

## EXPLORING PATIENT SATISFACTION AT A PRIVATE DENTAL CLINIC IN JAKARTA : A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor utama yang memengaruhi kepuasan pasien di Klinik X, sebuah klinik gigi swasta yang berlokasi di Jakarta. Desain studi kasus tunggal kualitatif digunakan untuk mendapatkan pemahaman mendalam mengenai pengalaman dan persepsi pasien. Partisipan dipilih melalui teknik convenience sampling dan diwawancarai secara mendalam menggunakan panduan pertanyaan semi-terstruktur dalam Bahasa Indonesia. Seluruh wawancara direkam, ditranskripsi secara verbatim, dan dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan tema yang berulang. Persetujuan etik diperoleh dari komite etik yang berwenang. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepuasan pasien dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor yang saling berkaitan. Rekomendasi dari mulut ke mulut, terutama dari keluarga dan teman, memiliki peran penting dalam menarik pasien baru. Selain itu, kompetensi dan perilaku komunikasi dokter gigi secara konsisten disebut sebagai elemen utama dalam menciptakan pengalaman positif. Keahlian dan sikap profesional staf pendukung, serta kemampuan mereka dalam berkomunikasi dan membangun hubungan yang baik, turut memberikan kontribusi signifikan. Pasien juga menghargai lingkungan klinik yang bersih, higienis, lengkap dengan fasilitas memadai, serta lokasi yang strategis dan mudah diakses. Efisiensi layanan, termasuk ketepatan waktu dan proses administrasi yang lancar, serta persepsi terhadap nilai yang sebanding dengan biaya, turut meningkatkan kepuasan secara keseluruhan. Dari semua faktor tersebut, kompetensi dan komunikasi dokter gigi, serta profesionalisme staf, dianggap sebagai yang paling berpengaruh.

**Kata kunci** : kepuasan pasien, klinik gigi, studi kualitatif

### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to identify key factors that influence patient satisfaction in Clinic X, a private dental clinic located in Jakarta. A qualitative single case study design was employed to gain in-depth insights into patient experiences and perceptions. Participants were selected using convenience sampling and participated in in-depth interviews guided by semi-structured questions delivered in Bahasa Indonesia. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate ethics committee. The findings revealed that patient satisfaction was influenced by several interrelated factors. These included word-of-mouth recommendations from family and friends, which played a significant role in attracting new patients to the clinic. Furthermore, the competence and communication behavior of the dentist were consistently highlighted as central to a positive patient experience. The expertise and professional attitude of the supporting staff, along with their ability to communicate effectively and build rapport, also contributed significantly. Patients additionally expressed appreciation for a clean, hygienic, and well-equipped clinic environment, as well as its strategic and easily accessible location. Service efficiency, including punctuality and smooth administrative processes, combined with the perceived value for money, further enhanced overall satisfaction. Among all factors, the dentist's competence and communication, along with staff professionalism, were seen as the most influential.*

**Keywords** : dental clinic, patient satisfaction, qualitative study

### INTRODUCTION

Oral health is still a major concern in many parts of the world, affecting millions of people. Changes in daily habits, diet, and overall health routines have contributed to the rise of issues

like dental caries, gum disease, and oral cancer (Dai et al., 2025). The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that nearly half of the global population suffers from some form of oral health problem. Unfortunately, many of these individuals do not receive proper care. This problem is especially common in middle-income and/or developing countries, where access to dental care is often limited due to cost, location, or lack of oral health literacy and awareness (WHO, 2022). Indonesia is one of the countries that reflects this global trend. According to the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey, 56.9 percent of the population reported experiencing dental problems. However, only 11.2 percent of these people sought treatment from a dental professional. Even more concerning, 91.2 percent of the population had never visited a dentist (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2023).

These figures suggest that many Indonesians are still unaware of the importance of preventative dental care (Maharani, 2012; Redaksi Sehat Negeriku, 2024). Many only seek help when the problem has worsened, which can result in more complex and costly treatment (Mukhari-Baloyi et al., 2021; Pratamawari et al., 2019). Several factors influence whether individuals decide to go to the dentist. Personal characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, place of residence, income level, and education all play a role. In addition to these, a person's knowledge of health insurance and their overall view of oral health also matter (Santoso et al., 2020). Financial burdens, such as out-of-pocket costs, and emotional factors like dental fear, also discourage many from seeking care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, fears of infection further reduced the number of dental visits, even for those in need (Felgner et al., 2023). The economic effects of COVID-19 also seemed to make it more difficult for affected people to afford dental care (Yashpal et al., 2022). It should therefore come as no surprise that the pandemic caused a drop in patient visits at many dental clinics that resulted in significant financial strain for the clinics (Farrokhi et al., 2024).

