



Positive Attitudes Towards Dental Visits from the Pediatric Patient's Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Dental fear (DF) is a challenging problem in dentistry and is common amongst children. DF is multifactorial with identifying factors including age, previous dental visits, type of previous dental treatment, and behavior. Some other suggested reasons for childhood DF includes separation anxiety, feelings of helplessness, fear of bodily harm, perception of dental instruments causing pain, previous painful dental experiences and increased parental anxiety.

There are no shortages of studies investigating the causes and variations of DF among different age groups. However, there is very limited literature on children's positive attitudes during dental appointments. In attempt to make dental visits more pleasant for children, more research is needed on positive correlation of factors associated with dental visits. The purpose of our study was to investigate positive attributing factors associated with children who enjoy going to the dentist.

METHODS

This cross-sectional study was completed at Nicklaus Children's Hospital pediatric dental outpatient clinic in Doral, Florida. The data was collected via an oral administered questionnaire to patients of record and their parents in the dental operatory prior to treatment. Inclusion criteria were patients of record, ages 7-12. Exclusion criteria included new or first-time patients. Parents signed a consent form and the patients signed an assent form. Assent form was developed for children ages 7-12.

The survey was administered orally by the principal investigator. A printed version was available in English and Spanish if parents or patients preferred to read the questions. The Spanish version was utilized for translation purposes. A pilot survey was administered by the principal investigator as a trial. Time for administering the survey was approximately 3-4 minutes. After the pilot survey the wording of some of the questions were edited.

The first portion of the survey was directed towards the accompanying adult and included demographic questions and feelings towards having a dental appointment. The second portion of the survey addressed the pediatric patients and collected information on feelings and family perception towards going to the dentist. Chi Square test analysis was ran to examine different factors and how they correlated with positive experiences at the dentist. The last portion of the study was a chart review that assessed factors including caries status, dental treatment history, and health status documented as ASA classification.

RESULTS

The surveys were completed from June 2021-December 2021. A total of 157 patients and accompanying adults consented to participate in this study. The population sample was evenly distributed with male (50%) and female (50%) patients. All accompanying adults were parents (N=156) with one exception, a sibling (N=1) over the age of 18. The average age of the patients were 9 years old. Race of the participants were reported as Mixed race (6.4%), Black or African American (9.6%), other (34.4%), and White (49.7%). Majority of participants reported they were of Hispanic origin, 140 (89.2%), while 17 (10.8%) reported not being Hispanic.

Of the 157 participants, 66 pediatric patients reported liking going to the dentist (42%); 37 pediatric patients reported disliking going to the dentist (23.6%); and 54 pediatric patients reported unsure how they felt or didn't care about going to the dentist (34.4%). When analyzed to determine association between pediatric patient group and their parents, the pediatric "like going to the dentist group" had the highest percentage of accompanying adults who also reported liking and enjoying going to the dentist (68.2%). The pediatric patient group reporting not liking going to the dentist had the highest percentage (32.4%) of accompanying adults who also reported not liking going to the dentist. When the children were asked if their parents like going to the dentist, the majority from all of the groups reported that they didn't know (69.4%).

