

Attitude Of Parents Towards Paediatric Dental Staff Attire

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Professional appearance contributes to first impression. Attire and appearance could be subject to cultural sensitivity. Moreover, they also could be perceived differently according to gender and pediatric practice. Attires have to be less intimidating and child friendly in pediatric dentistry. Parents harbor conscious and unconscious biases when it comes to the clinical demeanor of dental staff in a hospital. Dental staff needs to focus on their attire which would help in building quick rapport and trust in children and parents. This study portrays the perceptions of parents towards the dental staff in pediatric department in a hospital.

Aims and objective: To assess parental attitudes towards dental assistant attire, to find out effect of positive changes that would make children and their parents more comfortable.

Methodology: Data was collected using a validated questionnaire from 101 parents attending the Department of Pediatric Dentistry.

Results: This study revealed that parents place a great deal of emphasis on dental staff attire. Parents mainly favored formal attire as they believed in “targeted attire to improve likelihood of rapport” (TAILOR). Parent’s ranked multicolored apron with buttons closed with the name tags on the left side. They preferred the male assistants to be clean shaven and females to have tied hair and groomed nails with minimal accessories. 89% of the parents felt that assistants could play the role of oral educators.

Conclusion: The results obtained from this study can help dental staff decide what is appropriate to wear in pediatric dental clinic so as to minimize anxiety and improve delivery of health care. Professionalism is multi-factorial and is vital in engendering a way of comfort and confidence during treatment. The nonverbal communication attributed to an attire/appearance can play a major role in the child-dentist relationship. Making small changes in one’s appearance can have a big impact on decreasing the anxiety levels of the child.

Keywords: Attire, Appearance, Parental Attitudes, Pediatric Dental Staff, Professionalism.

1. INTRODUCTION:

According to human behaviorist Desmond Morris, 'It is impossible to wear clothes without transmitting social signals. Every costume tells a story about its wearer.'^[1] Psychologists have often stated the importance of physical appearance and its effect upon first impressions and interpersonal relationships.^[2]

Parents develop an impact of a dental staff before verbal communication supported clothing, grooming, and cleanliness^[3] and sometimes record and analyze their every word, movement, and gesture.^[4] Creating a robust rapport and establishing a friendship with the kid on his first dental visit helps to make a cushy atmosphere during which the kid doesn't feel threatened.^[5] Once a child is comfortable with the dentist and therefore the dental environment, dealing with certain anxiety-producing stimuli becomes easier, and this helps in delivering effective and efficient treatment. The way the assistant presents himself plays a pivotal role thus their attire has got to be appropriate.^[6]

Health professionals' attire has changed over the years although the white coat has been an accepted symbol of medical staff for quite 100 years, originally to offer a cloak of scientific validity for his or her treatments, to represent purity and cleanliness.^[7] However, fashion recently has played an influential role, giving rise to a medical workforce with a less formal look.^[8]

Many studies have looked into parents' attitudes towards professional attire. However, whilst there are abundant studies within the medical literature, the dental literature lacks reports to work out parents' feelings toward the looks of dental staff.^[8-10] Dental staff's attire is an interesting and important subject to focus on because it could be easily adjusted to the parents and child's preference.^[11]

Accordingly, as few studies have reported children's and parents' attitudes towards dental staff attire, further research was indicated. Hence, this study was conducted to seek out parental attitudes towards dental assistant attire and to seek out the effect of positive changes that might make children and their parents more comfortable in Paediatric dental clinic.

2. MATERIALS & METHODS:

Data was obtained from a sample of parents with a questionnaire developed by study investigators. The questionnaire designed to assess parents' attitude, perception and preferences towards dental staff attire and appearance. The questionnaire was formulated in English. The demographic information collected from the questionnaire included the parent's age, sex and qualification. The questionnaire comprised of 20 questions related to the dental assistant's attire. Parents were asked to select one appropriate option for each question. Subjects were asked if they had been to the dentist before and if there were any dental assistant in the clinic. They were also asked whether they had undergone any dental procedure. Also, they were asked to indicate their preference regarding the dental staff's gender, attire, and protective equipment as well as preferences regarding open hair and tied hair.

