Asia Pacific region sees significant shift in attitudes towards braces

By DTI

HONG KONG/PHNOM PENH, Cambodia/SYDENY, Australia: From the thriving fake braces business in South East Asian countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia to being disappointed when being told they do not need braces—in the last decade, attitudes towards orthodontic treatment have seen an incredible shift in the Asia-Pacific region from being a handicap of adolescence to making a fashion statement.

Whether because of advances in technology that have made today’s fixed orthodontic appliances smaller and more comfortable than ever or the vast array of colours orthodontic brackets and components are available in, dental braces are enjoying surprising popularity as a fashion craze in parts of Asia. The phenomenon of fashion braces that serve no medical purpose first appeared in Thailand in 2006. From there, the trend quickly spread to neighbouring countries Indonesia, Malaysia and, more recently, Cambodia. As reported by the Phnom Penh Post, fake braces are easily available online and through local suppliers in these countries, with material kits starting from as low as US$20 (€17.91).

After purchasing the necessary components, customers are referred to local dentists for impressions and attachments. However, even if the braces are fitted by a trained professional—which is not always the case, seeing as many dentists are simply refusers without regular adjustment or check-ups.

Aussie kids excited about fixed orthodontic appliances

Further to the south, in Australia, braces may not be considered a fashion statement yet; however, attitudes towards orthodontic treatment have shifted similarly over the past several years. A recent study conducted by the Australian Society of Orthodontists has found that seven in ten children responded with happiness or excitement upon hearing that they needed treatment with fixed orthodontic appliances. Moreover, nine in ten of the specialist orthodontists surveyed said that they had witnessed a child become visibly upset when told he or she did not need such treatment.

According to society spokesman and practising orthodontist Dr David Mastroianni, these findings reflect patients’ shifting opinions in Australia. “The industry has observed a shift in attitudes towards braces and orthodontic treatment firsthand. We now have children coming in for consultations, not because they’ve been referred by their dentist, but because the child wants braces,” he remarked. “With advances in technology indicating to do so, given the lack of medical purpose—the trend is a dangerous one to follow, experts caution. For example, the use of unsterilised equipment or sub-standard adhesives could cause infections and illness. Furthermore, fake braces expose their wearers to the same risks as that of actual fixed orthodontic appliances.

According to Dr Hok Sim Kot, Vice Dean of the Faculty of Dentistry at Phnom Penh International University, wearers with poor oral hygiene run the risk of demineralisation of the teeth, tooth decay or periodontal disease. Moreover, just like actual fixed orthodontic appliances, fashion braces may move well-aligned teeth into the wrong position without regular adjustment or check-ups.

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