

Towards a better understanding of dental anxiety and fear: cognitions vs. experiences.

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Source

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Abstract

Traumatic dental experiences are associated with dental anxiety and fear. However, many people with no dental fear have had negative dental experiences, and some people with considerable fear fail to recall any traumatic incidents. This study aimed to determine whether dental fear was better explained by experiences or by cognitive perceptions of going to the dentist as being uncontrollable, unpredictable, dangerous, and disgusting. A random sample of 1,084 Australian adults (response rate = 71.7%) completed a mailed questionnaire with measures of dental fear, perceptions of going to the dentist, and dental experiences. Perceptions of uncontrollability, unpredictability, dangerousness, and disgustingness had strong bivariate associations with scores on the Index of Dental Anxiety and Fear (IDAF-4C). Vulnerability-related perceptions accounted for 46.3% of the variance in IDAF-4C scores beyond that accounted for by demographic variables and five possible dental experiences comprising intense pain, considerable discomfort, gagging, fainting, and having a personal problem with the dentist. In contrast, dental experiences accounted for < 1% of the variance in IDAF-4C scores beyond that accounted for by the four cognitive perceptions. Perceptions of uncontrollability, unpredictability, dangerousness, and disgustingness were superior predictors of dental fear compared with negative dental experiences.

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