

RELIABLE DENTIST'S PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES. ARE THEY IMPORTANT? – BALTIC DENTAL STUDENT'S OPINION

Alina Pūrienė¹, Irena Balčiūnienė¹, Povilas Drobnys¹, Ričardas Kubilius², Inguna Grinvalde³,
Edvitar Leibur⁴

¹*Vilnius University hospital Žalgiris clinic, Vilnius, Lithuania,*

²*Department of Maxillofacial Surgery, Kaunas University of Medicine, Kaunas, Lithuania,*

³*Riga Stradins University, Latvia,* ⁴*University of Tartu, Estonia*

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Summary

Dentist's personality values are known to be one of the most important qualities on which professionalism is based on. The aim of this study was to find out which attributes, according to Baltic dental students, are the most important for a "reliable dentist". Material and methods. 190 Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian dental students were given an anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire included a number of questions about dentist's personality, work and scientific activity attributes. The answers about the importance of dentist's personality attributes were presented on a 5-point Likert scale, allocated according to the level of importance with the given dentist's quality.

Results. 113 respondents (60%) were Lithuanian dental students, 30 (16%) were Latvian and 45 (24%) were Estonian students. Lithuanian students' response rate was 90,4%, Latvian – 83,3%, Estonian – 58%. 88% Lithuanian, 93% Latvian and 97% Estonian respondents accentuated the importance of behaviour during painful and unpleasant procedures and pain management. Ability to control stressful situations was more essential for Estonian ($p < 0,001$) and Latvian students ($p = 0,007$) than for Lithuanian respondents. Self confidence was more appreciated by Estonians than by Lithuanian dental students ($p = 0,045$). Dentist's gender was more valued by male respondents ($p < 0,05$). Estonians and Latvians accentuated dentist's gender, empathy, neat clothing and punctuality more than Lithuanian students ($p < 0,05$).

Conclusions: This study clearly revealed Baltic students' attitude to the importance of reliable dentist's personality attributes, which is important in educating students and undergraduates, developing and improving dental study programs.

Many patients are known to choose a reliable dentist. Being reliable is a vigorous and challenging task, involving many professional and ethical responsibilities. Professionals are expected to be not only communicative, emphatic, respecting patient's confidentiality, maintaining appropriate relations with patients etc., but also be committed to lifelong learning and be responsible for maintaining the medical knowledge, clinical and team-skills necessary for the provision of quality care. Dentist's personality attributes are known to be one of the most important qualities on which professionalism is based on. The key mission of dental education is development of student professionalism [1]. Therefore, we decided to identify Baltic students' views on the most important personality attributes that should be possessed by a „reliable dentist“.

Introduction

Dentists are trained to be professionals. Concern for professionalism should be at the heart of dental education and lifelong practice [1]. Good doctoring means not only perfect skills of profession, but also demonstration of the attributes of professionalism [2]. Essential professional qualities include integrity, honesty, civic-mindedness, courage, self-sacrifice, ability to communicate clearly, thorough and clear work documentation, and commitment to quality. New students bring to dental school not only a genuine desire to learn but also little understanding why dentistry is a profession or why dentists are professionals. Therefore,

the mission of dental school is not only to increase student knowledge and hone skills, but also to promote good dentist-patient relationship - an integral element of quality care, to ensure student acquisition and consistent demonstration of the attributes of professionalism, which influence patient's trust in dentist and willingness to cooperate in treatment decision-making [3]. Attitude to professionalism, professional image is influenced by personality and value structure of dentists and dental students, as well as their moral development [4-7]. Although there are many articles describing good dentist's qualities, the literature on students' attitude to dentist's personality attributes, professionalism and reliability is thin. However, Lithuanian dentists' opinion about reliable dentist's personality attributes was studied in detail [8]. The most important reliable dentist's personality qualities for Lithuanian dentists were reported to be pain management, painless treatment, behaviour during painful and unpleasant procedures, communication skills and ability to answer patient's questions clearly. Understanding the most important reliable dentist's personality attributes helps to identify those core qualities that lead students to dental professionalism and lifelong success. There was no similar study among Baltic students and this is the first study in the Baltic States inquiring students' opinion about dentist's reliability and the importance of personality attributes.

The aim of the study: to find out Baltic students' similarities and differences in attitudes towards reliable dentist's personality attributes, to investigate their perception of dentist's reliability and professionalism.

