

Patients' Perception on Service Quality of Government Hospitals

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 20 January 2019

Keywords

Hospitals, Service quality, SERVQUAL

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ABSTRACT

Hospitals play an important role in giving health care facility to customers. This paper examines and measures the quality of services provided by Government hospitals in Thoothukudi district. The objective of this research is to examine the patient perception of hospital services in Government hospitals of Thoothukudi district. For this purpose 'SERVQUAL' instrument is used to measure the patient's expectations and perceptions about service quality delivered by Government hospitals. In this study, five dimensions namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy were considered. The research is purely based on primary data. The data has been collected from 772 respondents by using structured questionnaire. Results based on testing the mean differences between expectations and perception indicate that patients' perceived value of the services exceed expectations for all the variables measured. The findings help the Government hospitals to improve in the five dimensions tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

1. Introduction

Healthcare sector is considered to be the major service sector for a country as it plays a vital role to develop and maintain a healthy human capital to achieve national goals. In many countries around the globe, healthcare sector has also become a highly competitive and fast growing service industry (Jabnoun, N and Chaker M., 2003)¹. Patient satisfaction is an important factor for every Government hospital. Therefore the hospitals have to try to provide better facilities to the society. The Government hospitals will have to gear up to meet the present needs of the people. Now –a- days the life style of the people in the society has changed than before. As a result very serious diseases occur in the society. The poor and down trodden masses throng the portals of the Government hospitals for free medical care. Therefore, expenditure on public health care by the Government has escalated sky high. Government has to allocate sufficient funds in every budget to augment and provide latest facilities to the masses that depend on the Government hospital (Divya, M., 2014)². Service quality is a critical element of customer perception. In the case of pure services, servicequality will be the dominant element in customer's evaluations. In case, where customer's service orservices are offered in combination with physical product, service quality may also be very critical indetermining customer satisfaction (Dheepa, T. et al., 2015)³. However, service quality improvement for achieving customer expectations and satisfaction has become a major challenge for services industries.

2. Review of literature

Sedat et al (2007)⁴focused on the study to measure the patients' expectations, based on patients' rights. Analysis was done between age, gender, education, health insurance, and

the income of the family and patients' expectations. For this purpose, they collected data from 396 patients from different parts of the city. It was recommended by them that the educational and public awareness studies on the patients' rights must be done in order to increase the expectations of the patients. They observed that patient expectation levels are less than "required expectation level". It is thought that high satisfaction levels are due to low expectation levels and this does not show the high quality of health service.

Rajinder Singh (2010)⁵ found that consumer satisfaction is important to the hospital because it is generally assumed to have a significant determinant of repeat visit, positive word-of-mouth, and patients' loyalty. Patients' perceptions about health services seem to have been largely ignored by health care providers in developing countries. The important reasons to visit Government hospitals are fewer charges, geographical proximity, recommended by their friends or relatives. Patients are found to be dissatisfied with the doctors' checkup.

RanjitChakraborty and AnirbanMajumdar (2011)⁶ focuses on the measurement of patient satisfaction in the light of service quality provided by hospital. A detailed review of literature were considered to investigate the relevance of service quality in measuring patients satisfaction in healthcare sector in today's competitive environment. In spite of popularity of SERVQUAL, various researchers pointed out the limitation of SERVQUAL about its low reliability and construct validity. The authors at the end propose that there is a need to go deeper in to the subject matter of the applicability of SERVQUAL model in Indian context.

3. Statement of the problem

In a fast growth and necessity of hospital services, it becomes vital to know the delivery of services provided by Government hospitals. This study helps the hospital industry in understanding their position. Majority of people are from rural background and they are not having enough education on proper health, hygiene and sanitations. Since these people are from poor economic background, they solely depend on the Government hospitals for their treatments. The common man believes that the Government hospitals are providing low quality service to the patients (Dheepa, et al., 2015)⁷. Satisfaction is the result from the comparison between predicted service and perceived service whereas quality refers to the comparison between desired service and perceived service (Zeithaml, V.A., et al., 1993)⁸. Based on this view perceived service quality is a component of customer satisfaction. In this context, the researcher is interested in undertaking a study on patients' perception towards health services rendered by Government hospitals in Thoothukudi district.

4. Objectives of the study

The following are the objectives of the study

1. To study the socio-economic background of the patients and to measure any existing gaps between patients' perception and expectations.
2. To assess the patients' perception about the quality of services in Government hospitals at Thoothukudi district.

5. Hypotheses of the study

The following are the null hypotheses to be tested in the study

1. There is no significance difference between the demographic profile of the patients and factors influencing their perception of health services at Government hospital.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Design

This study concerned with obtaining information by interviewing the sample respondents is descriptive in nature. The study has made an attempt to explain the patients' perception towards the service quality offered by Government hospitals in Thoothukudi district.

