

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Outpatient satisfaction among users attending the pharmacy of a pediatric specialized health facility in 2021

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ABSTRACT

External user satisfaction with pharmacy services is a key indicator for evaluating the quality of care provided in healthcare institutions. This parameter reflects the effectiveness of medication dispensing and availability and assesses key aspects such as personalized service, the responsiveness of pharmaceutical staff, and the efficiency of waiting time management. This study aimed to assess the satisfaction level among external users attending the pharmacy service of a pediatric health facility in Lima, Peru, in 2021. The study used an observational, descriptive, cross-sectional design. A modified SERVQUAL questionnaire was administered to 384 participants who visited the hospital's pharmacy service. Satisfaction was evaluated by considering the dimensions of reliability, empathy, responsiveness, safety, and tangibility. The information collected was described using absolute and relative frequencies. A total satisfaction level of 68.92% was found. High dissatisfaction rates were observed in the dimensions of responsiveness (40.5%) and tangibility (41.1%). In contrast, higher satisfaction rates were recorded for safety (78.8%), empathy (77.31%), and reliability (70.3%). The study concluded that while overall user satisfaction was moderately high, user dissatisfaction is high in critical areas, such as responsiveness and tangibility, and warrants further attention.

Keywords: Patient Satisfaction; Pharmacy Service, Hospital; Surveys and Questionnaires (Source: MeSH)

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Satisfacción de los usuarios externos que acudieron a la farmacia de un establecimiento de salud especializado pediátrico durante el año 2021

RESUMEN

La satisfacción de los usuarios externos que acuden a los servicios de farmacia es un indicador vital para evaluar la calidad del servicio brindado en las instituciones de salud. Este parámetro no solo refleja la eficacia de la dispensación de medicamentos y su disponibilidad, sino que también mide aspectos cruciales como la atención personalizada, la capacidad de respuesta del personal farmacéutico y la eficiencia en la gestión de tiempos de espera. El objetivo de este estudio fue determinar el nivel de satisfacción de los usuarios externos que acudieron al servicio de farmacia de un establecimiento de salud especializado en atención pediátrica ubicado en Lima, Perú, en el año 2021. El estudio tuvo un diseño observacional, descriptivo, de corte transversal. Se aplicó el cuestionario SERVQUAL modificado a 384 participantes que acudieron al servicio de farmacia del nosocomio. Se evaluó la satisfacción considerando las dimensiones fiabilidad, empatía, capacidad de respuesta, seguridad y aspectos tangibles. La información recolectada se describió empleando frecuencias absolutas y relativas. Se encontró un nivel de satisfacción total del 68,92 %. Las dimensiones con alto porcentaje de insatisfacción fueron capacidad de respuesta (40,4 %) y aspectos tangibles (41,1 %). Las dimensiones de seguridad, empatía y fiabilidad mostraron una mayor satisfacción del usuario (78,8 %, 77,1 % y 70,3 %, respectivamente). El estudio reveló que la satisfacción general del usuario en el establecimiento fue moderadamente alta. Sin embargo, existen dimensiones críticas como la capacidad de respuesta y aspectos tangibles, donde los niveles de insatisfacción del usuario son elevados, y por tanto, requieren particular atención.

Palabras clave: Satisfacción del paciente; Servicio de Farmacia en Hospital; Encuestas y Cuestionarios (DeCS)

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the World Health Organization (WHO) proposed a reference framework to assess the performance of health systems. This framework emphasizes that the goal is not only to maintain and improve population health but also to meet users' needs and expectations regarding healthcare services (1). Thus, it highlights that users' satisfaction and awareness of service quality depend not only on health outcomes but also on the system's ability to fulfill expectations in health-related aspects (2).

In 2016, a national survey was conducted to assess users' satisfaction levels (ENSUSALUD). The results showed that nationwide satisfaction among outpatient users was 73.9%, representing an increase of 3.8% compared to 2014. Satisfaction with facilities under the Ministry of Health and Regional Governments was 66.7%, which was lower than the national average and that of other Health Service Provider Institutions (IPPS) in Peru (3).

