

Patients' Satisfaction with Health Care Services in Southern Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To evaluate the level of patients' satisfaction in primary health care centers and tertiary hospitals in Al-Baha, Saudi Arabia.

Methods: A cross sectional study was carried out during March 2018 using a questionnaire that has combined (outpatient and inpatient) measures to include admitted patients and clinics' attendants. After explaining the study nature and purpose, an individual consent was obtained from all the participants prior to filling the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using a computer program (SPSS, version 21.00).

Results: 303 responses were analyzed, of which (50.8%) were males, (93.1%) were aged from 15 to 45 years, about two thirds (65.3%) were single, (79.9%) were income-satisfied, and the majority (69.6%) has completed or still studying at the university, which indicates a high educational level among our sample. (82.8%) were satisfied about nurses' treatment, (90.1%) were satisfied about doctors' treatment, and around (79.6%) were satisfied about the cleanliness, quietness, and design of the facility.

Conclusion: The satisfaction among our sample is considered high and indicates a good care provided by health facilities in Al-Baha region, Saudi Arabia. Male gender and higher educational level were associated with higher levels of satisfaction. The least satisfactory factor was regarding communication; therefore, we recommend implanting programs concerning communication skills for health care providers.

Keywords: satisfaction, hospital, Al-Baha, Saudi Arabia.

INTRODUCTION

Patient satisfaction is considered as one of the most important predictors when measuring health outcomes and quality of services provided by any health care facility^[1]. It is linked to good patient-doctor relationship, and therefore, good compliance. Where satisfied patients were found to have a better compliance with their plans of treatment^[2].

Patient satisfaction was measured by measuring many factors, which are usually reported by the patient, and the results would be evaluated by the researchers to implant new programs and policies that hopefully would improve the patients' satisfaction for better outcomes^[3-4].

Those factors include all the services that are provided by the employees, nurses, and doctors, also, they reflect the patients' thoughts about the general appearance, cleanliness, quietness, and waiting time^[5].

Satisfaction can be measured at a clinic base (outpatient), primary health care (PHC) centers, or even in larger hospitals, all are directed to identify the points of defect in the health care system and thus, aiming to improve them.

Patient satisfaction is an important factor that should be studied frequently as indicated in a PHC based study that was carried out in Majmaah, Saudi Arabia. The main findings of the study showed a high level of satisfaction that has reached 82%^[2].

In PHC centers, the patients were satisfied with the enablement, and the most unsatisfying factor was poor continuity of care by the physician^[5].

In Najran, Saudi Arabia, nurses' services and care had the highest score of satisfaction in private tertiary hospitals. In the same study, the general satisfaction was found to be high as well (3.91 out of 5)^[6]. Regarding waiting time, a prospective study in central Saudi Arabia, waiting time was considered as the most important factor regarding the care of patients attending the emergency department^[7].

High satisfaction levels continued to be present also in the capital of Saudi Arabia tertiary centers. The only factors that have made patients unsatisfied were doctors not introducing themselves or explaining the procedures^[8]. Same findings were introduced by a study in Riyadh PHC centers, where physicians didn't explain the patients' medical conditions properly^[9].

Despite the literature findings of high satisfaction levels in Saudi Arabia. In Taif, it was found to be low^[10]. While private hospital attendants had slightly higher levels of satisfaction^[11].

In Saudi Arabia, many studies have been done to evaluate the general satisfaction of patients, and many of them were done in PHC centers or tertiary centers. This study has combined both (PHC and tertiary hospitals) by combining the O-PAHC (outpatient evaluation form) with the I-PAHC

(Inpatient evaluation form) that has been tested and considered as a reliable and useful tool for measuring the satisfaction^[12]. The aim of the study was to evaluate the general satisfaction of patients in PHC centers and tertiary hospitals in Al-Baha city, Saudi Arabia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and population

This is a cross-sectional study that was conducted in Al-Baha region. Three PHC centers were selected randomly and were included in the study along with King Fahd tertiary hospital (KFH).

All patients attending PHC centers and KFH were eligible to participate in the study as long as they give consent to fill the adopted questionnaire. Illiterate individuals were interviewed by the investigators to fill the questionnaire. All patients less than 15 years were excluded.

Research instrument

The combined form of outpatient (O-PAHC) and inpatient(I-PAHC) was translated and used. The form was tested by a previous study and is considered reliable tool in measuring the patient satisfaction^[12]. The questionnaire included personal information like; age, gender, marital status, and income satisfaction, to correlate them with the other factors which included questions about satisfaction about nurses' and doctors' services. The patients factors were about the quietness, cleanliness, hospital buildings and general rating of the hospital from the patients' point of view. Each factor was measured by a scale of five points (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree).

Sampling and data collection

A total of 303 questionnaires was collected from the attendants and were analyzed. Personal information like name or ID were not included to keep the participants' confidentiality.

Data analysis

Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, version 21.00) was used to analyze the data. Frequency of participants' characters along with general satisfaction were analyzed with tables. Cross-tabs of patient variables with their reported answers were made to find any significant correlations and compare it with the literature. Correlations with a P-value of less than (0.05) were considered significant.

