

Emerging Young Adults' Perceived Social Status and Motivators for Seeking Dental Care: A Qualitative Study

Sukalski JMC,¹ Askelson, NM,² Reynolds JC,¹ Damiano PC,¹ Xian JX,¹ McKernan SC,¹

¹The University of Iowa, College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics; ²The University of Iowa, College of Public Health

Objectives

Emerging young adulthood is a unique developmental period (aged 18-25) that presents opportunities and challenges as individuals experience changes in education and employment. Dental utilization may be disrupted by these changes, ultimately impacting oral health.

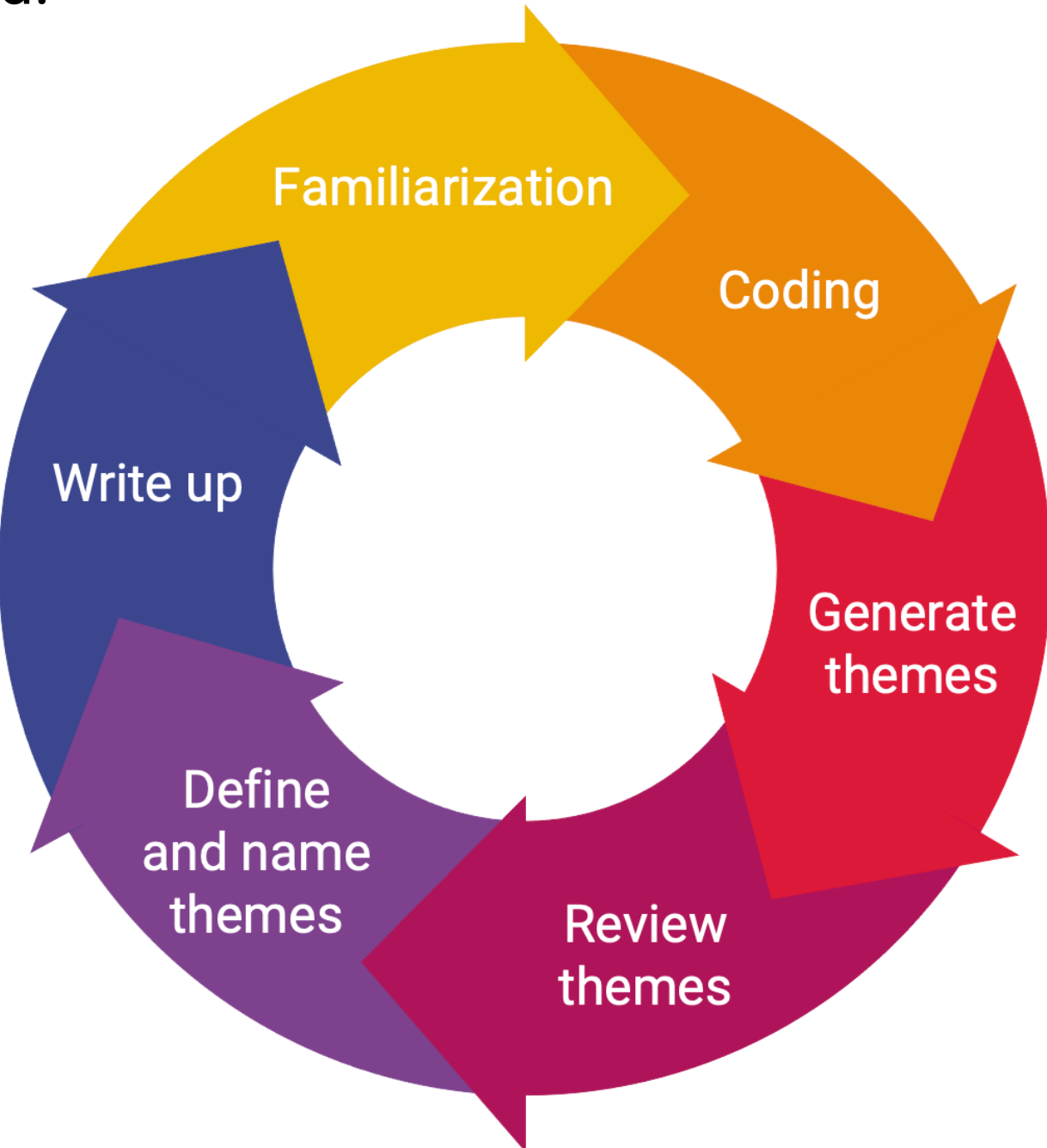
Perceived social status (PSS), a measure of social status, reflects one's perception of their own social and economic experiences throughout their lifetime relative to others.

