

Preferences of Dentists' Attire among Children

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In pediatric dentistry, dental fear and anxiety are the main factors compromising treatment success, and overcoming this problem remains a significant challenge. Different kinds of dentist's attire may evoke different reactions. The white coat phenomena can be a variable for its development. By understanding children's perception and preferences about dentist's attire, a suitable dress code could be adopted to establish good rapport with children.

Aim: To evaluate children's perceptions and preferences toward dentist attire.

Materials and methods: A questionnaire designed with a series of photographs of male and female dentists in different attires was responded to by 150 children.

Results: Of the total children ($n = 150$), the most popular mode of attire was the traditional white coat attire 53% ($n = 79$) as seen in Graph 1. The least favored among the children was the professional attire (7%, $n = 10$). Overall, 14% ($n = 21$) of the total child participants preferred the child-friendly attire. No significant difference was found between boys and girls preferences over different forms of dentist attire ($\chi^2 = 2.56$, $p = 0.39$). About 49% male participants favored the male dentists and 64% female participants favored female dentists. No statistical significant association was noted among the children and the use of protective wear ($\chi^2 = 0.98$, $p = 0.24$), thus favoring it. Statistically, no significant difference was found between children's reaction to white coat ($\chi^2 = 0.56$, $p = 0.53$), indicating a positive association between children's reaction on exposure to white coat.

Conclusion: We found the white coat attire is most preferred by children and parents. Thereby, this rules out the stereotyped concept of "white coat fear"/"white coat syndrome" among children. However, child-friendly attires could be useful in anxious children for better practice management.

Keywords: Attire, Behavior, Factors.

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INTRODUCTION

Dentists aim to develop a trusting relationship with patients of all ages and personalities as well as with their parents. Especially in pediatric patients, dental fear and anxiety are the main factors compromising treatment success, and overcoming this problem remains a significant challenge. Factors, such as the behavior of the dentist as well as the personality of the patient and his/her fear of the unknown and the past traumatic dental experiences affect patient behavior in the dental clinic.^{1,2} Patients often describe the dental office as an environment that provokes anxiety due to loud noises and the probability of pain.³ Surveys have indicated that 5 to 6% of the general population and 16% of school-age children have fear for dentists.⁴ The children with active caries are more afraid than other children due to their possible negative experiences during dental treatment.⁵ It is important for pediatric dentists to establish a friendly relationship with their child patients to reduce their preexisting fears, and be able to deliver an effective and efficient treatment. Hippocrates wrote that a physician's "dress should be neat and his person clean" for the public to believe that he/she is qualified to attend to their health.⁶ In pediatrics, concept of "clown doctors" has been observed to be effective in managing children's anxiety preoperatively.⁷ The objective of the present study was to determine children's and their parents' preferences toward the appearance/attire of the dentists among the children attending Department of Pediatric and Preventive Dentistry, Azeezia Dental College, Kollam, Kerala, India.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was cross-sectional in design. A sample of 150 children was selected from the children attending Department of Pediatric and Preventive Dentistry, Azeezia Dental College, Kollam, Kerala, India, over a period of 2 months from April to June 2016. Ethical approval was obtained from the college. A total of 150 children were selected for the study. The parents were informed about the purpose of the study both verbally and in writing; and a written consent was obtained prior to administration of the questionnaire. The methodology was taken from a study.⁸ All the participants were instructed to complete the questionnaire in the waiting area prior to the dental treatment. Guidance was provided to the participants if needed in completion of the questionnaires. The demographic information collected included gender and age of the participants.

The research questions included:

- The preference for a male or female dentist
- Five statements that listed participants' preferences of how they would prefer their dentist to be dressed
- Photographs of dentists wearing various attires, and
- Two pictures of a dentist, one with and the other without protective gear.

