



Cross Sectional Study on Public's Opinions about Community Pharmacists as Health Care Provider in Zawiya City, Libya

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Abstract

Background: Pharmacists are crucial in providing patient care and offering drug medication services within the society. However, this remains uncertain whether or not the public completely recognizes the extent of pharmacists' capabilities as essential Health service practitioner. This research seeks to explore Public views on Pharmacists in community settings and assess the degree of gratification with the services they offer.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional design research was carried out over a period of three months from October, 2023 through January, 2024 in Zawia city, Libya. A self-administered questionnaire was employed, containing questions about the respondents' demographic properties and their satisfaction with pharmacy services. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the data.

Results: availability, knowledge and flexibility of pharmacists as well as their counseling services affected public opinion. 95% of those surveyed said they receive respectful treatment from community pharmacists. The majority (58.5%) chose "Both" indicating they respected the opinions of both pharmacists and doctors. This shows faith in both medical practitioners' qualifications. Doctors' opinions were slightly more solely respected (25.0%) than those of merely pharmacists (13.9%). A little over 78.9% of respondents said they received distinct guidance from pharmacists on the drugs they are taking, and 65.3% said they trusted the advice of pharmacists regarding prescription drugs. Nearly, half of public (49.9%) think of pharmacists as medical experts.

Conclusions: Factors influencing customers' opinions included the accessibility and expertise of pharmacists, service efficiency, medication knowledge, and counseling.

Keywords

Public; community pharmacist; pharmacy services; satisfaction; Zawia.

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Introduction

Pharmacists have recently been working hard to transition their attention to shifted away from providing medications to providing patient care. The field has undergone a significant transformation moving away from drug medicament-focused tasks like dispensing and compounding medicines to offering pharmaceutical services, information, and patient-centered care.¹ Pharmaceutical health care helps reduce Medication-associated health complications and mortalities, enhances medical outcomes and quality of life associated to health, and decreases healthcare costs.² As a result, the patient's trust in the pharmacist plays a significant role in shaping the

patient-pharmacist relationship.³ Patients show signs of vulnerability and dependence on medical personnel. Thus, the patient's ability to receive therapy, willingness to share personal information, and adherence to treatment plans are all influenced by their level of trust in healthcare providers.⁴ In nations where drug prescription and dispensing are functionally separate, in community pharmacy, pharmacists are the healthcare providers who engage with patients primarily through pharmaceutical care services like drug dispensing, prescription reviews, and over-the-counter (OTC) sales.^{5,6} A strong relationship between a patient and a pharmacist significantly affects

the patient's quality of life, with trust being the key factor in building that connection.^{7,8,9} Some studies have shown that although many patients experience one type of relationship with their pharmacists, they might actually favor a different type of relationship with pharmacist. This relationship is also impacted by factors such as health conditions, number of medications prescribed; marital status and pharmacist patients frequent.¹⁰ Per a comprehensive review of literature on patients' views of community pharmacists in the United Kingdom.¹¹ Nonetheless, it has consistently been discovered in earlier research that growing pharmacy-led services requires public confidence in pharmacists. Gregory et al. found in a qualitative study that a pharmacist's actions and attitude might determine whether a patient gains or losses trust in a Canadian pharmacy. But a profit-driven strategy combined with unreliable or opaque practices may destroy patient and pharmacist trust.¹²

Therefore, the objective of this research is to assess how community pharmacists are perceived by the customer when offering pharmacy services, also to evaluate the level of general society satisfaction in community pharmacists and look at factors that influence it in the city of Zawia, Libya.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

A cross-sectional designed study was carried out over a specified duration of time three months from October, 2023 through January, 2024 in the city of Zawia, Libya. All data were analyzed by using SPSS for Windows software version 27. The results were described using frequency and percentage.

Creation and Validation of the Questionnaire

This questionnaire aligns with another research conducted in Saudi Arabia.¹³ The questionnaire containing a set of questions about the opinions that the general public has about community pharmacists (such as their availability, confidence, politeness, consultation, understanding, advice, and respect), about other pharmacy services (such as speed of service, screening and monitoring tests, and purchasing medication), about community pharmacies (such as appearance, availability of medicines, use of a computerized system, and privacy), obstacles to communicating with community pharmacists, as well as opinions on the effectiveness of pharmacists and pharmacy services. Furthermore, inquiries concerning demographic attributes (age, gender, nationality, education, employment status, marital status, health status, and income) were incorporated. The questionnaire was first created in English, and then a linguistic specialist translated it into Arabic. The questionnaire characterized by its clarity, simplicity, and translation accuracy. The questionnaire took 10

minutes to complete on average and was meant to be given out during a face-to-face interview.

