Patient Doctor Relationship in COVID -19 Times, A Cross-Sectional Study in Aljouf Region

Ayesha Mallick, MD* Qoot Naif Almeteb, MBBS** Nouf Abdulrahman Aljalawi, MBBS** Norah Okla Alrayyes, MBBS** Ebtisam Khashan M Alruwaili, MBBS** Ghufran Alwidhi E Alruwaili, MBBS** Renad Hassan Alderaan, MBBS** Atheer Shukr Alruwaili, MBBS** Hassan Mallick, MRCPsych*** Amanullah Ahmed Malik, Intern****

ABSTRACT

Study Design: Cross sectional

Introduction: Among interpersonal relationship the patient doctor relationship is an important yet difficult one. The importance of this relationship lies in the fact that it has been associated with patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment and treatment outcome. Covid 19 regulations including distancing and masking have affected this relationship. The objective of this study was to assess the satisfaction of patients regarding doctor patient relationship during the pandemic conditions

Methodology: Across sectional study with 342 participants using pre-validated Arabic version of PDRQ-9 was conducted during the pandemic restrictions. Data was collected by direct interview and recorded on electronic forms. All participants were above age of 18 and had visited the PHC at least one time before the pandemic.

Results: The questionnaire had 9 items with a likert scale of 1 to 5 with minimum score possible 9 and maximum score 45, the average score obtained was 25 showing low overall satisfaction. The mean of all individual items was between 2.7 and 2.88 with a minimum mean of 1 and maximum of 5 possible. There was no significant association between score and age or gender. 56% of the participants believed that the patient doctor relationship has changed during pandemic

Conclusion: The overall scoring of all items in the patient doctor relationship satisfaction was average.

Key Words: patient doctor relationship, PDRQ-9, patient satisfaction in covid 19

INTRODUCTION

The patient-doctor relationship (PDR) is an important concept in health care. Among interpersonal relationship the patient doctor relationship is a difficult one and it has been scrutinized many times over the years. The importance of this relationship lies in the fact that it has been associated with patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment and treatment outcome[1].

Critics have proposed a more active, autonomous and thus patient-centred role for the patient. This patient-centred approach has been described as one where "the physician tries to enter the patient's world, to see the illness through the patient's eyes" and has become the predominant model in clinical practice today.[2] The question was whether these basic principles were still compatible with the unusual COVID-period.

Covid-19 pandemic led to profound changes not only in daily life but also in health care. Highlighting the importance of preparedness and taking lessons from its legacy to prepare the healthcare system in the face of any such future event. In a situation like this with limited resources, health-managers must choose well-balanced solutions able to protect patients and citizens on the one hand and to provide maximal benefit for the society on the other hand.[3]

One area of healthcare which was affected during Covid- 19 was the patient doctor interaction. Changes that occurred in Covid times ranged from the way physicians presented themselves to each other (including the masks) and the patients, the poor conditions for physical examination, the mental suffering of both patient and caregiver until sometimes terrible end-of-life conditions. [4]

Despite these challenges the need of the hour was that caregivers should not consider the situation as an excuse to further damage the relationship and to understand the perceptions of patients as a better half in the relationship [5] Therefore, it was necessary to assess how the patient doctor relationship was affected during the pandemic situation.

Thus, this study aimed to assess the doctor patient relationship in the pandemic situation and to make recommendations based on the study for improvement of care for the general community.

AIM: To assess the perceptions of patients regarding patient doctor relationship in COVID -19 pandemic

---

*   Department of Family and Community Medicine
        College of Medicine, Jouf University
        Saudi Arabia. E-mail: amaseeb@ju.edu.sa
**   Student College of Medicine, Jouf University
***   Central & North West London (CNWL) NHS Trust
****   K.M.D.C., Abbassi Shaheed Hospital

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the satisfaction of patients about patient doctor relationship through a questionnaire within the pandemic situation.
2. To inquire about expectations of patients in a patient doctor relationship within the covid times.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional study was done and 342 participants were included via convenience sampling. Participants above the age of 18 of both genders who had visited the Primary healthcare centres at least one time before the pandemic were included in the study.

