



### HOSPITAL AND SERVICE PERCEPTION OF SERVICE RECIPIENTS: ANKARA PROVINCE SAMPLE

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**Abstract:** This research aims to measure patients' perception of physicians and hospitals in the community and to determine the factors affecting their perceptions. For this purpose, data concerning patients' perceptions of physicians and hospitals were collected from the sample of 380 participants in Keçiören district of Ankara through survey method. The obtained data were analysed and interpreted. It was consequently found that patients' perceptions of physicians and hospitals in general were at medium levels, that they found hospitals good in general, that they were moderately satisfied with physician-patient relations, that they considered doctors as belonging to the most dependable occupational group, that they trusted the army most and that the communication between patients and physicians, the physical conditions of hospitals and the quality of healthcare services hospitals offer were the important factors affecting images about physicians and hospitals. Access/ transportation to hospitals, due importance attached to patients' rights by hospital management and hospitality services offered by hospitals were found to be the factors influential in patients' attitudes towards hospitals. Significant correlations were found between patients' educational status and patients' preference of doctors according to physicians' gender. It was concluded that patients thought that they received better care if they visit their doctors in their private practice office. Studies on the subject in the literature and is important in the selection of the image of hospital patients.

**Keywords:** Hospital, Physician, Patient Perception, Community, Turkey.

## Introduction

Health institutions as organisations are complex institutions. Factors such as having many branches, having a great number of employees necessary for offering healthcare services, having too many patients, their obligation to continuously communicate with suppliers and communication with several institutions are among the causes for the complex structure of those institutions. This complex structure makes the emergence of a number of problems inevitable.

Hospitals, whose main task is to offer healthcare services to patients, work hard to have better institutional image in the eyes of society in order to be preferred by more patients. Work performed by health institutions to attain sustainable success and to make positive images includes emphasising new technologies, increasing the number of specialised medical personnel and working with well-equipped physicians.

Create a positive image in the eyes of society influences patients' choice of hospitals in positive ways. Hospital and physician satisfaction is composed of a specific commitment in people with a high level. Such factors as the number of hospitals' specialists, technologies, reputation, size and accessibility in addition to patients' values, economic status, insurance, age, ethnicity and gender are also influential in patients' preference for a hospital. Besides, patients' own experiences and the experiences of people around them also play significant roles in their choice (Fatt et al., 2000; Spyropoulou et al., 2010).

Hospitals, which are economically dependent on patients, face the obligation to make a good image in the eyes of society and to raise their probability to be preferred. Therefore, it is important to determine society's attitudes towards hospitals and physicians.

According to Ditcher (1985), image is "the sum total of impressions causing the formation of an existence in individuals' minds". Kotler and Clark (1987) describe image as the collection of beliefs composed of one's first impression and thoughts about an object. Image can be defined as a psychological and cognitive picture created in human mind in relation to such phenomena as people, institutions and actions. In other words, it can be defined as people's perception of abstract things such as a brand, a political figure or a country. It is the symbolic and visual representation of objects, actions or views (Türkkahraman, 2004). The general conception of the concept of image in society is in the form of different reflections of reality (Başaran, 2016). An image is the "approximate" presentation of reality. Holistic perception caused by work about institutional identity in relevant groups is called institutional image. Institutional image targets recipients directly and it aims to create a positive perception about the institution (Uzoğlu, 2001). An image is composed of subjective judgement and objective knowledge and thus creates a directive effect on people's decision-making process (Tolonguç, 1992).

This study aims to reveal the effects of medical staff that are the most important sources of communication with patients and patient relatives in addition to the factors influential in society's perceptions and image of physicians and hospitals.

## Literature Review

The concept of image from institutional perspective means mental pictures about institutions created in individuals' minds. The picture composed of individuals' opinions that they have in consequence of relations they directly set up with an institution forms the image of the institution (Çoban, 2003). Institutional image can be defined as the picture in the minds of the target group of an organisation. That is to say, it is the whole of judgements about the quality attributed to an institution by target groups in their minds (Gray and Palmer, 1998). There are several factors constituting institutional image such as the structure of an organisation, its functions, policies and philosophy. There are negative as well as positive factors influencing institutional image (Öğüt, 2008). The factors are listed as in the following: **Post-purchase service:** It is formed by care customers receive following the service they have bought. It is influenced by such components as warranty services and customers' satisfaction with the benefits a product or a service provides. **Advertisements:** Advertising by an institution to introduce people with itself and appropriate service to advertisements can be influential in image making. **Industrial relations:** Institutional image is directly affected by relations set up with employees, distributors and suppliers. **Packages:** High quality and protective packages giving prominence to customers' satisfaction are important in institutional image. **Physical appearance:** Institutions should have physical appearance capable of satisfying their customers in their service area. A healthy physical environment should be provided to meet the needs of service areas. **Public relations:** Setting up public relations to be able to care customers' questions and problems of any kind affects institutional image substantially.

