

# Development of Doctors Attire According to Patients Preferences

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## Abstract

**Background:** Doctor-patient rapport can be built in various ways, and it also includes non-verbal communication. Medical attire is an example of non-verbal communication that affects the patient's comfort and perception of a doctor. Medical attire that suits patient's preferences has a positive effect on the patient's trust and comfort.

**Objective:** This study aims to know about patient's preference towards doctor attire, so it will be a guide for doctor building good rapports in doctor-patient communication.

**Method:** This research is an analytical observational study with cross-sectional approach. Using consecutive sampling method, a sum of 6467 Indonesians was taken as samples. The data acquired from questionnaire via google form include age, sex, level of education, and patient's rate of comfort for doctor apparel. To analyze the data, both Independent T test and One Way Anova were conducted.

**Result:** White coat, basic pants, formal shoes, watch, and glasses are male doctors' garments that patients find very comfortable. On female doctors, the pieces of clothing that patients are very comfortable with are white coat, basic pants, formal shoes, and hijabs. There is a significant result in comparison at each attire ( $p < 0,05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The attire that patients find very comfortable to be worn by doctors are white coat, basic pants, formal shoes, hijabs (on women), watch, and glasses.

**Keywords:** *Medical attire, patient's comfort, white.*

## Introduction

A doctor must provide maximum service in all aspects, including promotive, preventive, curative, and rehabilitative aspects when performing his duties.<sup>1</sup> The important thing for doctors to work effectively is through good doctor-patient relationships.<sup>2</sup> Good relationships can be formed through effective communication, both verbally and nonverbal.<sup>3</sup> Nonverbal communication includes body gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, appearance, especially attire.<sup>4</sup> Nonverbal communication is not only a complement to verbal communication, but also gives meaning to the information conveyed. In fact, 65% of communication is delivered nonverbally.

Appearance is one form of nonverbal communication that plays an important role in shaping the patient's initial perceptions.<sup>4</sup> Doctor's appearance and attire is important in increasing patient trust and satisfaction with health services provided by doctors.<sup>6</sup> This is due to patient trust and satisfaction is not only objectively influenced by medical action, but also subjectively, such as by the good appearance and good attire of the doctor.

Problems regarding the patient's trust in doctors, makes it very important for doctor to improve their quality of service by increasing their nonverbal abilities. Therefore, the research that will be carried out regarding the development of doctor attire according to patient preferences can be beneficial for health practitioners.

This study aims to know about patient’s preference towards doctor attire, so it will be a guide for doctor building good rappsorts in doctor-patient communication. The benefits obtained are knowing the appearance preferences and how to dress that the patient likes, and make the patient feel more comfortable.

**Method**

This study used a descriptive observational method with a cross sectional design to determine patient preferences in choosing doctor’s clothing. The study was conducted in the span of September 2018 - December 2018 at the Medical Faculty of Sriwijaya University. The population of this study is all Indonesian people. The sample in this study was the population that met the inclusion criteria and was chosen as research subject through sampling process. The method of sampling in this study used a non-probability sampling technique, with a consecutive sampling method.

Consecutive sampling is done by taking all respondents or subjects that meet the research criteria. The inclusion criteria for this study were the Indonesian people who filled out questionnaire data and people who filled out questionnaire is 12 years and above. The exclusion criteria for this study were the questionnaire with unfilled data. The variables in this study were doctor’s attire (tops, bottoms, and accessories) and sociodemographic factors (age, gender and education level).

**Results**

**Table 1. Comparison of the Average Value of the Comfort of Patients Against the Doctor's Tops Attire**

Tops	Mean	p value
<b>Male doctors</b>		
Snelli *	4,32	0,000
Shirt*	3,84	0,000
Batik*	3,21	0,025
Polo shirt	2,28	0,000
Leather jacket	1,86	
<b>Female Doctors</b>		
Snelli*	4,50	0,000
Blouse*	3,55	0,000
Abaya*	3,45	0,000
Batik*	3,39	0,001
T-shirt	2,24	

**Table 2. Comparison of the Average Value of Patient's Comfort Level on Doctor's Bottoms Attire**

Bottoms	Mean	P value
<b>Male doctors</b>		
Basic pants*	4,23	0,000
Cotton pants*	4,13	0,000
Chinos*	2,99	0,000
Jeans	2,7	
<b>Female doctors</b>		
Basic pants*	4,01	0,000
Basic skirt	3,58	0,310
Cullote pants*	3,56	0,000
Short skirt	2,62	

Based on this study, it can be concluded that, patients feel very comfortable when male doctors wear snelli (mean of 4.32), and female doctors wear snelli (mean of 4.50). Snelli is the attire for male and female doctors that is perceived as very comfortable by patient, with significant p value. Meanwhile, patients were very uncomfortable with male doctors who wore leather (mean of 1.86) and female doctors who wore shirts with a (mean of 2.2).

