

Original article

# Knowledge and Awareness of Root Canal Treatment among Patients in Tripoli: A Survey-Based Study

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## ABSTRACT

Root canal treatment is a branch of dentistry concerned with the morphology, physiology, and pathology of the human dental pulp. The majority of patients worry about a root canal because they don't know much about it and believe the procedure will be painful. The aim of this study was to assess the knowledge and awareness of patients in a sample of Tripoli Libya's patients regarding root canal treatment. A Questionnaire comprised 19 questions was distributed in hard copies to 134 patients in public and private dental centers in Tripoli, Libya. The data were then subjected to statistical analysis using Chi square test and Fisher exact test, and  $P < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant. The survey found that 79.9% of patients were familiar with root canal treatment and a significant proportion of patients (80.6%) thought the therapy was necessary for treating tooth pain. There have been statistically significant results linking endodontic professionals' experiences with different age groups. Similarly, a significant connection has been shown between patient's knowledge about root endodontic therapy and their level of education. Additionally, women's decisions to receive treatment are significantly influenced by the cost of treatment. According to our study, it was clear that most of the people had good knowledge and awareness regarding root canal treatment, but they felt it was costly. A general dentist was the first choice for the majority of patients. The cost associated with treatment was a serious barrier to obtaining treatment, especially among women.

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## INTRODUCTION

Root canal treatment is the field of dentistry that deals with diseases of the dental pulp, surrounding tissue, and the root of the tooth in humans. If neglect of oral hygiene causes tooth caries to advance and reach the pulpal area and then the root canal treatment is necessary [1]. Whenever a root canal is not received, the tooth will eventually become irreversibly damaged, beyond restoration, and break out. A tooth's drifting, collapsing occlusion, opening up of contacts, loss of masticatory effectiveness, and loss of aesthetics are all signs of tooth loss that squeal [2,3]. When deciding if a tooth may be restored, root canal treatment (RCT) should be taken into consideration because it has superior clinical results and maintains normal dentition [4,5].

Research has shown that anxiety and fear are significant barriers to pursuing root canal treatment generally [6,7]. The lack of knowledge patients have about root canal therapy may be the cause of their anxieties. A lot of patients are unaware of the nature and extent of root canal treatment [8]. The patient delays the root canal treatment because of discomfort and treatment duration. Other factors that may influence the decision-making process for treatment planning include the patient's socioeconomic situation, level of treatment commitment, attitude and behavior, and personal preferences [9].

Someone may obtain information about root canal treatment from a variety of sources, including dental clinic staff members, the media, friends, and relatives [6]. On the other hand, some patients have a history of root canal treatments, but their dentist is not providing them with enough information. Patients may also have low understanding and awareness levels, which can lead to poor knowledge levels [10].

There aren't many studies of patient views and understandings regarding endodontic therapy carried out in Libya. Thus, the purpose of the current study is to explore patients' knowledge and attitudes about root canal treatment at public and private dental centers in Tripoli/Libya.

## METHODS

### *Study design*

A cross sectional study, questionnaire-based study was carried out on a group of 134 patients visiting four private dental clinics and two public centers covering the city of Tripoli, Libya during their regular dental visits. The questionnaire was conducted over a period of seven months, beginning in October 2023 and ending in April 2024. A consent were obtained from the included subjects whom over the age of fifteen years, and agreed to participate in the survey.

### *Data collection*

Data were collected through face-to-face interview using a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 19 multiple-choice questions covering topics such as patients' impressions and experiences with root canal therapy and its cost, their knowledge and awareness of root canal treatment, the standards for choosing a dentist, and patients' concerns regarding endodontic therapy.

### *Statistics analysis*

Descriptive statistics were used frequency with percentage for categorized variables. Categorical variables were compared using Chi square test and Fisher exact test, and p-value < 0.05 was considered to be statistically significant.

