

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Factors Associated with Infrequent Dental Visits among Female patients attending Dental OPD of College of Dentistry, King Khalid University, Abha, KSAFARIHA NAZ¹, RAHEELA YASMIN², REHANA KAUSAR³, SAADIA BANO LONE⁴, MEHVISH SAJJAD⁵, SADIA HASSAN KHAN⁶, SHAHERAH MEKHRB⁷, MASHAEL QASSIM⁸¹Assistant Professor of Operative Dentistry, Department of Restorative Dental Sciences, College of Dentistry, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia.²Professor of Oral Biology, Avicenna Dental College, Lahore.³Assistant Professor, Community and Preventive Dentistry Department, Islam Dental College, Sialkot.⁴Assistant Professor, Science of Dental Materials Department, Rashid Latif Dental College, Lahore.⁵Assistant Professor, Dental Materials, University of Lahore, Lahore.⁶Assistant Professor, Dental Materials, Rashid Latif Dental College, Lahore.⁷College of Dentistry, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia.⁸College of Dentistry, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia.Correspondence to: Dr. Fariha Naz, Email: farihashakeel@gmail.com, Cell: 03214454855**ABSTRACT**

The aim of the present study was to find out the reasons of low frequency of dental visits by the patients having one or less than one visit per year.

Materials and Methods: A questionnaire-based survey was carried out using convenient sampling technique, in the female dental OPD of College of Dentistry, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. Proformas were filled after interviewing patients having one or less than one per year frequency of dental visits and attending dental OPD on duty days of interviewing doctors. 159 questionnaires were filled. Frequency and percentage of each response were calculated through descriptive statistics using SPSS (V.16).

Results: Lack of time was the reason given by 29% of patients, high cost of treatment by 24.5%, fear by 23.9%, difficulty in approaching dental clinics by 23.3%, unawareness by 21%, low income by 20%, personal dislike for dental treatment by 14.5%, pending the visits by 13% and lack of family support for dental treatment by 12% of patients for not attending dental clinics for regular check-ups.

Conclusion: Lack of time, high cost of treatment and dental anxiety were the most common reasons for low frequency of dental visits by the patients. Unawareness about the importance of dental health was also a significant factor. Strategies should be adopted to address all the factors and to educate patients at all levels regarding importance of oral and dental health. Proper implementation of these strategies should improve the frequency of visits by the patients for regular dental-checkups.

Key words: Dental visits, Frequency, Low attendance, Reasons.

INTRODUCTION

Regular dental examination is one of the key factors in timely prevention of many oral and dental diseases.¹ Delay in seeking treatment for any dental problem may result in irreversible damage to dental tissues, initiation of treatment at more advanced stage of disease and increased cost of treatment.² Regular dental check-ups enable the patients to be guided by the dentists for appropriate oral hygiene measures, correction of faulty oral care habits and for reversal of few of the dental problems.³

Poor dental care and neglecting the need for dental treatment is a common community health problem.⁴ Most of the patients that visit dental clinics and hospitals have already lot of decayed teeth and periodontal and other problems.⁴ Negligence regarding dental visits has been linked to many reasons, of which more common ones are lack of awareness, dental anxiety, fear from previous dental treatment, lack of time and financial issues.^{5,6} Previous evidence also suggests that attitudes and perceptions about oral health and health care influence dental attendance patterns.⁷

In countries like Saudi Arabia, where free dental treatment is provided by the government, high level of dental care should be expected. However, still conditions regarding oral health status are not so encouraging.⁸ It is reported that majority of the population seek the emergency dental treatment only.^{8,9} This is evident from multiple studies that have been carried out in different regions of Saudi Arabia to evaluate the attitude of population towards oral health practices and to find out the reasons for poor dental attendance.^{8,9,10,11}

It is important to find out the reasons for the patients not visiting dental health care providers for routine dental check-ups. Finding these reasons help in developing effective health-policy interventions to optimize the oral health of the population.³ Currently no study is available to evaluate the attitude of patients in Abha, Saudi Arabia, towards attending dental clinics for routine dental check-ups. In order to address this issue, the present study was carried out to find out multiple reasons for

infrequent dental visits by female patients attending dental OPD of King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A questionnaire was developed to interview patients attending female dental OPD of King Khalid University, Abha. Convenient sampling technique was employed. All those patients with the age range of 15-65 years and attending dental OPD on the duty days of interviewing doctors were selected as participants. After taking written informed consent and collecting relevant demographic data, information was acquired regarding the frequency of dental visits per year. Further interview was continued for only those patients who had visited dental clinics for less than two times a year. Questions were asked regarding the reasons for not seeking the regular dental care and response was marked in respective column in the questionnaire. Once the data collection was completed, statistical analysis was done using SPSS (V16). Descriptive statistics were employed. The frequency of each response was described as its percentage in total subjects.

RESULTS

Interviews were taken from 200 patients. Frequency of visits to dental clinics per year is given in table 1.

159 patients had visited dental clinics for less than two times per year or for treatment of any complaint only. These patients were asked questions to find out reasons for not visiting dental clinics for dental check-ups.

Frequency and percentage for each response is given in table 2.

