

Patients' Preference and Perception of Dentist's Clinical Attire; A Survey-based Study in REU Clinics, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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Introduction: It is essential for dentists to ensure that they have proper attire when dealing with the patients and their physical appearance as well. **Materials and Methods:** This is a cross-sectional study conducted among patients visiting REU clinics using an online survey. A total of 500 patients having at least one previous visit to REU clinics filled up the survey. **Results:** Chi-square test showed that there was no statistically significant difference among males' and females' responses (p -value > 0.05). However, statistically significant differences were achieved when the responses were compared on the basis of age, marital status, and the number of yearly dental visits. **Conclusion:** A dentist's attire has a significant impact on the patients. Type of attire, mask, and goggles also affect patients' mood.

Keywords: Attire, Dental patients, Appearance.

INTRODUCTION

Although it might usually be assumed that it is more essential for doctors to be well versed in their profession and also in doing their job, a lot of recent studies have now shown that the physical appearance of dentists creates a huge impact. It is essential since it enables the patients and their families to be more comfortable with the situation and the stress level they are dealing with (Khan, 2019).

It is essential for dentists to ensure that they have proper attire when dealing with the patients and their physical appearance as well. For instance, they might have to cover up their tattoos, take out their eyebrow rings and also put on a proper white coat to depict the seriousness towards their profession. Although all these might seem petty concerns to one, it needs to be understood that it is a very small price to pay to gain the trust of those who are in serious conditions (Shigli & Awinashe, 2010).

There have been a lot of patients who have been surveyed in hospitals and clinics and nearly all of them have stated that what their physicians wear is an integral part of their treatment. This usually boosts up their satisfaction towards the treatment and makes them feel valued and cared. The kind of attire the doctor has creates more confidence in the patient and makes them feel that they are in good hands. The white coats of the

doctors are therefore recommended to be worn as a part of their proper dressing which can be followed by scrubs (Dore et al., 2012).

Despite the positive effect of wearing a doctor's attire it is pertinent to note that there is increasing evidence of disease transmission through doctors' white coats. And there are many countries that have started to discourage doctors from wearing their white coats during consultations with patients. In one of the studies, it was noted that most patients preferred that doctors wear white coats. However, this preference changed after they were made aware of the infection risk associated with these white coats (Zahrina et al, 2018).

It has been indicated that a good aesthetic of dentists leads to increased motivation of patients to undergo procedures. If the patients can appreciate the proper aesthetic status of the medical professional they are indicated to be more understanding of the patients' point of view (Lahti & Tuutti, 1992).

White coats play an important role in helping them look formal and professional. The code of medical professionals wearing white coats was introduced in the late 19th century to perform aseptic surgeries. The uniformity of wearing white coats by the medical professionals is appreciated by the

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patients. Appearance as the first impression is very important and obviously, the dress code enhances the attire of the dentists (McKenna, Lillywhite & Maini, 2007).

Psychologists have approved that proper dressing and codes aid in better interpersonal growth. It has been appreciated that the appearance of dentists conveys a strong message through their physical appearance and influence attire. It is a natural behavior of human beings that they are biased towards good attire.

There is a difference in opinion about the role of dentists in different communities and individuals. According to a recent study, 47.2% of the participants were motivated by the aesthetics of their dentists to maintain good oral health. Conceptualizations for dental looks are differed due to cultural differences and the brought up. Studies indicate that people aged more than 55 are not bothered by dental looks of dentists, whereas people of younger age are influenced by dental looks (Babu, 2016). A study conducted in Sweden concluded that a great majority of participants united to the point that impressive facial and overall physical appearance of dentists really conveys a strong encouragement for maintaining good oral health (Shulman and Brehm, 2001).

STUDY HYPOTHESES

The attire of dentists has a strong influence on dental patients.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

- To determine if there is any influence of dentists' attire and appearance on their patients.
- To compare the findings on the basis of gender, age, marital status, and previous dental history.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

This is a cross-sectional study conducted among the patients visiting REU clinics using an online survey.

Study Sample

Saudis (males and females) and more than 18 years of age willing to participate in this study were requested to fill up the survey. A total of 500 patients having at least one previous visit to REU clinics filled up the survey.

Study Instrument

An online questionnaire was designed using Google Forms with questions related to personal and demographic information followed by attire and its influence related questions.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

A pilot study was conducted by letting the survey be filled by 20 participants and the data was inserted in SPSS version 22 to determine the reliability by using Chronbach's coefficient alpha (Value was .731). Validity of the questionnaire was tested by sending it to experienced researchers in REU and no changes were made.

