

General Chiropractic Council

Chiropractic Patient Satisfaction and Experience



The PATSAT Study - Summary

1. Introduction

The Patient Satisfaction (PATSAT) report, completed in January 2023 by researchers at AECC University College in the UK, provides a contemporary evidenced based understanding of the experiences of and satisfaction with chiropractic care as delivered by chiropractors in the UK.

The research was carried out in two parts:

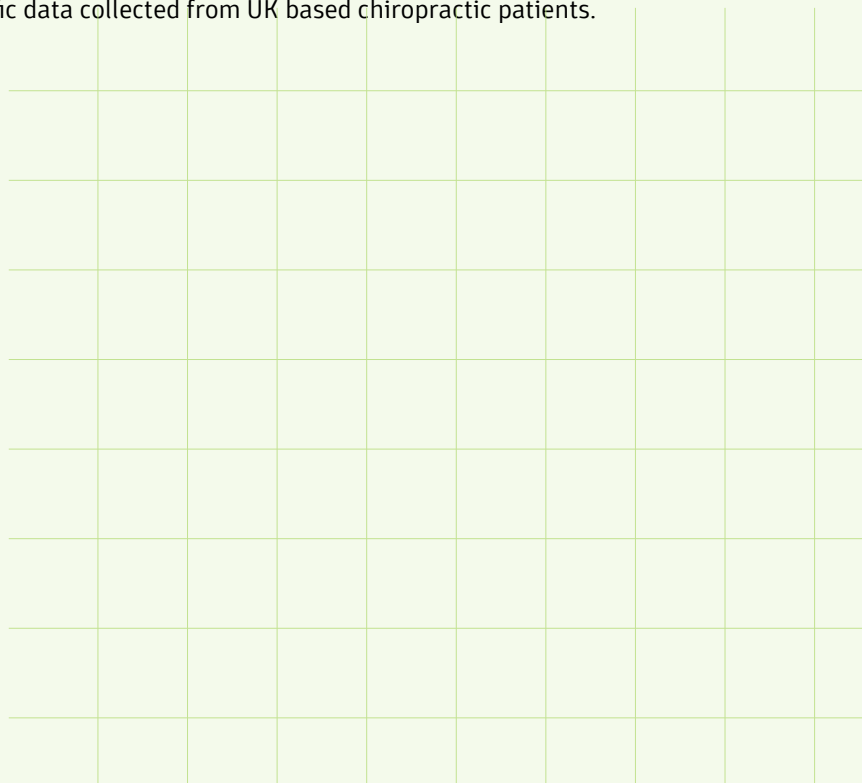
1. A systematic review of the literature pertaining to chiropractic patients' satisfaction and experience
2. Data collected from UK based chiropractic patients to explore the degree of satisfaction with chiropractic care and their experience while receiving such care

This document provides a summary of this study.

2. Key findings

The outcomes reported here highlight two key findings:

- Overwhelmingly, chiropractic patients report high levels of satisfaction and positive experiences with their care. This was true both in the literature that examined international patient cohorts as well as the specific data collected from UK based chiropractic patients.
- A strong therapeutic relationship and good communication between patient and chiropractor underpins high satisfaction scores and a positive experience. This was confirmed both in the international literature and through both quantitative and qualitative analysis of specific data collected from UK based chiropractic patients.





3. Phase one – systematic review

Phase one of this project consisted of a systematic review collecting research available on a range of databases in January 2021. The research question addressed was “What are the experiences and level of satisfaction of patients attending for chiropractic care?”

The review included studies from 43 published papers which were conducted across a wide geographical area.



The studies relate to care delivered in chiropractic settings with patients attending with a variety of conditions, including spinal pain, neck and leg pain and other musculoskeletal presentations.

Generally, the findings overwhelmingly indicated that chiropractic patients report high levels of satisfaction and positive experiences with their care.

3.1 A review of studies measuring patient satisfaction

Clinical trials reported higher satisfaction ratings from patients receiving chiropractic care in comparison with other health interventions and these overall achieved statistical significance. Interestingly, where substantive clinician time or attention were involved, patients were more satisfied, and this arose in both the quantitative and qualitative literature.