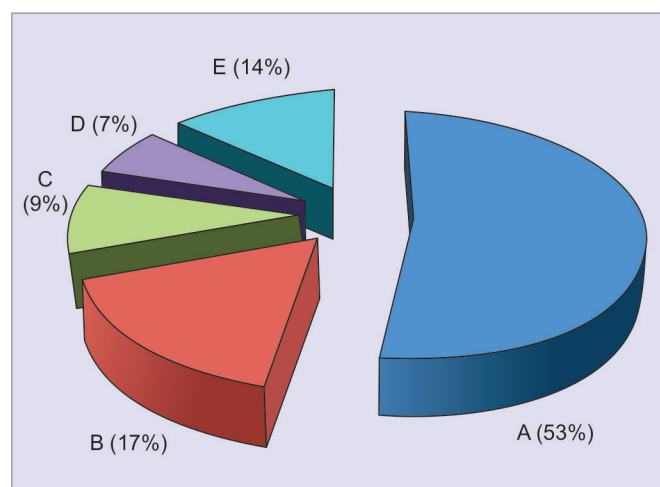
Photographs of a male and female dentist in different attires were taken in a photo studio using high-resolution camera. The following seven attires were used in the pictures:

1. *Traditional attire*: Traditional white coat with formal shirt and trouser for the male dentist and formal shirt and skirt for the female.
2. *Formal Kerala attire*: Formal Malayali dress (Mundu) for male dentist and formal Malayali dress (Mundum Neriyaathum) for the female dentist.
3. *Casual attire*: Casual T-shirt and denim jeans for the male dentist and casual shirt and skirt for female dentist.
4. *Professional attire*: Green clinical scrubs for both male and female dentists.
5. *Child-friendly attire*: Colored uniform with cartoon images for both male and female dentists.
6. Male and female dentists with head cap, face mask, and visor.
7. Male and female dentist without the protective gear.

The data from the questionnaire were coded and entered into a computer using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 20 (Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA) for statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Of the total children ($n = 150$), the most popular mode of attire was the traditional white coat attire 53% ($n = 79$) as seen in Graph 1. The least favored among the children was the professional attire (7%, $n = 10$). Overall, 14% ($n = 21$)



Graph 1: Distribution of children based on attire preferences

of the total child participants preferred the child-friendly attire. No significant difference was found between boys and girls preferences over different forms of dentist attire ($\chi^2 = 2.56$, $p = 0.39$). About 49% male participants favored the male dentists and 64% female participants favored female dentists. No statistically significant association was noted among the children and the use of protective wear ($\chi^2 = 0.98$, $p = 0.24$), thus favoring it. Statistically, no significant difference was found between children's reaction to white coat ($\chi^2 = 0.56$, $p = 0.53$), indicating a positive association between children's reaction on exposure to white coat.

DISCUSSION

Earliest judgment of a dentist is made by the children based on his or her appearance, and often they record and analyze their every word, movement, and gesture during a dental appointment. In order to make positive changes and adjustments that would make a pediatric dentist look more acceptable for the child, importance must be given to what form of attire will be more preferential. Psychologists/sociologists highlight the importance of appearance and its effect upon first impressions and interpersonal relationships.⁹ Physical appearance plays an important role in the development of physician-patient relationship. Mistry and Tahmassebi¹⁰ studied the attitudes of children and parents toward dental attire, and found that parents favored traditional white coat dress as it gives an air of professionalism. Dunn et al¹¹ found physical appearance to be a vital factor in an individual's choice of a family physician and in the development of the physician-patient relationship. The present study showed both children's preferences regarding the dentist's attire. The majority of the children in this study preferred their dentist wearing traditional white coat attire, which is consistent with the results of other studies that have examined children's preferences toward dentist attire.^{4,9,11-15}

CONCLUSION

We found white coat attire is most preferred by children and parents. We had kept child-friendly attire as one of the attires in our study, and found it to be the third most favored among the children and parents and, hence, can be recommended for dentist. Future research demands a larger sample size with additional age groups and different socioeconomic backgrounds that can establish a better understanding of the children preferences.

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