



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Oral health and hygiene status in Galician schoolchildren[☆]



María Blanco^a, Mónica Pérez-Ríos^{b,c,d,*}, María Isolina Santiago-Pérez^b, Ernesto Smyth^c

^a Xestión Integrada de Pontevedra e Salnés, Consellería de Sanidade, Pontevedra, Spain

^b Servicio de Epidemiología, Dirección Xeral Saúde Pública, Consellería de Sanidade, Santiago de Compostela, A Coruña, Spain

^c Departamento de Medicina Preventiva y Salud Pública, Facultad de Medicina, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, Spain

^d CIBERESP, Spain

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Dental caries;
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Abstract

Objective: The aim of this study is to determine the oral health and hygiene status in 12-year-old Galician schoolchildren.

Method: A cross-sectional study was conducted on a sample of 1267 schoolchildren. The field-work was carried out in the 2010–2011 academic year. Information regarding socio-demographic status, dietary habits, and oral hygiene practices was obtained through a structured self-report questionnaire given to the children at school. Dental examination to evaluate plaque and caries was carried out according to World Health Organization criteria. The prevalence and mean with 95% confidence intervals were calculated and logistic regression models were adjusted.

Results: Out of a total of 1045 pupils who participated in the study, 35% showed incorrect removal of dental plaque, and the prevalence of caries was 39.3%. Those who belonged to a lower socioeconomic group showed a higher prevalence of caries. Those who brushed their teeth daily had better oral hygiene.

Conclusions: Educational programmes need to be designed and implemented in order to improve dental health and hygiene.

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: monica.perez.rios@usc.es (M. Pérez-Ríos).

PALABRAS CLAVE

Salud oral;
Caries dental;
Escolares;
Cantidad de
dentífrico;
Cepillado dental

Salud e higiene oral en los adolescentes gallegos**Resumen**

Objetivo: Conocer el estado de salud e higiene oral entre los escolares gallegos de 12 años.

Método: Estudio transversal realizado en el curso 2010-2011 en una muestra de 1.267 escolares. La información sociodemográfica, sobre dieta y hábitos de higiene oral de los participantes se recogió con cuestionarios autocumplimentados. A los participantes se les realizó una exploración de la cavidad oral, de acuerdo con los criterios de la Organización Mundial de la Salud, para valorar la presencia de placa y de caries. Se estimaron medias y prevalencias acompañadas de intervalos de confianza del 95% y se ajustaron modelos de regresión logística.

Resultados: Participaron en el estudio 1.045 escolares; en el 35% la eliminación de la placa era incorrecta y el 39,3% tenían caries. La presencia de caries fue mayor entre los escolares de clases sociales más desfavorecidas y la frecuencia diaria de cepillado se asoció con una mejor salud oral.

Conclusiones: Es necesario diseñar e implantar programas educativos orientados a los escolares con el objetivo de mejorar su higiene y salud oral.

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Introduction

Teeth brushing is the correct hygiene practice to eliminate bacterial plaque and achieve good oral health. There are several factors that influence teeth brushing and its results, such as oral hygiene education, how often the teeth are brushed and how long for, and the amount of toothpaste used.¹

The dentist, as a health care practitioner, has an essential role as health educator. This is particularly important for children and adolescents, since proper oral hygiene instructions help establish good hygiene practices. Repeating these instructions at every visit to the dentist will ensure they become lifelong habits. As part of this education, the dentist must emphasise the importance of brushing teeth after meals, devoting the right amount of time to allow for proper plaque removal.

The ideal brushing technique is that which enables complete removal of the plaque in the least amount of time and without harming the tissues, though willingness and thoroughness is more important than any specific cleaning technique.^{1,2}

At the population level, a pea-sized dose of toothpaste is recommended for brushing (<1 g). For children under the age of 3 years, the recommended amount is lower due to the risk of accidental ingestion, since swallowing reflexes are not completely developed. Excessive use of toothpaste, aside from being wasteful, increases the risk of fluorosis at an early age and reduces mechanical removal of bacterial plaque.^{3,4}

To establish good habits, oral hygiene should start as soon as the child's first tooth emerges, since the age at which caries start to appear depends on the time children start brushing their teeth; the older they start, the higher the risk of caries.^{2,5}

The practice of oral hygiene must be reinforced during adolescence, a period in which there is a significant change

in habits, which leads to an increase in the prevalence of caries associated with less frequent brushing.^{6,7}

Behavioural surveys are regularly performed on the oral health and hygiene habits of a particular population, their awareness of oral hygiene issues and how habits develop over time.⁸⁻¹¹ This information enables health care authorities to design and assess oral health programmes, particularly those aimed at key population groups such as adolescents.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the status of oral health and hygiene and their potential correlation, among 12-year-old Galician schoolchildren.

Materials and methods**Study design**

During the 2010–2011 academic year, a cross-sectional study among 12-year-old schoolchildren was performed in Galicia. A two-stage sampling design was used: during the first stage, obligatory secondary education (OSE) centres were randomly selected. They were stratified by province and town size (rural: <20,000 inhabitants and urban: ≥20,000). Following this, a first-year OSE classroom was selected at each centre and every student born in 1998 was included.

Five work groups comprising a dentist and a dental hygienist, previously trained, visited the centres to perform an oral examination and an interview. To avoid observer bias, observations were calibrated by comparing the level of agreement between each dentist and an external observer in respect of findings in 64 children. The information required to evaluate health and oral hygiene was included in an examination report. The dental examination was performed following the recommendations of the World Health Organization.¹² Dental occlusion, plaque (Silness-Löe index: visible plaque and probe assessment), periodontal status,

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