

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

### THE FIRST DENTAL VISIT

N Ghimire<sup>1\*</sup>, B Kayastha<sup>2</sup>, P Nepal<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry, College of Dental Sciences, Chitwan Medical College, Bharatpur -10, Chitwan, Nepal.

<sup>2</sup> College of Dental Sciences, Chitwan Medical College, Bharatpur -10, Chitwan, Nepal.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Radiodiagnosis and Imaging, Chitwan Medical College, Bharatpur -10, Chitwan, Nepal.

\*Correspondence to : Dr Neeta Ghimire, Department of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry, College of Dental Sciences, Chitwan Medical College, Bharatpur-10, Chitwan, Nepal.  
Email: neetag@hotmail.com

#### ABSTRACT

Oral health is a vital part of overall infant health. An early dental visit is important in rendering prevention oriented intervention and parental counselling regarding the oral health. To assess the age and common chief complaint of the children in their first dental visit. This was a retrospective study done using case records of 842 children, who reported to the Department of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry, Chitwan Medical College. The age groups were divided into four categories; less than 3 years, 3-6 years, 7-11 years and 12-14 years. The various chief complaints of patient were categorized as follows; routine check up, dental caries, dental pain, deposits/bad breath, malocclusion, unerupted, missing or extra tooth, oral habits, trauma, orientation to prevention and others (cleft lip, palate, natal/neonatal teeth, mobile teeth, soft tissue lesions and others). The age group and the most common complaint at the first dental visit were assessed. Majority of children who visited the dentist were of age 7-11 years with the most common reason for their visit being pain followed by dental caries. None of the children visited for regular check up within 6 months of eruption of first tooth, though few children of that age group visited the dentist for other reasons like cleft lip/palate, natal/ neonatal tooth etc. The reason behind the first dental visit is when there is a problem. The most common age group to visit dentist was 7-11 years with the commonest reason for their visit being pain and dental caries. It can be concluded that awareness and knowledge regarding the first dental visit is almost nil among the parents of this region.

**Key Words:** Children, Dental Caries, First Dental Visit, Pain.

#### INTRODUCTION

Getting an early regular dental care is an important step in teaching a child a healthy habit. The first dental visit should occur shortly after the first tooth erupts and no later than the child's first birthday. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) and the American Dental Association (ADA) establish among their recommendations that 'a child should visit the dentist within six months of eruption of the first primary tooth and no later than 12 months of age'.<sup>1-3</sup> These recommendations are aimed at detecting and controlling the different dental pathologies, particularly dental caries, the oral disease that is prevalent in children which may occur soon after the tooth eruption.<sup>4</sup>

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends oral health risk assessment by 6 months of age and establishment of Dental Home for all infants by 12 months.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of dental visit at the early age is to 'lay the foundation on which a life time of preventive education and dental care can be built, in order to help assure optimal oral health into childhood'. Year one dental visit helps to give an anticipatory guidance and establishment of a dental home.<sup>6</sup>

An early dental visit will help the dentist to detect early lesions, evaluate craniofacial and dental development, provide anticipatory guidance, parent counselling, diet counselling and motivate parents towards prevention orientated intervention.<sup>7</sup> Many studies have shown low awareness level among the parents regarding the early visit of a child to dentist. Researchers have found that parents bring their child to dentist only when there is a problem and in very late stage when the diseases are very severe. So, the main aim of this study was to know the age at which parents first seek dental care for their child and to find the common reasons for seeking the dental visit in College of Dental Sciences, Chitwan Medical College, Nepal.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a retrospective study done in order to know the age and common reasons, at which parents first seek dental care for their children at Department of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry, Chitwan Medical College Teaching Hospital, Nepal. Patient records from the department of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry (May 2013 to November 2013) were used for the study. A total of 842 new patients record were studied. Records with incomplete findings were excluded. The age, sex

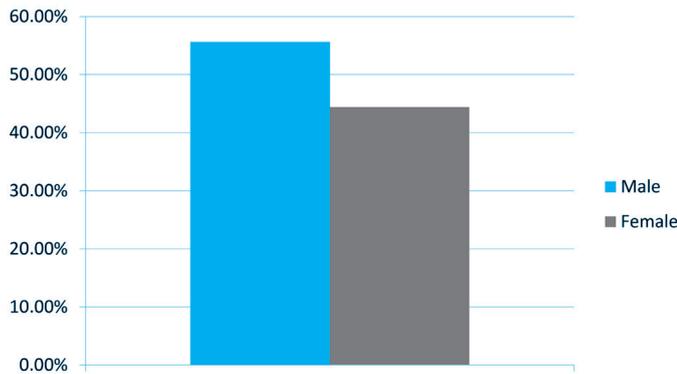
and reason for the first dental visit were noted in a data sheet. The patients were divided into 4 groups based on the age; less than 3 years (Group I), 3-6years (Group II), 7-11 years (Group III) and 12-14years (Group IV). The reasons for their visit were divided into following categories.

