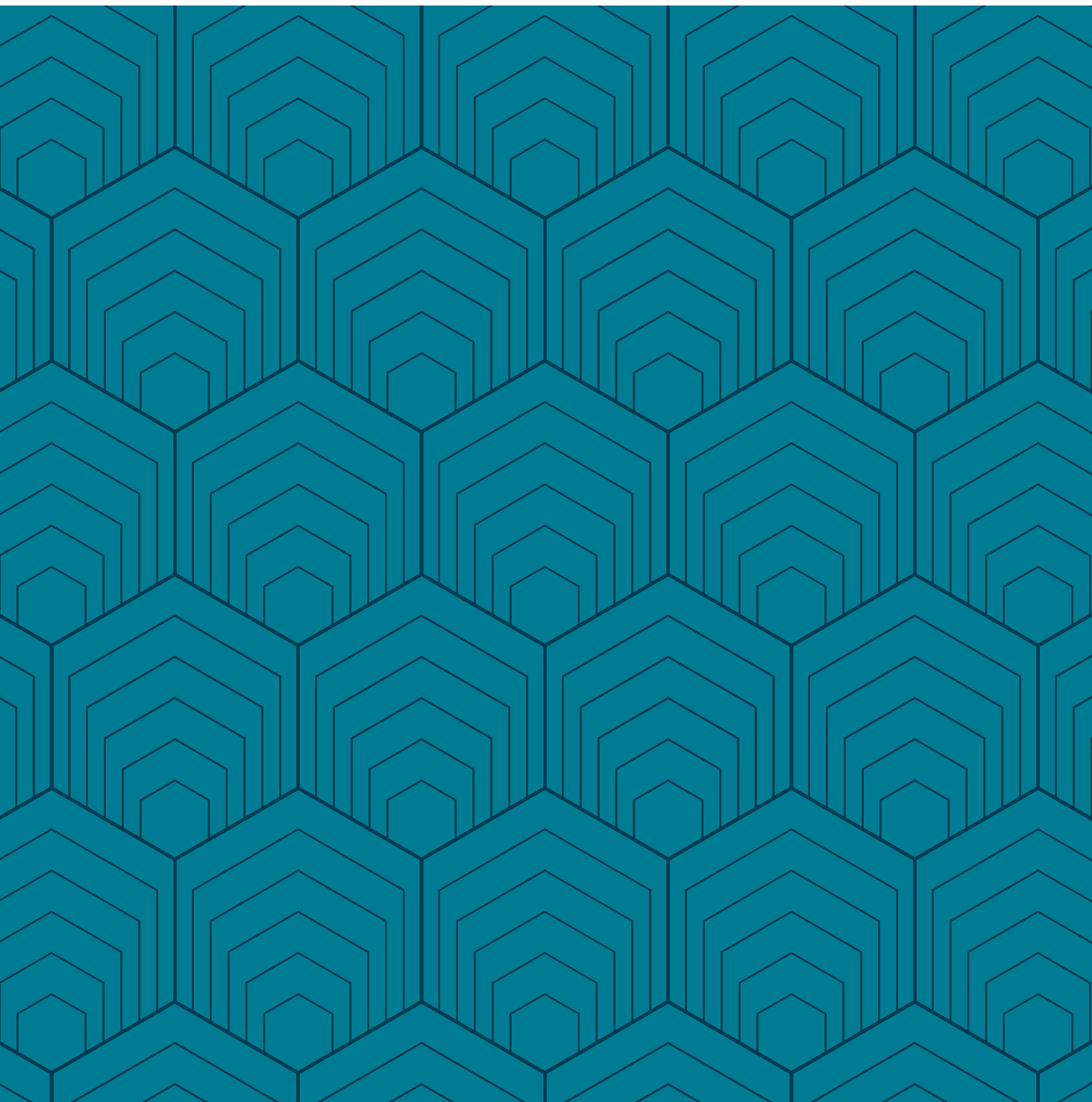


Dental therapists
working patterns
inferential analysis



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Glossary of terms

Term	Meaning
Active in the UK dental sector	Whether someone is: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Currently working in the dental sector• Seeking work in the dental sector
Clinical / non-clinical	Whether someone is working in a role that is: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clinical (fully or at least 75%)• Mix of clinical and non-clinical• Non-clinical (fully or at least 75%)• Other
Employment status	Whether someone works: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employed• Self-employed / locum / agency• Business owner / part owner• In training• On parental leave• On sick leave• Working unpaid / pro-bono• Not applicable• Prefer not to say
Healthcare sector	Sector worked in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NHS (fully or at least 75% of time)• Mix of NHS and private• Private (fully or at least 75% of time)• Other
Non-response bias	Is a bias that can happen when there is a significant difference between those who respond and those who don't respond to a survey
Weekly hours worked	Hours worked per week by range

Term	Meaning
Work setting	Setting worked in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• General dental practice• Specialist dental practice• Community dental services• Dental hospital• Other hospital settings• Laboratory• Oral public health• Armed forces• In education / training as a student• In education / training as a member of staff• Researcher / academic• Other• Not applicable• Prefer not to say

Acknowledgements

The GDC is grateful to all the dental professionals who responded to the working patterns questions. We would also like to thank the professional bodies, trade organisations, employers and other government stakeholders who supported the development of questions and encouraged dental professionals to complete this data.

Any further questions or suggestions related to the publication of working patterns data can be submitted via email at research@gdc-uk.org.