## RESULTS

### *Participant demographic characteristics*

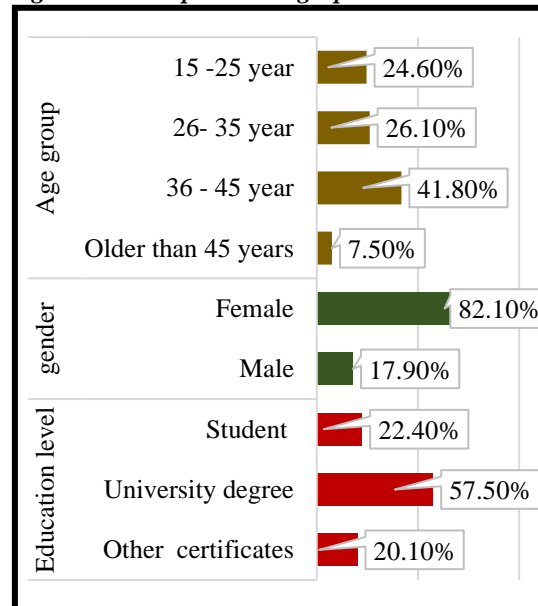
Out of 134 patients, 110 (82.1%) were female and 24 (17.9%) were male, with an age range of 15 to 75 years. Of these, 33 (24.6%) were aged 15–25 years, 35 (26.1%) were 26–35 years, 56 (41.8%) were 36–45 years, and 10 (7.5%) were older than 45 years old. Furthermore, 77 (57.5%) of the patients studied for a university degree, 30 (22.4%) were students, and 27 (20.1%) held other certificates. A summary of the participants' descriptive statistics was presented in figure 1.

### *Knowledge of patients regarding root canal treatment*

The results shown that a significant majority, 80.6%, of patients familiar with root canal treatment procedures believe such treatment is necessary for tooth pain, as affirmed by 79.9% of patients. Furthermore, 12.7% deem it crucial for decayed teeth, and a smaller fraction, 7.5%, consider it imperative for fractured teeth. Knowledge about root canal treatment specialists is present in 76.1% of the patients. Of these, 57.5% visited a general dentist, while 42.5% sought a root canal specialist. A preference for root canal treatment is shown by 78.4%, 10.4% prefer tooth extraction, 8.2% select self-treatment, and a mere 3% choose herbal treatment. A majority of the patients, 59.7%, experience fear of root canal treatment, in contrast to the 40.3% who do not share this apprehension.

Statistically significant results have been observed linking age groups to specialists' knowledge of root canal treatment, with p-values of 0.019. Likewise, a significant correlation exists between education levels and the specialists' understanding of root canal treatment, indicated by p-values of 0.004. In terms of gender, notable findings were reported for the experience of fear related to root canal treatment, with a p-value of 0.001 (Table 1).

**Figure 1. Participant demographic characteristics**



**Table 1. Frequency of various response to questions regarding the knowledge of patients regarding root canal treatment**

Item	N	%	Age	Gender	Education
			P-value	P-value	P-value
<b>Do you know what a root canal treatment is?</b>					
Yes	108	80.6%	0.349 <sup>C</sup>	0.708 <sup>F</sup>	0.512 <sup>C</sup>
No	26	19.4%			
<b>When do you think root canal treatment is required?</b>					
Pain in the tooth	107	79.9%	0.718 <sup>F</sup>	0.584 <sup>F</sup>	.739 <sup>F</sup>
Decayed tooth	17	12.7%			
Fracture of tooth	10	7.5%			
<b>Whom do you visit for a root canal treatment?</b>					
General dentist	77	57.5%	0.582 <sup>C</sup>	0.314 <sup>C</sup>	0.906 <sup>C</sup>
Root canal specialist	57	42.5%			
<b>Do you know that there is a specialist for root canal treatment?</b>					
Yes	102	76.1%	<b>0.019<sup>F</sup></b>	0.360 <sup>C</sup>	<b>.004<sup>C</sup></b>
No	32	23.9%			
<b>What do you prefer when there is tooth pain?</b>					
Root canal treatment	105	78.4%	0.795 <sup>F</sup>	0.817 <sup>F</sup>	0.923 <sup>F</sup>
Herbal treatment	4	3.0%			
Self -treatment	11	8.2%			
Extraction	14	10.4%			
<b>Do you fear undergoing root canal treatment?</b>					
Yes	80	59.7%	0.822 <sup>C</sup>	<b>0.001<sup>C</sup></b>	0.104 <sup>C</sup>
No	54	40.3%			

