

# Age of the First Dental Visit of Children in Rural Schools of Vidharba Region, Maharashtra, India: A Cross Sectional Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim & objectives:** The aim of this study was to determine the age of the first dental visit of children in rural schools of Vidharba Region, Maharashtra, India. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was carried out using the simple questionnaire in 1512 children of rural rural schools of Vidharba Region, Maharashtra, India. The children were divided into two groups: a) Group I: 5-12 years, b) Group II: Above 12-17 years and a screening form was recorded. **Results:** The number of children who reported for their first dental visit in the first group was 17.34% whereas in the second group it was 11.84%. Most common chief complaint for the visit was the pain (80.45%) and (56.81%) respectively. Most of the children who reported for their first dental visit were between 5-12 years (17.37%). **Conclusion:** Most commonly children report for their first dental visit only after 5 years for the complaints like pain, malocclusion and trauma giving the impression that preventive dentistry programme is still to reach the rural population of India.

**KEYWORDS:** First Dental Visit, Rural Children, Dental Pain, Trauma, Malocclusion

## INTRODUCTION

Oral health is an integral part of one's well being which reflects their general health and disease. Like the other milestones in a growing child commencing from first tooth erupting from his/her gingiva to the time they start walking, even their first dental visit is an important milestone which should be marked notably in a child's life history. The age of the first dental visit of the child helps in determining the quality of the preventive dental care that the child will receive and, thus, guides the future oral health of the child. Several studies have recommended early dental visit for children, suggesting that it should ideally be before completion of 12 months of age. An early dental visit, before attaining age of 12 months, will help the dentist to evaluate dental and craniofacial growth or development; detect early lesions; provide needful guidance, counsel parents regarding essential diet and importance of good oral health and also motivate parents towards prevention oriented dental treatment. Epidemiological studies on Dental caries suggested it to be most prevalent amongst the children group and endures it as a one of the major oral health issues affecting them. It was generally found that Dental caries is 5 times more prevalent than asthma while it affects the children 7 times more than the hay fever.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, if the child is exposed to the environment of

the dental clinic at an early age, it will help the children to co-operate and adapt themselves with the dental treatment or dentist in the future. From several studies it is evident that the factors influencing early dental care are socio-economic status, awareness and knowledge regarding infant oral health among general dentists and pediatricians, health insurance coverage, and parents attitude towards early dental care.

This study was conducted with the objective to evaluate the average age at which parents seek dental care for their children for first time and also to find the reasons for seeking dental care at the first visit in rural schools of Vidharba Region, Maharashtra, India.

## MATERIAL & METHODS

The present study was planned and carried out on children of government run primary schools in rural areas of Vidharba Region, Maharashtra, India. Multi stage random sampling was used to determine the sample of students from 11 districts for the study. Ethical Clearance was obtained from the ethical committee of the institution and permission was obtained from the heads of various participating schools of vidharba region, Maharashtra. Prior to the study, a pilot study was conducted on a small group of rural children with an age range of 5-17 years, that proved the feasibility of the

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study and helped in determining the sample size of the study. A total of 1512 students, age ranging from 5- 17 years, fulfilling the inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected for the study. Informed consent was obtained from the parents of the children. Those children unable to provide consent, were excluded from the study. The children were divided into two groups a) Group I- 5 - 12 years [767], b) Group II- Above 12 - 17 years [745]. The cross-sectional study involved, a pre-tested, standardized questionnaire. An Oral Health screening form was recorded after noting down the basic information about the child including Name, Age, Sex etc.

1) Have you ever visited dentist ?

Yes / No

2) If yes, Why did you visit the dentist ?

- a) Regular check-up
- b) Pain
- c) Irregular teeth
- d) discolored teeth
- e) Foul smell from mouth
- f) Broken teeth
- g) Information by media
- h) Information by peers/ family

## RESULTS

Majority of children never visited [n= 1291(85.34%)] the dentist till age of 17 years., Only n=221( 14.66%) children visited (Table 1). In group I, n=133(17.34%) visited the dentist & in group II, number of children visiting the dentist was found to be n=88 (11.82%) (Table 2). Most common chief complaint was pain followed by regular check. Trauma was found one of reason more in males where in females it was found irregular teeth (Table3).

TOTAL NO OF CHILDREN	1512
VISITED	221 14.66%
NOT VISITED	1291 85.34%

Table 1: Overall Distribution of First Dental Visit

GROUP I 5 to 12 years (N=767)				GROUP II 12+ to 17 years (N=745)			
Visited 133 (17.34%)		Not Visited 634 (82.66%)		Visited 88 (11.82%)		Not Visited 657 (88.18%)	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
58	75	256	378	49	39	255	402
7.52%	9.77%	33.39%	49.32%	6.62%	5.22%	34.15%	54.01%

Table 2: Distribution According To Age Group

## DISCUSSION

In the present study it was seen that the awareness among the rural population regarding the oral health is very low and parents seek to dentist only after their child attains the age of 5 years and unless the dental condition worsens

S. No	Reason for visit	Group I				Group II			
		M	%	F	%	M	%	F	%
1	Regular check up	13	23.07	10	13.75	22	45.4	6	15.38
2	Pain	45	76.92	62	82.33	22	45.4	28	73.07
3	Irregular tooth	0	0	3	3.9	1	3.03	5	11.53
4	Discoloured tooth	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	Foul smell	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	Broken tooth	-	-	-	-	4	6.06	-	-
7	Information by media	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	Information by peers/family	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	Any other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 3: Reason For First Dental Visit.

(pain , trauma ) which is contradictory to the American Academy of Pediatric dentistry Guidelines (2004-2005 )<sup>3</sup> which suggests that the first dental visit of a child should be at the first year of their life .

Meera et al<sup>2</sup> in a prospective and retrospective study concluded that that the awareness level regarding the importance of the first dental visit is very low in the Indian population, with an average age of the child's first dental visit being at more than 6 years of age.

Stanimira and Veselina<sup>4</sup> in their study at Bulgaria concluded that there was no established practice for children to make their first dental visit before they turn one year of age and the predominant cause to make the first visit was caries and its complications.

Ghimire et al<sup>5</sup> in a retrospective study deduced that the reason behind the first dental visit was when there is a problem while the most common age group to visit dentist was 7-11years with the commonest reason for their visit being pain and dental caries.

Yahya Md et al<sup>6</sup>, Soxman JA<sup>7</sup> and Masiga MA<sup>8</sup> in their respective studies suggested that the most common reason for the child first dental visit was dental caries and its related complications . However, in our study we have found that the other reasons for first dental visit were malocclusion mostly attributed to female population and trauma in the male population. It was also found that even after attaining 17 years of age children do not visit the dentist.

## CONCLUSION

1. It is evident that the awareness level regarding the importance of the first dental visit is very low in the Indian population, with an average age of the child's first dental visit being more than 5 years of age.
2. The commonest reason for seeking dental care at the first visit was found to be pain, trauma and malocclusion.

3. Preventive Dentistry has not been promoted widely in India particularly in rural settings leading to lack of awareness and a casual attitude towards dentition particularly during deciduous and mixed dentition period.
4. A concerted effort is required from all agencies including government and various associations of dentistry in India.

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