Even when individuals do visit the dentist, their willingness to return often depends on how they feel about the service. Patient satisfaction is the key. When people are satisfied with the care they receive, they are more likely to follow treatment plans, return for check-ups, and build long-term relationships with their healthcare providers (Lee et al., 2015; Park et al., 2021). Satisfaction reflects how well the service meets patient expectations, and it influences important outcomes such as patient loyalty, treatment adherence, and recommendations to others (Siripipatthanakul et al., 2021). For these reasons, understanding patient satisfaction helps dental providers assess and improve their services (Decree of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2014).

Many studies have identified key factors that shape patient satisfaction. These include friendly and respectful staff, affordable prices, ease of access, pain management, and clear communication (Luo et al., 2018; Al Ghanem et al., 2023). However, much of this research uses surveys and is quantitative in nature. Whilst useful, these approaches often miss the deeper reasons behind patients' thoughts and feelings (Turra et al., 2021). Some researchers have instead recommended more in-depth studies using qualitative methods. These allow for open-ended conversations in which patients can share their honest experiences thus providing deeper insights into what patients truly care about (Lixandru et al., 2024; Szabó et al., 2023). Furthermore, most of these studies on patient satisfaction focus on public or teaching hospitals, which operate differently than private dental clinics. Private clinics often follow different service models, have different cost structures, and serve patients with different expectations. Therefore, it is important to explore patient satisfaction in private dental settings as well (Luo et al., 2018).

In Indonesia, there is still a gap in this type of research. Since most studies focus on hospitals and public clinics, there is a limited understanding of what drives satisfaction in private dental clinics. This study aims to address that gap by exploring patient satisfaction at Clinic X, a private dental clinic in South Jakarta that has served the community for more than

30 years through a qualitative study. By listening closely to individual experiences, the research will identify key factors that influence satisfaction and examine how those experiences shape patients' decisions to return or recommend the clinic. In doing so, practical suggestions to help improve care at Clinic X can be provided.

## METHOD

This study used a qualitative single case study design to explore patient satisfaction with dental services at Clinic X, a private dental clinic in Indonesia. The population consisted of patients who had received dental treatment at Clinic X at least once. Informants were selected using convenience sampling. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews in Bahasa Indonesia. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The data were analyzed to identify patterns and themes related to patient satisfaction and their overall experience with the clinic's services. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the relevant ethics committee.

## RESULT

A total of 8 patients were interviewed as and the range of their ages was 24 to 58. Periodontal, orthodontic, endodontic, and oral maxillofacial surgery were among the treatments that the patients received in Clinic X, with some of them having undergone multiple treatment. After interview transcripts were analyzed, six key themes affecting patient satisfaction were identified. The latent variables are as follows: word-of-mouth influence (V1), competence and communication behavior of the dentist (V2), staff expertise and interpersonal communication (V3), clean, well-equipped, easily accessible clinic (V4), service efficiency (V5), and perceived value for money (V6).

### Word-of-Mouth Influence

All patient informants decided to visit Clinic X because of word of mouth recommendations from their friends or family members who were satisfied with the service offered. These positive referrals shaped initial trust and positive expectations towards the clinic. Patient satisfaction tends to increase as patients receive care that matches or above their expectations, increasing their likelihood to return for future treatments. Patient trust and satisfaction also further increase as patients become more familiar with the clinic, building a trustworthy rapport with the dentist and clinic staff with each return visit. Below are some responses given by the informants when asked about why they selected Clinic X:

*"A friend of mine actually had braces done here and she was really happy with the clinic. I happened to need dental care around that time, so I gave it a try. I have been here 4 times since then."* — S, Patient Informant 2.

*"...I've been more selective about which clinic to visit. I decided to try this clinic mainly because a colleague recommended it, and I trusted her judgement because she tends to be quite detail-oriented. Having gone through poor service before, I've learned to be more careful when choosing a clinic. I ended up returning to this clinic because, after trying it, I was satisfied—not only with the dentist's care but also with the overall service and the clinic's appearance."* — DE, Patient Informant 3.

*"My cousin recommended it to me... It's my fifth time here"* — AL, Patient Informant 4.

*"I've been coming here since I was a kid—my parents used to bring me, and I've just continued ever since."* — RA, Patient Informant 5.

