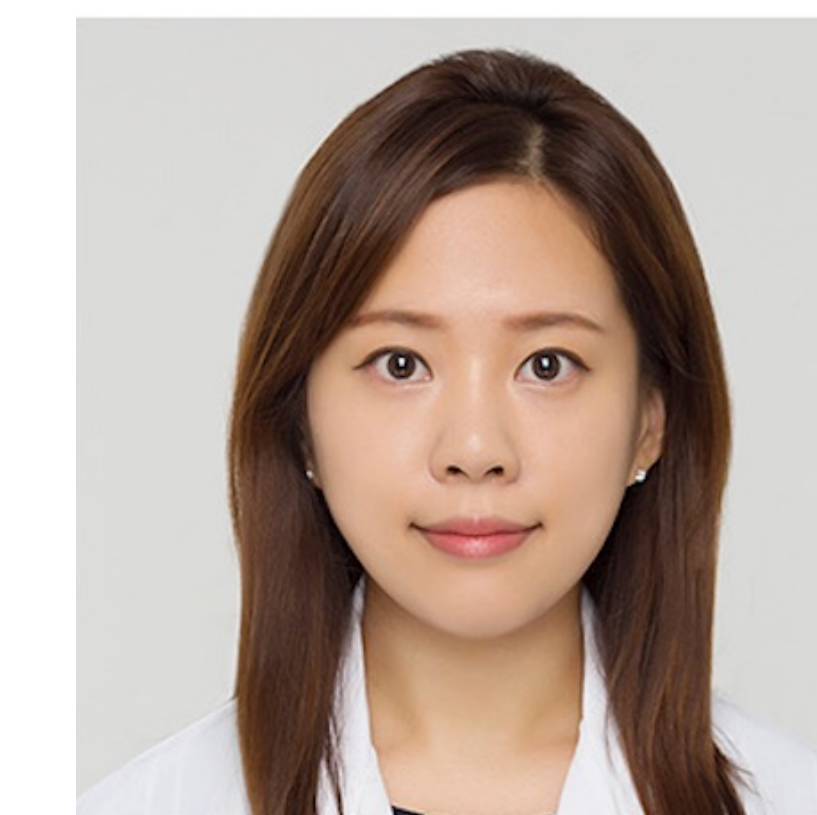




Exploring Factors Associated with Timing of Children's First Dental Visits

Seayoon An, Christine Chiao, Keri Discepolo

Department of Pediatric Dentistry, Boston University Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine, Boston, MA



Background

- Early first dental visits are important especially for children with special health care needs (CSHCN) as they are more vulnerable to dental caries and periodontal diseases than children without special health care needs. ^{1,2,3,4}
- It is important to investigate whether individuals have initial dental visits by the AAPD recommended age, 12 months of age, and if they are receiving preventive dental care in on time.
- The purpose of the research project is to compare age at the first visit to a dental clinic between CSHCN and those without special health care needs and to evaluate differences by other factors, such as the reasons for the first dental visits, the source of referral, if pediatricians provided the referral to a dental office and at what age it was given, barriers to access to oral health care, and possible solutions for better access to dental care.

Materials and Methods

- An observational cross-sectional study was conducted on patients seen at Franciscan Children's dental clinic between April 1st, 2022 and December 15th, 2022.
- Survey was conducted among English-speaking parents/guardians of children who were 21 years and under.
- 45 CSHCN and 83 children without special health care needs were included.
- Five questions were utilized to identify children with special health care needs.⁵ A positive response to one or more qualified a child as having a special health care need.

CSHCN screener:

- Does your child need or use prescription medications on a regular basis?
- Does your child need the use of medical, mental health, or educational services (more than routine physical visits)?
- Does your child have any restrictions or limitations on functions such as walking, talking, hearing, or any other limitations?
- Does your child use or need specialized therapies such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, etc.?
- Does your child require or use treatment or counseling for emotional, behavioral, or developmental problems?

Table 1. Description of study sample (n=128)

		Special Needs	Non-Special Needs
	Characteristic	%(N) or mean	%(N) or mean
Gender (N)			
	Male	57.8 (N=34)	48.2 (N=40)
	Female	42.2 (N=11)	51.8 (N=43)
Age (years)			
	Mean	4.9 +/- 3.5 years	10.6 +/-4.7 years
Relationship			
	Mother	86.7 (N=39)	73.5 (N=61)
	Father	13.3 (N=6)	26.5 (N=22)
Race			
	White	53.3 (N=24)	34 (N=34)
	African American	20 (N=9)	23 (N=23)
	Others	26.5 (N=12)	43 (N=26)
Ethnicity			
	Hispanic	43 (N=20)	42 (N=35)
	Non-Hispanic	57 (N=25)	58 (N=48)
Insurance			
	MassHealth	84.4 (N=38)	89.2 (N=74)
	Private insurance	15.6 (N=7)	10.8 (N=9)
Education level			
	High school or equivalent	33.3 (N=15)	32.5 (N=27)
	Some college	28.9(N=13)	39.8 (N=33)
	Graduate or professional school	35.6 (N=16)	19.3 (N=16)
	Others	2.2 (N=1)	8.4 (N=7)

Results

Table 2. Age of first dental visits and factors associated with timing of first dental visit

	Special Needs	Without Special Needs
Age of first dental visit		
No answer	6.7 (N=3)	7.2 (N=6)
< 1 year old	13.3 (N=6)	12 (N=10)
Between ages 1-3	48.9 (N=22)	57.8 (N=48)
Above age 4	31.1 (N=14)	22.9 (N=19)
Difficulties in access to dental care*		
Yes	28.9 (N=13)	8.43 (N=7)
No	71.1 (N=32)	91.6(N=76)
History of dental treatment in OR		
Yes	44.4 (N=20)	36.1 (N=30)
No	55.6 (N=25)	63.9 (N=53)
Did Pediatrician ever refer?		
No answer	20 (N=9)	14.5 (N=12)
Yes	42.2 (N=19)	48.2 (N=40)
No	37.8 (N=17)	37.3 (N=31)

*=statistically significant, P < 0.05

- Ages between one and three were the most common ages of first dental visits for both populations.
- The most common reason for the first dental visits for both populations were check-up followed by decay noted by parents/guardians.
- The most common source of referral for the first dental visits for both populations was parents/guardians themselves followed by a pediatrician.
- The most common barriers to access to dental care faced by parents/guardians of CSHCN were a child's other medical needs, followed by finding a dentist willing to treat, wait time for appointments, finances, distance traveled, and transportation.
- Parents/guardians of CSHCN wanted more dentists willing to treat their children, shorter wait time for appointments, more dental offices closer to home, and transportation services.

Conclusions

- Despite a similar average age of first dental visits, those with special health care needs were significantly more likely to report difficulty in accessing dental care.
- Medical professionals should encourage and help parents/guardians utilize community-based resources when appropriate to facilitate better access to dental care for CSHCN.

References

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