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Impact of Early Clinical Exposure on the Learning Experiences of Undergraduate Students at a Dental School in the United Kingdom

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IMPACT OF EARLY CLINICAL EXPOSURE ON THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Aim: To evaluate the impact of clinical exposure in BDS Year 1 on the learning experiences of students.

Methods:

Mixed Methods Study

1. Purposely Designed Questionnaire with three Subscales

- A. Learning Experience (6 Items)
- B. Relationship with Supervisors (5 Items)
- C. Clinic Environment (5 Items)

Responses scored on a five-point Likert agreement scale:

-2 (Strongly Disagree), -1 (Disagree), 0 (Unsure), 1 (Agree), 2 (Strongly Agree)

Participants: BDS Year 1, 2 and 3 Students and Clinical Supervisors

Data Analysis: SPSS 22.0 (SPSS Statistics for Windows, NY: IBM Corp.)

2. Qualitative Interviews (Interpretivism Paradigm)

Participants: Dental Students; Clinical Supervisors; Dental Nurses

One to one semi-structured interviews: Recorded and transcribed verbatim

Data Analysis: NVivo 11 (QSR International Pty Ltd) using thematic analysis with an inductive approach

Results:

Questionnaire

In total 134 students (response rate=76.77%) and 8 clinical supervisors (response rate = 66.66%) completed the questionnaire

- Mean scores show positive perceptions across the three subscales amongst students as well as clinical supervisors (Figure.1)
- Overall internal consistency of the scale was good (Alpha = 0.84) suggesting each subscale is coherent, with each item measuring a related theme

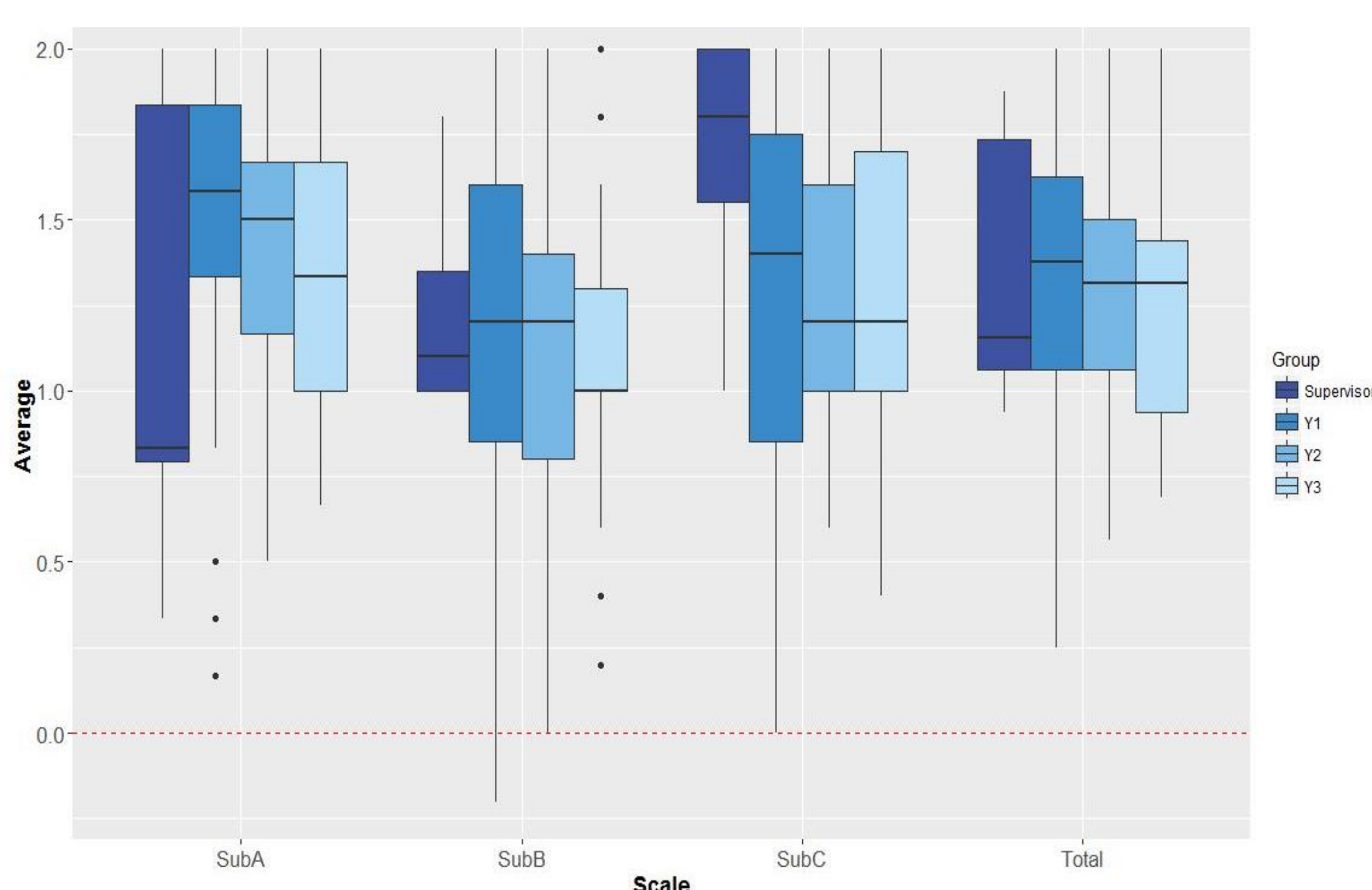


Figure 1 Subscale Scores by Groups

Conclusions:

- ✓ Early clinical exposure has a positive impact on the learning experience of Dental Students and offers significant benefits
- ✓ Adequate pre-clinical training in simulated settings is essential for patient safety
- ✓ Further improvements in the clinical training model are required



Qualitative Interviews

Eleven participants were interviewed (4 Dental Students; 4 Clinical Supervisors; and 3 Dental Nurses).

Participants considered early clinical exposure to be very valuable in providing a context to theoretical learning. Development of interpersonal skills with patients and members of the clinical dental team were perceived to be the main advantages.

"The theory made sense in my head, but then exploring examinations in clinic it was like everything you had learnt put into practice" Dental Student 1

"It helps them contextualise it and see how students always enjoy seeing why they are doing something. They can see the bigger picture and it impacts on their curriculum" Clinical Supervisor 4

"It is great for the students coming onto clinic so early so they are familiar with clinic and interacting with patients a lot earlier so they are not so nervous later because they see people for assessment before their treatment" Dental Nurse 2

The key suggestions for improvement were to reduce the curriculum-load in Year 1 and the need for further opportunities to consolidate basic clinical and affective skills.

"They have to learn all the anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, histology all the rest of it and the life sciences and they are in the simulated dental learning environment" Clinical Supervisor 1

"I think they would feel more confident if they were perhaps examining each other a little bit more before they see the patients" Clinical Supervisor 3