

## Original Research Article

# Understanding Saudi's preferences of emergency physicians attire a cross-sectional study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Patient centered care (PCC) is defined as the practice of attending to patients that includes listening, informing, and involving patients in their health care as per picker's eight principles. A part of the patients' rights is the presentation of the caring physician which includes attitude and attire. In Saudi Arabia, it has been known that doctors present with white coat. Several studies showed that physician dress-code improve patients' satisfaction. Our aim in this study is to identify Saudi population preference on the attire of emergency physicians.

**Methods:** This was cross-sectional study in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Questions were asked to Saudi population in malls and hospital's waiting areas regarding physician attire by online survey. Participants were asked demographic questions then they were asked in detail about their preferences.

**Results:** Total 486 participated in the study, where 52.15% strongly care about emergency physician's look. 82% would like to see their male physician wearing scrubs/medical coat, 43% agreed on a face cover for their female physician but still prefer scrubs/medical coat with 45%. Lastly participants had equal thoughts when it came to experience and reliability as 38% agree that looks can affect these two qualities. When it came to the relation of looks to knowledge as percentage were very close with 31% neutral and 32% agreed.

**Conclusions:** Both Saudi sexes equally consider emergency physician external look as a representation on their respectfulness, reliability, and experience, but not that significant to the knowledge he has.

**Keywords:** Attire, Emergency, Medical coat, Scrubs

## INTRODUCTION

Patient centered care (PCC) is defined as the practice of attending to patients that includes listening, informing, and involving patients in their health care. Picker's eight principles of patient centered care was founded on paying respect to patients' values, preferences, and expressed needs by involving patients in decision making,

recognizing they are individuals with their own unique values and preferences. A part of the patients' rights is the respectful presentation of the caring physician which includes not only the attitude but also the attire and appearance.<sup>1</sup> in addition, patient centered care was defined by the institute of medicine as "providing care that is respectful of, and responsive to, individual patient preference, need and values, and ensuring that patient

values guide all clinical decisions.<sup>2</sup> In Saudi Arabia and different parts of the world, it has almost always been a standard to wear a white coat while interviewing patients. In other parts of the world a common attire would be a causal clothing and a white coat. This might differ from department to another (emergency, surgery, medicine, obgyn, etc.) Based on the nature of work that is specific to that department.<sup>3</sup> It sometimes differs also based on the level of the practitioner (consultant, specialist, resident, intern, etc.). Dress code in Saudi Arabia has a special feature with its great variety. When it comes to physicians attires some Saudi male physicians wear cloths like thoab and shomagh at duty times while most Saudi female physicians were hijab.<sup>4,5</sup> For example, some female practitioners wear hijab that covers their hair and faces while others only cover their hair. This variety in attire has been generated by the cultural and religious believers of the Saudi Arabian community but could at the same time have an effect on patient-doctor relationship and could impact patients' experience. Several studies showed that enhancing physician-patient relationship and improving patient experience is associated with higher reported patient satisfaction, increased adherence to treatment and clinical outcomes. A cross-sectional study was conducted in 10 academic hospitals in usa concluded that physician dress-code improve patients' satisfaction.<sup>6</sup> Another systematic review study targeting attire to improve likelihood of rapport found that both elements have showed significant results in improving patient's experience therefore improves the outcome to better adherence to medical treatment.<sup>6</sup> In addition, cultural and religious believes play a major role. Thus, our aim from this proposed study is to identify Saudi population preference on the attire of emergency medicine physicians in Saudi Arabia.

## METHODS

### *Study design*

This is a cross-sectional study conducted by convenient sampling in waiting area of hospitals and shopping malls to include a generic population. Samples were collected for 90 days with a randomly selected one hour collection time per day. Study team collected 5-10 samples per day and data collection was be carried out by filling electronic questionnaire.

### *Study area*

This study was conducted in Riyadh-Saudi Arabia waiting areas inside the hospital and shopping malls where a questioner was collected online by research participants.

### *Study subjects*

It included all Saudi population older than 16 years. People who are younger than 16, who became unstable in

the waiting room, psychiatric patients, non-Saudi individuals and who had color blindness were excluded.

### *Sample size*

In the absence of previous citable studies in this area, we assumed the proportion of people to respond towards a specific attire to be 50% as a benchmark. With a precision level of 5%, the current study required minimum sample of 381 subjects to estimate the proportion with its corresponding 95% confidence interval using willson score formula.<sup>1,2</sup>

### *Data collection methods, instruments used, measurements*

Online survey data collection was distributed using electronic device as well as sent via messages. The questionnaire was a self devolped in Arabic language based on variables studied from multiple similar literature review. Included two parts: part one included demographic data such as age, gender, social status, level of education, marital status, color blindness. The second part was divided to 5 groups questions regarding physician attire preference. Each group was divided into three options for them to choose their own preference. And participants had their preference from each group. All data were stored and kept confidential with principal investigator.

