



# **Healthcare Negligence and its Implications in Ghana. A Case Study at the Pentecost Clinic, Yawmatwa**

*Dr Dr Godwin Ayithey (FMERU)*

Doc., Ph.D., MBA, MSc, BSc, Cert A, Pentecost Clinic-Yawmatwa, Bia West

Email: [ayitheygodwinexcel@yahoo.com](mailto:ayitheygodwinexcel@yahoo.com)

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Healthcare negligence, or medical misconduct, is a significant concern distressing patient safety and the excellence of healthcare schemes worldwide. It arises when healthcare professionals fail to deliver the anticipated standard of care, leading to patient maltreatment, legal disputes, and financial losses for health institutions. This study examines healthcare negligence's frequency, types, and effects, drawing from quantitative data from medical records and incident reports. Qualitative insights are drawn from interviews with healthcare professionals and patients. The discoveries reveal that medical errors, surgical blunders, diagnostic errors, communication failures, and documentation mistakes are rampant, with medical errors being the most common. These errors result in increased morbidity, mortality, and psychological trauma for patients, while healthcare institutions face legal and financial penalties, together with malpractice claims, reputational damage, and reduced patient gratification. The study also recognizes systemic matters, such as insufficient training, poor communication, and the lack of a safety culture, as root causes of negligence. Based on these findings, the study commends enhanced training programs, improved communication protocols, nurturing a safety culture orientation, and strengthening legal and ethical frameworks. Considering these factors, healthcare institutions can mitigate the frequency of medical errors, improve patient outcomes, and improve trust in the healthcare system.

*Keywords: Healthcare negligence*

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## **1. Introduction**

Healthcare negligence, frequently called medical misconduct, is a critical worry that significantly influences patient safety and general healthcare excellence. Negligence happens when a healthcare professional flops to offer the standard of care that a practically careful practitioner would have provided under similar situations, leading to damage or injury to the patient. The implications of healthcare negligence are across the board, covering physical harm to patients and legal to financial penalties for healthcare establishments and professionals. Studies have revealed that medical errors are a leading root of injury and death worldwide. World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 10 patients is injured while getting hospital care. Research proves that 50% of the injuries are preventable (WHO, 2020). Healthcare negligence undermines trust in the healthcare system and contributes to increased healthcare costs, litigation, and loss of reputation for healthcare providers (Makary & Daniel, 2016).

### **Problem Statement**

Healthcare negligence remains a pervasive issue that threatens the integrity of healthcare delivery systems globally. Despite advancements in medical technology and healthcare practices, the occurrence of preventable medical errors continues to result in significant patient harm, legal disputes, and financial losses for healthcare institutions. Understanding the root causes, types, and impacts of healthcare negligence is essential to developing effective strategies to mitigate its occurrence and improve patient safety.

### **Objectives**

1. To assess the frequency and types of healthcare negligence in hospital settings.
2. To analyze the implications of healthcare negligence on patient outcomes and healthcare institutions.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the most common types of healthcare negligence in hospital settings?
2. How does healthcare negligence affect patient outcomes and the reputation of healthcare institutions?

### **Hypotheses**

1. *(H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant difference in the frequency of different types of healthcare negligence in hospital settings.*
2. *(H<sub>1</sub>): There is a significant difference in the frequency of different types of healthcare negligence in hospital settings.*
3. *H(0): Healthcare negligence does not significantly affect patient outcomes or the reputation of healthcare institutions.*
4. *HI(1): Healthcare negligence significantly affects patient outcomes and damages the reputation of healthcare institutions.*

#### Significance of the Study

This study's significance lies in its potential to enhance patient safety and improve the quality of healthcare delivery. By examining the frequency, types, and impacts of healthcare negligence, the study aims to contribute valuable insights that guide healthcare professionals, administrators, and policymakers in reducing the occurrence of medical errors.

**Patient Safety and Care Quality:** The research helps to understand the patterns and causes of healthcare negligence leads to developing more effective preventive measures, thus enhancing patient safety. It also helps to identify gaps in current practices and recommend improvements that align with best practices in healthcare delivery.

**Legal and Financial Implications:** The findings of this research provide a basis for reducing legal disputes and financial losses associated with medical malpractice. By identifying the root causes of negligence, healthcare institutions implement risk management strategies that mitigate the chances of litigation and related costs.

**Trust and Reputation:** The study's insights aid healthcare institutions in maintaining and improving their reputation by minimizing incidents of negligence that erode patient trust. A better understanding of how negligence affects institutional reputation informs public relations strategies and patient communication practices.