*C: Chi square test. F: Fisher exact test. P < 0.05 is statistically significant*

**Patients' experience regarding root canal treatment**

The results shown that, 38.8% of patients identified tooth extraction, despite treatment, as the most distressing or anxiety-provoking part of root canal therapy. This was followed by 29.9% of patients who experienced pain during or after the procedure, 19.4% who had files break within the root canals, and finally, 11.9% who were apprehensive about receiving local anesthetic injections. Among patients receiving root canal treatment, 76.1% represent more than three-quarters, with 55.8% finding the treatment painful and 44.2% reporting it as not painful. 61.7% of patients recommend root canal treatment to their peers; however, 62.1% express fear towards the procedure; 31.8% find it too expensive;

and a mere 6.1% are unaware of it. Regarding the resolution of endodontic infections, % of patients believe antibiotics alone are sufficient without a dentist's intervention, while 88.0% disagree, stating that antibiotics alone cannot treat endodontic infections without a dental visit. 74.6% of patients reported that their teeth became weaker following root canal treatment, whereas 25.4% indicated no weakening of teeth after the procedure.

Significant findings were noted regarding age in the context of teeth weakening after root canal treatment, indicated by a p-value of 0.043. Similarly, when considering educational levels, significant outcomes were also seen for the same condition, with a p-value of 0.017. Furthermore, the aspects of receiving a root canal that were most uncomfortable or caused anxiety were significantly associated only with age, with a p-value of 0.021 (Table 2).

**Table 2. Frequency of various response to questions regarding patients' experience regarding root canal treatment**

Item	N	%	Age	Gender	Educati on
			p-value	p-value	p-value
<b>What is your most unpleasant or anxiety-arousing aspect associated with the RCT?</b>					
The need to remove the tooth despite undertaken treatment	52	38.8%	0.021 <sup>F</sup>	0.206 <sup>F</sup>	0.429 <sup>C</sup>
Pain during or after RCT	40	29.9%			
Local anesthetic injection	16	11.9%			
Broking of files in root canals	26	19.4%			
<b>Have you undergone root canal treatment?</b>					
Yes	102	76.1%	0.319 <sup>C</sup>	0.360 <sup>C</sup>	0.344 <sup>C</sup>
No	32	23.9%			
<b>If yes, what was your experience during Root canal treatment</b>					
Not Painful	45	44.2%	0.945 <sup>C</sup>	0.388 <sup>C</sup>	0.944 <sup>C</sup>
Painful	57	55.8%			
<b>Do you suggest root canal treatment to your colleagues?</b>					
Yes	82	62.1%	0.991 <sup>F</sup>	.096 <sup>F</sup>	0.363 <sup>F</sup>
No	9	6.8%			
May be	42	31.6%			
<b>If yes why</b>					
Fear about the treatment	51	62.1%	0.345 <sup>F</sup>	0.232 <sup>C</sup>	0.651 <sup>C</sup>
Too costly	26	31.8%			
Not worth it	5	6.1%			
<b>Can antibiotics alone resolve endodontic infections without the need to visit a dentist</b>					
Yes	15	12.0%	0.680 <sup>F</sup>	0.828 <sup>F</sup>	0.678 <sup>F</sup>
No	118	88.0%			
<b>Do teeth become weaker after RCT?</b>					
Yes	100	74.6%	0.043 <sup>F</sup>	0.637 <sup>C</sup>	0.017 <sup>C</sup>
No	34	25.4%			