The participants were directly interviewed by the co investigators and their responses were recorded in electronic forms on tablets. Data forms were confidential and anonymous with no identifying questions.

Permission to use the validated Arabic version of PDRQ-9 (Patient doctor relationship questionnaire) was obtained from Department of Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Menoufia University, Egypt. [6]

Questionnaire had 3 sections, first section was demographic data, second section contained the 9-item scale which ranged from 1 = Not correct at all, 2 = Fairly appropriate, 3 = Appropriate, 4 = Frequently Appropriate and 5 = Totally appropriate. 3rd section had two open ended questions. With a minimum score of 9 and maximum score of 45 was possible. The value of each item ranged from 1 to 5 with a higher score showing more level of satisfaction.

Data was collected from Jan to March 2021 and analysis of results was done using SPSS version 23. Confidence interval was kept at 95 with margin of error at 5%, Ap value of <.05 was considered as significant

RESULTS

Total respondent was 342

Table 1. Sociodemographic data

Variable		Frequency n=342	Percentage
Age	18-30	225	**65.8%**
	31-45	79	23.1%
	46-60	35	10.2%
	61+	3	0.9%
Gender	Male	49	14.3%
	Female	293	**85.7%**
Educational level	High school and below	66	19.3%
	University	276	**80.7%**
Marital status	Single	220	**64.3%**
	Married	122	35.7%

The mean score of all individual scores shown in graph 1 came out to be 25.39 where a minimum score of 9 and a maximum score of 45 was possible. Independent sample kruskall Wallis test comparing age groups with PDRQ score was not significant with a value of .462

Some of the responses included in the last 2 open ended questions asking how the patient thinks the doctor patient relationship has changed and how it can be improved were as follows:

The doctor is afraid of being close to the patient for fear of infection. The patient is now able to communicate with the doctor through the phone or telemedicine which is helpful. Lack of accurate and correct diagnosis of the other diseases due to the pandemic. More attention was