An institution has more than one image. The expectations and perspectives of institution shareholders such as employees, customers (patients) suppliers, government and society in relation to the institution are different and each shareholder has a different image of the institution (Bayın and Önder, 2014). On examining shareholders' expectations from an institution in general, we see that employees expect satisfactory wages, good work conditions, and personnel policies and trust while customers expect good prices, quality, product and service safety; shareholders expect reliability and society expects responsibility (Fatt et al., 2000).

Positive institutional image forms the basis for an institution to set up relations with its target groups. From customers' perspective, an image is a way for summarising the reality as good-bad, useful-useless. Positive institutional image supports the formation of an organisational culture, affects customer satisfaction in positive ways, increases customer dependence, supports defining institutional goals, raises the market share of an institution, contributes to strengthening the communication of an institution inside and outside, helps an institute to find qualified human resources and increases employees' spiritual satisfaction. From the perspective of health institutions an image indicates sum total of patients' thoughts, beliefs and impressions about a health institution (Bayın and Önder, 2014). An examination of the importance of institutional image for health organisations demonstrates that image is influential in setting priorities and distributing resources in the future on the part of hospital management. When image is tarnished, patients' preferences will be influenced in a negative way, preferences for suppliers and physicians will be lowered and this will cause a decrease in a hospital's share of

market. A good image, on the other hand, will raise the market share of the health institution since it will increase patients' tendency to prefer that hospital (Kim et al., 2008).

Tengilimoğlu (2001) states that the image of a hospital is also included in factors influential in patients' choice of the hospital. Hospital managers should try to build a good image in the eyes of patients and of society. A positive image is important for a hospital. Work should be based on realities in order to be able to make a positive image. On considering the fact that people can reach more information about hospital preference and that they can follow news about health institutions closely, it is clear that realistic and adequate informing will affect the image of an institution in positive way.

Technological adequacy, adequacy of equipment used, the number of specialist and well-equipped medical staff, cost, easy access, compatibility with quality standards can be given as examples for factors influencing the institutional image of hospitals. If the factors are favourable, they will cause positive image in patients and patients' relatives, and thus preference for a hospital will increase. Health institutions' images are associated with opponent institutions' images. Patients develop an image for a hospital on the basis of their own experience of treatment. Information offered to patients and patients' trust on the treatment affects hospital image in the eyes of the patients, and thus influences patients' choice of hospitals (Tengilimoğlu et al., 2015).

Patients' satisfaction is important in that it determines patients' choice of health institution, it assures the re-arrangement of services and that it is indicator of quality in healthcare services. Patients' and patient relatives' levels of satisfaction should be measured and their expectations should accurately be determined in increasing the quality of healthcare services (Şahin et al., 2005).

Turgut (2003) concluded that it was possible for hospitals to make positive image in the eye of society by doctors' caring patients more, emphasising patients' satisfaction, reducing bureaucracy, correcting physical elements and by following up to date technologies. Başaran (2016), in a master's thesis entitled "Research on Factors Affecting Healthcare Service Recipients' perceptions of institutional images about Hospitals" aimed to determine the factors affecting healthcare service recipients' perceptions of institutional images about hospitals. In line with the purpose, the data coming from a sample of 484 participants were analysed, and it was found that "trust on institutions", "employees' interest and politeness", "trust on the staff", "accessibility", "diversity of high quality service" and "hospital comfort" were the factors influencing the perception of image. It was concluded that if hospitals improved themselves in terms of those factors, it would affect their institutional image in positive ways. Kanoglu (2016) investigated the effects of institutional image on hospital business. Accordingly, the researcher found that institutional image had positive impacts on patients' satisfaction. In research on hospital and physician images Ekiyor, Tengilimoğlu and Ergün (2017) suggested that images about hospitals and physicians were shaped by such factors as taking care of patients, cleanliness and hygiene, access to hospital and personnel's interest. Accordingly, it was that 88% of the participants trusted on doctors, which was a positive result.

