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Research Article

MOTHER'S KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS ON PROMOTING CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Young children's oral health maintenance and outcomes are influenced by their parent's knowledge and beliefs which affect oral hygiene and healthy eating habits. Parent's knowledge and positive attitude toward good dental care are very important in the preventive cycle. A cross sectional questionnaire survey was conducted among 273 mothers of preschool children who visited dental college in Melmaruvathur, India. Data was collected through an interview using a structured proforma. Majority (65.2%) had poor knowledge, 23.9% exhibited fair awareness towards a children's oral health. This study showed that mothers had good knowledge and awareness towards a children's oral health due to which majority were following fair oral health practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Preschool children form an innocent and compassionate segment of the society and their oral health care is given due priority as it determines the oral health status of the future generations.¹ Oral health is an important part of overall health, good oral health contributes positively to the physical, mental and social wellbeing of children and to the full enjoyment of their lives by allowing them to speak, let and socialize without experiencing pain, discomfort or embarrassment.²

Research shows that parents play an important role in the decision making process vis-à-vis oral health care for their children. First identifying the indispensable role of parents about health care for their children becomes mandatory. Secondly assessing the knowledge and awareness of parents regarding child oral health is equally significant. Thirdly educating the parents about the oral hygiene is the next step since they are the primary caregivers.³

There is a strong evidence linking the health literacy of caregivers, defined as the comprehension and effective use of health information in making health choices, to early childhood health related behaviours. Improving health literacy in a population should be looked at as a desired outcome to a successful health promotion program. Developing an effective oral health promotion strategy in any given community must be

based on an in depth understanding of the unique needs of the population.^{4,5} A simple assessment of the knowledge and awareness of oral health may be the first step in identifying areas of weakness. Thus the aim of the study was to assess the level of knowledge and awareness of parents with regard to the oral health of preschool children.⁶

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross sectional questionnaire study was conducted for 6 months among 273 mothers of preschool children who visited the Department of Pedodontics, Adhiparasakthi Dental College and Hospital, Melmaruvathur. Ethical clearance was obtained from Institutional Review Board and an informed consent was obtained from the study participants. The structured questionnaire proforma was designed in English and Tamil languages. The Tamil format translated into English.

The structured questionnaire which consists of 25 questions related to periodic dental visit, dietary practices, importance of primary teeth, oral hygiene practices and also the oral health vs general health. The responses for the questions were rated as agree, disagree and uncertain. The results were expressed as sources of responses for each category of questions Chi-square test was utilized to find out the significant difference between the responses. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was

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used comparing the knowledge of mothers. For all the tests a p value of 0.05 or less was used for statistical significance.

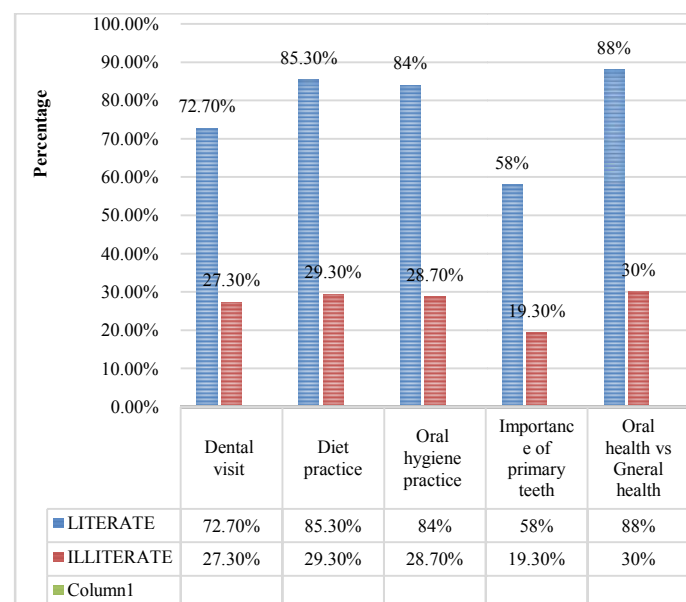
RESULTS

Mother's knowledge about oral health of their preschool children was assessed using a questionnaire which was prepared under five categories a) periodic dental visit b) diet and dietary practices c) oral hygiene practices d) importance of primary teeth e) health vs general health. The responses to the questionnaire were given scores, wherein a completely correct answer was awarded a score of 3 while a completely wrong answer was given 'o' as the score.

