

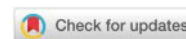
AGE-RELATED DIFFERENCES IN THE SELECTION AND EVALUATION OF DENTAL CARE

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Abstract: Dental care is a multifactorial process that is determined by the individual characteristics of the patient, the professional qualities of the dentist and his team, the accessibility of the dental clinic, the patient's previous experience and awareness of dental treatment. As part of the demographic characteristics of patients, age is an important factor when choosing a dentist. In the scientific literature, the authors study the relationship between the age of patients and the way they search for dental specific information, with the criteria that they consider important when making their choice of a dentist - recommendations from relatives and acquaintances, good reviews on social networks and the Internet, the location of the dental practice near the patient's home, random selection of a dentist and clinic, preference for visiting the same dentist for years. The demographic factor - patient's age also has an impact on assessing the quality of dental care provided. In recent decades, there has been a rapid development of new tendencies in the management and assessment of the quality of dental services worldwide. The aim of this scientific study is to investigate the influence of patients' age as a factor influencing the choice of a dentist and clinic for dental treatment, and the subsequent assessment of the quality of the dental care provided. A cross-sectional study was conducted between September 2025 and May 2026. 529 patients from different ages participated in the scientific study, with the youngest patient participating in the study being 18 years old and the oldest 89. The average age of the patients participating in the study is 53 years old. For the purposes of the study, the patients filled out a questionnaire. The questionnaire provided for patients to fill out is anonymous, and participation in the scientific study is voluntary. The information from the questionnaire was used and presented only in summary form. The data from the scientific study was processed using the SPSS v.31.0 statistical software. The results of the scientific study show that younger patients more often choose a dentist through reviews from social networks, which are the main source of information for them. For older patients, the first choice is the dental office closest to home. The location of the dental clinic and its team gains importance due to differences in patient mobility, transport accessibility and the need for more frequent visits. 30.6% of all patients participating in the study choose the dentist they want to visit through a recommendation from acquaintances and friends. In the scientific literature, personal recommendation is considered a form of social trust, where the decision is based on the real experience of family members, friends and acquaintances. The analysis of the age of patients in relation to the individual criteria for choosing a dentist can help to better adapt dental services to the needs and preferences by patients' different age groups.

Keywords: patient age, dental care quality, dental care utilization, patient preferences

Field: Medical Sciences and Health

1. INTRODUCTION

Dental care is a multifactorial process that is determined by the individual characteristics of the patient, the professional qualities of the dentist and his team, the accessibility of the dental clinic, the patient's previous experience and awareness of dental treatment. (Crocker et al., 2024) As part of the demographic characteristics of patients, age is an important factor when choosing a dentist. In the scientific literature, the authors study the relationship between the age of patients and the way they search for dental specific information, with the criteria that they consider important when making their choice of a dentist - recommendations from relatives and acquaintances, good reviews on social networks and the Internet, the location of the dental practice near the patient's home, random selection of a dentist and clinic, preference for visiting the same dentist for years. (Reda et al., 2018) The demographic factor - patient's age also has an impact on assessing the quality of dental care provided. In recent decades, there has been a rapid development of new tendencies in the management and assessment of the quality of dental services worldwide. Since ancient times, products and services have been evaluated based on their quality. This is evidenced by the works of the ancient Greek scientist and philosopher Aristotle. (Jonkisz et al., 2021)

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the dental care provided.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

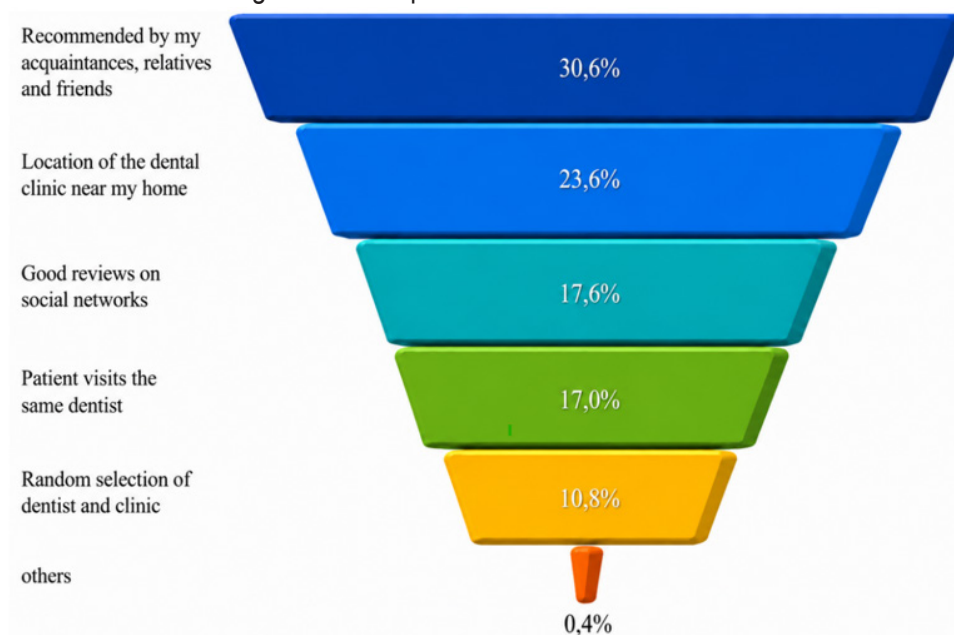
A cross-sectional study was conducted between September 2025 and May 2026. Written permission was obtained from KENI before the start of the research. For the purposes of the research, patients completed a questionnaire including fourteen socio-demographic questions, thirty-three questions related to the assessment of the quality of the dental services provided, six questions related to the assessment of patient satisfaction, five questions regarding patient trust, and six questions assessing patient loyalty to the clinic, the dentist, and his team. The questionnaire provided for patients to fill out is anonymous, and participation in the scientific study is voluntary. The information from the questionnaire was used and presented only in summary form. The data from the scientific study was processed using the SPSS v.31.0 statistical software.