*"I heard about this clinic from a few of my friends who recommended it... Been here 7 times"* — WL, Patient Informant 6.

*"The recommendations came from both friends and family members... I can't really remember but I think I have been here at least 10 times." — LS, Patient Informant 7.*

*"I got a recommendation from a friend...I have been here more than 20 times." — MG, Patient Informant 7.*

### **Competence and Communication Behavior of the Dentist**

All patients informants praised the dentist for being highly skilled. On top of that, they repeatedly highlighted his outstanding communication skills and clear explanations, which they all identified as one of the most fulfilling aspects of their treatment experience. The following are some responses highlighting the dentist's excellent clinical ability and soft skills:

*"(Most satisfying aspect) the doctor's service because the doctor here is very experienced and always explains everything to me in detail using language that I can understand easily." — E, Patient Informant 1.*

*"(Most satisfying aspect) the dentist was really professional. My first visit was for scaling, but during the check-up, the dentist also mentioned I had a cavity. It ended up being quite informative and comprehensive... Right from the beginning, the dentist explained things clearly." — S, Patient Informant 2.*

*"(Most satisfying aspect) the service was excellent, especially after I checked the dentist's credentials and got treated by that same doctor. It made me trust them more because the dentist seemed really smart, and I didn't feel any discomfort at all during the procedure... The dentist's skills really showed. Anytime he explained something...it was always very clear. So yeah, I'd say both his skill and communication were really great." — ED, Patient Informant 3.*

*"(Most satisfying aspect) The dentist was super friendly and informative... I was also given very complete aftercare instructions." — AL, Patient Informant 4.*

*"During my treatment, I felt satisfied because the dentist's care was great—so I didn't have any complaints...the dentist explained everything in detail." — RA, Patient Informant 5.*

*"What stuck with me most was how the dentist explained things clearly, and the nurses were all very warm and welcoming." — WL, Patient Informant 6.*

*"The dentist was really professional... When I had a tooth extracted here, I honestly didn't feel a thing. I was so surprised and happy—like, wow, I didn't even notice the injection!" — LS, Patient Informant 7.*

*"I chose this clinic mainly because of its reputation. I also looked at the dentist's profile, and it seemed trustworthy... I was satisfied because I got appointments right on time, and everything was clearly explained during the treatment." — MG, Patient Informant 8.*

Moreover, when asked about the top three most influential factors affecting their satisfaction during their visit to Clinic X, nearly all informants stated that the doctor's communication being one of the three:

*"The staff service, clinic cleanliness, and the doctor's communication." — E, Patient Informant 1.*

*"The clinic's location, the doctor's communication, and the staff's service." — S, Patient Informant 2.*

*"The doctor's communication, clinic cleanliness, and staff service." — DE, Patient Informant 3.*

*"The doctor's communication, staff service, and cleanliness of the clinic." — RA, Patient Informant 5.*

*"The doctor's communication and staff service." — WL, Patient Informant 6.*

*"Staff service, the doctor's communication, and clinic cleanliness." — LS, Patient Informant 7.*

*“First and most important is the doctor’s communication, second is service cost, and third is staff service.” — MG, Patient Informant 8.*

All patient informants consistently emphasized on the dentist’s rich knowledge and strong clinical skills making them very satisfied with the quality of care offered in Clinic X. Patients are also very appreciative of the dentist’s ability to communicate effectively, making this as one of the most satisfying aspect of their treatment experience. A patient-centered approach is reflected in this mix of skill and clear communication, which encourages trust and active participation in the treatment process. Patients felt more involved and reassured during their course of treatment as a result.

### **Staff Expertise and Interpersonal Communication**

Patients complimented Clinic X for having friendly and thoughtful staff who are able to communicate effectively and give them comfort during their visits. The following are some responses from patient informants highlighting the kind and considerate mannerism of Clinic X’s staff:

*“What impressed me the most was definitely the service at this clinic. The nurses and the dentist were all really friendly, and the instructions they gave me were always clear. So far, all of my experiences here have been positive.” — E, Patient Informant 1.*

*“The nurse and the receptionist greeted me and asked me to take a seat when I got there. They even provided me with a variety of snacks and beverages to enjoy while I waited. I think the administrative and nursing staff provided extremely excellent service...The nurse even sent me a note to inquire about my well-being following the operation.” — AL, Patient Informant 4.*

*“What stuck with me most was how the dentist explained things clearly, and the nurses were all very warm and welcoming.” — WL, Patient Informant*

When further asked about the top three most influential factors affecting their satisfaction during their visit to Clinic X, all informants stated that the clinic staff’s service as one of them:

