

Background

- The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry's recommendation is that a child should visit the dentist at the time of eruption of their first tooth and no later than 12 months of age¹.
- This first dental visit establishes a dental home and provides a foundation upon which a lifetime of dental education, prevention and oral health care can be built¹.
- The global estimated prevalence of dental anxiety among adults is about 15%⁹.
- While there is previous evidence that supports the relationship between parental dental anxiety and children's dental fear³, there is a lack of existing research on whether parental dental anxiety affects when their child's first dental visit takes place.
- Children whose parents avoid bringing them to their scheduled dental appointments, because of their own dental fear, have an increased risk for dental decay⁷.

➤ *The purpose of this study was to explore whether parental dental fear and anxiety resulted in a delay of their child's first dental appointment.*

Methods

Study population:

- Parents and guardians who visited the Boston University Pediatric Dental Clinic and Franciscan Children's Pediatric Dental Clinic with their children ages 6 and under between the dates of June 2023 and March 2024 were invited to participate in a voluntary and anonymous cross-sectional survey.

Data collection and analysis:

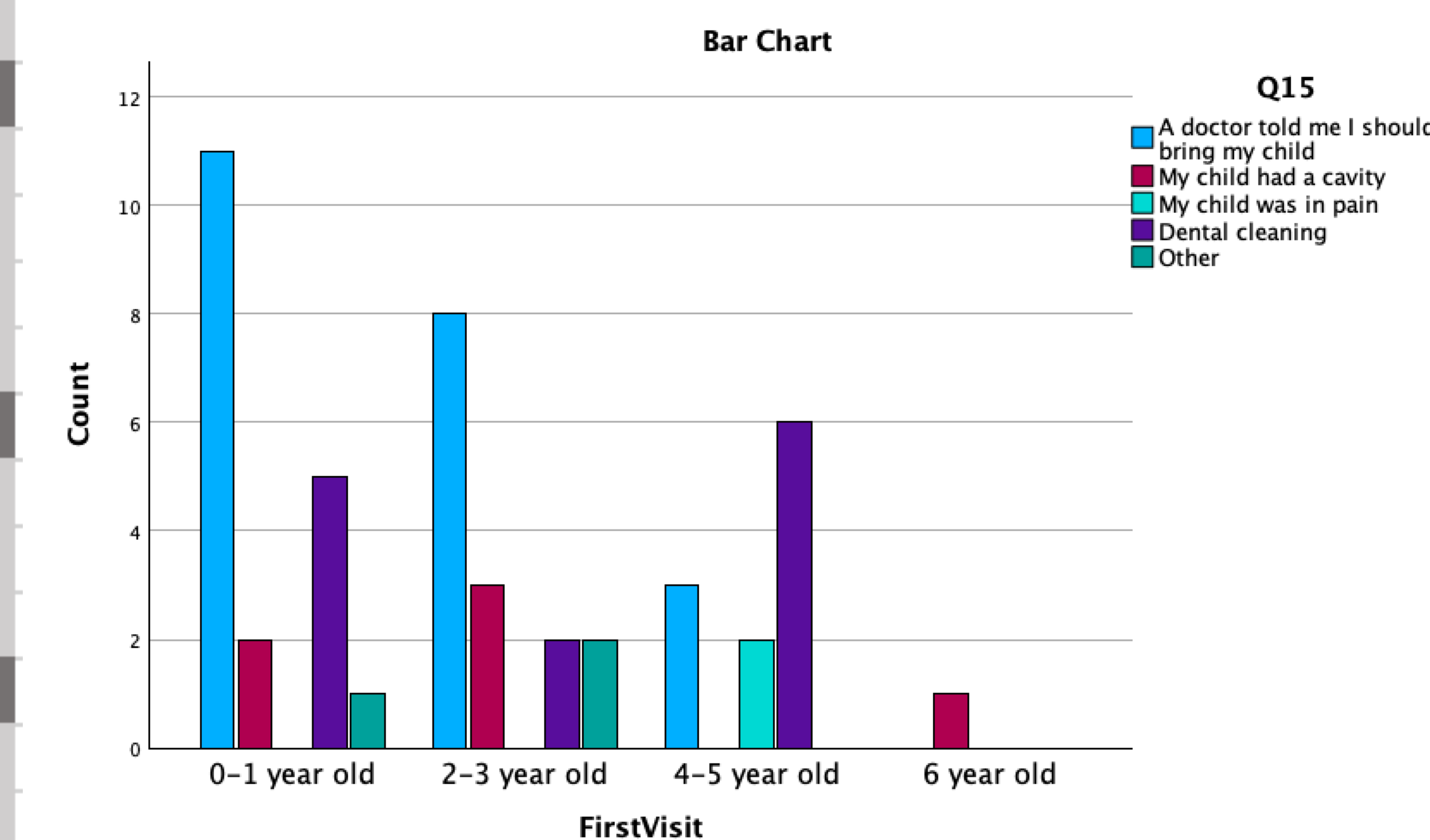
- The survey was 23 questions and available in English only
- A total of 46 surveys were completed and included in the study.
- The survey utilized 5 questions from the Modified Dental Anxiety Scale (MDAS)⁵. Each question is scored from 1 to 5, for a total score range of 5 to 25. Scores of 14 and under indicate minimally dentally anxious and scores 15 and above indicate moderately to highly dentally anxious.
- Additional questions recorded parent's demographics, how the old child was, when their child's first dental appointment took place, what the appointment was for, if they encountered any difficulties for their first dental appointment, and if the child was anxious for their first dental appointment.
- Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS. Significance testing was assessed using Chi Square test.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Sample (n=46)