Table 2. Individual scores of each item of PDRQ-9

| ITEM	RESPONSE n=342					
	Not correct at all	Fairly appropriate	Appropriate	Frequently Appropriate	Totally appropriate	Mean score
My OPD Doctor helps me	32 9.4%	96 28.1%	135 39.5%	39 11.4%	40 11.7%	2.88
My OPD Doctor gives me enough time	26 7.6%	102 29.8%	140 40.9%	29 8.5%	45 13.2%	2.89
I trust My OPD Doctor	46 13.5%	118 34.5%	108 31.6%	131 9.1%	39 11.4%	2.74
My OPD Doctor understand me	39 11.4%	104 30.4%	131 38.3%	29 8.5%	39 11.4%	2.78
My OPD Doctor is dedicated to help me	38 11.1%	102 29.8%	132 38.6%	32 9.4%	38 11.1%	2.79
My OPD Doctor and I agree on the nature of my medical symptoms	40 11.7%	86 25.1%	150 34.9%	24 7.0%	42 12.3%	2.83
I can talk to My OPD Doctor	36 10.5%	94 27.5%	143 41.8%	24 7%	45 13.2%	2.84
I feel satisfied with what My OPD Doctor prescription	45 13.2%	81 23.7%	146 42.7%	29 8.5%	41 12%	2.82
I find it easy to contact My OPD Doctor	34 12.6%	84 24.6%	144 42.1%	30 8.8%	41 12%	2.83
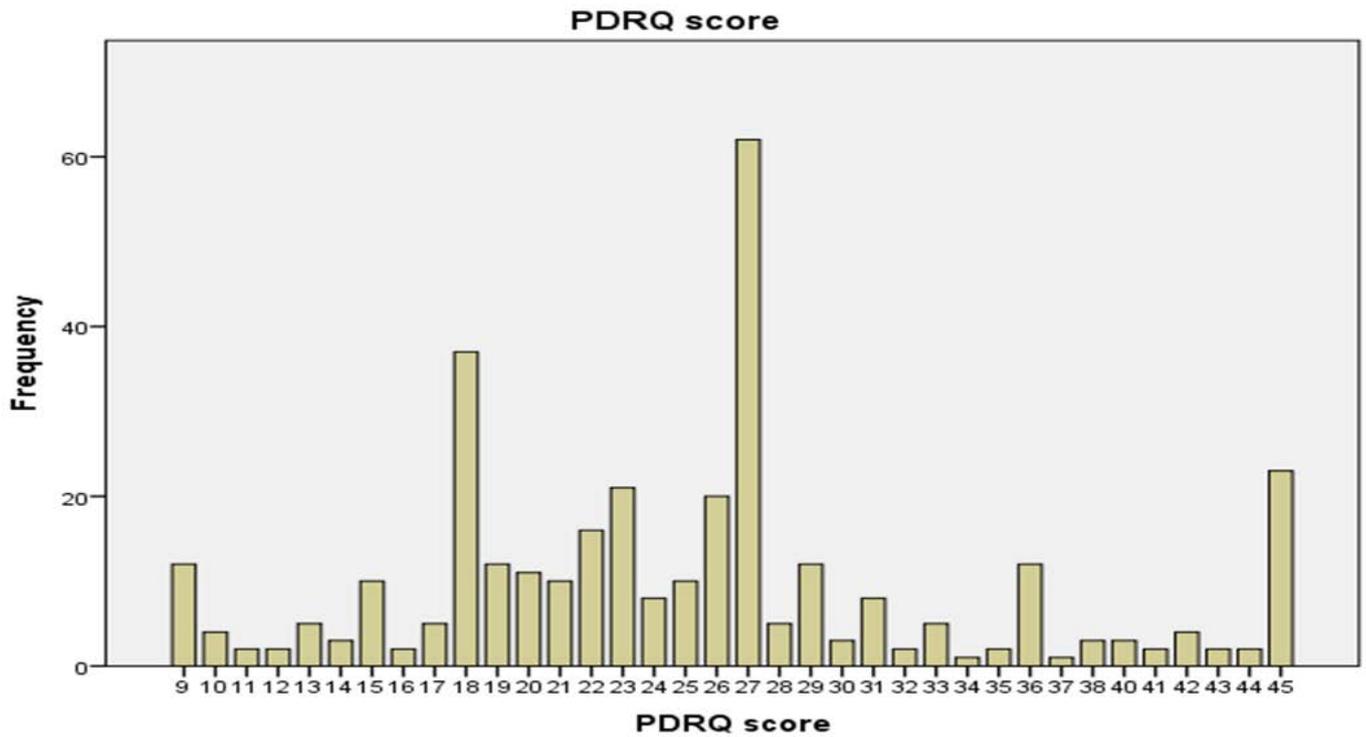
Figure 1. PDRQ score
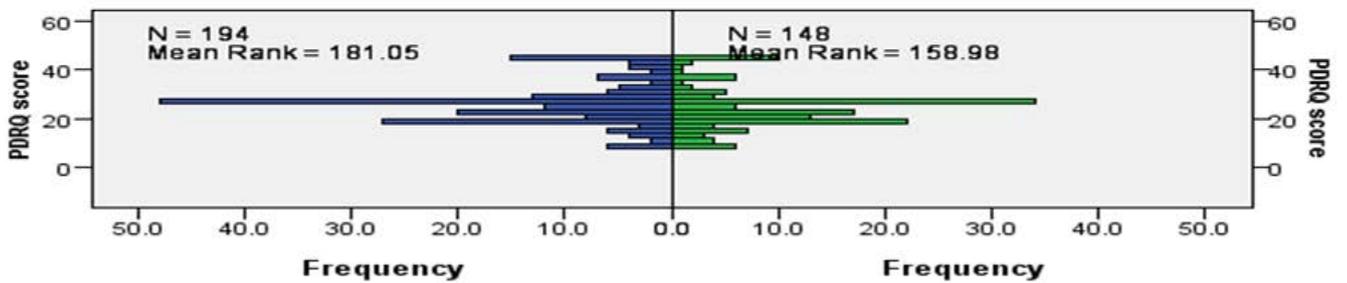
Total N	342
Mann-Whitney U	16,209.500
Wilcoxon W	35,124.500
Test Statistic	16,209.500
Standard Error	902.112
Standardized Test Statistic	2.055
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.040