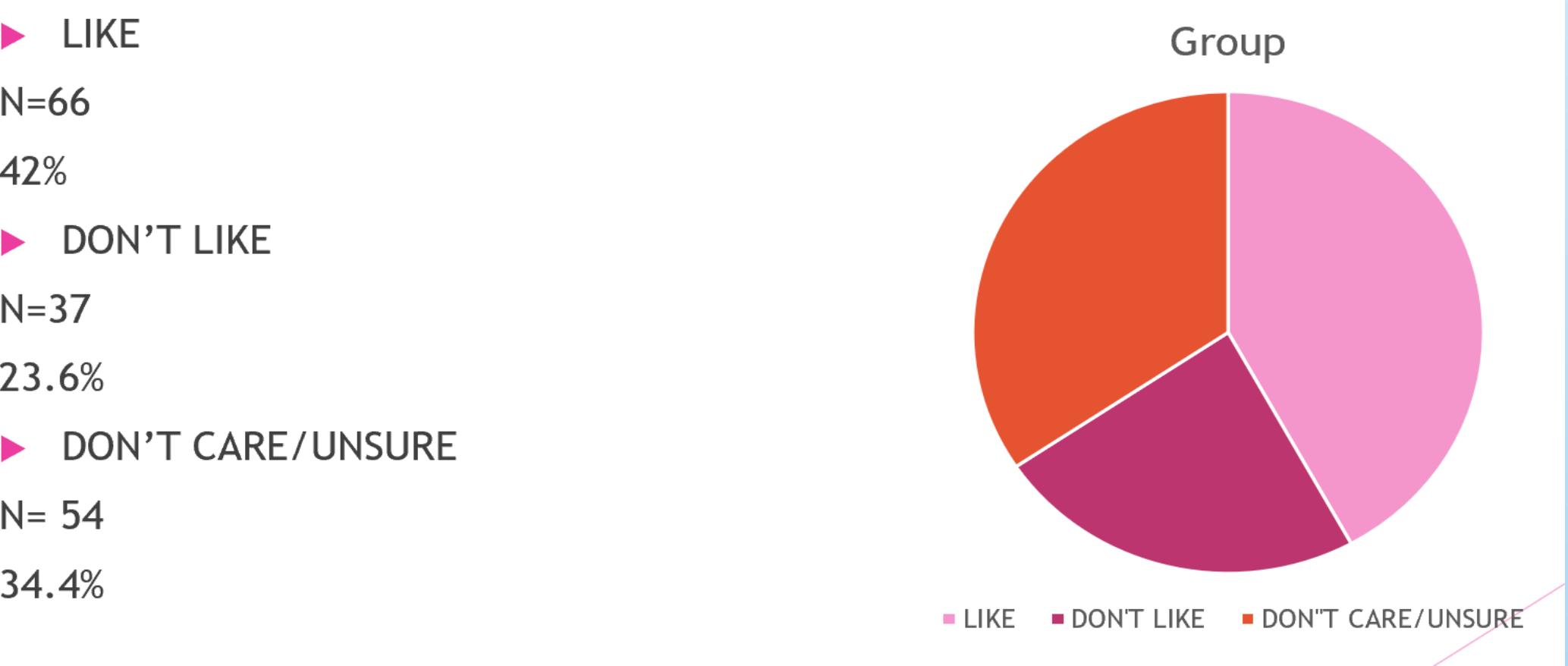
Pediatric patients were asked if they ever played with toys that involved the dentist or dental office. Overall, majority reported never playing with dental related toys (58%); 33.1% reported they had played with dental related toys; and 8.9% reported they were unsure if they had ever played with a dental related toy.

Patients were also asked how they felt about getting rewards at the dentist. The vast majority of patients reported liking the rewards, with the "like going to dentist group" having the highest percentage of liking the rewards amongst all of the groups.

Patient's caries status and dental treatment history were assessed via retro-active chart review and findings were not statistically significant. Health status was reported via ASA classification. Overall, majority of patients (74.5%) were healthy ASA I. The Pediatric patient groups of like, don't like, and don't care had an evenly distributed ASA Classification.

Results: Groups

"How do you feel about going to the dentist?"

