

Knowledge and awareness of oral hygiene among nursing students

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ABSTRACT

Background: Oral health knowledge is considered to be an essential prerequisite for health-related behavior. Little is known about oral health attitudes and behaviors of nursing students, especially of those who are great supporters of this field. Due to the high stress levels, the nursing students may find it difficult to maintain perfect oral hygiene. Hence, this study was initiated to assess the oral hygiene status and create improved awareness in them. **Aim:** The objective of the study is to assess the oral hygiene status among nursing students. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional survey was conducted among the nursing students in Chennai to assess the knowledge, attitude, and awareness of oral hygiene using a pre-tested questionnaire. A sample size of 100 students inclusive of 67 females and 33 males was used. Questions based on the dental knowledge and attitude toward oral hygiene were asked to the students. The questionnaire consisted of a basic 11 questions and appropriate responses were recorded. **Results:** About 98% of the nursing students do care about their oral hygiene. Moreover, about 90% of the students are aware of the advantages of good oral hygiene. About 66% do realize that refusing to go to a dentist does have an influence on their oral hygiene. Yet, only 33% go to a dentist for a regular checkup. **Conclusion:** This study concluded that even though the participants are aware of the certain consequences of bad oral hygiene, sufficient steps are not being taken by the nursing students to improve their oral hygiene.

KEY WORDS: Awareness, Health, Nursing students, Oral hygiene

INTRODUCTION

Health is the complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being and not just the absence of disease or infirmity. Health is a common theme in most of the cultures with an emphasis on the fact that health is a fundamental human right and a worldwide social goal necessary for an improved quality of life.^[1] Oral cavity is an important diagnostic area not only because it contains derivatives of almost all of the primary germinal layers and tissues not demonstrable anywhere else in the body but also due to its role played in diagnosing various diseases just due to their oral manifestations.^[2,3] Studies have shown that brushing, especially with fluoride toothpastes, can reduce dental caries,^[4,5] but the effect of oral hygiene on periodontitis has not yet been clearly demonstrated. Oral health is the standard of health of the oral and related tissues which enable individual to eat,

speak, and socialize without active disease, discomfort, or embarrassment and which contribute to general well-being. There have been rapid changes in the pattern of oral diseases during the past decade.^[6,7] One of the primary concerns of dental health-care professionals is to impart positive oral health knowledge and behavior in the society and to create an environment to shift the responsibility of public health from the shoulders of health professionals to the people's own hands.

Good oral health is essential for health and as has a positive influence on physical, mental, and social well-being. Oral hygiene plays a very important factor in prevention of oral disease. Poor and bad oral health can cause extreme pain, interruption of sleep, affect the ability to consume a healthy diet, have an impact on social interaction, and cause difficulty with speech. Furthermore, it can have a huge effect on other health conditions.^[8-10] Periodontal disease may contribute to cardiovascular disease, low birth weight, aspiration pneumonia, and nutritional deficiencies in children and elders are some of the examples.

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Oral hygiene has always been considered as a risk indicator and a risk factor for various oral problems and also for access to oral health has been a complex issue involving barriers such as inability to afford services to various cultural preferences, from lack of adequate services to various technological setbacks.^[9,10] Association between smoking and periodontal problems has been studied and researched for as far back as the 1940s,^[11] yet there has ended a prevalence as to the role of smoking in periodontal disease up to the 1980s.

The most confirmed risk factors for periodontitis are cigarette smoking and diabetes and regular dental checkups and non-smoking are recommended for maintaining optimal oral health.^[12-14] Students related to this health franchise play an important role in oral health care and promotion. People in nursing play a very important role in health promotion, and therefore, it is important that their oral health knowledge be good so that the community can also be benefited eventually. It is found that very few studies have collected data regarding the dental/oral hygiene knowledge of medical practitioners. Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess the knowledge, awareness, and practice of oral hygiene among nursing students.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey was conducted among the nursing students in Chennai to assess the knowledge, attitude, and awareness of oral hygiene using a pre-tested questionnaire. A sample size of 100 students inclusive of 67 females and 33 males was used. Questions based on the dental knowledge and attitude toward oral hygiene were asked to the students. The questionnaire consisted of a basic 11 questions and appropriate responses were recorded.