1. Regular check up
2. Dental caries
3. Dental pain
4. Deposits/bad breath
5. Malocclusion
6. Unerupted, missing or extra tooth
7. Oral habits
8. Trauma
9. Orientation to prevention
10. Others (cleft lip and palate, mobile teeth, soft tissue lesions, other reasons not mentioned above)

The data was recorded in a data sheet and the percentage was calculated.

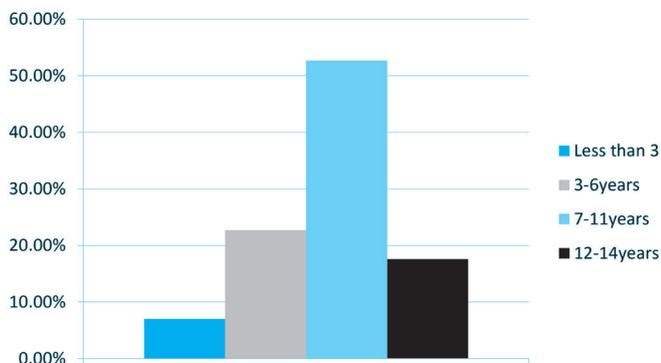
**RESULTS**

Out of 842 children, who visited the department for the first time, 468(55.6%) were male, 374(44.4%) were female



**Figure 1: Male- female distribution**

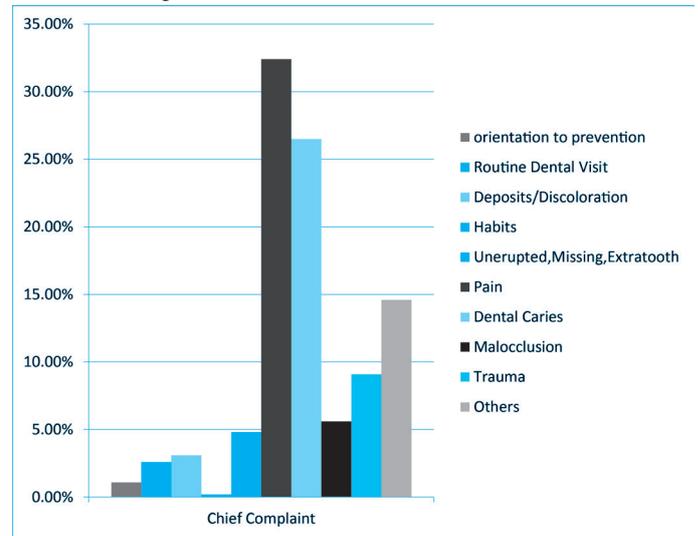
Majority of children who visited the dentist were of age 7-11years (52.7%, n=444) followed by children of age 3-6years (22.7%, n=191). Very few children (n=59, 7.0%) of age less than 3 years visited the dentist. Of 842 children, 17.6% (n=148) were of age 12-14 years



**Figure 2: Frequency of first dental visit in different age groups**

Most common chief complaint for their visit was pain (n=273) (32.4%), followed by dental caries (26.5%, n=223),14.6%

(n=123) visited for other reasons like cleft lip/palate, natal neonatal teeth, soft tissue lesions and others, 9.1% (n=77) had trauma, 5.6% had malocclusion, 4.8% visited with chief complaint of an erupted, missing or extra tooth. Very few visited for routine dental check up (2.6%) and only 1.1 % visited for orientation to preventive.



**Figure 3: Reason for first dental visit**

The maximum age group who reported were between 7-11 years followed by 3-6years, with the most common reason being pain, dental caries, others reasons and trauma. The present study revealed a very late visit of the child to the dentist and for a condition that was not in a preventable stage.

**DISCUSSION**

The present study showed a low awareness level among parents of this region, as the majority of children were brought for first dental visit at 7-11 years of age and the commonest reason for seeking dental care was pain and dental caries, though some children visited for other reasons as well. From this study, it was evident that in this part of Nepal, parents bring their children for a dental visit only when the child has a problem which is apparent and severe.

