

# Reasons for Negligence of Oral Health Care

Anjum Tariq<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Junaid Lakhani<sup>2</sup>, Wahab Kadri<sup>2</sup>, Mahparah Mumtaz<sup>2</sup>, Jamal Hussain<sup>2</sup> and Raesa Rehman<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The purpose of this study is to evaluate factors responsible for negligence of oral health care in our population.

**Study Design:** Observational / descriptive study.

**Place and Duration of Study:** This study was conducted at the Jinnah Medical and Dental College, Karachi from August 2015 to September 2015.

**Materials and Methods:** A questionnaire was structured which was based to evaluate, the background, including age, gender, social and educational level, dental habits and the reasons responsible for them. The data was stored in excel worksheet and was analyzed using SPSS.

**Results:** The major factors responsible for people neglecting oral health care was found out to be the high cost prices of dental treatments by 36%, followed by lack of care seeking attitude by 28% and time management by 23% of people. Socio-Economic status and educational background also had a significant relationship. People from lower socio economic and educational background were seen to be never visiting the dentist. No significant relationship was found with relation to age, marital status, availability of dentist, and dental misconceptions.

**Conclusion:** People are neglecting oral health care mainly due to the high cost price of dental treatments. Care seeking attitude is seen to be absent in our population. Dental health comes last in the set of priorities by the majority of people. Time is another area people find difficult to manage. These areas can be worked upon to decrease the prevalence of dental disease in our population.

**Key Words:** Dental health negligence, Oral health care, Care-seeking attitude, Time management, Socio-economic status, Dental treatment charges.

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## INTRODUCTION

Around 5 billion people all around the world suffer from oral diseases including tooth caries, dental erosion, periodontal and gingival disease.<sup>1</sup> In our part of the world the prevalence of oral diseases is also seen to be high. In general population many individuals have some unresolved dental issues. Regardless of their age, gender, social status or educational background, few seek elective dental treatments other than emergency. High cost, dental phobia or anxieties are among key issues in not having regular dental visits.<sup>2,3,4</sup> This study is being conducted to help us identify the factors that may be related to lack of interest in seeking dental treatment despite high prevalence of oral diseases in our population.

<sup>1</sup>. Department of Operative Dentistry / Oral Maxillofacial Surgery<sup>2</sup>, Jinnah Medical and Dental College, Karachi.

Correspondence: Muhammad Junaid Lakhani, Professor, Department of Oral Maxillofacial Surgery, Jinnah Medical and Dental College, Karachi.  
Contact No.: 0300-8222287  
E-mail: drmjunaaid@hotmail.com

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted at Jinnah Medical and Dental College (JMDC) from August 2015 to September 2015. A 15 item questionnaire was used to collect the data including age, gender, social and educational level, dental habits and the reasons responsible for them. The purpose of the study patients was told to all patients. The data was stored in excel worksheet and was analyzed using SPSS.

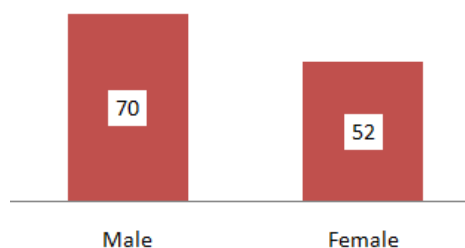
## RESULTS

The study sample consisted of 115 adults seen in JMDC. There were 39% females and 61 % males. The age range of the sample was between 18 to 65 years with 32 years being the mean age with a SD of 12.65 (Figure 1).

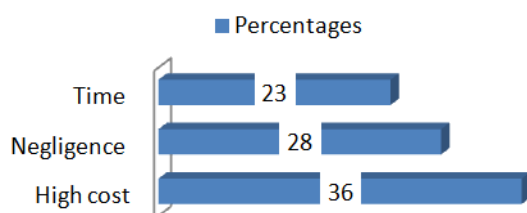
In our study 36% of the people never visited a dentist due to high cost of treatment, 28% had an attitude of neglect to oral care while 23% of people had time constraints for visiting a dentist (Figure 2).