6.2 Sampling Design

By multi stage stratified proportionate random sampling method, respondents were selected from three taluks of Thoothukudi district from the view of patients both in urban and rural areas. The sample size of this study is 772. Structured interview schedule was used to collect the relevant data among the patients acquiring treatment from Government hospitals in Thoothukudi District.

6.3 Sources of data

The present study is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through interview schedules. Secondary data were collected through books, websites, published articles, magazines and journals.

6.4 Framework of analysis

The selection of statistical tools was based upon the nature of data used and research objectives. The data were analysed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software package version 20. The applied statistical analyses are percentage analysis, chi-square analysis, rank, correlation and service quality gap analysis.

7. Results and discussion

This section shows the analysis and interpretation of data used for the study. Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, educational qualification, monthly income and occupation are very vital in determining and assessing patients' perception and service quality in Government hospitals.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents (n = 772)

Demographic profile	No. of respondents	Percentage
Age group		
Upto 20 years	49	6.3
21 - 40 years	405	52.5
41 - 60 years	214	27.7
Above 60 years	104	13.5
Total	772	100.0
Gender		
Male	218	28.2
Female	553	71.6
Transgender	1	0.1
Total	772	100.0
Educational qualification		
Illiterate	125	16.2
School level	473	61.3
Diploma	69	8.9

Graduates	70	9.1
Post graduates	27	3.5
Professionals	8	1.0
Total	772	100.0
Monthly income		
UptoRs. 10,000	457	59.2
Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000	262	33.9
Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 30,000	36	4.7
Above Rs. 30,001	17	2.2
Total	772	100.0
Occupation		
Unemployed	67	8.7
Students	43	5.6
Farmers	20	2.6
Business people	53	6.9
Private employees	213	27.6
Government employees	16	2.1
Professionals	2	0.3
House wives	347	44.9
Retired	11	1.4
Total	772	100.0

Source: Primary data

The demographic profile of the respondents was summarized in Table 1. Out of 772 respondents, 52.5 per cent of the respondents belonged to the age group of 21 to 40 years. 71.6 per cent of the respondents belong to female. 61.3

per cent of the respondents completed school level. 59.2per cent of the respondents earn income upto Rs. 10,000. In the study, 44.9 per cent of the respondents are house wives.

Table 2: Factors influencing the selection of the Government hospital –Simple ranking

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	Rank
Doctors are experienced and well qualified.	440 (57.0)	230 (29.8)	46 (6.0)	40 (5.2)	16 (2.1)	772 (100.0)	4.34	I
Reputation of the hospital is good.	167 (21.6)	468 (60.6)	90 (11.7)	14 (1.8)	33 (4.3)	772 (100.0)	3.94	III
The hospital has equipment facilities and infrastructures.	157 (20.3)	220 (28.5)	116 (15.0)	153 (19.8)	126 (16.3)	772 (100.0)	3.17	XII
The patient registration process is easy and simple.	186 (24.1)	356 (46.1)	123 (15.9)	53 (6.9)	54 (7.0)	772 (100.0)	3.73	IX
The doctors give proper guidance and diagnosis.	266 (34.5)	325 (42.1)	94 (12.2)	58 (7.5)	29 (3.8)	772 (100.0)	3.96	II
The hospital has good ambience.	171 (22.2)	438 (56.7)	82 (10.6)	31 (4.0)	50 (6.5)	772 (100.0)	3.84	V
The hospital gives extra facilities	177 (22.9)	222 (28.8)	138 (17.9)	152 (19.7)	83 (10.8)	772 (100.0)	3.33	XI
The hospital is located in nearby area.	138 (17.9)	291 (37.7)	141 (18.3)	112 (14.5)	90 (11.7)	772 (100.0)	3.36	X
The hospital has excellent emergency care services.	235 (30.4)	337 (43.7)	121 (15.7)	47 (6.1)	32 (4.1)	772 (100.0)	3.90	IV
The hospital is recommended by other doctors.	189 (24.5)	361 (46.8)	123 (15.9)	64 (8.3)	35 (4.5)	772 (100.0)	3.78	VII
Laboratory for tests are available in hospital.	224 (29.0)	295 (38.2)	142 (18.4)	71 (9.2)	40 (5.2)	772 (100.0)	3.77	VIII
The hospital offers easy payment system.	184 (23.8)	371 (48.1)	129 (16.7)	47 (6.1)	41 (5.3)	772 (100.0)	3.79	VI

Source: Primary data

Table 2 shows the factors affecting the selection of the Government hospital. Majority of the patients select the

Government hospital for the important factor is 'Doctors are experienced and well qualified' with a mean value of 4.34. It is

followed by the second, third and fourth reasons. 'The doctors give proper guidance and diagnosis', 'The reputation of the hospital is good' and 'The hospital has excellent emergency care services' with the mean values of 3.96, 3.94 and 3.90 respectively. The lowest mean value was obtained by the

factor 'The hospital has equipment facilities and infrastructures'. It is concluded from the analysis that the majority of the patients select Government hospitals because the doctors are experienced and well qualified.

