



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Orthodontist dressing: Its impact on patient perception and cooperation

Sylvia Simon Etim * and Joycelyn Odegua Eigbobo

Department of Orthodontics and Paediatric Dentistry, Faculty of Dentistry, College of Health Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 24(01), 1221-1226

Publication history: Received on 28 August 2024; revised on 06 October 2024; accepted on 09 October 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.1.3079>

Abstract

Background and Aim: Communication skills, including non-verbal cues such as attire, play a significant role in patient perceptions of healthcare professionals. An orthodontist's attire may influence patient cooperation during treatment. This study aims to investigate Nigerian orthodontic patients' perception regarding their orthodontists' dressing and its impact on patient cooperation.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted among orthodontic patients at the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital in Nigeria. A structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire with 34 items was used to gather data from 131 participants. The questionnaire covered socio-demographic characteristics, understanding of the orthodontist's role, and preferences for the orthodontist's attire. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 26, with significance set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Results: The study included 131 patients (82 females and 49 males), with a mean age of 19.2 ± 9.43 years. Most participants (88.6%) liked how their orthodontists dressed, with 50.4% stating that their orthodontists wore traditional white coats and 42.7% indicating that their orthodontists wore scrubs. When asked about the significance of the orthodontist's dressing, 46.6% indicated that it mattered to them, while the majority stated that it did not affect their cooperation or review appointments.

Conclusion: The study reveals that while orthodontic patients have preferences for their orthodontists' appearance, it does not significantly affect their cooperation or review attendance. These findings suggest that while maintaining a professional appearance is important, it may not be a determining factor in patient compliance.

Keywords: Communication; Orthodontist Dressing; Patient Cooperation; Perception

1. Introduction

The way an individual dresses conveys information about their personality, values, status, and profession. In the healthcare setting, an orthodontist's attire is a non-verbal form of communication that can influence patients' perceptions and trust. Orthodontists, being specialists in managing malocclusion, often work with children and adolescents, though adult patients seeking aesthetic treatment are becoming more common.

Orthodontist attire can impact the patient-provider relationship, potentially influencing patient cooperation, willingness to attend appointments, and adherence to treatment plans. Studies have shown that professional appearance, including controlled hairstyles, name tags, and attire, can build rapport [1, 2]. To enhance trust between patients and healthcare providers, there is a need for cordial and effective communication [3, 4]. This is important since impressions are formed within a short period of contact between the patient, and the doctor even before words are

* Corresponding author: Sylvia Simon Etim

spoken. (5) Coloured attire has been encouraged to make the clinic environment comfortable for children to reduce the anxiety experienced with the traditional white coat [6, 7]. Parents of children undergoing Orthodontic treatment tend to be interested in the appearance and the attire of their children's Orthodontists [8]. Parents had previously been found to have a positive preference for Orthodontic providers who wear formal attire or scrubs, with controlled hair, and display their name tags, [8] as was also seen in a previous Nigerian study [9]. Facial jewelry, visible tattoos, non-traditional hairstyles, and facial hair on men were found to reduce a patient's confidence in his or her managing physician [10].

Despite global research on patient preferences regarding dental professional attire [3, 5, 11], and within Nigeria [12, 13, 14], there is limited data on Nigerian orthodontic patients' perceptions. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of Nigerian orthodontic patients regarding their orthodontists' attire and its impact on patient cooperation.

