

Analysis Of Factors Influencing The High Rate Of Patient Referrals At The Regional Specialized Dental And Oral Hospital Of South Sulawesi Province

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Abstract

The high rate of patient referrals from Community Health Centers (Puskesmas) to the Regional Specialized Dental and Oral Hospital (RSKD) of South Sulawesi Province has become an important issue in healthcare services. This condition may lead to excessive workloads, long waiting times, and decreased service effectiveness at higher-level healthcare facilities. This study aimed to analyze the effects of healthcare service quality, government policies, and the level of public knowledge on the high rate of patient referrals at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province. The study population consisted of all referred patients who visited the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province during the period from October to December 2025, totaling 18,956 patients, with a sample of 100 respondents selected using accidental sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and official hospital documents. Data analysis included univariate analysis, bivariate analysis using the Chi-Square test, and multivariate analysis using multiple logistic regression to determine the partial and simultaneous effects of the independent variables on patient referrals. The results showed that the majority of patients rated the quality of healthcare services as good (74%), considered government policies appropriate (82%), and had a good level of knowledge (72%). The bivariate analysis indicated that all independent variables were significantly associated with patient referrals. Multiple logistic regression showed that healthcare service quality had a negative and significant effect on patient referrals, whereas government policies had no significant effect. Certain categories of public knowledge also had a significant negative effect. Simultaneously, the three independent variables significantly affected patient referrals. In conclusion, improving healthcare

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service quality and public knowledge can reduce the likelihood of high referral rates. It is recommended that the RSKD improve service quality, provide oral and dental health education to the community, and monitor the implementation of government policies to make the referral system more efficient and effective.

Keywords: Patient referrals, healthcare service quality, government policies, public knowledge, RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital.

INTRODUCTION

The healthcare referral system is an important component of a tiered healthcare service system that aims to ensure that patients receive services according to their medical needs through a referral mechanism from First-Level Healthcare Facilities (FKTP) to Advanced Referral Healthcare Facilities (FKRTL). An effective referral system plays a role in improving continuity of care, the efficient utilization of healthcare resources, and supporting the achievement of *Universal Health Coverage* through the strengthening of primary healthcare services. BPJS Kesehatan sets the maximum referral ratio from community health centers (Puskesmas) to advanced healthcare services at 15%; however, in various regions, this target remains difficult to achieve due to a combination of structural and operational factors within the healthcare service system (Andika, 2025; Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2024; Purba et al., 2025; Safari, 2023; Ramadhani, 2020; Permatasari & Ernawaty, 2019).

The phenomenon of high referral rates indicates that referral decisions are influenced not only by patients' clinical conditions but also by various factors related to healthcare service quality, government policies, and community characteristics as healthcare service users. From the community perspective, the level of knowledge regarding the function of FKTP, referral procedures, and the utilization of healthcare services also influences patients' decisions to request or accept referrals to hospitals. In addition, the implementation of the referral system is influenced by the competence of healthcare workers, the availability of resources, compliance with standard operating procedures, and adequate access to healthcare services (Ramadhani, 2020; Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2023; Safari, 2023; Purba et al., 2025; Simamora, 2022; Ardini et al., 2023; Juwita & Santoso, 2025).

Service quality, which includes the competence of healthcare workers, clinical communication, waiting time, facility availability, and patient satisfaction, has been shown to be associated with referral decisions. On the other hand, the relatively low level of public knowledge regarding oral and dental health may lead to delays in seeking treatment, causing patients to present with more complex conditions that require specialist care. This condition is supported by studies showing that service quality, patient

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satisfaction, public knowledge, and healthcare-seeking behavior contribute to increased referral needs in oral and dental healthcare services (Dindin Sh., 2023; Novianingrum, 2025; Anang et al., 2021; Lestari, 2024; Simamora, 2022; Ghanbarzadegan et al., 2021).

This problem also occurs at the Regional Specialized Dental and Oral Hospital (RSKD) of South Sulawesi Province as an advanced referral hospital. BPJS Kesehatan data for 2025 indicate that pulpitis (K04.0) and pulp necrosis (K04.1) were the most common referral diagnoses, accounting for approximately 25.5% of the top ten referral diagnoses. In addition, the 2025 visit report of the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province recorded a total of 76,507 referral cases, with an average of 6,376 referrals per month, indicating a high referral service workload at the hospital. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effects of healthcare service quality, government policies, and the level of public knowledge on the high rate of patient referrals at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province as a basis for developing recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the oral and dental healthcare referral system (BPJS Kesehatan, 2025; Novianingrum, 2025; Safari, 2023; Sinaga, 2022). The phenomenon of high referral rates also highlights the importance of evaluating the implementation of the referral system, particularly in terms of primary healthcare service quality and coordination among healthcare facilities, as part of efforts to improve the efficiency of the healthcare system.

