

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure - level of awareness among parents about preventive dental care treatments - A questionnaire survey

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Abstract

Dental care is important for children as well as for adults. As children grow up, they form habits that can be hard to break. One habit they should develop is proper dental care, and a big piece of that puzzle is participating in preventive dentistry. As the name suggests, preventive dental care helps people prevent bad things from happening to their teeth and gums. Preventive care includes dental activities that help you maintain good oral health.

Preventive dental care involves a combination of practices, habits and activities like brushing the teeth, flossing, eating healthy food and visiting your dentist for regular check-ups and cleanings. Children and adults alike can benefit from preventive dental care, but many people overlook its importance for children. In truth, taking care of one’s teeth should start in early childhood and last for the rest of the person’s life.

Parents have the responsibility to set an example of good oral hygiene at home. Children will see that preventive

oral care is important to parents, and that will make it feel more important to them. As a result, children will put an emphasis on taking care of their teeth from a young age, which can form habits that last a lifetime.

This study was done to unveil the level of parent's knowledge on the importance of primary dentition and acceptance of preventive dental procedures.

Keywords: Primary teeth, Parent's knowledge, Preventive dental procedures

Introduction

Most of the parents are not aware of the importance of preventive dental care treatments. They do not give importance to primary dentition, as they believe it is going to fall off soon and so treatment for primary teeth is just waste of money. In India, Pediatric dentistry is not much accepted as a speciality as compared to western countries. In the US, Pediatric dentistry has been a speciality since 1940s but in India it is treated as a separate speciality only in 1988.

Compared to western countries, Indians have low level of oral health awareness. In western countries, parents and dentists take initiative to take children for regular visits to dental clinics. But Indian parents are concerned about their child's dentition only when they experience pain.

Mostly parents underestimate the importance of primary teeth as they think they are going to exfoliate and have no influence on permanent dentition. So they believe it is not worth paying attention to it and therefore dental visits at a early age is a waste of time and money.

In children, milk teeth/primary teeth play a vital role for eating, phonetics, esthetics and also as a space maintainer for permanent teeth.

The primary teeth during the age of 6-7 years play an important role in guiding the eruption of permanent teeth.

Aim and objective

The study was conducted with the aim of assessing the parent's knowledge of the importance of primary dentition and acceptance of preventive dental procedures.

Materials and methods

A questionnaire study was conducted in Tirunelveli district over a period of 3 months. This questionnaire was formulated with the purpose to study the parental knowledge on the importance of primary dentition and their awareness on preventive dental procedures.

A study was conducted in the Department of Pediatric and preventive dentistry in Rajas Dental College and Hospital, Tirunelveli.

The parents of children who visited the dental OP were included in the study. Those parents who were not willing to participate in the study were excluded. A total of 100 parents were randomly included in the study.

The questionnaire was prepared in both English and the vernacular language Tamil. After obtaining a written consent from the parent, the questionnaire was given to 100 parents of children between the age group of 0-15. The study was double blinded and one of the investigators was always available with the participant to explain the questions in detail so that they understand the questions thoroughly and have no doubts left.

A total of 15 questions were included in the study. Questions from 1-4 asks includes the demographic details of the participant including name, age, education and place. The rest of the questions were to evaluate the knowledge and awareness level of parents regarding the preventive dental procedures.

On completion of the questionnaire parents, were provided with educational pamphlets on significance of primary dentition and the need for proper oral hygiene maintenance.

Results

Table 1

S no.	Demographic data	Numbers (%)
1	Age of the parent	
	• Less than 30 years	16%
	• 30-40 years	62%
	• 41-50 years	16%
2	Education	
	• Illiterate	18%
	• SSLC	32%
	• HSE	6%
3	Place	
	• Rural	54%
	• Suburban	14%
	• Urban	32%

Table 2

Sl no.	Questions	Numbers in %
1	Did you take your children to the Pediatric dentist before the age of 1 year?	
	• Yes	8%
	• No	92%
2	Are you aware of the importance of fluoride application?	
	• Yes	0%
	• No	100%
3	Are you aware of the importance of pit and fissure sealant application?	
	• Yes	0%

	• No	100%
4	Do you think it is important to take care of milk teeth?	
	• Yes	76%
	• No	24%
5	How many times do you advice your child to brush the teeth a day?	
	• Twice daily	42%
	• Once daily	58%
6	Do you motivate your children to brush the teeth?	
	• Yes	98%
	• No	2%
7	Are you concerned about irregularly placed teeth in primary dentition?	
	• Yes	28%
	• No	72%
8	How often do you think about visiting the dentist?	
	• Once in 6 months	2%
	• Yearly once	0%
9	How often do you replace your child's toothbrush?	
	• One month	34%
	• Three month	60%
10	What would you do if your child's milk teeth is decayed?	
	• After the brush has been damaged	6%
	• Get it treated by visiting the dentist	68%

