



# Growing Patients

A whitepaper, commissioned by Align Technology on the insights into the growing patient dental journey and the growing patient dental market in KSA & UAE

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All rights reserved. Information contained in this report is the result of surveys conducted by YouGov and CAPP MEA between Q4 2022 and Q1 2023 to parents of children/teens who had visited orthodontists or had orthodontic treatment, as well as to orthodontists, summarised and published by Align Technology. The information is comprised of the collated responses from 650 individuals living in the UAE and KSA and does not represent the opinion of Align Technology.

# Introduction



Orthodontic treatments in growing patients are increasingly gaining the attention of dental practitioners in the region, particularly in the economies of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, not only for aesthetic considerations, but more importantly for their overall oral health and well-being. Optimising the alignment of teeth in children and teens can play a crucial role in preventing future dental complications, thereby safeguarding the oral health.



In this white paper, we intend to illuminate the importance of teeth alignment for growing patients, the power of modern dental solutions in accomplishing this, and the essential role of dental professionals in guiding parents through the decision-making process.

Malocclusions in growing patients can contribute to a multitude of problems, such as difficulty in cleaning, tooth decay, speech issues, and even self-esteem concerns. Correcting these issues at an early age can help avoid more complicated dental procedures in the future and allow growing patients to further enjoy their teenage years with confidence and a healthy smile.

Orthodontic solutions such as clear aligners or lingual braces, technologies, have revolutionised the approach to treating malocclusions. Furthermore, with the advent of digital orthodontics, powered by solutions introduced by Align Technology, we are able to provide patients with personalised treatments that ensure effective results and improved patient satisfaction.

However, the selection of the most suitable orthodontic treatment for growing patients is a complex decision that should involve both the dental professional and the parent – as well as the patient. The choice of treatment is not solely reliant on the dental issue but also depends on the child's age, readiness, and cultural as well as personal preferences. Consequently, it is incumbent upon orthodontists to offer a comprehensive consultation that empowers parents with a clear understanding of the available treatment options, the associated costs and benefits, as well as potential drawbacks.

Dental professionals bear the responsibility of ensuring the long-term oral health of growing patients. As dentistry solutions continue to evolve, a new era of patient education emerges. Orthodontists are now increasingly using interactive visual aids and simulations to help patients understand their oral health conditions and treatment options better, leading to informed decision-making and improved compliance. Aside from aids, practitioners are gaining speed on embracing digital channels that are intuitive to their patients, particularly the younger generation encompassing children and teenagers. With short attention spans and often easily distracted, these growing patients require engaging, digitally enhanced, short form content to understand the procedures and treatments they are being recommended.

In this paper, you will find the latest research into the growing patient market in KSA and UAE surrounding dentistry and orthodontic care, the determining factors around their choice of alignment treatment, and the solutions dental professionals should consider for better patient outcomes.

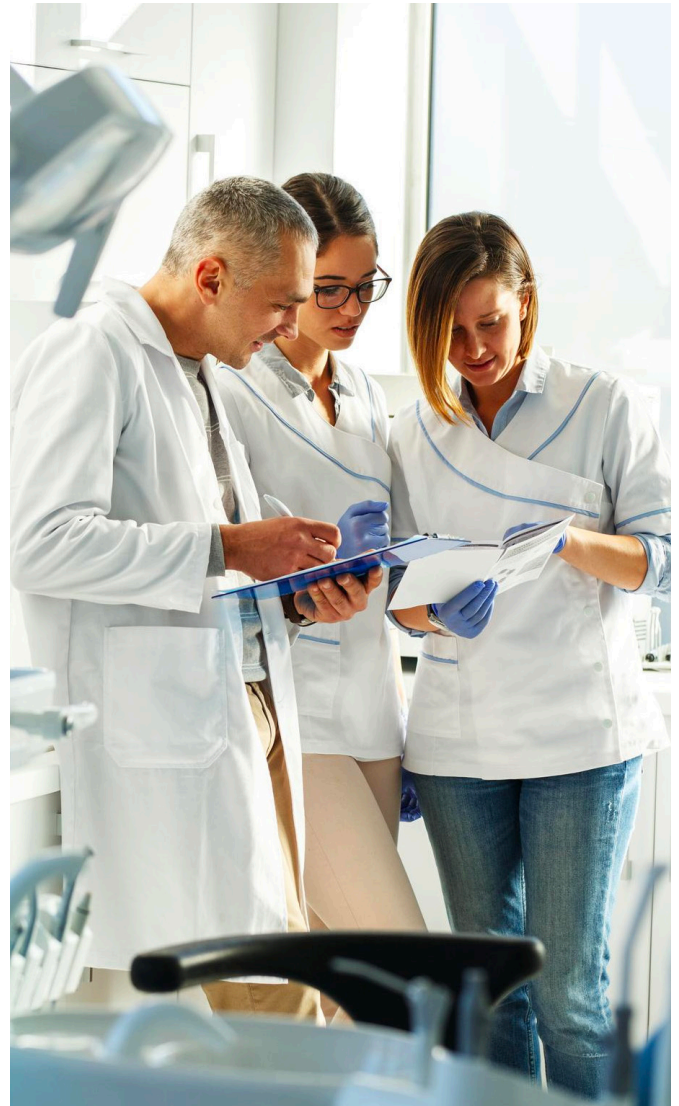


# Consumer Research



In view of the estimated potential of the clear aligner market among the growing patient segment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Align Technology commissioned a set of research programs targeting both the patient/ caregiver market at large as well as orthodontists and dental practitioners in both countries. These were conducted by leading market research company YouGov, and Centre for Advanced Professional Practices (CAPP), who specialize in Continuing Medical Education (CME) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) dental education programs in the Middle East and beyond.

The research methodology as mentioned below involved exploring the potential presence of a 'growing patients' demographic by collecting information on the current market capacity and pinpointing significant behaviors indicative of market engagement. The study also took into account possible factors that could influence the acceptance of clear aligners among children and teenagers in these regions. Finally, the report scrutinizes obstacles to market penetration, such as issues related to affordability, awareness, recommendation adherence, and shared beliefs.

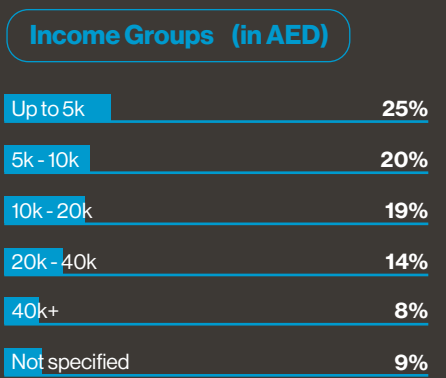
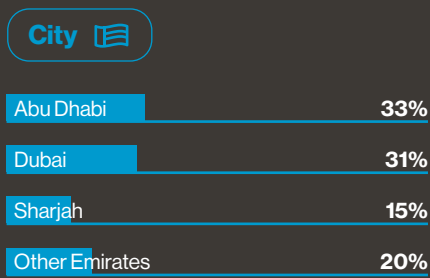
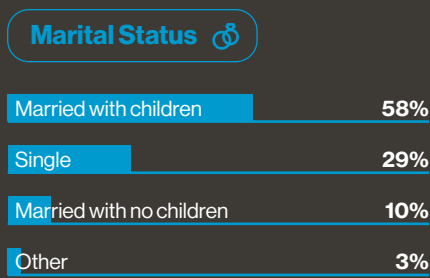
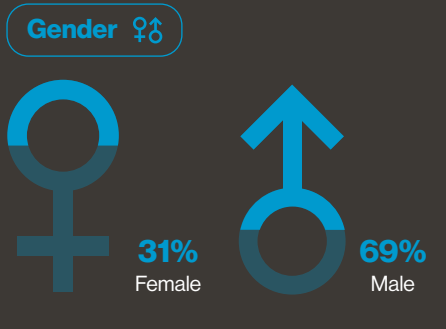
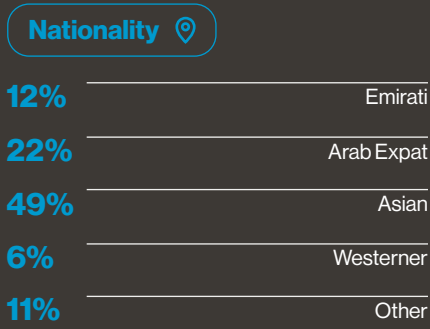
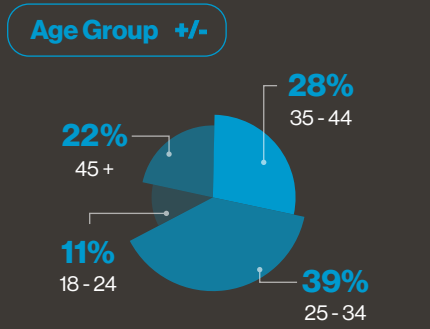


