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Research Article

DENTIST- APPEARANCE-PREFERENCE OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN ABOUT THE DENTIST'S ATTIRE IN INDIAN POPULATION -A QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To improve short communication skills by assessing parent's and children's preference for different types of dental attire and it's consideration to improve patient's compliances towards dental treatment.

Material and methods: A total of 100 parents of age group 25-55 years and their children of age 10 to 16 years who are seeking dental treatment were made to look at pictures showing male and female dental resident wearing different attires and safety measures. Data was collected using questionnaires accompanied by the same.

Result: A very high percentage of the parents irrespective of gender, prefer and well-groomed and professional-dentist, i.e. dentist in a formal attire with white coat where as few children prefer casual attire with a fully clean shaven and hair neatly tied up look and while operating to make the use of gloves along with a facemask and protective eyewear to maintain proper safety measure.

Conclusion: The awareness about hygiene and safety among parents and children is significant. The result obtained from this study can help a dentist decide what is appropriate to wear when dealing with children so as to improve their compliance by a better first impression and interpersonal relationship.

Keywords: Dentist' Attire, Safety Measures, Parents and Children, Compliance, Gender Differences, Indian Population.

INTRODUCTION

In dentistry we treat patients of all age groups i.e. from childhood to adult. Especially in cases of orthodontic therapy where treatment plan is mostly 2 phases with duration of treatment 1.5 years and more; where compliance of patient as well as of their parents is very important issue^{1,2}. Creating a strong rapport & establishing a friendly relation with the child and with his parents help to create a comfortable atmosphere in which they do not feel threatened. On first visit to dentist, prior to verbal communication, impression about a dentist is developed based on clothing, grooming and cleanliness³. Psychologists also highlight the importance of appearance & its effect upon first impressions & interpersonal relationship^{4,5}. Health professionals' attire has changed over the years although the white coat has been accepted symbol of medical staff for more than 100 years⁶. However fashion recently has played an influential role, giving rise to a medical workforce with a less formal look⁷.

Many studies have looked into patient's attitude towards professional attire^{8,9}, however dental literature lacks reports to determine parents and children's feelings toward the appearance of a dentist. So, this study is conducted among parents and children attending our college, Rural Dental College, PIMS whose children seek dental treatment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study group: A cross sectional sample was used of all dental patients and their parents attending the rural dental college for treatment over a period of 1 month in October 2014. An information letter explaining the purpose of the research along with the consent form is given to all participants. Questionnaires were completed in waiting area during their appointment.

Clinical attire depiction: photographs of male and female dental residents in different modes of attire were taken with different clothing and hairstyle. Color complexion, Facial expression kept constant as far as possible. Photographs were

taken in different style of dress or attire as mentioned in table no 1.

The parents and children’s preference for a well-groomed and professional-looking dentist was gauged from the results obtained from eight pictures showing male and female models wearing different clothes and appearance as mentioned in table 1. The parents were asked whether they preferred their dentist to wear name badges. Codes were given to each picture for ease of reference as shown in figures.

While operating on the patient, the results obtained for the pictorially depicted questions regarding wearing of gloves during operating on the patient.

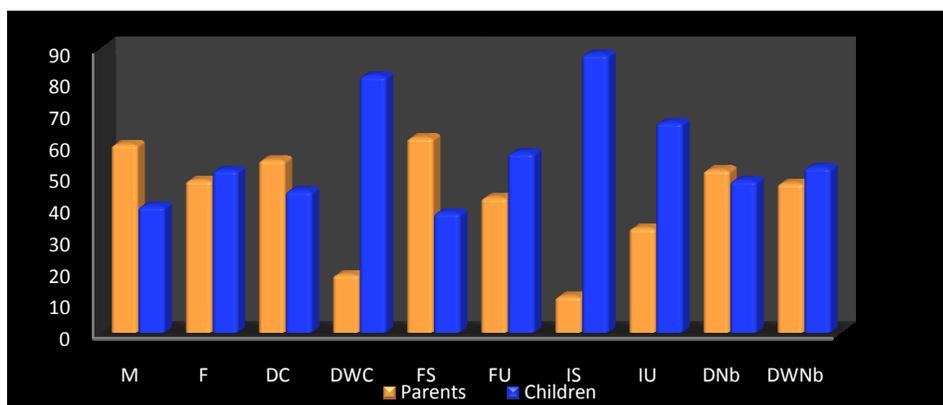
While operating, the parents and children preference for the same, the results were obtained by showing them eight pictures of male and female model wearing different safety measures, as given in table 2.