Executive summary

- Since November 2023, working patterns questions have been available on the GDC's online portal, eGDC, alongside the annual renewal process. Responses from dental care professionals were requested for the first time as part of their 2024 annual renewal (June – August). Following the publication of the working patterns dental care professional summary tables in October 2024¹, this report presents the results from further analysis of responses from dental therapists. Only statistically significant findings are focused on.
- Of the 5,558 dental therapists who completed their annual renewal in July 2024, 3,934 (71%) answered the working patterns questions.
- Of the 3,934 dental therapists included in this analysis, 98% were working in the dental sector and 2% stated they were looking for work.
- Most dental therapists (71%) were 'self-employed / locum / agency'.
- More than half (57%) of dental therapists listed their primary field of practice as dental therapist and nearly two-fifths (39%) reported working as dental hygienists.
- More than half (58%) of dental therapists who were up to 30 years of age were working more than 30 hours a week delivering dental care. This proportion decreased by age group.
- Half (50%) of dental therapists in clinical roles were working in the private sector, compared to only 29% of those in non-clinical roles.
- More than nine-in-ten (94%) dental therapists who were aged up to 30 years of age worked in general dental practice. This proportion decreased by age group, with 70% of dental therapists aged 61+ working in general dental practice.

1. [Working patterns data](#)

1 Introduction

The General Dental Council (GDC) has undertaken further analyses of our working patterns data, bringing it together with equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), registration and Fitness to Practise (FtP) data to derive greater insight and value from our working patterns responses. This report provides further analysis of dental therapists' responses to the working patterns questions.

Of the 5,558 dental therapists who completed their annual renewal in July 2024, 3,934 (71%) answered the working patterns questions. This analysis includes:

- Employment status
- Where dental therapists work (location and setting)
- Healthcare sector dental therapists deliver care in (NHS v private)
- Weekly hours worked by dental therapists
- Whether dental therapists work in clinical or non-clinical roles
- Variations by equality, diversity and inclusion characteristics
- Correlations between working patterns questions and incidence of FtP cases (at the aggregate level)

1.1 Methodology

Working patterns data is being collected using questions made available on the GDC's online portal (eGDC). This was done to maximise response rates, and data completeness, and was arrived at in dialogue with professional organisations, registrants and governmental stakeholders. We launched the data capture process by encouraging dental professionals to provide their data when they completed their annual renewal, beginning with dentists in 2023, and then dental care professionals in 2024. Completion of the working patterns questions is voluntary.

Analyses reported here are derived from dental therapists' responses received up to 10 August 2024. Responses received after this date will be included in future outputs. Only dental therapists who reported that they were either 'working in the dental sector' or 'looking for work in the dental sector' in the United Kingdom (UK) are included in these analyses.

For the analysis of responses, we tested if a difference in results was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level and only statistically significant results are reported.

The appendices contain further details on data collection and question design (4.1 Question design and format), on data cleaning (4.2 Data cleaning), on statistical linear models use to test hypotheses, p values and effect sizes² (4.3 Statistical analysis models), comparisons of the respondent numbers with GDC registration data across EDI characteristics and selected registration fields (4.4 Non-response bias), and notations for the statistically significant differences (4.5 Statistical notation).

2. The effect size measures the strength of a relationship between two or more variables (i.e. what proportion of the difference in the data is explained by this relationship).

2 Results

2.1 Active in the UK dental sector

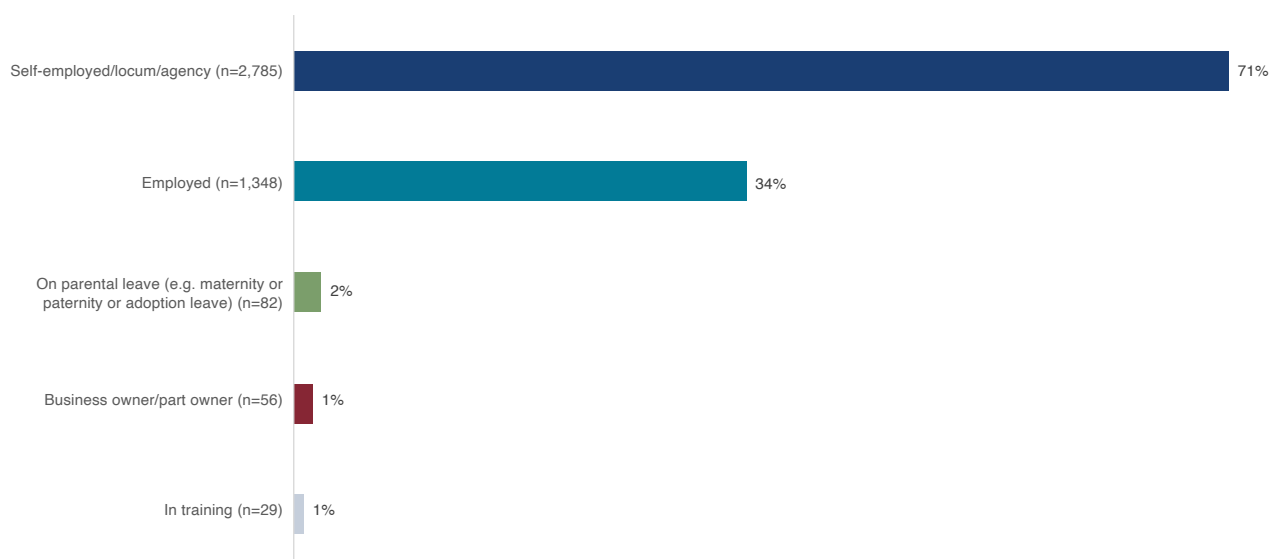
Of the 3,934 dental therapists included in this analysis, 98% were working in the dental sector and 2% stated they were looking for work.

Those looking for work had received their primary qualification a median of 1.9 years ago, compared with those in employment who had received their primary qualification a median of 7.3 years ago^a.

