



## White Attire Favored during Pediatric Patient Visit in Dental Operatory for the First Time: An Observation Study

Jayanti Ghosh\*

Pediatric Dentist, West Bengal Dental Council (WBDC), India

\*Corresponding Author: Jayanti Ghosh, Pediatric Dentist, West Bengal Dental Council (WBDC), India.

DOI: 10.31080/ASDS.2022.06.1458

Received: August 08, 2022

Published: August 29, 2022

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### Abstract

**Aim:** To assess children's perceptions of dentist's white attire. Protocol is available in Prospero Database (International Prospective register of Systematic Reviews).

**Keywords:** White Attire; Pediatric Dentistry; Anxiety; Apprehension; Parents; Fear; Surgical Scrub

### Abbreviations

PRISMA: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Metanalysis

### Introduction

A friendly behavior and a good rapport between the child and pediatric dentist is required for the completion of dental treatment. During the first visit, even before the speech/communication the child by looking at the attire of the dentist judges everything that whether he will go ahead with the treatment or not [1].

The professional white attire is the symbol for medical profession for more than a century, since it represents purity and cleanliness [2].

This study aims to review the scientific evidence regarding the patient's preferences on a dentist's professional attire [3].

Color plays an important role in children's life and can arouse emotions such as anxiety and fear. Clothes may have a certain impact on children due to previous experiences. Even a dental environment may contribute to anxiety and fear [23].

In pediatric dentistry, dental fear and anxiety are the main factors compromising treatment success, and overcoming this problem remains a significant challenge. Factors such as the behavior of the dentist as well as the personality of the patient and his/her fear of the unknown and past traumatic dental experiences affect patient behavior in the dental clinic [24].

However, since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the white coat has been seen as a significant way to communicate between patients and doctors. In recent years, physicians have begun to see patients without a white coat with the aim of establishing better communication with their patients.

### Material and Methods

This systematic review follows Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Metanalysis (PRISMA). The protocol was registered in PROSPERO #CRD42018102177 [3].

### Study design

This review was based on questions which included the following guidelines

- What are the children’s perceptions of the dentist’s attire?
- What do the kids think or what are their apprehensions while they enter a pediatric dental operator?
- Various questionnaires were being taken from the kids, and pictures were clicked while they entered the dental setup [4].
- Parents perceptions/thought process of the dental operator or hospital was excluded. As sometimes both the opinions of parents and their kids don’t match.
- Studies were gone through and information was gathered from article reviews, letters to the editor, chapters of the books etc. [5].
- Temperament of the child and dental treatment fear was recorded [6].
- The questionnaire consisted of the following information (child sex, date of birth, parent’s sex, educational level and parent’s family income) [7].
- Information on the physical health of the child [8].

Other factors were also noted down like (previous fear of dentist, previous experience, patient’s motivation, whether any sibling inspires or not, any preference regarding gender of the dentist) [9].

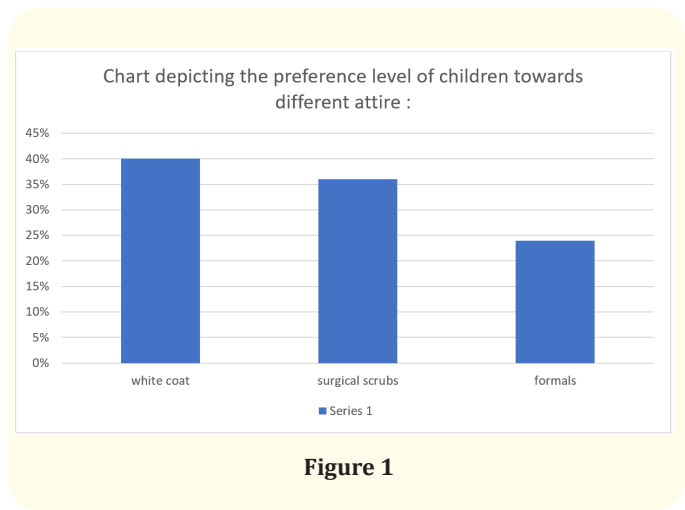
Children’s anxiety levels were assessed using Frankl’s scale with 4 items to be rated from 1 (definitely negative) to 4 (definitely positive) [10].