## Methodology

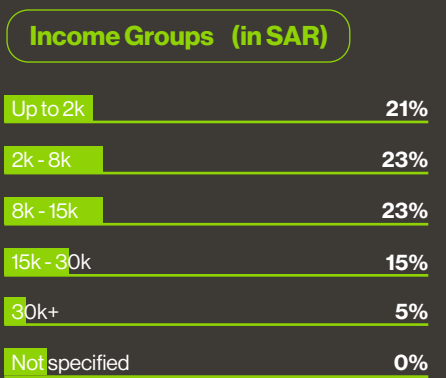
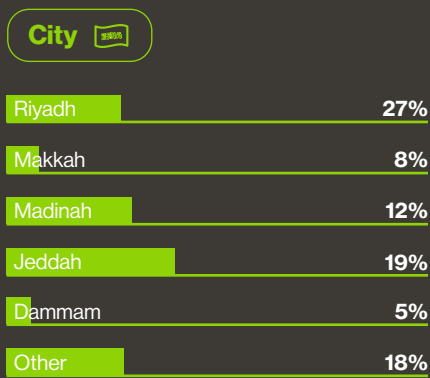
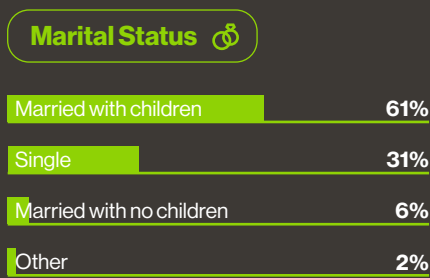
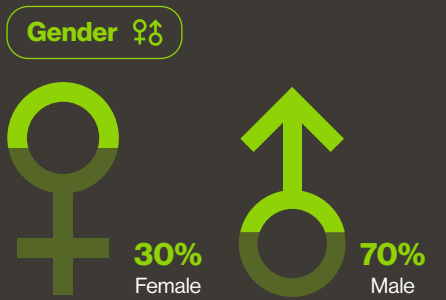
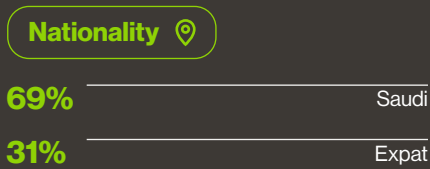
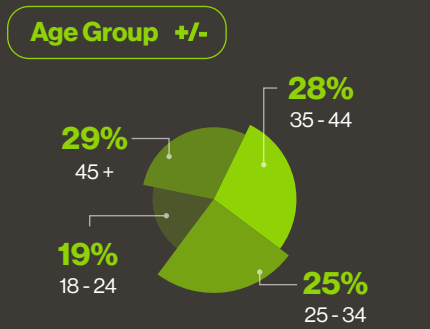
Conducted in Q4 of 2022, the research collected and analysed feedback from 505 parents in total in the UAE (304) and KSA (201). It focused on understanding the current market size of growing patients in the two countries, as well as the current usage and factors driving demand for orthodontic treatment for the general population.

**Core Market:** The research specifically examined usage and behaviour among a key demographic within the core market that had a base income of AED 25,000 / SAR 30,000, which is higher than the median income in both countries.

**UAE** Sample Demographics



**KSA** Sample Demographics





The median age in Saudi Arabia is 29 years<sup>1</sup>, while in the UAE it is 33.5 years<sup>2</sup>. With such a large group leaning towards a younger age bracket, understanding the preferences and behaviours of this demographic is crucial to tap into the potential for dental treatments in the two countries, particularly in the alignment segment.

The findings of the research commissioned for this white paper can be summarised into the following key learnings, which focus on the facts about dental alignment solutions, the current trends in parents' choices into the matter, and the factors that influence their choices.

## Percentage of population **under 19 years of age**



Target market in KSA: 1.3m

Target market in UAE: 550K

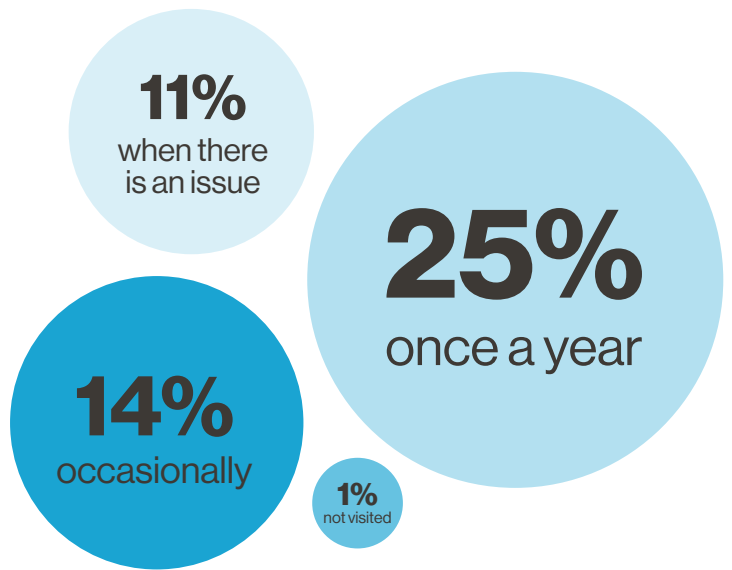
\*According to UN population statistics 2020

# Parents from affluent socio-economic backgrounds = **high dental utilization**



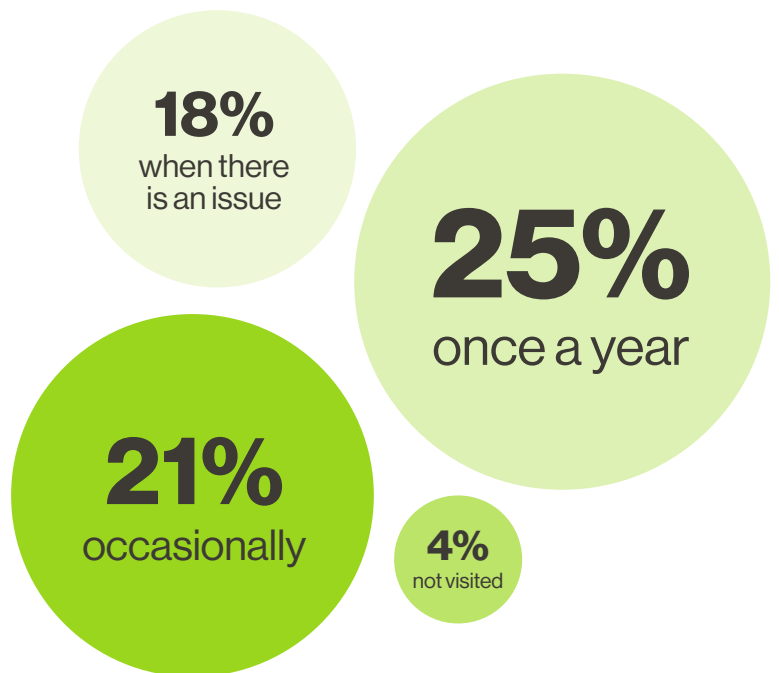
**KSA**

**49%** visited dentists several times a year



**UAE**

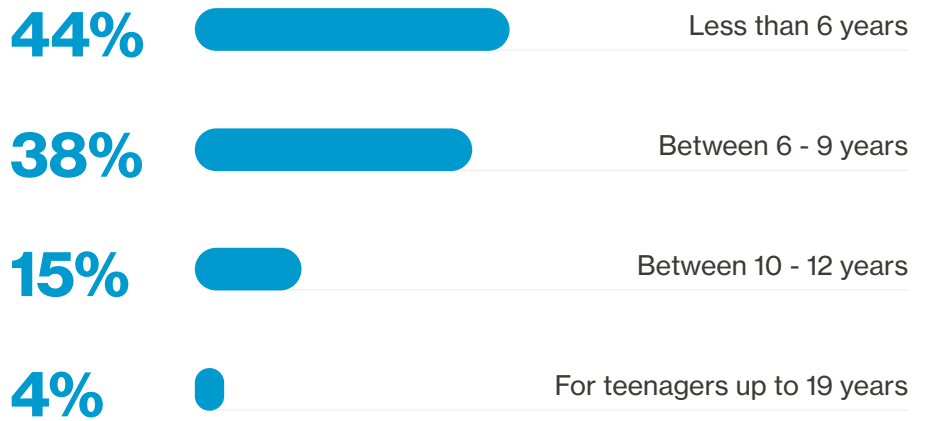
**33%** visited dentists several times a year



