

Patient Satisfaction with Primary Health Care Service Quality - The case of Shijak Health Center

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Background

World Health Organization defines Primary Health Care as an essential health care, made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community, by means acceptable to them. A greater emphasis on primary health care can be expected, to lower the costs of care, improve health through access to more appropriate services, and reduce inequities in the population's overall health (Starfield et al., 2005)¹. Integrated, patient - centered healthcare systems lead to a great potential to improve population health outcomes, access to care, and reduce overall health expenditures (WHO, 2016)².

The latest approach to primary healthcare seeks to engage the attention of both, patients and the public, in developing and offering healthcare services with the focus on its user satisfaction. Evaluation of healthcare quality through patient's perspective has become a priority in healthcare management, and there is no doubt that the cost-efficiency of health care services can be improved by shifting the emphasis towards patient centered primary health care (PHC).

Purpose

The main purpose of this cross-sectional study is to identify and evaluate factors that affect patient satisfaction with the quality of primary health care provided by the Shijak Healthcare Center. Also, other objective of the study is to identify how socio-demographic and patient-related factors may affect the reported levels of satisfaction with health care services. With a staff of 48 individuals, this health center offers primary health care services to 12.000 habitants of the Shijak city. While the emergency service department offers health care service to 44.000 habitants, including also the countryside.



¹ Starfield B, Shi L, Macinko J. Contribution of primary care to health systems and health. *Milbank Q*, 2005;83(3):457–502.

² World Health Organization WHO (2016). Framework on integrated people centered health services. WHO secretariat report, 2016

This research project aims to emphasize the importance of the patient role in the process of continuous quality improvement, as a new perspective in Albanian context, which will be also important for the accreditation process.

Methodology

The main research instrument is a structured questionnaire, with two main parts. The first section aims to collect socio demographic and related data of patients included in the study while the second part contains questions about the SERVPERF quality dimensions: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy and the Overall Satisfaction with the primary healthcare services.

At the exit of the Shijak Health Center, a total of 142 randomly selected patients became part of this study. Data collection consisted of self-administration of an anonymous questionnaire, right after receiving the health services. Confidentiality and privacy of participation were assured.

Written consent for participants was obtained confirming the voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

Main findings

Patient Overall Satisfaction

- Patients of the Shijak Health Center are, in general, satisfied with the healthcare services they received.

They declare in average high levels of satisfaction with the overall quality of primary health care services provided by Shijak Health Center, with an average rating of approximately 6 points, out of the maximum of 7 points. Regarding the level of the patient satisfaction specifically for each service, where they have received the healthcare: Patients who received Laboratory services

have declared higher levels of satisfaction with an average of 6.75 points, followed by Child Consultation Services with 6.41 points, and Woman Consultation Services, with an assessment of approximately 6.37 points. The patients rated the satisfaction with service of the Radiology with 5.87 point. This low evaluation is probably due to the high flux of patients this service had during the pandemic. More, the patient satisfaction with the Emergency Service is evaluated with an average of 6.29 points; the General Practitioner service is evaluated with 6.06 points, while the specialist service with 6.03 points. The medication, injection, microsurgery services have an evaluation of 5.35 points, which, although in absolute value is high, shows that patients are satisfied with the service itself, is the lowest evaluation compared to other services of the health center. Such low assessment might be related to the context in which the study was conducted.

Services	Mean	N
Emergency Service	6.2917	12
General Practices	6.0671	82
Specialist MD, Cardiologist, Neurologist	6.0357	7
Women counselor	6.3750	4
Child counselor	6.4167	3
Radiology	5.8750	24
Laboratory	6.7500	5
Medications, injection, micro surgery	5.3500	5
Total	6.0669	142

Patient-related factors and Overall Satisfaction

- *Gender*: 40.8% of female patients and 48.3% of male patients state that they are extremely satisfied with the health care services at this health center. There is a tendency of male patients included in the study to declare higher levels of satisfaction with health care services than female patients.



- *Age.* Patients who have on average higher satisfaction scores with the healthcare services are patients in the age group over 60 years, with an average satisfaction with the quality of health services, from 6.27 points out of 7. Whereas, less satisfied in relation to other age groups are young patients, up to 30 years old with an average satisfaction rating with health care services of 5.6 points.
- *Monthly income.* Patients with lowest level of satisfaction with primary health care services are those who declare income in the range of 50,000 to 70,000 ALL with an average rate of 5.78 points, while the highest level of satisfaction are declared by the patients with minimum income, up to 30,000 ALL with an average rating of 6.31 points.
It seems that patient income affects the perceived satisfaction. Those patients with higher incomes are likely to declare lower levels of overall satisfaction with primary healthcare at Shijak Health Center .
- *Education Level.* Patients with the highest level of overall satisfaction with health care services are those with a low level of education (8-year of education) with an average rating of 6.29 points out of a maximum of 7 points. While the lowest level of overall satisfaction was reported by patients with the highest level of education, post university graduation, with an average of 5.7 out of 7 points. Patient's education level affects the overall

perceived satisfaction with the quality of the primary healthcare.