Inclusion Criteria

Students of the age group 18–22 years were included as part of the survey population. Only nursing students were eligible to take part in the survey and would have adequate exposure demanded in the year of study. The students who were involved in the study had to be undergraduate students who are in their formative years of study.

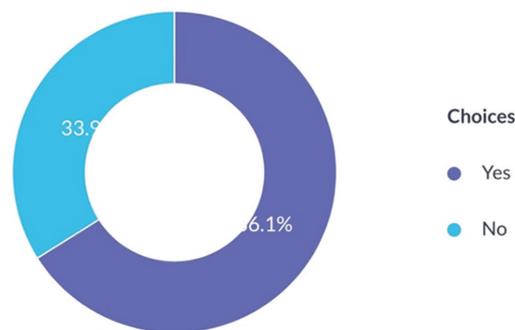
Exclusion Criteria

Postgraduation students were excluded from the study as the knowledge levels available would differ and dropouts were also excluded from the survey population.

RESULTS

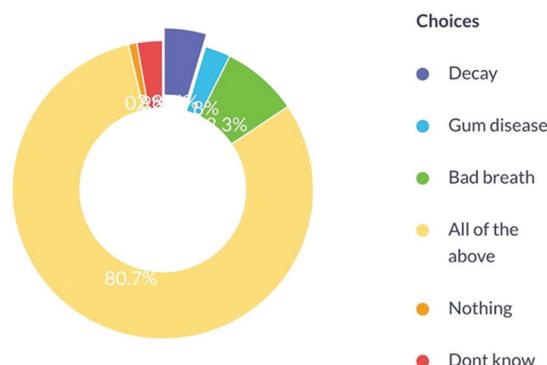
The below tabulation and charts show the questions asked to the participants, the number of participant to each response, and the percentage for each response.

Chart 1



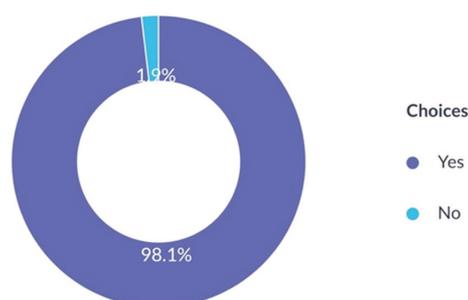
When asked if refusing to go to a dentist had an influence on their oral hygiene, 66.1% accepted that it did and the rest 33.9% answered that it did not influence on their oral hygiene.

Chart 2



When asked about the consequences of not cleaning the teeth everyday, 80.7% knew the consequences. This shows that most of the participants are indeed aware of oral hygiene. About 4.6% chose that they had got decay, 2.8% chose that they had got gum disease, 8.3% chose that they had got bad breath, 0.9% chose that they had got nothing, and 9.8% chose that they did not know any of the options nor the consequences.

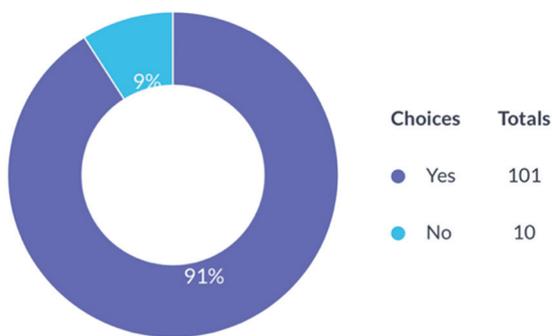
Chart 3



When asked if oral hygiene was also important for a healthy body, 98.1% answered that it was important. This shows that almost all participants are concerned about their oral hygiene.