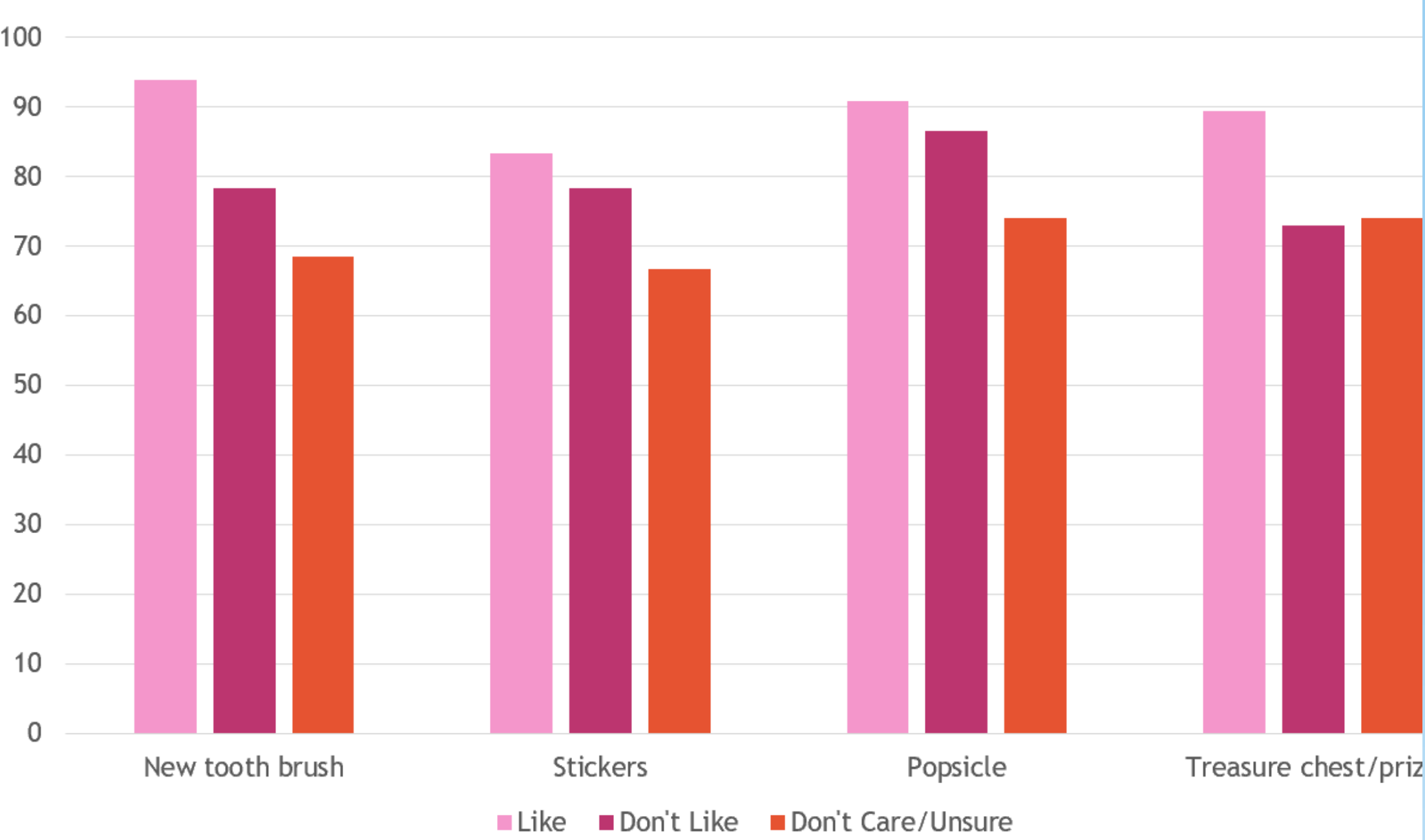


Results: Adult Attitude Towards Dentist Appointments

"If you had a dental appointment tomorrow how would you feel?"

	Overall	Like Group	Don't Like Group	Don't Care/Unsure Group
Adult Enjoys	N=82	N=45	N=14	N=23
	52%	68.2%	37.8%	2.6%
Adult Uneasy/Afraid	N=32	N=6	N=12	N=14
	20.4%	9.1%	32.4%	25.9%
Adult Doesn't care	N=42	N=14	N=11	N=17
	26.8%	21.2%	29.7%	31.5%

Results: Motivation/Rewards



DISCUSSION

Findings from the study revealed that over half of the pediatric patients included in the study reported liking going to the dentist. The remainder were split between not liking going to the dentist and being unsure how they felt or not caring. The majority of children in the group that reported liking going to the dentist never had caries. In contrast, the majority of children in the group that reported not liking going to the dentist had active caries. This finding highlights the importance of preventative dentistry.

Another interesting finding in this study was the correlation between children and accompanying adults' feelings about going to the dentist. Most of the children that enjoyed going to the dentist had an accompanying adult that also enjoyed dental visits. Pediatric dentists should use this information to educate parents on how their positive or negative feelings towards the dentist can influence their child's attitude and behavior.

Lastly, majority of children who participated in the study reported liking receiving rewards and prizes during their dental visit. This finding is in agreement with existing research and pediatric dentist should strive to always present children with some form of reward following treatment.

Most of the existing literature regarding children and health experiences relies on adults when gathering data about the child's thoughts, experiences, and feelings. A unique aspect of this study involved addressing pediatric patients directly. Directing interviews towards children themselves can contribute meaningful information about their subjective experiences.

The results of this study can contribute to reducing dental fear and encouraging more routine dental visits. It is imperative to bring awareness to the profession and the public that there are patients who enjoy going to the dentist in order to remove the negative stigma attached with dentistry. Findings of this study also promote suggestions for brief interventions in waiting rooms to patients that dislike the dentist. Interventions can include showing patients positive patient interaction videos, showing pictures of rewards, and coaching parents to talk about positive dental experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Children whose parents have positive attitudes towards going to the dentist have a greater likelihood of reporting liking going to the dentist.
2. Almost all pediatric dental patients enjoy receiving rewards and prizes after their dental visit.
3. The majority of children who report like going to the dentist never had caries.
4. Future research should focus on interventions towards children who report disliking going to the dentist and reinforcements to children who report liking going to the dentist.