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PATIENTS' PERCEPTION OF PHARMACY SERVICE QUALITY: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract:

This study assesses the quality of services provided by community pharmacists, focusing on waiting times, staff attentiveness and listening skills, as well as therapeutic education. Conducted across various regions in the Sétif province of Algeria, the survey included 220 participants who responded to a structured questionnaire. The collected data reveal that 96% of patients reported being attended to by pharmacy staff rather than the pharmacist, highlighting a significant gap in communication between pharmacists and patients. Additionally, 68.18% of participants expressed full satisfaction with the reception provided by the pharmacy staff, 58.18% with the attentiveness and listening skills demonstrated, and only 22% with the quality of advice received in the pharmacy. These findings emphasize the urgent need to enhance interactions between healthcare professionals and patients. Strengthening communication and fostering clear, educational exchanges could not only boost patient satisfaction but also improve the overall quality of care.

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1. Introduction

The quality of services provided by community pharmacists has become a central issue in the healthcare sector. Their role now extends beyond the mere dispensing of medications to encompass a more comprehensive approach to patient care. These healthcare professionals play a crucial role by offering personalized advice on treatment use, actively contributing to therapeutic education, and providing nutritional recommendations tailored to the medical needs of each patient [1,2]. This integrated approach not only promotes better treatment adherence but also contributes to improved patient health outcomes [3]. In this context, pharmacists bear an increasing responsibility for enhancing the quality of care through the implementation of Good Pharmacy Practices (GPP) and Pharmaceutical Care (PC) principles. These concepts aim to ensure optimal care while improving patients' quality of life [4].

Patient satisfaction is a key indicator for identifying areas that require improvement. Moreover, pharmacists, in collaboration with other healthcare professionals, play a central role in the prevention and management of chronic diseases, particularly within community pharmacies. Efficient resource utilization in these settings can lead to better health outcomes while optimizing economic management [5]. Although the overall level of satisfaction with pharmacists' competence and communication is high, criticisms frequently arise regarding organizational aspects, such as the location of pharmacie opening hours, and waiting times [6]. Patient dissatisfaction with certain elements of pharmaceutical services underscore the importance of evaluating satisfaction to identify and address weaknesses, such as staff communication and the quality of information provided. However, in Algeria, the lack

of studies on factors influencing patient satisfaction highlights the need for in-depth analysis to better understand and improve pharmaceutical services [7].

In this context, this study aims to assess the quality of services provided by community pharmacies, focusing particularly on patient satisfaction in areas such as pharmacist attentiveness, waiting times, and therapeutic education.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study area

Our study focused on patients residing in the Setif province of Algeria, a region covering an area of 6,549.64 km² with a population of 1,866,845 in 2008, divided into 60 municipalities.

The survey was conducted over a three-month period, from March to May 2021.

2.2. Study population

The study focused on male and female patients, distributed across different age groups, with or without chronic diseases, and with varied educational backgrounds, who regularly visit pharmacies located in the Sétif province.

The study population consists of 220 patients who responded to our questionnaire.

2.3. Questionnaire description

The questionnaire consists of 10 questions presented in a specific order, with single or multiple-choice response options. It is divided into two distinct parts:

The first part includes four questions about the patients' general information: gender, age, intellectual level, and the presence or absence of Chronic disease.

The second part consists of six questions designed to assess the quality of services provided by pharmacies: the criteria for choosing a pharmacy, the reception by the staff, waiting time, the qualifications of the employee responsible for patient care, the pharmacist's attentiveness and listening skills, and therapeutic education.

2.4. Data processing:

After collecting the questionnaires, the data were analyzed using Microsoft Office Excel 2019.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic information

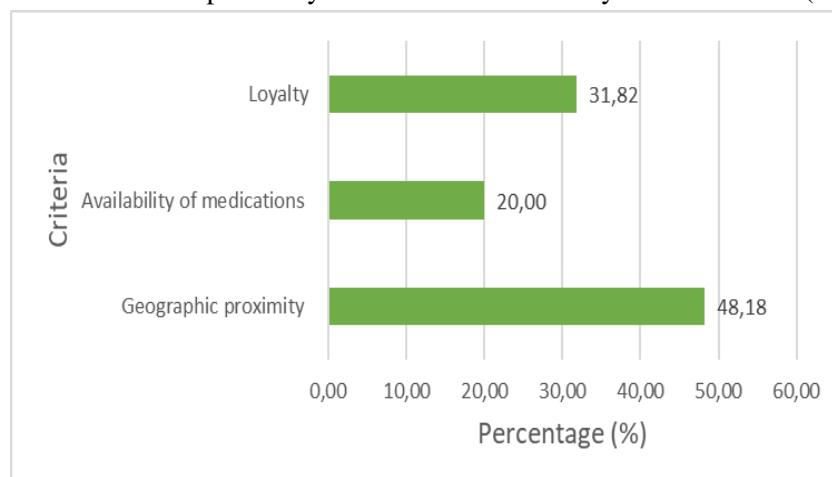
220 patients participated in the study by responding to the 300 questionnaires distributed, resulting in a response rate of 73.33%. Among these respondents, 60% were men, and nearly 41.1% reported having Chronic disease. All participants reside in the wilaya of Setif (Table 01).

