



Assessing Dental Patients' Acceptance and Trust of Dentists in COVID-19-related Services: A Cross- Sectional Study.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the healthcare systems across the globe faced extraordinary demands due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. ⁽¹⁻⁵⁾ This pandemic challenged oral healthcare providers to establish their role within the healthcare community and their own communities. Dentists can be a valuable resource among medical professionals during emergencies or national crises. ⁽⁶⁻⁷⁾ Dental students demonstrated readiness regarding most attributes and professional abilities during the pandemic. ⁽⁸⁾ Considering the clinical skills of dentists, they can support the disaster workforce in several ways. Dentists' skills can be of great support by providing information on SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19 testing, and vaccinations. As the pandemic persists, integrating dentists into public health communication, testing, and vaccination efforts could prove valuable.

PURPOSE

This study aims to determine the acceptance and trust of dental patients towards dentists conducting testing, vaccinations, or providing information regarding SARS-CoV-2. Also, the study will assess for differences in the level of acceptance and trust among patients of different races, ethnicities, ages, and insurance types.

MATERIALS & METHODS:

This cross-sectional study was conducted at the University of Florida College of Dentistry clinics. The consecutive patients visiting the clinics were recruited through a voluntary participation approach to fill a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to be an anonymous, self-reported, structured document with twelve questions . The inclusion criteria for this study involve patients who are 18 years of age or older and have the ability to read and understand English. No specific exclusion criteria have been set for the study.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

A total of 151 participants completed the questionnaire. Of these, 37.2% were males and 62.8% were females, the latter representing the majority. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 89 years, with a mean age of 55.1 years and a standard deviation of 19.1 years.

In terms of ethnicity, 12.1% of the participants identified as Hispanic, with the remaining 87.9% not identifying as such. Racially, 76.9% reported as White, 17% as Black, 5.4% as Asian, and 0.7% as Native American. Regarding medical payment coverage, 31.3% were under Medicare, 17.9% had Medicaid, 23.1% were insured privately, and 27.6% were self-pay.

Overall, the findings suggest that a significant proportion of dental patients display trust and acceptance towards dentists offering COVID-19 related services. Many patients are comfortable with dentists addressing various aspects of the pandemic, ranging from testing to discussing the disease's intricacies, emphasizing the expanded role dental professionals might play in pandemic response. However, a notable 48.64% of respondents expressed discomfort with the idea of receiving a COVID-19 vaccination from a dentist, indicating considerable reservations among the surveyed individuals about this specific role for dental professionals. Figure 1.

For test acceptance, the *logistic regression model* found age, sex, to be significant predictors. Older patients were more likely to be comfortable with dentists conducting COVID-19 services compared to younger patients. Females were more accepting than males. Hispanic ethnicity and race were not significant predictors in any of the models, indicating no major differences in acceptance or trust by these demographic factors.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a considerable degree of trust and acceptance among dental patients regarding dentists' involvement in various COVID-19 related services. The findings underscore the potential for dentists to play a more integrated role in pandemic responses, although certain roles, like vaccination, may necessitate further patient education and reassurance.

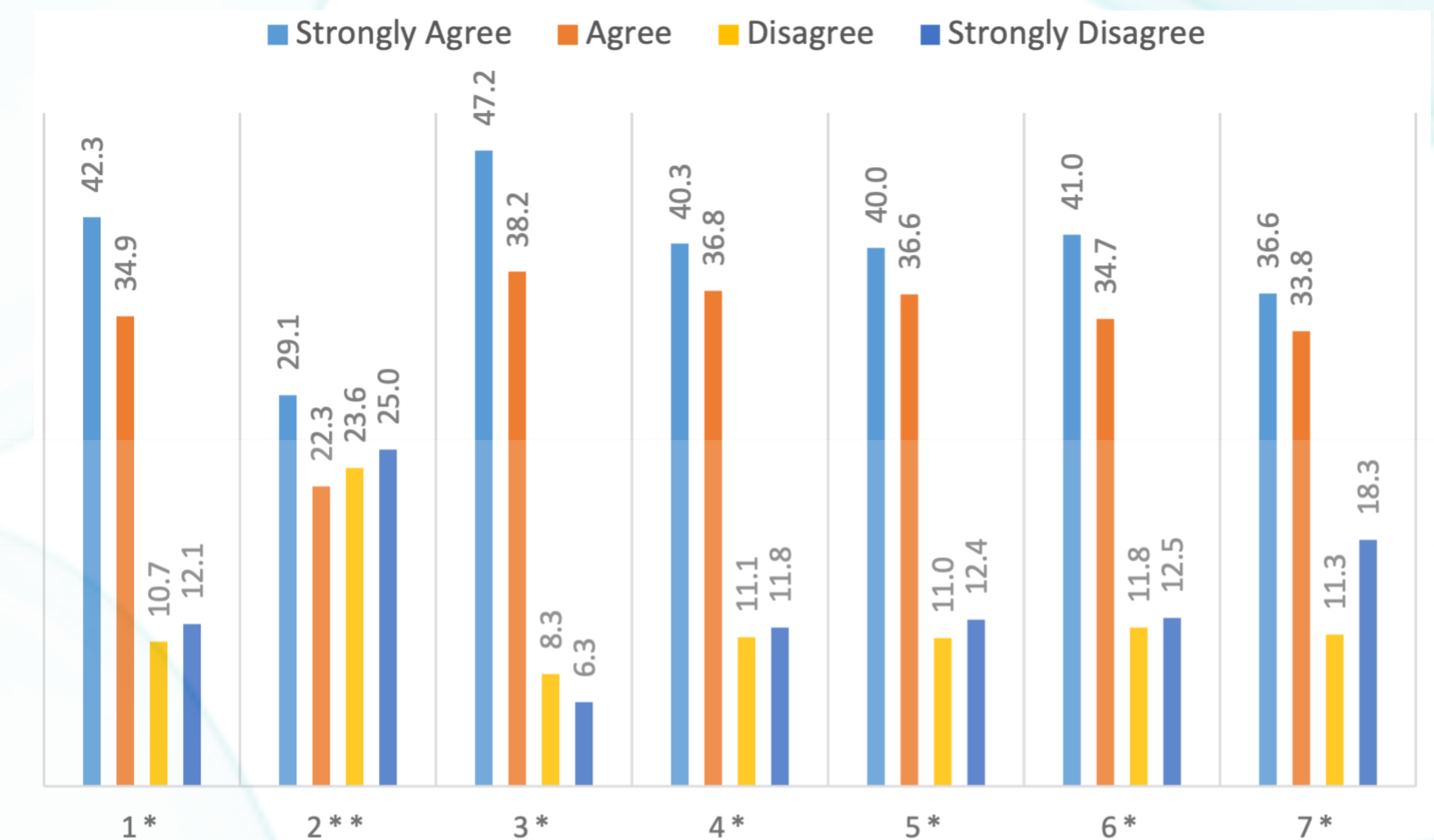


Figure 1 illustrates the percentage distribution of responses for each question, analyzed using the *Chi-Square Test*.

1. I would be comfortable having a COVID-19 test by a dentist.
2. I would be comfortable being vaccinated for the COVID virus by a dentist.
3. I would trust my dentist to discuss "facemasking" issues with me.
4. I would trust my dentist to discuss the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
5. I would trust my dentist to discuss COVID-19 disease.
6. I would trust my dentist to discuss testing for COVID-19.
7. I would trust my dentist to discuss vaccination to prevent COVID-19.

* *Chi-Square Test*: P=0.009

** *Chi-Square Test*: P=0.679

REFERENCES