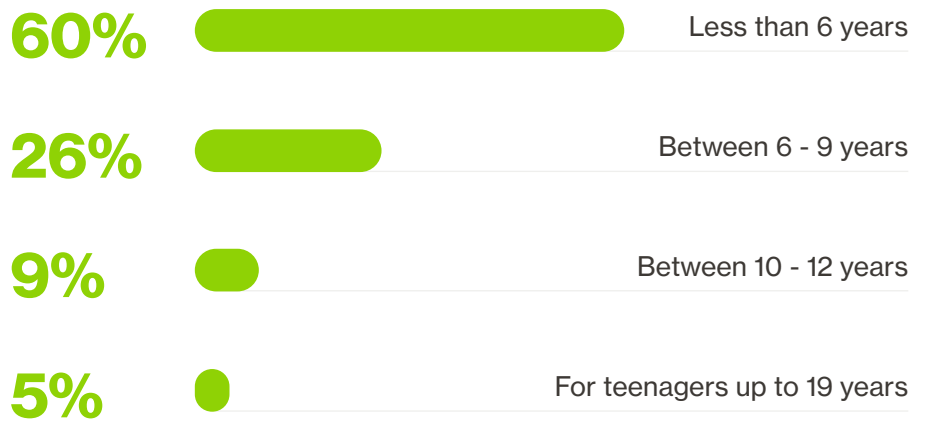
Parents from affluent socio-economic backgrounds = higher likelihood of taking their children to see a dentist **from a younger age:**



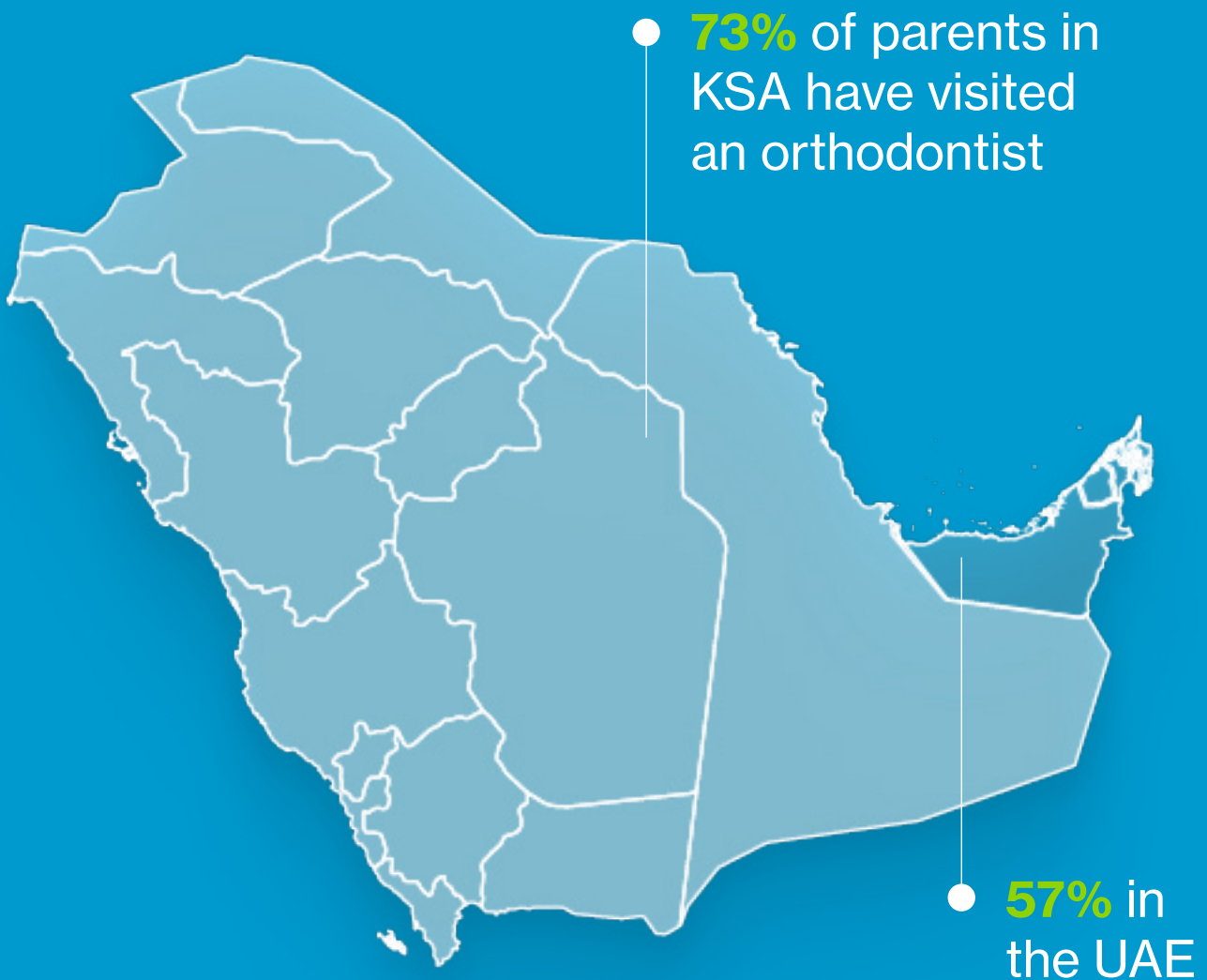
**KSA**



**UAE**



A high portion of parents who have taken their children to a dentist have **also taken them to an orthodontist.**



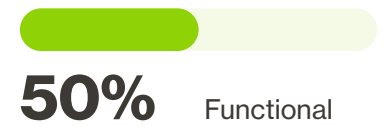
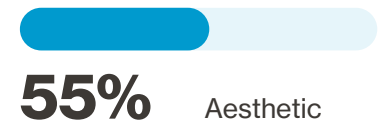
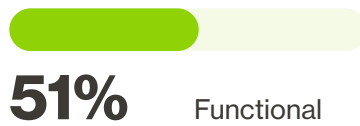
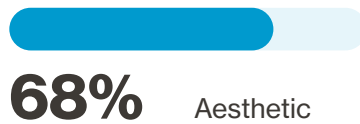
Of those who have visited an orthodontist, a high proportion are currently considering treatment:

**45%** in KSA

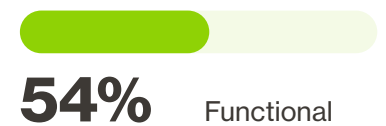
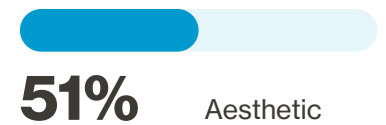
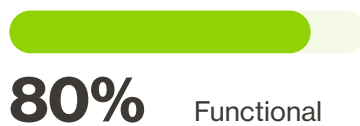
**56%** in UAE

# Aesthetic reasons dominate KSA and UAE parents' choices in seeking orthodontic treatment for their children

Orthodontic treatment motivators for those who have seen an orthodontist



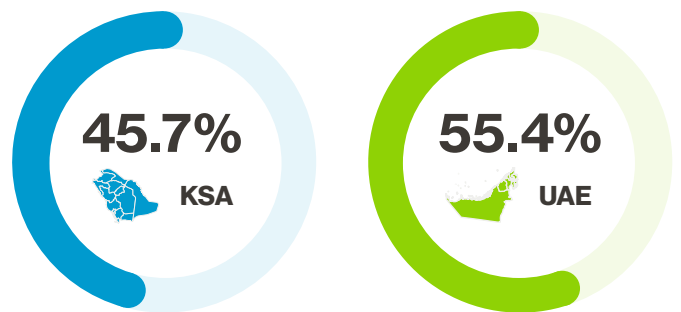
Orthodontic treatment motivators for those who are considering an orthodontic consultation



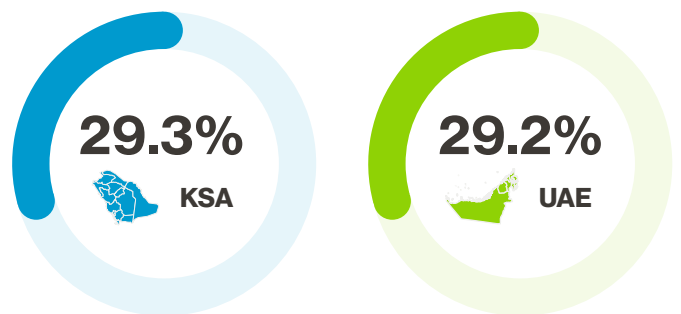
# Conspicuous gap in preference between traditional and clear aligner treatments

For those considering treatment, wires and brackets currently still dominate the choice in types of solutions available, with 45.7% in KSA and 55.4% in UAE choosing these over clear aligners (29.3% KSA and 29.2% UAE)

Traditional treatments such as wires and brackets:



Clear aligners treatments:



