

Purpose

- The significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on parental attitudes towards seeking dental care for their children cannot be overstated due to close proximity between dental providers and patients during treatment. The purpose of this cross-sectional study is to assess parental perceptions on their children's oral health during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide recommendations for pediatric dentists in response to future global health crisis.

Introduction

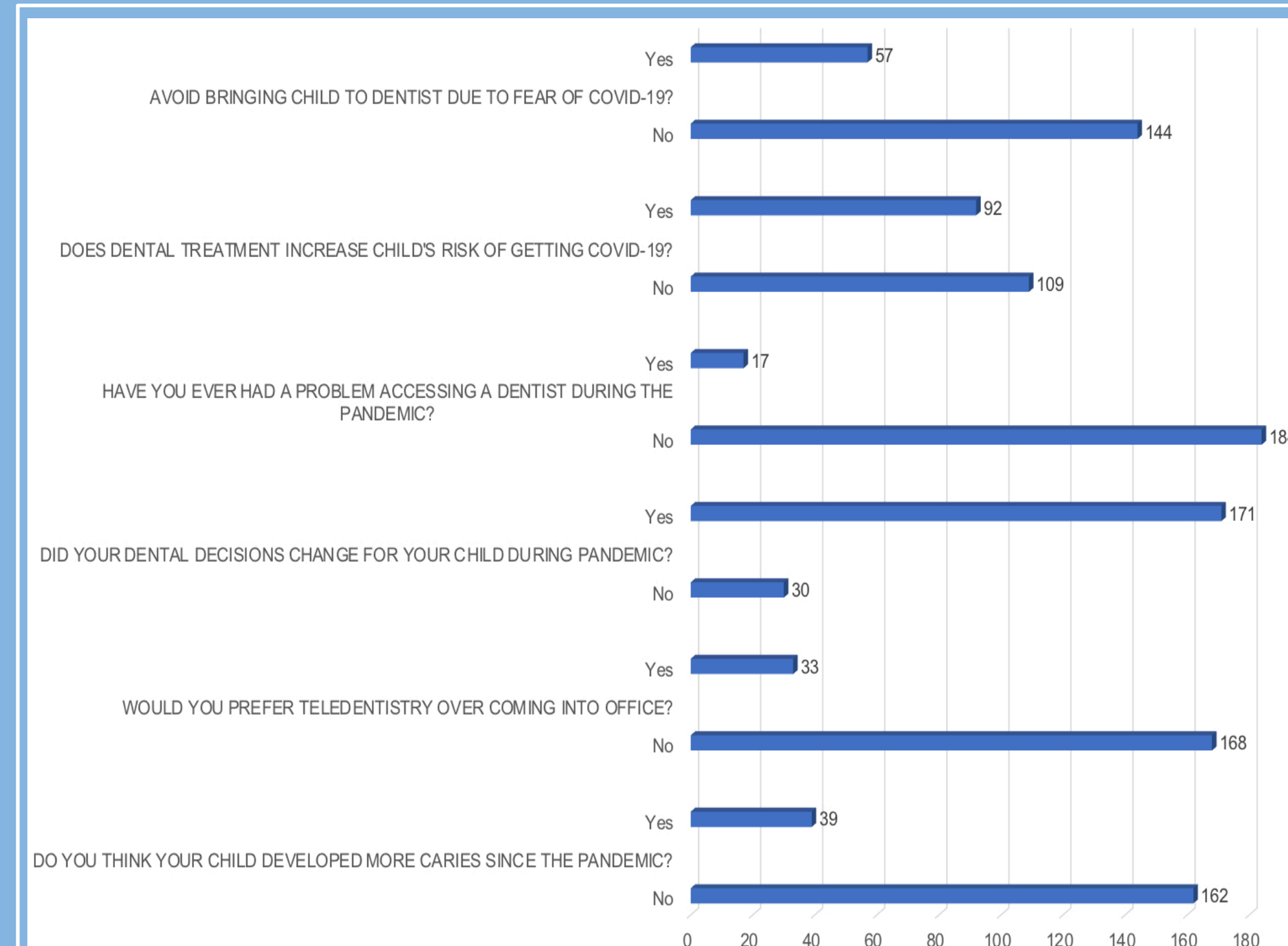
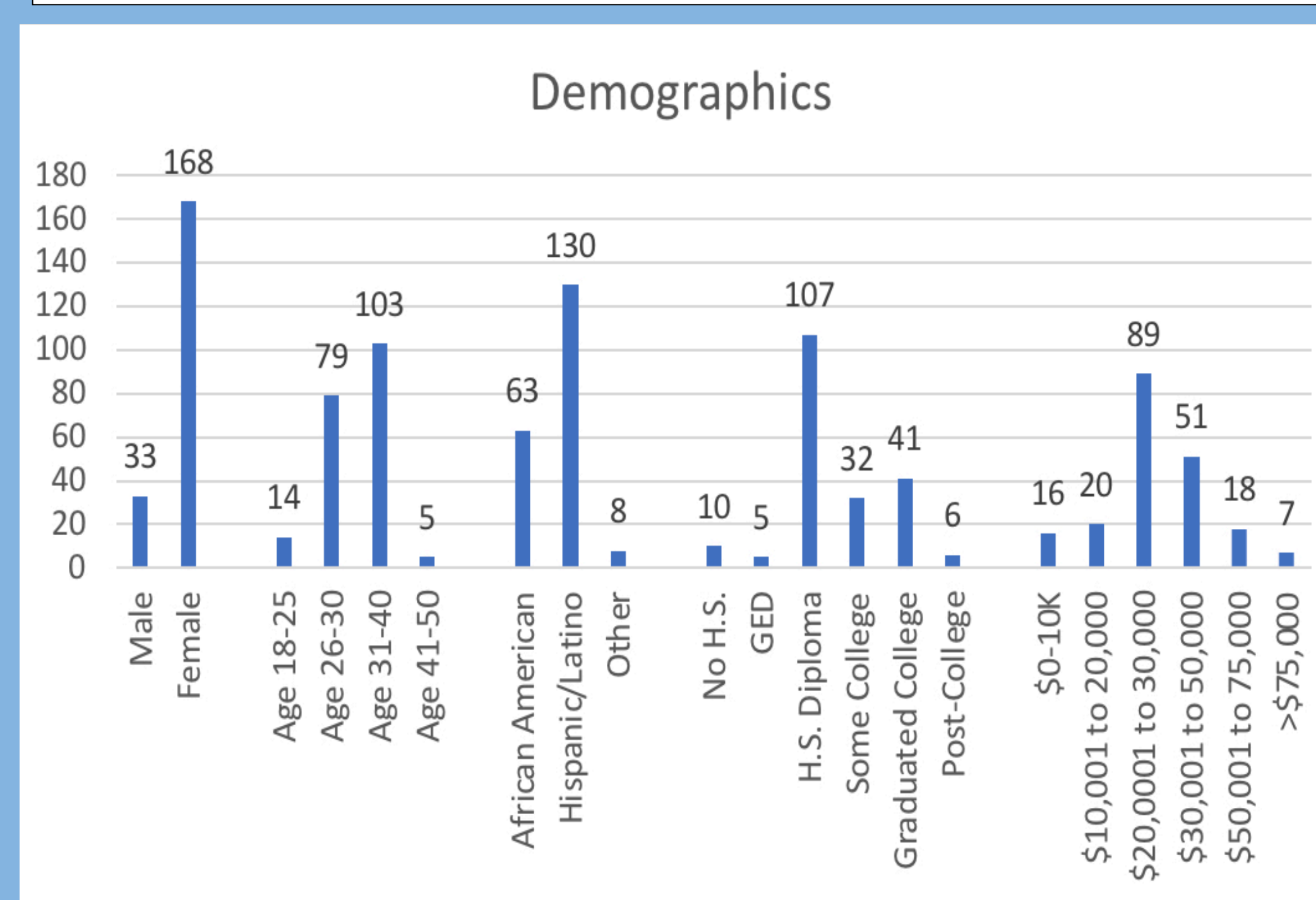
- The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 pandemic, which is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-Cov-2), on March 11, 2020.¹ It has been noted that SARS-Cov-2 can be transmitted through airborne droplets and close contact.² It has been reported that children with COVID-19 have relatively mild symptoms or are asymptomatic.³
- Many of the conventional dental procedures, which often generate aerosol, can increase potential risk for SARS-Cov-2 spread and transmission among patients and dental personnel.⁴
- Pediatric dentists modified various components of their dental practice. For instance:
 - dental emergencies were being managed more frequently with pain medications and antibiotics
 - increased use of teledentistry
 - increased use of minimally invasive and non-aerosol generating techniques such as Hall Crowns, Interim Therapeutic Restorations (ITR), and applications of Silver Diamine Fluoride (SDF).^{5,6}
- A study by Campagnaro et al. showed that more than half (66.6%) of the parents would only bring their children to the dentist for urgent needs. This study also noted a significant correlation between parental fear and deferring dental visits for their children.⁷
- Another study revealed that approximately 20% of parents were reluctant to take their children to the dentist even in the presence of severe dental pain.⁸

- Goswami et al. reported poor parental practices toward their children's dental care during the pandemic.⁹ Potential increased prevalence of caries in pediatric populations due to parental reluctance towards seeking dental care/lack of proper oral hygiene and dietary practices at home during the pandemic.