Although various studies have identified factors influencing the implementation of the referral system, most studies have focused on specific aspects, such as the implementation of the National Health Insurance (JKN) referral system at first-level healthcare facilities (Purba et al., 2025), healthcare workers' perspectives on referral decisions (Ridwan & Ramadhan, 2025), enabling factors in the utilization of oral and dental healthcare services (Nabila & Andriani, 2024), and literature reviews on the causes of high referral rates (Prepotif, 2024). Studies examining the relationship between service quality and patient satisfaction have also been conducted separately without integrating government policy and the level of public knowledge as determinants of high referral rates (Hermina Manado, 2023). In addition, several previous studies have focused more on barriers to the implementation of the referral system or factors contributing to high referral ratios in general, without developing a model that simultaneously integrates service, policy, and community characteristics, particularly in specialized dental and oral hospitals (Ridwan & Ramadhan, 2025; Juwita & Santoso, 2025; Ardini et al., 2023). Therefore, this study offers novelty through a simultaneous analysis of the effects of healthcare service quality, government policies, and the level of public knowledge on the high rate of patient referrals at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province.



RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study used a quantitative research method. Quantitative research was used to measure and analyze various factors suspected of influencing the high rate of patient referrals and the occurrence of patient referrals at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province.

Research Location and Period

The study was conducted at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province from February 2026 to July 2026.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The population in this study consisted of all referred patients who visited the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province during the period from October to December 2025, totaling 18,956 patients. Sampling in this study was conducted using a *non-probability sampling* technique. The sample was calculated using the Slovin formula, resulting in 99.5 respondents, which was rounded to 100 respondents.

The criteria for respondents in this study were: 1) referred patients who received services at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province; 2) patients aged ≥ 18 years; 3) patients who were willing to participate as research respondents and sign the *informed consent* form; and 4) patients who were conscious and able to communicate well.

Sources and Data Collection Methods

Data collection in this study was conducted to obtain accurate and relevant information in accordance with the research objectives. The data collection methods included primary and secondary data. Secondary data were obtained from official documents and reports available at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province. The variables examined in this study consisted of the dependent variable, namely the high rate of patient referrals (high and low) (Y), and the independent variables, namely healthcare service quality (X1), government policies (X2), and the level of public knowledge (X3).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 27 through univariate, bivariate (*Spearman's rho*), and multivariate analyses (multinomial logistic regression) with a significance level of $p < 0.05$. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using



the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Univariate Analysis

In this study, a total of 100 referred patients who visited the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province during the period from October to December 2025 were included.

Tabel 1. Deskripsi Statistik Variabel

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Healthcare Service Quality	100	24.00	50.00	40.8800	5.85736
Government Policy	100	30.00	50.00	40.9800	4.77785
Level of Public Knowledge	100	25.00	50.00	39.5900	5.11306
Patient Referrals	100	32.00	66.00	48.3300	10.75255
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Sumber: Data Primer, (2026)

The descriptive statistics of the variables in this study reflect the respondents' perceptions or opinions regarding various aspects measured through the questionnaire. The healthcare service quality variable had a mean score of 40.88, with values ranging from 24.00 to 50.00 and a standard deviation of 5.86, indicating that most respondents perceived the quality of healthcare services as fairly good, with moderate variability in their assessments. The government policy variable had a mean of 40.98, with values ranging from 30.00 to 50.00 and a standard deviation of 4.78, indicating that respondents' perceptions of government policies tended to be positive and relatively homogeneous. For the level of public knowledge, the mean was 39.59, with values ranging from 25.00 to 50.00 and a standard deviation of 5.11, indicating that most respondents had a moderate to good level of knowledge. Meanwhile, the patient referral variable had a mean of 48.33, with values ranging from 32.00 to 66.00 and a standard deviation of 10.75, indicating greater variation among respondents regarding the level of patient referrals.