Statistical Analysis

Collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 22, where descriptive as well as inferential statistics was conducted. Comparisons between groups were made with the value of significance kept under 0.05. Chi-square test was done to achieve this purpose.

RESULTS

Descriptive analysis shows the demographics of the study participants in Table 1. 48% were males and 52% females, 48% were 18-30 years of age, 28% were 31-45 years, 21% were 46-60% and 2% were 60 or more. 43% were single, 50% were married and 7% were divorced or widowed as far as their marital status was concerned. 56% had previously visited the dentist's office 1-2 times, 26% had visited 3-5 times and 18% visited 6 or more times. Chi-square test showed that there was no statistically significant difference among males' and females' responses (p-value > 0.05). However, statistically significant differences were achieved when compared the responses on the basis of age, marital status, and number of yearly dental visits.

DISCUSSION

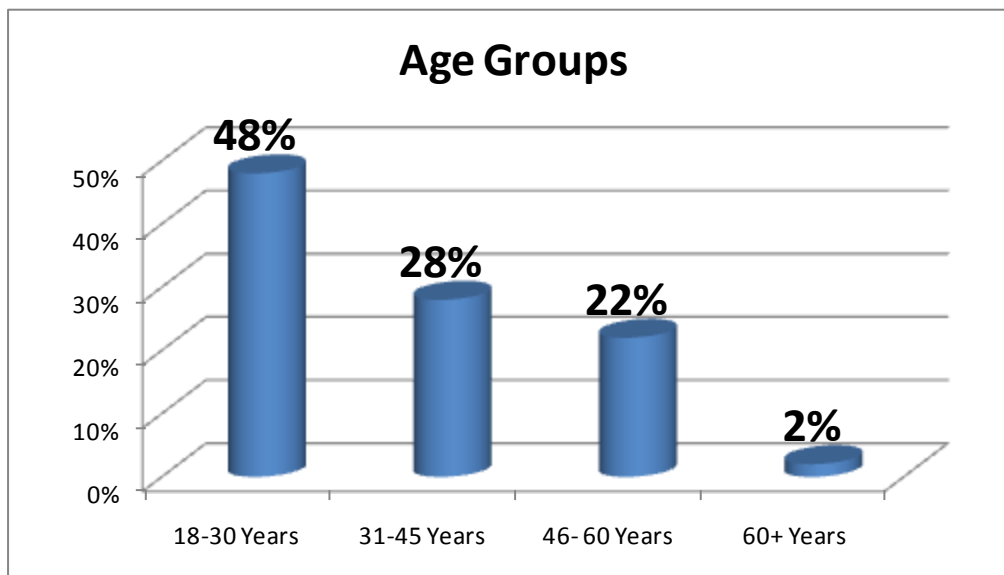
This study was conducted to assess patients' preference and perception of dentists' clinical attire. A total of 499 patients participated and responded to the survey questionnaire. The respondents were then categorized under gender, age, marital status, and number of dental visits in a year. The results were then assessed against each criterion to assess the statistical significance to derive meaningful conclusions. In an earlier study conducted it was found that all patients preferred dentists to use white coats during their treatment (Bahrami et al, 2018), hence highlighting the importance of a doctor's attire. Also, in another study, it was seen that the majority of respondents agreed that doctors should wear a name tag, white coat and they also disagreed that wearing blue jeans and carrying a snack is acceptable (Lefor et al, 2018).

As far as gender is concerned, statistically significant differences were found when inquired about the sex of the dentist they would prefer for their treatment (p-value: .022). In the survey, it was seen that both male (76%) and female (67%) patients preferred to be treated by a male dentist but the male gender is more likely to prefer a male dentist as compared to the female gender. Further research into this insight can be a guiding principle for hospital recruitment teams. All other associations were insignificant. In another study, it was found that there was a significant relationship between gender and their attitude in relation to the dressing of dentist (Farokh-Gisour et al, 2017)

When assessed against the age group of the respondents, statistically significant differences were found where the age group of 60+ gives more importance to the way a dentist dresses (p-value: .001) and they prefer them to wear a white coat (p-value: .004). However, the age group of 18-30 years is more inclined towards wanting a dentist to wear a name badge (p-value: .000), wanting the staff to wear a mask while treating them (p-value: .000). Also, they wanted the staff to wear safety goggles as well (p-value: .000) and the dentist to wear scrubs (p-value: .000) and they prefer male dentists more than any other age group in the survey (p-value: .000). They are also more inclined towards having more positive feelings by a dentist attire and overall professionalism (p-value: .000).

