

THE IMPACT OF WAITING TIMES ON PATIENT SATISFACTION AND PATIENT CARE: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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Introduction: Long waiting times before patients see a doctor have become endemic in most healthcare organizations. Patients often spend significant time waiting for care from healthcare professionals. Their satisfaction and perceived quality of care are closely related to the waiting and service times they experience. The time patients spend waiting is a crucial factor in accessing care and utilizing health services at hospitals. Despite its importance, these factors remain understudied in developing countries, with a scarcity of information on waiting times and their impact, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya. This study aims to describe the determinants and impacts of waiting times on patient satisfaction at the Aga Khan University Hospital, Nairobi (AKUH, N).

Method: This was a prospective cross-sectional study and included patients above 18 years who visited the accident and emergency department at AKUH, N. Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire, and prolonged waiting times were defined as waiting for more than one hour to see a doctor. Descriptive summaries, such as frequency (percentages) and median (interquartile range) were used to present the results. Additionally, logistic regression was

employed to identify factors associated with prolonged waiting times.

Results: A total of 941 participants took part in the study, with 52.0% being females and 53.6% were in the 20-40 years age group. More than half of the participants were married (52.4%), graduates (59.3%), and employed (69.0%). Regarding waiting times, 51.1% reported waiting for 31-60 minutes and 24.8% waited for 61-120 minutes. In terms of satisfaction, 70.8% of the participants were likely to return to AKUH and 71.7% were likely to recommend it to relatives and friends. The day and time of visit were significantly associated with the prolonged waiting time. Similarly, those who visited the clinic between noon-4pm were 7.62 times more likely to wait to see a doctor than those who visited in the morning hours.

Conclusion: The day and time of visit significantly impacted on waiting times. To reduce waiting times and improve access to treatment services, facilities should consider increasing the number of healthcare providers during these peak hours to ensure timely and quality consultations. It is crucial to identify bottlenecks and gridlocks within health facilities in order to come up with an efficient blueprint to improve waiting times which would in turn lead to improved satisfaction and outcomes.