Basic pants are considered very comfortable when worn by male doctors (mean of 4.23). The majority of respondents feel comfortable when female doctors wear basic pants (38.2%) with an average value of 4.01. The comparison of the average value between basic pants and cotton pants on male doctors is 0,000, and the comparison of mean values between basic pants and basic skirts on female doctors also shows the results of 0,000 which means there are significant differences (p <0.05). Most respondents felt uncomfortable seeing male doctors wearing jeans (average score of 2.7) and female doctors wearing short skirts (average score of 2.62).

**Table 3. Comparison of the Average Value of Patient’s Comfort Level on Doctor’s Footwear**

Accessories	Mean	P value
<b>Male doctors</b>		
Watches	4,33	0,094
Glasses*	3,93	0,000
Bracelet*	2,16	0,000
Aqeeq ring*	1,82	0,000
Piercing	1,41	
<b>Female doctors</b>		
Hijab*	4,48	0,003

Accessories	Mean	P value
Watches*	4,21	0,001
Glasses*	3,98	0,000
Socks	3,91	0,175
Make up*	3,84	0,000
Earrings	3,74	0,063
Rings	3,65	0,761
Bracelets*	3,13	0,006
Necklace*	2,94	0,000
Piercing	1,61	

**Table 4. Comparison of Mean between Patients Comfort to Doctor Accessories**

Footwear	Mean	P value
<b>Male doctors</b>		
Dress shoes*	4,23	0,000
Sneakers	3,46	0,729
Flat shoes	3	
<b>Female doctors</b>		
Dress shoes*	3,98	0,000
Sneakers*	3,66	0,000
High Heels*	2,67	0,000
Sandals	2,6	0,111
Boots	2,24	

Most respondents felt very comfortable seeing male doctors wearing dress shoes (mean of 4.23) and feeling comfortable when male doctors wore sneakers (mean of 3.46). Comparison of mean between dress and sneakers yields 0,000 ( $p < 0.05$ ) which indicates that the dress shoes is footwear that the respondent feel at ease with. Regarding, choice of footwear worn by female doctors, most respondents felt very comfortable seeing doctors wearing dress shoes (mean of 3.98) and felt very uncomfortable seeing doctors wearing boots (mean of 2.24). Loafers are the most comfortable women's footwear according to patient preferences ( $p < 0,05$ ).

Male doctor accessories that make patients very comfortable are watches (mean of 4.33) and glasses (mean of 3.93). On bivariate analysis, there were no significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ), which meant that doctors could wear either one of the accessories, watch, glasses, or both.

Patients are very uncomfortable with male doctors that wear piercings (mean of 1.41). Hijab as accessories for female doctors are considered very comfortable (mean of 4.48,  $p < 0.05$ ), followed by watch (mean of 4.21) and glasses (mean of 3.98). The accessories of

female doctors which are considered very uncomfortable by patients are facial piercing (mean of 1.61).

