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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

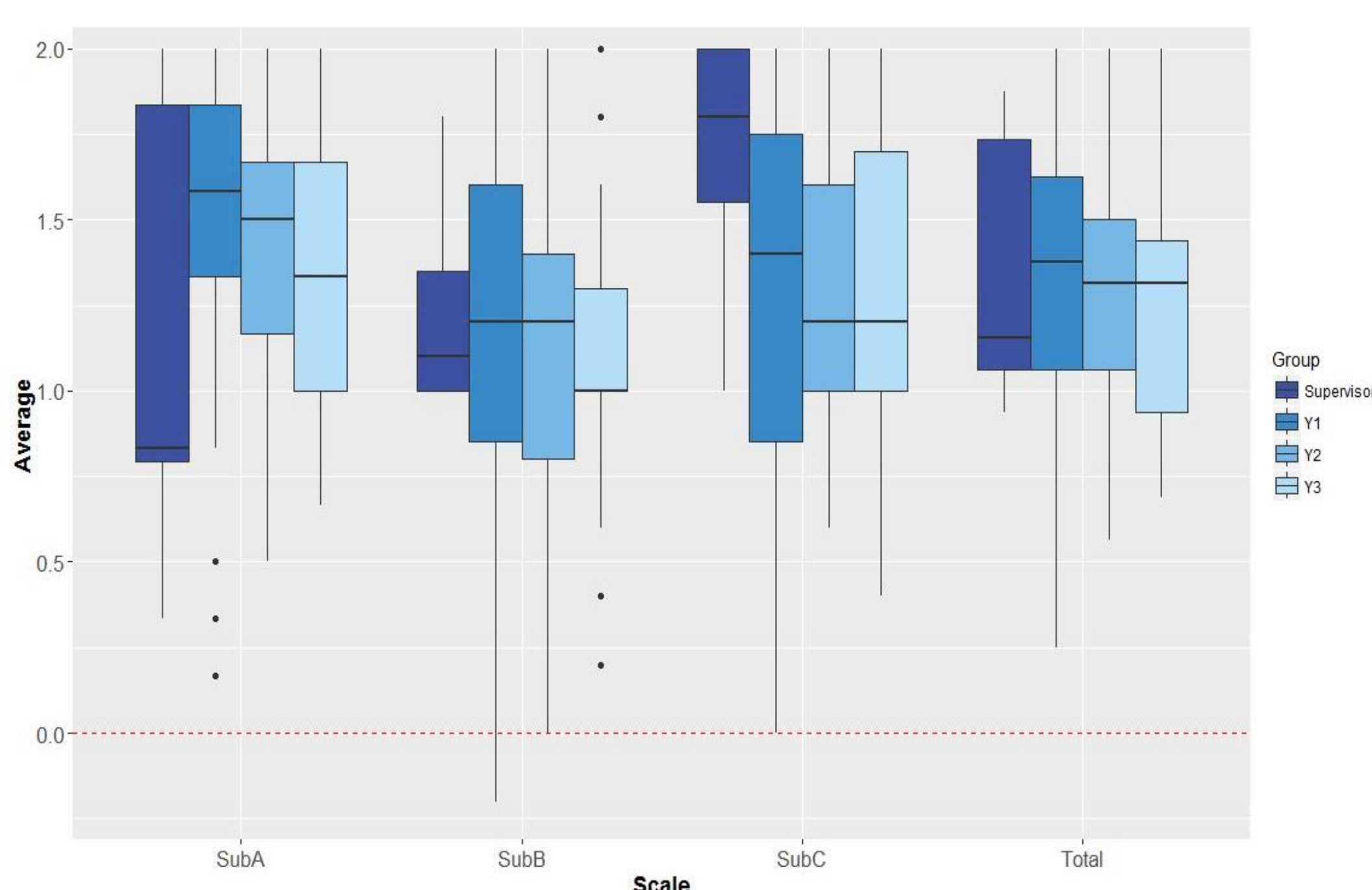


Figure 1 Subscale Scores by Groups

### 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

## 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