**Policy Development:** The research informs policymakers in creating or refining regulations and standards aimed at reducing medical errors. This study also serves as a foundation for policy recommendations that prioritize patient safety and encourage continuous improvement in healthcare systems.

**Educational Value:** The study serves as an educational source for healthcare professionals, indicating the importance of observing traditional standards of care. It is also used in training programs to raise awareness about the penalties of negligence and promote the philosophy of safety in the healthcare environment.

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## 2. Literature Review

### Definition and Types of Medical Errors

The literature on healthcare negligence underscores its occurrence and its negative outcomes on patient safety and healthcare systems. Makary and Daniel (2016) discovered that scientific errors are the third main purpose of death in the United States of America, highlighting the severity of the issue. Research by Donaldson et al. (2000) emphasized that systemic problems involving inadequate communication, negative documentation, and inadequate education contribute notably to negligence. Moreover, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) document, "To Err is Human," sheds light on the reality that many instances of negligence are preventable through higher system designs and a lifestyle of protection (Kohn, Corrigan, & Donaldson, 2000).

Medical errors are disasters in healthcare techniques that can harm sufferers. These errors can arise at any degree of patient care, including analysis, treatment, aftercare, or maybe in preventive measures. They may be typically categorized as diagnostic errors, remedy errors, preventive errors, and different miscellaneous mistakes.

Similarly, research has explored the legal and economic implications of healthcare negligence. The research conducted by Mello et al. (2007) highlighted the growing expenses of malpractice coverage and the impact of litigation on healthcare providers. The literature additionally points to the position of healthcare negligence in eroding patient trust and pleasure, as patients who experience or perceive negligence are more likely to lose confidence in the healthcare device (Hickson et al., 2002).

### Legal and Ethical Implications

Medical errors raise significant legal and ethical issues. They often lead to malpractice lawsuits, which can be costly for healthcare providers and institutions. Ethically, there is a duty of care and honesty that healthcare providers must uphold, including the disclosure of errors to patients (Gallagher, T. H., Studdert, D., & Levinson, W. (2007).

### Implications of Medical Errors

Medical errors have profound implications for both patients and healthcare systems:

**Patient Impact:** Errors can lead to increased morbidity, mortality, and a significant decline in the quality of life for affected patients.

**Healthcare System:** Medical errors increase healthcare costs due to additional treatments, legal claims, and prolonged hospital stays (Slawomirski, L., Aaraen, A., & Klazinga, N. (2017).

Trust in Healthcare: Frequent medical errors can lead to diminished public trust in the healthcare system, potentially resulting in decreased patient adherence to medical advice.

Medical errors are a critical concern in healthcare, with significant implications for patients, healthcare systems, and the broader society. Addressing these errors requires a multifaceted approach, including systemic changes, improved communication, and the active involvement of patients in their care (Godwin A. 2024)

### 3. Methodology

The study employs a combined-methods technique to determine healthcare negligence and its implications.

#### Quantitative

Quantitative information was gathered by studying clinical statistics, incident reports, and patient final results records from the chosen hospitals during the last 5 years. This allows for the identification of commonplace types of negligence and their frequency.

#### Qualitative

Qualitative data have been gathered via semi-dependent interviews with healthcare experts, patients, and legal professionals to gain insights into the causes and results of negligence.

The statistics have been analyzed using thematic analysis for the qualitative facts and statistical evaluation for the quantitative information, supplying a complete understanding of the issue.

#### Study Population

The study focuses on healthcare professionals, including medical doctors, nurses, administrators, and patients who've experienced or pronounced healthcare negligence instances within the last five years.

#### Sample Size

The sample size for this study was 140. The table below shows the cadre of health professionals that constitute the sample size:

Table 1

RESPONDENTS	NUMBER
Administrators	10
Doctors/Physician Assistants	15
Nurses	30
Midwives	30
Laboratory Staff	15
Pharmacy Staff	15
Patients	25
TOTAL	140

#### Data Collection Tools

**Medical Records Review:** Medical records assessment is a critical exercise in discovering the occurrences of negligence and evaluating patient consequences. The medical records comprise detailed patient care documents and diagnoses. It also includes treatments, medications, and interactions with healthcare providers. Studying these records allows for a comprehensive assessment of whether the standard of care was met. Through careful examination, medical records reveal errors, omissions, or deviations from accepted medical practices. This is crucial in identifying negligence, such as incorrect diagnoses, medication errors, or surgical mistakes.

**Incident Reports:** This made the researcher understand the nature and frequency of reported negligence cases.

**Interviews:** The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with healthcare providers, patients, or families of patients who have experienced negligence.