**Opportunity:** Increase clear aligner utilisation across both KSA and UAE in teen market.

## Appliance choice among parents who have taken their children to an orthodontist <sup>3</sup>

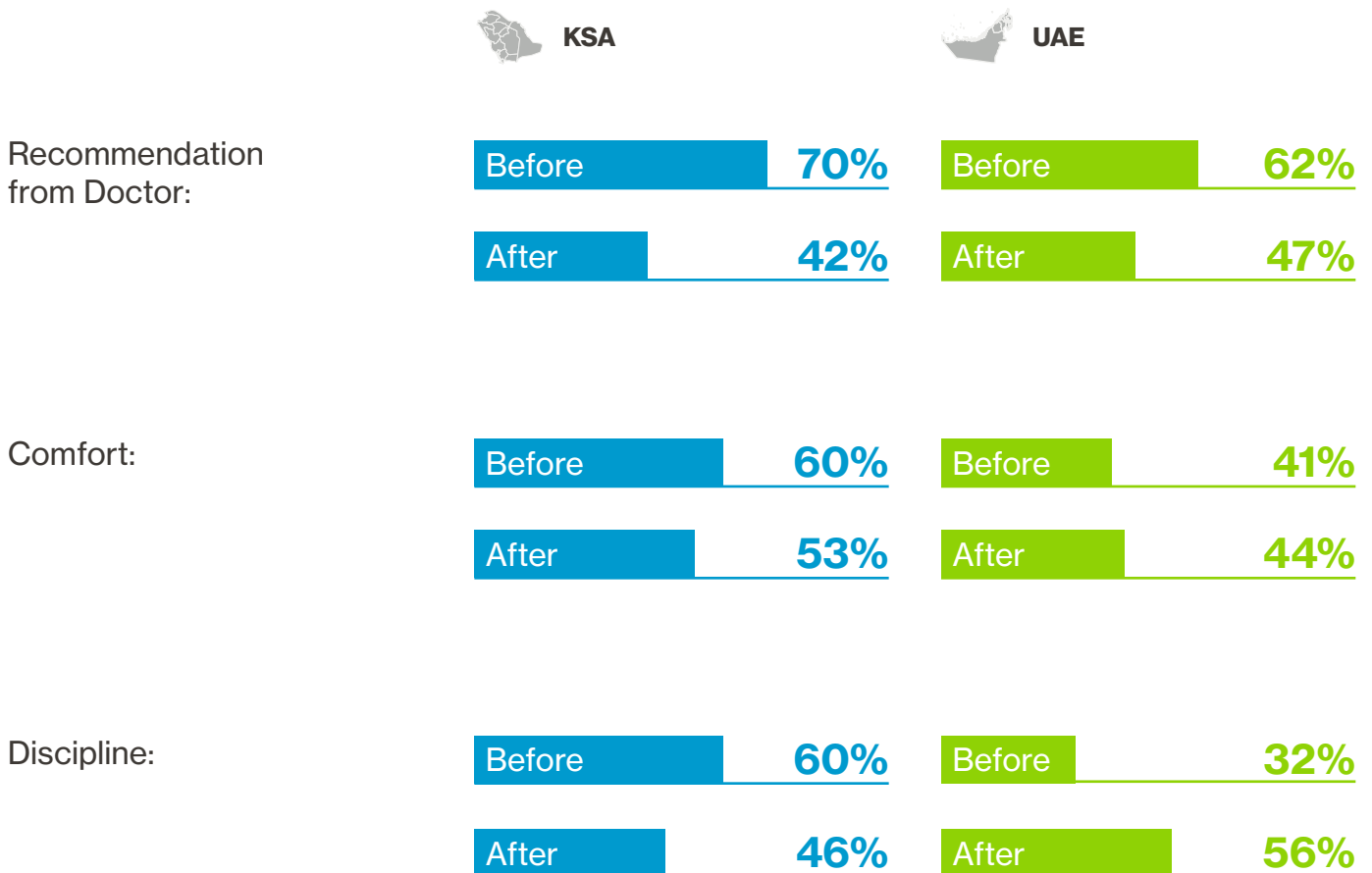
Less than a quarter of parents do not opt for clear aligner treatment for their children.

**24%** in KSA

**20%** in UAE

# High-income household parents who have not consulted an orthodontist have **pre-conceived factors in mind for treatments**

Factors influencing appliance choice among high-income household parents before and after orthodontic consultation:

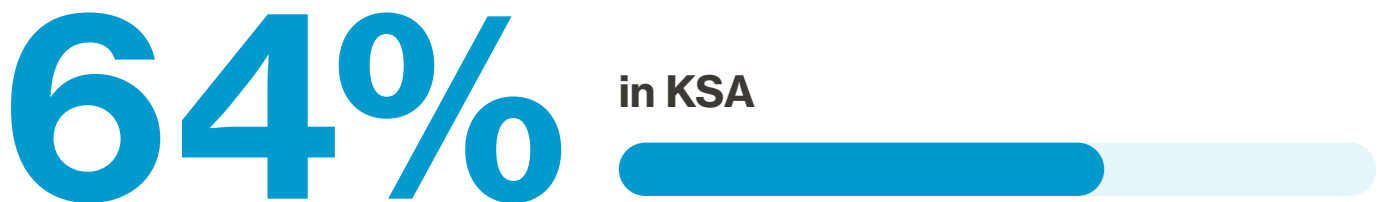


In both cases, affordability became less of a factor for UAE after doctor consultation (dropping from 54 to 49%), while in KSA, affordability became more of a factor after the fact (increasing from 30 to 45%).

Additionally, parents consult a number of sources when seeking referrals.

## Parents consult **a number of sources** when seeking referrals <sup>4</sup>

Online recommendations:



Parents of teenagers and children particularly in KSA and UAE where community feedback is heavily appreciated or sought out, are prone to having their choices influenced by their peers before they choose an orthodontist or a treatment methodology. Due to the lack of sufficient insight and education on clear aligners from publicly available resources, most parents go down the traditionally accepted route of wired braces instead of the often more convenient and comfortable option of Invisalign® solutions.





# Practitioner Research



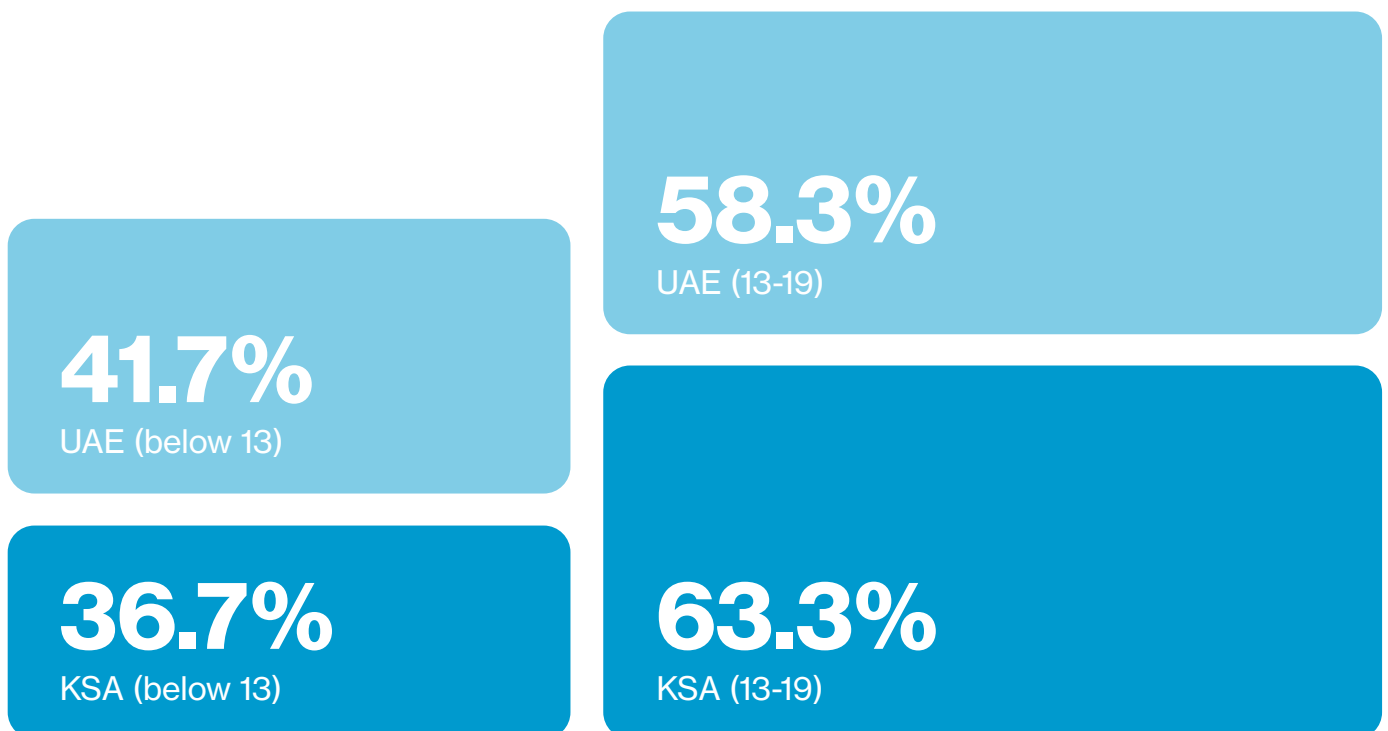
Orthodontists and dentists in KSA and UAE surveyed for this research tend to work in:



**36%** practice in Saudi Arabia

**61%** practice in the UAE

A large proportion of the growing patient segment i.e **the core target market, consists of teenagers.**



## **Affordability, doctor recommendations and compliance** influence the choice of treatment option

When it comes to considering teeth alignment, while several factors come into play, the common trend in both countries shows a prioritisation toward affordability as the most influential factor. Additionally, once affordability is no longer a concern, parents look to recommendations from their dentist on which orthodontist to reach out to. From an experience perspective, general concern among most parents is the ability or interest of their children to stay compliant to the daily needs of maintaining the braces or aligners, as this adds more stress to the parent involved.