## Research Methodology

### Purpose of the Study

The way physicians and hospitals are perceived in society is of great importance in choosing a hospital. The image about physicians and health institutions can influence preferences for health institutions in positive ways. Being informed of factors affecting perceptions of preference in making the choice of hospitals and physicians is important for the development of hospitals and in order for them to attract more patients.

This study aims to reveal the effects of medical staff who are the most important sources of communication with patients and patient relatives in addition to the factors influential in society's perceptions and image of physicians and hospitals.

The research problem statement, which is effective in the formation of the image of physicians and hospital factors?

### Method of the Study

The research population was composed of patients going to hospitals in Keçiören district of Ankara. According to data coming from Turkish Statistical institution (TUIK), 903,605 people live in Keçiören. Calculations indicated that sample size of 384 participants was sufficient for the study. The formula  $n = \frac{Nt^2 pq}{d^2 (N-1) + t^2 pq}$  was used in calculating the sample size (Özdamar, 2003). N: the size of universe, n: sample size, d: probability of observing the relevant action, q: 1-p (or probability of not observing the relevant action), p: accepted  $\pm$  sampling error rate, t ( $\alpha, sd$ ): is represented as t table critical value at  $\alpha$  significance level according to freedom degree. A total of 380 participants were selected through random sampling. Literature review and field study methods were used in the study. A questionnaire was performed in Keçiören district of Ankara for field study, and 380 people were interviewed face to face. The data were collected in April 2017. The questionnaire form contained 20 questions about hospitals and physicians in part two. The questions were created on the basis of literature review and expert opinion. The participants responded the questions in 5-pointed Likert type scale as 1: I definitely agree, 2: I agree, 3: I am indecisive, 4: I disagree agree, 5: I definitely disagree. The a statistical programme was used in analysing the research data. Frequency and Anova analyses were used in evaluating the data.

Following the validity analysis of the data, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated as 0.846. Accordingly, the data was found to be highly reliable.

### Findings of the Study and Interpretation

58.2% of the participants were female whereas 41.8% were male; 61.3% were married and 38.7% were single; 4.5% were 20 years old and below, 25.0% were between 21-31 years old, 31.1% were between 31-40 years old, 28.2% were between 41-50 years old, and 11.3% were 51 years old and above. On examining educational status, it was found that 7.9% of the participants were elementary school graduates, 19.2% were secondary school graduates, 24.2% were high school graduates, 14.7% had associate degree, 21.3% had bachelor's degree and 12.6% had post-graduate degree. The research findings demonstrated that 31.3% of the

participants were the members of government retirement fund (civil servants), 51.1% were members of social security administration, 2.9% had green cards, 9.7% had general health insurance, 1.6% had private health insurance and that 3.4% did not have health insurance.

**Table 1: The most Dependable Occupational Groups according to Participants**

| Occupational groups | N          | %            |
|---------------------|------------|--------------|
| Teachers            | 76         | 20.0         |
| Police officers     | 87         | 22.9         |
| Doctors             | 96         | 25.3         |
| Lawyers             | 12         | 3.2          |
| Engineers           | 23         | 6.1          |
| Architects          | 7          | 1.8          |
| Politicians         | 4          | 1.1          |
| Religious officials | 15         | 3.9          |
| Farmers             | 60         | 15.8         |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>380</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

On asking the participants what occupational groups were the most dependable, 20.0% said it was teachers, 22.9% said it was police officers, 25.3% said it was doctors, 3.2% said it was lawyers, 6.1% said it was engineers, 1.8% said it was architects, 1.1% said it was politicians, 3.9% said it was religious officials and 15.8% said it was farmers. According to the participants' statements, the most dependable occupational group was doctors by 25.3%.

**Table 2: The most Dependable Institutions according to Participants**

| Occupational groups                | N          | %            |
|------------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Courts                             | 40         | 10.5         |
| Army                               | 57         | 15.0         |
| National intelligence organisation | 51         | 13.4         |
| Ministry of National Education     | 22         | 5.8          |
| Ministry of Health                 | 49         | 12.9         |
| Presidency of religious affairs    | 34         | 8.9          |
| Grand national assembly of Turkey  | 7          | 1.8          |
| None                               | 120        | 31.6         |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>380</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

According to Table 2, 31.6% of the participants do not find any institutions dependable. The institutions thought to be dependable are army by 15.0%, National Intelligence Organisation by 13.4%, Ministry of Health by 12.9% and courts by 10.5%.

