



International Journal of Architecture and Planning Received: 27.05.2018 Accepted: 24.04.2020 Volume 8, Issue 1, pp: 01-19/ Published: 25.06.2020 DOI: 10.15320/ICONARP.2020.102 E- ISSN:2147-9380

# Effective Environmental Factors for Reducing Children's Fear in Children's Hospital: Using Parent's Attitudes

Sara Nourmusavi Nasab\* Amir Reza Karimi Azeri\*\* Seyedjalil Mirbazel\*\*\*

#### **Abstract**

## **Purpose**

Getting sick and getting into an unfamiliar environment in the hospital makes children fear, discomfort and is considered as a very common stressor in such setting. Poor design of hospital environments can exacerbate behavioral disorders, as well as fear and anxiety in individuals. The main purpose of this study is to investigate and address the needs and preferences of children regarding the design of therapeutic environments.

# Design/Methodology/Approach

The desk research method was used and data was collected through a questionnaire given to the parents of children in 17th Shahrivar Children's Hospital in Rasht city, Northern Iran. After the data of the questionnaires was collected, it was analyzed through spss22 software. Descriptive statistics (charts, mean ...) were used to analyze the data. Due to the nonparametric nature of the data, Spearman test was used in order to measure the correlation of variables.

#### **Findings**

The results showed that the components of entertainment and play, natural light, the presence of green space, cheerful atmosphere and the presence of family are among the most important environmental **Keywords:** Children, children's hospital, fear reduction, environmental factors

\*Architecture and Art Faculty, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran. (Principal contact for editorial correspondence.) Email: saranoormousavinasab@gmail.co

ORCID No: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1883-8042

\*\*Associate Professor, Architecture and art faculty, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran.

Email: mirreza\_karimiazeri@guilan.ac.ir ORCID No: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1551-8895

\*\*\*Lecturer. Architecture and art faculty, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran. Email: mirbazel1337@yahoo.com ORCID No: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5202-7964

DOI: 10.15320/ICONARP.2020.102 E-ISSN: 2147-9380



elements affecting the reduction of children's fears from the perspective of their parents.

# **Research Limitations/Implications**

the lack of direct involvement of the child in the study process as well as the cultural and economic differences are the main limitation of this study.

# Originality/Value

This study is the first study on the design of children's medical environment using the opinion of their parents in Iran and in this regard.

#### INTRODUCTION

Common stressors during childhood are sickness and hospitalization (Del Nord, 2006). For children, hospital settings stimulate different emotions, such as fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, loneliness, which can have adverse effects on children's physical, mental and social health (Birch et al., 2007; Bsiri-Moghaddam et al., 2011; Norton-Westwood, 2012; Wilson et al., 2010). There is ample evidence that children's anxiety increases during hospitalization and, in consequence, their health can be subconsciously affected (Dise-Lewis, 1988; Varni & Katz, 1997). Children suffer from a variety of considerable concerns and fears during their stay: fear of being away from family; fear of being in an unknown place; treatment stage's fear as well as loss of privacy (Coyne, 2006). Anxiety and fear, in terms of children' unconsciousness can affect the children's behavior throughout their life. As e result, researchers are more interested to study negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, and stress-related concerns which occur during illness (Thompson & Venon, 1993). According to previous researches, being a fun place, Hospital can attract children. children want an environment where they can make friends and engage in entertaining activities (Fletcher et al., 2011). In addition, the presence of peers and parents alongside sick children gives them a sense of security and comfort (Norton-Westwood, 2012). Previous studies about parents' perceptions of children's hospital environments have shown that one of the key elements is the physical quality of that environment, which should be quiet, clean and convenient while also providing adequate space and privacy (Pelander et al., 2007).

In the last fifty years, advances in medical technology have increased the level of design competence in the therapeutic spaces. Complexity in such buildings have increased. This complexity is the result of the multiplicity of units, abundance and the diversity of users and increase in the quality of medical technologies (Aydın, 2009). Now, in Iran, the situations of children's hospitals present a number of problems including lack of environmental facilities, inattention to the needs of children and the impact of the environment on their health condition.