The given table shows the mothers knowledge of five categories of questions. 143 (39.2%) mothers had good knowledge in maintaining dental visit, 123 (28.4%) in diet and dietary practice, 121 (28.1%) in oral hygiene practices, 141 (38.8%) in importance of primary teeth and 110 (27.1%) in oral health vs general health respectively.

Table I Mothers knowledge toward five categorised questionnaire

knowledge	Periodic dental visit	Dietary advice	Oral hygiene practice	Importance of primary teeth	Oral health vs general health
No knowledge	26 (5.5)	40 (7.2)	33 (5.9)	29 (5.7)	15 (3.7)
Parental knowledge	104 (26.2)	110 (27.4)	121 (28.3)	103 (26.1)	148 (39.8)
Complete knowledge	143 (39.2)	123 (28.4)	119 (28.1)	141 (38.8)	110 (27.1)
Total	273	273	273	273	273



Graph I Comparing the oral health related knowledge of literate and illiterate mothers

There is a significant difference seen between the literate and illiterate mothers under all the five categories of dental visit, diet and dietary practice, oral hygiene practice, importance of primary teeth and oral health vs general health.

DISCUSSION

Parents especially mothers function as role models for their children. This study provides important new data to the evidence base related to knowledge of mothers toward oral hygiene of preschool children.⁷ The questionnaire particularly focus on the knowledge of mothers about relevant risk and protective factors that are likely to have influence on oral health of preschool children and also the influence of socio-demographic factors on mothers knowledge.⁸

The family should promote children's health as well as their children's ability in developing a healthy lifestyle. The significant influence of mothers attitude on children's oral health found here may be attributed to the impact of their attitudes on their parental caring behaviors for their children.⁹ Additionally this points to the deep interaction between mother and child and supports the mother's role as an important resource for the child's perception and acceptance of attitudes, values and behaviors, especially during the critical period for establishing attitudes and beliefs and shaping each individuals health behaviour.¹⁰

The presence of desirable oral health practice among those with positive attitudes suggests that good oral health habits interact with attitudes towards oral health. Each parentally linked factor such as parents oral health knowledge, attitude and behaviour, may be considered to shape the oral health behaviors of their children, a possible optimistic estimation of oral health behaviour however does not rule out the influence of mothers attitudes towards their children.¹¹

The response of questionnaire was encouraging as 143 (39.2%) had good knowledge about diet and dietary practice which include questions regarding snacking practices, sugar and caries and feeding practices which was supported by Lin *et al*¹² and Pradeep Kumar *et al*¹³. Majority mothers had good knowledge regarding the role of diet in oral health, they believed that sweet snacks and sweet drinks contribute to caries.

In the present study, awareness about general health wellbeing with oral habit is good as reported in a study done by Gussy *et al*¹⁴. Mother's knowledge regarding fluoride, oral hygiene practices, brushing technique was satisfactory which is similar to the study done by William *et al*¹⁵.

One of the basic factors that may give some idea about oral health awareness among parents is the frequency of dental visits and the mother with higher educational qualification does visit the dentist more often as stated by Zavrza *et al*.¹⁶

Conditions established in preschool years provide a foundation for oral health condition and patterns for use of dental services later and in adulthood. Parents especially mothers, need to be helped to realize that they are role models for their children and to be encouraged to improve the child's dental health habit.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Parents play a central role in importing the information and encouragement to their children for healthy lives. The more positive attitude of the parents toward dental health care and dental professionals leads to a better dental health of their children. Without basic knowledge of caries risk factor,

importance of primary teeth and oral maintenance, it is difficult to employ effective disease preventive strategies. A matter of high priority is therefore the development and implementation of wide scale long term program of oral health education and promotion for expectant new mothers.

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