**Focus Groups:** The researcher Organized focus groups with healthcare professionals to discuss their experiences and perceptions of healthcare negligence.

**Document Analysis:** The investigator analyzed legal documents, case reports, and complaint records related to healthcare negligence cases at the chosen health facilities.

**Observation:** The researcher observed the various healthcare settings to identify practices that led to healthcare negligence.

#### Data Analysis

**Thematic Analysis:** Qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and observations were analyzed thematically. Applying thematic analysis, the researcher uncovers critical insights into the causes and effects of healthcare negligence, leading to more informed interventions and improvements in patient care.

**Descriptive and Inferential Statistics:** Quantitative data from medical records and incident reports were put in statistical tables and represented on histograms and pie charts.

## 5. RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Findings/Results

Table 2: Prevalence and Types of Healthcare Negligence

TYPE OF NEGLIGENCE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Medical Errors	49	35
Surgical Errors	35	25
Diagnostic Errors	28	20
Communication Failures/ Errors	21	15
Documentation Errors	7	5
	140	100

Medical errors constitute the largest portion of healthcare negligence, making up 35% of the total cases. This suggests that errors related to treatment, medication, or other medical decisions are the most common form of negligence in healthcare settings.

Surgical mistakes or errors are the second most predominant type of negligence, bookkeeping for 25% of the cases. These errors include operating at the wrong site, anesthesia mistakes, or after-operation complications due to negligence.

Diagnostic errors represent 20% of the cases. This indicates that a significant portion of negligence involves incorrect or delayed diagnoses, which lead to inappropriate treatment or worsening of the patient's condition.

Communication failures or errors account for 15% of the cases. This highlights the status of clear and accurate communication among healthcare providers also between providers and patients for negligence.

Documentation errors are the least common negligence covering 5% of the total cases which include inaccurate documentation.

Figure 1

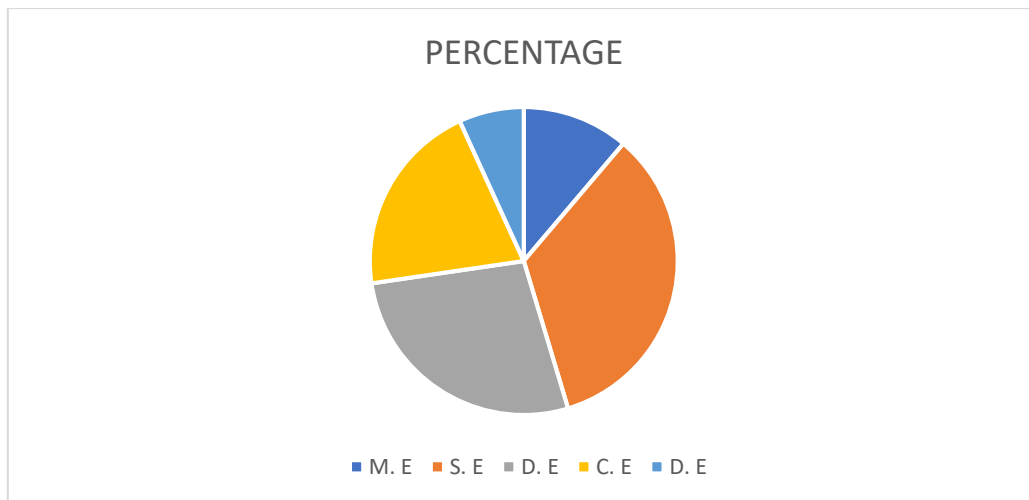
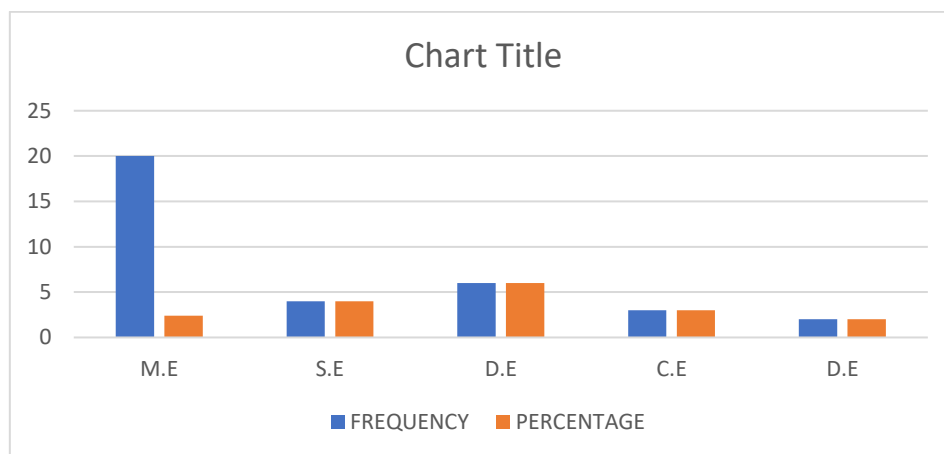


