

## FACTORS INFLUENCING PATIENTS' DECISIONS WHILE CHOOSING A DENTAL CARE PROVIDER

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### ABSTRACT:

**Introduction:** There are several factors that influence a patient in the decision making process of choosing their oral health care provider. The study at hand was carried out with the aim to deduce the various factors that influence patients' selectivity when it comes dental care providers.

**Materials and Methods:** This study focused on patients visiting different university hospitals in Riyadh Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Participants were selected randomly. A total of 634 questionnaires were collected and analysed. The survey consisted of questions relating factors influencing patients' decisions while choosing a dental care provider

**Results:** A majority of the patients chose to visit a private dental clinic (53.2%) over a Dental University (23.5%) or a Government setup (23.3%). Reasons for selecting a particular dentist for dental care were mostly the dentist's reputation and owing to recommendations from relatives and friends. More than two-third of the patients (68.6%) said that the dentist's education level played a role in them being selected as dental care providers.

**Conclusion:** The dentist's gender or place of graduation were considered two factors that did not govern their selection as dental care providers by our study population.

**Key Words:** Dental care, Dental Clinic, Specialization, University hospitals, Private hospital, Dental insurance



### INTRODUCTION

No one can overlook the evolution that is taking place throughout the various specialties in modern day dentistry. One of the main causes behind this evolution is the patients who are seeking conservative and preventive treatments owing to their increased level of education and motivation. The need therefore arises to identify how patients choose their dental care providers and what factors dictate such a decision.

There have been many studies that have focused on the factors that influence the patient's choices in the medical field, [1-5], while only a few studies have focused on the dental field. A study done in Saudi Arabia [6], stated that amongst 16 criteria in his study, 'caring dentist' showed the highest percentage (97.2%) followed by 'friendly staff' (95.1%). 'Accessible location of the clinic' showed the least percentage (80.3%), while pleasant décor and comfortable surroundings'

(81.4%) took the second lowest place on the list. Another study conducted in 2011<sup>[7]</sup>, suggested that patients preferred highly educated female dentists of the same nationality as theirs. Mangold et al.<sup>[8]</sup>, stated that when it comes to factors influencing decision making, quality of work, dentist's concern for patients, price, personal appearance, office location, waiting time to see the dentist, and insurance form preparation were the factors that showed most significance. Book and Stockton<sup>[9]</sup> concluded that referrals from friends and relatives and convenient office location were the two most important influencing factors.

The inference obtained from the present study can benefit dental care providers to reach out to the community in more effective ways by catering to a list of possible factors that has been evaluated to be significant in affecting patients' choices.

**Aim Of The Study:** To deduce the various factors that influence patients' selectivity when it comes dental care providers.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sample selection:

This study focused on patients visiting different university hospitals in Riyadh Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Participants were selected randomly from four University Dental facilities. A total of 827 questionnaires were distributed over a time frame of 4 weeks and 634 (76.6% response rate)

completed questionnaires were collected and analysed for this study.

The distribution of collected data is

- a. 466 were from Riyadh Colleges of Dentistry and Pharmacy (An Namuthajiyah, Olaya and Munisiya campuses)
- b. 49 from PSAU dental hospital
- c. 66 from KSAU dental hospital
- d. 53 from KSU

### Measurement:

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire which was adapted and modified from a similar unpublished study conducted in Kuwait.

Demographic information was included at the start of the survey. The survey consisted of questions relating to possible factors influencing patients' decisions while choosing a dental care provider, which could be broadly classified under:

- Reasons for seeking a dentist
- Type of dental set up
- What governs their choice
- Nationality of the dentist and more specified questions

An open-ended question about the participants' opinion of what makes a good dentist was included.

A trick question was also included to assure avoid an insouciant answering of the questionnaire.

The collected data were statistically analyzed using IBS SPSS statistic data editor version 20.

## RESULTS:

1. Private dental clinics (53.2%) were a more popular choice to visit than Government (23.3%) or University clinics (23.5%). (Figure 1)
2. Family and friends had a deep impact on influencing choice of dentist (41.8%,  $p=0.042$ ). (Figure 2)
3. A dentist's reputation and personality played a positive role in influencing a patient's decision in choosing them for treatment ( $p < 0.005$ ). (Figure 3)
4. Patients preferred specialists over general dental practitioners (53.6%,  $p=0.01$ ). (Figure 4 and Figure 5)
5. Availing dental Insurance was not a popular practice among most patients (37.5%). (Figure 6)

## DISCUSSION :

With the all the recent advancements in dental treatment and the various specialties that have arisen over the past decades, the modern day patient has so much to choose from. It is imperative to know what governs a patient in choosing their dental care providers. This information will help practitioners the

world over to modify or upgrade themselves to enable a better service to their patients.