A number of studies indicated that higher patient satisfaction scores were linked to:

- prior experience of chiropractic care or patients' choices suggesting that familiarity or historical factors may be important.
- positive outcomes or a sense of progression, although this was not universally the case.

Cost was not a factor associated with satisfaction or dissatisfaction with chiropractic care, although in another study, lack of knowledge of upfront costs was associated with lower satisfaction scores.



3.1.1. Chiropractic versus doctor

The findings may indicate that patients' satisfaction of care are quite different when visiting different health care professions.

Satisfaction with MD care associated with	Satisfaction with chiropractic care associated with
correct diagnosis	diversity of interventions
timely treatment	perception of the chiropractor's ability to handle multiple problems simultaneously
ongoing referral to other health care settings	

3.2 A review of studies measuring patient experiences

These studies used a variety of methods to understand the journey of chiropractic patients including quantitative and qualitative explorations of the patients' lived experience.

The literature suggests that chiropractic patients' experiences are more positive, when compared to visiting a doctor, across a number of important domains. These include:

- empathy
- patient centredness
- perceived support.

Where the patient experience was less than optimal, information around costs, delays in being seen and explanations for such delays were noted, although in other studies looking at satisfaction, the process of care including waiting and treatment times was very positive.

3.2.1 Common traits for a positive chiropractic experience

- good communication
- being listened to
- a strong therapeutic relationship
- trustworthiness and caring as being central in underpinning a positive experience.



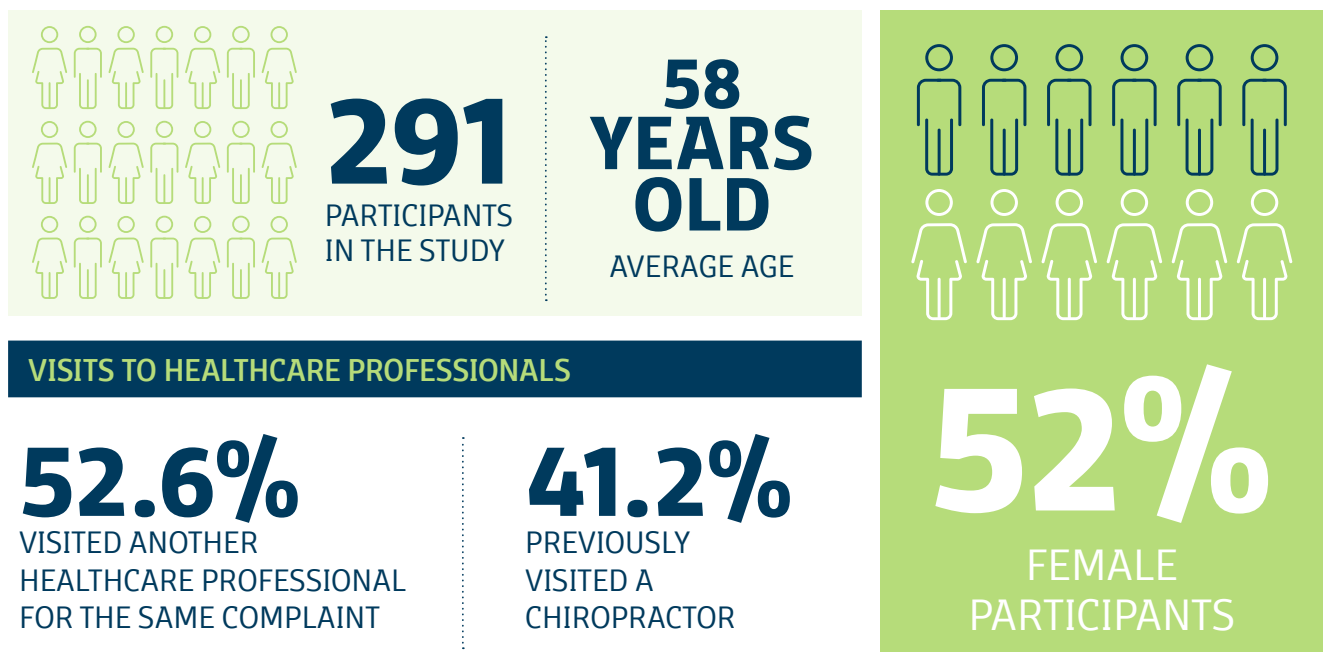
4. Phase two – data collected from uk-based chiropractic patients