Table 3: Perceived service quality in Government hospitals and nature of treatment–Cross tabulation

Nature of treatment	Factors	Perceived service quality			Total
		Low	Moderate	High	
Medical	Respondents	92	161	99	352
	Nature of treatment	26.1%	45.7%	28.1%	100.0%
	Perceived service quality	46.0%	42.6%	51.0%	45.6%
Surgical	Respondents	9	61	20	90
	Nature of treatment	10.0%	67.8%	22.2%	100.0%
	Perceived service quality	4.5%	16.1%	10.3%	11.7%
Emergency	Respondents	70	88	48	206
	Nature of treatment	34.0%	42.7%	23.3%	100.0%
	Perceived service quality	35.0%	23.3%	24.7%	26.7%
Maternity	Respondents	29	68	27	124
	Nature of treatment	23.4%	54.8%	21.8%	100.0%
	Perceived service quality	14.5%	18.0%	13.9%	16.1%
Total	Respondents	200	378	194	772
	Nature of treatment	25.9%	49.0%	25.1%	100.0%
	Perceived service quality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Primary data

Table 3 shows the relationship between the nature of treatment and patients' perception on service quality of the patients. The patients' perceived service quality is moderate for

majority of the patients' for taking any kind of treatment such as medical, surgical, emergency and maternity.

Table 4: Perceived service quality in Government hospitals and nature of treatment- Chi-square test

Factors	Chi-square value	df	Sig. value
Pearson Chi-Square	26.443	6	0.001*
N of Valid Cases	772		

*Significant at 5% level

Table 4 shows the association between the nature of treatment and patients' perception on service quality in Government hospitals. As per rejection of null hypothesis $p=0.001$ ($p<0.05$), nature of treatment is associated with the

perception of patients about Government hospitals. Therefore, nature of treatment influences the patients' perception on service quality in Government hospitals.

Table 5: Factors determining the level of patients' perception on service quality in Government hospitals - Correlation

Factors		Tangibility	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
Tangibility	Pearson Correlation	1	.900**	.888**	.914**	.895**
	Sig. value		.000	.000	.000	.000
	Respondents		772	772	772	772
Reliability	Pearson Correlation		1	.886**	.909**	.890**
	Sig. value			.000	.000	.000
	Respondents			772	772	772
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation			1	.928**	.892**
	Sig. value				.000	.000
	Respondents				772	772
Assurance	Pearson Correlation				1	.978**
	Sig. value					.000

	Respondents				772
Empathy	Pearson Correlation				1
	Sig. value				
	Respondents				

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 explains the relationship between the five dimensions of Government hospital services such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy using Pearson correlation. In this analysis, there exists a relationship among all the variables. It is observed that the

value of correlation co-efficient between assurance and empathy dimensions shows the value 0.978 and it is significant at 1 per cent level which indicates strong positive relationship between assurance and empathy.

Table 6: Service quality gap analysis

Variables	Expectations (E)	Perceptions (P)	Gaps (E)- (P)	% of Satisfaction
Tangibility				
Best and latest modern looking medical equipment	3.90	2.80	-1.10	-28.21
Usage of modern technology in service	3.42	2.24	-1.18	-34.50
Cleanliness and hygiene of the hospital environment is excellent	3.77	2.74	-1.03	-27.32
Hospital's personnel appear neat	3.88	2.87	-1.01	-26.03
Sufficient number of beds are available in the hospital	3.37	2.44	-0.93	-27.60
The hospital are in a convenient location	3.82	2.73	-1.09	-28.53
The hospital had adequate security	3.39	2.37	-1.02	-30.09
Overall cleaners of hospital	3.52	2.51	-1.01	-28.69
Basic infrastructural facilities	3.58	2.46	-1.12	-31.28
Regular power supply	3.49	2.44	-1.05	-30.09
Basic sanitation facilities	3.51	2.47	-1.04	-29.63
Reliability				
Offers prompt service every time	3.72	2.77	-0.95	-25.54
Provide the services as promised	3.37	2.40	-0.97	-28.78
Hospital staffs are dependable in handling the patients' needs	3.70	2.64	-1.06	-28.65
Hospitals maintain error free records	3.43	2.43	-1.00	-29.15
Doctors and staffs are professional and competent	3.58	2.64	-0.94	-26.26
Hospitals provide clear information about the medical condition	3.58	2.38	-1.20	-33.52
Nurses evince interest in solving patients basic problems	3.63	2.49	-1.14	-31.40
Doctors are attending patients whenever they are called	3.51	2.37	-1.14	-32.48
Responsiveness				
Administration staff are efficient in dealing with queries	3.84	2.63	-1.21	-31.51
Willingness to help patients	3.44	2.35	-1.09	-31.69
Hospital reception answers phone calls promptly	3.67	2.45	-1.22	-33.24
Prompt information on the services that would be performed	3.71	2.37	-1.34	-36.12
Readiness of doctors/ nurses/ personnel in providing prompt services	3.61	2.36	-1.25	-34.63
Hospitals give prompt services to the patients	3.59	2.39	-1.20	-33.43
Assurance				
Employees are carrying and courteous at all items	3.73	2.69	-1.04	-27.88
Use of proficient medical staff	3.48	2.34	-1.14	-32.76
Experienced and knowledgeable doctors/ nurses are working in the hospital	3.64	2.62	-1.02	-28.02
Staff in the hospital regards patients privacy	3.60	2.36	-1.24	-34.44
Hospital staff are favourable towards the visitors	3.52	2.33	-1.19	-33.81

