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**DENTIST-PATIENT COMMUNICATION IN DENTAL SETTINGS
OF UKRAINE: COMMON TRENDS AND CHALLENGES**

Мета дослідження – визначити рівень розуміння пацієнтом інформації, яку надає стоматолог, та вплив незнайомих термінів у його мовленні на комунікацію пацієнт-лікар серед українців 20-39 років. Дослідження проведено методом анонімного анкетування за участю 200 респондентів віком від 20 до 39 років, серед яких 151 жінка та 49 чоловіків. Виявлено, що стоматологічна тривога зустрічається у майже половини дорослого населення України з переважанням серед осіб 20-29 років та жінок. Стоматологічні терміни викликають більше тривоги, ніж довіри чи страху. З віком, все більше українців вважають, що медичні терміни не мають впливу на подальшу комунікацію між стоматологом та пацієнтом. Лікарям рекомендовано уникати складних технічних термінів, які містять греко-латинські компоненти чи запозичені з англійської, натомість, використовувати їхні українські відповідники чи надавати їхнє тлумачення, а також пересвідчитися в повному розумінні наданої пацієнту інформації з метою її викривлення та, як наслідок, посилення стоматологічної тривоги.

Ключові слова: *стоматологічна допомога, стоматологічна тривожність, спілкування, психометрія, опитування та анкетування.*

The aim of this study is to assess patients' comprehension of dental information provided by dentists, and to investigate the impact of unfamiliar technical vocabulary on patient-doctor communication among Ukrainians aged 20-39. The study involved 200 participants (151 women and 49 men), who

completed an anonymous questionnaire. The findings reveal that dental anxiety is prevalent in almost half of the adult population of Ukraine, with a higher prevalence among those aged 20-29 and women. Notably, dental terminology provokes more anxiety than trust or fear. As individuals age, they tend to believe that medical terminology has no impact on further communication between dentist and patient. Based on these findings, dentists can be recommended to avoid using complex technical terms that contain Greek-Latin components or are borrowed from English, and instead opt for Ukrainian equivalents or provide an explanation of the terminology. It is also important for dentists to ensure that the information they provide to their patients is fully understood in order to prevent misrepresentation and increased dental anxiety.

Key words: *dental care, dental anxiety, communication, psychometrics, questionnaires.*

Effective communication between patients and dental doctors is a critical component in providing high-quality dental care and preserving overall health [1; 2; 3]. Misunderstandings and incomplete health-related information can lead to a misperception of the disease, diagnosis, and treatment processes that, in turn, may result in more serious health consequences, which then will require more time, expenses, and can dramatically intrude the quality of life [4; 7].

When patients fail to understand sufficient information about their diagnosis, the proposed dental intervention, related risks and benefits, the potential advantages and disadvantages of treatment versus no treatment, alternative treatment strategies and their risks and benefits, the potential for a successful outcome, and the estimated recovery time due to the complexity of the vocabulary, it can create communication obstacles between the patient and doctor. Thus, the violation of some cooperative principles of communication, known as the Grice's maxim of quantity and the maxim of manner, eventually lead to poor satisfaction for both parties.

Poor communication between patients and dentists is a common cause of dental anxiety, which is more prevalent among women [1; 5; 6]. Therefore, it is essential to ensure the quality of patient-dentist communication in order to prevent dental anxiety and dental fear, which can make patients to avoid dental visits and reduce the effectiveness of treatment. Building up rapport and establish effective communication is especially important for young adults aged 20 – 39, as it can help maintain their dental health, preserve natural teeth, and enhance their overall quality of life.

The **objective** of this study is to determine the level of dental anxiety in Ukrainians aged 20 – 39, and to assess the impact of unknown technical vocabulary in the dentist's speech on patient-doctor communication among Ukrainians aged 20 – 39.

