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Dental service vouchers in public-private collaboration in Finland: qualitative interviews on the experiences of service providers

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1 Introduction

In Finland, wellbeing services counties have statutory responsibility in their area to **organize public dental services (PDS)**. They may provide the services themselves or purchase the services from a private service provider.

The demand for PDS for adults has increased in Finland in recent years. The patient has the right to receive non-urgent care in PDS within four months after the need for care has been assessed. **In order to improve access to care, private service providers are increasingly being used to supplement PDS through service vouchers.** The City of Helsinki's oral health care has used the service voucher since 2011. In 2023, about 220 private dentists and 180 dental hygienists from 30 companies were involved.

The Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) in healthcare encompasses a wide range of activities between the public and private sectors¹. Factors that have been found to determine the success of PPP are interaction, information exchange, profitability, management and the roles of the parties^{2,3}.

There is **little research** on the use of service vouchers. Our aim was to investigate **the experiences of private providers** with the dental service voucher, and to identify the prerequisites for a functioning service voucher.

2 Methods



Individual semi-structured interviews

- conducted: 15 May - 14 June, 2023
- carried out either:
 - online
 - over the phone
 - face-to face



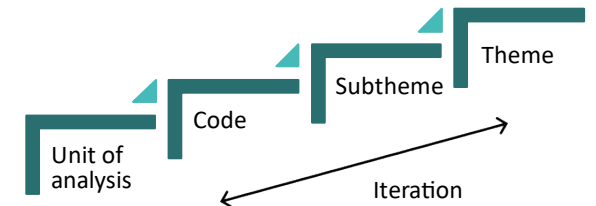
- **12 dental service voucher providers** for City of Helsinki
- A self-selected sample, various providers:
 - age
 - occupational group
 - time spent as service voucher provider
 - service voucher volume



Open questions:

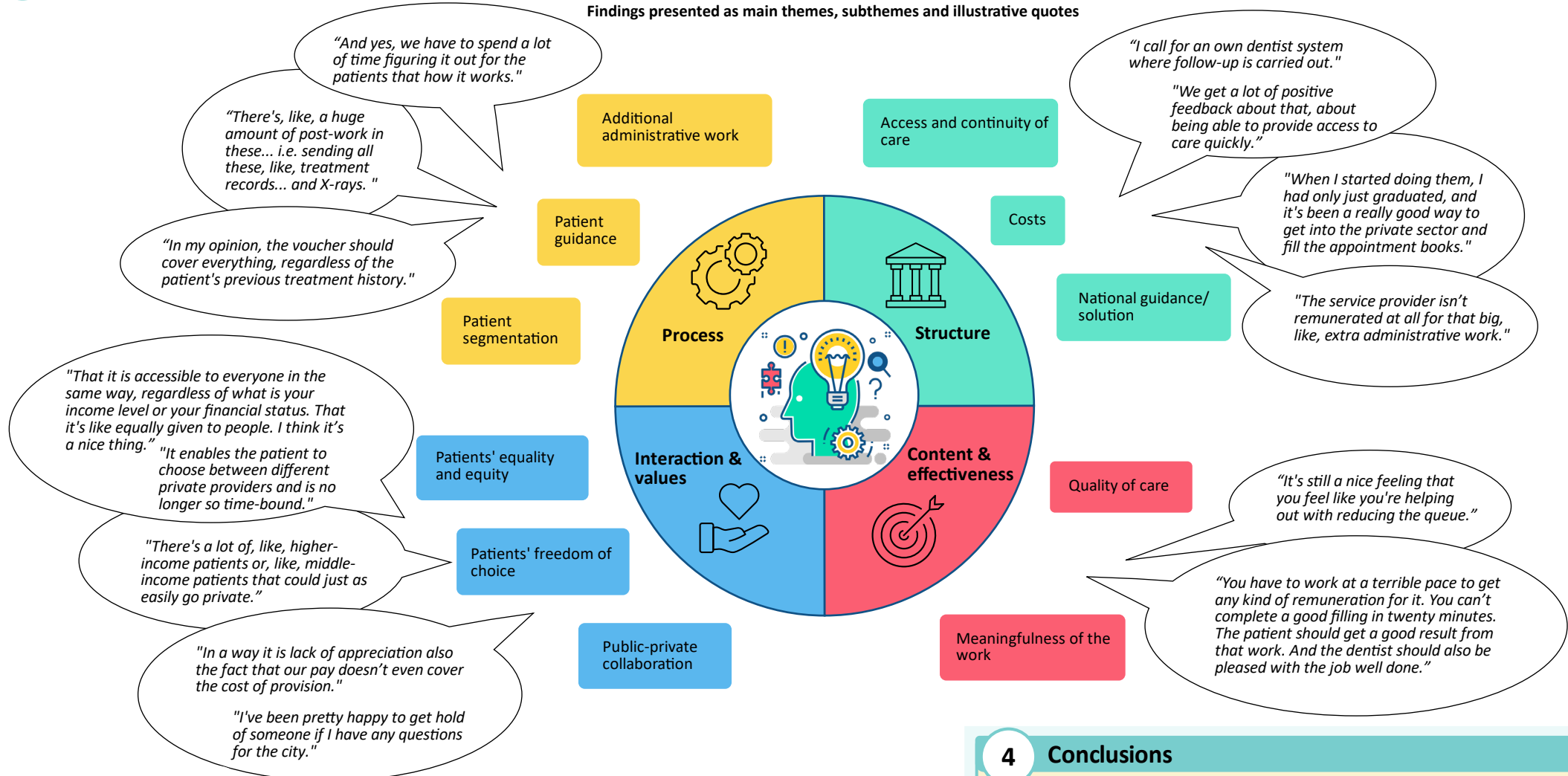
- understanding and experiences of the voucher
- advantages and challenges of the voucher
- the impact of vouchers in dental care
- a future dental service voucher
- self-reported respondent characteristics

The analysis was conducted iteratively using **inductive qualitative content analysis** by 2 researchers

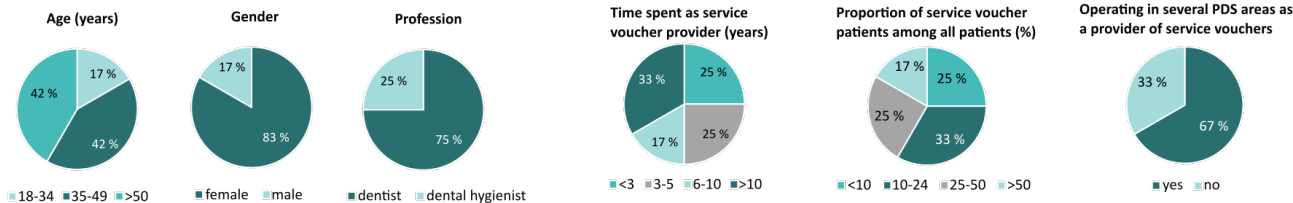


3 Results

Findings presented as main themes, subthemes and illustrative quotes



Characteristics of the interviewees



4 Conclusions

- Service vouchers seem to **increase the meaningfulness** of private service provider's work and **bring patients to private business**
- Practical issues need to be resolved to **alleviate the administrative burden** of service vouchers and to enhance data exchange between public and private partners
- **Versatile service voucher models** should be sought that support continuity of care, improve patient guidance, and support quality of care, while also taking into account the business interests of private entities involved.

¹Raman AV, Björkman JW. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK; 2008. p. 376–392.

²Tossavainen S. Master's thesis, University of Tampere, 2007. Finnish

³Nachtnebel M, O'Mahony A, Pillai N, et al. Soc Sci Med. 2015;145:193–200.

