

# Medical Graduate's Choice of Dentistry

Wahab Kadri<sup>1</sup>, M. Junaid Lakhani<sup>2</sup>, Anjum Tariq<sup>3</sup>, Umeed Javed<sup>2</sup>, Sidra Khan<sup>2</sup> and Ume Aimen Arif<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To determine the factors affecting how medical graduates of Karachi choose their dental health care providers.

**Study Design:** Observational / descriptive / cross sectional study.

**Place and Duration of Study:** This study was carried out at Jinnah Medical and Dental College, Karachi from August 2014 to December 2014.

**Materials and Methods:** The study was conducted at Jinnah Medical and Dental College. A 11-item questionnaire was used to collect the data. The data was collected from medical college graduates of Karachi to determine the factors affecting how medical graduates choose their dental health care providers. The questionnaire involved attributes ranging from dental practice to reputation, X-ray facility within clinics, skills/ experience, timings and availability, sterilization, location, Clinical Setup (general appearance/ambiance), qualification, Payment Plans (installments, credit cards, etc.) and Treatment charges. The study included 382 doctors. The data was stored in excel worksheet and was analyzed using SPSS.

**Results:** 26% of the respondents selected 'skills/ experience' as the most important attribute in selecting a dentist while 20% of the respondents picked 'sterilization' and 17% of the respondents chose 'qualification' as their top reason for the selection of dentist. Reputation of the dentist was selected by 14% of the respondents whereas 10 % selected treatment charges as their reason for selecting a dentist. Clinical setup and location accounted for 9 and 4 % respectively.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion skills/ experience, reputation of the dentist and sterilization standards of clinic are were the most important factors while selecting a dentist.

**Key Words:** Medical graduates, Dentist selection, Sterilization, Skills

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## INTRODUCTION

Dental health has significant impact on individual's personal and social life.<sup>1</sup> Dental diseases burden is reduced in most developed countries owing to quality oral care initiatives. This decline is not seen in most of the developing countries and the cost of dental treatment has also increased over time. Therefore, governments are trying to upgrade dental health care policies to provide decent oral health care facilities to their people.

There are a number of factors that people consider when they chose dental clinic like; the location, ambiance, and dental facilities these are vital factors in selection of dental clinic.

<sup>1</sup>. Department of Orthodontics / Oral Maxillofacial Surgery<sup>2</sup> / Operative Dentistry<sup>3</sup>, Jinnah Medical and Dental College, Karachi.

Correspondence: Prof. M. Junaid Lakhani, Department of Oral Maxillofacial Surgery, Jinnah Medical and Dental College, Karachi.

Contact No.: 0300-8222287

E-mail: drmjunaaid@hotmail.com

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Regular dental checkups, leads to good oral health outcomes and improves people's quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Selection of dentist depends on a variety of factors, including qualification of the dentist, access to care, socio-economic, and attitudes toward dental care.<sup>3,4</sup> These factors, in turn, may vary across geographic locations and demographic groups.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this study was to find out how and why medical graduates choose dentists for their oral care needs.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted at Jinnah Medical and Dental College. An 11-item questionnaire was used to collect the data. To examine the research questions, data was collected from 382 respondents comprising of medical graduates between the ages of 24-35 years living in Karachi.

An observational descriptive study was conducted to find out how and why people choose dentists for oral care needs. The questionnaire involved attributes ranging from dental practice to reputation, X-ray facility within clinics, skills/ experience, timings and availability, sterilization, location, Clinical Setup (general appearance/ambiance), qualification, Payment

Plans (installments, credit cards, etc.) and Treatment charges.

A total of 382 self-administered questionnaires were personally handed over to the respondents randomly. The respondents filled the questionnaires in the presence of the researcher so to expedite the process and answer and potential enquiries. This study used simple random sampling procedure to gather an unbiased data from a large population. The questionnaires were numbered from 1-382. The data was stored in excel worksheet and was analyzed using SPSS.

## RESULTS

To examine the research questions, data was collected from 382 respondents comprising of medical graduates living in Karachi. The age of the respondents were between 24 and 33 years mean age was 26.33 years (SD 2.23). There were 265 females and 117 males.

Amongst the 10 preferences given to the respondents in the questionnaire, skills / experience was the most frequently picked reason for selection of dentists whereas sterilization and qualification stood second and third respectively.