2.2 Employment status

Dental therapists were asked about their employment status within the dental sector (Figure 1). They could select multiple responses to this question. Most (89%) dental therapists indicated only one employment status.

Figure 1 – Most common employment status³



Nearly three-quarters (71%) of dental therapists were self-employed, with the next largest group being employed (34%)⁴.

3. The employment status responses of 'on sick leave' and 'working unpaid' were less than 1% each and therefore have been omitted from the figure.

4. This includes those who have more than one employment status.

2.3 Primary field of practice

Dental therapists were asked about their primary field of practice⁵ (Figure 2). More than half (57%) of dental therapists listed their primary field of practice as 'dental therapist'. Nearly two-fifths (39%) of dental therapists reported their primary field as dental hygienists, while 2% reported their primary field as dentist, 1% as dental nurse.

Figure 2 – Most common primary field of practice⁶



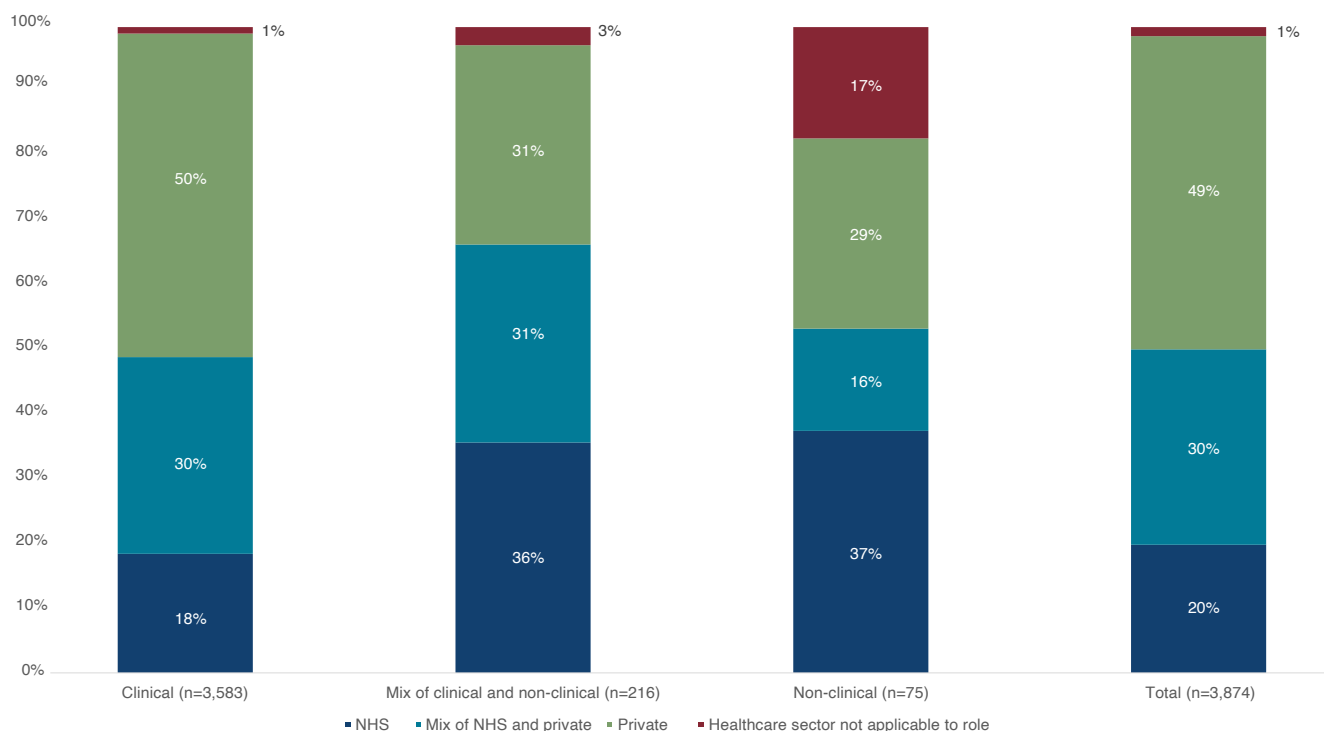
5. A dental professional may be registered under multiple titles with the GDC, but the working patterns question specifically asks for their primary field of practice.

6. 'Orthodontic therapist', 'specialist', and 'dental technician' responses have been omitted from the chart as they represented less than 1% each of responses selected. There were also 22 people who selected 'prefer not to say'.

2.4 Clinical / non-clinical work

Most (91%) dental therapists were working in clinical roles. Work in clinical and non-clinical roles differed by healthcare sector (Figure 3)⁷, with half (50%) of dental therapists in clinical roles working in the private sector, compared to 29% in non-clinical roles.