- *Distance to the health center.* The patient's overall satisfaction reports vary depending on the distance to the health center. Those patients who declare that live farther than 15 km from the health center declare on average lower levels of satisfaction, with 5.7 points out of the maximum of 7. While those with a distance up to 5 km report a higher level of overall satisfaction rating with 6.29 points. It seems that the overall patient satisfaction and the distance of the health center have a linear negative relationship.
Patients living farther away from the health center are more likely to declare lower levels of satisfaction. As the distance from the patient's dwelling to the health center increases, the reported levels of overall satisfaction with the health center tend to fall.
- *Monthly patient medical visits.* Patients who declare that they have received healthcare service more than 4 times in the last month, at this health center, report higher levels of satisfaction, with an average satisfaction rating of 6.39 points. While those who have received healthcare service only once, report lower levels of satisfaction compared to the other two groups with an average rating of 5.97 points. It seems that the more they visit the Healthcare Center, the more satisfied they are.



- *Time spent at the health center.* Time spent getting a service in the service industry, is definitely a very important factor in quality assessment by the customer. Patients with the highest satisfaction rating, with 6.17 points are those who declare they didn't wait to receive the services, and those with the lowest rating are those patients, who state that they waited 21 to 30 minutes to receive the health care service with an average rating of 4.87 points. When the time spent by patients to receive the health care service increase, the level of overall perceived satisfaction by patients decreases.

Quality Dimensions and Overall Patient Satisfaction

The dimensions of the SERVPERF instrument used to assess overall patient satisfaction with the quality of health care service are:

- *Tangibles:* the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication material, - Assurance: the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence,
- *Reliability:* the ability to perform the promised services accurately and dependably,
- *Responsiveness:* the willingness to help patients and provide prompt services,
- *Empathy:* the caring, individualized attention provided to the patients.

Tangible's dimension was rated by patients with an average rating of 5.3 points out of 7 points. This rating in absolute value means that patients are satisfied, but compared to other dimensions is the lowest rate. It means that patients need more improvement related to the appearance of the physical facilities, the

equipment and the communication materials. The dimension for which patients report higher levels of satisfaction, with a score of 6.3 points out of 7 point, is the Assurance dimension. The patients seem to be very satisfied with the knowledge and courtesy of Shijak Healthcare Center staff. Meanwhile, the Reliability dimension was evaluated in all its components with an average of 5.93 points. Responsibility related to the willingness to help the patients and to provide prompt services is evaluated with 6.04 points; while Empathy and the perceived individualized attention with 6.12 points out of 7 point.

	N	Min Value	Max Value	Mean
Tangibles	142	3.75	6.75	5.3116
Reliability	142	3.60	7.00	5.9380
Responsiveness	142	3.50	7.00	6.0440
Assurance	142	3.50	7.00	6.3134
Empathy	142	3.60	7.00	6.1225
Overall Satisfaction	142	3.74	6.85	5.9459

From the statistical analysis only 3 out of the 5 quality considered dimensions, *Assurance* (the knowledge and competence of the staff, the perceived credibility and the confidence of the healthcare staff); *Reliability* (the services performed as promised, accuracy of records and willingness of staff to help the patients) and *Tangibles* (the appearance of physical facilities, personnel and communication material), have a statistically significant relationship with overall patient satisfaction. These dimensions explain more than 78% of the variation values of the overall patient satisfaction with primary healthcare. ($R^2=0.783$, $p<0.05$)³.

³ Kurti.S. (2021) "Patient satisfaction with primary health care service quality. The case of Shijak Health Center.



Key messages

The importance of the patient in healthcare quality evaluation

- Assessing the quality of health care through the patient perspective is already a priority in the field of health management.
- Efforts and initiatives to improve the quality of health care services are more likely to be successful, if the patient is as an integral part of the improvement policy team.
- The cost-effectiveness of health care services can be significantly improved by shifting the emphasis towards patient-centered primary health care.

Patient related variables

- Some patient-related characteristics turn out to directly affect the reported overall level of satisfaction with the primary healthcare quality.

- Based on the study results, the patient's variables such as age, monthly income, education, and the distance from the patient residence to the health center are considered as patient related factors which influence the variation of patient satisfaction with primary health care services.
- Moreover, the time spent in the health center to receive the health service turned out to be an influenced factor to the patient general satisfaction level. The longer the time spent at the health center to receive the healthcare services, the lower the level of patient satisfaction.

Key Quality Dimensions

- Three out of five quality dimensions: *Assurance*, *Reliability* and *Tangibles* affect the overall level of satisfaction, explaining 78.3% of the variation values of overall patient satisfaction with primary health care services at Shijak Health Center.
- In order to increase the patient satisfaction level with the healthcare service quality the management should pay attention especially to:
 - a) the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication material,
 - b) the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence,
 - c) the ability to perform the promises services accurately and dependably.

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Disclaimer

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