Materials and Methods: The study was conducted using an anonymous survey of 200 respondents aged from 20 to 39, including 151 women and 49 men. The survey consisted of 20 questions, 5 of which were adapted from the modified dental anxiety scale, while other 15 questions were formulated by the authors. The findings obtained were analyzed using STATISTICA for Windows 13 software (StatSoft Inc., # JPZ804I382120ARCN10-J). The significance of differences in means for independent samples was calculated using the t-test, while the significance of differences in quality indicators was calculated based on the Pearson chi-square test (χ^2), including Yates' correction and Fisher's exact test. Significance was set at $p < 0.01$.

Results. The age distribution was as follows: 42.9% of respondents were aged 20-29 and 57.1% were aged 30-39. In the 20-29 age group, women prevailed constituting 71.6%; men made up 28.4%. In the 30-39 age group, the shares of women and men were 78.6% vs. 21.4%, respectively.

Dental anxiety of various levels of intensity has been found in 46.3% of the respondents, 23.2% of whom have the high levels. Younger individuals demonstrate a higher prevalence of dental anxiety, with 48.7% of those aged 20-29

affected, compared to 44.6% of those aged 30-39. Gender differences are only significant when age groups are considered separately, with 52.4% and 38.5% of women and men aged 20-29 affected, and 44.3% and 38.5% of women and men aged 30-39 affected, respectively.

The survey findings revealed that 63.3% of the respondents were able to comprehend all the words used by dental doctors, while 36.7% reported not fully understanding them. It is worth noting that this indicator does not change significantly with age, but depends on gender: men in the 20-29 years old group are more likely to fully understand the dentist, 92.3% vs. 57.1% of women. This difference is much smaller among the respondents aged 30-39, with 69.2% and 62.5% of men and women, respectively, fully understanding the dentist. There is an interesting tendency, as people age, they are less likely to consider that unclear words have an impact on communication. This is reflected in the frequency of respondents choosing the option "no impact". In the 20-29 age group, this option was chosen by 39.5% of all respondents, 39.7% of women, and 38.5% of men. In the 30-39 age group, the frequency of this answer option was 46.5% for all respondents, 45.5% for women, and 53.8% for men.

More than half of the respondents(55.4%) feel anxious at the dentist's appointment because of specialtechnical words, while 38.4% of them consider them as profession credibility statements. Interestingly, compared to the 20-29 year old group, the 30-39 year old group is more likely to be afraid of unclear terms - 2.6% and 8.9% respectively. This phenomenon is observed regardless of gender - 0% and 7.7%; 3.2% and 9.1% among male and female respondents aged 20-29 and 30-39, respectively. Moreover, the 30-39 years old group appears to be more prone to fear of unclear terms compared to the 20-29 years old group, with 8.9% and 2.6% respectively. This trend is evident among both genders, with percentages of 7.7% and 0%, and 9.1% and 3.2% among female and male respondents aged 30-39 and 20-29, respectively.

The overwhelming majority of respondents always ask for additional clarification about incomprehensible words during dental visits (92.7%), but there are also those who never ask (4%). Interestingly, the majority of those who never seek clarification are women aged 30-39 (85.7% of respondents who answered "no").

More than half of the respondents believe they always receive sufficient information from their dentist (55.4%). However, there is a difference in the prevalence of this opinion among people of different ages, with 61.8% and 50.5% among people aged 20-29 and 30-39, respectively. It is worth noting that, regardless of age, men are more likely to feel that they receive enough information from their dentist (69.2% vs. 60.3%, and 53.8% vs. 50.0% of men and women aged 20-29 and 30-39, respectively).

Conclusion. Dental anxiety is prevalent in nearly half of the adult population in Ukraine, particularly among women and individuals aged 20-29.

Dental technical words are found as eliciting more anxiety than trust or fear, but this effect decreases with age, as more Ukrainians consider that technical words do not have a significant impact on further communication between the dentist and patient.

In order to prevent misunderstandings and reduce dental anxiety, dentists are advised to avoid the frequent use of words having Greek and Latin components, or English borrowing, to ensure that patients fully understand the information provided by using analogues or explanations, and to improve communication techniques.

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