

Qualitative Study of Parental Preferences in Difficult Child Behavior Scenarios

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Introduction

In pediatric dentistry, parents often face challenging scenarios and are required to consider multiple factors in making treatment decisions for their child. When a child is cooperative and the dentist can provide a durable, esthetic restoration, parents' choice of treatment is relatively simple. However, when advanced behavior guidance techniques are required, factors that parents value most are unknown. In the era of "shared decision making", pediatric dentists benefit from learning about the parental decision-making process [1]. The purpose of this study was to determine patient decision factors in order to develop a follow-up discrete choice experiment. This type of experiment is used to elicit preferences without asking directly for those preferences from participants. Patients state preferences based upon hypothetical scenarios that contain multiple variables, or attributes. The extent to which these individual attributes vary may be referred to as levels [2]. Attributes, that have been studied in the literature include restorative materials and durability [3-5], cost of treatment [3,6,7], esthetics [3,5,8-11], and risks and benefits of behavioral techniques [7,12,13]. However, these qualitative studies often study these as independent factors or a pair of variables. Few qualitative studies examine complex treatment planning factors concurrently. Other factors may influence the decision-making process: parental socioeconomic status, confidence in the dental provider, previous dental experiences of the patient and parent [14], parental presence or absence, and established fear or anxiety. Few attributes have been assigned levels, meaningful cut-off points at which different

choices might be preferred. For example, cost may determine the amount a parent will pay for an esthetic restoration before a less esthetic option is preferable. The purpose of this qualitative study is two-fold:

- a) Exploration and description of various aspects of treatment and child behavior that influence parents to choose one treatment modality over another: and
- b) Identify attributes and levels parents use to make treatment decisions. A qualitative study design allows participants to independently define attributes and levels considered during the shared decision-making process, rather than providing a set of pre-determined choices as in a typical discrete choice experiment [2].

Materials and Methods

Participants were recruited from three private pediatric dental practices and the University of Tennessee Health Science Center Graduate Pediatric Dentistry Clinic, Memphis, TN. Participants included legal guardians who spoke English and accompanied the child to the appointment. The study was approved by the IRB Review Committee (18-06173-XP), and consent was obtained from each participant. A forty-four open-ended question oral interview survey instrument was used. It consisted of queries regarding various dental treatment options. Sociodemographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, insurance type, education level, and income was collected (Table 1). Participants were asked how