## Discussion

The results of this study indicate that patients have a high preference for doctors who use snelli. In line with these results, the study of Van Der Merwe and Douse et al. found that patients prefer white coats or snelli as clothes that should be worn by doctors when conducting consultations<sup>5,6</sup>. This is presumably because snelli is an easy way for patients to identify doctors and also increase level of professionalism in the eyes of patients<sup>7,8,9</sup>. White coats are also considered more hygienic as doctors are not directly exposed to patients<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, doctors who wear conventional clothing such as snelli is preferred by patients because it can increase the trust and desire of patients to share social, sexual, and psychological problems<sup>11</sup>. The most disliked tops attire for male doctors to wear is a leather jacket. In line with this findings, Marriane's research found that in general patients do not like very casual clothes such as leather jackets<sup>12</sup>. Doctors with casual clothing are considered less competent and less trustworthy than doctors with snelli or conventional clothing. Research conducted by Jennings supports this, namely for both male and female respondents, casual clothing is the most disliked clothing worn by doctors<sup>13</sup>. However, casual clothes that are semiformal like shirts are quite preferred by patients. According to Lill and Wilkinson's research, patients prefer doctors to dress semiformally and smile during consultations, makes patients feel more comfortable<sup>14</sup>. Semiformal western clothing such as shirts are also preferred in Saudi Arabia, because they make patients feel more comfortable and want to share more about their social, sexual and psychological problems<sup>15</sup>.

Patients felt least comfortable when female doctors wore t-shirts. Van Der Merwe et al in their research on doctor clothing preferences, found that only a few respondents liked t-shirts as female doctor clothes. This result is somewhat different from Hartmans' research, where t-shirts are female doctor's clothing that make respondents feel more comfortable than snelli or formal clothing<sup>16</sup>. However, Harmants found that doctors who used snelli were considered by patients to be more professional than those who were not<sup>16</sup>. In this study, it was found that the majority of respondents thought basic pants were bottom clothes that were suitable for doctors, both for male and female doctors. Several studies were

found to be in line with these results. Marriane in her research got basic pants as a bottoms that was liked by the majority of respondents, this was because patients considered basic pants to be formal and neat pants so that they could improve patient's comfort<sup>14</sup>. In line with these results, a study conducted by Boyce concluded that material pants as bottoms are the most preferred, because it can increase patients' trust<sup>8</sup>.

On the other end of the spectrum, jeans are bottoms that make the majority of patients feel uncomfortable to wear by male doctors. Marriane's research supports this claim that the preference for jeans for male doctors is low<sup>14</sup>. Chang et al. Sought further patient responses to casual clothing such as jeans, ie people with casual clothing were less competent and less trustworthy than those who dressed conventionally<sup>17</sup>. Short skirts on female doctors are bottomsthat patients feel uncomfortable with. Most respondents prefer female doctors to wear skirts under the knees<sup>13</sup>. Marriane's research also found the same thing, short skirts were felt to be uncomfortable by patients, while more conservative clothing such as long skirts were preferred<sup>14</sup>.

Loafers are footwear for male doctors with the highest rating in patients' comfort. Fox research found that the use of loafers is a characteristic expected by patients to their doctors. Similar to this, Van der Merwe's research found the results of loafers as the most preferred footwear for respondents and most comfortable to use for male doctors and male health service provider<sup>5,18</sup>. On the other hand, flat shoes are footwear for male doctors that are less preferred by patients. Same thing with male doctors, patients prefer female doctors who use footwear in the form of loafers. This result is not in line with Van der Merwe's research which found that patients' preference for female doctor's footwear is flat shoes because it is felt to make patients more comfortable and show the competence of a doctor<sup>5</sup>. Casual doctor's footwear such as sandals, high heels, or boots, in some studies suggest that these items have a low preference level in patients because they are considered to be not very professional and reduce the image of a doctor<sup>5,14</sup>.

Accessories with the highest preference for male doctors are watches. While the accessories that make patients feel very uncomfortable are piercing. Although the norms of society have begun to change with the use of piercings, they are accepted in the community, but this does not seem to apply to health workers. Research conducted by Lill and Wilkinson, states that patients

feel very uncomfortable when male and female doctors wear piercings<sup>14</sup>. According to research conducted by Newman et al, Piercing is considered inappropriate when used by medical workers because it can affect patients' beliefs and their views to the competence of a doctor<sup>19</sup>. For female doctors, the most comfortable accessories are hijab, which is in line with the research conducted by Seeger, which states that there is no difference towards Muslim women who cover themselves with hijab, as long as hijab doesn't limit their work capability<sup>20</sup>. In addition, research conducted by Batais shows that people still like doctors who wear special religious accessories such as turban and long overalls<sup>15</sup>.

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## Conclusion

The male doctor's attire patients feel most comfortable is snelli, basic pants, loafers, glasses and watches. Meanwhile, women's doctors attire patients feel most comfortable is snelli, basic pants, loafers, and hijabs.

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