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Does the First Visit Influence Current Attitudes Towards Dental Interventions?

J. Vulovic¹, T. Peric¹, B. Martinovic², M. Dzankovic²

¹Clinic for Pediatric and Preventive Dentistry, School of Dental Medicine, Belgrade, Clinic for Pediatric and Preventive Dentistry, Serbia, ²Department of Pediatric and Preventive Dentistry,, University of Pristina-Kosovska Mitrovica, Faculty of Medicine,, Pristina-Kosovska Mitrovica, Serbia

Objectives The purpose of the study was to analyse the influence of the first dental visit to patient attitudes towards dental interventions.

Methods The study included 407 respondents who filled in the modified "Children's dental fear" questionnaire. Four age groups were included: 15-20, 20-25, 25-30, and 30-40 year olds. Questions were related to experiences during the first dental visit in the childhood, and current attitudes towards dental interventions. The answers were scored from 1 (not afraid at all) to 5 (very afraid). The statistical analysis was done using the chi-square test.

Results Age distribution: 15-20: 18%; 20-25: 57%; 25-30: 12%; 30-40: 13%. The presence of fear (24%) in the adulthood is associated with an unpleasant experience (32%) during the first visit to the dentist ($p < 0.05$). Routine dental examination was the reason for the first visit for 55% of respondents, while 45% attributed it to pain. The cause of the visit did not influence development of dental fear. Rotary instruments were the main cause of fear at early age for 66% of respondents, and 60% stated that fear was still present. During their initial visit, 56% and 40% found sounds and smells in the dental office unpleasant, a feeling reflected by 49% and 33% of respondents respectively to this day. Forty-two percent of respondents said that going to the dentist on a regular basis helped to overcome the fear.

Conclusions The experience at the first dental visit might have a great impact on future behaviour in the dental office.