*“The staff service, clinic cleanliness, and the doctor’s communication.” — E, Patient Informant 1.*

*“The clinic’s location, the doctor’s communication, and the staff’s service.” — S, Patient Informant 2.*

*“The doctor’s communication, clinic cleanliness, and staff service.” — DE, Patient Informant 3.*

*“Clinic cleanliness, staff service, and waiting time.” — AL, Patient Informant 4.*

*“The doctor’s communication, staff service, and cleanliness of the clinic.” — RA, Patient Informant 5.*

*“The doctor’s communication and staff service.” — WL, Patient Informant 6.*

*“Staff service, the doctor’s communication, and clinic cleanliness.” — LS, Patient Informant 7.*

*“First and most important is the doctor’s communication, second is service cost, and third is staff service.” — MG, Patient Informant 8.*

### **Clean, Well-Equipped, Easily Accessible Clinic**

Many informants emphasized on the importance of the cleanliness of the facility in influencing their satisfaction during their visit to Clinic X. Informants found the clinic clean making their visits comfortable. Some of them also noticed the clinic's equipment to be of high quality and complete. The following are the statements made by informants indicating so:

*“...the equipment here also looks more modern.” — S, Patient Informant 2.*



*“That’s why I chose this clinic, first because of the recommendation, second because when I tried the experience at this clinic I came back again because overall I was satisfied with the doctor’s service, the overall service, and the overall aesthetics of the clinic.” — DE, Patient Informant 3.*

*“What makes me most satisfied is the waiting time because there are many patients there but I don’t have to wait too long to be served. The cleanliness of the clinic is very good. Registration is also fast. The doctor’s communication is also just one call away. For the price, I also really like it. The location is far from home but because it suits me, I just go there” — AL, Patient Informant 4.*

*“This is also the cleanest clinic I have ever been to so far compared to other clinics.” — WL, Patient Informant 6.*

*“The doctors are professional, the way they work is very clean in the clinic so I feel comfortable and the doctor is also a fairly well-known doctor” — LS, Patient Informant 7.*

Some informants felt that even though they had to travel some distance to reach Clinic X, the quality of care made the trip worthwhile. While distance was not seen as a major issue affecting their satisfaction, several participants mentioned that if the clinic were located closer to where they live or work, it would add to their overall convenience and further improve their satisfaction. The following are their responses:

*“...The location is far from home but because it suits me, I just go there... Maybe if Clinic X plans to expand their reach, please open a branch in West Jakarta so it is closer to my house.” — AL, Patient Informant 4.*

### **Service Efficiency**

Some informants raise few concerns such as waiting time and the difficulty in scheduling an appointment. The following are their concerns:

*“Sometimes the wait feels a bit long, but I guess it’s understandable since there are usually a lot of patients. So yeah, maybe it’s just normal. I usually wait around 10 to 15 minutes, but when it’s crowded, it can take up to 30 minutes.” — E, Patient Informant 1.*

*“I had to wait about 30 minutes once, but that was because I didn’t have an appointment.” — S, Patient Informant 2.*

*“I think the biggest room for improvement would be the scheduling and customer service. It’s been a bit tricky matching my schedule with the dentist’s. I’ve got a busy job, and I know the doctor teaches as well, so he’s not always available. I’m also not someone who plans far ahead—I often try to book things last minute, which makes syncing schedules a bit harder.” — DE, Patient Informant 3.*

*“Perhaps Clinic X could hire more administration staff as sometimes their responses are slow when it comes to scheduling an appointment. That’s all.” — RA, Patient Informant 5*

However, not all informants echo the same concerns with regards to waiting time as shown below. Expected waiting time by each patient tends to differ and is subject to each person’s perception and expectations.

*“What I really appreciated was the waiting time. Even though they’ve got a lot of patients, I didn’t have to wait too long to be treated... At most, around half an hour.” — AL, Patient Informant 4.*

Some informants also mentioned that the current waiting time is still within acceptable range and thus did not negatively affect their overall satisfaction. However, they felt that shorter wait would certainly make their patient experience at Clinic X even better. Besides that,

increasing ease of appointment booking for patients will surely positively influence their satisfaction.

