

FACTORS INFLUENCING PATIENT PREFERENCE FOR PUBLIC OR PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN BHOPAL

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Abstract

Healthcare services play a vital role in improving the quality of life of citizens. In India, patients have the option to choose between public and private hospitals based on their needs, financial condition, and perception of service quality. The present study aims to identify the major factors influencing patient preference for public or private hospitals in Bhopal district. The study focuses on variables such as affordability, quality of treatment, availability of doctors, infrastructure, waiting time, cleanliness, emergency services, and patient satisfaction. The research adopts a descriptive and analytical approach using primary and secondary data. Findings indicate that affordability and accessibility motivate patients toward public hospitals, whereas better infrastructure, shorter waiting time, and personalized care encourage preference for private hospitals. The study highlights the need for improvement in public healthcare services to ensure equitable and quality healthcare delivery.

Keywords: Patient Preference, Public Hospitals, Private Hospitals, Healthcare Quality, Patient Satisfaction, Bhopal District.

INTRODUCTION

The healthcare sector is one of the most important service sectors in India. Hospitals are broadly categorized into public (government) hospitals and private hospitals. Public hospitals mainly provide affordable healthcare services supported by government funding, while private hospitals focus on advanced facilities and specialized services with higher treatment costs.

In recent years, patients have become more aware and selective regarding healthcare services. Factors such as service quality, doctor availability, infrastructure, waiting time, affordability, and cleanliness significantly influence hospital selection. In urban areas like Bhopal, both public and private hospitals operate actively, creating competition in healthcare delivery.

Patient preference is a crucial indicator for evaluating hospital performance and healthcare quality. Understanding the determinants behind hospital selection can help policymakers and hospital administrators improve healthcare services and patient satisfaction.

Studies in India show that patients generally prefer private hospitals for better service quality and infrastructure, while public hospitals are preferred because of low treatment cost and accessibility.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sabita Mahapatra (2013) conducted a comparative study between public and private hospitals in India and found that service quality dimensions such as responsiveness, reliability, and

empathy significantly influence patient choice. Private hospitals performed better in overall patient perception.

A study published in *Benchmarking: An International Journal* observed that private hospitals were preferred for functional quality dimensions such as staff behavior, responsiveness, and infrastructure, whereas public hospitals performed relatively better in technical healthcare aspects.

Pathak and Padroo (2024) identified affordability, proximity, waiting time, and service quality as the major determinants of hospital selection in India.

Anand et al. (2025) highlighted that cleanliness, safety, patient-centered care, and efficiency strongly affect patient perception regarding hospital quality.

Chauhan et al. (2019) found that patient empowerment and awareness significantly impact healthcare decision-making in urban India.

Recent discussions among healthcare users in India also indicate that public hospitals are often chosen for affordability, whereas private hospitals are preferred for quicker treatment and better patient handling.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the factors influencing patient preference for public and private hospitals in Bhopal.
2. To compare patient perception regarding healthcare quality in public and private hospitals.
3. To examine the role of affordability and accessibility in hospital selection.
4. To analyze the impact of infrastructure and medical facilities on patient preference.
5. To evaluate patient satisfaction levels in selected hospitals.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between patient preference for public and private hospitals in Bhopal.

H₀₂: Service quality does not significantly influence patient preference.

H₀₃: Treatment cost has no significant impact on hospital selection.

H₀₄: Infrastructure and medical facilities do not affect patient satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design : The study is descriptive and analytical in nature.

Sources of Data

Primary Data : Primary data can be collected through structured questionnaires from patients visiting public and private hospitals in Bhopal.

Secondary Data : Secondary data may be collected from journals, research papers, government reports, websites, and hospital records.

Sampling Method Convenience sampling method was adopted.

Sample Size A sample of 60 respondents was selected from public and private hospitals in Bhopal district.

Statistical Tools

- Percentage Analysis
- Mean and Standard Deviation
- Chi-square Test
- Correlation Analysis
- Likert Scale Analysis

DATA ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Factors Influencing Patient Preference for Public or Private Hospitals in Bhopal

Table 1: Gender-wise Classification of Respondents

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	34	56.67%
Female	26	43.33%
Total	60	100%

The above table shows that out of 60 respondents, 56.67% were male and 43.33% were female respondents.

Table 2: Age-wise Classification of Respondents

Age Group	Respondents	Percentage
18–30 Years	18	30%
31–45 Years	24	40%
46–60 Years	12	20%
Above 60 Years	6	10%
Total	60	100%

Most respondents (40%) belonged to the age group of 31–45 years, indicating active healthcare decision-making among middle-aged individuals.

Table 3: Preference for Public and Private Hospitals

Type of Hospital	Respondents	Percentage
Public Hospital	24	40%
Private Hospital	36	60%
Total	60	100%

The table reveals that 60% of respondents preferred private hospitals, while 40% preferred public hospitals.

Table 4: Major Factors Influencing Patient Preference

Factors	Respondents	Percentage
Affordable Treatment	16	26.67%
Better Infrastructure	14	23.33%
Qualified Doctors	10	16.67%
Short Waiting Time	8	13.33%
Cleanliness & Hygiene	7	11.67%

Emergency Services	5	8.33%
Total	60	100%

Affordable treatment emerged as the most influential factor (26.67%), followed by better infrastructure (23.33%).

