

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**ASSOCIATION BETWEEN
PARENTING STYLES AND
CHILDREN'S DENTAL ANXIETY:
INSIGHTS FROM THE
MALAYSIAN CONTEXT**

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ABSTRACT

Parenting styles have significant influence on child behaviour development, including their response to dental visits. Existing literatures have identified an association between parenting styles and children's dental anxiety; however, no studies have explored this relationship within a Malaysian context. Given the cultural and societal variations in parenting practices, further investigation is needed to identify the parenting styles practiced among Malaysian parents and their correlation with children's dental anxiety. This study aims to investigate the correlation between parenting styles of Malaysian parents and their children's dental anxiety. It involved the translation of the Parenting Styles and Dimension Questionnaire (PSDQ) to use in the Malaysian context. The translated questionnaire underwent content validation by six experts and face validation among 30 adult participants to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness. A validated Malay version of the PSDQ was then used to assess parenting styles, while children's dental anxiety was measured using the Modified Child Dental Anxiety Scale (MCDAS_f). A total of 239 child-parent pairs attending the Pediatric Dental Clinic at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and the University Malaya (UM) were recruited using consecutive sampling method. Children aged between 5 to 12 years old were included, while those with cognitive impairments were excluded. Data collection was conducted from September 2023 to June 2024. Parents were required to complete the sociodemographic data and PSDQ instrument. The investigator distributed and guided the children to answer the Modified Child Dental Anxiety Score (MCDAS_f). Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 32. The content validity index per item was 0.89, and the total mean clarity score of the face validation was 0.68. Cronbach's alpha for the PSDQ items was 0.568. In the pilot study, the Authoritative domain recorded the highest mean score (mean = 4.26, $\pm$ SD = 0.40), indicating that parents predominantly exhibited authoritative parenting behaviours compared to other styles. The actual study revealed that 90% of the parents exhibited authoritative parenting (n=230). A weak correlation was observed between parenting styles and MCDAS_f score ($p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that parenting style alone may not be a strong determinant of dental anxiety in children. Nevertheless, the study highlights the need for tailored parental education and intervention programmes to equip parents with effective strategies for reducing dental anxiety in children.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights highlights the special care and assistance owed to children, recognizing the family as the fundamental unit of society. In line with this principle, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (U.N. General Assembly, 1989) emphasizes children's rights to appropriate medical care and their ability to express personal needs, particularly in challenging settings such as dental appointments. Within pediatric dentistry, the child occupies the apex of the treatment triangle (Figure 1.1), positioned at the center of interaction between the dental team and parents. Thus, pediatric dentists must accurately assess a child's developmental level, temperament, and attitude toward dental care to anticipate and manage behavioral responses effectively (Kupietzky, 2021).

A child's ability to cope with dental procedures is largely influenced by their psychological and personal development (Lewis, 2020). Factors such as age, cognitive capacity, emotional maturity, communication skills, and overall comprehension of the procedure play crucial roles in shaping their behavioral responses (Campbell et al., 2011; Lewis, 2020). Therefore, gaining insight into a child's anxiety levels and dental history is vital for optimizing treatment planning.

Dental anxiety (DA) is a specific form of anxiety characterized by abnormal fear or apprehension about dental visits remains a significant barrier to routine oral healthcare and is frequently associated with behavioral management problems in children (Lee et al., 2018). Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive understanding of its multifactorial nature. Dental anxiety is not attributed to a single cause; instead, it arises from a complex interaction of genetic and environmental factors. Notably, a child's social environment including parenting style, family dynamics, and adverse life events can substantially influence the development and severity of anxiety-related disorders (Cobham et al., 2020; Fullana et al., 2020; Alkhateeb, 2023).