

**VIEWS AND OPINION OF THE MALTESE PUBLIC
ABOUT THE COMMUNITY PHARMACIST AND
PHARMACIES**

Antoine Azzopardi

Introduction

Unfortunately, it is a fact that in Malta retail pharmacists are not appreciated for their true potential by the Maltese public. It would not be going too far to state that they are sometimes considered to be merely learned salespersons. The aim of this project was to observe and record views, opinions and attitude of the general Maltese public with regards to the retail pharmacist, elucidate the reasons for such opinions and behaviour and to formulate changes and take provisions which can improve this situation.

Methodology

The information needed was gathered by three survey methods which had the function of complimenting and validating each other.

- 1) a questionnaire was set up, considering all the necessary points needed for the survey. Due to the poor response attained in the pilot test when this questionnaire was sent by post, it was decided to adopt another system. This system involved the splitting up of Malta according to the 1990 electoral system, and assigning regional leader to distribute and collect these questionnaires. 1170 questionnaires were distributed, 90 in each section. A time limit was stipulated and if the subject did not hand in the questionnaire in this allotted time, then the latter was considered to be not interested in the survey.
- 2) interviews were held to gather first hand information from the public, to validate responses attained in the questionnaire and to identify any problems which were missed out in the questionnaire survey. The latter case mainly refers to the improvement which the public would like to see in Maltese pharmacies and the reason for these changes.
- 3) a telephone survey was also carried out. The aim for this survey was that of elucidating the public's opinion on cognitive services, that is whether they would use them and if they would be prepared to use them if a fee would be introduced for such services.

Results

The response rate was quite high, that is, 66.15%, however not to the desired extent. It was found that more females (56%) than males (44%) responded. The distribution of the age groups attained in the questionnaire was similar to the national distribution (Chart 1). The education level was also spread over the three categories even though there was a high proportion of respondents with a tertiary education.

Many other factors were sought in the dissertation however the most significant and indicative was the score attained by the respondent. In this part a score system was set up to compare the knowledge the respondent said to have with the reaction and attitude when confronted with problems involving the pharmacist. The most significant point by far is the fact that only one category of the population, that is males above 70, as a whole acceded the bottom line of 30 marks.

The satisfaction of the public with Maltese pharmacists and pharmacies was also sought and the improvement suggested by the respondents were recorded and used to formulate an idea situation (Chart 2, Chart 3). The table below lists the improvement suggested by the interviewed subjects.

Improvements suggested by interviewed

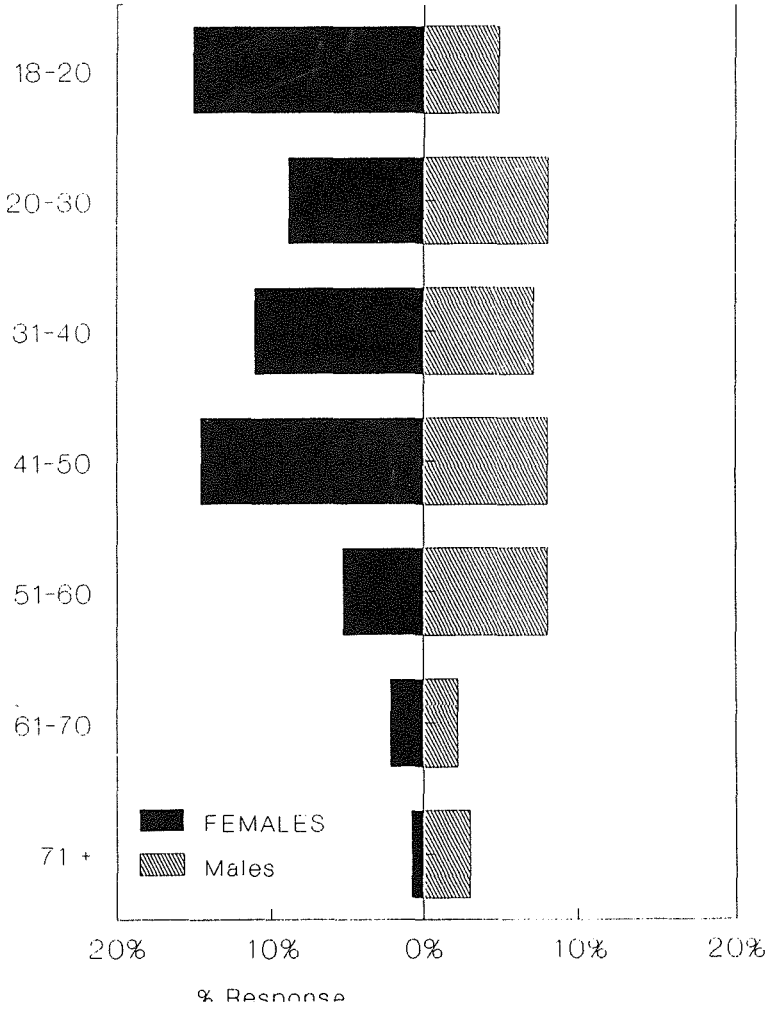
Change suggested	Number
Pharmacists' overcoat	71
More organised and cleaner pharmacies	28
More rapid service ⁺	37
More privacy*	45
More considerate pharmacists	12
Pharmacist in pharmacy	21
More pharmacies open on Sundays and 24-hour pharmacies	27

⁺ Suggested: - Separate cosmetic section;
- More than one pharmacist;
- More disciplined people.