Table 1: Description of codes given for Attires

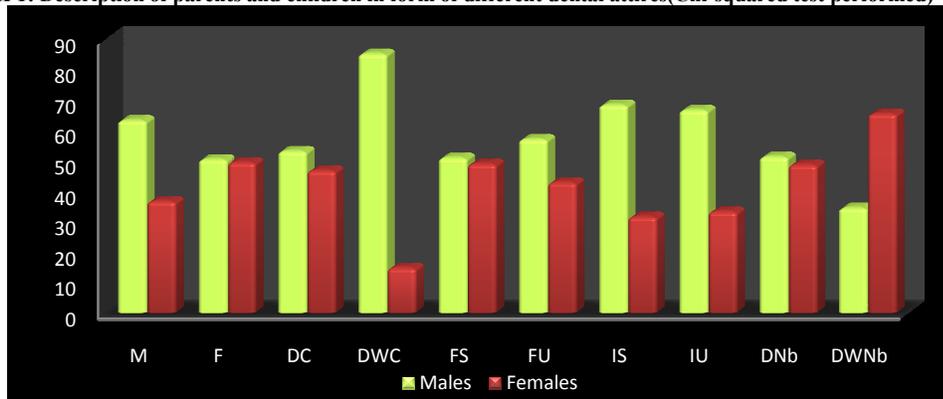
SR.NO	ATTIRES	CODES
1	Male dentist	M
2	Female dentist	F
3	Dentist with white coat	DC
4	Dentist without coat	DWC
5	Formals+ shaven look, tied hairs	FS
6	Formals+unshaven, open hairs	FU
7	Informals+shaven, tied hairs	IS
8	Informals+unshaven look, open hairs	IU
9	Dentist with name badge	DNb
10	Dentist without name badge	DWNb

Table 2: Description of codes given for Safety measures

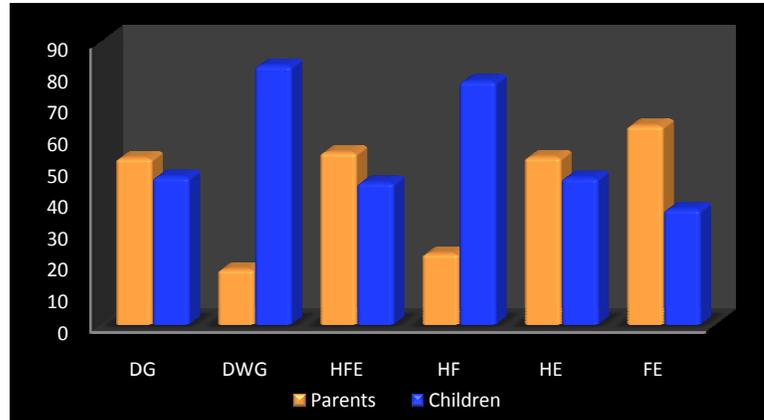
SR NO.	SAFETY MEASURES	CODES
1	Dentist With GLOVES	DG
2	Dentist without GLOVES	DWG
3	Headcap+Facemask+Eye protector	HFE
4	Headcap+Facemask	HF
5	Headcap+Eye protector	HE
6	Facemask+Eye protector	FE



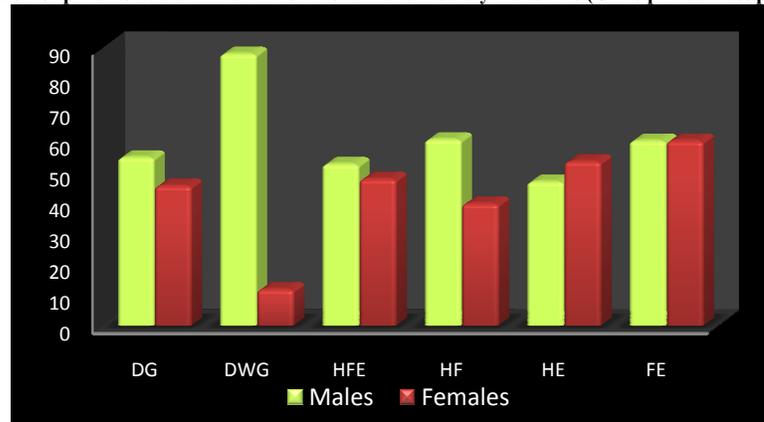
GRAPH 1: Description of parents and children in form of different dental attires(Chi-squared test performed)



GRAPH 2: Description of males and females in form of different dental attires(Chi-squared test performed)



GRAPH 3: Description of parents and children in form of different safety measures (Chi-squared Test performed)



GRAPH 4: Description of males and females in form of different safety measures.(Chi-squared Test performed)





(FU)

(IS)



(IU)

(DNb)



(DWNb)



(DG)

(DWG)



(HFE)

(HF)



(HE)

(EF)

Questionnaire: this is formulated in English. The demographic information collected from the questionnaire including parent's age, sex and occupation. The questionnaire comprise of questions along with photographs related to the dentist's attire. They were asked to select one appropriate option for each question. A short discussion is done before the completion of questionnaire to encourage parents to comment on each question.

