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EVALUATING HEALTHCARE FACILITY ACCESSIBILITY: A SATISFACTION STUDY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN PUBLIC HOSPITALS

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Abstract

Healthcare accessibility for persons with disabilities (PWDs) remains a significant concern in Malaysia's public healthcare system despite existing legislation mandating accessible facilities. This study evaluates the satisfaction levels of disabled users regarding facilities in public hospitals, focusing on two major healthcare institutions in the Northern region. The research employed a quantitative approach using questionnaires distributed through physical and digital platforms to collect comprehensive data on facility accessibility and usability. The study population comprises diverse groups of individuals with disabilities who utilize services at these hospitals. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software, presenting findings through detailed statistical analysis. Results revealed high satisfaction levels with elevator facilities and anti-slip flooring in disabled toilets, with mean scores of 4.57 and 4.49, respectively. However, significant deficiencies were identified in tactile flooring for visually impaired users (mean=1.97), wheelchair-accessible pathways (mean=4.27), and public toilet availability (mean=4.29). These detailed findings emphasise the critical necessity for targeted and strategic improvements across specific areas of hospital infrastructure to enhance overall accessibility and user experience. The research culminates in a series of comprehensive recommendations focused on infrastructure enhancement initiatives, specifically addressing the implementation of improved tactile flooring systems, extensive upgrades to wheelchair-accessible pathways, and strategic increases in accessible toilet facilities throughout the hospital complexes. These evidence-based findings and subsequent recommendations provide essential and actionable insights for healthcare facility planners, administrators, and policymakers working towards designing and preserving more inclusive, accessible, and user-friendly healthcare environments that effectively serve the diverse needs of everyone within the community.

Keywords: Disabilities, Facilities, Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Healthcare accessibility for persons with disabilities (PWDs) remains a critical concern in Malaysia's public healthcare system. Despite the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 mandating accessible facilities, many individuals with disabilities face significant barriers when accessing healthcare services. Public hospitals face persistent challenges in providing adequate facilities for users with disabilities, with limited empirical data on user satisfaction levels hindering the evaluation of current initiatives (Clemente et al., 2022). The unique needs of disabled individuals often go unaddressed, leading to dissatisfaction with healthcare services. Therefore, this research intends to examine the satisfaction levels of disabled users towards public hospital facilities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The satisfaction of disabled users with healthcare facilities represents a critical area of global research due to its direct impact on healthcare access and quality. Extensive studies have explored the challenges faced by persons with disabilities (PWDs) in accessing healthcare facilities, offering valuable insights into barriers and potential solutions that inform this study on disabled users' satisfaction with public hospital facilities.

Universal design principles are fundamental for healthcare facilities to ensure accessibility for all users. These principles create environments accommodating diverse needs while enhancing the overall patient experience. Research has shown that barrier-free design will improve healthcare outcomes for users with disabilities (Singh et al., 2024). Specialized design strategies prove particularly crucial in addressing varied needs across disability groups, including wheelchair users and those with visual or hearing impairments (Tsami & Chrysikou, 2024).

Despite established legal frameworks, implementing accessibility standards in healthcare facilities faces considerable challenges. While many countries have enacted protective legislation, such as India's Right for Persons with Disabilities Act, compliance remains inconsistent. Healthcare facilities often fail to meet mandatory standards, significantly impacting user satisfaction (Singh et al., 2024).

Current challenges in healthcare accessibility persist for PWDs, primarily centred around limited physical accessibility. Many facilities inadequately address the needs of individuals with visual, hearing, or intellectual disabilities (Kamarudin et al., 2014). Research indicates that 23% of people with disabilities encounter difficulties accessing primary healthcare (Groenewegen et al., 2021), underscoring a substantial disparity in service accessibility. Infrastructure challenges create significant barriers, including inadequate ramp design and insufficient guiding blocks for those who are visually impaired. User satisfaction studies reveal widespread dissatisfaction among wheelchair users regarding various aspects, including parking facilities, reception services, appointment systems, elevator access, and physiotherapy services (Alkawai & Aloyayyed, 2017). Physical barriers such as narrow doorways, insufficient ramps, and inadequate support facilities continue to limit building accessibility and reduce social participation (Hashim et al., 2011).