26% of the respondents selected 'skills/ experience' as the most important attribute in selecting a dentist while 20% of the respondents picked 'sterilization' and 17% of the respondents chose 'qualification' as their top reason for the selection of dentist. Reputation of the dentist was selected by 14% of the respondents whereas 10 % selected treatment charges as their reason for selecting a dentist. Clinical setup and location accounted for 9 and 4 % respectively.

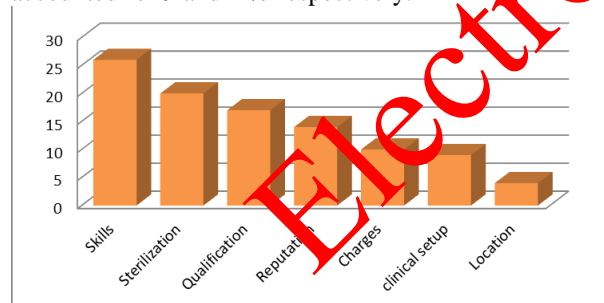


Figure No.1: Reasons for selection of dentist

## DISCUSSION

Dental problems immensely contribute towards the disease burden of Pakistan. This is a multifactorial problem ranging from socioeconomic to education and attitudes of the patient. But in patients who have access to dental care and socio-economic conditions that do not stop them to have dental care still have some priorities in managing their oral health. Selection of dental practice is an important consideration by the patient and is governed by certain factors that may be related to the patient and/or services. A study, comprising of 382 subjects from well to do socio

economic background was conducted to find out how and why people choose dentists for oral care needs, highlighted many patient and practice related attributes considered important by the consumers of oral care services. Our study took into account factors like reputation, skills/ experience of the dentist, X-ray facility within clinics, timings and availability, sterilization, location, Clinical Setup (general appearance/ambiance), qualification, Payment Plans (installments, credit cards, etc.) and Treatment charges. The subjects were also asked to prioritize their responses. In our study 26% subjects selected skills/ experience of the dentist suggesting highly skilled dentist is a strong factor for selection by patients. Similarly sterilization was selected by 20% of patients when it comes for selection of a dentist. For factors relating to dentist reputation 14% and qualification 17% turned out to be key factors while selecting a dentist.

A study conducted in Northern European countries gives us information on choices made for patient's health care. It depicts that a number of patient's traits are responsible for the choices they make. Included are characteristics like patient's age, gender, level of education, distance and means of transportation etc.

In the current study most of the respondents chose skills/experience, reputation and sterilization as their first choice. Qualification of dentists was also among the important attributes mentioned by the respondents.

Throughout the world, social wealth discrepancy and costly treatments have been blamed for difficulty in accessibility to quality dental care and thus leading to poor oral health. A Nigerian study revealed that exorbitant charges of dental treatment are also a hindrance to dental treatment utilization and was listed next to of dental injections.<sup>6</sup> In the current study, however, 'treatment charges' (10%) was not a major deciding factor as subjects were selected from middle to high socio economic class.

Ziaei and co-researchers did a study to determine patient satisfaction towards ophthalmic treatments.<sup>7</sup> They observed that doctor's availability and the treatment quality had the strongest correlation with the level of overall satisfaction and choice of health care providers while ambiance and monetary aspects had the weakest. Researchers have reported that education level and occupation of the patients were also responsible for the level of satisfaction and possibly a reason to select the dentist this study however did not take in to account the demographic variables while analyzing the data.

There is a widespread belief that the likelihood of dental services utilization will increase if the clinics were located nearby. On the contrary, the present study shows that location was not a deciding factor for most of the patients, as they considered skills/ experience, reputation and sterilization the most important factors among all other attributes

The outcome of the dental treatment depends largely on the standard of dental treatment received. An inference could be made, based on the prior studies, that patients' satisfaction would be pivotal to get other patients to visit a dental practice.<sup>8,9,10</sup> Patients usually look for the dental practices which have better quality, using newer technologies and treatment done by competent dentists and refer their friends and relatives.

The distance of the dental clinic from respondents' home, which was found to have less effect on patients decision in the current study, might be of more concern to people living in other cities as our sample belonged to middle class and it is assumed that means of transportation was not a major deterrent in choosing a dental clinic, explaining findings of some studies in which the difficulties in reaching a practice was found to be an important factor.<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion skills/ experience, reputation of the dentist and sterilization standards of clinic are were the most important factors while selecting a dentist.

**Conflict of Interest:** The study has no conflict of interest to declare by any author.

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