



**ORAL HEALTH AND
QUALITY OF LIFE OF
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
CHILDREN:
THE TEACHERS' POINT OF
VIEW**

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CHILDREN & ORAL HEALTH

Dental caries is the single most common chronic childhood disease.

Dental caries is

- 5 x more common than asthma**
- 7 x more common than hay fever, and**
- 14 x more common than chronic bronchitis.**

(Surgeon General Report on Oral Health, 2000)

CHILDREN & ACCESS TO CARE

- **Need for oral health care is the most prevalent unmet health care need of children**
 - Newacheck et al, 2000
- **Children from poor and / or minority families are especially vulnerable - 80% in 20%**
 - U.S. General Accounting Office, 2000
 - Vargas et al, 1998

ORAL HEALTH AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Children's impaired oral health leads to

➤ days missed from school

- Gift et al, 1992**
- U.S. General Accounting Office, 2000**

➤ impaired school performance

- Peterson et al, 1999**
- Ramage, 2000**

OBJECTIVES

Surveys with teachers in public elementary schools in socio economically disadvantaged neighborhoods were conducted in order

Objective 1: to assess the importance teachers place on various health related issues for students' abilities to learn.

Objective 2: to evaluate the teachers' evaluations of the relevance of various factors for having a student seek oral health care.

Objective 3: to explore whether teachers know when a student has a dental health problem.

METHODS

Respondents:

- **459 surveys were mailed to teachers in 35 elementary schools in the greater Flint, Mi, area.**
- **250 teachers responded (Response rate: appr. 54%)**
- **229 female / 18 male**
- **213 white / 20 African American / 5 American Indian / 4 Asian American / 1 Hispanic**
- **Average age = 43.80 years (range: 24 to 68 years)**

PROCEDURE

- A survey was mailed to 459 elementary school teachers in 35 schools.
- The teachers responded anonymously to the self administered mailed survey by mailing it back to the researcher.
- A lunch for the teachers in the two schools with the highest response rate (100%) was offered as an incentive.

RESULTS – Objective 1

Objective 1: to assess the importance teachers place on various health problems for students' abilities to learn.

Only 35% think that oral health is very important, and 29.2% that it is important.

Least important of all!

Table 1: % and Average Importance Ratings of Various Issues for Children's Ability to Learn

How important is each of the following factors <u>for children's ability to learn?</u>	1 - 3	4	5 = very important	Mean
Problems with Attention	.4	9.3	90.2	4.89
Problems with Impulse Control	11.0	22.6	66.3	4.51
Problems with Hyperactivity	14.4	26.3	59.3	4.39
Not Well Nourished	5.7	21.3	73.0	4.63
Problems with Depression	12.5	29.7	57.7	4.39
Problems with Learning Disabil.	18.7	27.6	53.7	4.37
Problems with Other Disabilities	16.7	23.4	59.8	4.02
Vision Problems	6.1	14.2	79.7	4.70
Hearing Problems	6.1	13.0	80.9	4.71
Health Problems	18.7	27.6	53.7	4.30
Dental Problem	35.8	29.2	35.0	3.84

Legend: The answers were given on a scale from 1 = "not at all important" to 5 = "very important"

RESULTS – Objective 2

Objective 2: to evaluate the relevance of various factors for having a student seek oral health care.

Majority of teachers thinks that if children have dental pain or a cavity they should see a dentist.




Table 2: Teachers' Evaluations of Reasons to See a Dentist

A child should see a dentist if	1-3	4= agree	5=strongly agree	Mean
the child has a toothache or pain.	2.4	6.1	91.5	4.88
the child has cavities.	2.8	7.3	89.8	4.85
dental pain keeps the child from paying attention in class.	2.8	8.1	89.1	4.83
the child complains about his / her teeth.	4.1	14.7	81.2	4.76
dental pain keeps a child from playing with other kids.	6.9	13.9	79.2	4.67
the child has difficulty chewing.	6.5	18.7	74.8	4.65
the child complains about pain mouth/jaws that is no toothache.	8.1	22.0	69.8	4.57
the child has difficulty biting hard.	10.5	28.7	60.7	4.47
the child's teeth are sensitive to hot or cold.	15.0	24.7	60.3	4.41
the child does not sleep through the night.	42.1	28.3	29.6	3.76
the child sucks her/his thumb or finger.	46.3	29.3	24.4	3.61

RESULTS – Objective 3

Objective 3: to explore whether teachers know when a student has a dental health problem.

- **98 teachers reported that at least one child in their class was undernourished.**
- **172 that at least one student had a learning disability.**
- **67 that at least one child had a medical problem (most commonly: asthma).**
- **60 teachers reported that at least one student had an oral health problem (most commonly: cavities).**

Table 3: Percentages / Average Responses Concerning the Prevalence of Health-Related Issues

	Percentage of students in class			Mean
	<=25%	>25 - <75%	>=75%	
Getting Free School Lunch	6.2	32.5	60.3	75.42
Problems with Attention	38.2	50.9	10.9	37.94
Problems with Impulse Control	71.9	24.2	3.9	20.72
Problems with Learning Disabil.	81.5	12.7	5.8	19.53
Problems with Hyperactivity	79.4	19.1	1.5	17.75
Not Well Nourished	78.8	17.2	4	14.61
Health / Medical Problems	93.3	6.7	0	14.10
Dental Problem	88.1	11.9	0	10.99
Problems with Other Disabilities	90.5	9.5	0	10.16
Problems with Depression	95.5	4.5	0	6.58

Reality Check:

- **School wide screenings in these schools showed that**
 - 47.3% of the children had at least one cavity, and
 - 4.0% had at least one abscess.
- **Surveys showed that**
 - 17.8% had a toothache at the time of the oral exam.
 - 36% indicated that their teeth hurt when they eat something hot or cold, and
 - 31.1% when they chew or bite.

CONCLUSIONS

- **Teachers evaluate the importance of dental problems as relatively lower than the importance of most other health problems.**
- **Teachers agree that a child should see a dentist if the child has pain or a cavity.**
- **Teachers underestimate the percentage / number of children in their class with an oral health problem.**
- **Educate teachers: ASK**
 - **raise awareness**
 - **increase skills to diagnose**
 - **Increase knowledge.**