

Abstract

This study investigates the linkage between service quality, service fairness, and service loyalty in hospitals in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India, focusing on both public and private healthcare sectors. In India, public hospitals often face challenges such as limited infrastructure, insufficient funding, and undertrained staff, leading to a decline in service quality and a decrease in patient loyalty. Conversely, private hospitals, while offering superior service quality and attracting foreign patients with cost-effective healthcare, often prioritize profitability over ethical standards, which can result in higher service charges. The study explores how these factors impact patient satisfaction and loyalty, particularly among different income groups, including the economically disadvantaged who rely on public healthcare services.

The research highlights key SERVQUAL dimensions—tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, access, courtesy, and communication—as critical factors influencing hospital service quality. The study finds that service quality significantly affects patient satisfaction, with private hospitals generally outperforming public hospitals in meeting patient expectations. While service fairness also plays a role in patient satisfaction, its effect on patient loyalty is less pronounced. Patient loyalty is notably higher in private and corporation hospitals compared to public hospitals, where it remains low.

The study concludes that hospital administrators must recognize the varying expectations of patients in public, private, and corporation hospitals, and devise tailored strategies to enhance service quality, fairness, and patient loyalty across all sectors. Specifically, improving nurse attitudes, ensuring easy access to services, fostering better communication, and enhancing overall patient care are essential steps to elevate hospital services and foster stronger patient loyalty.