The data also showed significant relationships between the dental care negligence with socio-economic status. People from low socioeconomic status who never visited the dentist were highest, comprising of 74%,

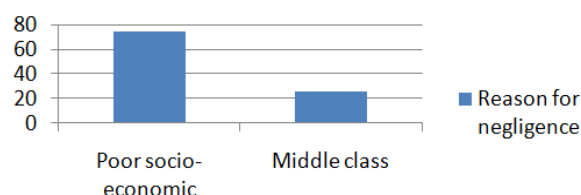
while people from the middle socio-economic status who never visited the dentists were 26% (Figure 3).



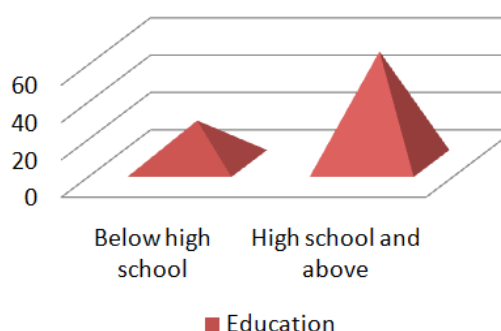
**Figure No.1: Gender Distribution**



**Figure No.2: Reasons for negligence**



**Figure No.3: Socio-economic Status**



**Figure No.4:**

Educational level was also seen to be playing significant role as the data indicated that 23% of people who had education up to high school had not once visited the dentist, while people with educational level above high school who visited the dentist at least once a year were 60%. (Figure 4).

## DISCUSSION

According to the results the main reasons for neglecting oral health care was regarding the high cost of treatment associated with the dental procedures as 36 % of patients referred to it in all social classes. However 74 % of patients from low socio economic status never visited a dentist. This is in accordance with the studies

that show Financial limitations are an important reason for inability to see a dentist. In a study it is reported that one out of five patients are being unable to afford needed dental care.<sup>5</sup> Another study highlighting on the oral health status of adults in the age group between 18 to 64 years found that in 2008, among seven given reasons that one may skip a dental visit for an oral health issue, the primary reason was “could not afford/no insurance.”<sup>6</sup> It was also shown that financial affordability of the patient in the dental sector remains low, relative to other parts of the healthcare sector.<sup>7,8</sup>

The second most common reason that came out to be responsible for keeping patients away from seeking dental treatments is the absence of care seeking attitude as 28% of patients fall in this category. This trend is in contrast to the results of the study done by Zhu et al.<sup>9</sup> in China where only 68% of 35-44 years old subjects had made at least one dental visit in their lifetime. The probable reason may be that people in our community mainly rely on home remedies for ailments before consulting a doctor or a dentist. In a study conducted by Newman and Gift it was reported that 53% of people in USA regularly visit dentist even when there is no problem. This vast disparity may be attributed to the lack of awareness of the study population regarding the role played by regular dental visits in preventing dental diseases.<sup>10,11</sup>

People in general have a much laid back and lazy attitude regarding their health, in particular oral health. There is no national index of oral health available in Pakistan but studies conducted at different centers refer to lack of interest in oral health as also indicated by concept of regular dental checkups is hardly seen. The only thing that brings the patients to a dentist is excruciating pain or disturbed aesthetics. 23% of patients reported time constraints as a reason for neglecting oral health as timing for appointments were found to be inconvenient for these patients. This also had a direct relationship with socio economic status as more patients of lower economic status found timing to be a constraint when it came down to oral health maintenance. This is in line with results in a study done in UK, where also 24% respondents agree to a similar statement.<sup>12,13</sup> This indicates the laid-back attitude of respondents in the present study toward the time scheduling of dentists. The number of patients visiting dental clinic seemed to improve with the level of education as 60% of patients with education above high school level were found to be visiting a dentist at least once a year for check-up/ treatment.

## CONCLUSION

People are neglecting oral health care mainly due to the charges as they find them unjustified. Care seeking attitude is seen not very often particularly the dental health comes last in the set of priorities by the majority of people. Time management is another area people

complained about at both ends, the dentist's as well as for the patients. These areas can be worked upon to decrease the prevalence of dental disease in our population by highlighting the importance of oral health care to the people.

**Conflict of Interest:** The study has no conflict of interest to declare by any author.

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