3. METHODOLOGY

This comprehensive research employs a carefully designed questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument, which is distributed to respondents through two complementary channels: traditional physical paper forms and the digital Google Forms platform. The questionnaire has been specifically developed to thoroughly evaluate disability facilities in public hospitals by measuring respondents' levels of agreement across multiple dimensions of accessibility and usability.

The study population comprises a diverse group of individuals with disabilities who utilize services at two major public hospitals in the Northern area. These hospitals were

selected based on their significant patient volume and geographical accessibility, ensuring a representative sample of the disabled community in the region.

The research employed the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software for data analysis. This robust analytical tool is utilised to conduct comprehensive statistical analyses of responses regarding hospital facility usage and satisfaction levels.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The satisfaction levels of disabled users regarding hospital facilities reveal strengths and areas that require improvement. The three highest-rated facilities are the width of the elevator (Mean = 4.57), availability of elevators (Mean = 4.56), and anti-slip flooring in disabled toilets (Mean = 4.49). Spacious elevators are crucial for individuals using wheelchairs or mobility aids, enabling smooth movement throughout the hospital. The adequate elevator width follows universal design principles, ensuring accessibility for all users. Elevators are equally important as they allow patients and visitors with mobility impairments to navigate between floors easily. The anti-slip flooring in disabled-accessible restrooms also plays a vital safety role, reducing the risk of falls. This feature is significant since wet bathroom surfaces can be hazardous for individuals with mobility challenges.

However, the lowest-ranked facilities are areas that require immediate attention. Tactile flooring for vision impairments (Mean = 1.97), pathways for wheelchair users (Mean = 4.27), and availability of public toilets in hospitals (Mean = 4.29) received the lowest satisfaction ratings. The particularly low score for tactile flooring indicates a significant gap in support for the visually impaired. This flooring type is a crucial navigation tool, and its inadequacy limits users' independence and safety. A study has shown that many individuals with disabilities face difficulties accessing healthcare services (McBride-Henry et al., 2023). While pathways for wheelchair users received moderate satisfaction scores, their design and maintenance need improvement. Research shows that people with disabilities often encounter physical accessibility issues in healthcare settings, leading to care disparities (Lagu et al., 2022). The lower satisfaction with public toilet availability indicates problems with either the quantity or accessibility of these facilities. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services stress the importance of accessible healthcare services, including restroom facilities, to ensure equal access for individuals with disabilities (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2024).

Improving tactile flooring, pathways, and restroom accessibility is necessary for enhancing the hospital experience for users with disabilities. These improvements will help create a more inclusive and accessible healthcare environment.

Table 1. Disabled users' satisfaction with the facilities provided at the hospital Item

	Disabled Users Satisfaction	Mean	Rank
1.	The width of the elevator	4.57	1
2.	Elevator at the hospital	4.56	2
3.	Disabled toilet applied anti-slip floor finishes	4.49	3
4.	Continuous handrail at the staircase	4.42	4
5.	Access to the hospital	4.40	5
6.	Disabled facilities are provided in every department	4.37	6
7.	Handrails provided for vision impairments	4.37	7
8.	Parking area near the hospital entrance	4.37	8
9.	Signage for disabled people	4.36	9
10.	Toilet in the public hospital	4.29	10
11.	Pathway provided for wheelchair users	4.27	11
12.	Tactile floor for vision impairment	1.97	12

5. CONCLUSION

This research has examined the satisfaction levels of disabled users regarding public hospital facilities, revealing both achievements and areas needing improvement. The findings show that while some aspects of hospital accessibility, such as elevator dimensions and availability, meet user expectations, other crucial elements, like tactile flooring for visually impaired individuals, need immediate attention. The study highlights persistent challenges of implementing comprehensive accessibility solutions despite existing legislative frameworks.

The findings lead to several key recommendations. Infrastructure enhancement should prioritize the installation and maintenance of tactile flooring systems throughout hospital facilities to better serve visually impaired users, with regular audits to ensure effectiveness. Wheelchair-accessible pathways require a comprehensive review and upgrades to meet the standards regarding international width, surface quality, and facility-wide connectivity.

Accessible toilets should be increased, with strategic placement throughout hospitals for the convenience and accessibility. A systematic evaluation process should regularly assess and maintain accessibility features, incorporating user feedback for continuous improvement.

These improvements would enhance the hospital experience for users with disabilities while creating a more inclusive healthcare environment. Future research should

monitor the implementation of these recommendations and their impact on user satisfaction, ensuring public hospitals continue to meet the diverse needs of all users.

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