Study Participants

Based on their geographic distribution, 43 community pharmacies in the city of Zawia were chosen at random to receive visits. With the specific goal of including pharmacies from various parts of Zawia city, the pharmacies were chosen at random. Every customer, regardless of gender, who answered the questionnaire, was given an interview by a designated pharmacist. They were made aware of the study's purpose and given the opportunity to fill out the questionnaire. The participants received assurances that the data collected through the surveys would be presented in groups and would remain secret. Out of the 1000 participants, 812 were enrolled in total. About 188 were excluded for not completing the answers to the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Out of the 1,000 individuals approached, 812 agreed to participate, yielding a response rate of (81.2%). Among the participants, (53.9%) were between the ages of 21 and 39. The sample was predominantly female (70.2%), with males comprising (29.8%). Most respondents, (68.2%), held a college degree, indicating a higher education level compared to the general population. Nearly two-thirds of the participants (63.4%) reported no significant health issues. Among those with health concerns, diabetes mellitus was the most prevalent condition, affecting (11.2%) of participants, while other chronic illnesses (such as hypertension, cardiac issues, and asthma) were relatively uncommon. A detailed breakdown of demographic data is provided in (Table 1).

Perception of Community Pharmacists by Customers

The role of pharmacists is shifting from simply dispensing and providing medications to offering more patient-focused services. We examined how customers perceive their community pharmacists. Among 812 participants, about 405 (49.9%) saw community pharmacists as drug experts, 232 (28.6%) as healthcare providers, 147 (14.7%) as medicine vendors, 15 (1.8%) as business people and 10 (1.2%) as trades people (Figure 1). The most common perception was that of a drug expert, chosen by nearly half of respondents, aligning with the desired view of pharmacists as knowledgeable pharmaceutical consultants. Additionally, 28.6% viewed pharmacists as healthcare providers. Combined, the perceptions of pharmacists as drug experts and healthcare providers indicate that 3 out of 4 respondents see them as health professionals, rather than just retail sellers of medicine.

Table 1. Demographics characteristics of participants.

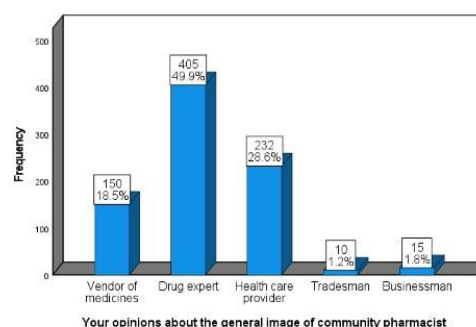
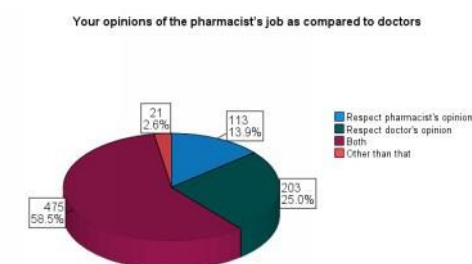
Variable	account	(%)
Age		
Less than 20 years	161	19.8
21-39	438	53.9
40-59	178	21.9
60 years and above	35	4.3
Gender		
Male	242	29.8
Female	570	70.2
Education level		
Illiterate	27	3.3
High school	132	16.3
College	554	68.2
Postgraduate	99	12.2
Health status		
Diabetes	91	11.2
Hypertension	66	8.1
Cardiac	36	4.4
Asthma	43	5.3
Other	61	7.5
None	515	63.4

Customers' perspectives on the accessibility and expertise of community pharmacists

Most respondents (82.3%) noted that community pharmacists were readily accessible at the pharmacy, and 90.5% reported being treated with respect and courtesy by the pharmacist, as shown in Table 2. Approximately 62.8% felt that the pharmacist dedicated sufficient time to their needs, while 74.3% indicated that the pharmacist answered their questions thoroughly. Additionally, around 65.3% of respondents expressed a high level of trust in pharmacists for providing pharmaceutical care and addressing medication-related issues.

Perspectives on public acceptance of community pharmacists as health care providers

When the participants asked about their views on the pharmacist's role compared to that of doctors, most customers (58.5%) selected "Both," indicating respect for the expertise of both pharmacists and doctors. This reflects a strong trust in both health professionals, as illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 1.** Public perceptions of the overall image of community pharmacists.**Figure 2.** Public perceptions of the pharmacist's role in relation to that of doctors.