Inclusion criteria: parents of child who are able to understand and to communicate in English were selected.

RESULTS

A total of 112 parents (63 males, 37 females) between ages 25- 55 years, mean age was 41 ± 0.8 years and 100 children (52 males, 48 females) between ages 10-16 years, mean age was 14.12 ± 1.05 completed and gave back the questionnaire. Of these 6 parents declined to participate in the study, 4 refused due to time restraints, 2 were not able to communicate in any appropriate language. So, total sample size was 100 for parents as well as for their children.

All data is collected and chi-squared test is performed to find significant values. And graphs are made which shows positive or yes values of result.

1. A vast majority of parents (90.4%) and children (80.3%) said that it was important to them how their dentist looked. Gender- based analysis revealed that 78.9% of the males and 81.8 % of the females felt than the dentist overall look is important.

2. The results (graph 1) showed that overall female dentist (78.9%) were favoured equally as male dentist (80.3%) depending upon the convenience and comfort level of the parent and children with the dentist ($P < 0.05$). Gender- based analysis revealed that 63.3% of males favoured male dentist and 49.5% of females favoured female dentist which is non-significant (p value 0.06) (graph 2).

3. A total of 53.2% parents and a total of 46.8% children preferred their dentist to wear white coats (labcoats) on formal attire ($P < 0.001$ S).

4. The parents and children preference for a well-groomed and professional-looking dentist and the result obtained for either of these questions showed that both preferred well-groomed dentist (graph 1). A higher percentage of parents (61.9%) and children (38.1%) preferred their dentist to wear a formal attire with full clean shaven look and hair neatly tied up ($P < 0.001$ S), whereas 33.3% of parents and 66.7% of children preferred their dentist to wear informal attire with an unshaven look and hair let down and open which is statistically non-significant.

According to Gender-based analysis (graph 2), the percentage was slightly higher for females as opposed to males, the difference being statically significant ($P < 0.001$). 51.0% males and 49.0% females preferred their dentist to wear formal attire with full clean shaven look and hair neatly tied up and 66.7% males and 33.3% females preferred their dentist to wear informal attire with an unshaven look and hair let down and open.

5. The majority of parents (62.8%) and children (59.1%) preferred the use of name badges by the dentist that is non-significant ($P > 0.05$).

6. While operating, a large number of children irrespective of the gender or age preferred the dentist to wear gloves. 53.0% parents preferred dentist to wear gloves whereas 47.0% children preferred dentist to wear gloves while operating on the patient (graph 3).

7. The results obtained regarding the use of protective eyewear, facemask and headcap, (graph 3) showed that not a very high percentage of children 45.2% prefer the use of protective eyewear, facemask and headcap, whereas 54.8% of parents prefer the use of protective eyewear, facemask and headcap. 22.2% of parents and 77.4% of children prefer dentist wearing headcap and facemask ($P > 0.05$ S). 53.3% of parents and 46.7% of children prefer dentist wearing headcap and protective eyewear ($P > 0.05$ NS). 63.3% of parents and 36.7% of children prefer dentist wearing facemask and protective eyewear that is statistically significant ($P < 0.001$).

Gender-based analysis (graph 4) is found to be non-significant that is 52.4% of males prefer dentist wearing headcaps, facemask and protective eyewear, whereas 47.6% of females prefer the same. 60.4% of male and 39.4% of female prefer dentist wearing headcap and facemask, 46.7% of male around 53.3% of female prefer dentist wearing headcap and protective eyewear, 60.0% of male and 40.0% of female prefer dentist wearing facemask and protective eyewear.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that not only did the parent have a very strong opinion regarding the attire of dentist, surprisingly so did the children. Non-verbal communication in the form of a clinician's appearances can play a major role in any attitude formed in the relationships between patients and practitioner¹⁰. Professionalism can be portrayed through proper appearance based on dress codes, can increase a patients feelings of comfort and confidences, thus leading to an improved dental experience¹¹.

1. Traditionally, patients are more familiar with medical doctor's image of a male in shirt and tie as opposed to females. It is interesting to note that a highly significant differences in gender preferences was found with males favouring male dentist and female favouring female dentist, this was due to the comfort level and convenience they shared with the practitioner. However, studies in the past have found no significances differences between males and females preferences^{8,4,11}.