Figure 2. Independent sample Mann Whitney U test comparing the answer to whether patient doctor relationship has changed during COVID -19

given to patients with flu symptoms. Some suggestions of improvement included: Answer all patient inquiries without neglecting any of them The doctor should give enough attention and time to the patient There should be an evaluation of the doctor after the visit communication with the doctor

DISCUSSION

A study done in China in 021 by Zhou et al showed that the patient doctor relationship had improved during the covid -19 times when they compared pre pandemic and post pandemic data related to patient doctor relationship [5-7]. Our results show a mean of about 2.7 out of a score which totaled of 5 showing average satisfaction about patient doctor relationship. However, since pre pandemic data about this is not available it cannot be ascertained whether this score is better than the pre pandemic scores or it has declined.

A systematic review done in Saudi Arabia by Senitan et al in 2018 measured patient satisfaction with various aspects of healthcare and it showed conflicting results with some items scoring high in one study and the other item scoring low in the other study [8]. None of the studies specifically measured the patient doctor relationship but some items like doctor and staff listened to me carefully showed low scores similar to our study.

Another study done by Aguirre, Sophia, et al in 2021 also showed that the pandemic did not have a negative impact on patient doctor relationship, this could have been due to the positive image of doctors promoted by the social media as front-line workers [9].

In a letter to the editor, published in Family practice, it was noted by Abhishek Ghosh that patient doctor relationship could be affected by 'masking' and distancing and this could have been a factor for low mean scores of item 3 and 7 in our study [10].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The doctor-patient relationship has a direct impact on patients' satisfaction with the healthcare system. In conclusion, our study showed that the satisfaction of patients with various aspects of patient doctor relationship was average with mean scores of most items between 50 to 60%. It is, however, unknown whether these scores are better or worse than pre pandemic scores. It is therefore, recommended to conduct further studies to assess and compare the satisfaction of patients in post covid times and to make appropriate changes to improve the service. Data collection by direct interview was difficult during the pandemic restrictions. Most of the respondents were females because access to only female section was allowed due to isolation restrictions.

REFERENCES

1. Mahmoudian A, Zamani A, Tavakoli N,etal. Medication adherence in patients with hypertension: Does satisfaction with doctor-patient relationship work?. Journal of research in medical sciences: the official journal of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences. 2017;22.

2. Atherton H, Briggs T, Chew-Graham C. Long, COVID and the importance of the doctor-patient relationship. Br J Gen Pract. 2021 Jan 28;71(703):54-55. doi: 10.3399/bjgp21X714641. PMID: 33509811; PMCID: PMC7846362.

3. Ward P. Trust and communication in a doctor-patient relationship: a literature review. Arch Med. 2018;3(3):36.

4. Pavlakis S, McAbee G, Roach ES. Fear and Understanding in the Time of COVID-19. Pediatric neurology. 2020 Oct 1;111:37-8.

5. Kurotschka PK, Serafini A, Demontis M, etal. General Practitioners' Experiences During the First Phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Italy: A Critical Incident Technique Study. Frontiers in public health. 2021 Feb 3;9:19.

6. Hegazy NN, Farahat TM, Elakkad AM, etal.Validation of the patient-doctor relationship and patient satisfaction questionnaire for an Arabic adult population in an Egyptian sample. The Egyptian Journal of Hospital Medicine. 2021 Apr 1;83(1):1514-9.

7. Zhou Y, Chen S, Liao Y, etal.General perception of doctor–patient relationship from patients during the COVID-19 pandemic in China: a cross-sectional study. Frontiers in Public Health. 2021 Jul 6;9:646486.

8. Senitan M, Alhaiti AH, Gillespie J. Patient satisfaction and experience of primary care in Saudi Arabia: a systematic review. International journal for quality in health care. 2018 Dec 1;30(10):751-9.

9. Aguirre S, Jogerst KM, Ginsberg Z, etal. Rappaport D. COVID-19 impact on the doctor-patient relationship: patient perspectives on emergency physician empathy and communication. Bulletin of Emergency & Trauma. 2021 Jul;9(3):125.

10. Ghosh A, Sharma K, Choudhury S. COVID-19 and physician–patient relationship: potential effects of 'masking','distancing'and 'others'. Family practice. 2021 Apr 1;38(2):192-3.