STUDY AIMS

1. Explore the role of PSS in seeking dental care among young adults.
2. Identify motivators to seeking dental care.

Methods

- In the summer of 2022, emerging young adults (18-25) were recruited from the Admissions Clinic at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics.
- One-on-one semi-structured interviews and survey questions.
- Thematic analysis of transcribed qualitative data was completed.



Results

- 45 participated: 17 reported low PSS, 15 reported moderate PSS, and 13 high PSS.
- 4 major themes emerged, and narratives shift from those reporting low PSS and those reporting high PSS:
 1. **Social pressures:** perception of others in negative light to "keeping up with the Joneses"
 2. **Positive relationships:** active encouragement to parental guidance throughout childhood
 3. **Establishing dental home:** never having dental home to re-establishing a dental home
 4. **Dental need:** caries/pain to more aesthetic treatment



Results

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of emerging young adults aged 18-25 years seeking dental care at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics (N=45)

	Low PSS Number (%)	Mod PSS Number (%)	High PSS Number (%)
Total	17	15	13
Age (years)			
18	2 (11.8)	2 (13.3)	0 (0.0)
19	1 (5.9)	3 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
20	2 (11.8)	4 (26.7)	2 (15.4)
21	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	3 (23.1)
22	4 (23.5)	1 (6.7)	1 (7.7)
23	2 (11.8)	2 (13.3)	2 (15.4)
24	2 (11.8)	1 (6.7)	2 (15.4)
25	3 (17.6)	2 (13.3)	3 (23.1)
Gender			
Male	7 (41.2)	6 (40.0)	5 (38.5)
Female	10 (58.8)	9 (60.0)	7 (53.8)
Non-binary	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.7)
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.7)
Black/African American	2 (11.8)	5 (33.3)	0 (0.0)
Hispanic/Latino	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.7)
Middle Eastern/Northern African	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (15.4)
Other or multiracial	3 (17.7)	1 (6.7)	2 (15.4)
White	10 (58.8)	9 (60.0)	7 (53.8)
Employment status			
Full time	7 (41.2)	9 (60.0)	6 (42.2)
Part time	4 (23.5)	3 (20.0)	3 (23.1)
Unemployed	6 (35.3)	3 (20.0)	4 (30.8)
Dental Insurance			
Medicaid	15 (88.2)	12 (80.0)	8 (61.5)
Private	1 (5.9)	3 (20.0)	4 (30.8)
Unsure	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.7)
None	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Completed Education			
Less than high school	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
High school degree/GED	11 (64.7)	13 (86.7)	10 (76.9)
2-year degree	2 (11.8)	2 (13.3)	0 (0.0)
4-year degree or more	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	3 (23.1)
Current Education			
Preparing for GED	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
2-year degree	0 (0.0)	4 (26.7)	3 (23.1)
4-year degree or more	1 (5.9)	3 (20.0)	6 (46.2)
Not in school	15 (88.2)	8 (53.3)	0 (0.0)

Conclusions

- Emerging young adulthood should not be overlooked in the lifespan.
- Significant differences in personal experiences and motivating factors were observed.
- As PSS increased, motivators decreased in dental need and self-drivers were in motion.
- Targeted programmatic efforts should be made early to provide individuals with low PSS the tools to guide healthy behaviors.

Funding Source

Supported by the NIH under award number 1F31DE030363-01