Perspectives on the clinical roles of community pharmacists from customers

Community pharmacists are highly accessible healthcare professionals, playing a critical role in educating the public on medication and health concerns. In community pharmacies, pharmacists can establish themselves as healthcare providers, moving beyond the perception of being mere medication vendors. This questionnaire section included four questions about the services pharmacists offer, such as Pharmacist inquire about medical condition while preparing prescription, gathering information on medical conditions and medications, conducting health screenings (including blood pressure, blood sugar, temperature, and weight checks), and offering guidance on lifestyle and health matters. When asked about these roles, respondents recognized pharmacists' roles in providing information on diseases, medications, and health screenings (Table 3). Specifically, when questioned about whether pharmacists collected information on medical conditions during prescription preparation, 59.7% responded "Yes," and 19.5% said "No." For gathering information on current medications, 49.3% responded "Yes," while 23% said "No." In terms of providing lifestyle and health advice (on topics such as diet, smoking, and exercise), 36.8%

Table 2. Perspectives of customers on community pharmacists.

	Yes		No		Sometimes	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Is the pharmacist present in the pharmacy during the specified hours?	668	82.3	75	9.2	69	8.5
Does the pharmacist interact with you in a respectful and engaged manner?	735	90.5	33	4.1	44	5.4
Does the pharmacist address all of your questions?	603	74.3	103	12.7	106	13.1
Do you have confidence in the pharmacist's advice about medications?	530	65.3	126	15.5	156	19.2
Is the pharmacist dedicating enough time to you?	510	62.8	133	16.4	169	20.8

Table 3. Survey responses regarding the clinical roles of community pharmacists.

	Yes		No		Sometimes	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Did the pharmacist inquire about your medical condition while preparing your prescription?	485	59.7	158	19.5	169	20.8
Did the pharmacist inquire about any other medications you take while preparing your prescription?	400	49.3	187	23.0	225	27.7
Did the pharmacist give general guidance on maintaining a healthy lifestyle, smoking cessation, and physical activity?	299	36.8	260	32.0	253	31.2
Did the pharmacist check or track any of the following: blood pressure, blood sugar, temperature, or weight?	200	24.6	330	40.6	282	34.7

reported receiving relevant information from pharmacists, whereas 32.0% did not. When asked if pharmacists measured blood pressure, blood sugar, temperature, and weight, only 24.6% said "Yes," and 40.6% responded "No." This suggests that many members of the public might not be fully aware of these services at community pharmacies, often opting to visit doctors or hospitals for such screenings instead.

Customer views on the role of pharmacists in providing information about medicine usage

This section of the survey included six questions regarding drug costs, alternatives, selecting over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, resolving drug-related issues, disposing of unused medications, storage, and the effectiveness and safety of drugs after opening. When participants were asked about their medication choices, costs, and drug-related concerns, their responses varied, as illustrated in (Table 4). The majority of respondents (78.9%) reported receiving clear instructions from pharmacists on how to use their medications. Approximately 52.6% sought guidance on avoiding unnecessary prescription costs; 73.3% received advice on drug alternatives, 63.5% on choosing over-the-counter medicines, 36.9% on addressing drug-related issues (such as side effects, interactions, and adherence), and 47.4% on disposing of unused drugs.

DISCUSSION

In this study, Data from a survey involving 812 (570 women and 242 men), participants were analyzed. We noticed that most of the sample in the research consisted of female (70%). Female respondents reported higher satisfaction with pharmacy services compared to males, which was linked to their emotional responsiveness and greater openness to receiving information about their medications from the pharmacist.¹⁴

According to health status, in the current study, diabetic, hypertensive, cardiac, and asthmatic patients make up a small portion of the sample. This suggests that most respondents visit community pharmacies for medication dispensing or advice on minor conditions, but are still reluctant to seek pharmacists' consultations for their chronic disease management. This finding aligns with recent studies conducted in England and Slovakia.^{15,16} Possible reasons include the strong relationship chronic disease patients have with their doctors, the insufficient access to patient's electronic medical records by community pharmacists in Zawia, Libya, and community pharmacists are not familiar with the most recent guidelines for treating chronic diseases. This underscores the need to enhance the pharmacist's role and establish a trust-based, long-term relationship between patients and pharmacists.

Table 4. Answers to questions regarding pharmacist guidance on medication use.