During a pilot study, 40 parents were asked to complete the questionnaire and comment on overall structure, specifically on any questions which were difficult to understand. Following the comments from the respondents, certain modifications were incorporated and certain questions were changed and the validated questionnaire was administered to a total of 101 parents including 72 females and 29 males attending College of Dental Sciences & Research Centre, Ahmedabad.

Completed questionnaires were collected and passed blind to an independent statistician where they were analysed using SPSS version 22 for response frequency and Chi square test with 95% confidence level and the results were tabulated.

3. RESULTS:

A total of 101 parents (29 males, 72 females) completed and gave back the questionnaire. Of these, 3% parents were in the 20-25 years range, 23% parents were in the 26-30 years range, 31% parents were in the 31-35 years range, 20% parents were in the 36-40 years range, 14% parents were in the 41-45 years range and 9% parents were 45 years above age. The mean age of the sample was found to be 36 years. The study found that the vast majority of parents felt clinical attire of dental assistant was important.

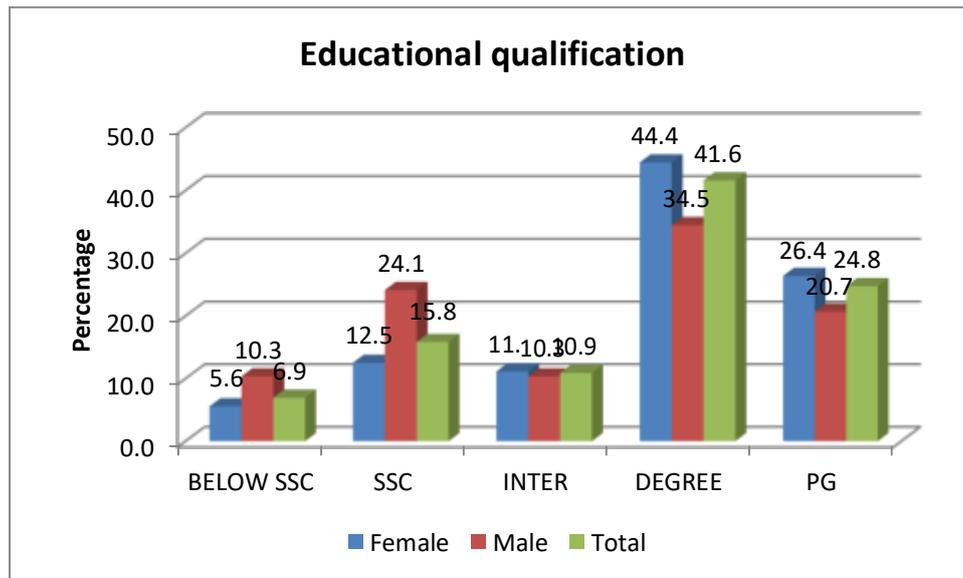
Eighty six percent of all the parents in this study had been to the dentist ($p=0.19$) and 74% parents had already undergone any kind of dental treatment ($p=0.025$). Approximately 62.4% of the parents preferred their child to be treated under a female dental assistant. Further analysis revealed that preference regarding the dental assistant's gender was dependent on the gender of the parents. Father of the child strongly preferred to be treated by a male dental assistant while mother of the child preferred to be treated by a female dental assistant ($p<0.001$).

Table 1/ Graph 1 shows distribution of study sample according to educational qualification of parents and it was not significant ($p>0.05$).

	Female		Male		Total	
Qualification	N	%	N	%	N	%
BELOW SSC	4	5.6	3	10.3	7	6.9
SSC	9	12.5	7	24.1	16	15.8
INTER	8	11.1	3	10.3	11	10.9
DEGREE	32	44.4	10	34.5	42	41.6
PG	19	26.4	6	20.7	25	24.8
Total	72	100.0	29	100.0	101	100.0
Chi sq			3.227	P value		0.521 NS

NS - Not significant ($p>0.05$)

Table 1: Distribution of sample according to educational qualification



Graph 1: Distribution of sample according to educational qualification

When asked about preferred age of the dental assistant for their child, majority of parents (45.5%) preferred dental assistant of 25-30 years age, 27.7% parents preferred of 20-25 years range, 13% parents preferred of 30-35 years of age, 4% parents preferred of below 20 years of age while only 2% parents preferred dental assistant of 35 years above age and result is nonsignificant ($p=0.27$).