Table 1: Demographics of the study participants

Gender: Male Female	241 (48%) 258 (52%)
Age: 18-30 Years 31-45 Years 46-60 Years 60+ Years	241 (48%) 141 (28%) 108(21%) 11 (2%)
Marital Status: Single Married Widowed/ Divorced	213 (43%) 252 (50%) 35 (7%)
Dental Visits: 1-2 Visits 3-5 Visits 6 or more Visits	248 (56%) 117 (26%) 79 (18%)

Fig. 1: Gender Ratio**Fig. 2: Age Groups Distribution of Study Participants**

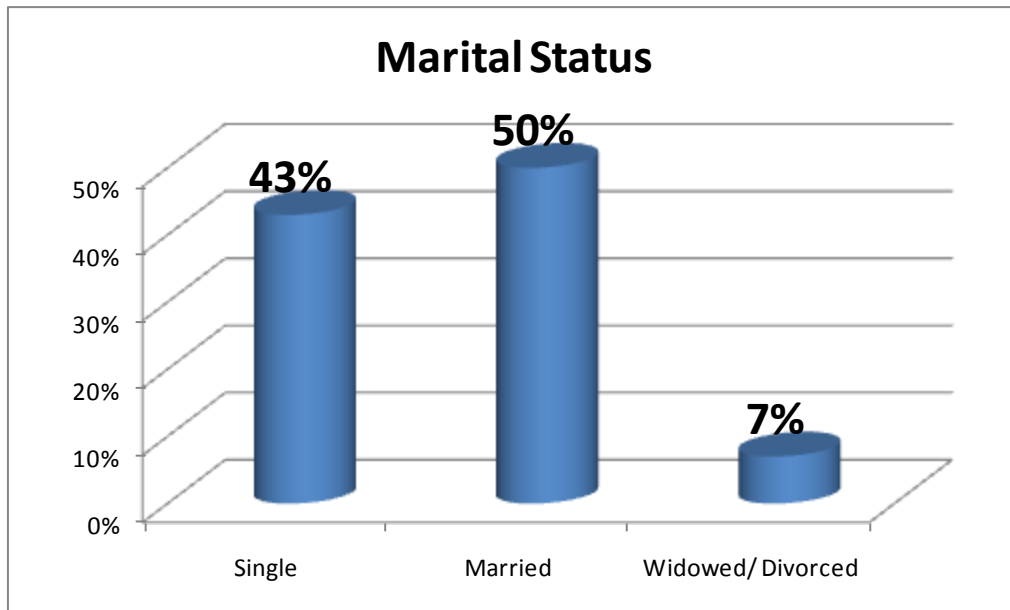


Fig. 3: Marital Status Distribution of Study Participants

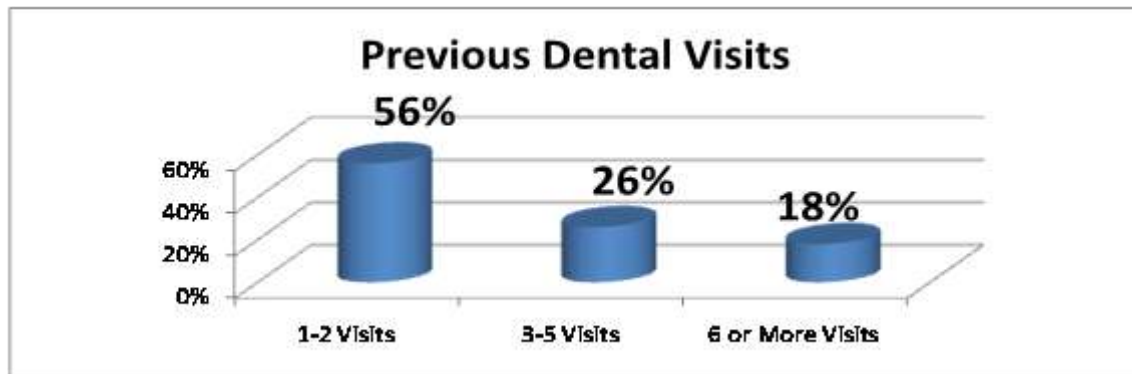


Fig. 4: Previous dental Visits Distribution of Study Participants

Table 2: Comparison on the basis of Gender

Item	Male	Female	P- Value
How important is the way that your dentist dresses?	Not important 12%	Not important 13%	0.235
	Somewhat important 23%	Somewhat important 23%	
	Important 34%	Important 26%	
	Very important 31%	Very important 38%	
Should dental professionals wear name badges?	Yes 77%	Yes 77%	0.642
	No 11%	No 13%	