Figure 3 – Clinical or non-clinical role by healthcare sector⁷

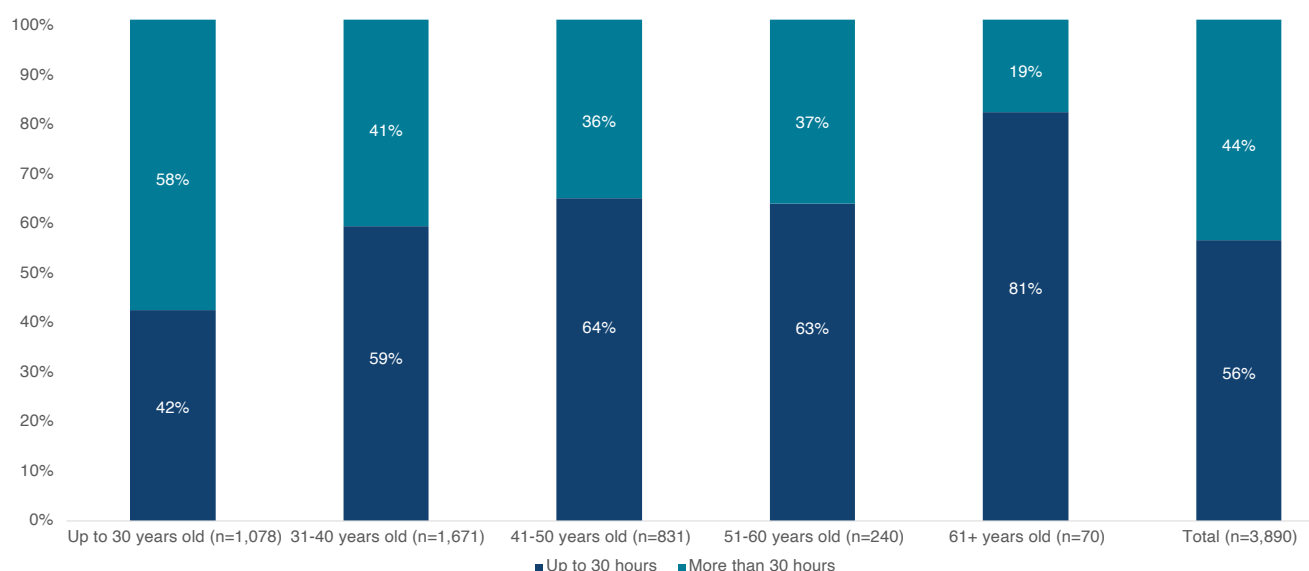


7. Due to small base numbers, dental therapists who selected 'not applicable to role' have been omitted from this figure.

2.5 Weekly hours worked by dental therapists

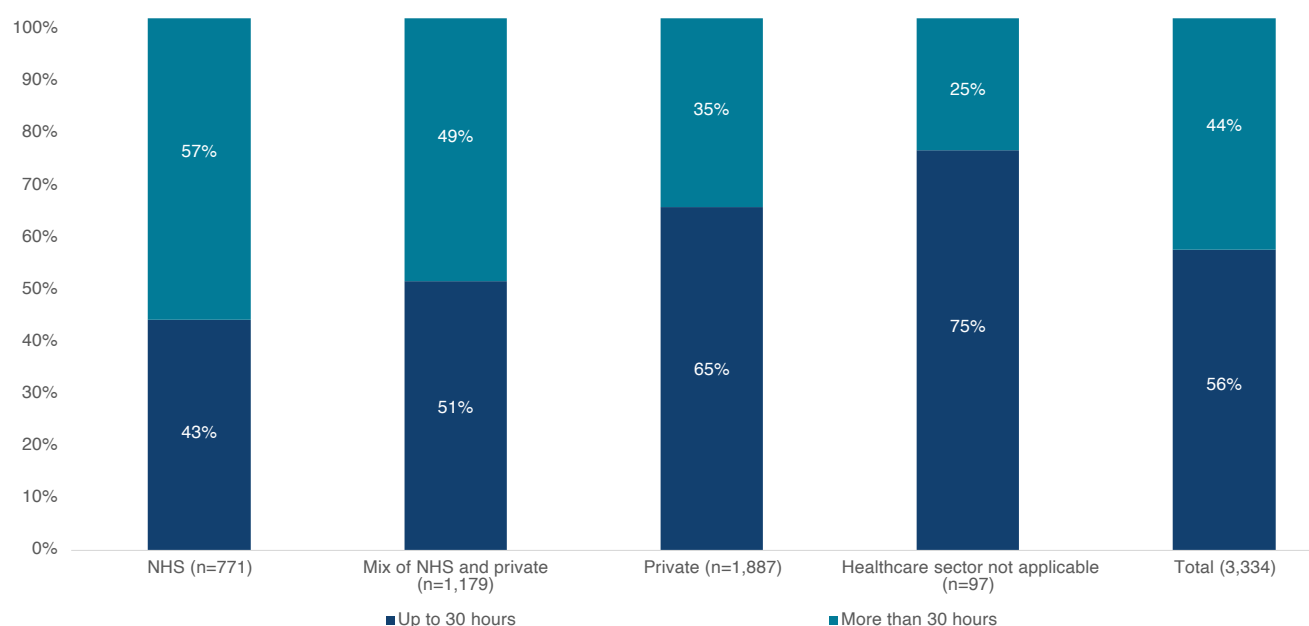
The hours worked⁸ by dental therapists varied by age group (Figure 4)^c, with more than half (58%) of dental therapists who were up to 30 years of age reporting working more than 30 hours a week. This proportion decreased by age group.

Figure 4 – Hours worked by age group



More than half (57%) of dental therapists who reported working in the NHS sector were working more than 30 hours a week, which was much higher than the figure for all healthcare sectors (44%) (Figure 5)^d.