The majority of parents (89%) preferred the use of name badges by the dental assistant. Gender-based analysis revealed that 89.7% males and 88.9% females preferred dental assistant to wear name badges but results are nonsignificant ($p=0.91$).

The results obtained regarding the use of protective equipment like eyewear, face mask, gloves etc. showed that 93% of parents preferred that their dental assistant wear some type of protective gears. Parents who had a previous dental experience were more likely to prefer that their dental assistant wear protective gear than those who had not attended a dental clinic and this difference was statistically significant. Gender-based analysis revealed that only 3% of males and 8% of females did not support its use.

Parents were also asked to indicate how their dental assistant smelled. When asked whether they would like their dental assistant to wear perfumes, 60.4% of the parents replied in the affirmative. Gender-based analysis revealed that 52.8% females and 79.3% males preferred good smelling dental assistant ($p<0.05$).

The parent's preference for a well groomed and professional-looking dental assistant was gauged from the results obtained from questions regarding the wearing of white apron or colored clothes, open or closed footwear, and a clean-shaven or unshaven look for a male dental assistant. The results obtained for either of these questions showed that parents strongly preferred well-groomed dental assistant. A total of 87% parents preferred their dental assistant to wear white, ironed and neat apron with all buttons closed (80%) whereas 44% preferred their dental assistant to wear closed footwear. According to gender, 86.2% males and 87.5% females preferred ironed clothes and 44.8% males and 43.1% females preferred the use of closed footwear ($p=0.226$).

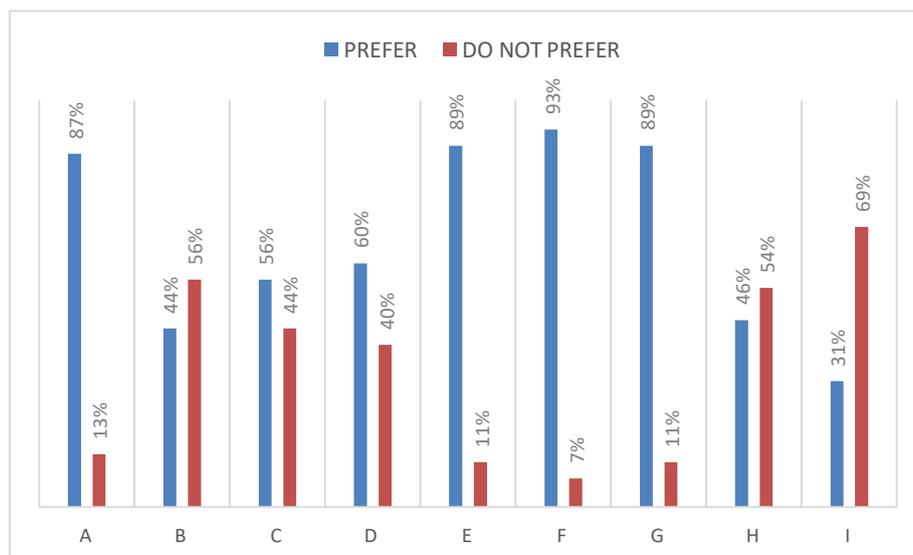
The study found that 56% of parents preferred their male dental assistant to be clean-shaven and the percentage was slightly lower for females (55.6%) as opposed to males (58.6%), the difference being statistically nonsignificant. Whereas 54.5% of parents preferred their female dental assistant to be without nail paints.

Majority of the parents (68.3%) did not like their dental assistant to wear any kind of ornaments like watches, rings, bracelets etc. ($p=0.91$). Gender-based analysis revealed that 58.6% of the males and 72.2% of the females preferred their dental assistant not to wear ornaments. Majority of parents (84.2%) were comfortable with their dental assistant with tied hair ($p=0.008$) and more than 89% parents felt that dental assistant should give oral hygiene instructions to the child ($p=0.41$). When parents were asked to indicate which name was most appropriate for dental assistant, the overwhelming opinion was by calling out with their initials (63.5%) and results is statistically significant ($p=0.007$).

