CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Oral health is still a major concern in many parts of the world, affecting millions of people. Changes in daily habits, diet, and overall health routines have contributed to the rise of issues like dental caries, gum disease, and oral cancer (Dai et al., 2025). The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that nearly half of the global population suffers from some form of oral health problem. Unfortunately, many of these individuals do not receive proper care. This problem is especially common in middle-income and/or developing countries, where access to dental care is often limited due to cost, location, or lack of oral health literacy and awareness (WHO, 2022).

Indonesia is one of the countries that reflects this global trend. According to the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey, 56.9 percent of the population reported experiencing dental problems. However, only 11.2 percent of these people sought treatment from a dental professional. Even more concerning, 91.2 percent of the population had never visited a dentist (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2023). These figures suggest that many Indonesians are still unaware of the importance of preventative dental care (Maharani, 2012; Redaksi Sehat Negeriku, 2024). Many only seek help when the problem has worsened, which can result in more complex and costly treatment (Mukhari-Baloyi et al., 2021; Pratamawari et al., 2019).

Several factors influence whether individuals decide to go to the dentist. Personal characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, place of residence, income level, and education all play a role. In addition to these, a person's knowledge of health insurance and their overall view of oral health also matter (Santoso et al., 2020). Financial burdens, such as out-of-pocket costs, and emotional factors like dental fear, also discourage many from seeking

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care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, fears of infection further reduced the number of dental visits, even for those in need (Felgner et al., 2023). The economic effects of COVID-19 also seemed to make it more difficult for affected people to afford dental care (Yashpal et al., 2022). It should therefore come as no surprise that the pandemic caused a drop in patient visits at many dental clinics that resulted in significant financial strain for the clinics (Farrokhi et al., 2024).

Even when individuals do visit the dentist, their willingness to return often depends on how they feel about the service. Patient satisfaction is the key. When people are satisfied with the care they receive, they are more likely to follow treatment plans, return for check-ups, and build long-term relationships with their healthcare providers (Lee et al., 2015; Park et al., 2021). Satisfaction reflects how well the service meets patient expectations, and it influences important outcomes such as patient loyalty, treatment adherence, and recommendations to others (Siripipatthanakul et al., 2021). For these reasons, understanding patient satisfaction helps dental providers assess and improve their services (Decree of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2014).

Many studies have identified key factors that shape patient satisfaction. These include friendly and respectful staff, affordable prices, ease of access, pain management, and clear communication (Luo et al., 2018; Al Ghanem et al., 2023). However, much of this research uses surveys and is quantitative in nature. Whilst useful, these approaches often miss the deeper reasons behind patients' thoughts and feelings (Turra et al., 2021). Some researchers have instead recommended more in-depth studies using qualitative methods. These allow for open-ended conversations in which patients can share their honest experiences thus providing deeper insights into what patients truly care about (Lixandru et al., 2024; Szabó et al., 2023). Furthermore, most of these studies on patient satisfaction focus on public or teaching hospitals, which operate differently than private dental clinics. Private clinics often follow different

service models, have different cost structures, and serve patients with different expectations. Therefore, it is important to explore patient satisfaction in private dental settings as well (Luo et al., 2018).

In Indonesia, there is still a gap in this type of research. Since most studies focus on hospitals and public clinics, there is a limited understanding of what drives satisfaction in private dental clinics. This study aims to address that gap by exploring patient satisfaction at Clinic X, a private dental clinic in South Jakarta that has served the community for more than 30 years through a qualitative study. By listening closely to individual experiences, the research will identify key factors that contribute satisfaction and examine how those experiences shape patients' decisions to return or recommend the clinic. In doing so, practical suggestions to help improve care at Clinic X can be provided.

1.2 Research Problem

Halim Dental Clinic, henceforth referred to as Clinic X for confidentiality purposes, is a well-established private dental clinic located in South Jakarta and has been serving its community since 1992. The clinic primarily serves middle to upper-income patients who seek high-quality, personalized dental care in a comfortable and professional setting. The clinic is known for providing reliable dental care through a team of experienced professionals. With a wide range of services, not limited to preventative care, emergency care, restorative treatment, endodontic treatments, orthodontics, and cosmetic procedures and a long-standing reputation for quality, the clinic has built strong relationships with its patients over the years. Clinic X has also partnered with various external organizations in an effort to make dental care more accessible and responsive to community needs. On average, Clinic X sees about 28-35 patients a day, 6 days a week (Monday to Saturday) excluding public holidays.

