Oral Health Needs Assessment in Estancia, El Salvador

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Abstract

Background: The burden of oral health problems continues to affect millions worldwide, especially people with low socioeconomic development. WHO estimates that El Salvador has 3x higher rate of oral disease, 4x higher rate of edentulism, and ¼ the number of dentistry personnel as compared to the United States. Estancia is a cluster of rural communities in the mountainous, northeastern part of the country. In Estancia, many realities exacerbate oral health: poverty; minimal potable water; limited access to toothbrushes/toothpaste; lack of accessible, affordable, sophisticated dental services. Doctors for Global Health and Campesinos para el Desarrollo Humano conducted the first oral health needs assessment in the area using community based participatory approach with key informants including clinic staff, Salvadoran dentists, and community members.

Methods: Face-to-face interviews with community members during clinic and home visits to identify oral health problems, knowledge, and practices.

Results: 396 participants, 56% can read, 52.5% can write, 84% have homes with dirt floor, 73% have electricity, 60% access water from well, 43% always treat water. Self-report, health of teeth and gums: Excellent 3.5%, Good 20%, Average 26% Bad 22%, No teeth 27.5%. Caregiver report, health of child’s teeth and gums: Excellent 14%, Good 25.5%, Average 16%, Bad 11%, No response 32.5%. 35% respondents cite transportation cost as the main barrier to dentist. 22% respondents report their child does not own toothbrush.

Conclusions: Estancia has significant oral health needs. This assessment is helping CDH create and implement local educational materials and preventive strategies. For example, CDH has teamed up with the local Ministry of Health doctor to perform fluoride application in schoolchildren. DGH and CDH plan to collaborate with another local NGO, ASAPROSAR, who is addressing oral health needs in another region of El Salvador, to use the data to inform national health policy.
The burden of oral disease affects millions of people worldwide, especially people with low socioeconomic status. The WHO estimates that El Salvador has 3x higher rate of oral disease, 4x higher rate of edentulism, and ¼ the number of dentistry personnel compared to the United States.

Estancia is a cluster of rural communities in the mountainous, northeastern part of the country. Doctors for Global Health (DGH) has been partnering with the people of Estancia since 1992 and helped them form their own NGO, Campesinos para el Desarrollo Humano (Peasants for Human Development, CDH), in 2004.

CDH works to alleviate health disparities and address unmet health needs for approximately 2500 impoverished people through provision of medical care in CAIPES (Centro de Atención Integral, Prevención y Educación en Salud, Center for Integrated Attention, Prevention and Education in Health); water, sanitation, and nutrition projects, Centers for Integrated Child Development; women, youth and elderly development; and income-generating/microcredit projects.

Dental care has been an unmet health need and priority; many people suffer from preventable oral maladies. In Estancia, many realities exacerbate oral health: poverty; minimal potable water; limited access to toothbrushes/toothpaste; lack of accessible, affordable, sophisticated dental services. DGH and CDH conducted the first oral health needs assessment in the area using community based participatory approach with key informants including clinic staff, Salvadoran dentists, and community members.

**Materials and Methods**

- With the help of CDH community health workers and staff, we conducted face-to-face interviews with community members during clinic and home visits. Also had informal discussions with CDH CHW, CAIPES physician-director, and MOH physician and dentist.
- HMS IRB approved
Conclusions

- Estancia’s adult and pediatric populations have significant oral health problems
- Poor oral health is related to/associated with tooth loss
- A disparity exists between the percentage of respondents who have significant oral health problems (e.g. 24.2% reported bad teeth, 32.9% reported being edentulous) and yet do not have access to appropriate dental care (e.g. 26.3% reported they did not go anywhere when they had an oral health problem
- At least a portion of self-reported oral health problems can be prevented or mitigated by environmental changes (e.g. access to potable water, toothbrushes, toothpaste, fluoride varnish)
- Much work needs to be done to improve the quality and accessibility of even the most basic dental care
- Many opportunities exist to educate adults and children alike about the importance of good oral health care.
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Results: Respondent

Self-Report Oral Health (%)

Where Respondents Seek Dental Care for Oral Problems (%)

Reasons for Not Visiting Dentist (%)

Results: Youngest Child


Where Parents Seek Dental Care for Their Youngest Child’s Dental Problems, N=286 (%)

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Abstract

Introduction

Materials and Methods

Results

Conclusions

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References