

# Evaluating Children's Perception of Dental Experiences Through Drawings

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## Introduction

- Dental fear and anxiety are emotional responses to dental treatment, affecting 10.0–29.3% of children and 4.2–50% of adults.
- DFA is often linked to negative dental experiences during childhood and adolescence, influencing future attitudes toward dental care.
- Early experiences can lead to avoidance behaviors, delayed treatment, and long-term oral health consequences.
- Dental fear can disrupt the connection between oral health and overall well-being, reducing quality of life.
- Avoidance driven by DFA can worsen oral conditions, reinforcing fear and shame.
- Patient-centered approach is crucial for effective treatment and improved health outcomes
- The dental industry could benefit from viewing patients as partners in care, tailoring services to their specific needs.

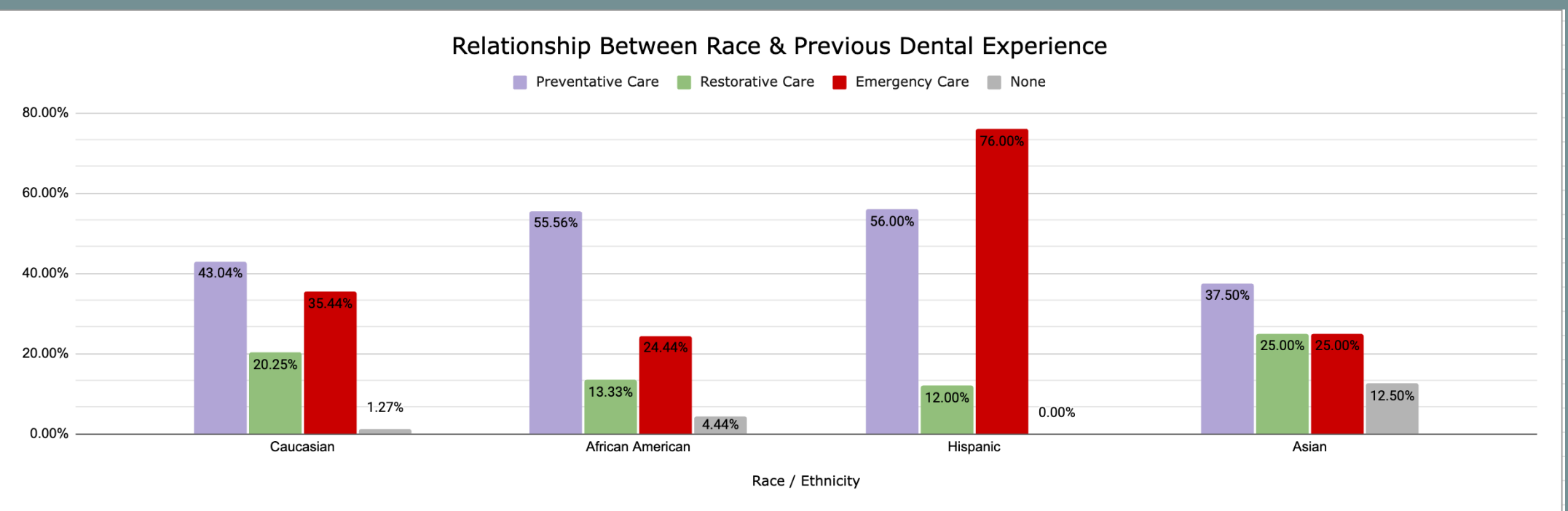
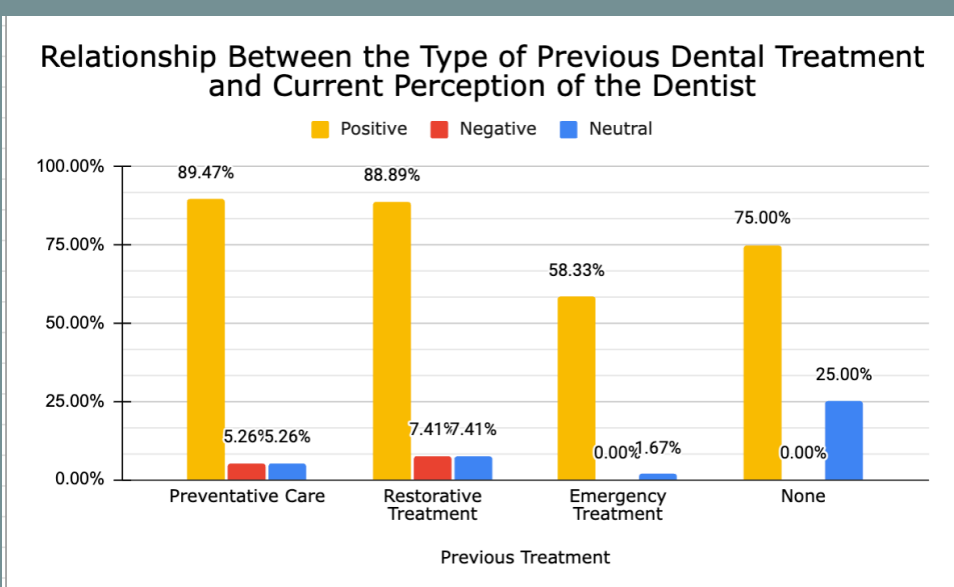
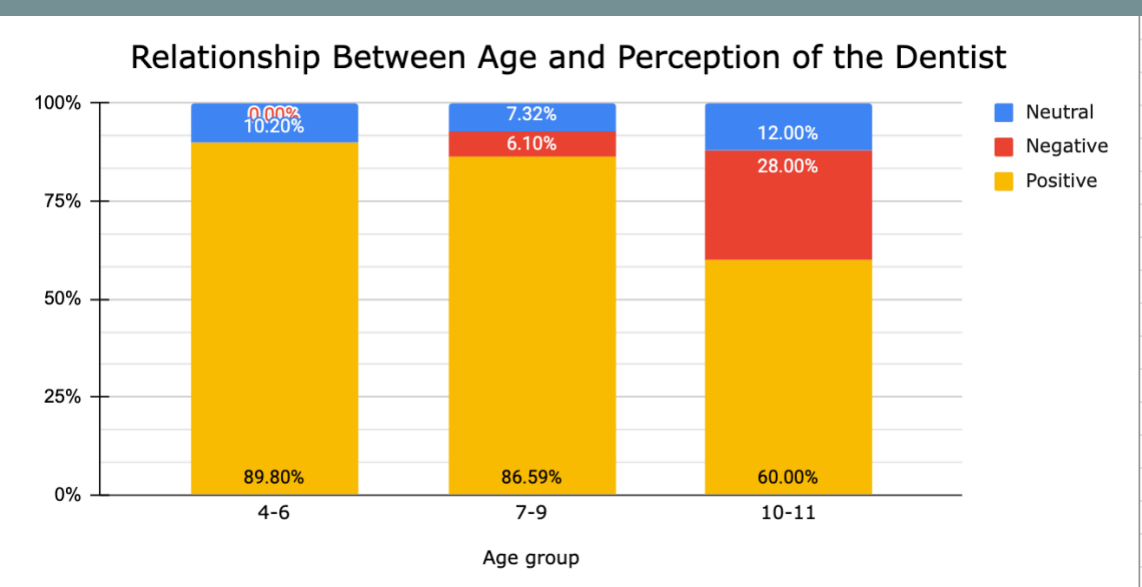
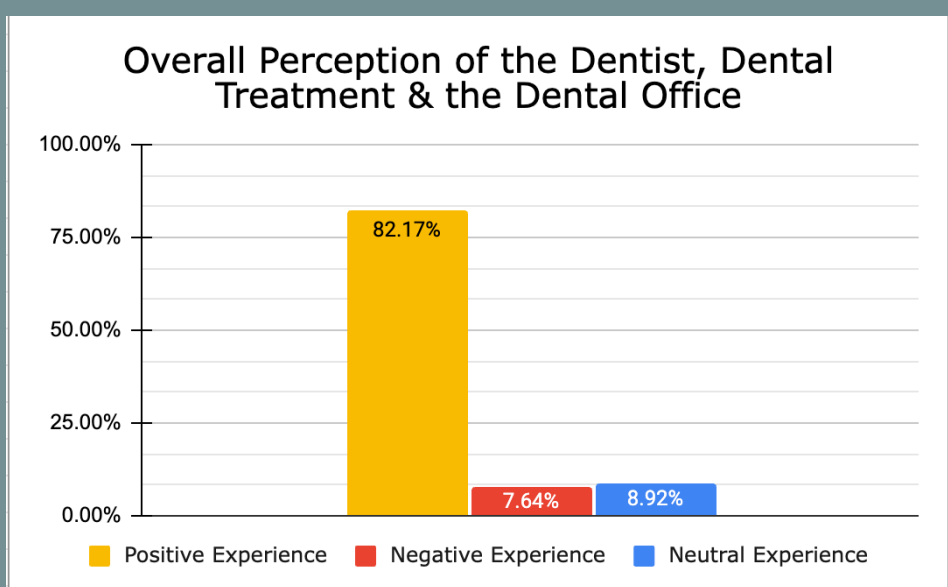
## Objective