Figure 5 – Hours worked by healthcare sector⁹



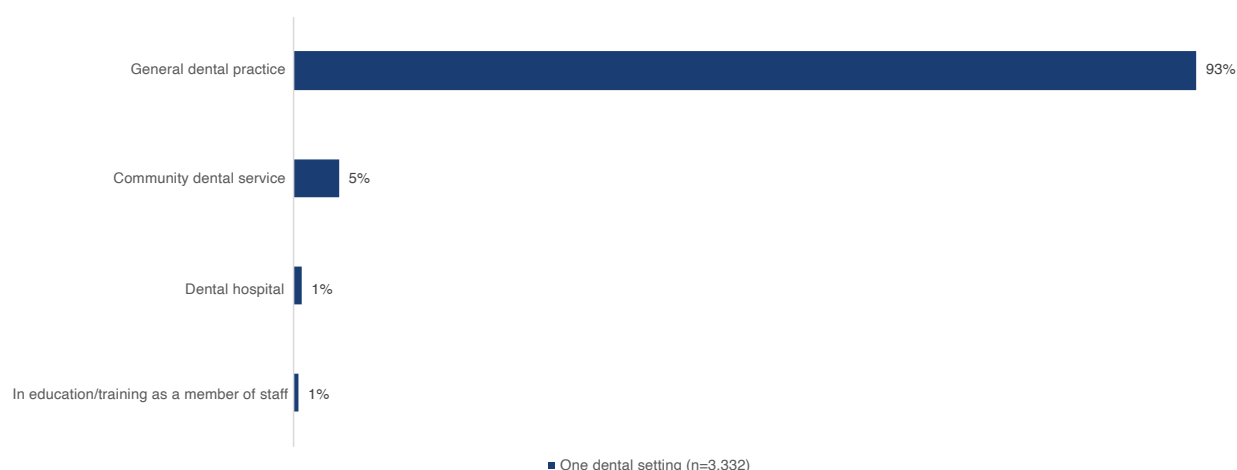
8. For the purpose of this analysis, due to small respondent numbers per response options, hours worked have been grouped into 'Up to 30 hours' and 'More than 30 hours' a week.

9. 'Healthcare sector not applicable' represents the responses of 'not applicable' to the question on which type of dental care (e.g. NHS, private, mix of NHS and private) they most commonly provided.

2.6 Work setting

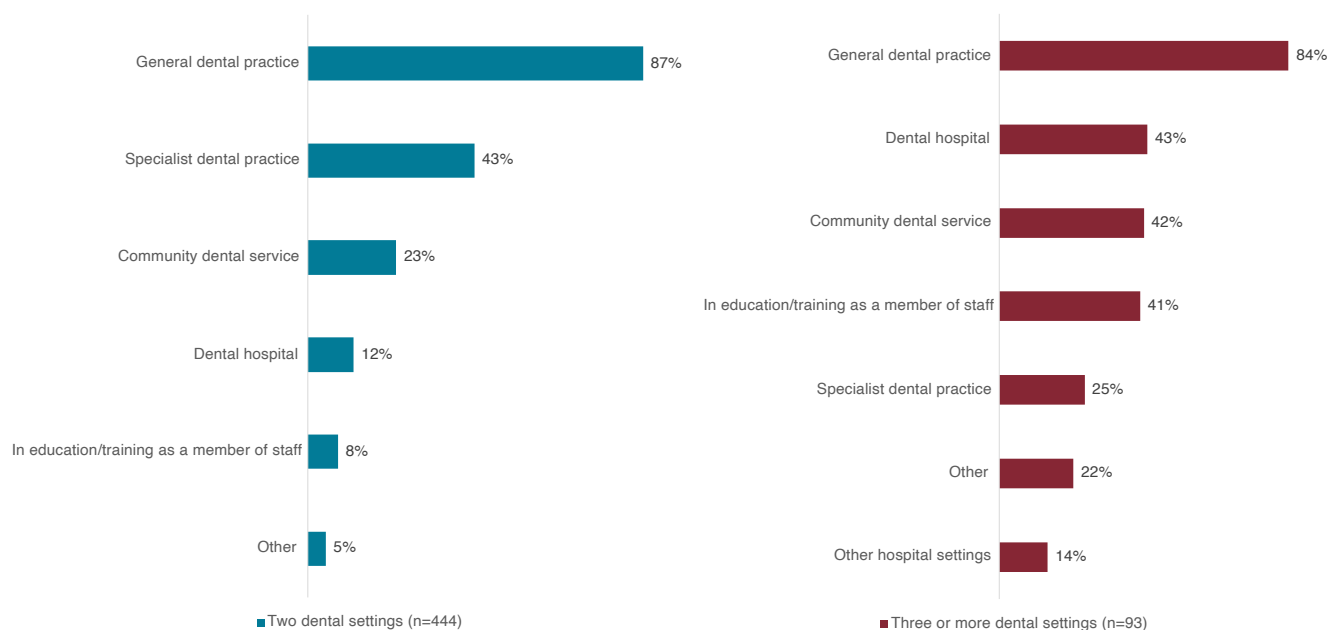
Most (85%) dental therapists who responded worked only in one dental setting. Of these, more than nine-in-ten (93%) indicated that they worked in general dental practice (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Main work settings for dental therapists with only one reported setting¹⁰



Those who worked in more than one dental setting usually worked in general dental practice (Figure 7).