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Today, children's hospitals acknowledge that they must provide support for the whole family. Compared to adult patients, the whole family will be involved when the child is hospitalized. Parents suffer as a result of their role as guardians and supporters of their child. Brothers and sisters of the child will also suffer because parents' attention is focused on the other. Since the mental state of children in the hospital is very important to help the healing process, identifying the elements of the children's hospital environment that lead to stress reduction can be an effective step in their recovery as well. Additionally, as the parents of children are directly involved in the treatment of their children, the purpose of this paper is to ask parents' opinions about their children's preferences for the ideal physical design of hospital built environments. The knowledge generated from this study helps designers and healthcare creators providing data that can be used in their design and operations decisions. And also it may improve the ability of healthcare providers to create environment that is congruent with the needs of parents and their children. This study will therefore address the following research questions.

- How important is the existence of environmental factors, such as; color, light, spatial layout, green space, scale and shape of hospital?
- How effective is the existence of amusement spaces in reducing child's fear?
- How important is the presence of the family next to the child?

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

By the 1960s, hospital buildings had focused more on hospital performance than patient experience (De Wilde & Muylle, 2012). Until the 1990s, little information was available about hospital design, but through the decade, architects and interior designers tended to design based on existing information and knowledge based on research achievements in this field (Rubin, 1998). Kellman (1987), focuses on the scale structure (outer structure and interior design, vertical dimensions, furniture size and handle height), play areas, environmental issues (color, texture, light and acoustic). Eriksen (2000), reviewed some children's opinions about the hospital environment during study at a children Hospital. In this study, factors such as the ability to play, the use of cheerful colors, attractive decoration, the presence of green space, the proper dimensions of the furniture, the presence of private space are considered. Previous studies illustrated the influence of Parental involvement and partnership in healthcare environment on treatment of child patients as assistants (Coyne, 1995; Dudley & Carr, 2004; Ygge &Arnetz,



2004). Ha and Park (2016) worked on a study with the aim of designing user-oriented children's hospital. In this study, user's needs were examined, especially by the help of their mothers and the nurses. The findings indicated that to improve the satisfaction of the mothers of ill children and the nurses, factors such as privacy, safety, accessibility should be considered.

In another study, children who used deviant techniques such as watching cartoons or listening to music reported less pain and anxiety (Sinha et al., 2006). A joint study about group play therapy impact on the rate of depression in children with cancer in Mahak Hospital in Tehran, showed that the game could be used as an effective solution by healthcare team members to help hospitalized children so that they could be helped in order to be prepared and tuned with the process of difficult treatments and tension associated with hospitalization procedure (Zareapour et al., 2009). In another research in a children hospital in Iran, children perspectives about ideal physical environment were extracted. The results of this article expressed that ill children prefer a hospital environment that provides appropriate recreational facilities for them. And at the same time, other environmental design factors such as light, green space, appropriate color and the possibility of parent's presence were important (Nasab et al., 2020). Below, some factors influencing children's perceived stress and fear in the environment of the hospital are summarized with their sources (Table 1).

Table 1: Factors influencing children's environment and stress in hospital

References	Factors
(Rollins, 2015)- (Shirani et al., 1986)	Family Partnership
(Malkin, 1992) - (Bettelheim, 1976)	Access to the outside environment
(Carpman & Grant, 2001) - (Topf, 2000)	Routing and Readability
(Kellman, 1987)	Scale
(Malkin, 1992) - (Bettelheim, 1976)	Feel under control and care
(Rubin, 1998) - (Kellman, 1987) - (Rollins, 2015) -(Lee et al., 2007)	light
(Rollins, 2015) - (Topf, 2000)- (Ulrich et al., 2008) - (Mour, 2010)	Effect of green space design
(Shirani et al., 1986) - (Lee et al., 2007) (Barlas et al., 2001)	Create privacy controls and privacy
Malkin, 1992) - (Bettelheim, 1976)	Coordination
(Frampton & Charmel, 2009)	See artistic and positive
•	images
(Lee et al., 2007)	Availability and order
(Shirani et al., 1986)- (Rollins, 2015)	Human interactions
(Topf, 2000) - (Kellman, 1987)	Prevent unwanted sounds

In the following, the theoretical framework is expressed, on which the research method is written.