Phase two of this project consisted of a mixed-methods study, including a cross-sectional survey and qualitative interviews of UK-based chiropractic patients.

4.1 Cross-sectional survey

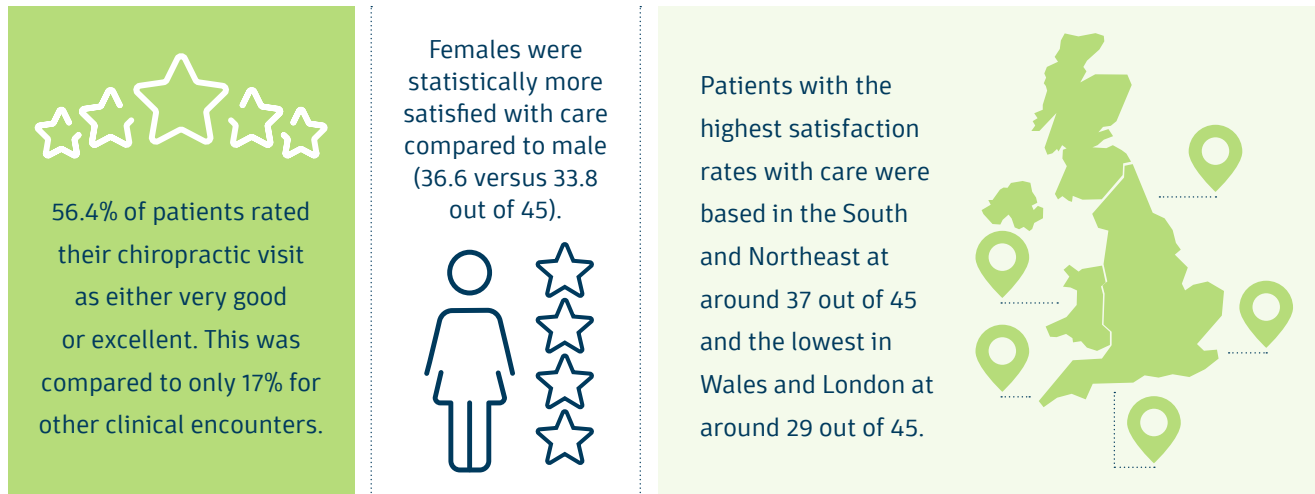
The findings of the systematic review (phase one) were used to guide decisions regarding survey development. Based on the findings of the review, it was deemed important to collect data on patients' treatment beliefs about manual therapy, perceptions of patient-centred communication, and therapeutic alliance (the relationship that develops between a practitioner and a patient during treatment).

4.1.1. Survey participants

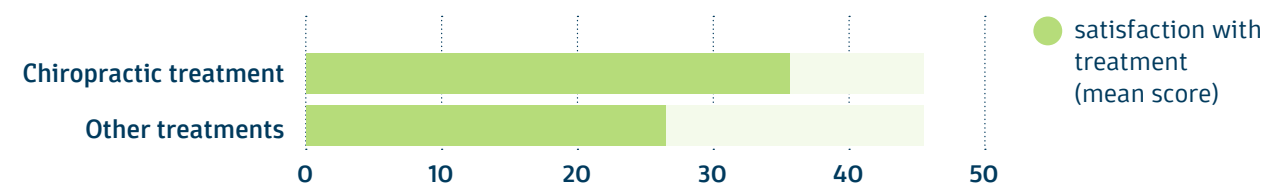




4.1.2 Patient satisfaction scores



Patients had higher satisfaction rates with chiropractic treatment than other treatments



Higher scores of patient satisfaction were significantly associated with higher ratings of patient-centred communication, treatment beliefs about manual therapy, and therapeutic alliance with particularly high correlations between patient centred communication and therapeutic alliance.

