Patients Preference Towards Private Hospitals In Tirunelveli City

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The healthcare industry has witnessed a significant shift in customer preferences, with private hospitals emerging as a favoured choice for many patients. This study explores the factors influencing customer preference toward private hospitals, focusing on aspects such as quality of care, infrastructure, accessibility, service delivery, and patient satisfaction. Through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews, the research identifies key determinants such as advanced medical technology, shorter wait times, personalized care, and superior amenities that contribute to the preference for private healthcare institutions ("upadhyai" n.d). Additionally, the study examines demographic and socioeconomic variables, uncovering trends across age, income levels, and urban-rural divides. The findings provide actionable insights for private healthcare providers to enhance patient-centric services and address challenges, such as affordability and equitable access. This research contributes to the growing discourse on healthcare consumer behaviour, offering strategies to bridge the gap between public and private healthcare systems while maintaining a focus on quality and inclusivity.

Key Words: Healthcare industry, Patient preferences, Private hospitals, Quality and Personalized care.

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare is a fundamental need, and the quality of services provided significantly impacts an individual's well-being. In recent decades, the healthcare landscape has undergone substantial transformation, with private hospitals becoming a popular choice for many individuals worldwide. The growth of private healthcare institutions is often attributed to their

ability to offer superior infrastructure, advanced medical technologies, and personalized care. These attributes, combined with growing dissatisfaction with overcrowded and under-resourced public healthcare systems, have contributed to a shift in customer preferences toward private hospitals.

Understanding customer preferences in healthcare is critical for stakeholders, including policymakers, healthcare providers, and administrators, to design systems that meet patient expectations and deliver equitable care. While private hospitals often excel in aspects like service quality, accessibility, and convenience, they face challenges related to affordability and inclusivity, which can create disparities in healthcare access. The assessment of health systems can also take into account factors including equity, acceptability, efficiency, and quality. In the US, these have also been referred to as "the five C's": complexity, cost, coverage, consistency, and chronic illness.

This study seeks to explore customer preferences toward private hospitals, examining the key factors that drive their selection and the underlying demographic, economic, and social influences. By identifying these determinants, the research aims to provide insights that can help private healthcare providers enhance their offerings while ensuring a balanced healthcare system that accommodates diverse patient needs. The findings also have implications for policymakers to address the gaps between private and public healthcare services, fostering a more integrated and patient-centered approach to healthcare delivery.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ali SS, et.al. (2018) Indicated best patients preference in some dimensions of services, namely, the tangible dimension of parking spaces," empathy dimension of "Doctors response to patient request", assurance dimension of "dependency on Doctor/Nurse," and in the responsiveness dimension of "employees alwayscommunicate truly" on hospital matters.

Kumar et.al. (2019) from their study concluded that patient satisfaction is significantly associated with eight factors like, Medical care, Staff behaviour, Facilities, Welfare aspect, Doctors' behaviour, Administrative procedure, Operative facility, and Cleanness but is most significantly correlated with medical care and staff behaviour indicating their importance in the setting of hospital services, and least significantly correlated with welfare aspect and cleanness.

According to **Rani, M. S. B. A. (2021)**, in her study explained that Patient satisfaction, adoption, perception, behaviour patterns, security, as well as privacy are some of the areas that are considered. After a diligent and thorough search, about 30 articles met the criteria for this review. A result of the review, security concerns for Fintech users both during and after adoption continue to be a barrier to adoption. As an outcome of the research, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) emerged as the most widely used for Fintech model. Again, trust, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived risk, compatibility and performance and effort expectations remain the most studied variables in the Fintech literature, according to a recent review. As being one of the least significant subjects in Fintech, security

is seized and encapsulated in this review. However, most of the reviews proposed that better action should be focused on security, as it relates to the safety of customers of the whole emerging Fintech technology. This study has also inspired researchers and academics to explore other aspects apart from security.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The healthcare industry in Tirunelveli City is witnessing a growing competition between private and public hospitals. Understanding customer preferences towards private hospitals has become increasingly important for healthcare providers to ensure quality service delivery, patient satisfaction, and competitive positioning. Despite the availability of public healthcare facilities, a significant portion of the population chooses private hospitals for various reasons, such as quality of care, accessibility, infrastructure, and personalized attention. This study seeks to address the problem of identifying and analyzing the key factors influencing patient's preferences towards private hospitals in Tirunelveli City. There comes a need to identify the public awareness about private hospital and the reason behind choosing hospital.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the socio-demographic profile of the respondents in the study area.
- To examine the awareness of the respondents towards private hospitals in Tirunelveli city.
- To identify the Patient preference towards private hospitals in Tirunelveli city