Bivariate Analysis

The bivariate analysis in this study demonstrated an association between each independent variable and the dependent variable, namely healthcare service quality, government policy, and the level of public knowledge in relation to patient referrals.

Effect of Healthcare Service Quality on Patient Referrals

The bivariate analysis showed an association between healthcare service quality and patient referrals. Among the 26 respondents who rated the quality of healthcare services as poor, 25 respondents (25%) had a low referral level, while only 1 respondent (1%) had a high referral level. Conversely, among the 74 respondents who rated the services as good, 38 respondents (38%) had a low referral level and 36 respondents (36%) had a high referral level. These results indicate that perceptions of healthcare service quality tend to be associated with the level of patient referrals; the better the assessment of the services, the greater the likelihood that patients had a high referral level, whereas poorer assessments were more commonly associated with low referrals.

Table 2. Effect of Healthcare Service Quality on Patient Referrals

Healthcare Service Quality	Patient Referrals				Total		P-Value
	Low		High				
	n	%	n	%	N	%	
Poor	25	25%	1	1%	26	26%	0,000
Good	38	38%	36	36%	74	74%	
Total	63	63%	37	37%	100	100%	

Source: Primary Data, 2026

Effect of Government Policy on Patient Referrals

Among the 18 respondents who considered the government policies to be inappropriate, 17 respondents (17%) had a low referral level, while only 1 respondent (1%) had a high referral level. Conversely, among the 82 respondents who considered the policies to be appropriate, 45 respondents (45%) had a low referral level and 37 respondents (37%) had a high referral level. These results indicate that positive perceptions of government policies related to healthcare services tend to be associated with higher levels of patient referrals, whereas perceptions that the policies were inappropriate were more commonly associated with low referral levels.



Table 3. Effect of Government Policy on Patient Referrals

Government Policy	Patient Referrals						P-Value
	Low		High		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Not Appropriate	17	17%	1	1%	18	18%	0.002
Appropriate	45	45%	37	37%	82	82%	
Total	62	62%	38	38%	100	100%	

Source: Primary Data, 2026

Effect of the Level of Public Knowledge on Patient Referrals

The bivariate analysis showed an association between the level of public knowledge and patient referrals. Among the 3 respondents with a low level of knowledge, all had a low referral level. In the group with a moderate level of knowledge, 23 respondents (23%) had a low referral level, while 2 respondents (2%) had a high referral level. Meanwhile, in the group with a good level of knowledge, the distribution of referrals was more balanced, with 36 respondents (36%) having a low referral level and 36 respondents (36%) having a high referral level. These results indicate that the higher the level of public knowledge, the greater the likelihood of patients having a high referral level, whereas lower levels of knowledge were more commonly associated with low referrals.

Table 4. Effect of the Level of Public Knowledge on Patient Referrals

Level of Community Knowledge	Patient Referrals						
	Low		High		Total		P-Value
	n	%	n	%	n	%	0.000
Poor	3	3%	0	0%	3	3%	
Fair	23	23 %	2	2%	25	25%	

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Good	26	26 %	36	36 %	72	72%	
Total	62	62 %	38	38 %	100	100 %	

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Healthcare Service Quality on the High Rate of Patient Referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province

The results of the study showed that healthcare service quality had a significant effect on the high rate of patient referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province, based on both bivariate analysis and logistic regression. The negative direction of the effect indicates that the better the quality of services at first-level healthcare facilities, the lower the likelihood of referrals, whereas suboptimal service quality increases the likelihood of patients being referred to advanced healthcare facilities. This condition is consistent with the concept of primary healthcare as a *gatekeeper* in a tiered referral system, in which good service quality enables most cases to be managed at the primary level, thereby reducing unnecessary referrals (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021; Kringos et al., 2020). These findings are consistent with Ramadhani SN (2020), who stated that low-quality human resources and services that do not comply with standards contribute to increased referral rates during the implementation of the National Health Insurance (JKN) system. These findings are also supported by Purba et al. (2025), who found that barriers to referral implementation affect the efficiency of the referral system; Ridwan and Ramadhan (2025), who showed that healthcare workers, the referral system, and physicians' perceptions influence referral rates; Nabila and Andriani (2024), who demonstrated that facilities and infrastructure as well as access to services affect the utilization of oral and dental healthcare services; Prepotif (2024), who identified facilities, human resources, standard operating procedures, patient knowledge, and transportation as factors contributing to high referral rates; and a study at the Dental Polyclinic of Hermina Manado Hospital (2023), which showed that service quality was positively associated with patient satisfaction. This finding is also supported by Kruk et al. (2022), who emphasized that healthcare service quality is a major determinant of health system effectiveness because high-quality services can increase patient trust while reducing the need for advanced care that could otherwise be managed at the primary healthcare level. In addition, Levesque et al. (2020) explained that access to healthcare is determined not only by the availability of facilities but also by the ability of the healthcare system to provide responsive, timely, and