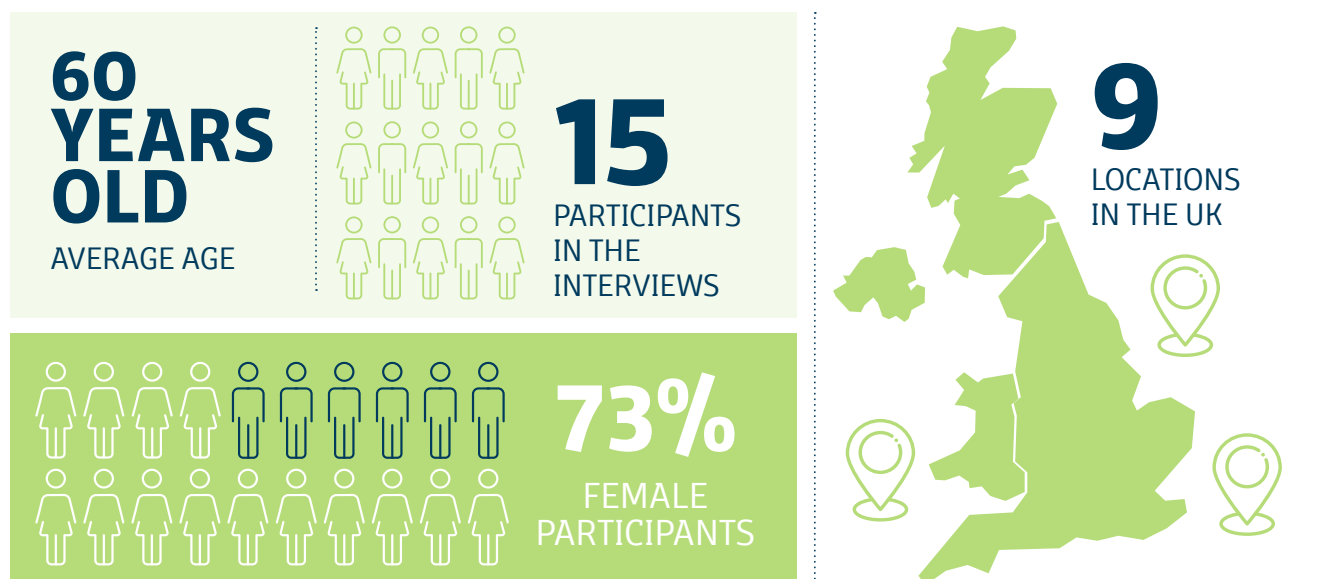
Unexpectedly, there were statistically significant associations between satisfaction with other treatment and satisfaction with chiropractic treatment.

The quantitative surveys revealed clear drivers of patient satisfaction scores centred on therapeutic alliance, patient centred communication, treatment beliefs and treatment outcomes.



4.2 Qualitative interviews

At the end of the survey, participants were invited to take part in an interview. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants online following a topic guide. The topic guide was based on the findings of the systematic review and included questions about the patients experiences and thoughts before having chiropractic treatment, experience of consultations and chiropractic treatment, and reflections on treatment.



Interview participants primarily had back pain (11 participants) with four participants identifying other musculoskeletal complaints, the length of their complaint varied from less than 3 months to over 2 years. Participants interviewed originally sought treatment for pain, notably back pain, neck pain, and sciatica. Pain intensity and experience varied among the participants.

The topic guide was based on the findings of the systematic review and included questions about the patients experiences and thoughts before having chiropractic treatment, experience of consultations and chiropractic treatment, and reflections on treatment. The topic guide can be found in Appendix II.

4.2.1 Common themes around patient satisfaction

Positive treatment outcomes

- Participants noted deciding to try chiropractic after dissatisfaction with other methods, such as visiting the GP or physiotherapist; this included the limited time with practitioners and lack of progress.
- Participants also expressed wanting a manual method as an alternative for surgery or a reluctance to take medication.
- Most of the participants experienced various benefits from the chiropractic treatment, notably significant pain relief.