**Factors that impact the adoption of clear aligners amongst both doctors and patients.**

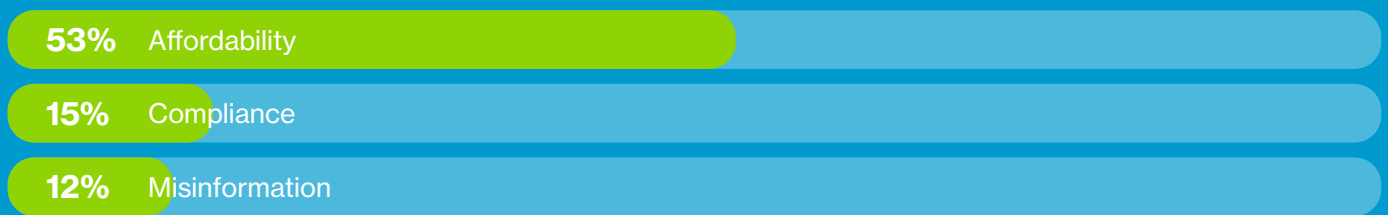


# Affordability, compliance and misinformation are three primary entry barriers, specifically for clear aligners according to orthodontists

Factors influencing orthodontists' patient influx:



KSA



UAE



Total  KSA +  UAE :



For the most part, parents do not opt for clear aligner treatment for their children.

## Frequency of parents **choosing Invisalign® clear aligners** for their children

In both KSA & UAE, almost 40% or 4 out of 10 parents do not choose clear aligners when consulting with the orthodontist.

**74%**

of parents in KSA choose clear aligners less than 20% of the time

**53%**

of patients in the UAE choose clear aligners less than 20% of the time, however 27% of UAE parents are more likely to be interested in clear aligners at some point

## Orthodontists view the growing patients demographic **as a significant market segment**

**82%**

in KSA have more than 30% of patients in the children to teen segment

**83%**

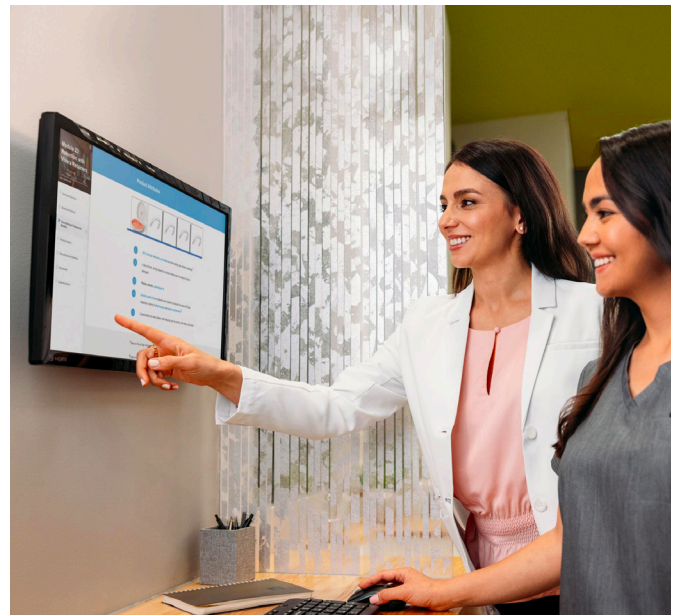
in the UAE have more than 30% of patients in the children to teen segment

Approximately 59% of practices surveyed (including Invisalign® providers and non-providers) reported at least half of their patient mix consisted of the growing patients segment

## Referrals are key to an increase in patient influx

43% of orthodontists say

**50%** of patients come through referrals from other patients



50% of these patients are

**under 19 years of age**

Orthodontists consult a variety of parents of all age groups with varying needs and pre-existing biases. Where practices saw a lack of patients from younger age groups, the overarching reason was the lack of referrals in both KSA and UAE, at 43%.

A quarter of all such practices were only focused on adult patients, thereby ignoring a fast growing and affluent patient segment that can benefit from Invisalign® clear aligners.<sup>4</sup>

# Foreword





The era of a simple orthodontic recommendation from a professional seems to be evolving into a more complex decision-making process. Our research, conducted by world leading consumer survey company YouGov and regional B2B research team CAPP, has highlighted how parents are increasingly leaning on the experiences of their peers and using online platforms to inform their choices, but also rely on self-education and their existing orthodontist's recommendations, all in a collaborative collection of data. It helps to demystify this new behavioral trend, offering insights into why and how these decisions are being made, and more importantly how you can use these insights to influence an elevated patient experience via exceptional clinical outcomes, guiding parents towards the safer, more aesthetically pleasing option of clear aligners.

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Welcome to our newest study where we unfold a profound shift in the behaviors and decision-making mindset of parents when it comes to their children's and teenagers' dental health, specifically orthodontic treatment.

In the three years since the pandemic first hit, there has been a considerable change in the ways we - as individuals and communities - engage with the world around us. We are witnessing an extraordinary time in history, when the aftermath is dramatically changing the way we live, work, communicate and make decisions. These changes, unsurprisingly, have trickled down to the choices parents make regarding their children's ongoing wellbeing, including relating to dental alignment treatments. This paper provides a detailed analysis of these changes, showing a marked shift towards reliance on peer referrals and online recommendations.



**Angelo Maura,**  
General Manager, Middle East, Align Technology



**The ultimate aim of this paper and our research is to build an understanding among dental professionals about the growing patient market for clear aligners in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to help them increase practice efficiency and influence growth.**

The research process sought to assess the existence of a growing patient market by gathering data on the current market size and identifying key behaviors that indicate market activity.

For example, while it was discovered that there is a large segment of growing patients (63.3% in KSA and 58.3% in UAE), most parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds take their children to see a dentist at earlier ages i.e. less than 6 years (44% in KSA, 60% in the UAE).

An additional key observation was that parents' motivations for orthodontic treatment prior to meeting with an orthodontist was susceptible to changing after said meeting. In particular, while functionality was more important than aesthetics (80% KSA, 54% UAE) pre consultation, this reversed to aesthetics being more important after the consultation (68% KSA, 55% UAE).

These and other findings helped us see how parents and orthodontists have a critical need for consultations to determine the best outcomes for treatment of growing patients instead of relying on pre-consultation 'gut feelings' or peer pressure.

As professionals in the field, it is critical for us to understand these changing dynamics. It is not merely about appreciating the transformative power of new treatment options that can change patients' lives, but about helping them adapt to it and understanding how to align our practices with the evolving needs and expectations of our patients.