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# Stress and Child's Fear in the Hospital

Seeing hospital settings of any size and form provides a frightening experience for each person (El Marsafawy, 2006). The unfamiliar environment of hospitals can be destructive and harmful to children which, in consequence, causes stress. For example, the problem of losing privacy due to the presence of multiple room (Larsen et al., 2014). According to Lee et al. (2007), "the physical environment affects the person's behavior, and positive experiences can help the person to overcome stress". The outcome of admission to hospital is anxiety for children, in which case, children react in three ways: protest, disappointment, and denial. Reduced interest in playing and collective activities, avoiding collapse and isolation, mischief, anger and lack of satisfaction are the responses of children admitted to hospital (Malkin, 1992). For children, stress signifies by stomach pain, sleeping problems, stools and infections (DeBord & Sawyers, 1996). The following five main factors can boost stress in a child: 1- Disease, 2- Hospital admission, 3-Physical - social environment of the hospital, 4- repetitive treatment processes, 5- pain Experience (Del Nord, 2006). A research in the environmental psychology field indicates that architectural factors such as motivation, plurality, diversity, complexity, novelty, sound, light, odor, colorization, crowding, apparent, visual, proximity, neighborhood, communication, readability, organization, Predictability, Signs, Paths. Distinctions, External Perspectives, Land Operations, Ambiguities, coordinated alignment of furniture and refreshment are perceptually related to both positive and negative stresses (Lee et al., 2007).

# Desirable Environmental Components for Children in Hospital Environment

In the context of effective factors in the design of medical environments, in 1859, Florence Nightingale, in her book entitled "Hospital Writings," stated that design, lighting, ventilation are critical elements for accelerating patient recovery and reducing pressure (Ebneshahidi et al., 2011). In 1960, interior design was introduced as a major factor in hospital environmental planning (Morelli et al., 2007). The needs of hospitalized children include healthy eating, proper sleep in good conditions, and basic needs such as personal hygiene and physical care. Hospitalized children may not feel comfortable not only because of their illness, but also because of being away from their families. Also, they may respond to their disagreement over their age group (SilavUtkan, 2012).

DOI: 10.15320/ICONARP.2020.102 E-ISSN: 2147-9380



# The Importance of Light and Color in Children's Hospital Design

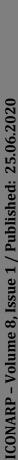
Factors such as color and light can affect people's perceptions and responses to the environment in which they are present. In particular, these factors are important in the treatment environment and the patient's recovery process. Light can improve the quality of the overall experience of staff, visitors and especially patients in the hospital environment (Dalke et al., 2006). Kellman in his research emphasized on the effect of natural light on children's recovery and the reduction of effective feelings (Ebneshahidi et al., 2011). A research showed that the proper coloring of the environment is effective in creating a person's positive mood and comfort (Tofle et al., 2004). J. Coad and N. Coad (2008), conducted a research through interviews on children's preferences in the design and color of the hospital environment. They questioned some children's views in three color ranges: Pink-purple, Blue-Green and Orange-Yellow. The color mostly selected by children was between the color range of green and blue. Children over the age of 11 years had a darker range. Warm yellow-orange colors as well as the pink-purple colors had the lowest number of choices. Park (2009), in his research, concluded that, based on gender, girls were more likely to enjoy red and purple colors. Apart from the gender perspective, sick children often preferred blue and green, and had the slightest tendency to the white color.

