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SURVEY OF PATIENT SATISFACTION WITH THE DENTAL OFFICE ORGANIZATION IN LITHUANIA

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The problem statement. In order to achieve highest quality of dental care, it becomes important to explore patient satisfaction regarding not only dentist work itself but also various aspects of dental office organization including commuting to the dental office, availability of parking, institution's exterior and interior appearance, office lighting and temperature, use of technologies, personnel's dress-code, doctors' working hours and information about the opening hours of institutions.

Objectives. The aim of the present study was to evaluate Lithuanian patients' overall satisfaction with dental services and specifically examine their perceptions about the structure and organization of dental offices, and to examine if these perceptions relate to patients' socio-demographic characteristics and dental care sector type.

Materials and methods. A mailed questionnaire survey was carried out in 2006 with the response rate of 60.0% totaling to 1,801 respondents. The questionnaire comprised answers structured on a 5-point Likert scale. Associations between the organizations of dental institutions, the dental care sector type, and patients' socio-demographic characteristics were evaluated by means of Chi square Test. The impact of office organization on the overall patient satisfaction with dental care was studied by means of the multiple logistic regression analysis.

Results. Patients were most satisfied with personnel's clothing (4.32, 95% CI 4.29-4.35), doctors' working hours (4.22, 95% CI 4.19-4.26), and available information (4.24, 95% CI 4.20-4.27). Other satisfying factors were: the use of modern treatment and diagnostic equipment (4.13, 95% CI 4.09-4.17), room lighting (4.12, 95% CI 4.09-4.17). The least satisfying factors were: commuting to the dental office (4.08, 95% CI 4.05-4.12), appearance of office interior (4.08, 95% CI 4.04-4.12), and exterior (4.03, 95% CI 3.99-4.07), room temperature (4.06, 95% CI 4.02-4.10), and possibilities for car parking (3.70, 95% CI 3.65-3.74). Commuting to the dental office (OR 2.3; 95% CI 1.7-3.0), use of modern treatment and diagnostic equipment (OR 2.2; 95% CI 1.6-2.9), doctors' working hours (OR 1.9; 95% CI 1.3-2.8) and available information (OR 1.7; 95% CI 1.2 – 2.5) had a significant joint impact on the overall satisfaction with dental services. Statistically significant relationships ($p < 0.05$) were observed between the commuting and social factors such as social status ($\chi^2 = 16.66$; $p = 0.0001$), residence ($\chi^2 = 26.99$; $p = 0.0001$) and income ($\chi^2 = 16.46$; $p = 0.0001$). Similarly, a significant relationship was found between other dental office organization related factors, dental sector type and some socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Age and gender were not significantly related to dental office organization related factors.

Conclusions. The overall patient satisfaction with dental office organization related factors was high. Significant relationships were determined between the patients' socio-demographic characteristics, except for age and gender, dental sector type and the satisfaction with the organization of the dental institution. Private sector patients were more likely to be satisfied with dental office organization than public sector patients. Possibly, a rather limited choice of dental offices in rural areas led to statistically significantly lower levels of satisfaction with some of dental office organization factors in these areas.

Commuting to the dental clinic, modern treatment and diagnostic equipment had the most positive impact on the overall satisfaction with dental service. However, the dentists' working hours as well as information about it were less important in terms of the patient satisfaction with the dental care services.

Practical implications and recommendations. The findings of the present study can be valuable information to the existing and future dental care institutions willing to optimize their operation by obtaining and mastering modern technologies, or simply selecting easier accessible locations for their premises. The patient satisfaction with the dental services should be assessed on a regular basis.

Keywords: satisfaction with dental care; office organization factors; patient satisfaction; Lithuania.

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