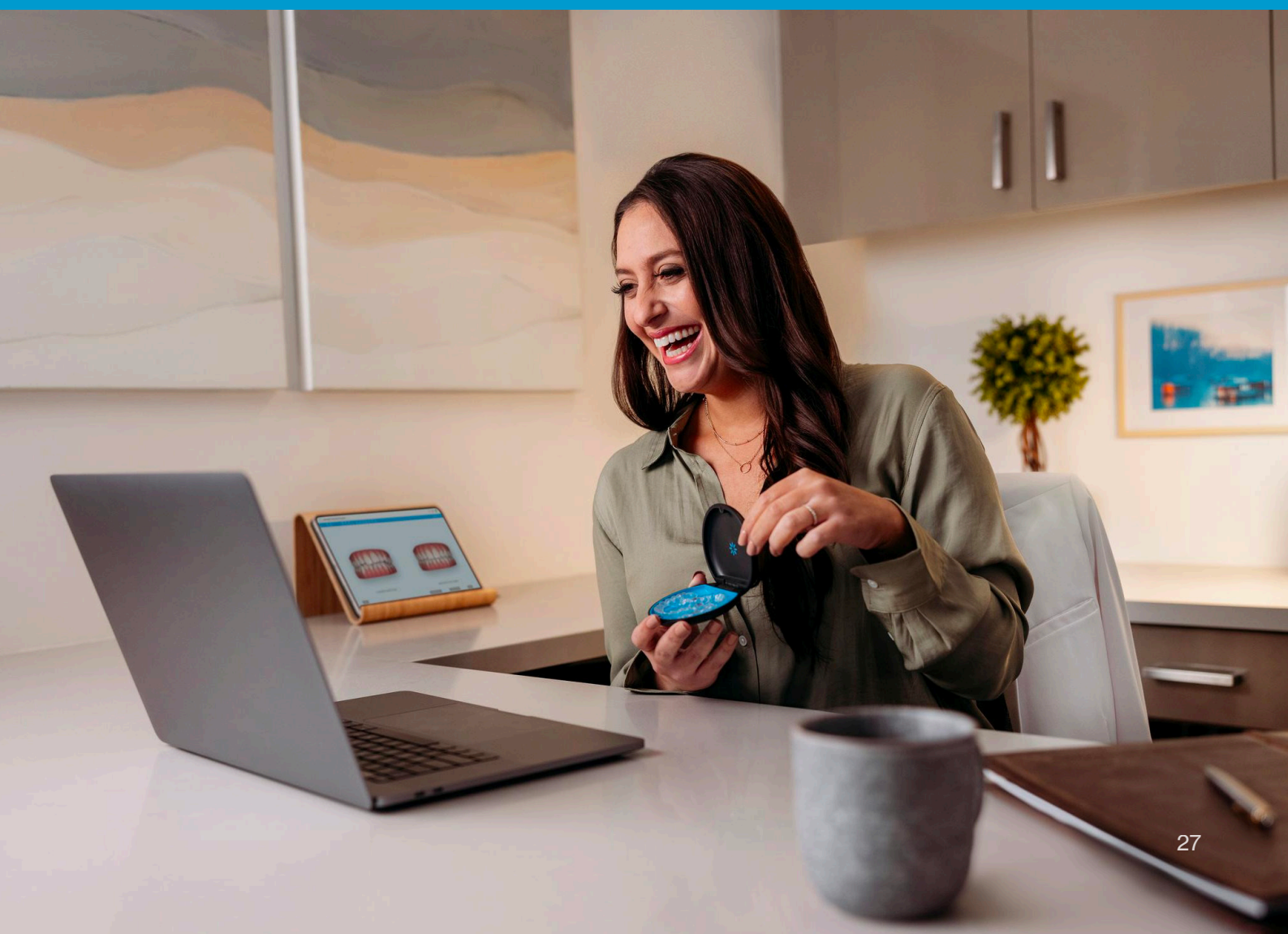
We trust this paper will create an opportunity for discussion and introspection on how we can best navigate and thrive in this new era of digital referrals and peer recommendations.



Chapter 1:

# Current State-Of-Play

A Post-Pandemic Dental Industry Boom



Clear aligners are a transparent version of conventional brackets and wires, with a purpose of aligning teeth and correcting the malocclusion. This orthodontic system is crafted from a proprietary plastic material, custom-made to accommodate each patient's oral shape, and provides gentle, more constant forces to improve control of tooth movements. They are removable and can be temporarily taken out during meals which is different from traditional wire bracket braces that stay fixed.

While functional, a major benefit of clear aligners is not just to correct problems related to bite, but also to address issues like gapped and overcrowded teeth i.e., aesthetic value. Factors contributing to the growth of the clear aligners market include an **increasing population with malocclusions** and advancements in dental treatment technologies. With the pandemic having forced a large segment of the population indoors for a considerable amount of time without access to regular dental visits and treatment, teenage patients with needs to alleviate malocclusions would have seen their self-esteem or appearance concerns take a hit, **given the propensity to succumb to peer pressure.**<sup>5</sup>

Conditions such as malocclusions and temporomandibular jaw misalignment are leading to a greater need for cosmetic and user-friendly substitutes for traditional fixed options. The aesthetic appeal and convenience of clear aligners are, hence, boosting their popularity. The upsurge in demand for personalized clear aligners and an increase in advancements related to visualization software cannot be overstated.

In 2022, the global market for clear aligners was approximately US\$ 3.96 billion, and expected to reach around US\$ 57.05 billion by 2032.<sup>6</sup> In the Middle East, the size of the dental care market currently sits at around US\$ 1.44 billion (2022) and is projected to reach US\$ 2.54 billion in 2030<sup>7</sup> while the UAE market is estimated to be around \$179 million (2022), projected to reach \$318 million in 2030. This growth isn't unprecedented, as even before the pandemic the surge in dental professionals in the GCC was obvious. In the middle of the last decade, the UAE had the highest rate of growth of dental professionals from 2013 to 2017 at 78.8% among GCC countries. KSA was 26.5% in the same period.<sup>8</sup>

Growing technological developments such as computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing (CAD/CAM) technologies in dentistry, spearheaded by companies like Align Technology, will no doubt positively encourage the use of clear aligners.

Post pandemic parents were keen to restart their children's visits to the dentists and orthodontists to fix bite and teeth issues, exacerbated by the lack of physical healthcare access to specialists during the 18 months of uncertainty and regulations in place, particularly in KSA and UAE. With limited access, the leading source of patient insight into treatment options came from other patient recommendations and referrals. Onwards in 2022 until now, there has been a surge in visits to orthodontists for treatment of children and teenagers, as well as a large uptake in the request for braces and teeth aligners.

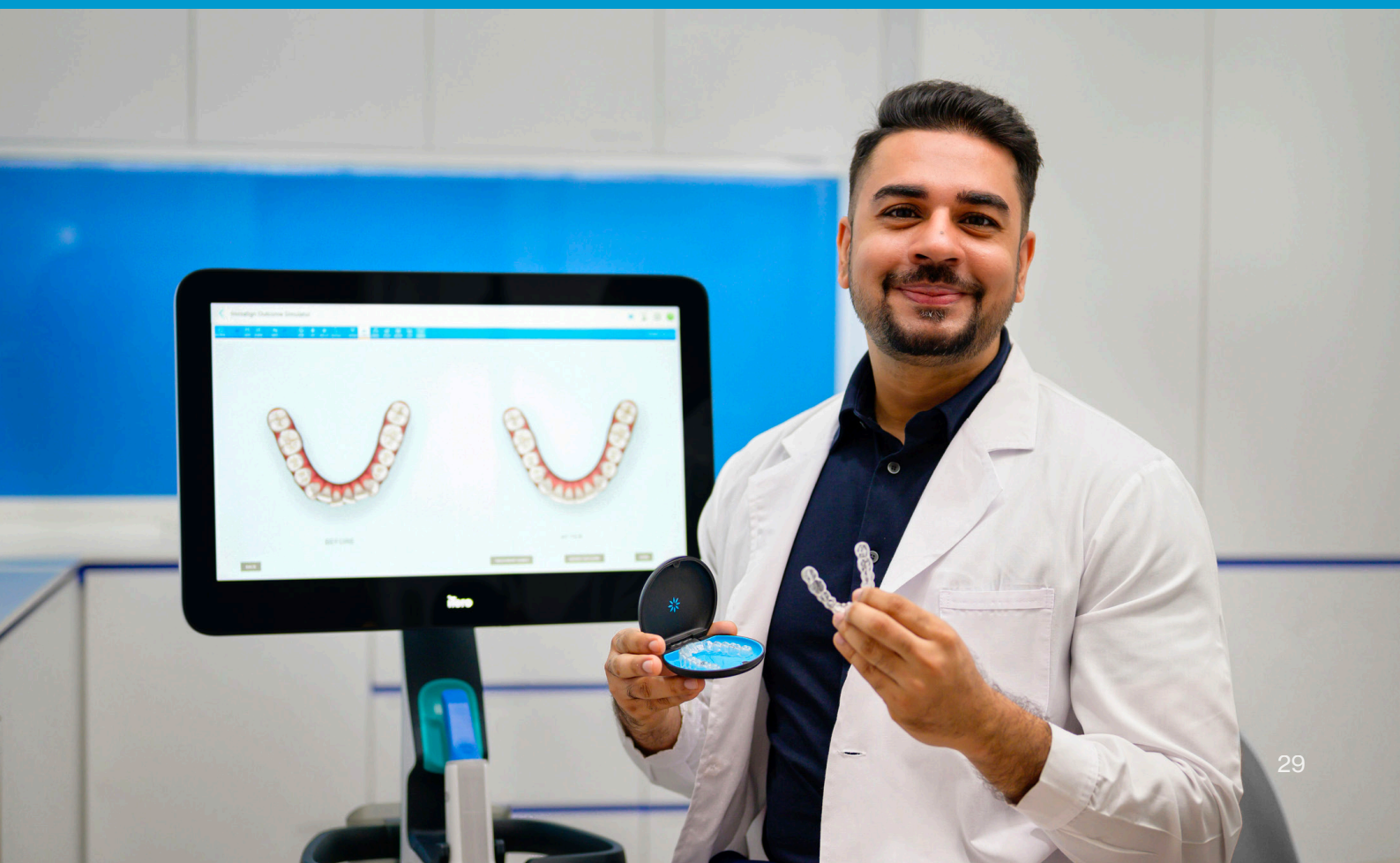


**49% of parents in KSA and 33% in the UAE visited dentists with their children multiple times in a single year, with a quarter in each country doing so at least once.**

Chapter 2:

# Functional vs Aesthetic Dentistry

Key Differences and Impact on Patient Care





As we journey further into 2023, the scope of dentistry has significantly expanded beyond just the treatment of oral diseases. Today, two emerging areas in the practice are functional and aesthetic dentistry, gaining recognition for their distinct approach towards oral care.