*C:Chi square test. F:Fisher exact test. P < 0.05 is statistically significant*

**Cost effectiveness to root canal procedure from patient perspective**

In table 3 shows that a majority of patients, 92.5%, consider root canal treatment to be expensive, while a mere 7.5% do not find it costly. Additionally, 57.5% of patients report that cost is a factor in deciding to proceed with the treatment,

whereas 42.5% indicate that cost does not affect their decision. The study found that gender had the most significant effect on the decision to use cost for treatment, with a p-value of 0.045.

**Table 3. Frequency of various response to questions regarding patients' cost effectiveness to root canal procedure**

Item		N	%	Age	Gender	Education
				p-value	p-value	p-value
<b>Is the root canal treatment costly?</b>	Yes	124	92.5%	.0591 <sup>F</sup>	0.125 <sup>F</sup>	0.206 <sup>F</sup>
	No	10	7.5%			
<b>Does the price influence your decision about not taking a root canal treatment?</b>	Yes	77	57.5%	0.956 <sup>C</sup>	0.045 <sup>C</sup>	0.504 <sup>C</sup>
	No	57	42.5%			

C: Chi square test. F: Fisher exact test.  $P < 0.05$  is statistically significant

## DISCUSSION

One of the main and most popular dental procedures is root canal therapy (RCT), which aims to preserve the damaged tooth as a functioning unit on the arch while also reducing pain in the pulpal origin. Patients' previous experiences, as well as their financial situation, expectations, and attitude toward the procedure, are all taken into consideration. We may put greater focus on patient education and motivate patients to undergo root canal treatment rather than tooth extraction if we are aware of the extent of awareness regarding this procedure.

Fear of getting dental work done and anxiety about the pain that is involved are still common [10]. Anxiety and fear are frequent causes of patients delaying dental appointments and, as a result, not receiving dental care [11]. The inability to receive dental care results in worse oral health and a lower quality of life related to oral health [12,13]. In this study, a significant majority, 80.6%, of patients familiar with root canal treatment procedures believe such treatment is necessary for tooth pain. These results resemble Sisodia et al results [1], 52% of their patients were familiar with the term root canal treatment. This awareness may be due to the spread of learning methods, taking care of health, and the high percentage of learners in the current study, while Habib et al., [6] stated that 25.3% of the respondents had no knowledge about the treatment, whereas 21.7% of the respondents knew a lot.

In root canal treatment, effective pain management helps patients avoid the stigma that comes with thinking their doctor is making them feel worse or causing more pain. In the present study, 55.8% of patients who had undergone root canal treatment find it painful similar study conducted by Faya [14] among 50% of a Saudi Arabian dental patient, among 44% of Polish dental patients by Janczarek et al., [9], and 52% in Nebal by Suman Gautam et al., [15]. The patient's comfort during the process may be impacted by selecting a dentist with less experience or by choosing not to see a specialist. This could be the cause of patients delaying medical care until they get an unexpected toothache [6].

A tooth extraction may lead to many problems, such as harm to the patient's natural smile and appearance, shifting of the adjacent or opposing teeth, and trouble chewing. In a present study, the most disturbing reason for root canal treatment was the fear of tooth extraction despite treatment (38.8%), followed by the fear of pain (29.9%), fear of broking of files in root canals (19.4%), and the least stress fear of local anesthetic injection (11.9%), while Bansal R and Jain A [5], found (15.11%), (51.56%), (5.56%), and (27.78%), respectively. In this study, patients are aware of root canal treatment and the importance of the survival of natural teeth, and the significance of those teeth for oral health.