3. RESULTS

529 patients from different ages participated in the scientific study, with the youngest patient participating in the study being 18 years old and the oldest 89. The average age of the patients participating in the study is 53 years old.

The choice of a dentist is determined most by recommendations from acquaintances, followed by the location of the dental office and in third place are reviews from social networks. (Fig.1)

Fig 1. Patients' preference based on various factors

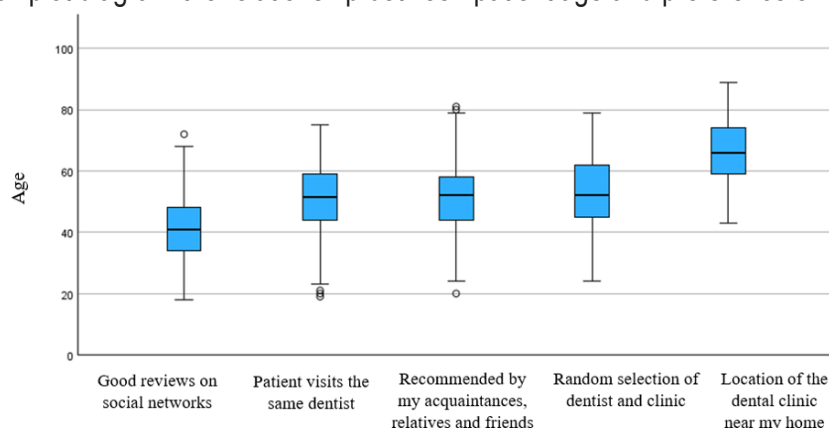


Source: Authors' research

To the question from the survey "When you need dental care, how do you choose the dentist to visit?" 162 (30.6%) patients answered that they choose a dentist who was recommended to them by acquaintances and friends. For 125 (23.6%) respondents out of all those who took part, the location of the dental clinic near home is an important factor in choosing a dentist and clinic. 17.6% of all those participating in the scientific study choose a dentist who has good reviews on social networks and the Internet from other patients. 90 (17.0%) patients indicated that they visit the same dentist for many years. Only 10.8% of all patients indicated that they make a random choice of dentist and clinic to visit.

In recent decades, the reason for choosing a dentist and the relationship with the socio-demographic factor age have been of interest. Since only two respondents, which is less than half of all respondents, answered that their choice was dictated by another unspecified reason, these other reasons will not be considered in the analysis. The relationship between age and the reason for choosing a dentist can be presented by a box plot diagram. (Fig.2)

Fig 2. Box plot diagram-the relationship between patient age and preference of clinic and dentist



Source: Authors' research

The results of the scientific study show that younger patients more often choose a dentist through reviews from social networks, which are the main source of information for them. Young patients pay more attention to the online reputation of the clinic and dentists, look at photos of clinical cases “before-after”, reviews and the digital presence of the dentist. Young patients do not have long-term contact with a dentist and this is also one of the reasons for looking for information online. The box plot diagram shows that patients around 50 years of age responded that they visit the same dentist because they have already built trust in a specific doctor and clinic, have a positive personal experience, prefer continuity in treatment or have a more complex dental history, which makes changing doctors less desirable for them. For older patients, the first choice is the dental office closest to home. The location of the dental clinic and its team gains importance due to differences in patient mobility, transport accessibility and the need for more frequent visits.

4. DISCUSSIONS

In their scientific studies, the authors found age-related differences in the criteria for choosing a dentist and clinic. The results of the study by Tâncu et al. (2019) show that age can be considered a significant factor related to the different prioritization of the characteristics of dental services when making a decision to choose a dental practice. The results of our study confirm the conclusions of the scientific study by Tâncu et al. (2019) that the choice of a dentist is influenced by the location of the dental clinic, the reputation of the dentist and the socio-demographic characteristics of the patient.

Similar to the research of Nitschke, I., Ulbrich, T. et al. (2022), in which the authors found that personal recommendation is the most important way in which patients learn about and choose a dentist, the results of our study show that the majority 30.6% of all patients participating in the study choose the dentist they want to visit through a recommendation from acquaintances and friends. In the scientific literature, personal recommendation is considered a form of social trust, where the decision is based on the real experience of family members, friends and acquaintances. (Jung et al., 2018) In their scientific work Nitschke, I., von Chlingensperg, R. et al. (2022), describe that for younger patients, online reviews and the presence of dentists in social networks and the Internet are becoming increasingly important when choosing a clinic and dental care provider. Similar results are reported in the studies of Al-Khalifa (2024), Gušić et al. (2024) and Freire et al. (2023). These studies confirm that good online reviews and recommendations have a greater relative weight in the choice of clinic and dentist by younger patients.

Nyyssönen et al. (1984) studied continuity of dental visits. The authors found age differences in the frequency of changing dentists and clinics – younger patients changed their dentists more often than older patients.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the age of patients in relation to the individual criteria for choosing a dentist can help to better adapt dental services to the needs and preferences by patients' different age groups. From the research conducted, the selection criteria and the results of the scientific study show a strong relationship with the patient's age factor. Patient selection reflects generational differences in the way they seek and evaluate health information.

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