

Study on the Influence of Service Quality towards Patient Satisfaction of Private Hospitals in Western Province of Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Healthcare has become one of the most important and rapidly expanding service sector industries in Sri Lanka, comprising private and public sector healthcare service providers. The attention given to qualitative studies on understanding how patient satisfaction is influenced by service quality is very rare, especially in the Sri Lankan healthcare sector. According to the Private Health Services Regulatory Council (PHSRC) directed under the Ministry of Health (MOH), there are fifty (50) hospitals identified and related to the private sector located in the Western province of Sri Lanka (MOH, 2022). The study focuses on the adoption of SERVQUAL (reliability, tangibility, assurance empathy, and responsiveness) to assess how service quality influences patient satisfaction. Enhanced service quality will help retain existing customers as well as attract potential customers, improve the business image of the business, create positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and will lead to improved profits.

Researchers have utilized the following SERVQUAL model factors which affect service quality (Duggirala, Rajendran, and Anantharaman, 2008; Aynul Sowmiya Badhurudheen, 2018; Team, 2022). Reliability refers to the organization's ability to perform the services to satisfy their customer needs and maintain customer satisfaction consistently. It involves all the instances from customer interaction to the delivery of final products, grievance handling, and competitive pricing. An organization's success will depend on its capability to meet customer expectations of reliability. Tangibility means the company's ability portrays service quality through tangible quality. Maintaining the physical facilities, employee appearance, and organization of the facility is important. Empathy is an organization's ability to deliver

services by being empathetic towards the customers. When the customers trust the organization as a party that is empathetic and truly cares about their demands and desires, they tend to be more loyal to the organization. Responsiveness means the company's ability and willingness to help its customers promptly. Responsiveness can be stated as the quick and consistent response to customer requests, feedback, questions, and issues as it shows how the organization values its customers. Assurance refers to the organization's ability to create confidence and trust among customers. Gaining the trust of the customers is important for a company when retaining customers.

Objectives

The study aims to investigate the influence of service quality (SERVQUAL model) on patient satisfaction in the Sri Lankan private healthcare sector with reference to the Western Province.

Methodology

The study intended to achieve the objectives via a qualitative approach by a theoretical thematic analysis, using convenience and purposive sampling. The researchers identified two main constructs as service quality - the independent construct - and patient satisfaction as the dependent construct. Service quality is determined by referring to the SERVQUAL framework with reliability, tangibility, assurance empathy, and responsiveness. Data collection was done by interviewing the people who have been admitted and received treatments from six (06) leading private hospitals located in the Western province of Sri Lanka, for not less than five days (purposive sampling) and respondents were identified from the researchers' contacts as per the convenience sampling technique. Fifteen (15) interviews were conducted until the saturation was met. Saturation is the stage of data collection where there cannot be any additional issues or insights that could be identified from data and all relevant conceptual categories have been identified and explored. After the data collection, the analysis was done with the technique of theoretical thematic analysis. According to the study conducted by Braun and Clarke in 2006, thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data and is used to search across a data set to identify, analyze and report repeated patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The goal of this approach is to identify themes of patterns

in a data set and to use those themes to address research objectives or to say about any issues identified.

Results and Discussion

As per the study, six themes were derived from the conducted thematic analysis, which confirms that the private sector hospitals have been providing positive experiences to their customers that cover the five dimensions indicated on the SERVQUAL model, which ultimately leads to satisfied customers. Hence the private sector hospitals provided high-quality service for their customers, and there is a positive influence of service quality towards patient satisfaction in the private sector hospitals of Western, Province Sri Lanka.

Table 1: Analysis of the private hospitals (SERVQUAL)

Quotes	Codes	Theme
<i>“No additional charges were added to the bill”</i>	Clear indication of prices	Reliability
<i>“Admission fee was deducted from the final bill”</i>		
<i>“No issues encountered”</i>	Convenient payment options	
<i>“Very kindly and carefully addressed and treated”</i>	Attentive medical staff	Responsive ness
<i>“Checked the health conditions daily”</i>		
<i>“Immediate treatments were given without any delays”</i>	Efficiency of treatments	
<i>“Accurate and efficient treatments were received”</i>		
<i>“All necessary information was given once the critical condition was overcome”</i>	Factual information	Empathy
<i>“Even informed about delays if there were any”</i>		
<i>“Addressed very friendly and empathetically since the patient was a two-year-old”</i>	Courtesy addresses	
<i>“All necessary information was given once the critical condition was overcome”</i>	Factual disclosure	Assurance
<i>“Listened very well to the suggestions and information provided by the caretaker”</i>	Supportive response	

<i>“Hospital staff was very supportive”</i>		
<i>“A very clean environment that was suitable for children with fancy pictures”</i>	Maintain cleanliness	Tangibility
<i>“A very calm and clean surrounding”</i>	Alluring peaceful atmosphere	

Source: Developed by authors

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine how patient satisfaction was influenced by service quality at private hospitals in Sri Lanka's Western province. In order to reach the intended objective, this study was done qualitatively, and the data needed for it was collected from patients who have received care in private hospitals using the techniques of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. After transcribing the data, thematic analysis was used to generate accurate codes and themes, which were then presented in detail. As a result, the researchers concluded that private hospitals have been able to maintain a high level of patient satisfaction by upholding good service quality.

The Sri Lankan private sector healthcare industry is operating in a state where the hospitals provide high-quality service to meet their customer satisfaction. Highly facilitated hospitals and high-quality medical services can be utilized to attract foreigners to receive their medical treatments from Sri Lanka. The foreigners receiving treatments from local healthcare providers will get the benefit of receiving a high-quality healthcare service, despite the expectation of the foreigners; they will receive medical treatments for a comparatively very low cost from hospitals that have exceeded the quality expectations of the locals. Sri Lanka will get the benefit of the dollar inflow to the country, which will be an effective approach to facing the economic crisis.

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