Subjects and methods

190 Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian fifth grade dental students (study year 2008-2009) were given an anonymous questionnaire, which was approved by the Lithuanian Bioethical Committee Nr. 59, 2007. The questionnaire included a number of questions about dentist's personality, work and scientific activity attributes. The majority of them were structured, and a few open questions were added. The questions have been widely used in surveys for many years during study process in Vilnius University, institute of Odontology to evaluate students' attitude to dentist's reliability and professionalism. The survey responses have been evaluated using kappa statistics. The answers about the importance of dentist's attributes were presented on a 5-point Likert scale allocated according to the level of importance with the given dentist's quality: 1 – not important at all, 2 – not important, 3 – might be important, 4 – important, 5 – very important. The questionnaire also obtained information about the personal and professional characteristics of the subjects including gender, age, and work experience. Statistical analysis was undertaken using the MS Office, Excel and SPSS version 13.0 software packages. For clarity, the answers were classified into 3 groups according to the importance with the specific attribute: very important (they included very important and important), might be important and not important at all (not important at all together with not important ones). Univariate analysis, Tukey's HSD test and Spearman correlation were used to evaluate associations between respondent's age, gender, country of the residence, place of the residence in the separate coun-

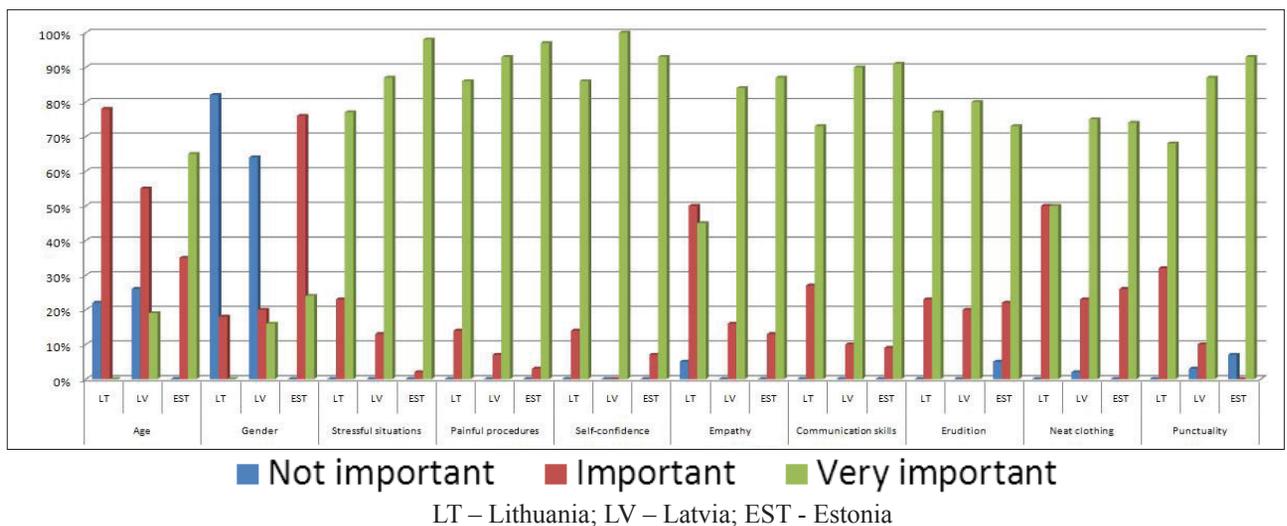


Figure 1. The distribution of importance according to dentist's personality attributes. Baltic students' opinion

Table 1. Evaluation of associations between respondent's country of the residence and various dentist's personality attributes using Tukey's HSD test. Only statistically significant results are described

Dependent variable	(I) Country	(J) Country	Mean difference (I – J)	Std. Error	P	95% Confidence interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Dentist's age	Lithuania	Latvia	-0.47	0.157	0.008	-0.85	-0.10
Empathy	Lithuania	Latvia	-0.38	0.136	0.015	-0.71	-0.06
		Estonia	-0.74	0.117	0.0001	-1.02	-0.46
Neat clothing	Lithuania	Latvia	-0.59	0.168	0.004	-0.99	-0.18
		Estonia	-0.31	0.125	0.04	-0.60	-0.01
Dentist's gender	Lithuania	Latvia	-0.61	0.172	0.002	-1.01	-0.20
		Estonia	-0.42	0.148	0.013	-0.77	-0.07
Self confidence	Lithuania	Estonia	-0.28	0.116	0.045	-0.55	0.00
Punctuality	Lithuania	Latvia	-0.41	0.155	0.025	-0.77	-0.04
		Estonia	-0.43	0.133	0.004	-0.74	-0.11
Stressful situations	Lithuania	Latvia	-0.43	0.139	0.007	-0.76	-0.10
		Estonia	-0.48	0.120	0.0001	-0.76	-0.20