	Doesn't matter 12%	Doesn't matter 10%	
Do you prefer staff to wear a face mask when treating you?	Yes 79%	Yes 80%	0.428
	No 15%	No 12%	
	Doesn't matter 6%	Doesn't matter 9%	
Do you prefer staff to wear safety goggles when treating you?	Yes 57%	Yes 60%	0.221
	No 16%	No 19%	
	Doesn't matter 27%	Doesn't matter 21%	
What type of attire do you prefer for your dentist?	Casual 15%	Casual 13%	0.410
	Formal 35%	Formal 32%	
	Scrub 50%	Scrub 56%	
Do you prefer that dentist wear a white coat?	Yes 46%	Yes 55%	0.087
	No 20%	No 19%	
	Doesn't matter 34%	Doesn't matter 26%	
Which gender of dentist do you prefer?	Male 76%	Male 67%	0.022
	Female 24%	Female 33%	
Dentist's attire/professionalism would affect you positively?	Yes 78%	Yes 72%	0.301
	No 14%	No 19%	
	Doesn't matter 9%	Doesn't matter 9%	

Table 3: Comparison on the basis of Age

Item	18-30 Years	31-45 Years	46-60 Years	60+ Years	P- Value
How important is the way that your dentist dresses?	Not important 14%	Not important 18%	Not important 5%	Not important 9%	0.001
	Somewhat important 20%	Somewhat important 30%	Somewhat important 24%	Somewhat important 0%	
	Important 31%	Important 28%	Important 29%	Important 18%	
	Very important 36%	Very important 24%	Very important 43%	Very important 73%	
Should dental professionals wear name badges?	Yes 82%	Yes 65%	Yes 81%	Yes 73%	0.000
	No 6%	No 22%	No 12%	No 9%	
	Doesn't matter 12%	Doesn't matter 12%	Doesn't matter 6%	Doesn't matter 18%	
Do you prefer staff to wear a face mask when treating you?	Yes 88%	Yes 60%	Yes 87%	Yes 64%	0.000
	No 6%	No 27%	No 11%	No 0%	
	Doesn't matter 5%	Doesn't matter 13%	Doesn't matter 2%	Doesn't matter 36%	
Do you prefer staff to wear safety goggles when treating you?	Yes 60%	Yes 58%	Yes 60%	Yes 36%	0.000
	No 10%	No 27%	No 19%	No 18%	
	Doesn't matter 30%	Doesn't matter 15%	Doesn't matter 20%	Doesn't matter 45%	
What type of attire do you prefer for your dentist?	Casual 10%	Casual 20%	Casual 13%	Casual 27%	0.000
	Formal 23%	Formal 45%	Formal 40%	Formal 36%	
	Scrub 66%	Scrub 35%	Scrub 47%	Scrub 36%	
Do you prefer that dentist wear a white coat?	Yes 50%	Yes 43%	Yes 60%	Yes 73%	0.004
	No 15%	No 29%	No 17%	No 18%	
	Doesn't matter 35%	Doesn't matter 28%	Doesn't matter 23%	Doesn't matter 9%	
Which gender of dentist do you prefer?	Male 82%	Male 57%	Male 70%	Male 36%	0.000
	Female 18%	Female 43%	Female 30%	Female 64%	
Dentist's attire/professionalism would affect you positively?	Yes 81%	Yes 61%	Yes 80%	Yes 64%	0.000

	No 11%	No 27%	No 14%	No 9%	
	Doesn't matter 8%	Doesn't matter 12%	Doesn't matter 6%	Doesn't matter 27%	

Table 4: Comparison on the Basis of Marital Status

Item	Single	Married	Widowed/ divorced	P- Value
How important is the way that your dentist dresses?	Not important 14%	Not important 12%	Not important 11%	0.220
	Somewhat important 23%	Somewhat important 23%	Somewhat important 26%	
	Important 33%	Important 28%	Important 14%	
	Very important 30%	Very important 37%	Very important 49%	
Should dental professionals wear name badges?	Yes 81%	Yes 77%	Yes 47%	0.000
	No 8%	No 14%	No 21%	
	Doesn't matter 10%	Doesn't matter 9%	Doesn't matter 32%	
Do you prefer staff to wear a face mask when treating you?	Yes 83%	Yes 81%	Yes 54%	0.002
	No 10%	No 13%	No 26%	
	Doesn't matter 7%	Doesn't matter 6%	Doesn't matter 20%	
Do you prefer staff to wear safety goggles when treating you?	Yes 58%	Yes 62%	Yes 40%	0.029
	No 15%	No 16%	No 34%	
	Doesn't matter 27%	Doesn't matter 21%	Doesn't matter 26%	
What type of attire do you prefer for your dentist?	Casual 15%	Casual 13%	Casual 17%	0.000
	Formal 23%	Formal 39%	Formal 54%	
	Scrub 62%	Scrub 48%	Scrub 29%	
Do you prefer that dentist wear a white coat?	Yes 45%	Yes 57%	Yes 46%	0.026
	No 18%	No 20%	No 17%	
	Doesn't matter 36%	Doesn't matter 23%	Doesn't matter 37%	