In the present study, patients with higher education and older age are significantly aware of the presence of the root canal treatment (76.1%), yet when they go, they choose a general dentist (57.5%, especially women, similarly to previous study by Mary *et al* [16] found just (18%) prefer a specialist. In contrast to our results, the following studies were the results demonstrated that 86.6%, 38%, 68%, and 66.8%, Ahamed Z et al., [17], Janczarek et al., [9], Doumani M et al., [2], and Habib [6]; respectively of the subjects preferred a specialist to carry out the treatment. Even though our study's percentage of university graduates is high, there seems to be a lack of awareness regarding the importance of endodontic specialists. This could result from a lack of knowledge about the challenges that general practitioners might face or a belief that, a general dentist can handle all dental problems in their respective fields, even if they are unwilling to switch doctors.

Endodontically treated teeth are primarily weakened because of dental caries, trauma, or preexisting restorations. Also, the chemicals such as sodium hypochlorite (NaOCl) and ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA) used during root canal treatment primarily result in collagen depletion; this affects the elasticity of dentine and predisposes the tooth to fracture during shearing forces.[18] In our study there were the Significant findings noted regarding age and education in the



context of teeth weakening after root canal treatment, (74%). This result is similar with result of Dwivedi 73.8% [19], Jain et al., [5], 79.11% and differ than result of Haqetal [20], found only 29% believed that teeth become weaker after root canal treatment.

On the other hand, there is no evidence from science that root canal treatment teeth are weaker or more brittle than healthy teeth, or that their mechanical properties have been damaged [21]. A conservative endodontic access cavity preparation will reduce tooth stiffness by only 5% [22]. The following root canal treatment processes, such as biomechanical preparation and obturation, will either have little to no impact on the tooth's biomechanical characteristics or a slight reduction in fracture resistance [21]. Preserving people's natural teeth requires educating them about the significance of endodontic therapy. The majority of participants in this study (78.4%) chose root canal treatment over extraction, it is possible that patients who are adequately informed about root canal treatment may be more motivated to receive therapy. These results are similar to those of Bansal et al., Jain et al., [5] (84%), Doumani et al., [2] (79%), and Faya et al., [14] (76%). This indicates that patients are more aware of and concerned about.

Regarding the resolution of endodontic infections, 12.0% of patients in present study believe antibiotics alone are sufficient without a dentist's intervention, while 88.0% disagree, stating that antibiotics alone cannot treat endodontic infections without a dental visit, Similar results were seen in study by Aldaswari et al., [22], where 89.1% answered that it cannot be resolved with antibiotics without endodontic treatment, Since almost one-third of the participants in our study had more than three root canal-treated teeth, this could be their answer related to the patients' previous experiences with the treatment.

The high price of endodontic treatment plays a vital role in choosing between the root canal treatment or tooth extraction. Our study found that gender had the most significant effect on the decision to use cost for treatment high cost of dental care has led to not referring patients to the clinic in many times and countries [23], this may be due to the nature of women who prioritize their home and children over themselves, or the fact that many Libyan women are housewives with a weak financial standard of living.

In this study, a majority of participants found root canal treatment too expensive (92.5%) similarly in previous studies by Satpathy S & Gupta R [24] (78.2%) and Bansal R and Jain A [5], 64.67%. It was not understood how complicated the course of treatment was, and it is challenging to dispel the idea that root canal treatment is more expensive than standard dental restorative procedures because each treating physician has a different fee strategy [5]. It is a difficult myth to dispel because every dentist has his own rate. In most cases, root canal treatment is pricier than most routine dental procedures, such as restorations. But it is justifiable as root canal treatment is a more complex procedure, takes longer, and requires more skill. In the end, root canal treatment is going to save a natural tooth, so despite the high costs involved, it is a sound investment. Dietz et al., [25] rightly stated that although it cannot be said that root canal treatment is inexpensive, there is good value received for the money spent. The cost associated with root canal treatment was a barrier in this study, so the results of the present study are in disagreement with the results of previous studies [9,2].