Table 2. Evaluation of associations between respondent's place of the residence in the separate country and various dentist's personality attributes using Tukey's HSD test. Only statistically significant results are described

Dependent variable	(I) Place of the residence	(J) Place of the residence	Mean difference (I – J)	Std. Error	P	95% Confidence interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Punctuality	Major city, district's centre	Minor city, village	0,34	0.135	0.037	0,02	0,65

Table 3. Univariate analysis of reliable dentist's gender importance for the Baltic dental students

Dependent variable: Reliable dentist's gender		Mean	Std. Error	P	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Respondent's gender	Female	1,931	0,075	0.03	1.783	2.079
	Male	2,627	0,308		2.019	3.235

Dentists's attribute	Spearman correlation coefficient	P
Empathy	-0.241	0.001

Table 4. Correlation between respondents' age and evaluation of various dentist's personality attributes. Only statistically significant results are described

try and various dentist's attributes. Only statistically significant results are described.

Results

113 respondents (60%) were Lithuanian dental students, 30 (16%) were Latvian and 45 (24%) were Estonian students. Lithuanian students' response rate was 90,4%, Latvian – 83,3%, Estonian – 58%. The mean respondents' age was 22 years. 58% Lithuanian, 52% Latvian and 41% Estonian dental students live in major cities, whereas only a few of them (13%, 3%, 6% respectively) live in district's centres. 41% Estonian and 32% Latvian and only 9% Lithuanian respondents live in rural areas.

Among reliable dentist's personality attributes dominated ability to control stressful situations, behaviour during painful and unpleasant procedures, communication skills and self-confidence (Figure 1). Tukey's HSD test revealed statistically significant differences between respondent's country of the residence, place of the residence in a separate country and various dentist's attributes (Table 1, table 2). Ability to control stressful situations was more essential for Estonian and Latvian students than for Lithuanian respondents (Table 1). Self-confidence was more appreciated by Estonians than by Lithuanian dental students. Although respondents' answers about reliable dentist's communication skills and behaviour during painful and unpleasant procedures did not differ significantly, Estonians and Latvians accentuated dentist's gender, empathy, neat clothing and punctuality more than Lithuanian students (Table 1). Respondents, who came to study from major cities or district's centres valued punctuality more than those, coming from minor cities or villages (Table 2).

Dentist's age was more appreciated by La-

tvians than by Lithuanian respondents. Univariate analysis revealed that reliable dentist's gender was more valued by male respondents (Table 3).

A statistically significant weak negative correlation between respondents' age and the importance of empathy is shown in table 4: the greater the age, the lower the importance of the following reliable dentist's attribute.

Discussion

Both Baltic students and Lithuanian dentists [8] accentuated the importance of dentist's communication skills. Patients' satisfaction, as well as anxiety reduction, is known to be mainly influenced by the communicative behaviour of the dentist [9]. Therefore, it remains important to train dentists in communicative skills. This view highlighted one of the most important attribute a reliable dentist should possess and reminded one of the domains stated in the profile and competences for the graduating European dentist: "on graduation a dentist must be competent to communicate effectively, interactively and reflectively with patients, their families and carers and with other health professionals involved in their care, irrespective of age, social and cultural background" [10].

Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian respondents agreed on the importance of behaviour during painful and unpleasant procedures, ability to control stressful situations and drew attention to the profile and competences for the graduating European dentist, stating that a graduating dentist must "identify the origins and continuation of dental fear and anxiety and manage this fear and anxiety with behavioural techniques" [10].

Baltic students emphasized the importance of pain management and painless treatment, which are substantial for a reliable dentist (Figure 1). These findings correspond to previous study inquiring dentists' opinion about who is thought to be a reliable dentist [8]. Having in mind that both Baltic students and Lithuanian dentists put emphasis on pain management, painless treatment was reported to be a core quality for a reliable dentist. This finding reminds poor pain management problems of soviet dental service, common allergic reactions to widely used local anaesthetic novocaine [11], which made dental work stressful and hard, and as a result many Baltic students and Lithuanian dentists can't imagine a reliable dentist unable to treat without pain.