- To evaluate children's perception of the dentist, dental office and dental treatment using drawings
- To evaluate how age, race and previous dental experiences of the child influences a child's perception of the dentist, dental office and dental treatment

## Methodology

- Phenomenological Study
- Conducted in February 2025 at a Pre-K to 5th grade elementary school.
- 156 total students
  - PreK-1st grade (4-6 years old): 52
  - 2nd-3rd grade (7-9 years old): 83
  - 4th -5th grade (10-11 years old): 25
- Parents or guardians provided consent and completed a questionnaire about their child's previous dental experiences
- Each child was instructed to draw a picture of themselves at the Dentist
- Children's drawings were independently completed. There was no time limit and no distractions
- Children discussed their experiences and drawings.
- Examined using the Child Drawing: Hospital Scale.

## Results



## How Do You Feel About Going to the Dentist?

*"I feel happy. I like to go to the Dentist!"*

*"A little scared because I've never been before. After I was done, I was happy because I got it out of the way"*

*"I also feel nervous because my dad said the Dentist yanked his tooth out and it hurt him"*

*"Excited, my Dentist has a rocket ship, games, and a TV in the lobby."*

*"I like that it's quick"*

*"Bad, because I can't breathe"*

*"A little scary, they put things in your mouth and it feels weird"*

*"I don't like when my Dentist talks to me while my mouth is open"*

*"Nervous because it hurts. Numbing stuff doesn't work"*

## Discussion

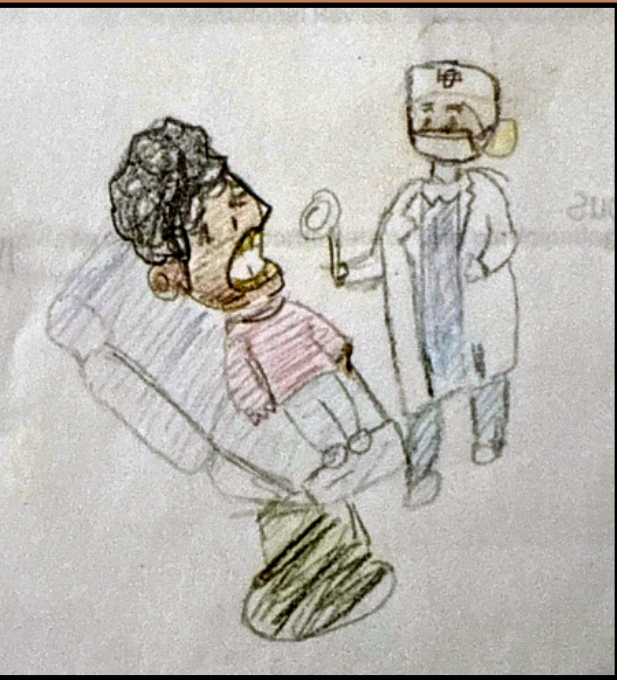
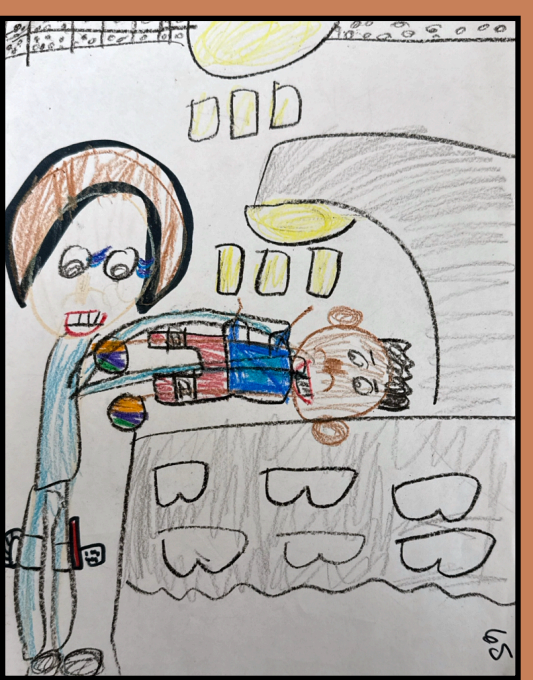
- This study found that children's perceptions of dental care are influenced by a combination of race, gender, age, prior dental experiences, and anxiety levels.
- Asian girls have the most positive perceptions (100%), Caucasian boys have the lowest (78.2%), Hispanic girls have the highest negative perceptions (15.38%), and African American boys have the lowest (6.25%).
- Preventative care is linked to more positive perceptions, especially among African American, Caucasian, and Asian children.
- Emergency care is linked to more negative perceptions, especially among Hispanic children.
- Younger children (ages 4–6) have the most positive perceptions, while older children (ages 10–11) express more negative perceptions.
- Overall, 82.17% of participants have a positive perception of dental care.