Empathy				
Giving individualized medical attention	3.66	2.66	-1.00	-27.32
Offers convenient times to use the hospital services	3.54	2.44	-1.10	-31.07
Understanding towards the feelings of discomfort	3.40	2.53	-0.87	-25.59
Convenient timing of services for patients	3.56	2.45	-1.11	-31.18
Ease of communication with the doctors	3.62	2.47	-1.15	-31.77
Getting approval from patients/ relatives before test/ treatment	3.55	2.55	-1.00	-28.17

Source: Primary data

The data of analysis in Table 6 reveals that among the statements in different dimensions all statements have negative service gap viz., under the factor tangibility, 'Usage of modern technology in service' (-1.18), under the factor reliability, 'Hospitals provide clear information about the

medical condition' (-1.20), under the factor responsiveness, 'Prompt information on the services that would be performed' (-1.34), under the factor assurance, 'Staff in the hospital regards patients privacy' (-1.24) and under the factor empathy, 'Ease of communication with the doctors' (-1.15).

Table 7: Mean scores of five dimensions on service quality

Factors	Expectations (E)	Perceptions (P)	Gaps (E)-(P)	% of Satisfaction
Tangibility	39.65	28.07	-11.59	-29.22
Reliability	28.51	20.13	-8.38	-29.40
Responsiveness	21.86	14.56	-7.30	-33.40
Assurance	17.98	27.44	9.46	52.63
Empathy	21.32	15.10	-6.23	-29.20
Overall Results	129.33	90.20	-39.13	-30.26

Source: Primary data

From the above table 7, the mean scores are calculated for individual dimensions. It is found that tangibility dimension of health care service has more gap followed by reliability and responsiveness. Empathy dimension is the fourth on the list. On the other hand, only the dimension of assurance has no gap. Overall the gap in tangibility, reliability and responsiveness are more in the service quality of Government hospitals which is needed to be taken care. The Government hospitals have to improve in these four dimensions tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and empathy.

8. Findings of the study

The following are the important findings of the study

1. Majority (52.5 per cent) of the respondents belonged to the age group of 21 to 40 years. Majority (71.6 per cent) of the respondents belong to female category. Most (61.3 per cent) of the respondents are educated at school level. Majority (59.2 per cent) of the respondents are earning upto Rs. 10,000 as monthly family income. Majority (44.9 per cent) of the respondents are house wives.
2. Majority of the patients select the Government hospital for the important reason that doctors are experienced and well qualified.
3. Relationship between the nature of treatment and patients' perception on service quality of the patients about the Government hospitals is the highest (45.6 per cent) among the patients undergone for medical checkup.

4. Chi-square analysis reveals that nature of treatment is related to the perception on service quality in Government hospitals.
5. Correlation analysis found that the five dimensions of Government hospitals are having positive association with the level of perception.
6. Service quality gap analysis reveals that among the statements in different dimensions all statements have negative service quality gap. It is found that tangibility dimension of health care service has more gap. On the other hand, only the dimension of assurance has no gap. Overall the gap in tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and empathy are more in service quality in Government hospitals which need to be taken care.

9. Suggestions and conclusion

In conclusion, patients' perception towards service quality in Government hospitals at Thoothukudi is divided into five dimensions such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The negative SERVQUAL gap score for each of the four dimensions indicate a need for overall improvement in service quality. Administrators should understand the area in which expectations are high, so that the service delivery process can be tailored to meet those expectations. The Government hospitals have to improve in the four dimensions tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and empathy. Health services must be of decent quality. This means not only offering a good standard of health care but also reducing waiting time, availability of medicines and treating patients with respect.

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