

Preference of Hospitals by the Rural Households and the Factors Determining it – A Study in Kanyakumari District

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ABSTRACT: *With the aim of providing access to the weaker sections by giving specialised treatment as in private hospitals, public hospitals are being established in the State. Public-Private Partnerships have emerged as one of the options to direct the growth of private sector towards health goals, which will help to increase efficiency in service delivery, management owing to better capacity utilization and ensuring to provide better treatment to the sick people in the study area.*

A collective acceptance with regard to hospital usage is that most of the people prefer to use private hospital even if the cost of private hospital tends to be high. Public hospital are not preferred by the majority of the respondents in the study area due to some of the reasons which are listed in this paper, even though these services are provided at low cost. The provision of healthcare facilities is related to preventive, curative and promotive services. In the present study 490 households of the rural areas from the four taluks of the district have been interviewed through the well designed schedule. In these 490 households, 341 respondents have suffered from various diseases during the survey period. In order to understand the preference and not preference of the type of hospitals (public and private) for seeking treatment, the researcher used ranking method to identify which are the most compelling factors to get treatment from public and private hospitals. The study also revealed that in private hospitals, patients could easily approach anyone including the reception staff and all are helpful, and the private hospitals are equipped with modern equipment, and doctors treat patients in a friendly manner.

Key Words: *public-private partnership, utilization, preference of hospitals*

Introduction

The healthcare system consists of a combination of public and private sectors, networks of healthcare facilities at the primary, secondary and tertiary level run mainly by the State Government. Government of Tamil Nadu has allocated more resources on health and nutrition, strengthening health infrastructure to reach world class standard, emerging medical manpower resources and encouraging health outreach activities (MHFW 2005). Tamil Nadu is totally committed to address the major concerns and to bridge the gap in the existing health infrastructure and to provide accessible, affordable and equitable healthcare of the highest order to the public (Parthasarathi, R. 2016). Considerable achievements have been made with regard to the core health indicators (<http://www.corecentre.org/nrhnm>).

India's primary Healthcare system is not bad; its main problem is poor management. Not only is there the issue of poor access, there are concerns like the non-availability of essential drugs around the year and the lack of a robust referral system to tackle emergencies (Aditi Bishnoi, 2015). Health care is widely recognized to be a public good with strong positive externalities. Universal access, of an adequate level of care, with equitable distribution of financial costs, cost effective use of the results of relevant research and special attention to vulnerable groups such as children, women, disabled and the aged is a key component of a modern civilized society (<http://www.mohfw.nic.in>).

In India, proportion of the private hospitals is nearly 66% of the total hospitals and government own hospitals constituted for around 31% and the local bodies own the rest. Utilization of healthcare services also depends on the waiting time, availability of drugs, behaviour of the hospital staff, and prescription by doctor whether they are reasonable or costly, timings of the hospitals etc. (Anitha P.H. and Raghavendra T.S. 2014).

Numbers of the studies have showed that people generally prefer private hospital. The cost of treatment in the public and private sectors differ much in both rural and urban. It is typically seen that usage of the hospital is affected by social, economic and environmental factors (Prasad, S 2013).

Objective

There were big gaps found in the usage of public versus private hospital in India. Thus, the present study is carried out with the objective of finding out the reason for preferring and not preferring public and private hospitals by the respondents in the study area.

Methodology

The present study is based on survey method; the researcher used random sampling method for selecting the panchayats, villages and households from the rural areas of four taluks namely Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode of Kanyakumari District. A sample of 10 per cent of the households were taken from each of the selected villages of the selected panchayats belonging to these talukhs. Thus 490 households of the rural areas from the four taluks of the district have been selected as samples and interviewed through the well designed interview schedule. Personal interview method was adopted to collect primary data. The researcher has analysed the reasons for using the public or private hospital in the study area.

Discussion

The respondents may prefer and not prefer a particular type of hospital due to several reasons. An attempt is made in this section to find out the reason behind this aspect of preferring and not preferring a particular type of hospital.

To find out the reason for preferring and not preferring a particular type of hospital, the respondents were provided with certain attributes and they were asked to provide their opinion.

Based on the opinion of the respondents that is strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree and strongly disagree, points were awarded. +2 points for every strongly agree opinion, +1 to every agree opinion, -1 for every disagree opinion and -2 for every strongly disagree opinion. Thus the intensity value is calculated and the attributes with highest intensity value is ranked 1 and so on.

Reason for Preferring Public Hospital

In order to analyse the reason for preferring public hospital, six factors were identified, namely, free medicine, free treatment, affordability, nearness, elder's decision and acceptance of health insurance. The respondents were asked to give their opinion.

