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## The Attitude of Patients towards the Involvement of Medical Students during a Medical Procedure or Examination

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### **Abstract:**

*Objective: The following study is aimed at investigating the attitude of patients towards medical students as they deliver services to them in terms of medical investigation or procedures.*

*Methods: Through a questionnaire, the researcher asked patients what their preferences are as regards medical students attending them. The points of interest were the number of medical students a patient would be comfortable with, the gender of the student and the types of medical investigation or procedure that the patient would be comfortable with if attended by a student.*

*Results: Of the 144 patients sampled, 69.44% were male and 30.56% were female, out of which 56% consented to involvement of medical students on teaching practice, as 44.05% refused. Different patients were comfortable only with a particular number of students attending them. For example, 37.8 % of respondents who consented preferred only 1 student's presence while 29.26% preferred 2 students. More than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the respondents wanted a student attending them to be under the supervision of a professional doctor. Different respondents had diverse opinions on the role of the student in the examination or procedure. Religion also played a role in the manner of attending to the patient, as well as the preferred gender of the attending student.*

*Discussion: The proportion of consenting respondents was just slightly higher than those refusing to be attended by students in medical practice. This may imply that a good number of patients are suspicious or uncomfortable with medical students attending them. Patients were also selective on the number of students to attend to them. The nature of examination also influenced consent or refusal of attendance by students.*

**Key words:** Medical students, respondents, patients, attendance

### **1. Aims of the Study**

This study was conducted with the aim of establishing patients' preferences on the involvement of medical students while being attended to, as well as their opinion on the role of the medical student.

### **2. Study Subjects**

This study was conducted at Mathari Hospital, Nairobi, Kenya. This is a referral and teaching hospital with a 600-bed capacity, located to the East of Nairobi.

The target population was composed of all the patients that were reporting to Mathari Hospital as out-patients and in-patients.

### **3. Methods of Study**

Descriptive statistics were used in a 180-patient sample, which was picked out of all the patients sent to Mathari Hospital. Questionnaire method was used to obtain opinion from the patients, who were served with letters requesting them to participate in filling the questionnaire. The questionnaires were given to the patients willing to participate voluntarily, which the researcher collected before departure.

**4. Data Analysis and Presentation**

Of the 180 patients sampled, 144 returned the filled questionnaires which had been completed by the patients or their parents/guardians. This figure makes up 72% of the total sample, of which 99 (68.75%) were females while 45 (31.25%) were males, all who were aged between 7 – 40 years.

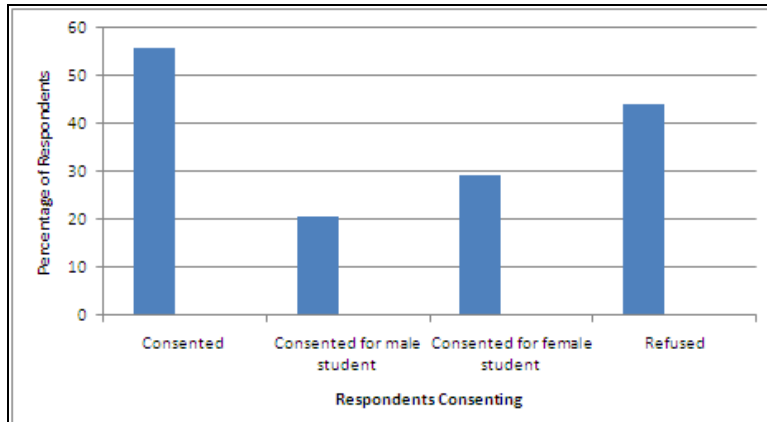


Figure 1: Respondents' consent for involvement of medical students in their attendance

62 respondents (44.05%) were against the involvement of medical students in their examination. 38.19% (55) of these consented under no conditions. 29.17% of respondents consented on condition that the students were females while 20.83% favored the involvement of male students.