### Perceived Value for Money

Some informants also recognized the quality of care provided by Clinic X. Despite the relatively higher treatment costs in Clinic X compared to other dental clinics, some informants still reported satisfaction and believe that the care they received by Clinic X is valuable, justifying the costs. The following are their responses:

*“If I were to compare this clinic to the one I went to in Bandung, the costs there were definitely lower. But here in Jakarta, the equipment is more complete—for example, you can get an X-ray done right away, which makes things much more convenient. So, as a patient, I don’t mind paying more because everything feels quicker, smoother, and the tools look more modern. Overall, I just feel more comfortable here.”* — S, Patient Informant 2.

*“What really made me happy was how efficient the service was. Even though the clinic gets quite busy, I never had to wait too long to be seen. The place is super clean, registration is fast, and if I need to talk to the doctor, it’s just one call away. I also feel that the pricing works well for me. Even though the clinic is far from my house, I don’t mind the trip because I’m really satisfied.”* — AL, Patient Informant 4.

*“In terms of cost, this is actually one of the most expensive clinics I’ve been to... But to me, it’s worth it. The service lives up to what I expected. If I’m paying a premium, I want clear explanations and a high standard of care—and that’s what I get here.”* — WL

## DISCUSSION

In order to improve care services and assess the overall quality of care, patient satisfaction is essential. Depicted in Figure 1 is the model theory of patient satisfaction at Clinic X. It became evident from speaking with patients that the two main themes that had the most influence were competence and communication behavior of dentist, and staff expertise and interpersonal communication. The findings regarding service efficiency were also quite significant. Although the majority of patients expressed general satisfaction, several said that lengthy wait times and challenges with appointment scheduling could be addressed. This suggests that more convenient scheduling and improved time management could eventually contribute to higher patient satisfaction in Clinic X.

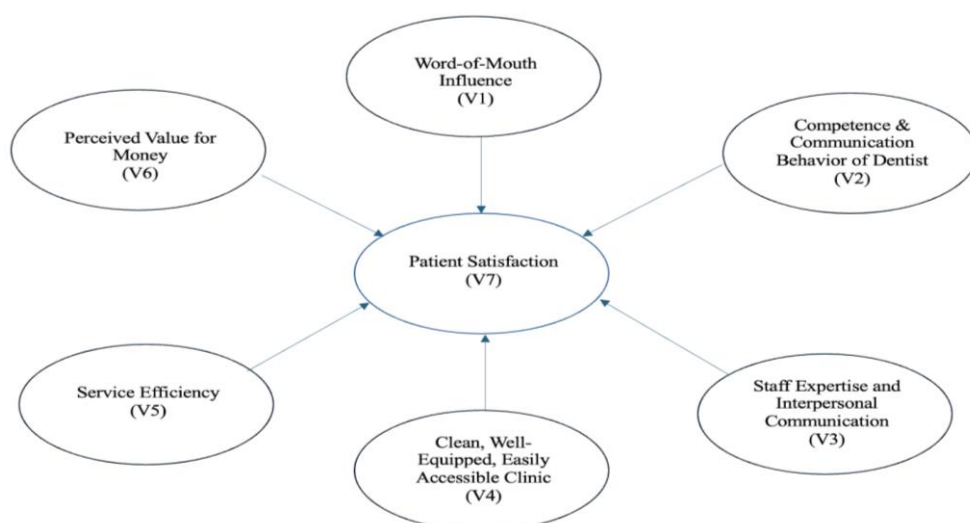


Figure 1. Model Theory of Patient Satisfaction at Clinic X

In light of these findings, some practical recommendations for Clinic X to improve service efficiency include the implementation of a digital appointment system to increase the ease of appointment booking and reduce waiting time of patients, as well as hiring more admin staff to improve service and facilitate appointment schedule. Clinic X should also consider extending its operational hours to increase the availability of the dentists and better accommodate more patients. This study, however, does have certain limitations such as restricted generalizability due to the sample being drawn from a single clinic. Consequently, it is possible that the results are not immediately transferable or representative of patient experiences in other clinics or in other geographical areas. To improve generalizability, future research may consider adopting a multiple case study approach across different clinics. Moreover, conducting additional research using quantitative methods may validate and support the findings obtained from this qualitative study, thus providing a more accurate representation of the population.

Another limitation of this study is the possibility of introducing selection bias with the use of convenience sampling method during data collection. While practical, this sampling method might have limited the generalizability of findings as the chosen participants might not have accurately represented the patient population in Clinic X. Other alternative sampling methods such as purposive or stratified sampling techniques can be utilized in future research in order to guarantee a more representative sample and enhance the findings' generalizability.

## CONCLUSION

Patient satisfaction in Clinic X is most strongly influenced by competence and communication behavior of the dentist, as well as staff expertise and interpersonal communication.

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