Table 1. Demographic information.

Variables	Number of Patients N = 220	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	132	60,0
Female	88	40,0
Age group		
18-40	98	44,5
40-60	66	30,0
>60	56	25,5
Education level		
Primary school	20	9,1
Secondary school	80	36,4
University-level	120	54,5
Occupation		
Unemployed	17	7,7
Liberal profession	48	21,8
Government employee	155	70,5
Type of disease		
Chronic disease	75	34,1
Acute disease	145	65,9

3.2. Criteria for choosing a pharmacy

A significant proportion of the population, 48,18%, prioritizes the geographic proximity of the pharmacy to their home or workplace as the main selection criterion. Additionally, 31,82% of individuals choose to frequent the same pharmacy due to their loyalty. Finally, 20% select their pharmacy based on the availability of medications (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Criteria for choosing a pharmacy.

3.3. Reception by pharmacy staff

The majority of patients (68,18%) reported being satisfied with the reception provided by the pharmacy staff. However, 31.82% expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of this reception (figure 2).

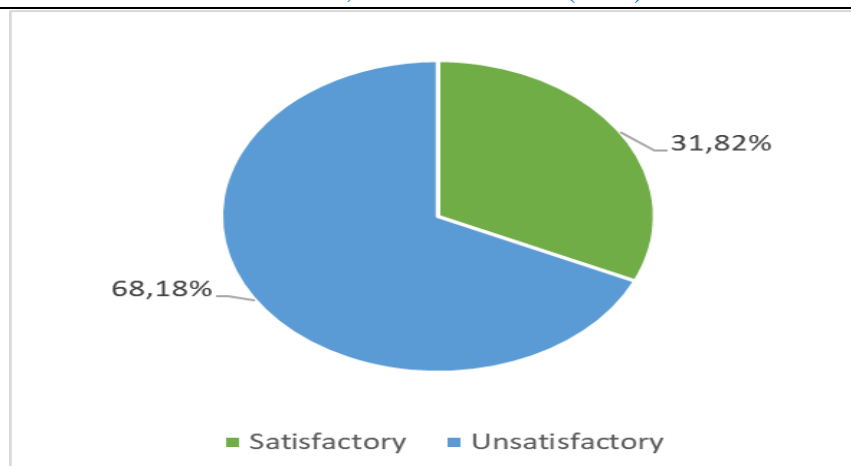


Figure 2. Evaluation of the reception by pharmacy staff.

3.4. Waiting time

This survey reveals that the majority of participants, 50,91%, considered the waiting time to be short. In contrast, 43,63% of respondents described it as relatively long, while only 5,45% perceived the waiting time in the pharmacy as long (Figure 3).

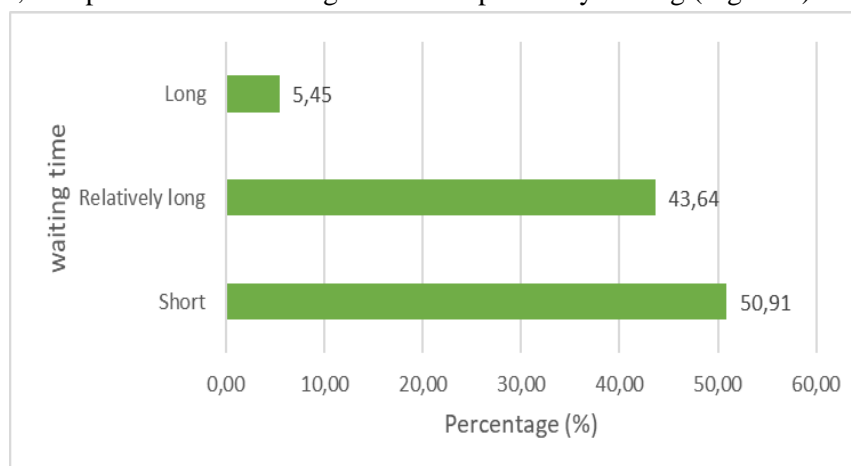


Figure 3. Evaluation of the waiting time by the patients.

3.5. Qualification of the employee responsible for patient care

The majority of participants, 96% of respondents, stated that the pharmacy staff is responsible for dispensing medications. However, 4% stated that only the pharmacist is responsible for this task (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Qualification of the person dispensing the medicines.

3.6. The pharmacist's attentiveness and listening skills

58.18% of participants reported being satisfied with the listening skills and attention provided by the pharmacy staff during the purchase of medications. However, 31,82% of participants rated their satisfaction as moderate, while a minority of 10% expressed dissatisfaction (Figure 5).