## Positive Distractions' Role in Children's Hospital

Positive distractions are related to environmental features that create "positive emotion and attract people's attention and their disturbing thoughts may be declined by that" (Devlin & Arneill, 2003). Positive distractions help people overcome their stresses and tensions. Positive distraction involves distraction potential, including static stimuli such as pictorials, posters or nature paintings, active stimuli such as animals, music and elements that make people happy (Berman et al., 2008). The impact of positive distraction on the activity of children in two clinic waiting areas is examined by Pati and Nanda (2011). They concluded that distraction leads to a gentler behavior of children, which reflects its significant sedative effects. Also, the data indicated that the waiting time for children in hospitals can be risen by improving the environmental attractiveness.

# The Effect of Green Space in Children's Hospital

A research has shown that the simulation of nature creates stress-reducing effects similar to what there is in nature (Berman et al., 2008). The most effective of these distractions is the ability of nature to improve and repair stress (Raanaas, 2012;



Salonen et al., 2013). It was shown in a study that patients undergone surgery who could see the plants through window, when compared to those who couldn't, had a shorter hospital stay and reported more positive hospital experience (Ulrich et al., 2008). Also, the views of the windows that opened to the green space could have reduced the hospital's post-operative stay by 8.5 percent. In US hospitals, they are increasingly focusing on trees and taking care of them in order to improve their patients' recovery faster (Mour, 2010).

# The Importance of Way Finding in Children's Hospital

Researchers found that stress due to losing one's path loss can contribute to frustration, increased blood pressure, headache, physical stress and fatigue (Carpman & Grant, 2001). Hence, creating a readable environment can enhance the cognitive inhibition of users in terms of perceiving environmental results in better treatment outcomes. Due to complexity of their paths, hospitals, as a public place, have problems about way finding (Rousek & Hallbeck, 2011). Proper way-finding in hospital design can be effective in increasing user satisfaction such as employees, visitors and, most importantly, the patient (Cooper, 2010). Being aware of surrounding environment leads to ease and safety (Cutting, 1996). By utilizing graphics and tactile communication way finding can be improved (Arthur & Passini, 1992).

## The importance of family presence

For decades, parental involvement has been considered as a supported philosophy for the continuity of care for children (Power & Franck, 2008). The presence of parents can grow the sense of security of children (Norton-Westwood, 2012). Children's resources point to the fact that if one parent or both can be with their children, it is the most important factor that helps children to cope with a mental illness due to hospitalization. Parental presence also helps the child to more easily accept the daily work process of the hospital (Malkin, 1992).

# **RESEARCH METHOD**

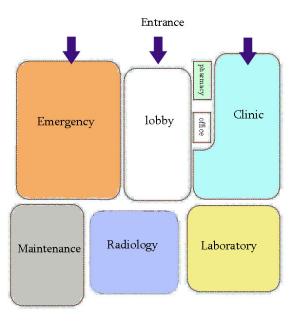
This research is purpose-oriented, applied. In terms of collecting data, it is a non-test descriptive study. Also, it was carried out as a sample case study. The measurement tools include: questionnaire and the software of social package for statistical analysis (SPSS22). The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions classified into 5 categories entitled "Mental relaxation, comfort, attractiveness, positive distraction and security." When developing the questionnaire, it was tried not to make them



unobtrusive, ambiguous, directional, complex, duplicate, negative, and the concept of questions was completely clear. Hivdah Shahrivar Hospital which is the only specialized pediatric children hospital in Rasht, is selected for this research. To estimate the sample size for the questionnaire the Morgan table is used (Krejcie & Morgan,1970). Given the fact that about 140 people were visiting Hivdah Shahrivar hospital every day, and with respect to this table, 103 parents were being examined. The type of questionnaire is Questions in Closed Ended Format. This is an ideal format for calculation of statistical information which can be helpful in obtaining opinions about a subject. The format of Questions is Likert Questions which is helpful in analyzing Customers' feelings about a topic. Based on the theoretical foundations of the study, the effective variables in reducing environmental stress in hospital such as color, light, structure, green space, presence of parents, etc., were selected and used in designing the questions. After the questionnaire was developed and the sample size was determined, next step was to enter the field. After entering the field to reach the best solution and generalizability of the responses, 103 parents of the patients were randomly selected. In this way, first they were given a letter in which the purpose of data collection, needs for their cooperation in providing the required data, and confidentiality of the responses, were expressed. Then the questionnaires were distributed and each respondent helped in the response process.