The results obtained for either of these questions showed that parents have strong opinions on how dental staffs dress and they strongly preferred well-groomed dental assistant. A majority of parents felt that this attire portrayed the qualities of cleanliness, professionalism and authority. The respondents felt that the traditional tunic portrayed cleanliness, trustworthiness and approachability.

PARENTAL PREFERENCE [%AGE]	
APRON	87%
APRON WITH ALL BUTTONS CLOSED	80%
NAME TAGS	89%
PERFUME	60%
FORMAL SHOES	44%
TIED HAIR	85%
CLEAN SHAVE (MALE)	56%
NAIL PAINT (FEMALE)	54%
PROTECTIVE GEARS	93%
ORAL EDUCATORS	89%
ORNAMENTS	31%

Figure 1: The parental preference of dental assistant attire (percentage wise)



A. With apron; **B.** Shoes; **C.** Male with clean shave; **D.** Perfumes; **E.** Name tags; **F.** Protective gears; **G.** Oral education; **H.** Female with nail paint; **I.** Ornaments

Graph 2: Summary of parent's response for dental assistant attire.

4. DISCUSSION:

This study revealed that parents have strong perceptions and preferences regarding dental visits and dental assistant attire. The majority of the parents in this study reported that they liked their visit to the dental clinic which has a well-groomed dental assistant which is consistent with the results of other studies that have examined children's attitudes toward dental care.^[12,13] However, dental practitioners should be concerned by the fact that 13.9% of parents in this study reported that they never had visited dental clinics or hospitals before and another 25.7% reported that they never have undergone any kind of dental procedure. The purpose of identifying parent's attitudes towards their dental assistant attire in Paediatric dental clinic is to effect positive changes or adjustments that would make children more comfortable in the dental environment and improve the quality of dental visits.

Parents in this study indicated that they would prefer their child to be attended by a dental assistant of the same gender as them. Assigning them to dental assistants of the same gender may improve the general comfort level of parents in the dentist's office.^[4]

Physical appearance is a factor in a parent's choice of a dental assistant and plays an important role in the development of the relationship during dental treatment.^[14] Our results indicated that parents prefer their dental assistants to wear traditional formal attire with a white coat in the dental clinic. This finding supports the study done by McCarthy et al.^[15] that found that contrary to popular belief, children are not afraid of the physician in white coat and view a more formally dressed physician as more competent and anxious. This agrees with the study during which adult patients expected and ranked highly their male physician who wearing a formal suit and a tie.^[16] Parents may prefer the white coat as they'll see it as a symbol for healing. This agrees with McKinstry and Wang^[17] on the patient's attitude to the way the doctors' dress. The majority of parents thought that the way the dental assistant dress is of some importance, with many parents feeling that they would have more confidence in a dental assistant dressed in a white coat. However, this finding differs from other studies that found that patients were less favorable towards the white coat.^[18, 19] However, around 84.2% of parents prefer dental assistant with tied hair and around 80.2% of parents prefer them with all buttons closed in the apron. This is also in agreement with studies related to adults in medical literature, where the authors concluded that parents felt that this attire portrayed the qualities of cleanliness, professionalism, and authority.^[6]

The study by Brosky et al. (2003)^[20] considered dental attire or appearance amid other factors to encompass professionalism, defined as 'an image that promotes a successful relationship with a patient'. A questionnaire assessed patients' views on dental students and staff rated for physical characteristics and behaviors. The study found that >75% of patients felt formal attire was 'appropriate for staff' and formal dental attire of dental students was preferred. However, this study considered the broader topic of professionalism and thus questions specific to dental dress were limited.^[20]

McKenna et al. in 2007 investigated patient's opinions towards dental clinical attire, name badges, and cross-infection control measures. A majority of patients' preferred dental professionals to use both safety glasses and face masks as they felt clinical attire was important in the dental hospital.^[21]