RESULTS

A total of 303 responses was entered and analyzed. Of which (50.8%) were males, (93.1%) were aged from 15 to 45 years, about two thirds (65.3%) were singles, (79.9%) were income-satisfied, and (69.6%) have completed or still studying at the university, which indicates a high educational level among our sample.

The satisfaction about nurses and their treatment were found to be high. The lowest score was for the explanation of the medical conditions by the nurses, which could be due to language barrier. (Table 1).

Table 1: Patients' satisfaction about nurses' services.

	nurses treat you with courtesy and respect	nurses listen to you carefully	nurses explain things in a way you could understand
Strongly agree	44.2	32.3	29.4
Agree	38.6	37.6	29.7
Neutral	13.9	22.1	26.4
Disagree	2.0	5.6	8.9
Strongly disagree	1.3	2.3	5.6

Doctors have slightly higher levels of satisfaction by their patients, and the same addressed issue of explaining the medical condition was reported by our sample. (Table 2)

Upon analysis of cleanliness, quietness, privacy, and difficulty moving around the hospital. The results indicated high levels of satisfaction about privacy and moving around, while the facilities visitors were not very pleased about quietness and cleanliness. (Table 3).

Table 2: Patients' satisfaction about doctors' services

	Doctors treat you with courtesy and respect	Doctors listen to you carefully	Doctors explain things in a way you could understand
Strongly agree	63.7	49.5	33.3
Agree	26.4	34.3	29.0
Neutral	7.9	12.5	23.8
Disagree	1.3	2.3	9.2
Strongly disagree	0.7	1.3	4.6

Table 3: Patients’ satisfaction about cleanliness, noise, privacy and difficulty moving.

	The rooms were kept clean	The area is quiet at night	Staff make sure you have enough privacy	It is easy to find your way around the hospital
Strongly agree	32.7	29.4	58.7	63.0
Agree	46.9	34.3	28.4	24.1
Neutral	15.8	24.4	9.9	9.9
Disagree	4.0	10.2	1.7	1.7
Strongly disagree	.7	1.7	1.3	1.3

On asking about medications, explaining their purposes, and side effects, our population found those factors as the least satisfying upon all other factors. The missed percentage is for patients who have not been prescribed drugs during their visit. (Table 4).

Table 4: Patients’ satisfaction about explanation of drug-related information.

	Staff tell you what is the medicine for	Staff explain possible side effects
Strongly agree	33.7	13.9
Agree	26.4	23.4
Neutral	11.9	17.8
Disagree	1.7	12.9
Strongly disagree	1.7	7.3

Females were slightly less satisfied about services provided by nurses (P-value=0.013). In comparison to males’ satisfaction about doctors’ services which was found to be significant (p-value=0.044). Higher levels of education were correlated significantly with higher levels of satisfaction (P-value=0.048).

Further analysis found that patients who are income-satisfied, are generally satisfied about the health services in PHC centers and KFH.

Researchers could not find any further significant associations of satisfaction with marital status, residence, or age.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are generally supportive to the literature. Where most of the participants were satisfied about the services provided by PHC centers and tertiary hospitals. In our study, patients were more satisfied about doctors

than nurses with high levels of satisfaction for both, where the literature have found that nurses had the highest scores for patients’ satisfaction [13-14].

Our study has included PHC and tertiary centers with the exclusion of private hospitals. Previous studies have found that patients were also satisfied about private hospitals in Saudi Arabia [11,13]. A comparative study between governmental and private hospitals was the only study where we could find a low satisfaction among governmental hospitals patients [11].

Considering the communication factor, it was found to be the lowest satisfactory factor among all other studied factors in the present study, when patients have reported that doctors and nurses don’t explain the disease, medicine, and other health-related issues clearly. This finding was also suggested before, where the most probable explanation for this is the language barrier [8-9]. For this reason, previous studies have emphasized the importance of empathy and communication skills [8-9,15].

A significant finding in the present study was that males were more satisfied than females (P-value=0.013). Where most of the studies could not find any significant association between satisfaction and gender, a single study that was investigating satisfaction among patients attending the emergency department in central Saudi Arabia has found the opposite finding, in which low satisfaction rates were associated with the male gender [6].

Where many previous studies have found that higher levels of satisfaction are associated with lower education levels [2,5], we have found a significant correlation between high levels of education and satisfaction (P-value=0.048). This was predictable as most of our samples were at the university level or have finished university. Generally, our results concluded a high rate of satisfaction.

Income-satisfied participants were also satisfied about the health care services. Researchers were unable to find any such supportive or contrary findings proposed in the literature.

Age, marital status, and residence were not significantly associated with the levels of satisfaction in our sample.

The limitations of this study were the relatively low sample size, and the exclusion of private hospitals. The low sample size will not make the conclusive data generalizable to Saudi Arabia.

CONCLUSION

The current study indicated a high level of satisfaction among the attendants of PHC centers and hospitals in Al-Baha, Saudi Arabia.

Male gender, higher education, and income-satisfaction were significantly associated with the high levels of satisfaction.

The unsatisfying factor was that doctors and nurses did not explain to the patients' health issues sufficiently. Thus, we recommend implanting programs concerning communication skills for health care providers.

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