Despite a solid foundation in dental services, the circumstances in recent years have reflected noticeable changes. The clinic has seen a decline in the number of patient visits. This shift raises concerns about potential gaps between patient expectations and the care provided. It may suggest that some aspects of the patient experience no longer align with what patients are seeking, leading to decreased loyalty and a lower likelihood of returning for future visits. Clinic X sees about 20-25 patients a day in the last few years, showing a decline in daily patient volume. This suggests a reduction in visitation frequency among existing patients, which may reflect shifting patient loyalty or satisfaction levels.

The number of new dental clinics in Indonesia, particularly Jakarta has rapidly surged in recent years. With increased competition, Clinic X is now under more pressure to differentiate itself in a crowded market in addition to maintaining excellent standards of treatment. This is further illustrated in the infographics below, which highlights the dense concentration of dental clinics surrounding Clinic X.
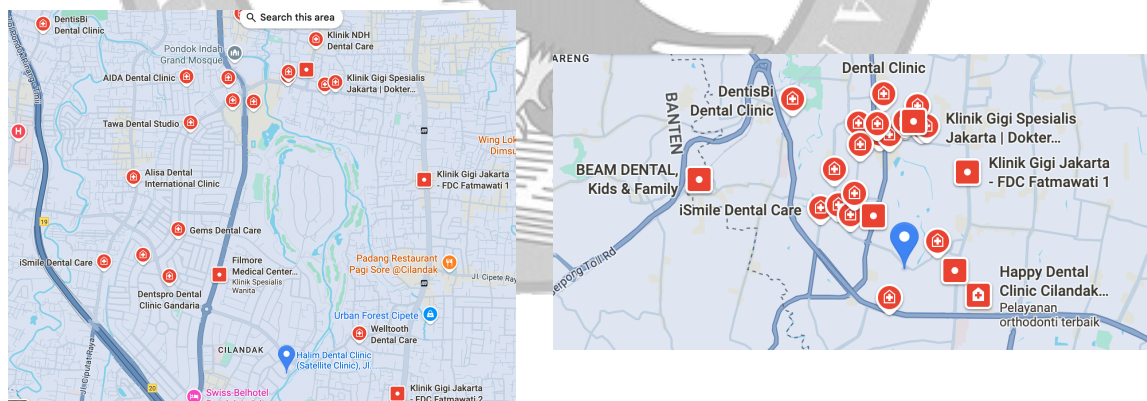
Fig 1.2 Geographic Distribution of Dental Clinics in the Vicinity of Clinic X, Illustrating Local Market Competition

Currently, Clinic X relies on limited indicators such as repeat visits and informal observations to gauge patient satisfaction. While these impressions may offer some insights, they do not capture the full range of patient experiences. There is no structured system in place to gather, analyze, or act on patient feedback in a consistent way. Without deeper exploration, valuable insights into what patients truly value—and what might be causing dissatisfaction—remain out of reach.

To date, no formal research has been conducted at Clinic X to examine how patients experience and evaluate the care they receive. As a result, important questions about what drives satisfaction and how it influences future behavior remain unanswered. This gap presents a clear opportunity to better understand the voices and needs of patients in a more deliberate and comprehensive manner.

1.2.1 Research Questions

1. What are the factors that contribute to patient satisfaction at Clinic X?
2. How do these factors contribute to patient satisfaction at Clinic X

1.3 Research Purposes

The purpose of this study is to determine and evaluate the factors that influence patient satisfaction at Clinic X and investigate the ways in which these factors contribute to the overall patient satisfaction in the clinic.

1.4 Research Implication and Contribution

1.4.1 Practical Implication

This study provides useful insights for Clinic X to enhance patient satisfaction. Based on patient feedback, the clinic can implement specific strategies such as improving communication training for staff, reducing

waiting times, maintaining a clean and welcoming environment, and possibly introducing a simple digital feedback system. These improvements can lead to better patient experiences, increased trust, and stronger patient loyalty, ultimately supporting the clinic's operational and service excellence in the long term. Furthermore, the insights obtained from this study may not only relevant to Clinic X but may also be applicable for other dental clinics and dental field in general.

1.4.2 Academic Contribution

This study contributes to the academic literature by addressing the gap in studies related to patient satisfaction in private dental clinics in Indonesia. By using a qualitative approach, it offers a deeper understanding of patient experiences that are often overlooked in quantitative research.