The results indicated that the majority of the parents (89%) preferred their dental assistant to wear a name badge. This result is in accordance to the study in which patients of all age groups attending a dental hospital for a consultation appointment were given a questionnaire to complete and where most of the sampled patients, irrespective of age or gender, preferred dental professionals to wear a name badge.^[21]

This study also examined if parents noticed and liked the smell of their dental assistant. Most of the parents reported that they liked dental assistant to smell good as most

of them preferred them to wear perfumes which underscores the importance of self-care of the dental assistant especially if he or she is a smoker.^[4] It also emphasizes that the dental assistant should take good personal care. A review of the literature did not reveal studies on wearing of perfume by the dental assistant, so a direct comparison of these findings was not possible. In a survey by Maha AlSarheed,^[4] 88% of children surveyed reported that the dentist they had visited in the past had a good smell which they liked.^[6]

Laws and regulations regarding proper dress and use of protective clothing must be followed to protect patients, parents and health care providers from contracting infectious diseases in the paediatric dental clinic. Because in the dental profession, there is a high risk of transmission of infection hence the use of protective equipment like gloves, facemasks, eyewear, and head caps is highly recommended. It is also important to examine how they perceive certain protective clothing and to evaluate if the use of certain clothing increases or decreases their satisfaction with care. The study showed that almost 93% of parents preferred that dental assistants wear masks and protective eyeglasses during dental treatment. This was far away from the information reported by Shulman and Brehm^[16] within which 70% preferred that dentists wore masks during dental treatment. This result was in agreement with the survey conducted by G. McKenna et al., where the majority of respondents preferred their dentist to wear safety glasses (56%).^[21] Children may be intimidated by protective devices such as masks and eyeglasses and may be unaware of the purposes of protection they serve. Dental assistants may calm the fears of patients, especially children, by explaining the purpose of the protective devices.^[4]

A review of the literature did not reveal studies on the type of footwear worn by the dental assistant, so a direct comparison of these findings was not possible. This finding supports medical studies where open-toed sandals and clogs worn by physicians were rated negatively by children and adults and formal shoes or dress shoes were termed desirable.

The parent's preference for a well-groomed dental assistant could also be gauged from their liking for a clean-shaven male dental assistant as compared to one with a stubble or beard and female dental assistant without nail paints instead of one with nail paints. A review of the literature did not reveal studies on the preference of parents for stubbled or clean-shaven male dental assistants and a female dental assistant with or without nail paints, so direct comparison of these findings was not possible.

Most of the parents did not prefer their dental assistants to wear any kind of jewellery. But they preferred them to wear a wristwatch. This probably matched their image of a professionally dressed dental assistant, but as wristwatches are considered a cross-infection risk, their use during treatment procedure is not recommended. An intermediary solution can be that the dental assistant wears a wristwatch during the initial interaction with the child but remove it before starting the treatment and explain to the child the purpose of doing so. A review of the literature did not reveal studies on preference of wristwatches by parents, so direct comparison of these findings was not possible.^[6]

More than 89% of parents felt that dental assistants should give oral hygiene instructions to the child. Around 45.5% of parents preferred dental assistant of 25-30 years age and the majority of parents (53.5%) would like to call dental assistant by sir/mam because the respondents felt that Positive first impressions, traditional dress, and an overall level of professionalism portrayed by the dental health care provider can increase parents feelings of comfort, confidence, trustworthiness, and approachability, thus leading to an increase in the exchange of information between them, in turn leading to more efficient and improved delivery of dental care.^[21]

5. CONCLUSION:

The study presents a new insight into the minds of parents and shows that parents do have strong perceptions and preferences related to their dental staff's attire and this has an effect on the first impression and interpersonal relationship. Making small changes in one's appearance can have a big impact on decreasing the anxiety levels of the child and improve delivery of health care. Bringing about certain changes in one's style of dressing, however, can make the child more comfortable and increase the chances of the child accepting the treatment readily.

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WHY THIS PAPER IS IMPORTANT TO PAEDIATRIC DENTISTS

- The study presents a new insight into the minds of parents and shows that parents do have strong perceptions and preferences related to dental assistant's appearance, and this has an effect on the first impression and interpersonal relationship.
- Making small changes in one's appearance can have a big impact on decreasing the anxiety levels of the child.