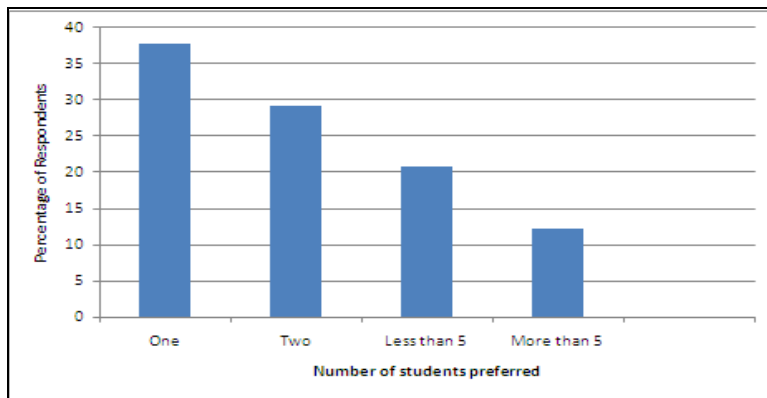


Figure 2: Number of students the respondents preferred to be involved in their attendance

As illustrated above, 37.8% of respondents who consented preferred only 1 student's presence while 29.26% preferred 2 students. 20.73% of the respondents preferred 5 or less students, while only 12.19% preferred the involvement of more than 5 students.

87.8% of the respondents who consented agreed to be examined by students under the supervision of a doctor while 12.2% were comfortable without a supervising doctor, as illustrated below.

**Figure 3a: Students under supervision of a doctor**

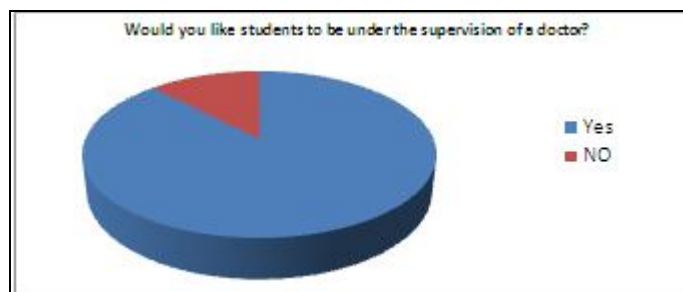


Figure 4: Reasons for refusal by respondents

Of the 62 who refused, 25.81% said that the quality of care would be affected if attended by a student while 19.35% were influenced by personality, and that the student would take more time. At the same time, 12.9% of the respondents reported to have had a negative prior experience with being attended by students, and therefore would not prefer being attended by students. 12.9% of respondents as well refused to be attended by students because of the nature of their medical condition. 6.45% reported that cultural and gender based norms would allow them to be attended by students.