## Conclusion

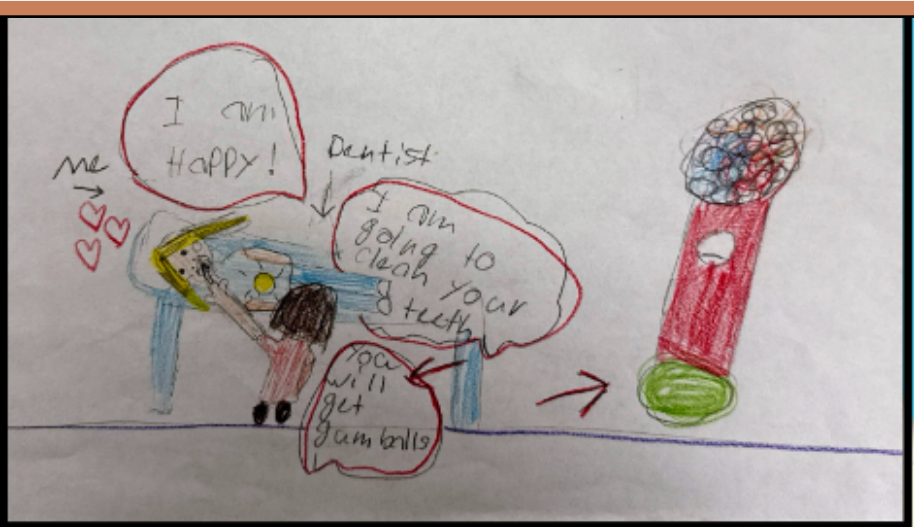
- Factors influencing children's dental care perceptions include prior experiences, age, race, and anxiety levels.
- The Drawing: Hospital Rating Scale isn't a reliable measure of dental fear—direct conversation is more effective
- Positive perceptions are most common among children with preventative care experiences.
- Negative perceptions increase in older age groups.
- Racial disparities, especially among Hispanic children, influence dental care.
- Study limitations include communication barriers and uneven demographic representation.

## Drawings

### Negative Perceptions



### Positive Perceptions



## References

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## Children's Feedback

- Positive Feedback:**
- Watching movies/TV, Tik Tok (phone/tablet use)
  - Picking toothpaste flavors.
  - Balloons, toys/tokens, bouncy balls (prizes)
  - "The Dentist was nice!"

- Negative Feedback:**
- Don't know what's going on
  - Scared of handpiece noise
  - Last time they took my tooth out, and it hurt.
  - Wish they were more gentle
  - Scared of tools and how it feels

- Ways to Improve:**
- Let patient know what's going on
  - Give breaks
  - Tell kids "it's going to be ok"
  - Nothing can be done to make it better