appropriate services according to patients' needs, thereby reducing unnecessary referrals. The findings are also consistent with Ghanbarzadegan et al. (2021), who stated that access and quality of dental healthcare services are major determinants of dental healthcare utilization, as well as Starfield et al. (2021), who emphasized that high-quality primary healthcare can improve the effectiveness of the referral system and reduce the service burden on referral hospitals.

The Effect of Government Policy on the High Rate of Patient Referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province

The results of the study showed that government policy was associated with the high rate of patient referrals in the bivariate analysis, but did not have a significant effect in the multivariate analysis after being tested together with healthcare service quality and the level of public knowledge. Although the direction of the effect was negative, indicating that more appropriate tiered referral policies tend to reduce referral rates, these results indicate that policies function primarily as a regulatory framework, while referral decisions in practice are more strongly influenced by operational factors such as service quality, the availability of healthcare workers, facilities and infrastructure, patients' clinical conditions, and communication between healthcare workers and patients. This condition is reflected at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province, which continues to receive a large number of patients even though the majority of respondents considered government policies to be appropriate and most were BPJS participants who followed the tiered referral system. Theoretically, the effectiveness of referral policies depends heavily on the readiness of first-level healthcare facilities as *gatekeepers*. Therefore, well-designed policies may not necessarily reduce referral rates if their implementation is not supported by adequate resources and healthcare services. This is also consistent with the recommendations of the World Health Organization (2021), which emphasize that the success of a referral system is determined not only by regulations but also by primary healthcare capacity, healthcare worker competence, and coordination among healthcare facilities. In addition, the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD, 2020) states that strengthening primary healthcare is a key prerequisite for ensuring that referral policies operate effectively and reducing the service burden on hospitals. These findings are consistent with Purba et al. (2025), who stated that implementation barriers continue to affect the efficiency of the referral system; Ridwan and Ramadhan (2025), who showed that the referral system, healthcare workers, and physicians' perceptions are more influential in referral decisions; Prepotif (2024), who identified facilities, human resources, standard operating procedures, patient knowledge, and transportation as factors contributing to high referral rates; and Nabila and Andriani (2024), who emphasized that the availability of facilities and infrastructure and access to

oral and dental healthcare services also influence referral needs. These findings are also consistent with Nicholson et al. (2021), who explained that the effectiveness of a health policy depends heavily on its implementation at the service-delivery level and the readiness of service-providing organizations. Furthermore, the findings are supported by Ghanbarzadegan et al. (2021), who stated that access to quality dental healthcare is strongly influenced by the readiness of the healthcare system and the availability of resources, indicating that policy implementation alone is insufficient to improve the effectiveness of the referral system.

The Effect of the Level of Public Knowledge on the High Rate of Patient Referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province

The results of the study showed that the level of public knowledge was associated with the high rate of patient referrals in the bivariate analysis, but did not have a significant effect in the multivariate analysis after being analyzed together with healthcare service quality and government policy. The negative direction of the effect indicates that better knowledge tends to reduce the likelihood of high referral rates because the public has a better understanding of the functions of first-level healthcare facilities, referral procedures, and the importance of utilizing healthcare services according to their needs. However, referral decisions in practice are more strongly determined by patients' clinical conditions, healthcare workers' capabilities, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, and the capacity of primary healthcare facilities; therefore, public knowledge is not the dominant factor. This condition can be observed at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province as a referral hospital that receives dental and oral cases requiring specialist care, while the majority of respondents had secondary to higher levels of education, good knowledge, and were BPJS participants who followed the tiered referral system. Theoretically, public knowledge plays a role in shaping healthcare-seeking behavior, but the effectiveness of the referral system remains dependent on the readiness of healthcare facilities. In addition, Nutbeam and Lloyd (2021) explained that *health literacy* affects individuals' ability to understand health information and make decisions regarding healthcare utilization, although its influence is often affected by organizational and healthcare system factors. Paakkari and Okan (2020) also showed that health literacy contributes to individuals' ability to make rational health decisions; however, its impact on healthcare utilization remains influenced by the characteristics of the available healthcare system. Furthermore, Sørensen et al. (2021) emphasized that improving health knowledge needs to be accompanied by accessible healthcare services in order to produce optimal changes in healthcare utilization behavior. These findings are consistent with Suryana A.Y. (2020), who stated that a lack of understanding of referral procedures can increase unnecessary referrals; a study at Bahorok Community Health