# **RESULTS**

Shahrivar Hospital is a Children's Specialized Hospital located in Rasht. This hospital has 170 beds. The only specialized medical unit of Rasht is this hospital. The spatial relationships and positioning of the building are shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3.



**Figure 1**. Ground floor space relations diagram (Authors).



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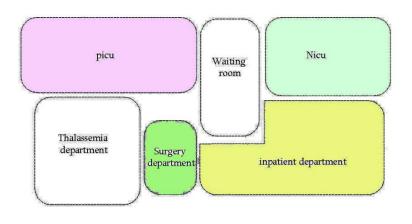


Figure 2. First floor space relations diagram (Authors).

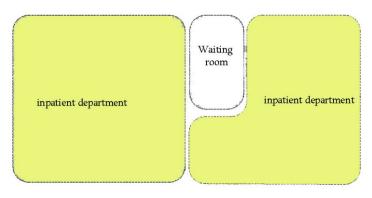


Figure 3. Second floor space relations diagram (Authors).

The current visual form of this hospital is illustrated in Figures 4, 5 and 6. No use of happy colors and green space in the environment, scattered space layout and inappropriate furniture can be seen in the pictures.



Figure 4. Waiting room (Authors).



Figure 5. Patient room (Authors).



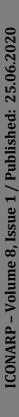


Figure 6. Patient room (Authors.)

In order to measure the reliability of the research tool, the most popular instrument used by many researchers to assess the validity of the questionnaire is the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha is one of the best analyzes for the reliability of research in the social and organizational sciences (Bonett & Wright, 2015). This criterion was calculated by SPSS22 software and the questionnaire had a reliability of more than 70 % which indicates a satisfactory level of reliability. So, it can be said that the questionnaire has been able to measure the subject. Therefore, the research has a good internal consistency. Depending on the type of research and its data, the method for data analysis is logically based on inductive method. Descriptive statistics (charts, mean ...) were used to analyze the data. For this purpose, the answers of the questions were entered into SPSS22 software and the graphs and statistical results were extracted and analyzed. The most important option in the subset of the factors are the question 2 and the 21st question, namely the presence of at least one of the parents at full time (question 2) and the possibility of having a game room in each part of the hospital (question 21) with an average of 4.5. The least important question is question 5 expressing presence of religious elements with an average of 3.2 (Table 2).

**Table 2:** The effect of environmental components on reducing children's fear in the hospital from parents' perspectives, with the questions separated

the hospital from parents perspectives, with the questions separated		
Factor: Mental relaxation		
Question 1	Average= 4.6 Mode=5	
Question 2	Average= 4.6 Mode=5	
Question 3	Average= 4.6 Mode=5	
Question 4	Average= 4.6 Mode=4	
Question 5	Average= 4.6 Mode=3	
Factor: comfort		
Question6	Average= 4.3 Mode=4	
Question7	Average= 4.4 Mode=4	
Question8	Average= 4.3 Mode=4	
Question9	Average= 4.3Mode=4	
Question10	Average= 4.3 Mode=4	
Factor: attractiveness		





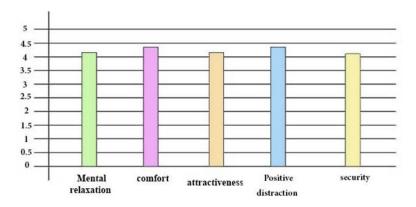
# Effective Environmental Factors for Reducing Children's Fear in Children's Hospital: Using Parent's Attitudes