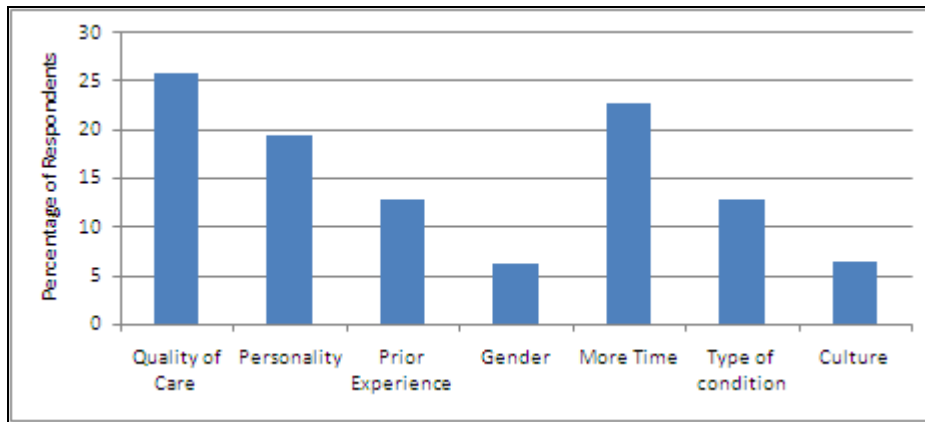


Figure 5: Opinion of the respondents towards the role of the medical student

- Respondents’ opinion on the role of the student

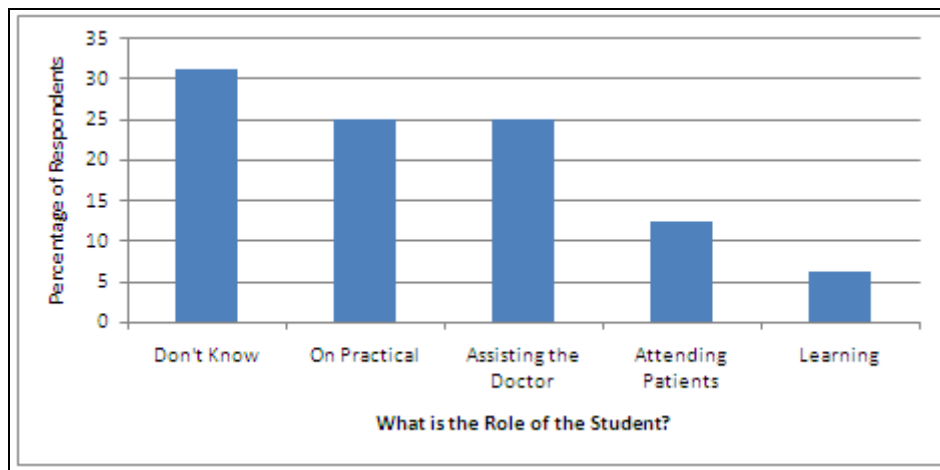


Figure 6a: Feeling of respondents

31.25% of respondents said they did not know the role of the medical student in their attendance. 25% of them reported that medical students were on practicals as part of their academic requirement, with the same number saying that the students were assisting the doctor; while 12.5% said that the students were the main attendants as 6.25% said that the students were learning.

- The feelings of the respondents

31.25 of respondents reported feeling uneasy on the presence of medical students, 25% felt extremely uneasy while 18.25% felt easy, as 12.5% felt very easy and never minded their presence.

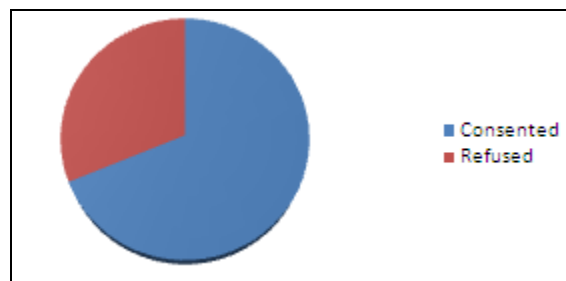


Figure 6b: Respondents’ consent

Of the 144 subjects, 68.75% reported that they required to consent and be informed of the student’s presence while 31.25% refused to consent.

- Type of examinations the respondents underwent in the presence of medical students

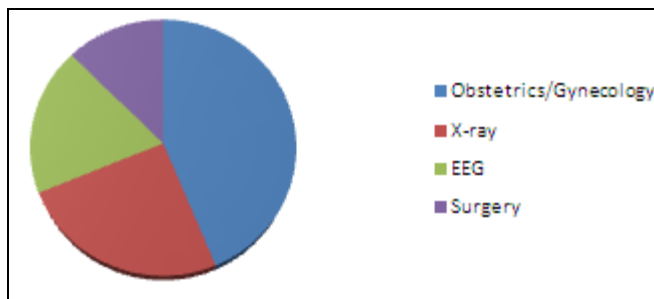


Figure 7: Type of examination done in the presence of medical students

43.75% of the respondents reported to have been attended to by students during obstetrical/gynecological examinations, 25% in x-ray examinations, 18.75 during EEG and 12.5% during surgical examinations.

- The following table shows the age bracket of the respondents in percentage:

Age Bracket	Number of Respondents in %
Below 10 years	6.25
11-15 years	18.75
16-20 years	18.75
21-25 years	18.75
26-30 years	12.25
31-above	18.75
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1: Respondents’ age bracket

- Figure 4.6 Gender Distribution

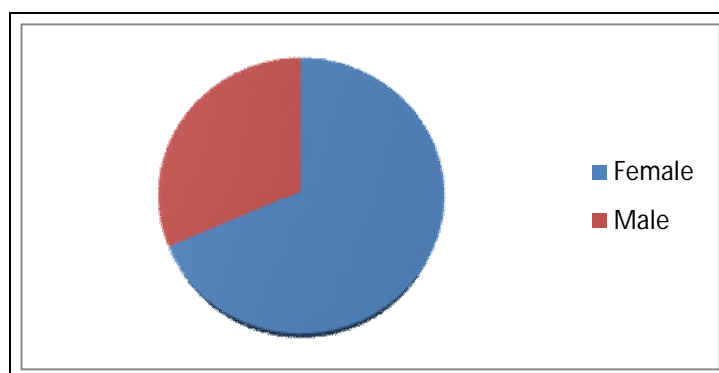


Figure 8: Respondents’ Gender

68.75% of the respondents were female while 31.25% were male.