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on patients' preferences towards selecting hospital. Thus, this research is based on descriptive research and the sampling method is convenience sampling. 385 samples were taken for the study. Primary and secondary data was used in the study. Tools like percentage method, ranking method and Friedman analysis test were used for analysis. Different publications of the central, state or local governments, Books, magazine, newspapers & websites are used forthe collection of secondary data. The Interview schedule was used to collect the data.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The economic development and importance of health care services has constantly increased nowadays. There is a need to extend a superior service to satisfy the patients. This study focuses on evaluating patient preference as a measure of healthcare service effectiveness.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The patients who visited the private hospitals alone were selected for interview and

collected data from only those patients who were willing to spare their time to give responses to the inquiries of the researcher. This study focuses on the respondents from Tirunelveli city only.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents the analysis of data and its interpretation. The following table shows the socio-demographic profile of the respondents,

Table 1 Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

Socio-demographic variables	Categories	No of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	197	51.17
	Female	181	47.01
	Transgender	07	1.82
Age	Less than 20 years	34	8.84
	21-40 years	237	61.56
	41-60 years	106	27.53
	Above 60 years	08	2.07
Marital status	Married	194	50.40
	Unmarried	180	46.75
	Widow/Divorced	11	2.85
Qualification	Primary education	98	25.45
	Secondary Education	62	16.10
	Higher Secondary Education	74	19.24
	Graduation	123	31.94
	Post-Graduation	28	7.27

The above table shows that 51.17% of the respondents are male, 47.01% of the respondents are female and 1.82% of the respondents are transgenders. It is also clear that 8.84% of the respondents are less than 20 years of age, 61.56% of the respondents are between 21 and 40 years of age, 27.53% of the response are between 41 and 60 years of age and 2.07% of the respondents are above 60 years. The table shows that 50.40% of the respondents are married, 46.75% of the respondents are unmarried and 2.85% of the respondents are widow or divorced. It is also evident from the table that 25.45% of the respondents have completed primary education, 16.1 0% of the respondents have completed secondary education, 19.4% of the respondents have completed higher secondary education, 31.94% of the respondents have completed graduation and 7.27% of the respondents are post graduates.

Table 2 Awareness about hospital

S.No	Sources	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
1	Medical Professionals	72	18.70	I

2	Friends and Relatives	46	11.95	V
3	News/Ads/and Media	69	17.92	II
4	Ex-Patients	57	14.81	IV
5	Free Health campus and Exhibition	43	11.17	VI
6	General Public	62	16.10	III
7	Others, Please Specify	36	9.35	VII
	Total	**385**	**100**	

From the table 2 it is evident that 18.70% of the respondents know the hospital through medical professionals which ranked as first followed by 11.95% of the respondents through friends and relatives, 17.92% of the respondents through news/ads/media, followed by 14.81% of the respondents by ex-patients. 11.17% of the respondents are aware by free health campus and exhibition, 16.10% of the respondents by general public and 9.35% of the respondents came to know about the hospital through other sources. Hence the medical professionals and media ads plays a vital role among the patients towards their awareness level in the study area.

Table 3 Reason for Choosing Private Hospital

S.No	Sources	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Infrastructure	67	17.40
2	Service	109	28.31
3	Patient Care	102	26.50
4	Transport and Food Facilities	58	15.06
5	Safety	49	12.73
	Total	385	100.00

The above table 3 clearly shows that 17.40% of the respondents had choose private hospitals for its infrastructure, 28.31% of the respondent for the services offered, 26.50% of the respondents for patient care, followed by 15.06% of the respondents feel comfortable with its transportation and food facilities. 12.73% of the respondents choose private hospitals for safety. From this above, majority of the respondents have chosen private hospitals for the services offered followed by patient care given by the hospitals in the study area.