The patients need to be made aware of the level of complexity of the treatment. The rapid development in the field of root canal treatment, in terms of devices and materials, and the higher level of skill required all of that has increased the cost of treatment, as well as of the advantages of saving one's teeth from over-extraction and future replacement. The patients need to be made aware of the long term biological and economic benefits of root canal treatment.

## CONCLUSION

Within the limitations of this questionnaire survey, it is seen that participants have high awareness among dental patients in Tripoli about root canal treatment and a specialist taught them that, but they prefer to resort to a general dentist. The fear of tooth extraction is the strongest factor for root canal treatment, not pain, as in some other studies. Most of the patients in the study preferred root canal treatment over extraction and knowing that antibiotics are ineffective without clinic intervention The price of root canal treatment has a strong impact on the decision to treat the root canal, especially among women.

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## Conflicts of Interest

There are no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest to declare.

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## المعرفة والوعي بعلاج قناة الجذر بين المرضى في طرابلس؛ دراسة قائمة على المسح سمية عقيلة

قسم العلاج التحفظي، كلية طب وجراحة الفم والاسنان، جامعة طرابلس، طرابلس، ليبيا

### المستخلص

علاج قناة الجذر هو فرع من طب الأسنان يهتم بمورفولوجيا وفسولوجيا وأمراض لب الأسنان البشرية. يشعر غالبية المرضى بالقلق بشأن علاج قناة الجذر لأنهم لا يعرفون الكثير عنها ويعتقدون أن الإجراء سيؤلمهم. وقد كان الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تقييم معرفة ووعي المرضى في عينة من مرضى طرابلس، ليبيا فيما يتعلق بعلاج قناة الجذر. تم توزيع الاستبيان في نسخ ورقية على 134 مريضاً في مراكز طب الأسنان العامة والخاصة في طرابلس. يتألف الاستبيان المستخدم في الدراسة من 19 سؤالاً يتعلق بالحاجة إلى علاج قناة الجذر وعوامل مختلفة، بدءاً من المعلومات الشخصية والعامة إلى أسئلة محددة حول معرفة المرضى وموقفهم وفهمهم لمعالجة قناة الجذر. تم بعد ذلك إخضاع البيانات للتحليل الإحصائي باستخدام اختبار مربع تشي واختبار فيشر الدقيق، واعتبرت قيمة  $P > 0.05$  ذات دلالة إحصائية. وجد الاستطلاع أن 79.9% من المرضى كانوا على دراية بعلاج قناة الجذر وأن نسبة كبيرة من المرضى (80.6%) اعتقدوا أن العلاج ضروري لعلاج آلام الأسنان. كانت هناك نتائج ذات دلالة إحصائية تربط بين تجاربهم مع المتخصصين في علاج قناة الجذر لمختلف الفئات العمرية. وبالمثل، فقد ظهر وجود علاقة هامة بين معرفة المرضى حول علاج قناة الجذر ومستوى تعليمهم. وأظهرت المعلومات أنه بعد علاج قناة الجذر. علاوة على ذلك، فإن المؤشر الوحيد المهم لجوانب تلقي علاج قناة الجذر التي كانت الأكثر إبلاماً أو قلقاً هو العمر. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تتأثر قرارات النساء لتلقي علاج قناة الجذر بشكل كبير بتكلفة العلاج. وفقاً لدراستنا، كان من الواضح أن معظم الناس لديهم معرفة ووعي جيدين فيما يتعلق بمعالجة قناة الجذر، لكنهم يعتقدون أن العلاج مكلف. وقد كان طبيب الأسنان العام هو الخيار الأول لغالبية المرضى. كانت التكلفة المرتبطة بمعالجة قناة الجذر عائقاً قوياً أمام الحصول على العلاج.

**الكلمات الدالة:** المعرفة، الوعي، علاج قناة الجذر، القلق، طبيب الأسنان العام.