts across each levels of pregnancy would be determined by demand and supply-side factors, we could not include important supply-side covariates like patient-provider relationship, availability of workforce, etc. in our model due to the unavailability of data. Also, factors related to inertia/ status quo bias could not be included due to data constraints. Although the space dimension plays an important role in strengthening different levels of health care services, we were unable to assess the role of this dimension with the available information. Therefore, the study's findings may provide not provide the complete list of indicators contributing to the dropouts and incomplete utilisation of care. Moreover, our results cannot be generalised to all women of reproductive age because the survey design is restricted to married and cohabiting women only. Hence, a qualitative research adopting a mixed approach would help to elucidate a comprehensive list of factors contributing to the dropouts/ incomplete utilisation of continuum of maternal health care services.

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Authors' contributions
SG designed and conceptualised the study, conducted data analysis and drafted the manuscript, and hence the production of this paper. SG formulated the research gap, supported during study conceptualization and in analysis, reviewed and edited the writing, and production of the final version of the paper UD has guided the formulation of the research gap, supported during study conceptualization and in analysis, reviewed
and edited the writing, and production of the final version of the paper. SB has supervised and reviewed and edited the writing, and production of the final version of the paper. All the authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Availability of data and materials
The dataset analysed during the current study are available in the DHS Program website, https://dhsprogram.com/data/available-datasets.cfm

Declarations

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Not applicable.

Consent for publication
Not applicable.

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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