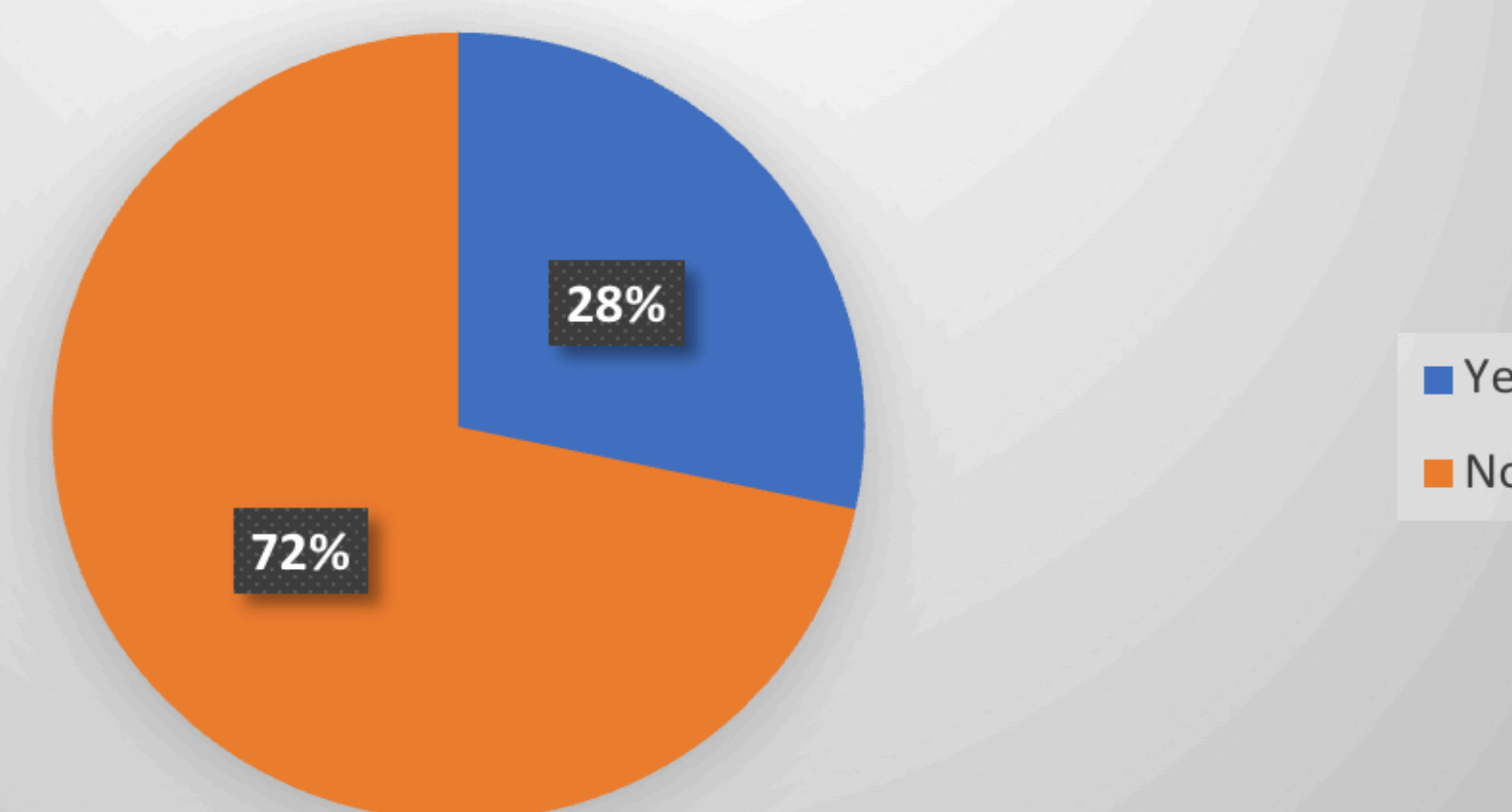
Methods

- This six month (August 2022-January 2023) cross-sectional research study was conducted via an anonymous and voluntary survey questionnaire consisting of 20 questions given to parents who present to the Pediatric Dental Clinic at BronxCare Health System with their children.
- The 201 total surveys collected demographic information along with parental attitudes and oral health practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Inclusion criteria were: Parents of children in the age range of 0-12 years old; parents who can read and understand English or Spanish; and parents of children who present for comprehensive oral evaluation or periodic oral examination. Parents who did not fit this criteria were excluded from the study.