The opinion of the respondents regarding the preference of public hospital is analyzed in Table No.1

Table No. 1 Reason for Preferring Public Hospital.

Reason	Opinion (n=135)					Intensity value	Rank
	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
Free medicine	104	31	0	0	0	239	2
Free treatment	117	18	0	0	0	252	1
Affordability	96	29	10	0	0	221	3
Nearness	78	31	17	9	0	178	4
Elder's decision	27	48	14	29	17	57	6
Acceptance of health insurance	75	32	12	16	0	166	5

Source: Primary data.

Note : n- Number of persons who have taken treatment from public hospitals

Table No.1 shows the opinion of the respondents regarding the preference of public hospital. Based on the intensity value it is evident that, free treatment is the main reason for preferring public hospital by the respondents, the other reasons are free medicine, affordability, nearness, acceptance of health insurance and elder's decision to go to public hospital.

Reason for Not Preferring Public Hospital:

Six factors were identified for not preferring public hospital, they are, rude behavior of staff, long waiting time, not functioning in evening, insufficient drugs, poor infrastructure, service and elders' decision.

The opinion of the respondents regarding non preference of public hospital is analysed in Table No.2

Table No. 2 Reason for Not Preferring Public Hospital

Reason	Opinion (n=206)					Intensity value	Rank
	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
Rude behaviour of staff	63	86	18	22	17	146	3
Long waiting time	195	11	0	0	0	401	1
Not functioning in evening	74	68	0	35	29	123	5
Insufficient drugs	82	46	19	40	19	132	4
Poor infrastructure service and sanitation	179	27	0	0	0	385	2
Elder's decision	49	77	20	32	28	87	6

Source: Primary data.

Note : n- Number of persons who have taken treatment from private hospitals

Table No. 2 shows the reason for not preferring public hospital. Based on the intensity value it is known that, long waiting time is the main reason for not preferring public hospitals by the respondents, the other reasons are poor infrastructure, service and sanitation, rude behavior of staff, insufficient drugs, not functioning in the evening and elders' decision to go to private hospitals.

Reason for Preferring Private Hospital

To find out the reason for preferring private hospital, six factors were identified namely, availability of specialized doctors, good infrastructure, better efficient care, availability of medicine, words of friends and relatives, and 24 hour functioning. The opinion of the respondents regarding the preference of private hospital is analysed in the table No. 3

Table No. 3 Reason for Preferring Private Hospital

Reason	Opinion (n=206)					Intensity value	Rank
	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
Availability of specialized doctors	121	71	14	0	0	313	3
Good infrastructure	97	77	17	15	0	256	4
Better efficient care	181	25	0	0	0	387	1
Availability of medicines	50	62	66	19	9	125	5
Word of friends and relatives	64	41	51	19	31	88	6
24Hours functioning	157	49	0	0	0	363	2

Source: Primary data.

Note : n- Number of persons who have taken treatment from private hospitals

Table No. 3 shows the opinion of the respondents regarding the preference of private hospital. Based on the intensity value it is observed that, better efficient care is the main reason for preferring private hospitals by the respondents. The other reasons are 24 hour functioning, availability of specialized doctors,

good infrastructure, availability of medicines and words of friends and relatives to prefer the private hospital.

Reason for Not Preferring Private Hospital

In order to find out the reason for not preferring private hospitals, four factors were identified namely, not having ability to pay, no health insurance, distance from residence and expensive treatment. The opinion of the respondents regarding non preference of private hospitals is analysed in table No. 4

Table No. 4 Reason for Not Preferring Private Hospital

Reason	Opinion (n=135)					Intensity value	Rank
	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
Not having ability to pay	93	42	0	0	0	228	2
No health insurance	59	76	0	0	0	194	4
Long distance from residence	77	58	0	0	0	222	3
Treatment is expensive	108	27	0	0	0	243	1

Source: Primary data.

Note : n- Number of persons who have taken treatment from public hospitals

Table No. 4 shows the opinion of the respondents regarding not preferring private hospitals. Based on the intensity value it is evident that, high expense is the main reason for not preferring private hospitals by the respondents, the other reasons are not having ability to pay, long distance from the residence and no health insurance.

Conclusion

Health and illness are the most important issue in the discussion about the hospitalization. In this study, 60.41 per cent of the respondents are using private hospital and avoid public hospital due to so much rush and long waiting time, poor infrastructure and hospital services, rude behavior of the medical staff, lack of sanitation, lack of sufficient drugs in public hospitals. In contrast to that, private hospital provides proper clinical services and standard of health-care. The result of the study reveals that there is an association between the preference of hospital and the cost of the services offered in the hospital and it makes an impact in the selection of hospital for medical treatment.

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