Questions	Options	Participants	Percentage
1. How much times do you brush a day?	1. Once	63	42.2
	2. Twice	46	57.8
	3. More than twice	0	
2. Did you know that the way you brush also has an impact on how healthy your teeth are?	1. Yes	99	90.8
	2. No	10	9.2
3. Do you use mouthwash or do you floss everyday?	1. Mouthwash	32	29.4
	2. Floss	9	8.3
	3. Both	17	15.6
4. How many times have you visited a dentist in the past 1 year?	4. None	51	46.8
	1. Never	44	40.4
	2. Once	27	24.8
	3. Twice	21	19.3
5. During the past 12 months was there a time when you needed dental care and could not get one?	4. More than twice	17	15.6
	1. Yes	14	12.8
	2. No	72	66.1
	3. Did not know if I needed one	23	21.1
6. Do you think refusing to go to a dentist has an influence on your oral hygiene?	4. Refused	0	
	1. Yes	72	66.1
7. Do you go to a dentist for regular checkup for a healthy mouth?	2. No	37	33.9
	1. Yes	36	33.3
8. In the past 3 months, have you noticed teeth that did not look right?	2. No	56	51.9
	3. Not concerned	16	14.8
	1. Yes	27	25
9. Not cleaning your teeth everyday can cause	2. No	71	65.7
	3. Yes, I did notice. I am not concerned about it	10	9.3
	1. Decay	5	4.6
	2. Gum disease	3	2.8
	3. Bad breath	9	8.3
	4. All of the above	88	80.7
10. How long do you normally take to brush your teeth?	5. Nothing	1	0.9
	6. Do not know	3	2.8
	1. About 30 s	11	10
	2. About a minute	42	38.2
	3. More than a minute	53	48.2
	4. Do not know	4	3.6
11. Do you think oral hygiene is also important for a healthy body?	1. Yes	106	98.1
	2. No	2	1.9

Chart 4



When asked if the way they brush also had an impact on oral hygiene, 91% accepted that it did have an impact and 9% denied that it did not.

From this survey, it has been seen that people are indeed aware of oral hygiene, its advantages, yet they do not take enough steps to improve their oral hygiene, i.e., only a few go to a dentist for a regular checkup. Hence, as participants of dental field, it is

our responsibility to spread more awareness of dental hygiene to everyone and not just to the supporters of this field (nursing students).

The results indicated that most of the participants are concerned about their oral hygiene for a healthy body. Yet, they did not take enough steps to improve their oral hygiene.

DISCUSSION

Health beliefs and attitudes of the people in nursing field will not only affect their oral self-care habits but can also give motivation to their patients to maintain their oral hygiene. There are many other factors that can influence the attitude and behavior of an individual.^[15-18]

Knowledge is defined as the level of understanding of an individual toward the facts, information, skills, etc. Therefore, the knowledge that is associated to dental health during training period is important, especially

for the future nurses. Besides all that, socioeconomic status and educational level will also affect people's oral health behavior.^[19-21]

The results indicated that most of the participants are concerned about their oral hygiene for a healthy body. Yet, they did not take enough steps to improve their oral hygiene. The present study results have shown the evidence that 66.1% do not visit a dentist when required; this shows the general negligence to oral health and oral hygiene. It is also further noted as part of the results obtained from the present study that a majority of the surveyed population have not visited the dentist because they did not feel the need to, thus this portrays more importance on the fact that regular dental checkups should be in practice.

Various studies exist in further geographic locations with nursing student population, such as the study which took place in Rohilkhand Hospital portrays the results that a bulk of the population only visit the dentist in times of pain which are in correlation with the results of the present study. In comparison to the aforementioned study, a higher population in the present study use mouthwash and floss to clean and protect their oral hygiene and are aware of the methods for the same.

Studies on various other populations of the society such as the dentist population have been checked of their knowledge of oral hygiene and their attitude toward it, which makes it evident that the nursing population do not have proper adequate knowledge in the field, and hence, camps conducted in their populations would help their general oral health and oral hygiene as well.^[22,16]

CONCLUSION

This study says that 98% of the students do care about their oral hygiene. Moreover, about 90% of the students are aware of the advantages of good oral hygiene. About 66% do realize that refusing to go to a dentist does have an influence on their oral hygiene. Yet, only 33% go to a dentist for a regular checkup. Hence, this study infers that even though the participants are aware of the certain consequences of bad oral hygiene, sufficient steps are not being taken by the students to improve their oral hygiene.

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