**Results**

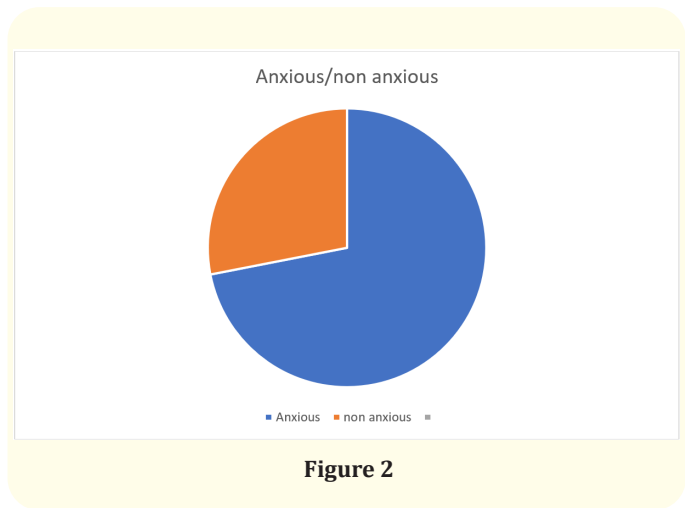
Demographic data revealed that out of 432 children, 200 children liked doctors in surgical scrubs whereas, 232 children liked doctors in white coats. This was cited out in Dhanlakshmi Ravi Kumar, *et al.* study [11]. Preference level of children towards different attire was seen in the bar graph given below

It was found out by the above pie chart from the various observations and questionnaires answered that children were more anxious from the green scrubs whereas they felt more comfortable with the white attire.

It was found out by the observation studies that most children preferred the formal doctor’s attire, whereas some authors like Asokan [12], *et al.* and Yalyaoglu, *et al.* [13] found out that child-



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

friendly colored attires may help reduce anxiety and behavior. But as per some other studies, it was found out that colorful attires may also sometimes appear as “clown dentists” [14].

Cohen [16] concluded that there was no significant difference between all the groups (white overcoat, formal shirt and tie, and clinical surgical scrub).

Westphal [17], *et al.* along with other authors Ravikumar, *et al.* [18] suggested that scrubs are the preferred option.

According to Molinari [18], it was seen many kid patients are comfortable and used to with the protective equipment used by the dentist.

Considering all the 5 studies, that addressed children's perception of the dental clinic, most of them suggested that along with the white gown which was preferred along with that a well decorated and child friendly atmosphere was also favored as well [19].

## Discussion

- There is a changing trend concerning the attire used for pediatric care in dental care environments. However, no systematic review or meta-analysis was found addressing whether or not there is scientific evidence supporting this change [7].
- According to the three-pathway theory of Rachman, children may develop an anxious response directly (by conditioning) or via more indirect learning (by modeling or from information).
- The children had likeness for white coat as the color is the symbol of healing, looks professional, increases the confidence level and they trust the doctor/dentist when they wear white coat.
- This result is in accordance with Al Sareed., *et al.* [20] who also stated that white coat is a symbol of healing.
- The reasons for dislike for white coat included fear of body injury, contamination etc. [21].
- The children who preferred colored scrub listed reasons such as child friendly attire, bright color, attractive, looks simple and not threatening [22].
- Certain children of growing stage stated that doctors who wore scrubs indicated that they were less trained than white coated doctors [20].
- To reduce anxiety pediatric dentist's, require techniques like TSD (Tell Show Do), Voice control, Distraction, during treatment [19].
- A child friendly colorful dental operatory can help [7].
- Cohen (1973) [13] observed no significant difference between dentist in white jacket, shirt and tie, shirt and tie only and clinical gown; and concluded that dental attire has more effect on the dentist themselves than on the patient. However, Mistry and Tahmassebi (2009) [14] found that parents preferred traditional white coat whereas children preferred the

casual attire. Kusc., *et al.* (2009) [15] found that children preferred white coat attire but highlighted the use of child-friendly attire in anxious children [13].

## Clinical Significance

Child friendly appearance of dentist would be more appropriate for children of younger age group and would be considered for children who would be visiting dentist for the first time [5].

The students who participated in this study were few and of female gender only. The preferences of a child regarding "attire" and "clinic environment" may also be influenced by other factors that were not considered in this study such as socioeconomic background, cultural diversity, and their experience with previous dental treatment [16]. Future studies with a larger sample size and participants of different age groups and gender, as well as family and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, can help in better understanding the preferences of children regarding the dentist attire and the color of the dental clinic setting [18].

## Conclusion

The results obtained from the study showed that in contrary to what is believed was most children preferred the dentist to wear a white coat compared to all other attires [4].

Still children with previous negative experiences, systemic disease and dental anxiety preferring casual dress over white coat, suggesting casual dress on part of the practitioner may help to improve cooperation [5].

## Summary

Hence it was seen in this study, mostly children preferred white attire over other attires like surgical scrubs or colorful/flamboyant attires. Still there are some children expressing their interests over colorful attire [21]. Several studies which have been previously investigated concluded male patients preferred male caregivers wearing white coat, whereas female patients preferred female caregivers [23]. There are various factors as discussed above which affects a child's behavior be it previous treatment experience, culture or familial factors affecting anxiety levels of the child [5]. Even assessment of anxiety levels after having proper rapport with the child was reduced with proper attire specially white attire which is the symbol of purity [7].

## Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest.

## Sponsorship and Financial Support

Nil.

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**Volume 6 Issue 9 September 2022**

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