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I've got the pain killed and the kind of tension released and I'm not taking a drug, I'm not taking a chemical.



Patient-centred and tailored care

- Participants valued the information provided by their chiropractor. This included explanations of patient's pain and providing detailed explanations of the treatment process.
- It was important for participants to understand the potential benefits of chiropractic and set clear expectations from the treatment.
- Participants noted good care included an individualised element, highlighting and complimenting how treatments were tailored to their needs as well as advice such as posture at work, and tips on participating in sport and fitness activity.
- They highlighted the thorough questioning by the chiropractor to understand their personal experiences, condition, and how this impacted them.
- Participants discussed chiropractors working holistically, and highlighted examples where chiropractors provided health promotion advice.
- Referrals to another healthcare professional were also praised as being good care, tailored to their needs.

Patient-chiropractor relationship

- Patients noted the relationship they had with their chiropractor, most highlighting they felt cared for and listened to by their chiropractor.
- They discussed the trust they had with their chiropractor and valued the mutual respect.
- Participants valued the professional respect given by all members of staff (not just the chiropractor).
- Participants valued their chiropractor's specialist knowledge compared to what they considered to be generic treatment from a GP. Being able to have a detailed discussion about their pain and treatment with an expert was seen as beneficial to their treatment experience and treatment outcome.
- Participants felt their chiropractors took their concerns and issues seriously and were helpful and available when needed.
- Flexibility in making appointments and in the length of treatments was also valued. Participants felt this reflected the chiropractor listening to their needs in booking appointments quickly.



It's so very individual, very attentive, very personal and targeted.



He listened, really listened to what I had to say. And what happened and what was hurting and why I was there.



Patient treatment beliefs

- Some participants expressed apprehension and felt nervous towards chiropractic treatment or had concerns that the treatment might have a negative impact.
- Although most participants did not have concerns, many lacked knowledge about the profession and treatment before being recommended. For some, this made them sceptical about the treatment.
- The positive experiences from chiropractic treatment led to patients having a new sense of belief in the method. There was no consensus from participants on how chiropractic treatment worked, but all participants noted that they would return for treatment.
- Positive outcomes lead many to return to their chiropractor as a form of maintenance care or as a form of prevention.
- Due to the positive benefits of the treatment, many participants did not voice concerns about the cost of treatment. This was especially noted in participants who had severe pain or had tried several different treatments before seeking chiropractic. Participants valued the benefits and as such paid for treatment accordingly.
- Some participants did note that they could only afford treatment as part of insurance or employee health scheme, however, in some cases with individuals who paid themselves, they felt that the price "is a deterrent to frequent treatment" and wished it to be subsidised by the NHS.

Poor experiences

Some participants spoke of previous practitioners where chiropractors had not provided such a positive treatment experience. This was noted as a lack of person-centred care or that lived experiences were not valued.

It was also noted that poor communication and failure to set expectations led to a poor treatment experience.



I'll keep going to the chiropractor because it works. If you'd asked a few years ago before all this..... I would have told anyone it's a load of mumbo jumbo. But it does actually work, which is quite surprising, I don't ask why it worked or how it works. I just know it works.



It was sort of a conveyor belt feeling.



5. Conclusion

This report shows that both existing literature and de novo data collection from patients receiving chiropractic care in the UK highlight excellent perceived experience and high satisfaction with such care.

Factors such as therapeutic alliance and communication are strongly associated with these positive perceptions by patients although other factors such as treatment beliefs were also significantly associated with satisfaction scores.

6. Recommendations

- To offer the highest quality of care, both in terms of clinical outcomes and patient experience, chiropractors should be explicitly skilled at curating excellent therapeutic alliances and communication with patients.
- Such skills and competences within chiropractic care delivery should receive higher visibility within the chiropractic profession generally and more specifically through advocacy within leading institutions and core emphasis within chiropractic curricula.