Functional dentistry places a strong emphasis on the connection between oral health and overall body health.<sup>9</sup> This approach operates under the principle that oral health issues can be both a symptom and a cause of systemic health problems. A functional dental professional focuses on rectifying problems to improve the overall health of the patient, using treatments such as clear aligners for malocclusions or deep cleaning for periodontal disease.

On the other hand, aesthetic dentistry, often referred to as cosmetic dentistry, focuses primarily on improving the visual appearance of teeth and smiles. Aesthetic dentists utilise procedures such as teeth whitening, porcelain veneers, and cosmetic bonding to enhance the smile's visual appeal. The goal of aesthetic dentistry is not only to boost the patient's self-esteem but also to restore function when necessary.

While aesthetic dentistry is primarily concerned with appearance, it does not overlook the importance of oral health. In fact, procedures such as dental implants or crowns, while improving aesthetics, also restore function and contribute to overall oral health.

In essence, both functional and aesthetic dentistry have their unique perspectives and roles in the realm of dental care. Functional dentistry is concerned with the overall health of the patient and uses the mouth as a gateway to identify and treat potential systemic issues. Meanwhile, aesthetic dentistry seeks to improve the smile's visual appearance, thereby enhancing the patient's self-confidence and, in some cases, oral function.

In KSA and UAE, research tells us that functionality, while important to patients visiting a dentist, takes a back-seat to aesthetics when the patient is younger i.e., teenager or a child.



**Parents in KSA (73%) and UAE (57%) tend to take their children to visit orthodontists soon after visiting a dentist, and after a consultation they tend to prefer aesthetic needs alleviation over functional concerns such as bite.**



Chapter 3:

# Traditional Braces vs Clear Aligners





Innovation has grown in the orthodontics industry over the past 25 years, including in the area of teeth alignment techniques. Among these advancements is the introduction of clear aligners, which offer an alternative to traditional wire braces. There are key differences between traditional wire braces and clear aligners, which dental professionals should understand to help make informed decisions based on their patients' needs.

Traditional wire braces have been a reliable staple in orthodontics for many decades. They are metal brackets which adhere to teeth, connected by a wire and tightened periodically, and by applying consistent pressure on teeth they shift them into a desired position over time. They are particularly effective for complex cases involving severe overcrowding, malocclusion, and jaw alignment issues.

However, wire braces have a set of drawbacks.<sup>10</sup> The metal brackets can cause discomfort and mouth sores, especially during the initial installation period or after adjustments. Additionally, oral hygiene becomes challenging, as food particles become trapped in the brackets and wires on a regular basis. Braces also require regular orthodontic visits for adjustments, something not convenient for all patients particularly the fast-paced environment of life in KSA and the UAE.

On the other hand, clear aligners, like Invisalign®, represent a more recent innovation in orthodon-

tics. Clear aligners are custom-made, transparent, plastic trays that fit over teeth. They are designed to exert a controlled amount of force on teeth, gradually moving them into position. Unlike traditional braces, clear aligners are removable, allowing patients to eat, drink, and clean their teeth with ease. Clear aligners offer certain key advantages over traditional braces, which parents of children are more appreciative of when they become aware. They are nearly invisible, which makes them an aesthetically pleasing option. Moreover, they generally cause less discomfort and fewer issues with oral hygiene due to their removable nature. In modern, state of the art orthodontic practices which use the tools provided by Align Technology, orthodontists can help patients see the potential of their smile with solutions like the Invisalign® SmileView™ tool, and help them visualise what their new smile could look like with the Invisalign® Outcome Simulator™.

Both traditional wire braces and clear aligners have their unique benefits and drawbacks. The choice between the two often depends on the patient's specific orthodontic needs, lifestyle, and personal preference. It is essential that dental professionals stay informed about the nuances of these treatment options to provide the most effective and appropriate care for patients. Understanding the strengths of clear aligners in particular enables guidance for patients towards achieving their ideal smiles, especially if they were not previously aware of the benefits or even the existence of clear aligners. In fact, the research we conducted showcased clear preference based out of a lack of clarity or knowledge of alternatives.



**45% of parents in KSA and 47% in the UAE still prefer metallic braces over clear aligners (24% in KSA and 20% in UAE).<sup>3</sup>**

## Chapter 4:

# Affordability

Key Determining Factor Influencing the Choice  
Between Traditional Braces and Clear Aligners



In orthodontics, cost plays a significant role in determining the type of treatment a patient opts for, holding especially true when parents make decisions for their children's dental health. Both traditional braces and Invisalign® clear aligners offer unique benefits, but their respective costs can vary, often influencing a parent's choice.

The cost of traditional braces - long being the standard in orthodontics - is a key factor. The pricing for braces treatment typically includes all necessary appointments, adjustments, and in some cases, even the cost of a retainer post-treatment. This pricing can make budgeting for treatment easier for parents, and insurance companies may cover a portion of traditional braces due to their long-established use.

Clear aligners, being a more recent innovation in orthodontics, tend to carry a different price tag. The cost is due, in part, to the advanced technology used to create the custom aligners and the proprietary materials used.

While some insurance plans may cover elements of the treatment plan such as consultations, the coverage for clear aligners may not be as extensive as for traditional braces, and there are fewer to no emergency appointments, as well as stipulations about the age and orthodontic needs of the patient.

The perception, therefore, is that while Invisalign® offers the aesthetic advantage of near invisibility, ease of use and comfort, affordability of traditional braces often makes them a more accessible choice for many families. Orthodontists in the CAPP survey clearly indicated **affordability** as the top determining factor in choosing treatment options, **with 53% in KSA and a whopping 64% in the UAE citing this.**<sup>4</sup> As dental professionals, understanding these financial considerations can aid us in providing guidance and options that align with the financial realities of the families we serve.

This concern of affordability is seen as possibly alleviated when parents in higher income brackets consult orthodontists despite preconceived, influential factors. Where affordability is a concern, doctors' recommendations and the resulting consultations help refocus these concerns toward their child's comfort and the ability of the patient to stick to treatment plans (**a jump from 32% to 56% in the UAE**).<sup>3</sup>



## Chapter 5:

# Compliance

Importance of Compliance in Growing Patient Orthodontic Treatment





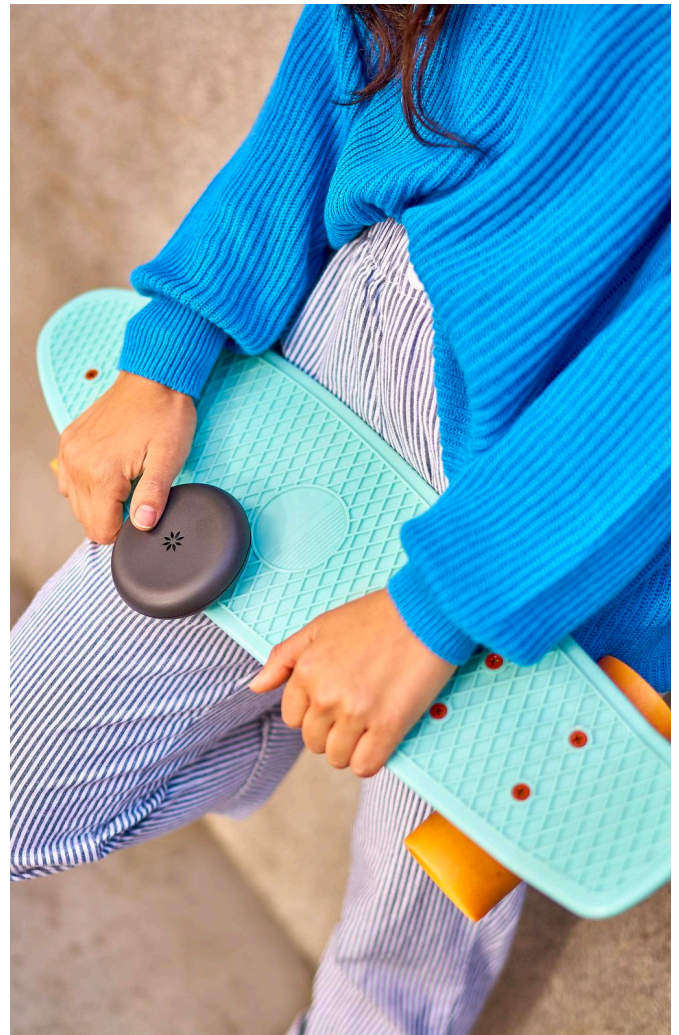
**Orthodontists report compliance as the second biggest concern they face with parents of growing patients in KSA (15%) and UAE (24%), while in KSA this is exacerbated by a lack of interest in teens (14%).<sup>4</sup> Prior to consultations with orthodontists, the perception of treatment concerns in KSA in particular revolve majorly around compliance in growing patients, with 60% of parents identifying this as a problem.<sup>3</sup>**

