

# Influence of Patients' Perception on Doctors Physical Appearance - Kap Study

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Despite technological advances and changes that the medical fraternity has experienced in the last few decades, the physical appearance of orthodontists influence the patients. Literature report says that the type of clothing and accessories have the potential to influence the patient-doctor relationship.

**Aim:** This study was primarily aimed at investigating patient opinion on the physical appearance, behaviour and overall professionalism of the physician or the doctor treating them.

**Materials and Methodology:** This questionnaire based study was aimed at subjects visiting as outpatients in a private dental set up, who were 18 years or older. Subjects who were not able to read and write were not included in this study. The participants were randomly involved in the study and were provided with a questionnaire formulated with a set of 18 multiple choice based questions. They were asked to choose the more appropriate answer from the options provided.

**Result:** Most of the preferences made by the volunteers showed that physical appearance did not affect the perception of patients. There was no significant gender variation found.

**Conclusion:** Within the limitations of this study, it can be concluded that the physical appearance of a physician or doctor did not affect the patients' perception towards his or her treatment. And there was no gender variation found in terms of patient perception.

**Key Words:** *patient perception, doctor appearance, Doctor's attire, Patient-doctor relationship.*

## Introduction

Despite technological advances and changes that the medical fraternity has experienced in the last few decades, the physical appearance of orthodontists has shown tendencies to influence the patients' perception. Literature says that the type of clothing and accessories

have the potential to influence the patient-doctor relationship.

Many studies have been conducted using various methodological approaches in different countries to appreciate the influence of patient-doctor relationship based on the physical appearance of the physicians or orthodontists. Communication is found to be a vital and complex component of the physician-patient relationship.<sup>(1)</sup> Physicians communicate with patients through verbal and nonverbal messages.<sup>(1)</sup> In general, it has been reported that patients preferred doctors, male or female, with a conservative style, for instance, wearing white coats. Studies demonstrated that a significant portion of the population associated white coat to the image of physicians with professional attitude, better

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prepared and hygienic. <sup>(2-5)</sup> As the trends are changing with time, patients prefer to assess the orthodontists based on their clinical skills and knowledge rather than the physical appearance.

Literature evidence provides many studies on the patient perception around the world but very few among the Asian population. And no studies were found to be done in Chennai city. So, this research focused on the importance of patients' perceptions of their dental care provider based on their physical appearance, attire (dress), behavior, and overall level of professionalism.<sup>(2)</sup>

Hence, the aim of this study was to investigate patient opinion on the physical appearance, behaviour and overall professionalism of the physician or the doctor treating them.

### Materials and Methodology

This questionnaire based study was conducted on 100 male and female patients visiting a private dental college in Chennai. The participants were randomly involved in the study, who were outpatients visiting a private dental set up, to assess their perception towards the physicians physical appearance .

A questionnaire was given with a set 18 questions to the patients wherein they were asked to choose from the options they found more appropriate. Questions asked were like - " Do you prefer your orthodontist to be slim; plump; well-built; doesn't matter. " The items evaluated in both genders were clothing style; piercings; tattoos; dyed hair; extravagant hair color, such as green or red; T-shirt; surgical scrubs; formal wear. <sup>(6)</sup> The items exclusively evaluated for male physicians were beard; moustache; long hair; tie; jeans, and absence of a tie. Items that were evaluated only for female physicians were hairstyle, dressing style.

The identity of the participants was not disclosed and the confidentiality of their identity was assured to them. Prior to the start of the study, Ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Review Board of SIMATS. <sup>(7)</sup> A written informed was obtained from every participant and their personal identity were masked during data processing and analysis. Sufficient amount of 15minutes was provided for filling up the questionnaire. Following this, data was statistically

analyzed. Descriptive statistics using percentage and mean was used to analyse the results.

Inclusion criteria :

Orthodontic Patients above the age of 18 years.

Exclusion criteria :

Patients who were unable to read and write.

### Results

Data collection was carried over a period of two weeks. The collected questionnaires were analyzed for completeness of the answers. 18 questionnaires were discarded due to an excessive number of unanswered questions or due to the errors in the questionnaire. The final analysis was based on 82 questionnaires from patients who were above the age of 18 years.

Most of the preferences made by the volunteers, for both, male and female, showed that the physical appearance did not bother the patients. <sup>(8)</sup> Among the patients, the more frequently chosen option in response to the question of the height of the orthodontist was that it made no significance to them. Statistics showed that 61% of the patients did not bother if their orthodontist was slim, well built or plump.[ Table 1] Only 40% of the total respondents were specific on the height as well as complexion of the orthodontist. 61% of the respondents said it did not matter if the orthodontist was tall or short and 60% said that the complexion of doesn't matter. <sup>(9)</sup> Neither the height nor complexion of the orthodontist did not make a difference to the patient's attitude towards the orthodontist.[Figure 1 and 2] More than 65% of the participants did not bother about the hairstyle of the orthodontist treating them. The hairstyle of the male or female orthodontist also did not affect the patient-orthodontist relationship. [Figure 3]

As the trends are changing with time, it did not matter to the patient if the orthodontist treating them had dyed hair; tattoos; body piercings; wore spectacles or not. <sup>(10)</sup> It was also seen that it did not matter to them if the orthodontist treating them was young aged, middle-aged or old aged. Even the alignment of the teeth of the orthodontist did not make a difference to them.