Table 4 Friedman test for a significant difference between mean ranks towards factors influencing the patients' preferences on selecting hospitals

S. No.	Factors	Mean Rank	Rank	Chi-Square value	P value
1.	Popularity of hospital	3.11	XXVII		
2.	Availability of specialist doctors	5.68	VII		
3.	Centre place	3.22	XXVI		
4.	Local transport facility	3.29	XIV		
5.	Ease of making appointment	6.89	V	470.22	<0.001**
6.	Less Waiting time in the reception/exam	6.75	VI		
7.	Privacy when being examined or treated	4.75	XIII		
8.	Explanation of diseases and treatment	5.58	VIII		
9.	24 hours Doctors/ Nurses availability	8.20	I		
10.	Government Scheme Implementation	5.44	IX		
11.	Approach of doctors/nurses	7.80	III		
12.	Service on demand	3.26	XXV		
13.	Good infrastructure facilities	5.32	X		
14.	Availability of pharmacy	3.38	XXI		
15.	Availability of canteen	3.30	XXIII		
16.	Advance reservation services	4.52	XVII		
17.	Specialty department for diseases	4.89	XII		
18.	Emergency admission possibility	8.11	II		
19.	Availability of 24 hrs Ambulance facility	4.69	XV		
20.	Advanced Scanning technologies	4.49	XVIII		
21.	Lab for blood/culture	4.72	XIV		
22.	Availability of more ward	4.38	XX		
23.	Advanced communication technology	4.42	XIX		
24.	Hygienic Environment	5.24	XI		
25.	Systematic diagnosis	4.58	XVI		

| 26. | Cost of treatment | 7.45 | IV | | |
| 27. | Proximity to residence | 3.32 | XXII | | |

Note: 1. ** denotes significant at 1% level

Hypothesis: There is a significant difference between mean ranks towards factors influencing the patients' preferences on selecting hospitals.

It is observed that there is a significant difference between mean ranks towards factors influencing the patients" preferences on selecting private hospitals in the Tirunelveli City. Hence the above measurement variables were considered to be statistically significant at 1 percent level and play important role on patient's preferences while selecting private hospitals. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. While ranking the statements according to the mean values, "24hrs doctors/nurses availability" proved to be the most effective factor that has influenced the preference of patients with mean rank of 8.20. The statements "Emergency admission possibility" (8.11), "Approach of doctors/nurses" (7.80), „Cost of treatment"(7.45), and "Ease of making appointment" (6.89) are ranked as important factors from second to five. The patients have given least preference towards "Availability of Canteen" (3.30), "Local Transport Facility" (3.29), "Service on Demand" (3.26), "Centre Place" (3.22) and "Popularity of Hospital" (3.11) Hence from the above analysis, it is concluded that "24hrs doctors/nurses availability" proved to be the most effective factor that has influenced the preference of patients.

FINDINGS

From this study it is evident, that the patients came to know about the hospital mostly by medical professionals, followed by news, ads and media. When the respondents were asked to present their perceptions on preference of private hospitals in Tirunelveli city through five-point scale. The perception of each measurement items has been decided on the mean rank score of the perception of patients" preference. Based on mean rank score, the 27 statements have been positively perceived by the patients. It is observed from the table 4 that there is a significant difference between factors influencing the patients" preference on selection of hospitals. In general, Service and patients care find top priority in choosing the hospital. People between the age group of 21 to 40 visit hospital often that too mostly male candidates. Clean bathroom facilities and water facilities is another reason identified as a significant factor.

SUGGESTION

The preferences of patient towards selecting hospitals are related to several fundamental issues. Awareness about doctors list and schedules, courtesy and approach of medical staffs, availability of ambulance, food, canteen and bathroom facilities finds most the significant factors to be improved by the health care services to attract and sustain the patients group. Patient trust is very much important to effective treatment in clinical practice. So, it became

inevitable to take appropriate responsibility to take care of patient welfare at the highest priority.

CONCLUSION

One important strategy in the service industry that gives a boost to global competition in the field is sustainability. Today, the healthcare industry has begun embracing sustainability more aggressively. Patients' preference towards healthcare services becomes an important tool in devising healthcare service quality, access improvement and monitoring. In our study we have found that patient's preference is identified with service quality, transport, pharmacy & canteen services. The fact is, increasing modern era demands awareness of the health care seekers push the medical care providers to deliver quality medical care in package with quality hospitality and related facilities to succour them.

Ultimately, the study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach that integrates the strengths of private healthcare sectors to deliver efficient, equitable, and high-quality services for all.

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