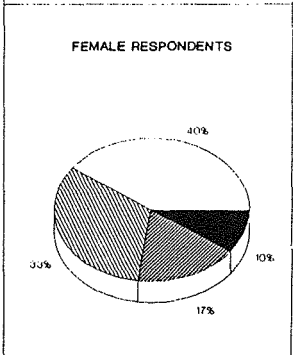
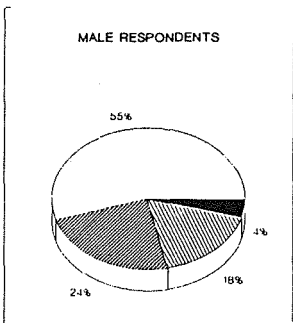
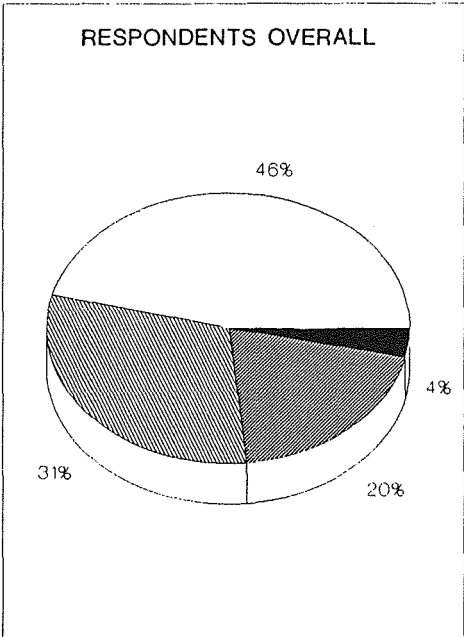
* Most of those who suggest this option were women and elder subjects.





AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES

Age (years)

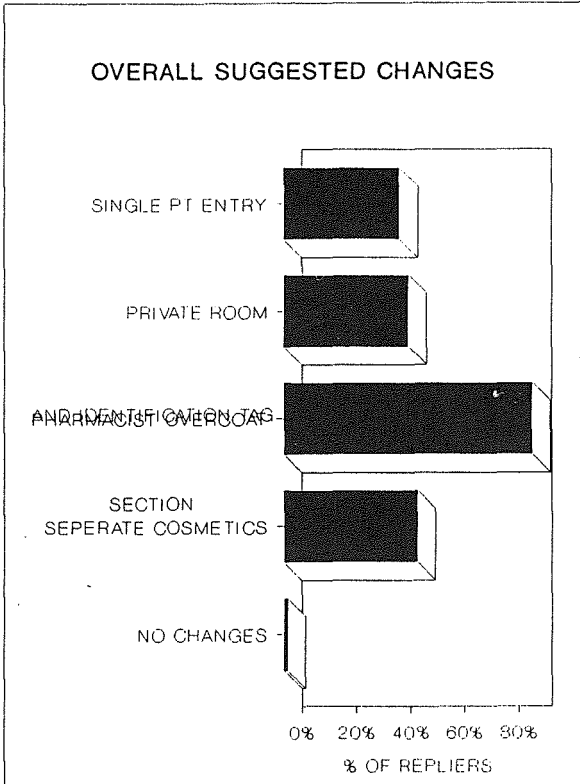


RESPONDENTS' SATISFACTION CONCERNING MALTESE PHARMACIES.

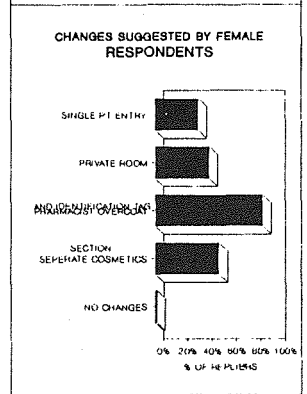
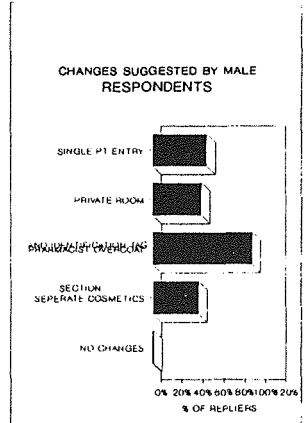


-  COMPLETELY SATISFIED
-  SATISFIED (BUT WOULD WANT TO MAKE SOME CHANGES)
-  NOT CONTENT
-  DISAPPOINTED

IMPROVEMENTS SUGGESTED BY RESPONDENTS.



PT: PATIENT



Discussion

The Maltese public has only a slight knowledge on the pharmacist. For this reason, the public has a poor overall idea of the pharmacist and does not acknowledge his expertise. In fact, the majority even though having some knowledge in particular fields, about the pharmacist, they still do not use this knowledge to their advantage.

However, the pharmacist shares the blame as well. Carelessness on his or her side when failing to adhere to simple rules (like wearing an overcoat, etc..) which might seem trivial, effect both his image as well as the desire of the public to be helped.

These factors together have led to the degeneration of the pharmacist's importance in society, with loss of respect from the public (enjoyed by other professions).

Suggestions

It is very easy to criticize and very difficult to amend. This dissertation has identified certain problems which with a little effort and co-operation from the public and the pharmacist, can be changed.

The suggested items were the following:

- a) A national campaign to sensibilise the public to the role of the community pharmacist in society and the advantages that can be attained from the latter.
- b) To introduce stricter measures in law which control an establishment, to ensure the safeguard and total satisfaction of the public. This will also result in an improved use and image of the pharmacist.