2. Parents are more comfortable with traditional styles of appearance such as white coats, formal suits and shirts/tie as it gives an air of professionalism encouraging trust and confidence⁹. Despite recent changes in western culture towards casual, relaxed dress it appears that those of an older children continue to expect a formally dressed dentist^{12, 13}. Younger children in the study were significantly more likely to favour casual attire agreeing as accordance with previous study, those of a younger generation often opt toward casual attire with white coat as they are conditioned to expect a dentist to be wearing a white coat due to past experiences^{8, 14}. The use of casual attire is very common in many dentist practice today as many of the patients, children as well as parents, feared the use of white coat, most commonly known

as the "White-Coat Syndrome" ¹⁵. McCarthy et al¹⁶ did not confirm the popular belief that patients are afraid of dentist in white coat, in fact there are many medical studies that confirm that patients prefer their practitioner to wear a white coat while practicing as it portrayed the qualities of cleanliness, professionalism, and authority, symbol of healing ^{4,17,18,19,20}. As described by Taylor, the patient's first impression of a physician can have a strong influence on perception of the care provided and the physician's competence level²¹.

3. The parents and children's preference for a well-groomed and professional-looking dentist could also be gauged from their liking for dentist in a formal attire with a full clean shaven and hair tied up look, as compared to one in an informal or casual attire with a stubble or beard and hair let down and messy as it gives an appearance of unprofessionalism and an unhygienic look and sad impression of a dentist towards its patient. Review of literature did not reveal studies on the preference of patient for these; so direct comparison of finding was not possible.

4. The results indicated that majority of the children and parents did prefer the use of a name badge. However it was concluded after a lot of medical studies that as when patient is new to the environment in a hospital setting, they preferred the use of the same, but would be different in a dental practice where the interaction between the practitioner and patient is more on a personal and one-to-one base where the patient already knows which dentist they are seeing and hence need not need the name badge. This result is in accordance with study carried earlier by McKenna G¹⁹. However, our study was carried in an institutional hospital and hence our study concluded that for a better rapport between the patient and dentists it was preferred that the dentist did make the use of a name badge. However, keeping in mind previous studies it is considered that name badges are a mode of cross-infection risk^{12, 22}. Hence a more appropriate solution could be the incorporation of an integral or embroidered tag as part of staff uniform.

5. In the dental profession, there is a high risk of transmission of infections between dentist and patients. Now a days it is considered as a standard practice, in modern dental surgery/office and practice that the dentist not only for the safety of the dentist but also for the safety of the patient should make use of gloves, a facemask, protective eyewear as well as headcap as and when required.

In our study, a majority of parents encourage the use of gloves along with facemask and protective eyewear as the awareness regarding the increase potential of trans-mucosal transmission of infective diseases has increased, hence prefer the use of such safety equipment, supporting the findings of Shulman and Brehem²³ as well as McKenna et al¹⁹. However, our study says that there are some mixed views regarding the use of a headcap. Some parents prefer the use, whereas majority of the parents do mind the dentist not using the headcap as long as their hair are neatly tied up and do not intervene their dental procedure.

However, children on the other hand lack this awareness. Few studies reveal that it is important especially for children to maintain a good amount of eye contact during the treatment with the dentist, whereas on the other hand it is a myth that

children are intimidated by the use of such safety equipment and also at the same time may be unaware of the protective purposes they serve. However this can be explained to them in a more calmed way to increase their knowledge regarding this awareness. Hence, our study revealed that an older group of children prefer the use of safety equipment as they understood the importance of it and as they were familiar with the dentist wearing such safety equipment. On the other hand a younger group of children did not much prefer the use of the same.

CONCLUSION

The study presents a new insight into the minds of patients and shows that not only do parents but also children have strong perceptions and preferences related to their dentist's attire and appearance. This has a very important effect on the first impression of the dentist towards their patients and in future helps in the interpersonal relationship between both of them. Hence making small changes in one's appearance can have an important impact on increasing as well as decreasing the level of anxiety and comfort level of the patient with their dentist. Parents significantly favors traditional styles of appearances such as formal attire with full clean shaven and hair tied up look along with a white coat and the use of various safety equipment for an air of professionalism and a good level of hygiene, whereas children significantly prefer dentist in a casual attire with a full clean shaven look along with a white coat. However, it is important to note that although patient's preferences in this study did indicate certain opinion regarding their dentist appearances, these preferences carry little weight as compared to personal soft skills such as kindness, patience and their clinical competences.

However to conclude our study, bringing about certain changes in one's style of dressing and appearances can make a remarkable change towards the attitude of the parents and children towards the dentist in terms of their comfort and anxiety levels and can increase the chances of the child accepting the treatment readily, thus increasing patient compliances.

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