In recent years, Latin American countries have undergone significant changes in the organization of their national health systems, with a focus on healthcare quality at the core of service delivery (4). This emphasis highlights the critical importance of delivering high-quality care, encompassing diagnosis, disease prevention, recovery, and rehabilitation; essential phases in the care continuum (5).

Patient satisfaction is a key component in evaluating the quality of healthcare services. Each user or patient visiting a healthcare facility must have their needs met, including aspects such as waiting time, respectful treatment, accessibility, adequate infrastructure, and equipment (6). However, this situation varies across facilities, where factors such as lack of human resources, limited infrastructure, and medication shortages restrict service capacity, leading to user dissatisfaction (7).

Previous studies, such as those by Urda *et al.* (8), Becerra *et al.* (9), and others (6,10,11), have highlighted the importance of understanding and improving patients' perceptions of the care received in different hospital settings and during critical periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies employed tools such as the modified SERVQUAL questionnaire, which is also used by the Peruvian Ministry of Health (MINSA), to measure various dimensions of satisfaction, including reliability, responsiveness, safety, and tangibles (12).

In this context, the present study aimed to evaluate the level of satisfaction among outpatient users of the pharmacy service at the Instituto Nacional de Salud del Niño San Borja, a pediatric health facility in Peru, during 2021. Additionally, the study sought to assess satisfaction across specific dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, safety, empathy, and the tangible aspects of the service.

METHODS

Study design

Quantitative, descriptive, prospective, cross-sectional study.

Participants

The study population consisted of all outpatient users who visited the pharmacy at the Instituto Nacional de Salud del Niño San Borja (INSN-SB). Parents or guardians of pediatric patients seen in outpatient consultations who consented to participate were included. Parents or guardians who declined to participate were excluded. A sample size of 384 individuals was calculated based on the assumption that 50% of them would report high satisfaction.

Variables of interest

User satisfaction was evaluated through five dimensions: reliability, empathy, responsiveness, safety, and tangibles. Tangible aspects refer to the physical characteristics perceived by users in the organization, including the condition and appearance of the facilities, equipment, staff, communication, cleanliness, and comfort. Additional data were collected, such as the age and sex of the pediatric patient represented by the parent or guardian. Information was also recorded on whether the patient was a new user or had previously received care at the facility.

Procedures

Data were collected using a survey technique. The survey was administered to parents and guardians of pediatric patients coming from outpatient consultation services who had completed their visit at the INSN-SB central pharmacy. Prior to survey administration, the study objectives were explained, and voluntary participation was requested. Participation was documented through an informed consent form. Surveys were conducted Monday to Friday, in the mornings (from 9:00 to 12:00) and afternoons (from 14:00 to 18:00).

Statistical analysis

The modified SERVQUAL questionnaire, provided by the Ministry of Health of Peru (12), is divided into two sections: "Perceptions" (P) and "Expectations" (E). User satisfaction was determined using the "P-E" difference, where negative scores indicated dissatisfaction and scores equal to or greater than zero indicated satisfaction. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27 was used to analyze the final scores from the questionnaire, and Microsoft Excel 2019 was used to generate tables.

Ethical considerations

Approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee (Act No. 5 - 2022, code: PI-636). No personal data were collected that would allow the identification of participants, and the information gathered did not affect access to pharmacy services for either those who accepted or declined to participate.

RESULTS

The overall satisfaction level among outpatient users was 68.9%. The dimensions with the highest satisfaction levels were safety (78.8%), empathy (77.1%), and reliability (70.3%). Conversely, the dimensions with the highest dissatisfaction levels were tangibles (41.1%) and responsiveness (40.5%) (Table 1).

The average age of the pediatric patients was 5.66 years, with a standard deviation of 3.81 years. The majority of patients were male (54.2%), and almost all were returning users (97.9%) (Table 2).