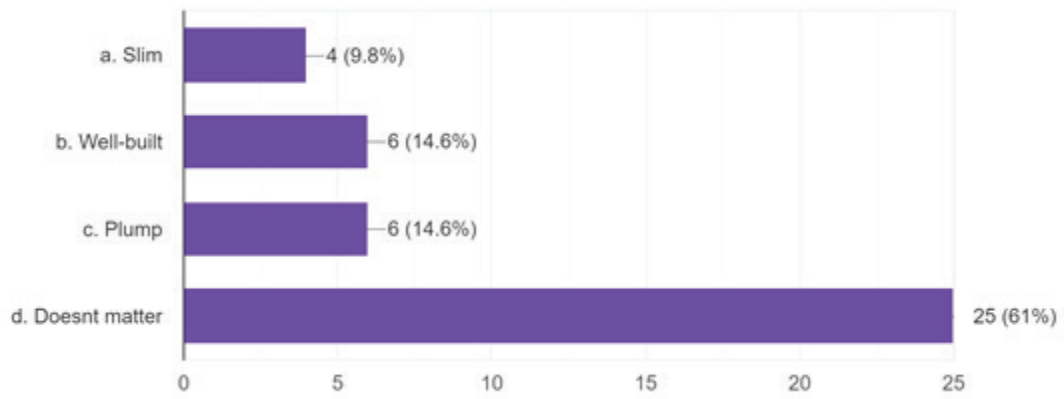


Figure 1: Bar graph showing patient perception on weight of the patient

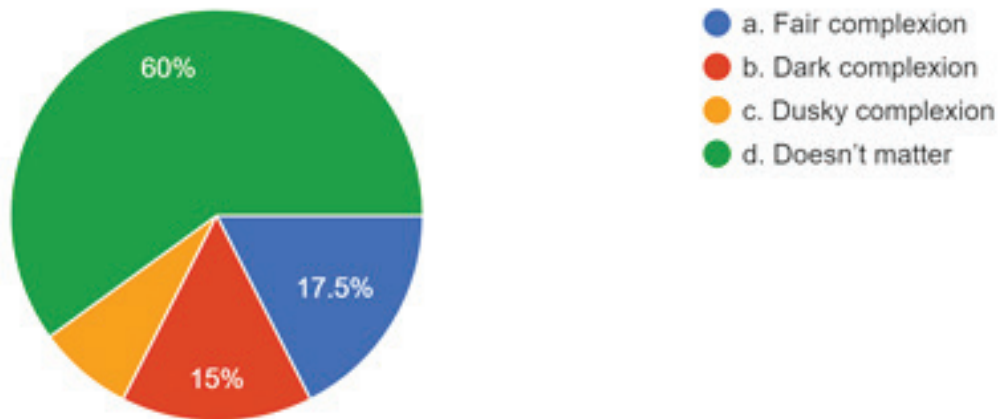


Figure 2: Pie chart showing the patient perception on complexion

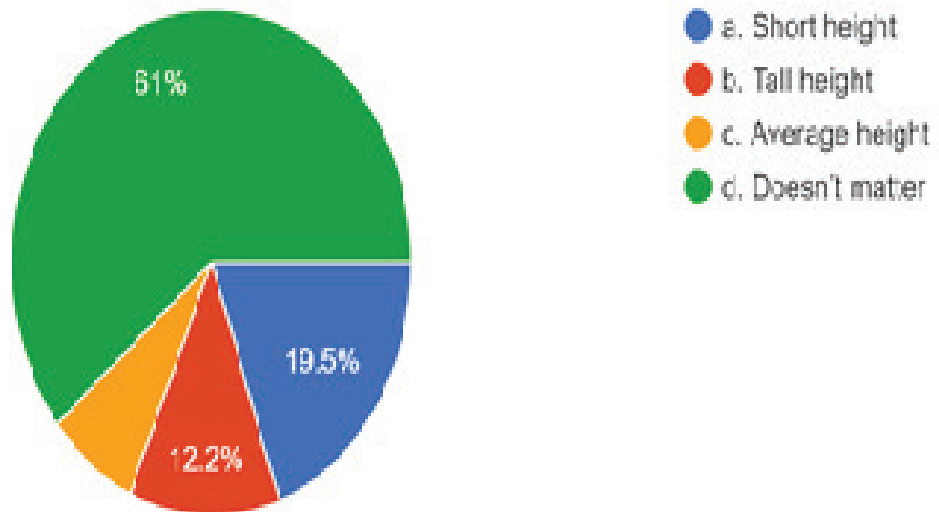


Figure 3: Pie diagram showing patient perception on the orthodontists' height

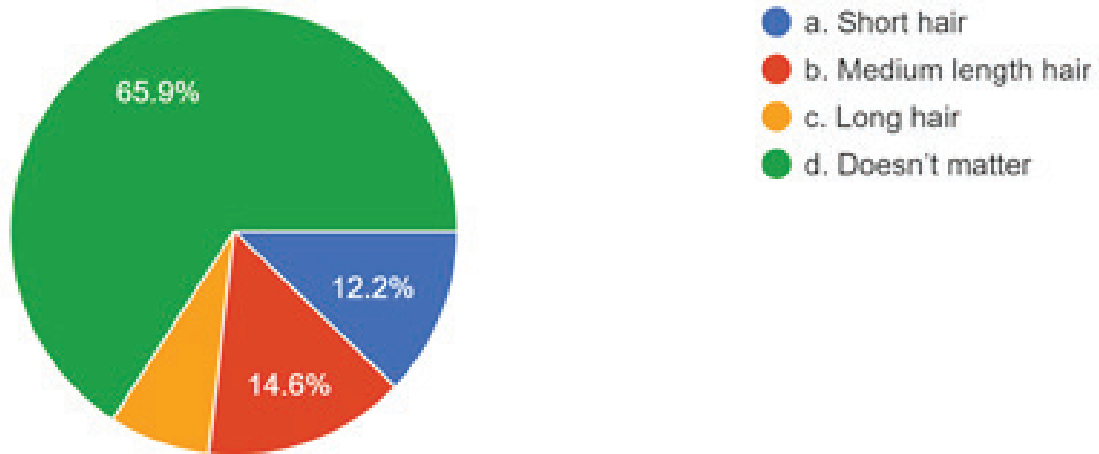


Figure 4: Pie chart describing the patient perception on hairstyle of the orthodontist

Would you prefer your orthodontist (if male) to have

41 responses

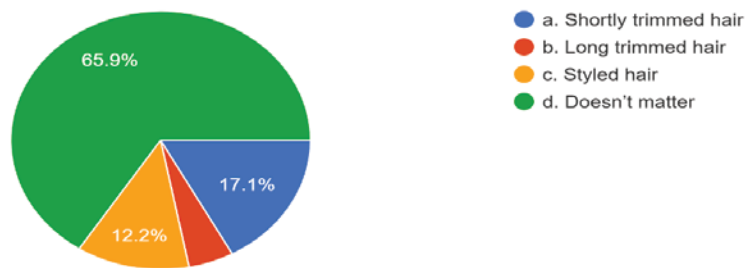


Figure 5 : Pie chart describing the patients' perception on the length of the hair of the female orthodontist

Would you prefer your orthodontist (if male) to have coloured hair

40 responses

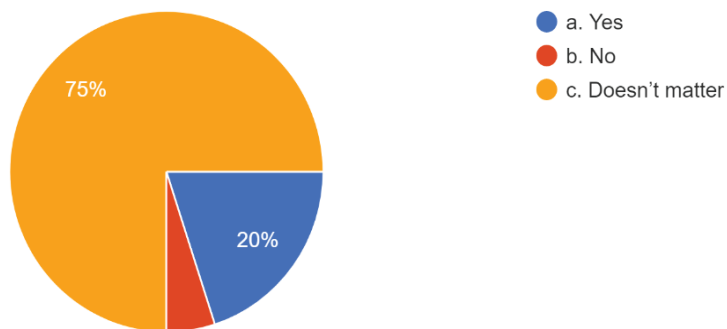


Figure 6: Pie chart representing the patients' perception on the dyed hair of orthodontists

## Discussion

Only questionnaire which were duly filled with all details and those which was returned back were considered valid. The response rate was found to be 82% (N=82) <sup>(11)</sup> The rationale behind this study was to assess the patients' perception towards the physical appearance of the orthodontist treating him or her.

Literature review says that there are several studies conducted in different parts of the world, but none in the Chennai city, to address to aspects related to value judgments on the manner of dress and the physical appearance of the orthodontists. <sup>(12)</sup> The results obtained demonstrated that the patients preferred orthodontists irrespective of their styles of dressing or physical appearance, per se. The groups did not report any level of discomfort with orthodontists presenting with excessively liberal appearance elements. <sup>(13)</sup>

Among the individual styles selected by patients, the option – “did not matter” was frequently selected, both for male and female orthodontists. This finding indicates that such a style of dress should not affect the patient-doctor relationship. <sup>(14)</sup>

This investigation presented a series of limitations, among which is the collection of data from a single dental centre. Accordingly, the opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect other regional realities of the country. Additionally, it is based on the response obtained by literates. <sup>(15)</sup> It is possible that the volunteers would have different opinions in actual situations. <sup>(16)</sup>

## Conclusion

The height of the orthodontist did not influence the patients' perception. Neither the height nor complexion of the orthodontist did not make a difference to the patient's attitude towards the orthodontist. <sup>(17)</sup> As the trends are changing with time, it did not matter to the patient if the orthodontist treating them had dyed hair; tattoos; body piercings; wore spectacles or not. It was also seen that it did not matter to them if the orthodontist treating them was young aged, middle-aged or old aged. Even the alignment of the teeth of the orthodontist did not make a difference to them.

**Ethical Clearance:** Ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Review Board of SIMATS

**Source of Funding:** Self

**Conflict of Interest:** Nil

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