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RESEARCH NOTE

Dental Epidemic Diseases and Oral Health Knowledge in People with Disabilities: a Survey in a Southwest City of China

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PEOPLE with disabilities constitute an important group in the field of oral health care, yet have rarely been studied. Based on WHO methodology of oral health survey, data of 531 persons with disabilities in vision, hearing, intelligence or extremity, or with mental disease are collected from 4 different districts in Zigong City, Sichuan Province in China in 2007 with cluster sampling and analyzed with Foxpro 6.0 and SPSS 11.0 software.

The survey results revealed extremely poor oral health of the studied group. The recorded rates of dental caries in permanent teeth, gingival hemorrhage, cementoperiostitis, brushing, and dental visit were 58.0%, 35.6%, 23.5%, 63.5%, and 7.9% respectively. Only 17.3% of the sample group did not require any dental treatment. 79.7% needed regular dental treatment, 69.1% should receive dental treatment as soon as possible, and 27.7% needed emergent dental treatment. The proportions of people having periodic inspection, pit and fissure sealant, utilization of fluoride, and tooth washing were only 1.1%, 1.7%, 37.1%, and 0.6% respectively. Among the surveyed people, 16.1% knew little about their dental health status and

41.3% acknowledged that they never received dental health care.

The results also indicated that some people with disabilities had partial basic knowledge of dental care. A large part of them (82.3%) believed that it is essential to brush teeth every day; 54.0% thought that using brush and floss everyday can effectively prevent gingivitis; 81.60% considered gingival bleeding abnormal; 88.50% disagreed that dental caries is self-healing thus needs no treatment; 52.4% agreed that tooth bleeding indicated gingivitis; 62.9% agreed that diet with more sugar and dessert is more likely to cause dental caries; 57.3% felt that regular mouth rinsing can be the most effective method to keep oral hygiene; and 71.4% were aware that oral diseases have much to do with physical health, although not clear about the specific relationship. However, the lack of knowledge of periodontal disease was quite obvious and the proportion of those having some professional oral health knowledge was rather low (14.1%). Among the disabled, 52.8% were unaware that periodontal disease is caused by plaque and 14.1% did not know that periodontal disease can eventually lead to teeth loss. 46.7% believed that teeth loss is inevitable in the elderly. Only 39.5% knew that pit and fissure sealant can prevent teenagers' dental caries. Some (14.3%) even did not know the significant role of fluoride in preventing against dental caries. Though

67.8% considered oral examination once a year necessary, only 1.1% of the 531 surveyed people put it into practice. In view of these results, it is concluded that the attitudes of people with disabilities toward oral health are possibly inconsistent with the dental health care knowledge they have. 87.30% of the surveyed people with disabilities did not know about the national "Love Teeth Day" at all.

The results reveal poor oral hygiene and urgent need of dental care and treatment among persons with disabilities. Meanwhile, the majority of the disabled lacks basic knowledge of oral health. Public education on oral health and oral disease prevention would enhance the oral health awareness and eventually improve oral health behavior of people with disabilities.