Figure 7 – Types of dental settings by number of settings

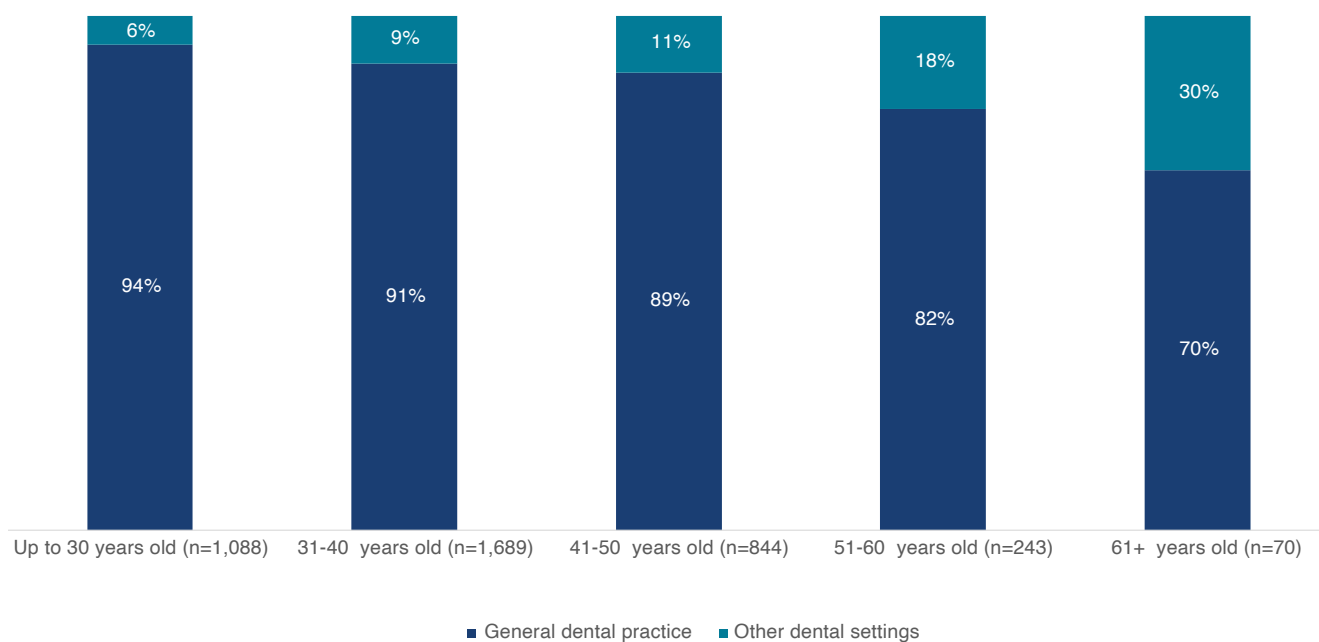


Whether a dental therapist worked in general dental practice varied by age group⁹. More than nine-in-

10. Respondents who did not select a setting or who selected more than one were not included in this figure. Other settings that were less than 1% and are not included in this figure were: 'specialist dental practice', 'other hospital settings', 'laboratory', 'in education / training as a student', 'researcher / academic', 'oral public health', 'non-clinical', 'Armed Forces', 'other', and 'not applicable'.

ten (94%) of those who were up to 30 years of age worked in general dental practice. This gradually decreased by age group with 70% of dental therapists aged 61+ stating they worked in general dental practice (Figure 8).

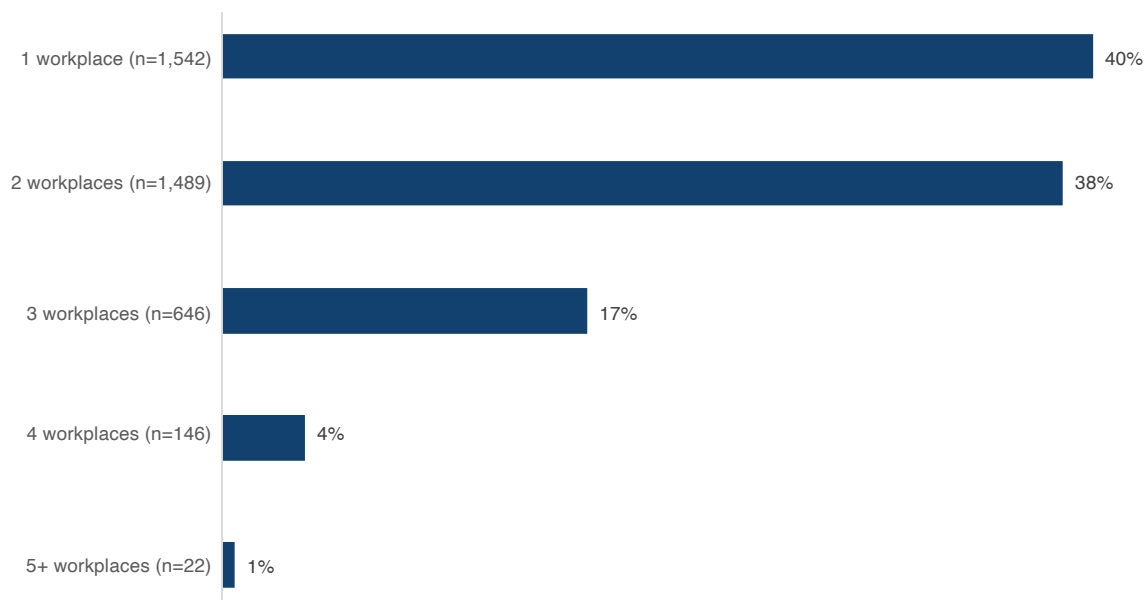
Figure 8 – Age group of dental therapist working in general dental practice



2.7 Number of workplaces and number of countries of work

Nearly all (99%) dental therapists were working in only one UK country. A similar proportion of dental therapists reported having one workplace (40%) as reported having two workplaces (38%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9 – Number of workplaces¹¹



2.8 Fitness to Practise

The GDC does not use working patterns data in FtP case decision making. We matched our working patterns data to our FtP and EDI data, to undertake pseudonymised¹² analysis to explore possible links to working pattern responses. We found no correlations between involvement in an FtP concern¹³, working patterns responses or any respondent characteristics (such as EDI characteristics, time on the register, or route of qualification)¹⁴.

11. 22 respondents chose 'prefer not to say', 53 respondents stated they had no place of work.

12. The person responding was given a dummy ID so that they could not be identified.

13. Which was defined as a dental therapist being involved in a case that had at least progressed beyond the triage stage within the previous two years.