	Yes		No		Sometimes	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Did the pharmacist give clear guidance on how to use the medications?	641	78.9	90	11.1	81	10.0
Did you consult a pharmacist to help prevent unnecessary expenses with your prescriptions?	427	52.6	175	21.6	210	25.9
Did the pharmacist provide you with alternatives when the medication you needed was unavailable?	595	73.3	99	12.2	118	14.5
Do you receive assistance from the pharmacist when choosing OTC and herbal medications?	516	63.5	146	18.0	150	18.5
Did the pharmacist discuss any medication-related issues (such as side effects, drug interactions, or adherence) that were on your mind?	300	36.9	267	32.9	245	30.2
Did the pharmacist offer guidance on how to dispose of unused medicines, medication storage and drug efficacy and safety after the opening?	385	47.4	221	27.2	206	25.4

Unlike some earlier studies conducted in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which revealed public dissatisfaction with the education and professional skills of pharmacy staff,^{17,18} in this study based on the responses to our questionnaire, while 49.9% of customers recognized pharmacists as drug experts, only 28.6% saw them as healthcare providers. Instead, some participants 18.5% regarded pharmacists mainly as medicine sellers instead of as professionals in the healthcare field. Some customers also believed that pharmacists prioritize the business side of their role over the health aspect. This contrasts with a study conducted by El Hajj et al.¹⁹ found that 44% of patients felt that pharmacists effectively balanced the health and business responsibilities together. Similarly, study conducted by Hargie et al.²⁰ in their communication audit of community pharmacy services, revealed that 32% of respondents viewed pharmacists with a business-oriented mindset, 26% occurred as health-focused, and 42% as balanced between both health and business considerations.

As is known, people have trusted physicians for drug therapy consultations, often turning to them with their medication-related questions. However, in this study, just 36.9% of participants felt that community pharmacists were incapable of providing effective medication or consultation for drug-related issues. A comparable study conducted by El Hajj et al.²¹ found that about 70% of contributors did not perceive pharmacists as competent in Evaluating and tracking for particular illnesses. Additionally, Wazaify et al.²² indicated that the majority of participants (62.7%) would seek advice from a pharmacist only when their issue did not warrant a visit to a doctor. These results emphasize the necessity for awareness campaigns within the Libyan community to inform the public about

the roles and services that community pharmacists provide in patient care, helping to foster stronger patient–pharmacist relationships.

The majority of contributors in this study observed that while the Pharmacists inquire about customers' presently prescribed medications (49.3%) and any existing medical conditions when preparing prescriptions (59.7%), they do not offer comprehensive counseling on medication use or advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Most likely the reason is community pharmacists in Zawia, Libya; assume that patients are already informed about their medical conditions by their doctors. But this will effect on patients satisfaction and they will believe that pharmaceutical skills are not at the required level. Previous researches in Jordan and Pakistan have also indicated that patients are dissatisfied with the professional pharmaceutical skills of pharmacy staff.^{23,24} This highlights the significance of continuous learning and the creation of residency programs to provide essential clinical practice training, particularly for services provided by community pharmacies.

In terms of factors affecting patient satisfaction, Satisfaction among patient is a key measure of the standard of medical and pharmaceutical services in healthcare environments. Numerous studies have examined patient trust and perceptions of pharmacy healthcare.^{17,19,25} These studies indicate that trust with such services is influenced by the service efficiency and the pharmacist's expertise. In developed modern countries, patient satisfaction is a crucial component in evaluating health care quality,²⁵ while in developing nations, accessibility plays a more significant role.²⁶ In the Middle East, many people do not view providing advice or information as a pharmacist's primary responsibility; they believe pharmacists should focus on dispensing medications.^{17,22,26} In our research, participants shared positive opinions and satisfaction

regarding community pharmacists and the services they provide.

Additionally, patients were only mildly satisfied with the pharmacist's ability to provide advice on disposing of unneeded medications, proper medication storage, and the efficacy and safety of drugs after opening (47.4%). This finding contrasts with previous studies, where patients reported being satisfied with the pharmacist's guidance on medication storage and the safety and efficacy of drugs post-opening.^{27,28}

Like the results of other studies, 74.3% of contributors were satisfied with the pharmacist's willingness to address their questions. Additionally, it was unsurprising that most respondents were pleased with the attitudes of the pharmacy staff.²⁷

CONCLUSION

The study indicated that the majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with their pharmacists and the services provided by the pharmacy in Zawia city. It emphasizes the significance of highlighting the responsibilities of pharmacists within the community to ensure they are desirable as healthcare providers and seen as essential partners in the healthcare field. Factors influencing customer's opinions included the accessibility and expertise of pharmacists, service efficiency, medication knowledge, and counseling. Overall, customers were highly satisfied with the professionalism of them.

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