Lack of time for seeking dental treatment was one of the most common reasons as calculated from collected data and 29% of the patients gave it as a reason for their poor dental attendance. High cost of any proposed treatment by 24.5 % of participants, fear from dental treatment by 23.9%, difficulty in approaching dental clinic by 23.3%, unawareness about present dental condition by 21%, low income by 20%, personal dislike for getting professional

dental care by 14.5%, pending the visits by 13% and lack of family support was given as a reason by 12%.

11.3% marked lack of trust in dentists for not seeking dental treatment and 11.3% patients had avoided treatment because of bad previous experience from dental treatment. 3.8 % of respondents used home measures for dental problems and only 3% had a belief that dental care was not an important thing.

Table 1: Frequency of dental visits per year

Frequency per year	No. of respondents (n=200)
Less than 1	34
Less than 2	31
More than 2	9
Frequently	32
On complaint only	94

Table 2: Reasons for low frequency of dental visits

	Reasons for low frequency of dental visits	No. of patients (n=159)	Percentage of patients
A	Fear	38	23.9
B	Dislike	23	14.5
C	Bad previous experience	18	11.3
D	Unawareness about dental condition	33	20.8
E	Lack of time	46	29
F	Belief that dental care is not necessary	5	3
G	Go on pending	21	13
H	Lack of family support	19	12
I	Low income	32	20
J	High cost of proposed treatment	39	24.5
K	Difficulty in approaching dental clinic	37	23.3
L	Lack of trust in dentists	18	11.3
M	Use of home measures	6	3.8
N	Others	24	15

DISCUSSION

In the present study, lack of time was given as the reason by the highest percentage (29%) of patients for not getting regular dental check-ups. This finding is in accordance with the study done by George AC and two other studies done by Quetish Tanni et al. where lack of the time was the reason given by the highest percentage of patients.^{11,12,13} In a survey, also done in Saudi Arabia, 79.5% patients gave the lack of time as a reasoning for not visiting dental clinics regularly.¹⁴ Giving time constraint as a reasoning for not seeking dental examination clearly indicates low prioritization of dental treatment by patients.

High cost of the treatment was the reason given by 24.5% of patients. 20% of respondents demonstrated their low income as a factor for not visiting dental clinics. In a study done by Gaffar BO and colleagues, 71.5% of the patients showed irregular dental visits because of high cost of treatment,¹⁴ while in another study 40% of patients avoided dental treatments because of cost factor.⁸ Patients might have experienced this due to seeking treatments from private dental clinics. In Saudi Arabia, free dental services are provided in the hospitals working under Ministry of Health and in the hospitals affiliated with public sector dental colleges. Relatively longer procedures in these health care facilities or their non-availability in the evening might be the reasons for patients visiting private clinics and then avoiding treatment because of high cost. Improving the facilities and management in government run dental set ups may solve this issue.

Fear of dental treatment was the third most common reason for avoiding dental treatment and 23.9% of patients had this fear according to present study. Different studies have shown different percentages of patients having dental fear and anxiety, however, in most of the studies conducted to find out the reasons for low dental attendance, dental fear was found to be the most common reason.^{8,9,10} In the study done by Saatchi et al, 58.8% of patients

had fear and anxiety of dental treatment.¹⁵ As fear of dental treatment greatly affects the attitude towards seeking dental care and ultimately the oral health of an individual, it is very important to address this issue. Different strategies have been suggested which could alleviate the level of anxiety, improve dental attendance, and may result in overall improvement in dental health of concerned individuals.¹⁴

23.3% of the patients described difficulty in visiting dental clinics as a reason for not seeking dental treatment. Most of dental OPDs are working during daytime when females may find it difficult to have some male person at home to carry them to hospital. The same reason could be associated with visiting private dental clinics and avoiding treatment because of high treatment cost. The similar reason was found in another study population by the authors in KSA.⁸ Now, when the females have got permission of driving the vehicles in KSA, this problem might get solved to some extent.

About 14.5% of patients showed their personal dislike for getting under dental treatment and it was one of the main reasons for them for not attending dental clinics. This must be a form of unknown dental phobia or due to some bad previous experience. It was shown in another study that 89% of the patients visited dentist only for emergency treatment.¹⁰ These patients might not be aware of the consequences of not seeking timely dental check-ups. Explaining to these patients the importance of dental health care and regular dental visits might be helpful for overcoming their personal dislike for dental treatment.

Unawareness about the oral health condition was the reason described by 21% of participants of the study. Other studies on Saudi population have also described low level of dental awareness.¹⁶ Community based oral health programs are needed to give this awareness to the population and to emphasize the need for professional help for prevention of dental diseases as much as possible.

A good number of patients (11.3%) had a previous bad experience from dental treatment and almost the same percentage of participants showed distrust in dentists. In a cross-sectional study by Schneider, it was emphasized that remembrance of past negative dental experience resulted in avoidance behavior.¹⁷ These factors must be identified in patients with poor oral health and specific strategies be adopted to increase the confidence of patients in dental health care providers and in dental treatment.

CONCLUSION

Lack of time, high cost of treatment and dental anxiety were the most common reasons for low frequency of dental visits by the patients. Unawareness about the dental health condition was also one of the contributing factors. Strategies should be adopted to address all the factors and to educate patients at all levels regarding importance of oral and dental health. Proper implementation of these strategies should improve the frequency of visits by the patients for regular dental-checkups.

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