

On Wednesday 3 September 2014, the Ministry of Public Health, in collaboration with the WHO country office, released the results of research on the status of oral health in Egypt.

This study is the first nationwide survey to collect comprehensive information on the status of oral health among Egyptian adults and children since the last survey conducted over 23 years ago. It covered over 10 000 individuals from Egypt's 27 governorates and involved different sectors of the society, including orphanages and prisons. The study was conducted over a period of 10 months.

The study results show that utilization of dental services is not at optimal level; 40% of subjects reported that they experienced dental problems at the time of examination but did not see a dentist for treatment. Visiting behaviours of subjects showed that nearly 20% had not visited a dentist for more than 2 years and another 20% had never been to a dentist.

Nearly 70% of examined children had some untreated caries experience; meanwhile, 80% were suffering from some form of periodontal disease. Diabetics and smokers were at a higher risk to develop gingival and periodontal problems. Minimal attention is being paid to primary prevention both on individual and professional levels. 77% of the examined individuals do not brush their teeth on a regular basis, 38% have never brushed their teeth, and only 48% use toothpaste. On a professional level, more than 85% of subjects had not been shown proper techniques of tooth brushing by dental professionals, a service which should be offered routinely to all people either on individual or community basis.

The study has highlighted the profound and consequential oral health disparities within the population in Egypt. There is a distinct lack of policy on prevention in oral health in Egypt, in addition to a lack of research, data, or planning provisions for dental treatment.

The study authors highlighted the need to develop a national oral health plan which entails promoting oral health, preventing oral disease, especially in children and low income adults, providing equitable access to oral health care, and delivering effective, efficient and equitable services to all Egyptians.

Dr Henk Bekedam, WHO's Representative in Egypt commended the oral health department of the Ministry of Health and Population and the research team for their excellent work. He expressed WHO's commitment to providing support in developing and implementing a national plan.

There is also a need for more research to assess availability of service, its governance framework, facilities' infrastructure, equipment, staffing and management system to inform national planning. Dr Bekedam emphasized the importance of paying greater attention to sound infection control measures during dental work given the high prevalence of hepatitis C in Egypt, with some 160 000 new cases every year, about 75% of which take place in health facilities, including dental facilities.

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