Average= 4.3 Mode=4	
Average= 4.2 Mode=4	
Average= 4.3 Mode=4	
Average= 4.3 Mode=4	
Average= 4.1Mode=4	
Average= 4.2 Mode=4	
Factor: Positive distraction	
Average= 4.4 Mode=4	
Average= 4.2 Mode=4	
Average= 4.4 Mode=4	
Average= 4.4 Mode=4	
Average= 4.5 Mode=5	
Average= 4.4 Mode=4	
Factor: security	
Average= 4.3 Mode=4	
Average= 4.2 Mode=4	
Average= 4.2 Mode=4	
Average= 4 Mode=4	

According to the descriptive statistics, among five factors of mental relaxation, comfort, attractiveness, positive distraction and security, comfort and positive distraction with the average of 4.3 were more important than other factors (Table 3 and Figure 7).

**Table 3:** The effect of environmental components on reducing children's fear in the hospital from parents' perspectives

Factor: Mental relaxation	Average=4.1 mode=4
Factor: comfort	Average=4.3 mode=4
Factor: attractiveness	Average=4.2 mode=4
Factor: Positive distraction	Average=4.3 mode=4
Factor: security	Average=4.2 mode=5



used to measure the correlation of variables. Spearman's Rho is a

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test which is a much used goodness-of-fit test, is often employed to test normality (Steinskog et al., 2007). In the following, with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the value of "P" was less than 5 hundred, suggesting that the distribution of data is not normal. Hence nonparametric testing should be used. Due to the rank of variables, Spearman test is

**Figure 7.** The average impact of environmental factors on reducing the children's fears in the hospital from the perspective of parents (Authors).

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non-parametric test which is appropriate method to examine the strength of association between two variables, where the value r = 1 means a perfect positive correlation and the value r = -1means a perfect negative correlation (Allen, 2017). According to Spearman's analysis, by which the correlation between the variables is determined, there is a high correlation between the mental relaxation factor of the happy colors and the green space, which means that the more increase the values of these two factors, the more increases the calmness. The factor of religious elements has had the least correlation value (Table 4). For comfort element, the presence of sufficient lightning had the highest correlation (Table 4). For the factor of attractiveness, elements hanging from the ceiling and the Hospital Curve structure were highly correlated, which suggest these factors are more important (Table 5). For distraction, the presence of artificial light had a high degree of correlation, and the creation of art workshops and the existence of television had a small correlation. For security, the readability was more correlated (Table 6). In general, the factors of artificial light, play room, water elements, elements hanging from the ceiling, outdoor play, hospital curve structure, ventilation, adequate lighting, green spaces and happy colors were more important ones. The factors of religious elements, noise reduction, television and art workshops were weaker factors.

**Table 4:** Correlation between variables of mental relaxation and standard spaces factors

Factor: Mental relaxation	
Religious elements	correlation coefficient= 0.043
	sig= 0.666
Happy colors	correlation coefficient= 0.8
	sig= 0.003
green space	correlation coefficient= 0.73
	sig= 0.002
The presence of family	correlation coefficient= 0.212
	sig= 0.032
Factor: comfort	
Proper ventilation	correlation coefficient= 0.64
	sig = 0.046
Enough lighting	correlation coefficient= 0.71
	sig= 0.032
Furniture with scale and size of	correlation coefficient= 0.523
the child	sig= 0.063
Noise reduction	correlation coefficient= 0.186
	sig= 0.06



Table 5: Correlation between variables of attractiveness and positive factors

Factor: attractiveness		
Children Handcrafted	correlation coefficient= 0.601	
	sig= 0.051	
Hospital Curve structure	correlation coefficient= 0.854	
	sig= 0.018	
The playing field is outdoors	correlation coefficient= 0.666	
	sig= 0.044	
Elements hanging from the	correlation coefficient= 0.842	
ceiling	sig= 0.020	
Water elements	correlation coefficient= 0.665	
	sig= 0.041	
Factor: Positive distraction		
Art workshops	correlation coefficient= 0.154	
	sig= 0.141	
Game room	correlation coefficient= 0.627	
	sig= 0.048	
Computer Game Features	correlation coefficient= 0.512	
	sig= 0.065	
Existence of television	correlation coefficient= 0.141	
	sig= 0.138	
Artificial light	correlation coefficient= 0.954	
	sig=- 0.06	