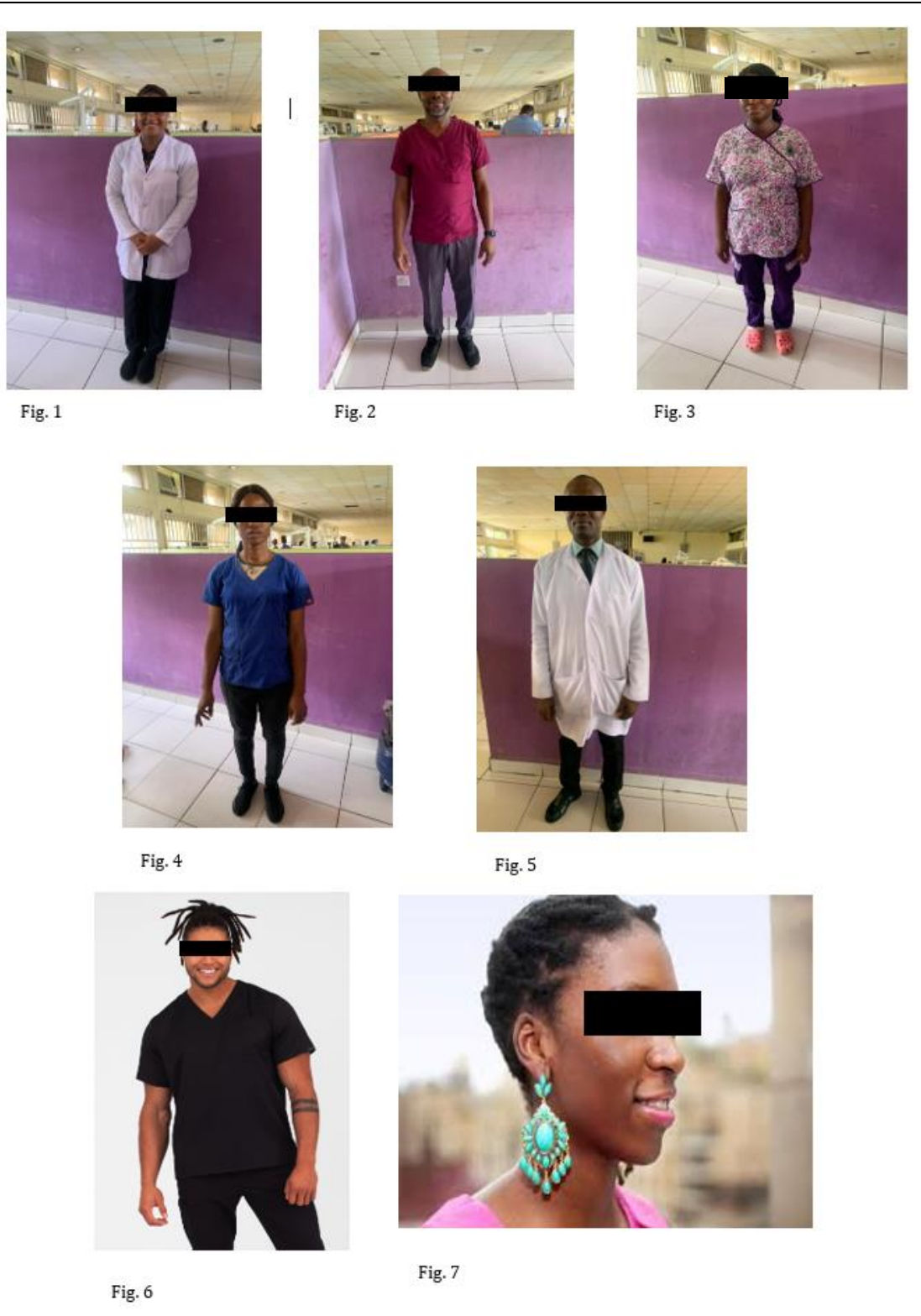
2. Material and Methods

This cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted among orthodontic patients receiving treatment at the Orthodontic Clinic of the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, South-South Nigeria. Inclusion criteria included patients whose parents provided consent and who themselves agreed to participate in the study.

2.1. Study instrument

The study utilized an interviewer-administered questionnaire consisting of 34 items, divided into three sections:

- **Section A:** Socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender).
- **Section B:** Knowledge of the dentist and orthodontist roles.
- **Section C:** Preferences for the orthodontist's gender and attire, and the potential influence of attire on appointment adherence. This section included standard photographs of orthodontists in various attire for participant preference assessment with their consent.



Figures 1 Standard photographs in various attire

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were entered and analyzed using IBM SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to generate frequency tables and proportions. Chi-square tests were employed to determine the significance of relationships, with p-values ≤ 0.05 considered statistically significant.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics and Research Committee of the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital. Informed consent from parents, and adult patients, and assent from children were duly obtained from the study participants.

3. Results

A total of 131 patients participated, comprising 82 females (62.6%) and 49 males (37.4%), with a mean age of 19.2 ± 9.43 years (range: 7-58 years). The majority (98.5%) had previous dental visits and were aware of who an orthodontist was.