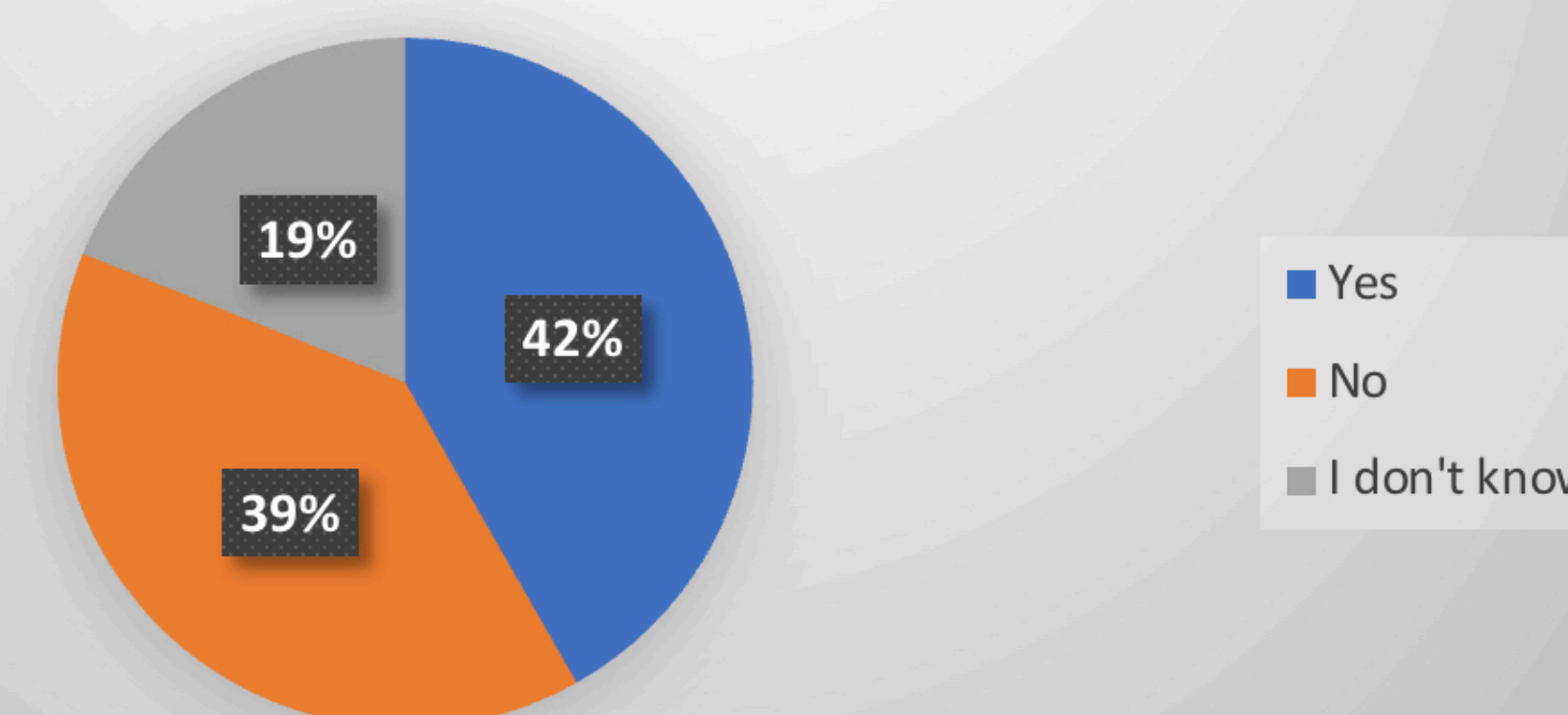
Results



Avoid bringing child to dentist due to fear of COVID-19?



Do you believe that you brushed your child's teeth more during the pandemic?



Discussion

- In contrast with previous studies, although all parents were concerned about COVID-19, a considerable percentage (72%) would still take their children to dental regardless of COVID-19 risk, though they had limited knowledge regarding the role of the dental environment in the spread of the infection (46% believed dental increased risk, while 54% said dentistry did not).
- Only 42% of respondents took extra efforts to maintain their child's oral hygiene with extra brushing. 81% of respondents reported they didn't think their child got more caries during the pandemic, perhaps since a majority (73%) of respondents reported less frequent snacking during the pandemic.
- Parents with higher levels of education/financial freedom reported greater levels of fear regarding dental treatment for their child during the pandemic; however, a majority did not avoid the dentist due to this fear.

Conclusion

- Understanding parental perceptions and concerns about dentistry during the COVID-19 pandemic may help pediatric dentists to alleviate parental fear and offer alternative treatment options when indicated. Furthermore, positive parental attitudes and increased knowledge related to dentistry can encourage parents to seek oral health care and implement appropriate home care for their children.
- Dentists who treat children during the pandemic should enact universal infection control procedures to the highest standard.
- Diligent efforts should be directed toward informing the public regarding the strict measures undertaken to avoid contamination in dental offices and that dental cases can be treated with lower risk, even during a pandemic.

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