Parent Age	% (N) or mean	Child Age	
19 and under	10.9 (5)	0-1 year old	6.5 (3)
20-30	34.8 (16)	2-3 year old	32.6 (15)
31-40	34.8 (16)	4-5 year old	26.1 (12)
41-50	17.4 (8)	6 year old	34.7 (16)
older than 50	0		
Parent Race		Age of first visit	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0-1 year old	41.3 (19)
Black or African American	54.3 (25)	2-3 year old	32.6 (15)
Asian	10.9 (5)	4-5 year old	23.9 (11)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	6 year old	2.2 (1)
White	21.7 (10)	Insurance Status	
Other	13 (6)	Mass Health	82.6 (38)
Parent Ethnicity		Private insurance	6.5 (3)
Hispanic	28.3 (13)	Other	10.9 (5)
Non-Hispanic	60.9 (28)	Parent MDAS Score	
Did Not Respond	10.9 (5)	Minimally Dentally anxious	91.3 (42)
Parent Gender		Moderately to Highly dentally anxio:	8.7 (4)
Male	32.6 (15)		
Female	67.4 (31)		

Figure 1: Age of first Visit and Reason for Visit



- Of the 46 parents who participated in the study, the mean Modified Dental Anxiety Scale (MDAS)⁵ score was 8.8 (minimally dentally anxious) with a standard deviation of 3.68
- 6.5% of participants admitted the delay of their child's first dental visit was due to their own dental fear
- 4.3% of participants admitted the delay of their child's first dental visit was due to their child's own dental fear
- 19.6% of parents admitted to having dental fear
- Insurance type was not associated with age of first dental visit
- 47.8% of parents was told by a pediatrician to bring their child for their first dental visit
- Parents might be unaware that they may experience dental fear and phobia, more research and support is needed in this area of study

Discussion

- There are many factors that may be more strongly correlated with the age of a child's first dental appointment besides parental dental anxiety. These include socioeconomic status, medical history and access to care. Increased research is needed to understand the multifactorial causes of delayed first dental visits
- Dentists should educate parents on the benefits of early dental visits to prevent emergency dental conditions

References



Please scan for references