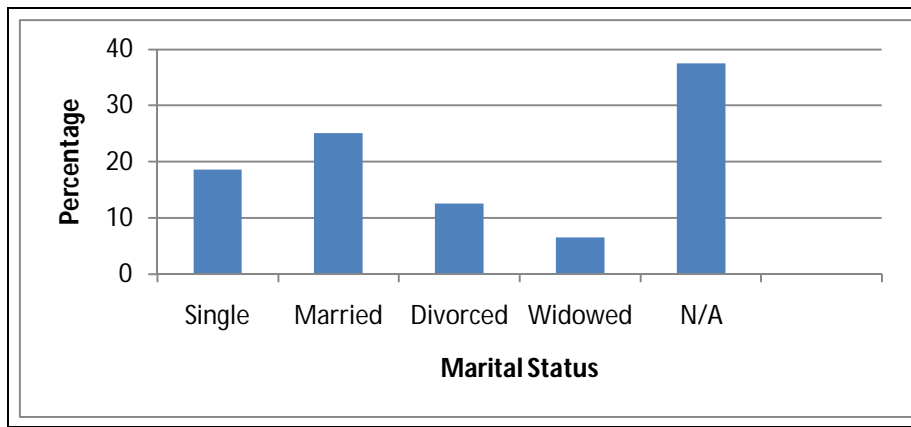


Figure 9: Respondents' Marital status

37.5% of the respondents were minors, 25% were married, 18.25% were single, and 12.5% were divorced/separated while 6.5% were widowed.

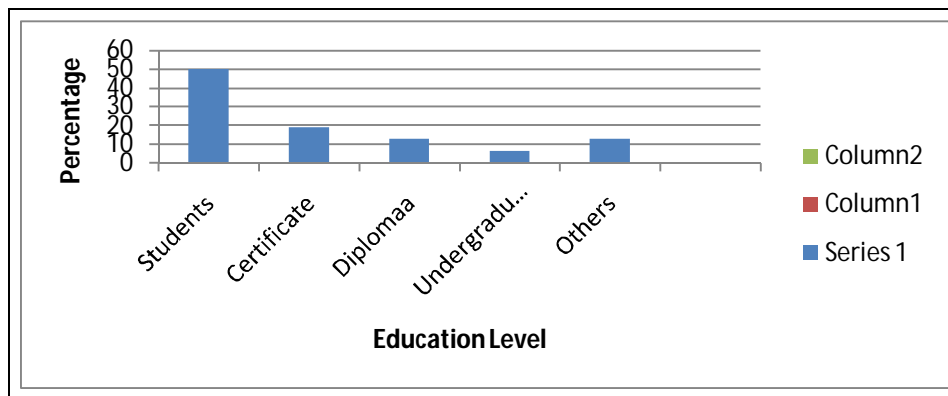


Figure 10: Respondents' Level of Education

As illustrated above, 50% of the respondents were students, 18.75% were graduates of a certificate level course, 12.5% were diploma graduates, 6.25% were undergraduates while the rest were categorized as others.

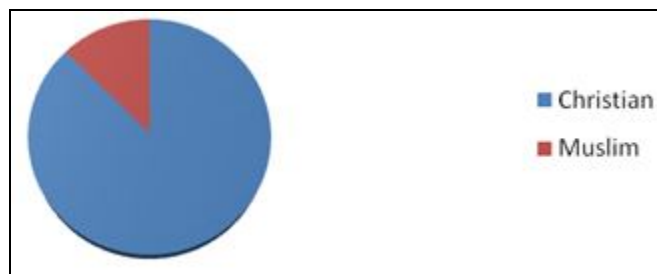


Figure 11: Respondents' Religion

87.5% of the respondents were Christians while 12.5% were Muslims.

- Inferential Analysis

Respondent's Age in years		Feeling in the presence of a medical student										Total	
		Extremely Uneasy		Uneasy		Won't Mind		Easy		Very Easy		Count	%
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		100
	<10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	100	9	100
	11-15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	100	27	100
	16-20	0	0	27	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	100
	21-25	0	0	18	50	18	50	0	0	0	0	36	100
	26-30	18	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	100
	>31	0	0	0	0	9	33	18	67	0	0	27	100
<b>Total</b>		18	13	45	31	27	19	18	13	36	25	144	100

Table 2: The relationship between the respondents' age and feeling at examination by student

As illustrated in table above, all (100%) respondents aged 15 and below felt very easy in the presence of a medical student, all the 27 respondents sampled aged 16-20 were uneasy, as were 50% of the 21-25 year old counterparts. The other 50% of respondents aged 21-15 did not mind a student's presence while all respondents sampled that were aged 26-30 felt very uneasy. 33% of respondents aged above 31 years did not mind a student's presence while 67% were easy.