### *Data management and analysis plan*

To analyze data, we used the statistical package of social sciences version 14-computer software (SPSS, inc., Chicago, il, USA). Descriptive statistics (continuous data) including age, level of education, marital status was used to analyze the participants' sociodemographic characteristics. A cross tubulation were done to compare female and male on perspective and preference.

## RESULTS

A total of 486 participants were participated in this study, most respondents were female (65.43%), and most of them were in the age group of 18-20 years (10.29%) and 21-29 years (37.04%). Majority of the participants were civil employees (33.33%), (22.43%) were students and (15.84%) were teachers (Table 1).

The results showed that most of the respondents (52.16%) strongly agreed that the look of the emergency physician is essential, in details most respondents 18.72% preferred a beard, and 72.43% preferred a neutral look for male doctors (Figure 1). Regarding the best clothing look for male doctors, 82.10% preferred scrubs and a medical coat, and 7.82% preferred a suit (Figure 2).

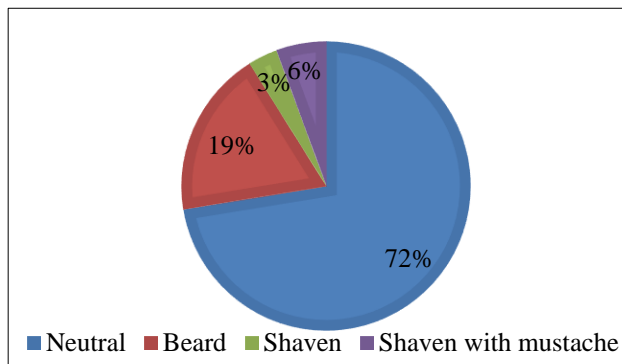
On the other hand, for female doctors, 43 % preferred a face cover, 19.55% selected a head cover, and 34.36% preferred a neutral look (Figure 3). The results for

clothing choice showed that 45.47% preferred scrubs and a medical coat, and 23.66% chose long skirts or pants

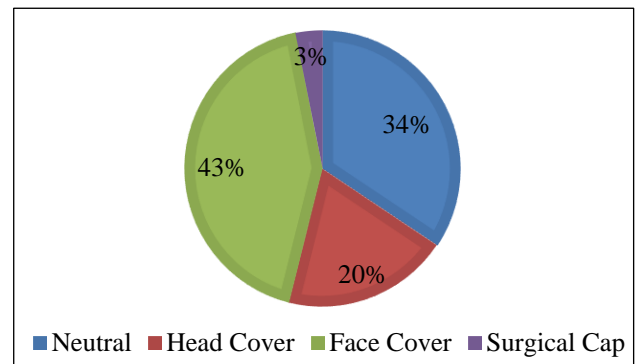
with the medical coat as the best clothing look for female doctors (Figure 4).

**Table 1: Demographics.**

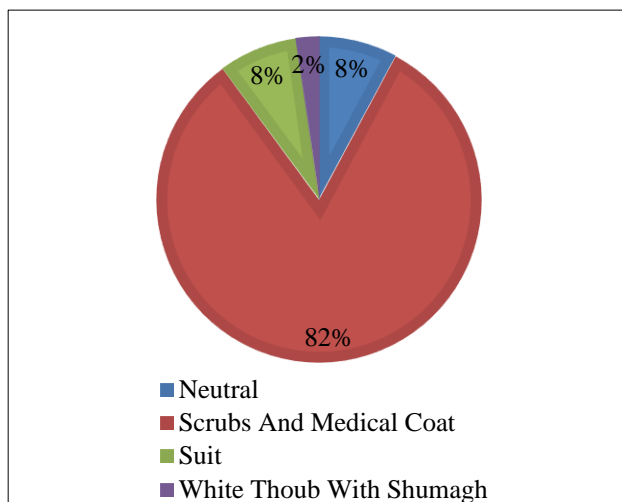
Sex n (%)		Occupation n (%)	
Female	318 (65.43)	Army employee	7 (1.44)
Male	168 (34.57)	Civil employee	162 (33.33)
Age n (%)		Housewife	42 (8.64)
18-20 years	50 (10.29)	Retired	46 (9.47)
21-29 years	180 (37.04)	Student	109 (22.43)
30-39 years	102 (20.99)	Teacher	77 (15.84)
40-49 years	94 (19.34)	Unemployed	19 (3.91)
50-59 years	41 (8.44)	Other	24 (4.94)
60 or older	19 (3.91)		