The present study also revealed respondents' attitude to dentist's age, gender, neat clothing, precious smile and punctuality which were not discussed among many graduating European dentist's competences [10]. Dentist's gender was found to be more important for male respondents, coinciding with the view, observed in dental literature, that

traditionally based gender stereotypes, as well as potential impact of feminization upon professions are applied to dentists as well [12,13]. Female dentists are viewed as significantly more likely to make patients feel relaxed and to take time to discuss ailments with them. However, male dentists are perceived as more devoted to career than family, more likely seem to be in charge and attracted to the power of their profession [12]. Both Baltic students and Lithuanian dentists [9] reported the importance of dentist's age, which corresponds to the view observed in the dental literature that dentist's age is essential in trusting a dentist [14]. Patients' preference for dentist's age is known to be influenced by dentist's training location: for the British-trained there is a preference for younger dentists, whereas for the Asian-trained there is a preference for older dentists [14]. Precious smile, neat clothing and punctuality were also emphasized more by Baltic students than Lithuanian dentists [8]. These results correspond to the view, observed in dental literature, that patients make judgements about appearance after meeting a dentist [15]. Neat clothing influences patient's trust in dentist and cooperation. The importance of punctuality is well understood among dentists and running behind schedule is known to be one of the most intense stressors in dentistry [16]. Univariate analysis of associations between respondent's place of the residence in the separate country and various dentist's personality attributes using Tukey's HSD test revealed that punctuality was more appreciated by respondents, who came to study from major cities than minor ones or villages (Table 2). This finding coincides with the view, observed in the literature, that metropolitan lifestyle, closely related to money economy, is based on calculability, exactness and punctuality [17].

A weak negative correlation between respondents' age and the importance of reliable dentist's empathy was discovered (Table 4). A decline in an appreciation of empathy might have been affected by an increasing respondent's patient exposure [18]. No statistically significant correlation was discovered analysing many other reliable dentist's attributes due to the minor differences in Baltic dental students' age.

Although the survey responses might have been influenced by many factors, such as dissimilarities in dental study programs, social and cultural discrepancies, different respondents' attitude, in this study the comprehension of dentist's professionalism and reliability was found to be very similar among Baltic dental students.

Conclusions

This study clearly revealed Baltic students' attitude to the importance of reliable dentist's personality attribu-

tes and reminded many issues dentists have to face every day in real life working situations. However, the differences found between the Baltic countries and the profile and competences of graduating European dentist revealed unique respondents' attitude to dentist's reliability and professionalism, which is important in educating students and undergraduates, developing and improving dental study programs.

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AR SVARBIOS PATIKIMO GYDYTOJO ASMENINĖS SAVYBĖS? BALTIJOS ŠALIŲ STUDENTŲ ODONTOLOGŲ NUOMONĖ

A. Pūrienė, I. Balčiūnienė, P. Drobnys, R. Kubilius, I. Grinvalde, E. Leibur

Raktažodžiai: studentų nuomonė, patikimas odontologas, asmeninės savybės.

Santrauka

Tyrimo tikslas – išsiaiškinti, kokios patikimo odontologo asmeninės savybės yra svarbiausios Baltijos šalių studentams odontologams.

Tyrimo medžiaga ir metodai. Buvo apklausti Lietuvos, Latvijos ir Estijos studentai odontologai. Anketoje buvo nurodomos patikimo odontologo asmeninės, darbo ir mokslinės veiklos savybės, kurių svarbą respondentai vertino pagal Likert'o skalę.

Rezultatai: iš 190 atsakiusių į pateiktus klausimus 113 (60%) buvo Lietuvos studentai odontologai, 30 (16%) - Latvijos ir 45 (24%) Estijos studentai. Lietuvos studentų atsakymo dažnis buvo 90,4%, Latvijos - 83,3%, Estijos - 58%. 88% lietuvių, 93% latvių, 97% estų studentų odontologų akcentavo gydytojo elgesio atliekant nemaloniais skausmingas procedūras bei beskausmio gydymo svarbą. Gebėjimas valdyti stresines situacijas buvo svarbesnis Estijos ($p < 0.001$) ir Latvijos ($p = 0.007$) respondentams nei Lietuvos. Estijos studentai odontologai vertino gydytojo pasitikėjimą savimi labiau nei Lietuvos studentai ($p = 0,045$). Patikimo odontologo lytis buvo svarbesnė respondentams vyrams ($p < 0,05$). Patikimo odontologo lytį, gebėjimą užjausti, tvarkingą aprangą bei punktualumą labiau vertino Estijos ir Latvijos respondentai nei Lietuvos ($p < 0,05$).

Išvados: tyrimas atskleidė Baltijos šalių studentų odontologų nuomonę ir požiūrį į patikimo odontologo asmeninių savybių svarbą. Tyrimo rezultatai svarbūs edukaciniam procesui, kuriant bei tobulinant studijų programas, mokant studentus bei gydytojus rezidentus.

Adresas susirašinėti: alina.puriene@gmail.com

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