14. Fewer than one percent of dental therapists who responded had an FtP case closed within the past two years.

3 Conclusions

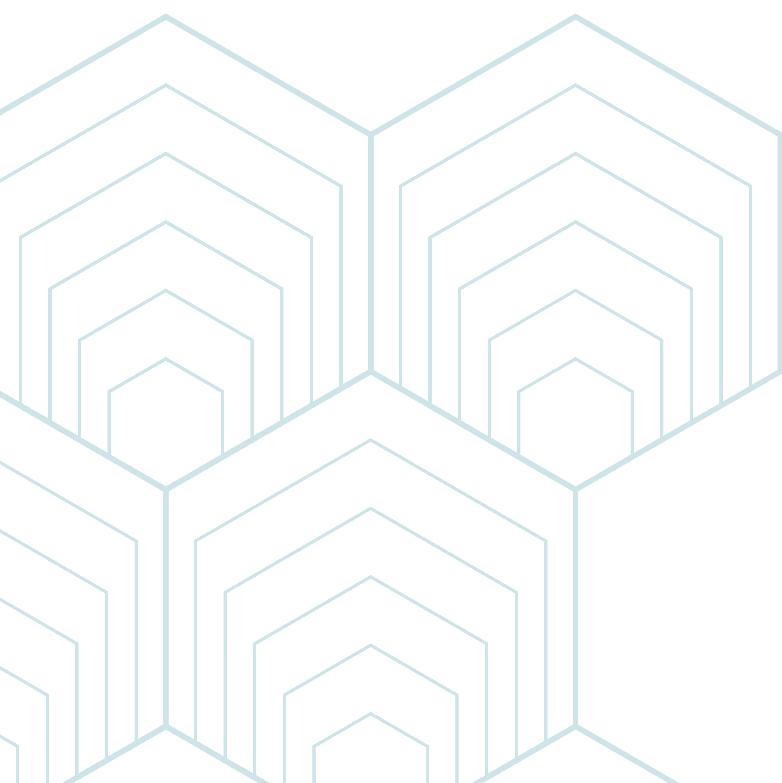
Most dental therapists who completed the working patterns questions were currently working self-employed / locum / agency. Those looking for work had typically had their primary qualification for a median of 1.9 years, compared with those in employment who had received theirs for a median of 7.3 years (i.e. those looking for work had been on the register a shorter period of time).

Just over half (57%) of dental therapists listed their main primary field of practice as dental therapist with dental hygienist (39%) being the next most frequently mentioned field of practice.

Dental therapists up to 30 years of age were more likely to work over 30 hours per week. The proportions working over 30 hours per week decreased by age group.

The main differences across clinical / non-clinical types of roles were in the proportions of dental therapists delivering private care, with half of those in clinical roles working privately compared to less than a third of those in non-clinical roles.

There were no correlations between any working patterns questions and involvement in an FtP concern.



4 Technical appendix

4.1 Question design and format

GDC researchers looked at existing information on working patterns data including sources from the NHS, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and the Institute for Social and Economic Research. This was combined with questions previously developed from GDC primary research.

The questions were designed to minimise the burden on respondents and to capture factual data about working patterns. They were fixed response questions and took on average five minutes or less to complete. They were voluntary and every question had a 'prefer not to say' option to ensure that respondents had the possibility of avoiding answering any question which they might find to be sensitive in nature.

The working patterns questions were piloted with an external group of dental professionals.

4.2 Data cleaning

Any values that were left blank or entered in an invalid format (e.g. for text entry) were coded to unknown during the data cleaning process.

4.3 Statistical analysis models

This analysis uses null hypothesis frequentist linear models to test for correlations in the data. The nine working patterns questions were combined with an additional 22 GDC registration fields and five fitness to practise fields. The large number of analyses has meant that only those with statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) and at least a small effect size have been highlighted as 'significant' (the model performance is included in 4.5 Statistical notation).

4.4 Non-response bias

Tables 1 to 5 show EDI category comparisons between the dental therapists who completed the working patterns questions and the numbers of dental therapists on the GDC's register.

The main difference between the dental therapist register's EDI characteristics and working patterns sample were:

Ethnicity: Dental therapists who identified their ethnic group as 'White' accounted for 61% of working patterns dental therapist respondents, compared to 53% of registered dental therapists (Table 2).

Marital status: Dental therapists who identified their marital status as 'Married' represented 49% of the working patterns dental therapist respondents, compared to 44% of registered dental therapist (Table 3).

Table 1 – Sex from working patterns compared with register data

	Dental therapist working patterns respondents (10/8/2024) (n=3,934)	Dental therapist register data (10/8/2024) (n=6,630)
Female	88%	86%
Male	11%	13%
Prefer not to say	1%	1%
Total	100%	100%

Table 2 – Ethnicity from working patterns compared with register data

	Dental therapist working patterns respondents (10/8/2024) (n=3,934)	Dental therapist register data (10/8/2024) (n=6,630)
Asian or Asian British	25%	28%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	3%	3%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	3%	3%
Other ethnic group	3%	3%
White	61%	53%
Unknown	3%	6%
Prefer not to say	3%	4%
Total	101%*	100%

*Due to rounding

Table 3 – Marital status from working patterns compared with register data

	Dental therapist working patterns respondents (10/8/2024) (n=3,934)	Dental therapist register data (10/8/2024) (n=6,630)
Divorced	4%	3%
Formerly in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved	0%	0%
In a registered civil partnership	1%	0%
Married	49%	44%
Never married and never registered in a civil partnership	35%	36%
Separated, but still legally in a civil partnership	<1%	0%
Separated, but still legally married	1%	1%
Surviving partner from a registered civil partnership	0%	0%
Widowed	<1%	0%
Unknown	5%	9%
Prefer not to say	6%	6%
Total	101%*	99%*