**Figure 1: Best head look for a male doctor?.**

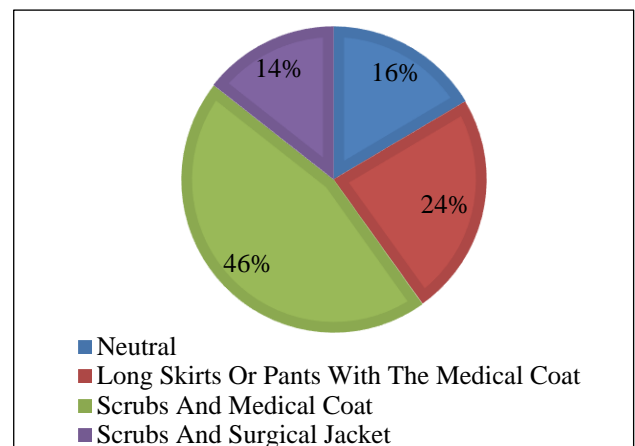


**Figure 3: Best head look for a female doctor?.**



**Figure 2: Best clothes look for a male doctor?.**

Furthermore, most of the participants thought that attire reflect on the physicians as 21.24% thought they would have had more information and knowledge, 23.97% also agree that these physicians have more experience and maturity and 25.41% thought they would be more reliable, and lastly 44.21% thought they are more respectful of his patients (Table 2).



**Figure 4: Best clothes look for a female doctor?.**

Although almost all the participants gave their opinion regarding the association of physicians attire on multiple knowledge and professional factors none of them gave any significant value between the factors (Table 2).

## DISCUSSION

The research results provide insights into Saudi people's preferences regarding emergency physician attire. The

findings indicate that Saudi patients prefer that emergency physicians dress respectfully, conservatively, and professionally. Unlike Li SF that showed formal and

casual scrubs did not have a significant difference on the patient's satisfaction or professionalism.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 2: Association of physicians attire on professional factors.**

Gender	Female n (%)					Male n (%)					P value
Association of physicians attire to following:	Strongly don't agree	Don't agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly don't agree	Don't agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
He has more information and knowledge	6 (1.70)	45 (12.75)	112 (31.73)	120 (33.99)	70 (19.83)	9 (5.06)	14 (7.87)	54 (30.34)	58 (32.58)	43 (24.16)	0.0766
He has more experience and maturity	5 (1.42)	38 (10.80)	91 (25.85)	143 (40.63)	75 (21.31)	3 (1.69)	17 (9.55)	44 (24.72)	64 (35.96)	50 (28.09)	0.5157
More reliable	6 (1.70)	39 (11.08)	91 (25.85)	133 (37.78)	83 (23.58)	3 (1.69)	8 (4.49)	46 (25.84)	68 (38.20)	53 (29.78)	0.1093
More respectful of his patients	4 (1.14)	16 (4.55)	56 (15.91)	125 (35.5)	151 (42.90)	3 (1.69)	5 (2.81)	19 (10.67)	66 (37.08)	85 (47.75)	0.3841

Furthermore, our results show that female respondents and respondents in the 21-29 age range were more likely to agree with all the statements, indicating that younger generations are more likely to be influenced by the attire of emergency physicians. Hence, female respondents were more likely to agree with all opinions than male respondents, suggesting that Saudi women are more likely to value these qualities in emergency physicians, the research findings align with previous studies, which have found that Saudi people prefer conservative and professional attire for their physicians.

Most of our participants agreed on medical coat involvement in the physicians attire affect their satisfaction, this is probably as Houchens N addressed that white coat is considered a symbol of the profession as it was historically a traditional physician's uniform.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Roehrens conclusion aligns with the findings of previous studies, which have observed a preference for conservative and professional attire for physicians working in Saudi.<sup>9</sup> The survey indicates that attire is an essential indicator of professionalism for Saudi patients because they view it as a reflection of the respect and reliability of their physicians. The findings of this research are imperative to Saudi healthcare providers as it shows patients' preferences regarding physicians' attire. Also, the results can help healthcare providers understand how to improve patient-physician relationships in Saudi Arabia by dressing their physicians respectfully and professionally. Proper attire can foster positive patient-physician relationships, which is essential

for providing quality healthcare.<sup>10-12</sup> Although this research's findings support the hypothesis that Saudis prefer professional and conservative attire to show respect for patients and the profession, further research is needed to assess the effect attire has on patient-physician trust and the patient-physician relationship. Besides, more research is required to evaluate how cultural and religious differences influence how Saudis perceive physician attire. Ultimately, the findings of this research can be used to inform the development of guidelines for appropriate dressing for physicians in Saudi Arabia.

Our study had few limitations, initially the types of the attires was defined only upon the commonest presentations in the Saudi healthcare system. Furthermore, this type of studies is limited in our region and not studied toughly. Regarding the distribution, it was randomly and we did not approximate the demographics, which may show variation in the results.

## CONCLUSION

As it was shown in this study that both Saudi male and females equally do consider emergency physician external look very seriously. While most age groups agrees that a physician look can have a positive impact on the patient's prospective regarding his/her knowledge, maturity, reliability, and respectfulness with his look have the least impact on his/her knowledge according to our participants.

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