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Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Oral Hygiene among School Children in Modara - Mattakkuliya Zonal Educational Area

Liyanage W.L.V.M., Nishshanka N.A.I., Jayaweera J.W.V.K., Dilhani H.A.S.I.,
Kuruppu N.R., Madhavi A.V.P.[#]

Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka

[#]Corresponding author: avpma@ou.ac.lk

Background: Proper oral hygiene is not only about clean teeth, it is the best way to maintain good oral health and well-being of an individual. People who do not maintain proper oral hygiene practices are at risk of having oral diseases such as dental caries, periodontal diseases, oral infections and oral cancers.

Objectives: To investigate the knowledge, attitudes and practices of oral hygiene among school children aged 16-18 years.

Methodology: The quantitative approach and descriptive design were utilized. Data were collected from randomly selected 400 school children in the age between 16-18 years from ten schools in the Modara, Mattakkuliya Zonal Educational area by using a self-administered questionnaire. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the National Hospital of Sri Lanka.

Results: Nearly half (56%) of students had satisfactory knowledge, while 29% had moderate knowledge regarding oral hygiene. Of the total, the majority of the students knew the purpose of maintaining oral hygiene (83.3%), causes of cavities on teeth (80.3%) and symptoms of gum bleeding (64.8%). When considering the attitudes of oral hygiene, 54.5% of students worry about their teeth colour while the majority (84.4%) of students believed that upper teeth extraction cause blindness. Only 20% of students agreed that missing teeth replacement is necessary. Regarding practices, 96.3% of students used toothbrushes and 96.8% used fluoride toothpaste. But only 20.8% changed their toothbrushes when the bristle damage or discolourations occur. Majorities (90%) of students have not visited their dentist regularly every six to twelve month and students visit the dentist only when they have pain (48%).

Conclusions: Even though students had satisfactory knowledge on oral hygiene, they have some negative attitudes and poor practices regarding oral hygiene. Therefore, to fill the existing gap between student's knowledge and practices, arranging awareness programs and incorporating oral health education into the school curriculum is a timely need.

Keywords: *Attitudes, Knowledge, Oral hygiene, Practices*