*Due to rounding

Table 4 – Sexual orientation from working patterns compared with register data

	Dental therapist working patterns respondents (10/8/2024) (n=3,934)	Dental therapist register data (10/8/2024) (n=6,630)
Bisexual	1%	1%
Gay/Lesbian	1%	1%
Other sexual orientation	0%	0%
Straight/Heterosexual	90%	87%
Unknown	2%	5%
Prefer not to say	5%	6%
Total	99%*	100%

*Due to rounding

Table 5 – Age from working patterns compared with register data

	Dental therapist working patterns respondents (10/8/2024) (n=3,934)	Dental therapist register data (10/8/2024) (n=6,630)
16-21	<1%	1%
22-30	28%	31%
31-40	43%	42%
41-50	22%	19%
51-60	6%	5%
61-65	1%	1%
65+	1%	1%
Total	101%*	100%

*Due to rounding

4.5 Statistical notation

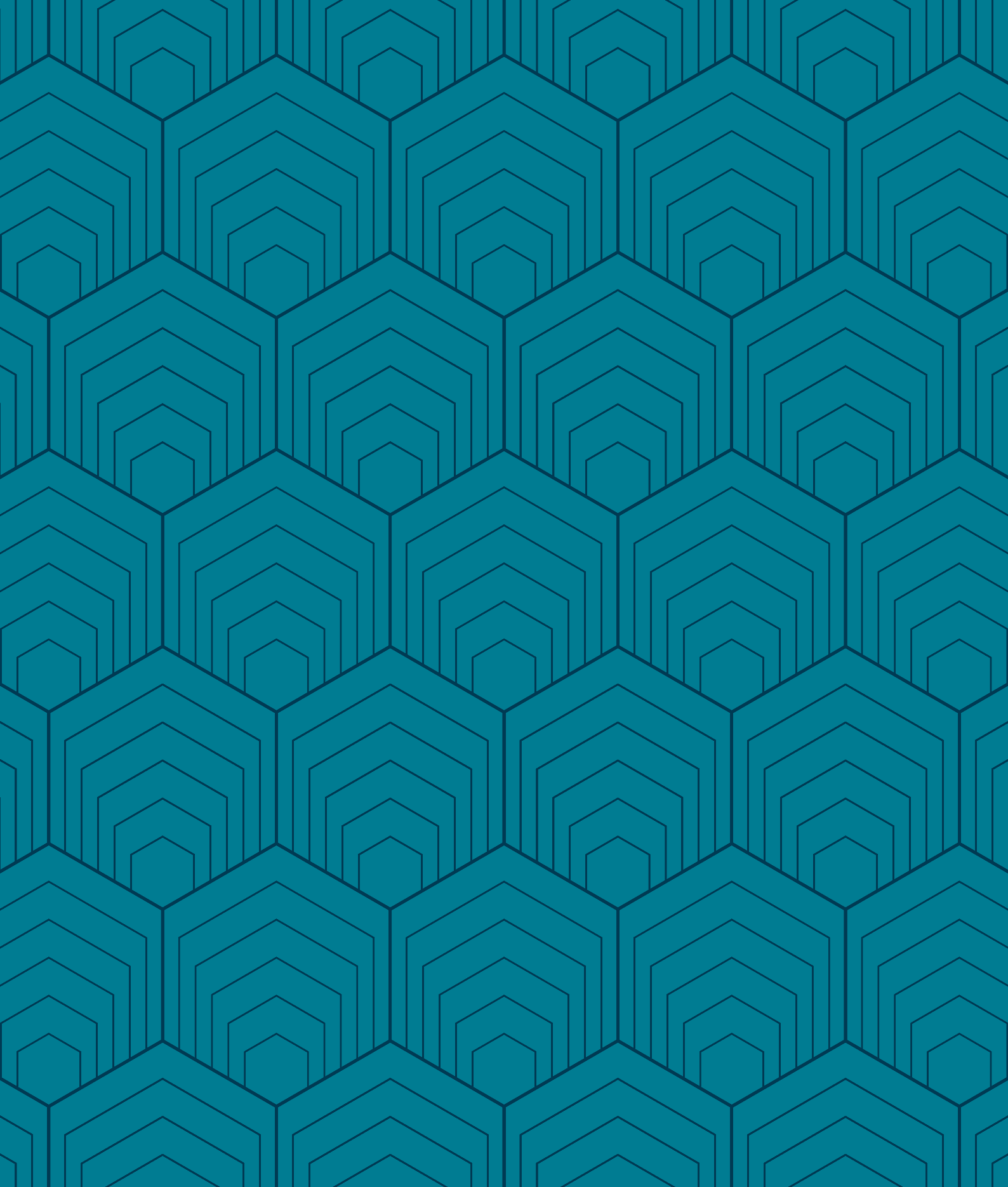
^a Kruskal Wallis H test = 40.5 (n=3,933), df = 1, p = 0.01, $\eta^2 = 0.1$ (small effect size)

^b Pearson Chi-Square $\chi^2 = 200.4$ (n=3,874), df = 6, p = 0.01, Cramer's V = 0.16 (medium effect size)

^c Pearson Chi-Square $\chi^2 = 137.7$ (n=3,890), df = 4, p = 0.01, Cramer's V = 0.18 (medium effect size)

^d Pearson Chi-Square $\chi^2 = 134.6$ (n=3,934), df = 3, p = 0.01, Cramer's V = 0.18 (medium effect size)

^e Pearson Chi-Square $\chi^2 = 75.1$ (n=3,934), df = 4, p = 0.01, Cramer's V = 0.14 (medium effect size)



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