The present study included 634 patients who visited various Dental University clinics in the Riyadh Province of Saudi Arabia. The studied population comprised of a majority of Saudi nationals (78.5%) with most of them aged between 22 – 50 years of age (76.5%). Male patients (64.7%) were more than female ones and most of the studied population were educated above high school (91%). 59.1% of the patients were employed and a majority of the population had an income of less than 10,000 SAR per month.

Half of the studied population (50.5%) reported to a dental clinic owing to pain followed by 27% for a regular dental checkup. Cosmetic and Orthodontic treatment was a reason for treatment by 16.1% and 19.4% respectively. Some other reasons for visiting a dentist included extractions, restorations and cleaning.

Of the entire population that was studied only 37.5% possessed dental insurance, and of this minority only 41.6% had an insurance policy that had a full coverage of all dental treatment undertaken by them.

A majority of the patients chose to visit a private dental clinic (53.2%) over a Dental University (23.5%) or a Government setup (23.3%). This choice was seen to be unanimous irrespective of gender, nationality or employment

status. Patients below the age of 60 years and those who were educated above a high school level showed high significance ( $p=0.002$ ) towards choosing private clinics for dental treatment. Patients above the age of 60 years preferred Governmental setups, however, this data cannot be considered significant owing to the low number of participants in this age group ( $n=3$ ). These findings were contrary to those of a study conducted in 2007 [6], where they reported a higher incidence of patients towards Government dental setups, possibly owing to the lack of dental insurance acceptance in private clinics in the regions assessed.

Reasons for selecting a particular dentist for dental care were mostly the dentist's reputation and owing to recommendations from relatives and friends. The dentist's reputation showed a very high significance ( $p < 0.005$ ) among Saudi patients and those who were at least graduate degree holders with a salary between 5001 – 20000 SAR per month. The influence of relatives and friends in choosing a dental care provider showed a significance ( $p=0.042$ ) among the studied population, showing no nationality bias.

More than half of the patients showed 'No Preference' (55.8%) towards the dentist possessing the same nationality as themselves. Of the patients who had a preference on this factor (either yes or no) 58.6% chose Saudi dentists for their oral care. This was followed by a choice of American (13.9%) and Syrian (12.9%)

dentists. Egyptian, Jordanian and Indian dentists ranked lowest in the choice of dentist nationality by patients, 4.3%, 2.1% and 1.8% respectively. Our findings contradict those of Khan N. et al [6], who found that non-Saudi dentists were preferred over Saudi dentists for treatment. They did, however, mention a regional limitation to this criterion.

The dentist's gender or place of graduation were considered two factors that did not govern their selection as dental care providers by our study population ( $p<0.01$ ). These findings were dissimilar to a similar study testing the same criteria among medical patients in the UK [5]. They found that male patients showed a significantly stronger preference towards male doctors than female patients did towards female doctors. It was also found by them that there was a preference towards doctors trained in the UK over other practitioners trained elsewhere.

More than two-third of the patients (68.6%) said that the dentist's education level played a role in them being selected as dental care providers. A significantly high number of patients (53.6%) preferred Specialists to treat them ( $p=0.01$ ). This finding was in concurrence with Khan N. et al [6] who rated the dentist's qualification as the second highest criterion for selection among patients.

It was also seen that a very high significance ( $p=0.001$ ) was given to the dentist's personality with 82.2% of the patients saying that this criterion played an important role in their choice of a dental care provider. This was in agreement with a study conducted [6] where they stated that behavioral components of the dentist and their staff proved most important to the patients.

### CONCLUSIONS:

Within the limitations of the study we can conclude that,

1. A majority of patients prefer private dental clinics over Government or University dental setups.
2. Most patients are influenced into choosing a dentist by their reputation or by a recommendation from kith and kin.
3. The dentist's personality and level of education played a significant role in them being selected by patients. Specialists had a much higher chance of being chosen than other dental practitioners.
4. Dental insurance was possessed by a minority of the patients and even

those who did, did not have a complete coverage for all procedures.

