Common chief complaints of patients seeking treatment in the government dental institution of Puducherry, India

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To explore the common chief complaints (CCs) of patients seeking treatment in the government dental hospital of Puducherry, India. Materials and Methods: The age, gender, and the CC or the main reason for the visit were recorded for each consecutive patient of the 1,014 patients attending the dental hospital. The chi-square test was used to find any statistical association between the variables. Results: The mean age of the study group was 28.1 years with age ranging 1-80 years. “Toothache” is found to be most common CC reported by 33% of the patients. “Decayed tooth” is reported as the CC by 19% of the patients. CCs were found to vary across the different age groups and to some extent gender differences were also noted. Conclusion: CC denotes the demand for dental care and thus, helps in proper planning of the public dental health care system.

Key words: Chief complaints, normative need, perceived need, toothache

INTRODUCTION

The chief complaints (CCs) of the patients represent the demand for dental care.[1] It is usually recorded in the patient’s own words to know the patient’s perception of the problem.[2] Demand for dental care is the expression by a patient or the public of a desire to receive dental care to attend to their felt need. Felt need, also called perceived need or subjective need, is the need for dental care as determined by the patient or the public. Data from epidemiological studies are used to assess the extent and severity of dental diseases within populations, from which estimates of need can be made. These estimates of normative need to tell us how much care is required if we are to treat active disease of the population today.[1] Demand for dental care may differ from normative need, which is professionally determined.[1] The problem that brings the patient to the dentist is obviously a treatment priority; otherwise, the patient will seek treatment elsewhere.[4] It was found that only very few studies were made on the CCs of dental patients and there was no published report about the Indian scenario. Hence, this study was undertaken to determine the common CCs of dental patients among the semi-urban community in South India.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

A prospective epidemiological study was conducted among 1,014 subjects who sought treatment on an outpatient basis in the Mahatma Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Dental Sciences, Puducherry during the first week of January 2005. The age and sex of the patients and the CC or the main reason for the visit were recorded for each consecutive patient of the 1,014 patients. The chi-square test was used to find any statistical association between the CCs with the age or gender of patients.

RESULTS

The age of the study group ranged 1-80 years with mean age of 28.1 years. Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of subjects according to age group and gender. A higher percentage of females sought treatment compared to males. Those demanding treatment mostly belonged to the age group of 21-30 years in both the sexes. Among the age group of 31-40 years, significantly (P < 0.05) more females sought treatment, whereas significantly (P < 0.05) more males sought treatment among the age group of >60 years.

Table 2 shows the percentage distribution of the CCs according to gender. Overall, the most common CC reported was “toothache,” reported by 32.5% of the subjects. The second and third most common CCs reported were “decayed tooth” reported by 19% of the subjects and “wants to remove the tooth” reported by 9.4% of the subjects. When we compared sex differences, significantly more females sought treatment for “decayed tooth” (P < 0.01) and for “wants to wear clip” (P < 0.01), whereas significantly more males sought treatment for “wants to replace missing teeth” (P < 0.05).

Table 3 shows percentage distribution of the CCs according to age group. When the age groups were considered separately, “toothache” was the most common CC reported by all age groups except for the age group of 1-10 years, in which “decayed tooth” was the most common CC reported. “Decayed tooth” was the second most common CC reported by 11-20 years, 21-30 years, 31-40 years, and 41-50 years age groups. “Wants to replace the missing tooth” was the second most common CC reported by 51-60 years and >60 years age groups.

When we compared differences among the age groups, significantly more subjects complained of “decayed tooth” (P < 0.001) and “unerupted upper front teeth” (P < 0.001), whereas fewer subjects complained of “toothache” (P < 0.05), “wants to remove the tooth” (P < 0.001), and “wants to fill decayed tooth” (P < 0.001) in the age group of 1-10 years.

In the age group of 11-20 years, significantly more subjects complained of “wants to wear clip” (P < 0.001), “forwardly placed front teeth” (P < 0.001), “irregularly placed front teeth” (P < 0.005), and “wants to fill decayed tooth” (P < 0.01), whereas fewer subjects complained of “toothache” (P < 0.001) and “wants to remove the tooth” (P < 0.005).

In the age group of 21-30 years, significantly more subjects complained of “wants to fill decayed tooth” (P < 0.05), whereas fewer subjects complained of “mobile tooth” (P < 0.005). Among the age group of 31-40 years, significantly more subjects complained of “toothache” (P < 0.05) and “wants to remove the tooth” (P < 0.05), whereas fewer subjects complained of “wants to wear clip” (P < 0.05). In the age group of 41-50 years, significantly more subjects complained of “wants to replace the missing teeth” (P < 0.001), whereas fewer subjects complained of “decayed tooth” (P < 0.05).

In the age group of 51-60 years, significantly more subjects complained of “mobile tooth” (P < 0.005) and “wants to remove the tooth” (P < 0.05), whereas fewer subjects complained of “decayed tooth” (P < 0.005).
Table 3: Percentage distribution of the chief complaints according to age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chief complaint</th>
<th>Age group in years</th>
<th>0-10</th>
<th>11-20</th>
<th>21-30</th>
<th>31-40</th>
<th>41-50</th>
<th>51-60</th>
<th>&gt;60</th>
<th>All Ages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 148)</td>
<td>(n = 211)</td>
<td>(n = 278)</td>
<td>(n = 183)</td>
<td>(n = 89)</td>
<td>(n = 62)</td>
<td>(n = 43)</td>
<td>(n = 1014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toothache</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decayed tooth</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to remove the tooth</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to clean the teeth</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to fill the decayed tooth</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to replace the missing teeth</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to wear clip</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile tooth</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forwardly placed front teeth</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bleeding gum</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain in the gum</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregularly placed front teeth</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental checkup</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swollen gum</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad breath</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposits in the teeth</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

group of >60 years, significantly more subjects complained of “mobile tooth (P < 0.001)” and “wants to remove the tooth” (P < 0.005), whereas fewer subjects complained of “decayed tooth” (P < 0.005).

**DISCUSSION**


Findings of this study reveal that most people appear to seek treatment only when acute disturbing symptoms such as pain is apparent. Demanding treatment at late stages may relate to several psychosocial factors such as dental anxiety, financial costs, perceptions of need, and lack of...
access.\cite{15} Even in the developed countries such as the United States, performance of the general economy is reported to affect the demand for dental care.\cite{3} Data collected among 427 patients at Udaipur, Rajasthan, India revealed that the reason for not visiting the dentist in the past was “I did not have any problems with my teeth” followed by lack of time and fear of painful dental procedures.\cite{16} A similar investigation among 246 patients at Bangalore, Karnataka, India reported that high cost was the main barrier in the utilization of dental care.\cite{17} Further studies are needed to identify the specific factors for delay in seeking dental treatment in this government institution where treatment is provided free of cost.

One of the limitations of this study is that it is conducted only in one public dental hospital without collecting socioeconomic details of the patients. So caution is necessary before drawing conclusions. Also, the actual dental treatment needs of the patients and the underlying cause for the CCs were not assessed. So the perceived need could not be compared with the normative need of the study population. Accurate and consistent documentation of hospital records may facilitate complete data retrieval for large scale hospital-based retrospective studies.\cite{12}

**CONCLUSION**

The reason for dental visit varies across different age groups and to some extent, gender differences are also noted. Multicentric studies about CC will give an idea about the actual demand for dental care. This would be helpful for proper planning of the dental health care system at the national level with limited financial resources.

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**Conflicts of interest**

There are no conflicts of interest.

**REFERENCES**