According to the results obtained in the questionnaire, the participants preferred state hospitals the most (by 63.4%) whereas they preferred private hospitals the least (by 17.9%). The rate of



participants thinking that specialised staff was lacking was 83.4% whereas the rate of those who did not think that specialised staff was lacking was 16.6%.

**Table3: Participants' Attitudes towards Hospitals and Physicians**

|   | <b>X</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Health care service offered in hospitals is adequate.   | 2.43     | 1.321     |
| I find the physical conditions of hospitals adequate.   | 2.31     | 1.255     |
| Equipment in hospitals has today's technology.  | 2.03     | 0.877     |
| I can easily convey my requests and complaints to hospital administration.                              | 2.29     | 1.224     |
| Access to the hospital is quite easy.   | 2.11     | 1.022     |
| Hospital employees have good approach towards patients.   | 2.32     | 1.060     |
| Hospitality service in a hospital affects my views about the hospital.                                  | 2.33     | 1.010     |
| Hospital administration attaches due importance to patients' rights.                                    | 2.39     | 1.035     |
| Physicians are respected very much  | 2.30     | 1.082     |
| Physicians have the necessary sensitivity in the process of therapy given to their patients.            | 2.32     | 1.075     |
| Physicians are careful about patients' confidentiality.   | 2.29     | 1.160     |
| Physicians are paid less than they deserve.   | 2.80     | 1.165     |
| Physicians see patients as customers.   | 2.62     | 1.177     |
| Physicians I see in their private practice office take closer care with my illness.                     | 2.10     | 1.044     |
| Physicians illuminate patients adequately during examination.   | 2.44     | 1.184     |
| What I hear about hospitals and physicians affects my decisions.  | 2.26     | 1.028     |
| Physicians are good at communication with patients.   | 2.38     | 1.027     |
| The high number of patients preferring a doctor affects my perspective of the doctor in a positive way. | 2.65     | 1.225     |
| I believe that a doctor's age is directly proportional to his/her knowledge                             | 2.93     | 1.335     |
| Physicians' gender affects my choice.   | 3.07     | 1.479     |

An evaluation of the responses to 5-pointed Likert type items showed that physicians' gender was not influential in patient's choice of doctors that the high numbers of patients did not affect patients' perspectives of the physicians in positive ways and that doctors were adequately paid. It was also found in this research that the equipment used in hospitals had new technology, the physical conditions of hospitals and healthcare services in hospitals were adequate, access to hospitals was easy, patients' privacy was cared and that due importance was attached to patients' rights. Patients thought that doctors they visited in their private practice office showed more interest in their illness. The participants also pointed out that physicians were good at communication with patients, that they enlightened patients sufficiently during examination and that they could easily conveyed their requests and complaints to the administration. An average result was obtained in the issue that physicians see patients as customers.

In the extent to which the participants agreed with the statements, it was found through t-test that there were statistically significant differences between genders in the statement “access to hospital is quite easy” ( $p < 0.05$ ). While male participants agreed more (2.08) with the statement, female participants agreed less (2.13). Besides, significant differences were also found between genders in the statement “Hospital administration attaches due importance to patients’ rights” ( $p < 0.05$ ). Male participants agreed with the statement more (2.33) than female participants did (2.47). No significant differences were found between genders in the extent to which the participants agreed with the other statements.

The results for Anova Test which was performed so as to find the correlations between marital status and attitudes towards physicians showed that there were statistically significant differences between groups in three statements. Accordingly, significant differences were found between groups’ responses to the statement “hospitality services in a hospital affect my views about the hospital” ( $p < 0.05$ ). The participants who were single agreed more (2.20) with the statement than the married participants did (2.42). Significant differences were found in participants’ responses to the statement “Physicians are respected very much” ( $p < 0.05$ ). Accordingly, the single participants agreed more (2.25) with the statement than the married ones did (2.33). And finally, the single participants agreed more (2.03) with the statement “physicians I see in their private practice office take closer care with my illness” ( $p < 0.05$ ) than the married ones did (2.14).

