Exploring Young People's Perspectives of Fixed Orthodontic Treatment

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Abstract

This study explored young people's perspectives of having a brace throughout their treatment experience. I recruited fifteen young people from the Orthodontic Department at Charles Clifford Dental Hospital and a specialist orthodontic practice in Sheffield. I carried out qualitative in-depth interviews with each of the young people before they had their brace fitted, throughout their orthodontic treatment, and after they had had their brace removed. In addition to collecting data using in-depth interviews, I lent each of the participants a small video camera for them to record video diaries. This was to enable the young people to tell me about their experiences of having a brace at times that were relevant to them. I analysed the interview data and video data together using thematic analysis, case study analysis and narrative analysis.

A longitudinal qualitative study has not been carried out in orthodontics before. Therefore, the findings contribute to the existing knowledge base by providing an understanding of the temporal experiences of having a brace. The study demonstrates that some of the young people regard having a brace as a rite of passage through adolescence. In addition, having the brace removed, together with the educational transition was a symbolic event in their youth transition. The appearance of the teeth was the primary motivating factor for the young people undergoing orthodontic treatment, and it carried more significance than simply improving the appearance, it reflected their identity. Opinions about appearance were influenced by gender, peers, and images seen in the media. The sensation of the brace changed during treatment. All young people became used to the brace, although some built a bond with the appliance. Some young people shared their experience of having a brace with people around them and the relationships they were embedded in, influenced how they experienced treatment.