**Table 6:** Investigating the correlation between security factor variables

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Factor: Security	
Readability and wayfinding	correlation coefficient=0.334
	sig= 0.094
The closeness of the nursing station to the hospital room	correlation coefficient= 0.206 sig= 0.037
Independent admission room	correlation coefficient= 0.214 sig= 0.117

#### **DISCUSSION**

The findings demonstrate that factors like adequate lighting, play room, water elements, outdoor play, hospital structure, ventilation, green spaces and happy colors, can be ideal environmental elements providing suitable environment for children.

In this study, comfort and positive distraction with an average of 4.3 are more important than other ones. Previous studies have also highlighted the significance of positive distraction. Other research done by Pati and Nanda (2011), has also expressed that positive distraction leads to gentle behavior of children.

The use of happy colors is the most important factor for the subjective sense of mental relaxation. Other studies have also suggested that the use of happy color in the environment can lead to positive effect on children's mood (J. Coad and N. Coad, 2008).

Lighting as an environmental factor in this research, is indicted by other researchers in hospital environment as well. Light improves the quality of patients, staff and visitor's overall

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experience in the hospital environment (Dalke et al., 2006). Readability is another important environmental element. Other studies have also suggested that readability have positive effect on stress reduction in hospital environment (Lee et al., 2007).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study was conducted as a scientific research to transform children's needs into design by examining their parents' responses about their children's needs in hospital setting. Considering the results of the attitude screening questionnaire from the parents of the sick children as well as library studies done through desk research method, the elaboration of the features that can be considered for designing children's hospital environments is as follows:

- Of the four factors of mental relaxation, attractiveness, positive distraction and security, comfort and positive distraction with an average of 4.3 are more important than other ones.
- The most important factor for the subjective sense of mental relaxation is the use of happy colors in the environmental design of hospital.
- The most important factor for the environmental comfort is the presence of adequate light in the environment.
- The most important factor for the subset of attractiveness is the use of curve structures in the design of the environment.
- The most important factor for the subset of positive distraction is the use of artificial light.
- The most important factor for the security subset is readability in routing.

In conclusion, according to the findings, the presence of happy colors, sufficient lighting, elements hanging from the ceiling, hospital curve structure and artificial light, had a correlation of more than 0.7, suggesting that these factors are more important. However, the relative importance of factors may vary (for example, by culture).

This study provides nurses, architects, clinicians and other stakeholders with insight into what an ideal healthcare environment should constitute, from the perspective of parents. And if these design strategies are used, it seems to affect the quality of life of hospitalized children.

An important limitation of this research is the lack of direct involvement of the child in the study process. In other words, there may be differences between parents and children view. Another major limitation of this study is the cultural and

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economic differences as well as the existence of different living conditions in different societies. Each of these factors can be effective in prioritizing environmental factors. It seems that in future research, the impact of culture, economy and living conditions of people in different geographical areas can be examined.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

This article is an excerpt from Sara Nourmusavi nasab's Master Dissertaion titled "The design of the children specialist health center in Rasht with an approach to reduce the fear of the environment utilizing user opinions", directed by Dr Amir Reza Karimi Azeri, Seyedjalil Mirbazel at Gilan University.

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#### Resume

SaraNourmusavi Nasab received her B.Arch and M.Arch from Guilan University in the major of Architecture. She currently works as a researcher.

Amir Reza Karimi Azeri currently works at Guilan University, Department of Architecture, as an associate Prof. He received his M.Arch and PhD in Architecture from Iran University of science and technology.

Seyedjalil Mirbazel currently works at Guilan University, Department of Architecture, as a lecturer. He received his M.Arch in Architecture from Iran University of science and technology.