The results for Anova Test which was performed so as to find the correlations between participants’ educational status and their attitudes towards hospitals and physicians demonstrated that there were statistically significant differences in three statements. Accordingly, there were significant differences in participants’ responses to the statement “equipment in hospitals has today’s technology” ( $p < 0.05$ ). Secondary school graduates agreed the most (1.85) with the statement, and participants having an associate degree agreed the least (2.32) with the statement. While high school graduates agreed highly (2.5829) with the statement, university graduates (those having a bachelor’s degree) agreed the least (3.0189). The second statement with statistically significant difference was the statement “physicians are respected very much” ( $p < 0.05$ ). Participants who were elementary school graduates agreed the most (2.03) with the statement. The participants having an associate degree agreed the least (2.63) with the statement. The statement “physicians’ gender affects my choice of physicians” ( $p < 0.05$ ) was another statement with significant difference according to educational status. Accordingly, participants having a bachelor’s degree agreed the most (2.63) with the statement whereas those who were elementary school graduates agreed the least (3.37) with the statement.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Improvements in information technologies have enabled people to have access to information more rapidly and more easily. Thus, individuals can now reach information on their illness, hospitals and physicians easily through many sources of information- as in all other issues they want to learn. Health sector, like all sectors, is in competition. Hospitals, whose main aim is to provide patients with healthcare services so that they can recover from their illnesses, have financial income which changes in directly proportional to the number of patients consulting them. Naturally, patients’ selectivity in terms of hospitals and physicians plays an important



role in this respect. Determining society's perception of hospitals and physicians is important so that hospitals can improve themselves.

This study, conducted for this purpose, found that the majority of people had social security. Doctors were at the top of the list of most dependable occupational groups. It was found that the participants did not find any institutions dependable. This finding was important in that it indicated society's perspective of the image and dependability of institutions.

The research results showed that people primarily preferred state hospitals to receive healthcare services. Thus, two out of three patients chose to go to the state hospitals. The great majority of participants thought that specialised staff was lacking in hospitals.

Participants in general had positive views about hospitals and physicians. Hence, it was found that patients were generally pleased with hospitals and physicians, that healthcare services were adequate, that they liked hospitals in terms of physical conditions, that physicians communicated well with them and illuminated them sufficiently. The fact that the participants mostly held the view that doctors they visited in their private practice office took more care with their illness was a matter to think about.

In relation to participants' attitudes towards hospitals and physicians according to gender, marital status and educational status, it was found that there were significant differences between patients' perceptions of physicians according to gender in the matter of access to hospitals, and accordingly, male participants agreed more with the statement. In responses to the statement that hospital administration attached due importance to patients' rights, it was found that female participants agreed more with the statement. On examining correlations between marital status and attitudes towards hospitals and physicians, it was found that there were statistically significant differences between groups in their responses to the statements "hospitality service in a hospital affects my views about the hospital", "physicians are respected very much" and "physicians I see in their private practice office take closer care with my illness". In all of the responses to the statements, the single participants agreed more with the statements than the married participants. Significant differences were found between responses to the statement that hospital equipment had today's technology according to educational status. Secondary school graduates agreed the most with the statement while participants having an associate degree agreed the least. Significant differences were also found between responses to the statement that physicians were respected very much according to educational status. Accordingly, while elementary school graduates agreed with the statement the most, the participants having an associate degree agreed the least. In terms of the statement about physicians' gender and patients' preference of physicians, significant differences were found according to educational status. Accordingly, participants having a bachelor's degree agreed the most with the statement while elementary school graduates agreed the least. This result was found interesting in that it indicated that physicians' gender became more important in patients choice of doctors as their level of education increases.

Similar results have been obtained in the literature. It was found that hospitals with strong image had positive effects on patients' choice (Ambrose, Purdum, 1974; Berkowitz, Flexner, 1980; Turgut, 2003; Kaanoğlu, 2016; Başaran, 2016; Ekiyor, Tengilimoğlu, Ergin, 2017).

It may be recommended that hospitals should primarily lay more emphasis on institutional image activities to increase patients' satisfaction. The thing that has priority in this matter is that patients should be informed correctly while designing institutional image. Determining patients' expectations accurately and meeting the expectations at the maximum level will cause institutional image to gain value. Institutional image functions as a guide for an institution to achieve its goals and it also requires continuous hard work to offer better services. When performed with a larger group of participants, this study will enable researchers to obtain better results in seeing society's general perceptions of the issue.

Since the study is limited with district Ankara, results do not give precise information. It will be continued to search by enlarging the different district and population in the future.

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