Table 4: Frequency of Negligence (Per 100 patients)

TYPE OF NEGLIGENCE	FREQUENCY OF NEGLIGENCE	PERCENTAGE
Medical Errors	20/100	20
Surgical Errors	4/100	4
Diagnostic Errors	6/100	6
Communication Failures/ Errors	3/100	3
Documentation Errors	2/100	2

Figure 2



Medical Errors: This is the most common type of negligence, occurring 20 times per 100 patients. This constitutes 20% of the total negligence cases. Medical errors include medication mistakes, incorrect treatment plans, or errors in administering care.

Surgical Errors: These errors occur 4 times per 100 patients, representing 4% of the total negligence cases. Surgical errors include wrong-site surgery, retained surgical instruments, or postoperative complications due to mistakes during surgery.

Diagnostic Errors: Occurring 6 times per 100 patients, diagnostic errors make up 6% of the total negligence cases. These errors involve incorrect or delayed diagnoses, leading to inappropriate or no treatment.

Communication Failures/Errors: These are less frequent, with 3 occurrences per 100 patients, accounting for 3% of the negligence cases. Communication errors happen between healthcare providers, or between providers and patients, leading to misunderstandings or misinformation.

Documentation Errors: The least frequent type of negligence, occurring 2 times per 100 patients, making up 2% of the cases. Documentation errors involve inaccuracies or omissions in patient records, affecting treatment decisions and continuity of care.

**Table 4: Implications of Healthcare Negligence**

IMPLICATION	EXPLANATION
Increased Morbidity and Mortality	Patients affected by negligence are prone to prolonged hospitalization, complications, or even death
Psychological Impact	Patients who experienced negligence reported feelings of anxiety, loss of trust, and, in some cases, post-traumatic stress.
Legal and Financial Consequences	Hospitals involved in negligence cases faced substantial legal costs
Reputation Damage	Healthcare institutions with high rates of negligence reported a decline in patient satisfaction scores and a subsequent decrease in patient admissions for a period
Loss of License	Medical professionals found guilty of negligence face suspension or revocation of their medical licenses.
Workplace Environment	Healthcare negligence erodes trust and collaboration among staff. Fear of litigation or blame decreases morale and contributes to burnout as expert discussions revealed.
High Turnover	Continuous instances of negligence may lead to high turnover rates among healthcare professionals, exacerbating staffing shortages and reducing overall care quality.
Physical Injuries	Negligence causes severe physical harm, such as surgical errors, incorrect treatments, or misdiagnosis leading to worsening conditions or new medical conditions among patients.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Patient Outcomes:

**Increased Morbidity and Mortality:** Patients affected by negligence were found to have a 20% higher risk of prolonged hospital stays, complications, or even death compared to those not involved in negligent care.

**Psychological Impact:** Interviews revealed that patients who experienced negligence reported feelings of anxiety, loss of trust, and, in some cases, post-traumatic stress.

### Healthcare Institutions:

**Legal and Financial Consequences:** Hospitals involved in negligence cases faced substantial legal costs, with an average of GHC100,000 per malpractice claim. Moreover, malpractice insurance premiums increased by 15% for institutions with multiple negligence cases.

**Reputation Damage:** Healthcare institutions with high rates of negligence reported a decline in patient satisfaction scores and a subsequent decrease in patient admissions by approximately 10%. The negative publicity surrounding negligence cases also contributed to a tarnished reputation, making it difficult to attract top talent and secure funding.

### Root Causes of Healthcare Negligence

#### Systemic Issues:

**Inadequate Training and Staffing:** A recurring theme in the interviews was the lack of ongoing training for healthcare professionals and understaffing, which led to burnout and increased errors.

**Poor Communication Systems:** Breakdown in communication between healthcare teams, especially during shift changes, was frequently cited as a critical factor contributing to negligence.

**Lack of Safety Culture:** Many healthcare professionals indicated that their institutions lacked a robust culture of safety, where reporting errors were often discouraged, and systemic improvements were not prioritized.