Which gender of dentist do you prefer?	Male 82%	Male 66%	Male 46%	0.000
	Female 18%	Female 34%	Female 54%	
Dentist's attire/professionalism would affect you positively?	Yes 80%	Yes 75%	Yes 49%	0.000
	No 11%	No 18%	No 34%	
	Doesn't matter 9%	Doesn't matter 8%	Doesn't matter 17%	

Table 5: Comparison on the Basis of Dental Visits

Item	1-2 Visits	3-5 Visits	6 or more Visits	P- Value
How important is the way that your dentist dresses?	Not important 15%	Not important 15%	Not important 13%	0.000
	Somewhat important 15%	Somewhat important 39%	Somewhat important 24%	
	Important 34%	Important 24%	Important 27%	
	Very important 36%	Very important 21%	Very important 36%	
Should dental professionals wear name badges?	Yes 87%	Yes 59%	Yes 60%	0.000
	No 5%	No 30%	No 17%	
	Doesn't matter 8%	Doesn't matter 11%	Doesn't matter 23%	
Do you prefer staff to wear a face mask when treating you?	Yes 90%	Yes 58%	Yes 63%	0.000
	No 6%	No 27%	No 26%	
	Doesn't matter 4%	Doesn't matter 16%	Doesn't matter 12%	
Do you prefer staff to wear safety goggles when treating you?	Yes 64%	Yes 52%	Yes 46%	0.000
	No 9%	No 34%	No 25%	
	Doesn't matter 27%	Doesn't matter 14%	Doesn't matter 29%	
What type of attire do you prefer for your dentist?	Casual 11%	Casual 22%	Casual 20%	0.004
	Formal 31%	Formal 39%	Formal 33%	
	Scrub 58%	Scrub 38%	Scrub 47%	

Do you prefer that dentist wear a white coat?	Yes 56% No 17% Doesn't matter 28%	Yes 40% No 32% Doesn't matter 28%	Yes 42% No 19% Doesn't matter 39%	0.002
Which gender of dentist do you prefer?	Male 77% Female 23%	Male 55% Female 45%	Male 77% Female 23%	0.000
Dentist's attire/professionalism would affect you positively?	Yes 84% No 9% Doesn't matter 7%	Yes 56% No 32% Doesn't matter 12%	Yes 64% No 9% Doesn't matter 27%	0.000

According to the marital status of the respondents, statistically significant differences were found whereby the patients who were single wanted the dentist to wear a name badge (p-value: .000), they also preferred that the staff should wear a mask (p-value: .002). They also wanted the dentists to wear scrubs (p-value: .000) having more positive feelings by a dentist attire and overall professionalism (p-value: .000). However, the respondents who were married wanted the staff to wear goggles (p-value: .029) and a white coat (p-value: .026). All other associations were insignificant.

As far as the medical visits are concerned, statistically significant differences were found whereby the patients who generally have 1 – 2 dental visits are more likely to give importance to the way a dentist dresses (p-value: .000) and they want the dentist to wear name badges as well (p-value: .000). They also want the staff to wear masks (p-value: .000) and safety goggles (p-value: .000). They also want the dentist to wear scrubs (p-value: .004) and preferably a white coat all the time (p-value: .002). They also prefer male dentists (p-value: .000) over any other group in the survey and are inclined toward having more positive feelings by a dentist attire and overall professionalism (p-value: .000).

Whereas an overwhelming majority in the study preferred a male dentist, in another study conducted, it was shown that the respondents preferred a female gender for dental health personnel (Srinivasan, 2019). However one of the studies concluded that when patients and dentists are both men or women, the shame and fear of physical contact during the exam is reduced (Henríquez-Tejo & Cartes-Velásquez, 2017).

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest among the authors regarding the writing and publication of this research.

CONCLUSIONS

- Dentist's attire has a significant impact on the patients.
- Type of attire, mask, and goggles also affect the patients' mood.
- Gender has no bearing on the effect of dentist's attire.
- Age, marital status, and previous dental visits had a significant bearing on the effect of dentist's attire on patients.
- Dentists should choose their attire carefully and present themselves in a professional manner.

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