Center, which showed that limited public understanding of the function of community health centers increased referral requests; Anang et al. (2021), who demonstrated that knowledge of oral and dental health is associated with better health behavior; and Prepotif (2024), who identified patient knowledge as one of the factors contributing to high referral rates, along with facilities, human resources, standard operating procedures, and transportation.

The Dominant Variable Influencing the High Rate of Patient Referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province

The results of the study showed that healthcare service quality was the most dominant variable influencing the high rate of patient referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province. Logistic regression results indicated that healthcare service quality remained significant after being tested together with government policy and the level of public knowledge, whereas the other two variables did not have significant partial effects. The negative direction of the effect indicates that the better the quality of services at first-level healthcare facilities, the lower the likelihood of referrals because patients can be managed optimally without being referred to advanced healthcare facilities. As a specialized referral hospital, the high number of patients at the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province reflects that limitations in healthcare worker competence, facilities and infrastructure, and service capacity at first-level healthcare facilities remain major factors contributing to referrals. This condition is also supported by the characteristics of the respondents, the majority of whom were BPJS participants and therefore followed the tiered referral system, while service quality is the factor most directly experienced during the healthcare service process. Theoretically, these findings emphasize the role of first-level healthcare facilities as *gatekeepers* in determining the effectiveness of the referral system. In line with this, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) stated that improving the quality of primary healthcare through strengthening healthcare worker competence, ensuring the availability of facilities, and improving service coordination is a key strategy for increasing health system efficiency and reducing the burden on referral hospitals. In the context of dental healthcare, Ghanbarzadegan et al. (2021) also showed that access to high-quality and equitable healthcare services is an important determinant of dental healthcare utilization and the achievement of *Universal Health Coverage*. These findings are further supported by Shi et al. (2021), who demonstrated that high-quality primary healthcare can improve health system efficiency by reducing unnecessary hospital service utilization. Furthermore, Macinko and Wright (2020) explained that countries with strong primary healthcare systems tend to have more effective referral systems, lower healthcare costs, and better health outcomes. In the context of dental

healthcare, **Watt et al. (2021)** stated that strengthening primary healthcare is a key strategy for reducing disparities in access to dental healthcare while improving the effectiveness of the referral system. These findings are consistent with **Ramadhani SN (2020)**, who stated that low-quality human resources and services that do not comply with standards increase referral rates; **Purba et al. (2025)**, who found that implementation barriers affect the efficiency of the referral system; **Ridwan and Ramadhan (2025)**, who showed that healthcare workers and the referral system influence referral decisions; **Prepotif (2024)**, who identified facilities, human resources, standard operating procedures, patient knowledge, and transportation as factors contributing to high referral rates; and **Nabila and Andriani (2024)**, who demonstrated that facilities, infrastructure, and access to services affect the utilization of oral and dental healthcare services.

CONCLUSION

1. Healthcare service quality has a significant effect on the high rate of patient referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province.
2. Government policy does not have a significant effect on the high rate of patient referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province.
3. The overall level of public knowledge does not have a significant effect on the high rate of patient referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province.
4. Healthcare service quality is the dominant variable influencing the high rate of patient referrals to the RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province.

Managerial Implications

1. First-level healthcare facilities need to improve the quality of healthcare services, particularly healthcare worker competence, diagnostic accuracy, patient communication, and the availability of facilities and infrastructure, to reduce referrals that are not clinically indicated.
2. The government and BPJS Kesehatan need to strengthen the implementation of the tiered referral system by improving the capacity of primary healthcare facilities, rather than relying solely on the development of regulations.
3. The RSKD Dental and Oral Hospital of South Sulawesi Province needs to strengthen coordination and feedback mechanisms with referring healthcare facilities to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of the referral system.



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