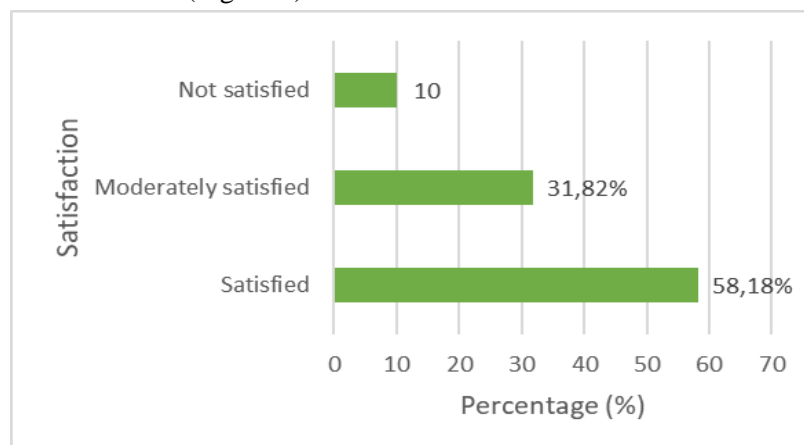


Figure 5. Evaluation of the attention provided by pharmacy staff.

3.7. Therapeutic education

The majority of participants, with a percentage of 78 %, reported being dissatisfied with the quality of the therapeutic education received at the pharmacy, while 22 % rated it as satisfactory (Figure 6).

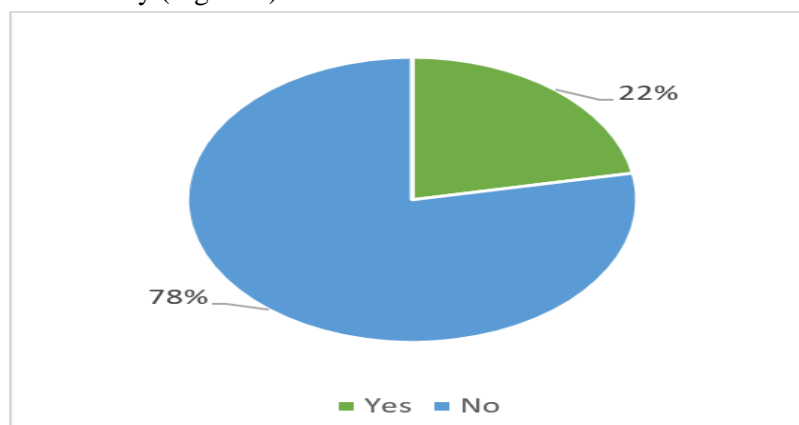


Figure 6. Evaluation of therapeutic education.

4. Discussions

The results of this survey reveal several key points regarding patient reception in pharmacies as well as the quality of therapeutic education provided.

Firstly, the majority of participants (96%) stated that the dispensing of medications is handled by pharmacy staff. Similar results were reported in a study conducted in Spain, where 91.7% of patients identified medical staff as the primary professionals responsible for informing them about their treatment, while only 5.2% considered the pharmacist to be the primary professional [6]. Regarding waiting times, the results are mixed. While 50.91% of participants considered the waiting time to be short, 43.64% felt it was relatively long. This discrepancy suggests a need for efforts to reduce waiting times, particularly during peak periods. Pharmacies must strike a balance between efficient queue management and maintaining service quality to prevent dissatisfaction.

A study conducted in Saudi Arabia reported similar findings, with the majority of participants expressing satisfaction with the waiting time before being served [5]. Another study at Dr. J.P. Wanane Hospital in Indonesia showed that patient waiting times are limited to 15 minutes, and the responsiveness of pharmacy staff ensures that complaints are addressed promptly, guaranteeing efficient services and patient satisfaction [8].

Regarding the attention provided by pharmacy staff, it is noteworthy that the majority of participants (58.18%) expressed satisfaction with the listening and attention they received. This positive feedback reflects the pharmacists' involvement and their ability to provide personalized service, which is essential to fostering a strong patient-pharmacist relationship. However, a significant proportion of respondents (31.82%) rated their satisfaction as moderate, highlighting opportunities for improvement to further enhance this relationship. A minority of participants (10%) expressed dissatisfaction, potentially highlighting specific cases where the attention or listening provided did not meet patient expectations. Other studies have similarly reported high levels of patient satisfaction with pharmacy services [9, 10]. A study evaluating patient satisfaction with pharmacy services found no significant differences based on age, gender, ethnic origin, or the number of illnesses. However, satisfaction with drug therapy management was positively correlated with overall patient satisfaction [11].

Finally, the results indicate that the majority of participants (78%) were dissatisfied with the quality of this education. Only a small percentage (22%) rated it as satisfactory. This highlights an urgent need for improvement in the therapeutic support offered to patients in pharmacies. Ongoing training for pharmacists and the adoption of more effective teaching practices could help bridge this gap and enhance the impact of therapeutic education on patient health outcomes.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study highlights several important aspects of the services provided by pharmacies, including patient reception, expectations management, and the quality of therapeutic education provided. While the majority of patients express notable satisfaction with the listening and attention of the pharmacy staff, improvements are still needed to strengthen the patient-pharmacist relationship, particularly in terms of waiting time management. Additionally, the dissatisfaction regarding therapeutic education points to an urgent need to enhance the continuous training of pharmacists and adopt more appropriate teaching methods. The results of this study suggest that by improving these various aspects, pharmacies could not only increase patient satisfaction but also play a key role in therapeutic support, thus contributing to the improvement of public health.

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