**Recommendations:** To help enable a better clinical practice and to ensure a bigger chance of you being a patient's choice, we recommend

1. Self-improvement in social skills and building your reputation as a dentist who cares.
2. Improving your professional educational level and keeping abreast with latest advances in dental practices to be able to provide adequate information to your patients.
3. To propagate your practice setup so that the general public understands that superior quality of service is being provided by you.
4. Getting connected with insurance companies so that you can provide your patients with superior treatment without making them feel the pinch of it with each visit made.

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**TABLES,GRAPHS AND FIGURES:**

Figure 1: Type Of Dental Setup Preferred

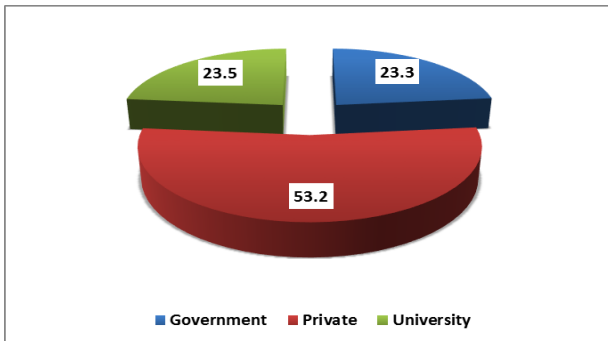


Figure 4: Influence of Dentist's Education Level

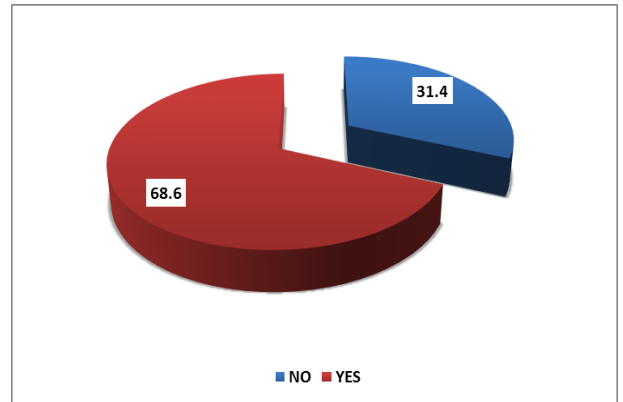


Figure 2: Basis of selecting a patient

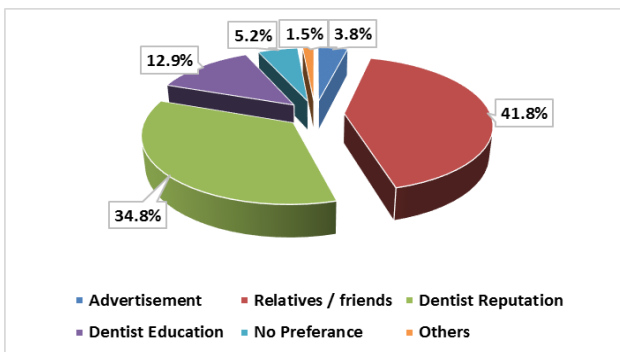


Figure 5: Selection of dentist as per their Education Level

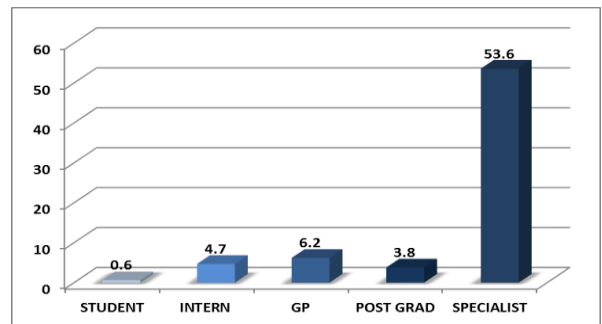


Figure 3: Influence of Dentist's Personality

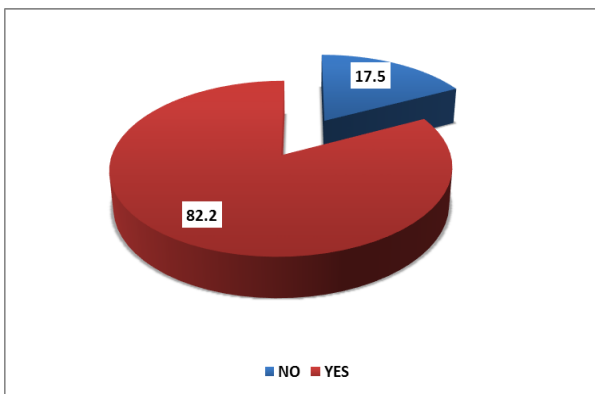


Figure 6: Patients Possessing Dental Insurance

