



The use of Dental Anxiety Management Techniques during One-Session Treatment



Introduction

One in three Finnish adults experiences dental anxiety, and one in ten suffers from severe dental anxiety (Liinavuori 2016, Pohjola 2009). Therefore, dentists frequently encounter patients with dental anxiety in their everyday practices. The short-term consequences of dental anxiety include irregular visits, avoidance of dental care and deteriorating oral health (Berggren & Meynert, 1984). In the long term, dental anxiety can lead to a diminished quality of life related to oral health, feelings of shame or inferiority and psychosocial distress (Boman et al. 2010; Armfield 2013).

Aim and data

The study aimed to explore the techniques dentists use to manage dental anxiety during treatment sessions with anxious adult patients. The data consisted of five video-recorded treatment sessions, which are part of an intervention study that includes a diagnostic interview and a modified one-session treatment for dentally anxious adults (Kurki et al. 2023).

Results

Table 1. Description of fear and anxiety management techniques and their characteristics used during one-session treatment.

Categories under themes	Technics and examples
Theme 1: The foundation of psychological treatment: specific strategies to enhance trust and control	
Building trustful relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building rapport • Encouraging two-way communication • Expressing concern • Demonstrating competence and ethics • Including significant others
Providing control: Informational control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about technic in lay terms • Information about safety • Information about comfort • Telling-showing-doing • Structuring the time
Providing control: Behavioral control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreeing with signalling • Planning rest breaks • Using behavioral strategies to control injection pain
Theme 2: Psychological management: specific strategies	
Behavioral strategies: relaxing the body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaxation breathing • Muscle relaxation
Cognitive strategies: relaxing the mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Altering expectations: Redefining success and offering praise • Altering expectations: Redefining the experience: • Distraction: • Focusing attention

Methods

A theory-driven qualitative content analysis (Marks & Yardley 2004), was conducted, using the anxiety management classification by Milgrom et al. was used to identify and categorize the techniques dentists used during treatment situations.

Results

Various categories of dental anxiety management techniques were identified, grouped under two main themes: enhancing trust and control, and psychological management. A wide range of techniques were frequently used throughout the sessions to build a trustful relationship and to provide informational or behavioral control. Additionally, behavioral strategies were used to relax the body and cognitive strategies to control the mind. These techniques were regularly used in specific situations.

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Theme 1: The foundation of psychological management: Specific strategies to enhance trust and control

<p>Building a trustful relationship</p> <p>Examples: Dentist (D): 'How does it feel to come here today for treatment?' 'How's it going?' 'Are you still okay?' 'Is it okay if you lay down or would you prefer a half-sitting position?' 'Are any of your teeth especially sensitive to cold?' 'I'll do it very carefully' 'This tooth in the upper left moves slightly, can you feel it with your tongue?'</p>	<p>Providing control: informational control</p> <p>Examples: D: 'Let's see if there is any tartar or gingival pockets' 'I'll check the upper teeth with a light' 'I'll check the gumline now with this ball-headed instrument [shows the instrument]' 'It's not sharp' 'And while I check them, I will list things and talk to the nurse about them, but it doesn't mean that there's something dangerous or wrong' 'You can feel slight scraping' 'I will now dry and look with the lamp like this, which will be put beside the tooth' 'You can swallow in just a moment'.</p>	<p>Providing control: behavioral control</p> <p>Examples: D: 'And you don't have to keep your mouth open the whole time' 'Do you want that we use a topical anesthesia first to numb the mucous membrane?.'</p>
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Examples of the use of techniques

Theme 2: Psychological management

<p>Behavioural strategies: relaxing the body</p> <p>Examples: Dentist (D): 'Really focus on that, we will do the rest and you just remember to keep breathing' 'Just normal regular breathing, and now, if you can, you can try those things that you have learned with X about relaxing [in the diagnostic interview]'.</p>	<p>Cognitive strategies: relaxing the mind</p> <p>Examples: D: 'You have done well, really well [encouraging, supportive tone]' ' now bite your teeth gently together please, good, well done, keep breathing slowly through your nose, good, then you can swallow' 'You have so many good teeth' 'And now our goal is to try and change your mind set about the anesthetic not working' 'Lets' take our time and wait until it numbs thoroughly' 'That's Finnish schlager music, do you like it?' 'The sounds are so beautiful'.</p>
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Main findings

- A variety of dental anxiety management techniques were used in an individualized manner during treatments.
- Techniques were often used simultaneously during specific treatment situations.
- The use of techniques was related to specific strategies to enhance trust and control in terms of building a trustful relationship and providing the patient with informational and behavioral control.
- The use of techniques related also to psychological management, specifically to behavioral and cognitive strategies to relax the patients' body and mind.
- Overall, the use of techniques indicated diversity, flexibility, and coherence in proceeding.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that a range of dental anxiety management techniques were used during one-session treatments. The insights can help dentists better manage patients with dental anxiety and improve their overall treatment experience.