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will not treat as it is anyway going to fall off 	32%
11	If your child has a toothache and swelling in the mouth and after taking the medicine, the toothache and swelling subsides, what would you do next? ¹	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still take him to the dentist to know the cause and treat the cause 	46%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wait for the pain to recur and then take him to the dentist 	54%

Discussion

To provide proper oral health care for children it is important to assess the parent’s knowledge on the importance and care given for the primary dentition. The dental health of the children reflects the attitude and knowledge of their parents towards dentistry. The more positive the attitude, the better will be the dental health of the child.¹

Reports say 40% of world’s population fears dental treatment because of their dental experiences during their childhood¹. These dental experiences from childhood often drag onto the adulthood. That is why it is of great importance that the child gets positive dental experiences in their early age. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a friendly experience to the child in their first dental visit.

The first dental visit is very crucial in a child’s life and regular visits to the dentist are necessary for the general health of the child. According to American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, a child must visit the dentist by their first birthday.¹ In our present study, 8% of the parents have taken their child to the dentist before their first

birthday whereas the rest of the parents (92%) reported that their child’s first visit to the dentist was when they experienced a painful tooth.

Since they have more regular visits to the pediatrician, it would be better if they suggest them to pay a visit to the dentist and thereby make them understand the importance of early dental visits. However, Hinz et al noted that 40% of the paediatricians referred a 1-year-old to a pedodontist and only 29% believed it is important.¹ All the above studies show that most of the parents are unaware of the ideal age when they should consult a dentist for their child. Early dental check-ups provide many advantages including reduction of stress and cost and improve the oral health.

Dental caries in deciduous teeth can even cause life threatening infections and thereby affects the overall health of the child. 76% of the parents in this study reported that they care about the primary teeth whereas 24% believe anyway the primary teeth will exfoliate so it is unnecessary to spend their time and money on the care of primary teeth. As parents encourage their child’s first step, they also should encourage their children to brush the teeth. In our study 98% of the parents motivate their children to brush the teeth and only 42% of the parents advice their child to brush twice a day.

In our study only 28% of parents are concerned about the irregularly placed teeth in primary dentition whereas 72% were not concerned. It was concerning to see that 42 % of educated parents wait for the pain to recur before they decide to visit a dentist. Brushing your teeth is important to maintain the oral health. And it is also important to change the brush once in 3 months. Because overtime bacteria build up, bristles worn out and cross contamination may occur after a sickness. In our study 34% of parents change their child’s toothbrush once a month whereas 60% of parents change once in 3 months.

It is concerning to know that 6% of parents replace their child's toothbrush only if it gets damaged.

Parents are completely unaware of the consequences of early loss of primary tooth. In our study, no parents were aware of the preventive dental treatments like fluoride application and pit and fissure sealant. This was similar to the study of Suresh et al, where mother's knowledge is inadequate about preventive dental treatments.

This study strongly upholds the concern that improvement should be made in providing dental health education to our population. Because 32% of the parents believe it is not necessary to treat the decayed primary teeth as it is anyways going to fall off.

Many oral health conditions are preventable and can be treated in their early stages. Primary prevention aims at the initial stages, whereas secondary aims to stop disease progression³. Interception is done best at earliest or initial stages. Dental plaque can be prevented by reducing dietary sugar exposure and improving the resilience of the teeth. Routine dental check-up spaced at 6 months' interval is the best way toward the prevention of dental decay along with population focused prevention.

The role for parents is very important to address oral disease prevention in children as oral health of children is associated with oral health knowledge of their parents⁴.

Many studies assessed knowledge, attitude, and practice of preventive dentistry and different preventive measures among dentists and dental auxiliaries^{5,6,7,8}.

It showed the choice of preventive measures and its use by dental practitioners differ between countries, individual dentists. The differences are due to many factors^{5,9,10}, but the ultimate truth was it seemed to be a distance between what is known about preventing oral

diseases and what is provided in private practice, dental schools, and community-based programs¹¹.

There is no separate oral health policy in many countries, which influence on knowledge and utilization of preventive dentistry utilization. In general, people were aware of the importance of oral hygiene for the prevention of oral diseases which was similar to our study. Lower educational level is consistently associated with a low level of knowledge¹².

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is not only to provide dental health education but also to take necessary steps towards proper dental treatment. This study emphasizes the role of education among parents determining their attitude towards dental treatments. Regardless of their education, most parents are unaware of preventive dental treatments and strongly believe that regular dental visits are not necessary unless there is pain. So it is very important to educate them about the importance of primary dentition and the role of preventive dental treatments.

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