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Review Article

### DENTAL ANXIETY IN CHILD PATIENTS: A REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

Dental anxiety in child patient is a situation which all dentists face in their clinical practice. There are various reasons for these anxieties which vary from child to child; and it results in the uncooperativeness and lower pain threshold in the child patients. Therefore it is important to understand the anxiety in a child patient on the dental chair to avoid the further consequences. The present article summarizes the causes, types, effects and the management of the anxiety of children in dental clinics.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, Dental treatment, Fear.

### INTRODUCTION

Dental treatments are associated with the experience of two strong negative feelings of dental anxiety and dental fear, which are often used interchangeably in the dental literature<sup>1</sup>. Anxiety is an emotion, which is similar to fear but arising without any objective source of danger. It is a reaction to unknown danger and also a learned process through the surrounding environment of the individual<sup>2</sup>.

Dental anxiety was described by *Klingberg and Broberg* as "a state of apprehension that something dreadful is going to happen in relation to dental treatment or certain aspects of dental treatment"<sup>1</sup>.

Anxiety is a sense of psychological distress that may involve the following (either alone or in combination): an environmental stress, the effect of a medicine or drug, an internal psychological conflict or a physical disease<sup>3</sup>.

Levels of dental anxiety vary from person to person and it is also related to age, gender, socioeconomic status and educational qualification. Various studies have found that the prevalence rate of dental anxiety ranges from 5-20% in children and adolescents. Identification of the anxious child patient in the dental chair is crucial for the management and treatment outcome<sup>4,5</sup>.

#### Causes of dental anxiety in child patient:

1. Influence of Parents: The past years, usually children were accompanied by their mothers to the dental office, which often the cause of anxiety in children<sup>6</sup>. Also it is caused to

some extent by irregularity of dental visits, due to busy schedule of their parents<sup>4</sup>.

2. Dentists and Dental Auxiliaries: Many of the times, children's are treated without understanding their causes of anxiety, which leads to increased severity of the dental anxiety<sup>4</sup>.
3. Dental Setting and Procedure: The foremost important reason for the dental anxiety in children is the dental setup and the various dental procedures<sup>4</sup>.
4. Self experience: Past dental experience of the child may also lead to future anxiety<sup>2,4,7</sup>.
5. Indirect learning experiences: Vicarious learning or modelling that attest that the dental treatment is dangerous, is also one of the important cause of the dental anxiety<sup>7</sup>.
6. Personality of the dentist: approach of the dentist should be casual, confident and friendly towards the child, otherwise it also leads to anxiety situations<sup>8</sup>.
7. Lack of dentists skill and speed<sup>8</sup>.
8. Increased time and length of the appointment<sup>8</sup>.
9. Use of fearful words<sup>8</sup>.

#### Types of dental anxiety in child patient:

1. Trait anxiety: These patients are usually skittish and hypersensitive to stimuli<sup>2</sup>.
2. State anxiety: It involves acute situational episodes of anxiety, which do not persist beyond the provoking situation<sup>2</sup>.
3. Free floating anxiety: In this the cause is unknown and other things stimulate the anxiety<sup>2</sup>.

4. Situational anxiety: Related to specific situation only<sup>2</sup>.
5. General anxiety: Patient experiences the chronic feeling of anxiety irrespective of the external environment<sup>2</sup>.

**Consequences of dental anxiety in children:**

Anxious child patients usually are uncooperative during dental visits, they try to avoid or delay dental treatment or develop lower pain threshold. Dental anxiety in children may also cause sleep disorders or affect daily routine life of patient and have negative impact on the psychological functioning<sup>3,9</sup>.

These patients can demonstrate other phobias like of heights, closed spaces, blood, animals or social phobia and can lead to depression and mood disorders. All of these affect the overall oral health and ultimately general health of the child patient<sup>10</sup>.

**Management of child patient with dental anxiety:**

Dental anxiety in children may be managed by pharmacological or non-pharmacological approaches. Pharmacological approach includes use of sedatives, hypnotics, tranquilizers or the anesthetics, which may be administered by oral, rectal or the parenteral routes<sup>2,8,11</sup>.

The non-pharmacological approaches start from the preappointment behavior modification and developing communication with the child patient. Behavior shaping and management of the anxious child patient mainly involves reducing uncertainty, modelling, cognitive approaches, relaxation techniques and systematic desensitization<sup>2,8,11</sup>.

Also the other important aspect of the reducing dental anxiety is the management of some other factors like pain in a conservative treatment or in a surgical treatment; which can be achieved by enhanced knowledge and approaches to the treatments<sup>12</sup>.

**CONCLUSION**

Dental anxiety in a child patient is an important aspect in relation to the oral and general health of the child patient. Most of the dentists neglect these situations, which leads to the adverse effect on the children for the future dental treatments. Therefore it is advised to understand the anxiety in a child and manage accordingly, which is important for the future health of one's life.

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