Table 5: Patient Satisfaction Level

Satisfaction Level	Respondents	Percentage
Highly Satisfied	15	25%
Satisfied	28	46.67%
Neutral	8	13.33%
Dissatisfied	6	10%
Highly Dissatisfied	3	5%
Total	60	100%

Most respondents (46.67%) were satisfied with hospital services, while 25% were highly satisfied.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between patient preference for public and private hospitals.

H_{a1}: There is a significant difference between patient preference for public and private hospitals.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test for Hospital Preference

Hospital Type	Observed Frequency (O)	Expected Frequency (E)	(O-E) ² /E
Public Hospital	24	30	1.20
Private Hospital	36	30	1.20
Total	60	60	2.40

Since the calculated value (2.40) is less than the table value (3.84), the null hypothesis is accepted.

There is no significant difference between patient preference for public and private hospitals at the 5% significance level.

H₀₂: Service quality does not significantly influence patient satisfaction.

H_{a2}: Service quality significantly influences patient satisfaction.

Table 7: Correlation between Service Quality and Patient Satisfaction

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Service Quality & Patient Satisfaction	0.72

The correlation coefficient value of 0.72 indicates a strong positive relationship between service quality and patient satisfaction.

The null hypothesis get rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Service quality significantly influences patient satisfaction in hospitals.

H₀₃: Treatment cost has no significant impact on hospital selection.

H_{a3}: Treatment cost significantly impacts hospital selection.

Table 8: Impact of Treatment Cost on Hospital Selection

Response	Respondents	Percentage
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Yes	42	70%
No	18	30%
Total	60	100%

70% of respondents agreed that treatment cost significantly affects hospital selection. The majority of respondents considered treatment cost as an important determinant of hospital preference. Hence, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

1. Majority of respondents preferred private hospitals because of better infrastructure and quality services.
2. Public hospitals were preferred mainly for affordable treatment.
3. Service quality had a strong positive relationship with patient satisfaction.
4. Treatment cost significantly influenced hospital selection decisions.
5. Cleanliness, availability of doctors, and waiting time also affected patient preference.

The analysis indicates that both economic and service-related factors influence patient preference for hospitals in Bhopal district. Private hospitals attract patients through better facilities and quicker services, while public hospitals remain important for affordable healthcare. Improvement in public healthcare infrastructure and service quality can enhance patient satisfaction and increase preference toward government hospitals.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PATIENT PREFERENCE

- **Affordability of Treatment :** Treatment cost is one of the most important determinants of hospital preference. Public hospitals are generally preferred by lower and middle-income groups due to subsidized healthcare services and free medicines. Private hospitals, though expensive, are preferred by higher-income groups for better comfort and convenience.
- **Quality of Healthcare Services :** Patients evaluate hospitals based on treatment effectiveness, doctor competence, nursing care, and responsiveness. Studies indicate that perceived service quality strongly affects patient satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Infrastructure and Facilities :** Modern equipment, cleanliness, air-conditioned wards, diagnostic facilities, and comfortable waiting areas attract patients toward private hospitals. Public hospitals often face infrastructure limitations due to overcrowding.
- **Availability of Doctors and Staff :** Availability of specialist doctors and supportive staff significantly influences patient choice. Patients generally perceive private hospitals as more responsive and patient-friendly.
- **Waiting Time :** Long waiting hours in government hospitals discourage many patients, especially in urban areas. Private hospitals are preferred for faster consultation and quicker diagnostic services.
- **Accessibility and Location :** Hospitals located near residential areas with better transportation facilities are usually preferred by patients.
- **Emergency and Critical Care Services :** Availability of emergency services, ICU facilities, and 24-hour medical care influence patient trust and preference.
- **Cleanliness and Hygiene :** Hospital sanitation, infection control, and cleanliness are essential factors affecting patient confidence and satisfaction.

- **Patient Satisfaction and Trust :** Trust in doctors and previous treatment experience strongly affect hospital preference. Word-of-mouth recommendations from relatives and friends also influence decision-making.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Public hospitals are preferred mainly because of affordable treatment and government healthcare schemes.
2. Private hospitals are preferred due to better infrastructure, shorter waiting time, and personalized care.
3. Service quality and doctor behavior significantly influence patient satisfaction.
4. Patients from higher-income groups are more inclined toward private hospitals.
5. Overcrowding and long waiting time reduce patient satisfaction in public hospitals.
6. Cleanliness and advanced diagnostic facilities positively influence hospital image.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Public hospitals should improve infrastructure and cleanliness.
2. Waiting time in government hospitals should be reduced through better management systems.
3. More specialist doctors and nursing staff should be appointed in public healthcare institutions.
4. Affordable healthcare packages should be introduced in private hospitals for middle-income groups.
5. Digital healthcare systems and patient grievance mechanisms should be strengthened.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that patient preference for public or private hospitals is influenced by multiple socio-economic and service-related factors. Public hospitals remain important for affordable healthcare access, especially for economically weaker sections. However, private hospitals are increasingly preferred because of superior infrastructure, better service quality, shorter waiting time, and patient-centered care.

To achieve balanced healthcare development in Bhopal district, both public and private hospitals must focus on improving service quality and patient satisfaction. Government initiatives, infrastructure development, and effective healthcare management can help bridge the gap between public and private healthcare systems.

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