



## ORAL HYGIENE KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES AMONG SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN IN AN URBAN AREA OF SRINAGAR--- A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY.

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** WHO recommends oral health promotion through school as the key strategy for improving knowledge, attitude and behaviour relating to oral health and for preventing and controlling oral diseases. **Objective** to assess the knowledge and practices on oral hygiene among school children in an urban area. **Methodology:** This study was done in August 2022 in Government higher secondary school Soura in our urban field practice area. School health check-ups were conducted almost for a week and on the last day questionnaires were administered to all students, who consented to participate excluding that of primary classes, to assess their knowledge and practices regarding dental hygiene. Total students thus interviewed were 170 from middle, high and higher secondary classes. Data so collected was compiled and analysed using SPSS 21. **Results:** Only about half of the respondents i.e., 89 (52.3%) had ever visited a dentist and 32(35.9%) among them had visited the dentist more than 2 years back. Purpose of visit in majority 44(49.5%) was dental caries followed by 22(24.8%) for toothache. Only 8 (8.9%) students had gone for check-up and equal number for halitosis, sensitivity and gum bleeding. 81(47.7%) had never visited a dentist. **Conclusion:** there is a need to sensitize and raise awareness of the children as well as their families by organizing regular school health cum awareness sessions and community based outreach sessions.

**KEYWORDS :** Oral health, dental caries, dentist, halitosis

### INTRODUCTION:

Oral health is the state of the mouth, teeth and orofacial structures that enables individuals to perform essential functions such as eating, breathing and speaking, and encompasses psychosocial dimensions such as self-confidence, well-being and the ability to socialize and work without pain, discomfort and embarrassment. Oral health varies over the life course from early life to old age, is integral to general health and supports individuals in participating in society and achieving their potential.

The WHO Global Oral Health Status Report (2022) estimated that oral diseases affect close to 3.5 billion people worldwide, with 3 out of 4 people affected living in middle-income countries [1]. Globally, an estimated 2 billion people suffer from caries of permanent teeth and 514 million children suffer from caries of primary teeth. Lack of knowledge and following wrong practices related to oral health are very important factors resulting in poor oral hygiene, therefore it is important to assess the knowledge and practices of community so that we can focus on health related behaviours and improve knowledge and practices which would be instrumental in the effective prevention of dental diseases. WHO recommends oral health promotion through school as the key strategy for improving knowledge, attitude and behaviour relating to oral health and for preventing and controlling oral diseases.[2] Teaching children the importance of good oral care can install habits which will improve their health for a lifetime. Also it can go a long way in promoting the health and general wellbeing of not only the children but their families as well. With this background this study was done to assess the knowledge and practices on oral hygiene among school children in an urban area of Srinagar district of Kashmir valley.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS:

Department of Community Medicine Skims regularly conduct school health services in urban and rural field practice areas. These services comprise of general health check-ups, anthropometric measurements, eye and dental check-ups plus awareness sessions on diverse topics related to promotion of health and prevention of disease. These services

are provided by health team comprising of medical and dental residents & interns plus ophthalmic and dental technicians. This study was done in August 2022 in Government higher secondary school Soura in our urban field practice area. School health check-ups were conducted almost for a week and on the last day questionnaires were administered to all students, who consented to participate excluding that of primary classes, to assess their knowledge and practices regarding dental hygiene. Total students thus interviewed were 170 from middle, high and higher secondary classes. Data so collected was compiled and analysed using SPSS 21.

### RESULTS

Out of 170 students, 168 (98.9%) were females, 127(74.7) were in age group 15-18 and 88(51.8%) were studying in higher secondary classes. Different age groups demonstrated no significant differences in their responses, so the frequency tables present the subjects as a whole.

Regarding knowledge of respondents 123(72.5%) were aware that both milk and permanent teeth are important and 135 (79.4%) believed that replacement of teeth is important. 59 (34.8%) regarded sweets as cause of dental caries while 139 (81.7%) opined sweets affect dental health. Only 103 (61.8%) believed that soft drinks affect dental health while 81 (47.6%) considered tooth decay is avoidable. 147(82.9%) agreed that regular dental check-ups are important

Only about half of the respondents i.e., 89 (52.3%) had ever visited a dentist and 32(35.9%) among them had visited the dentist more than 2 years back. Purpose of visit in majority 44(49.5%) was dental caries followed by 22(24.8%) for toothache. Only 8 (8.9%) students had gone for check-up and equal number for halitosis, sensitivity and gum bleeding. 81(47.7%) had never visited a dentist. 168(98.8%) were brushing their teeth and 98(58.4%) were brushing twice daily. 119(70.8%) replaced their tooth brushes after every 6 months and majority 71(42.2%) were using soft brushes. Duration of brushing in majority 92(54.4%) was >2 minutes. 134 (78.9%) were using tooth paste for cleaning teeth. 43 (25.2%) complained of sensitivity while 35(20.5%) that of caries.

**DISCUSSION:**

This paper focuses on oral health knowledge and practices among children in urban area of District Srinagar of Kashmir valley. Overall knowledge was found to be good as approximately 70% to 80% of the participants gave correct responses to questions pertaining to tooth decay, effects of sweets and soft drinks on oral health and regular dental check-ups. This was higher to most studies reported in India and globally [3-6]. Though similar findings were seen in study done in Qatar [7] where 94.9% of children knew that sweets cause tooth decay and only 39% were not aware of soft drinks as a cause.

The knowledge acquired in our study might have been gained either due to use of social media, television or through teachers. Even though 82.9% of the respondents stated that regular dental visit was necessary, only 21.3% of them practiced it. Similar findings were seen in a study done in Manipur [8] where 80.7% believed regular dental check-up is necessary but only 28.9% were practising it. This shows that the awareness of oral health does not necessarily influence good dental practice. The inhibition of visiting the dentist may perhaps arise from the negative impression about the dental care providers or lack of accessibility to dental services. Arrangements should be made or intensified in the form of periodic visits of dentists to school as a part of school health programs and frequent dental camps in the communities. Toothbrushes were most commonly used oral hygiene aids which are similar to findings in studies done in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait [9, 10]. Regarding the practice of changing the brush, 3 month duration of time has been advocated as ideal. 16 This time frame was practiced by only 30.7%. in a study done in Jammu [11]. 16.7% of children were replacing it after 3 months which is similar to the study conducted by Jain et al [12] while it was found to be double among the subjects studied by Gupta i.e., 35.8% [13].

Surprisingly not a single child had any knowledge about use of dental floss, cleaning of tongue or use of fluorinated toothpastes. Whereas Practice of cleaning tongue, as an essential component of oral health hygiene, was found to be as high as 63.3% in one study [11] whereas in another study conducted by Jain et al still 20% of sample had the habit of cleaning tongue [12]. Likewise in Jammu study 83.3% of respondents did not know about fluoride toothpaste [11].

Based on the findings of the current study, it can be concluded that school age children of present study had satisfactory knowledge about few aspects of dental hygiene but were totally ignorant about use of dental floss or tongue cleaning and the reported practice regarding oral hygiene was also partially satisfactory.

The findings of our study showed that there is a need to sensitize and raise awareness of the children as well as their families by organizing regular school health cum awareness sessions and community based outreach sessions so that they can prioritize oral health and inculcate better oral health practices in their day to day life.

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