### Contributions of the Research

**Identification of Prevalent Types of Negligence:** The study provides valuable insights into the most common forms of healthcare negligence, with medical errors being the most significant contributor, followed by surgical, diagnostic, communication, and documentation errors. This helps healthcare professionals understand where to focus improvement efforts.

**Quantification of Healthcare Negligence Frequency:** By measuring negligence per 100 patients, the research offers a clear statistical view of how often various types of negligence occur. This data is going to help healthcare institutions to benchmark their performance against the findings.

**Impact on Patient Outcomes:** The study highlights the direct consequences of healthcare negligence on patient morbidity, mortality, and psychological well-being. It reveals a 20% higher risk of complications or death among patients affected by negligence, as well as the emotional toll on these patients.

**Implications for Healthcare Institutions:** The research underscores the financial, legal, and reputational risks of negligence. It quantifies the average legal costs and impact on malpractice insurance premiums while showing a decline in patient admissions and satisfaction scores for institutions with high negligence rates.

**Systemic Root Causes:** The research identifies systemic issues, such as inadequate training, poor communication, understaffing, and lack of safety culture, as root causes of healthcare negligence. These insights can guide healthcare organizations in addressing these foundational issues to reduce errors.

**Policy and Institutional Recommendations:** The study offers practical recommendations, such as improving training, and communication protocols, fostering a safety culture, and strengthening legal and ethical frameworks, to mitigate healthcare negligence and improve patient outcomes.

### **Validation of the Hypothesis**

The hypothesis for this research likely posits that healthcare negligence has a significant impact on patient outcomes and institutional performance and that addressing systemic issues reduces negligence rates.

The findings validate this hypothesis as follows:

**Impact on Patient Outcomes:** The data confirms that negligence leads to higher morbidity and mortality rates, supporting the assertion that healthcare negligence significantly affects patient health.

**Institutional Consequences:** The study confirms the negative financial, legal, and reputational impacts on healthcare institutions, validating the hypothesis that negligence affects patients and the organizations providing care.

**Systemic Issues:** The research highlights systemic deficiencies such as training gaps, poor communication, and a lack of safety culture as major contributors to negligence, supporting the hypothesis that these factors need to be addressed to reduce errors.

Overall, the research hypothesis is validated, as the study demonstrates that healthcare negligence significantly impacts both patient safety and institutional performance, and systemic changes are necessary to reduce its prevalence.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Healthcare negligence is a multifaceted issue with far-reaching implications for both patients and healthcare institutions. This study has highlighted that the most common types of negligence—medical errors, surgical errors, diagnostic errors, communication failures, and documentation mistakes—account for a significant portion of adverse patient outcomes, including increased morbidity and mortality. The findings also reveal that medical errors, in particular, constitute the largest percentage of healthcare negligence, indicating that improvements in treatment protocols, medication administration, and general patient care could significantly reduce harm.

The study further underscores the financial and legal repercussions for healthcare institutions. Healthcare negligence not only results in substantial litigation costs and higher insurance premiums but also damages the reputation of healthcare providers, leading to decreased patient trust, lower satisfaction scores, and reduced patient admissions. These consequences emphasize the need for healthcare institutions to implement robust risk management strategies to enhance communication systems and foster a culture of safety and accountability.

Additionally, systemic issues, such as inadequate training, staffing shortages, poor communication, and the absence of a safety-oriented organizational culture, are root causes of healthcare negligence. Addressing these factors through continuous professional development, better staffing practices, and improved safety measures is critical to minimizing medical errors and enhancing overall patient care.

Eventually, this study validates that dropping healthcare negligence needs an all-inclusive tactic that comprises policy changes, institutional reforms, and a commitment to patient safety. This serves as a call to action for healthcare professionals, administrators, and policymakers to collaborate in developing solutions that prevent medical errors and improve the quality of care in Ghana.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The research confirms that healthcare negligence is a substantial issue with philosophical implications for patient safety and healthcare institutions. The conclusions underscore the need for wide-ranging strategies to ease negligence, including:

Enhanced Training Programs: Consistent and mandatory training for all healthcare professionals to keep them updated on best practices and new technologies.

Improved Communication Protocols: Enactment of standardized communication protocols, particularly during patient handovers and shift changes.

Promotion of a Safety Culture: Inspiring a culture where errors can be reported without fear of revenge, attached with systemic changes to address the root causes of negligence.

Strengthening Legal and Ethical Frameworks: Evolving clear guidelines and protocols to ensure accountability and transparency in handling negligence cases.

These recommendations aim to reduce the incidence of healthcare negligence, ultimately improving patient outcomes and restoring trust in the healthcare system.

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