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Compliance is crucial to the success of a patient's orthodontal treatment, whether it involves traditional braces or clear aligners like Invisalign®. For parents of children undergoing orthodontic treatment, ensuring compliance can be a challenge despite being essential for achieving desired results and enhanced patient experiences.

With traditional braces, compliance primarily involves maintaining good oral hygiene and avoiding certain foods. Braces consist of brackets and wires that can trap food and plaque, so meticulous cleaning is necessary to prevent tooth decay and gum disease. Parents need to consistently ensure children brush and floss thoroughly to clean around the braces. Hard, chewy, or sticky foods can damage braces or cause them to come loose, so parents need to supervise their child's diet closely, which can be difficult in situations where they have no contact such as at school, college or play areas.

The challenge of compliance is quite different with clear aligners. Since aligners are removable, patients must be responsible enough to wear them for the recommended 20-22 hours per day and only remove them when eating, drinking anything other than water, and during oral hygiene routines. In the case of a forgetful or less responsible child, keeping track of and caring for aligners can be a significant concern.





When it comes to oral hygiene, growing patients treated with Invisalign® clear aligners have been shown to demonstrate better compliance, presenting a significantly lower full mouth plaque score and full mouth bleeding score over three, six and twelve months, than their peers with fixed aligners.<sup>11</sup>

Regular visits to the orthodontist are another essential aspect of compliance. Missed appointments can lead to prolonged treatment time and additional costs. Whether it's adjusting traditional braces or ensuring treatment is progressing as planned, these appointments are crucial. Patients treated with Invisalign® do, however, have an element of flexibility, with next generation digital tools allowing for remote monitoring between face-to-face appointments, and the nature of Invisalign® SmartStage™ technology meaning that doctors can recommend continuing with a patient's current aligner without risk of undesired movements should they not be able to make an appointment.

Top tier orthodontic practices where affordability is less of a concern tend to have the facilities available to educate and inform parents and patients, particularly using state of the art visual aids, digital outcome simulators and before-after non-clinical 2D image generators to help build confidence and drive adherence.<sup>4</sup> In fact, practices using state of the art solutions like Align Technology's Invisalign® system as well as the Invisalign® Outcome Simulator™ tool with the iTero™ Intra-oral scanner can enable fewer visits per patient and a faster treatment time, by helping minimize disruption to patients' daily lives.

Compliance is a shared responsibility between the orthodontist, the child, and the parents. It is essential to achieving successful outcomes and maintaining oral health throughout the treatment process. It is the role of dental professionals and providers of treatment solutions to deliver clear instructions and encourage growing patients and their parents to understand and value the importance of compliance in orthodontic treatment.

## Chapter 6:

# Referrals

The Power of The Parent Community In Dental Treatments



When it comes to making decisions about their children's health and well-being, in particular during orthodontic treatments which can be a stressful experience for children, parents often rely heavily on referrals and recommendations of other parents. This preference can be attributed to a few key reasons.

Parents naturally trust the advice of other parents who have already navigated the same treatment path. Personal experiences and recommendations from trusted sources who have experienced exceptional clinical outcomes often carry more weight than general information or professional advice because they are seen as more relatable and unbiased. This is particularly more common in the era of social media and digital communications, where such referrals can be received instantly. Hearing another parent's first-hand account of how a child adjusted to braces or clear aligners, or their interaction with a particular orthodontist, can provide a level of reassurance that cannot be obtained from a brochure or website. While professionals can explain the procedures, parents can share insights about practical everyday challenges like maintaining oral hygiene with braces, ensuring compliance with clear aligners, or managing discomfort after adjustments.

Parents can also provide feedback on the cost-effectiveness and value for money from their perspective, particularly if they fall into the same socio-economic bracket as the questioning parent. They can share their experiences with insurance coverage, out-of-pocket expenses, and any unforeseen costs, helping other parents make more informed treatment decisions.



Even when it comes to the choice of orthodontist, a recommendation or referral from other parents can help in making a strong choice. **Most respondents in the UAE (72%) choose their dentist by seeking referrals from people they know, while respondents in KSA sought referrals (65%) as well as searched for online recommendations (64%).<sup>3</sup>**

While professional competence is a key indicator, factors such as their rapport with children, friendliness of office staff, or the atmosphere of the clinic can greatly influence a child's comfort and cooperation during treatment. Such factors might not be readily apparent during an initial consultation but can significantly impact the overall treatment experience.

Referrals provide parents with relatable, holistic, and practical insights. These help to build trust and set expectations, equipping parents to make well-informed decisions that suit their child's needs, their budget, and their family's lifestyle. As dental professionals, acknowledging and understanding this preference can help us better communicate and build stronger relationships with patients and their families.



# Conclusion:

Aligning With The Consumer



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## The Way Forward

Examining the behavior of parents, we have discovered their preference for peer insight and online endorsements when selecting orthodontists for their children, as well as their inclination towards wire bracket braces over clear aligners. However, the research also revealed key insights that can empower orthodontists to effectively guide parents towards a more elevated patient experience, thereby benefiting their children and teenage patients in terms of both oral health and aesthetic improvement.

It is crucial for orthodontists to engage with parents and address their concerns regarding clear aligners. With knowledge, affordability and compliance being clearly highlighted as a significant apprehension for parents when considering clear aligners for growing patients, orthodontists should pro-actively provide access to education around the significant benefits of clear aligners to the lifestyle of their patients. Moreover, orthodontists should actively educate parents about the numerous advantages of clear aligners over traditional wire braces.

This education should focus on the long-term benefits of clear aligners in terms of oral hygiene, comfort, and convenience. Providing informative materials in the form of digital aids such as the ones provided by Align Technology, augmented reality or virtual reality platforms and computer aided imaging to influence younger, tech savvy patients that explain these benefits in a clear and concise manner can be an effective strategy. Visualizing the potential transformation before committing to treatment can be a powerful motivator for children and teenagers, as they often prioritize the aesthetic aspect of orthodontic care.

As peer referrals of orthodontists are a major deciding factor, orthodontists can position themselves as accessible and long-term providers with considerable insight into how clear aligners are beneficial to growing patients.

Embracing innovation and implementing comprehensive strategies will not only benefit growing patients but also position orthodontic practices at the forefront of the evolving dental landscape. Together, we can drive positive change and provide a superior orthodontic experience for teenage patients seeking a radiant smile and a brighter future.





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## About Align Technology

Align Technology designs and manufactures the Invisalign® System, the most advanced clear aligner system in the world, iTero™ intra-oral scanners and services, and exocad™ CAD/CAM software. These technology building blocks enable enhanced digital orthodontic and restorative work-flows to improve patient outcomes and practice efficiencies for over 256 thousand doctor customers and is key to accessing Align's 600 million consumer market opportunity worldwide. Over the past 26 years, Align has helped doctors treat over 17 million patients with the Invisalign® System and is driving the evolution in digital dentistry through the Align Digital Platform™, our integrated suite of unique, proprietary technologies and services delivered as a seamless, end-to-end solution for patients and consumers, orthodontists and GP dentists, and lab/partners. Visit [www.aligntech.com](http://www.aligntech.com) for more information.

For additional information about the Invisalign® System or to find an Invisalign® doctor in your area, please visit [www.invisalign.com](http://www.invisalign.com). For additional information about the iTero™ digital scanning system, please visit [www.itero.com](http://www.itero.com). For additional information about exocad dental CAD/CAM offerings and a list of exocad reseller partners, please visit [www.exocad.com](http://www.exocad.com).

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