Early childhood caries is the most common dental problem encountered in children. The Royal College of Surgeons England also reported in their national guidelines that dental caries is the most common disease in children. Hence, it is essential to detect lesions early and prevent them.<sup>7</sup> The scenario is same everywhere in both developed and developing countries. Due to the unhealthy food habit, poor oral hygiene, sedentary life style, dental caries is affecting many children. One study showed that most children are exposed to medical care at an early age but not to dental care.<sup>8</sup> So, if a child was brought for a early dental visit, white spot lesions can be detected and parents can be trained to perform active preventive measures which can help avoid severe lesions later in life.<sup>7</sup>

Though according to American Guidelines, the first dental visit should be within six months of eruption of first tooth; In the study very few patient of that age group reported but those who reported had problems like cleft lip, palate, natal and neonatal tooth, herpetic gingivostomatitis and other conditions. None of

the children were brought for regular check up and orientation to prevention at early years. This seemed due to lack of awareness and knowledge regarding the oral health.

A careful dental examination is not possible in very young children but an inspection of the teeth and gingiva is often possible as early as one year of age. One purpose is to identify children with thick plaque accumulation, which has been shown to be a risk factor for caries in young children. An early dental visit makes it possible for interceptive interventions aimed at arresting the progression of caries lesions. Preventive goals include improvement of the child's oral hygiene, correction of improper dietary and eating habits, improved knowledge of the role of non-nutritive sucking for the development of malocclusions, improved knowledge of the risks for traumatic injuries, including where, when and how to seek emergency care.<sup>8</sup>

Some authors recommend that the first dental visit should be around the fourth month of intrauterine life. During this visit the dentist have the opportunity to explain the importance of dental visit at 6 months of age, educate the mother or parents on eruption of teeth and preventive procedures, provide diet counselling.<sup>7</sup>

Hale and shah in 2001 stated that this age is the best time to assess oral growth and development, age appropriate injury prevention counselling and counselling for oral habits and mainly caries prevention.<sup>9</sup> Slayton et al in their study reported that among children between birth to 3 years only 2% of the parents reported that their child had a dental visit by 1 year of age.<sup>10</sup>

Meera et in their study found the average age range when the child first visit the dentist was between 6-12 years and the most common chief complaint was dental pain and dental caries.<sup>7</sup> Yahya ma Draidi et al in their study on mean age and chief complaint of children on their first dental visit found low awareness level regarding the importance of the first dental visit among Jordanian population, with mean age of the child's first dental visit being more than 5 years of age. The commonest reason for seeking dental treatment on the first dental visit was found to be pain and dental caries.<sup>11</sup> Nino John et al found the average age of the first dental visit among children of Tiruvalla, Kerala was seven years; dental caries being the commonest reason for consultation.<sup>6</sup>

In this study, awareness regarding the first dental visit for a child was found to be low as majority of children who visited were 7-11 years of age. Only 7% of children who visited were less than 3 years. Among this percentage, very few reported for regular dental visit and orientation to prevention.

The infant oral health care should be seen as the foundation on which a lifetime of preventive education and dental care can be built in order to help assure optimal oral health into childhood. Oral examination, anticipatory guidance including preventive education and appropriate therapeutic intervention for the infant can enhance the opportunity for a lifetime of freedom from preventable oral disease, emphasized in education about

the importance of oral health for general health and adequate dietary and sanitary habits as well as basic information about dental caries in order to encourage the parents to adhere the program.<sup>12-13</sup>

Traditionally, the family physicians and paediatricians have been providing information on preventive oral health in infants, because of the early age at which these children are brought to their offices; Awareness should also be made among these medical professionals, since they get acquainted with the children at an earlier age, as compared to the dentist.<sup>6</sup>

Oral health is a vital part of overall infant health. All individuals with whom a child interacts play an important role in the overall health and development of the child including the child's family, dentists, paediatricians and other health professionals. These providers can work together toward a common goal of improving the child's oral health and in turn general health. So, organising oral health camps, school oral health programs, campaigning, advertisement and education on oral health in media will surely help to increase the early visit of a child to dentist, which in turn helps to impart preventive care as 'Prevention is better than cure'.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident from the study that most common age group of the children for their first dental visit was 7-11 years and the commonest reason for seeking dental care at the first visit was pain and dental caries.

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