Respondent's Sex		Feeling in the presence of a medical student										Total	
		Extremely Uneasy		Uneasy		Won't Mind		Easy		Very Easy		Count	%
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		100
	Male	36	80	9	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	45	100
	Female	0	0	36	36.4	18	18.2	27	27.2	18	18.2	99	100
<b>Total</b>		36	25.0	45	31.3	18	12.5	18.8	18	12.5	12.5	144	100

Table 3: Relationship between a respondent's Gender and Feelings in the presence of a medical Student

As indicated above, 80% of male respondents felt extremely uneasy while 18.2% of females felt easy in the presence of a medical student during examination. 18.2% of females also didn't mind the students' presence, while no male recorded such a feeling, neither did any male feel very easy.

### 5. Discussion

The study findings observed that 31.25% of respondents felt uneasy when examined in the presence of medical students. They cited the need for privacy, while others stated that they did not want to be used as learning subjects. This was consistent with the study by Benson et al (1997), which reported that patients are happy to help medical students, but are disappointed at the manner of the students' involvement and presence. 12.5% of the respondents recorded mixed feelings as they were happy to help medical students in their research, but were at the same time worried about their confidentiality and privacy. 25% of the respondents, the majority, made their decision based on the concern about the quality of care.

44.4% of respondents refused to have students during their examination citing lack of proper interpersonal skills and confidentiality from the students. 25% of respondents preferred to be examined by a doctor as opposed to students since they didn't want to be attended by unqualified staff. 87.5% of the respondent preferred to be examined by students under the supervision of a qualified health professional.

This study further observed that 31.25% of the patients did not know the role of the student in the examination, since they were not informed about this role, or indeed the students' involvement. This is against Clin's(2001) assertion that patients should be informed of the identity and professionalism of any individual involved in their care, and all health care professional have the responsibility of properly identifying themselves. Patients gave varied opinions on the role of the students: 6.25% said they were learning, 25% of the respondents refused to be attended by students in an active role because the quality of health care would be compromised. This concurs with Abdulghani et al (2008) who stated that patients would agree to students performing minor procedures and physical examinations. 18.75% made their decision based on the presumed personality of the attendant, 12.5% on previous experience and 6.25% on the gender and culture of the student.

43.75% of patients were attended to by students while on obstetric examinations. They were worried of their privacy hence preferred to be examined by students of the same gender. This concurred with Shlomo M. Brody (2001) who observed that patients most women prefer to female doctors for gynecological matters. Abdulghani et al (2008) reported that medical students' involvement at obstetric, gynecological and surgical procedures was lower compared to other departments of primary care and medication.

It was observed in this study that 37.5% of patients preferred not to be attended by any student, 6.25% were not comfortable with more than 5 students, while the rest were comfortable with less than 5 students due to privacy and confidentiality concerns.

Religion also played a big role in the decisions of the respondents, where 87.5% were Christians while 12.5% were Muslims. Muslims reported that it was against their religion to expose their bodies to strangers.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

### 6.1. Conclusion

We can therefore deduce a few things from the findings of this study. First, most patients were not informed of their rights nor of the involvement of students in their examination. Secondly, most patients preferred to be attended by qualified professionals as opposed to students on attachment. Most patients also wanted their consent sought before students were involved in their examination. Patients are usually receptive of students if their consent is sought prior to being attended to. Uneducated and young patients are not receptive to students, citing confidentiality and quality concerns.

### 6.2. Recommendation

The study recommends the following.

All health care practitioners should seek patients' consent before attendance. They should also clearly identify themselves, and explain the role they play in the attendance, in a language clearly understandable by the patient, so that the patient can make an informed decision on the whether to consent or accept the involvement of the practitioner, especially students on attachment. Each healthcare provision station should have print-out of the rights of patients, which are available to the patient before administration of services. Medical students should be clearly instructed to keep patient matters private.

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