Table 1. Satisfaction of outpatients attending the pharmacy service of the health facility

Dimensions	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
	%	
Reliability	70.3	29.7
Responsiveness	59.5	40.5
Safety	78.8	21.2
Empathy	77.1	22.9
Tangibles	58.9	41.1
Mean	68.92	31.08

Table 2. Characteristics of the surveyed users who attended the pharmacy service at the health facility

Characteristic	n	%
Age		
Mean (SD)	5.66 (3.81)	
Median (IQR)	5.0 (2.0-8.0)	
Sex		
Female	176	45.8
Male	208	54.2
Type of user		
Returning	376	97.9
New	8	2.1

SD: standard deviation; IQR: interquartile range

DISCUSSION

Over the past decade, the Ministry of Health (MINSA), in collaboration with the country's leading healthcare providers, has undertaken valuable initiatives to enhance the quality of healthcare services. The quality of service delivery in healthcare has become a key concern in sector management. For this reason, in 2011, the SERVQUAL instrument was approved as a practical tool for assessing outpatient satisfaction in healthcare facilities.

In the present study, conducted among outpatients attending the pharmacy service of INSN-SB, a highly specialized pediatric institute, it was found that 68.92% of users were satisfied, a higher percentage compared to the 37.3% satisfaction level reported in a study conducted by Florián et al. (13) in a health center in Lambayeque, a region located on the northern coast of Peru. Similarly, our results are consistent with the findings of Febres and Mercado (6), who reported a total satisfaction level of 60.3% among outpatients at a hospital in Peru's coastal region.

Upon analyzing the satisfaction levels by dimension, the response capacity and tangible aspects showed "in-process" dissatisfaction levels (between 40% and 60%), which aligns with findings from Florián et al. (13), who reported dissatisfaction rates of 56.8% and 58.2% in these dimensions, respectively.

Regarding the dimensions of safety and empathy, we found satisfaction rates of 86.81% and 80.3%, respectively, similar to those reported by Febres and Mercado (6). In addition, our study's reliability dimension achieved a satisfaction rate of 70.3%, surpassing the 67% reported by Bustamante

and Gálvez (14) among outpatients attending the central pharmacy service of the regional hospital in Cajamarca, a province located in the northern highlands of Peru.

Users of a specialized pediatric institute may have different expectations compared to those of a general health center or a hospital in the coastal region (15), as expectations in a specialized pediatric service are likely to be higher. If those expectations are adequately met, higher satisfaction levels may result (16,17).

On the other hand, internal processes such as waiting time, medication availability, and dispensing efficiency may vary significantly across different types of facilities (18,19). In theory, a specialized institute may have more refined and efficient processes that contribute to higher user satisfaction. However, given the greater complexity of such establishments, increased service demand could lead to rushed care and a lack of personalized attention if these processes are not properly managed and organized (20,21).

Additionally, regional differences in terms of accessibility, demographics, and socioeconomic factors may influence the perception of service quality. For instance, users in urban or more developed areas may have higher expectations due to greater access to a broader and more advanced array of healthcare services, including specialized care and cutting-edge technology (22). This exposure to high-level medical care may elevate their expectations of other healthcare services, including pharmacy services, potentially resulting in different satisfaction levels compared to users in rural or less developed areas.

The satisfaction survey conducted within the pharmacy service revealed a significant level of dissatisfaction, particularly regarding reliability, responsiveness, and tangible aspects. These findings underscore the need to optimize critical areas, such as medication supply, infrastructure conditions, and the introduction of a more adaptable information system that facilitates prescription download and management. Addressing these issues could alleviate current time constraints and foster a more efficient system that enhances user satisfaction.

Author contributions

SCG contributed to the conceptualization, data analysis, drafting, and review of both the original and final versions. ECH contributed to the methodological guidance, data analysis, drafting, and review of the final version.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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