Table 1 Gender Preference of Orthodontists

Gender Preference	Female (n=82)	Male (n=49)	Total (n=131)	Chi-square p-value
No preference	37 (56.1%)	37 (56.1%)	74 (56.5%)	0.335
Female	24 (29.3%)	13 (26.5%)	37 (28.2%)	
Male	13 (15.9%)	7 (14.3%)	20 (15.3%)	

3.1. Gender Preference

Most participants had no gender preference for their orthodontist (56.5%). Among those with a preference, 28.2% preferred female orthodontists, while 15.3% preferred males.

Table 2 Orthodontist Dressing and Participant Preferences

Attire	Female (n=82)	Male (n=49)	Total (n=131)	Chi-square p-value
White coat	40 (48.8%)	26 (53.1%)	66 (50.4%)	0.318
Scrubs	28 (34.1%)	18 (36.7%)	56 (42.7%)	
No coat	3 (3.7%)	3 (6.1%)	6 (4.6%)	
Not bothered	10 (12.2%)	3 (6.1%)	13 (9.9%)	

3.2. Orthodontist Appearance

- **Name Tag Usage:** 53.4% reported that their orthodontists used name tags, while 42.7% did not notice.
- **Attire:** 50.4% stated that their orthodontists wore traditional white coats, and 42.7% said theirs wore scrubs. Notably, 53.7% preferred the white coat, with a higher preference among the 10-19 and 20-29 age groups. (Table 2)
- **Hair Appearance:** The majority preferred female orthodontists with tied-up hair (74.4%) and male orthodontists without dreadlocks (58.5%).
- **General Preferences:** Patients preferred orthodontists with minimal jewelry and a pleasant scent.

Table 3 Impact of Orthodontist Dressing on Patient Cooperation

Impact on Cooperation	Female (n=82)	Male (n=49)	Total (n=131)	Chi-square p-value
Matters	38 (46.3%)	25 (51.0%)	63 (48.1%)	0.504
Does not matter	36 (43.9%)	21 (42.9%)	57 (43.5%)	
Not bothered	8 (9.8%)	3 (6.1%)	11 (8.4%)	

3.3. Impact on Cooperation

While 46.3% indicated that orthodontist dressing mattered, most participants (84.1% of females and 79.6% of males) stated that it did not affect their cooperation or review appointments.

4. Discussion

This study highlights the importance of an orthodontist's appearance in shaping patient perceptions. While most patients have a preference for certain attire and grooming standards, these factors do not appear to influence cooperation or adherence to review appointments significantly. This aligns with previous studies that suggest professional appearance contributes to patient comfort and trust but is not the sole determinant of compliance [3, 4].

Interestingly, the preference for the traditional white coat persists among younger patients, similar to Nigerian findings [12, 13] and other studies [11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20] but contrary to some studies [21, 22] suggesting children are more attracted to colorful attire. This may reflect cultural perceptions of professionalism associated with the white coat in Nigerian society. The contrary presentation seen previously could be from the fact that parents were involved in those studies [21, 22] and will prefer coloured attire since their perception is that of colours serving as motivation for their children to desire attendance for treatment.

The female preponderance for white coats found in the present study was contrary to a previous report [22] where studied female participants preferred coloured attire. Grooming standard expectations for doctors have influenced the females who participated in this study as many preferred their female Orthodontist to have pinned/ well-packed hair and the male orthodontist not have dreadlocks, or afro on their hair, and this corroborated previous studies [8, 23]. Female orthodontist appearing in big earrings was not welcomed by female participants compared to their male counterparts even though all desired the wearing of perfume with the main reason being that they love good scents around them while being treated as confirmed by a previous study [24]. However, this gender difference was not statistically significant.

The lack of significant impact of orthodontist's attire on patient cooperation suggests that while professional attire is important, the orthodontist's communication skills, treatment quality, and rapport-building play a more crucial role in patient adherence.

4.1. Limitations

This study is limited by its cross-sectional design and the potential for response bias, as it relies on self-reported data. Further research with a larger sample size and a more diverse population is recommended to validate these findings.

5. Conclusion

Orthodontic patients prefer well-groomed and professionally dressed orthodontists, with a tendency toward the traditional white coat. However, these preferences do not significantly impact patient cooperation or adherence to review appointments. Orthodontists should maintain a professional appearance while focusing on effective communication and treatment quality to enhance patient care.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this research work.

Statement of ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics and Research Committee of the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria with reference number UPTH/ADM/90/S.II/VOL.XI/650

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was duly obtained from adults and assent from children participants who were included in the study.

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