

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Oral health knowledge, attitude and practice among secondary school students in Kuching, Sarawak

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Keywords

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Abstract Dental caries is a major health problem affecting an estimated 90% of school children worldwide. This cross-sectional study aimed to evaluate oral health knowledge, attitude, and practices among secondary school students in Kuching, Sarawak. Data was collected using a pretested questionnaire on 209 randomly selected students from four schools. Results showed no significant differences between the gender and age groups in terms of knowledge level, but significant differences were observed between the schools. The students had positive attitude towards the dental services, but their dental visits were still low due to fear of dental needle and handpieces. Toothbrush and toothpaste were still the most commonly used oral hygiene aids. As compared to parents and friends, dentist was perceived to have more influence on oral hygiene practices among the students. Girls consumed more sweets, snacks and soft drinks than boys. However, girls spent longer time to brush their teeth and brush more frequently. Oral health education should be a life-long practice and incorporated into the school environment with the support of teachers and parents.

Introduction

About 90% of school children worldwide and most adults have experienced caries, with the disease being most prevalent in Asian and Latin American countries (Petersen *et al.*, 2005). In Malaysia, the annual impact indicators, percentage of DMFT (decay, missing, filled, extraction) among 12-year-old children had improved from 47.4% with 3 or less decayed, missing, filled teeth in 1990 to 91.2% in 2000. In Sarawak, the mean DMFT score for 12-year-old had decreased over the period of ten years from 2.5 in 1997 (Oral Health Division, 1998) to 1.4 in 2007 (Sarawak Health Department, 2008). Although this decreasing trend indicate an improvement in oral health status, environmental risk

factors such as diet, nutrition, oral hygiene, tobacco and alcohol (Petersen *et al.*, 2005) can play an important role in prevention of dental caries.

Evidence had showed that strong knowledge of oral health demonstrates better oral care practice (Smyth *et al.*, 2007). Similarly for those with more positive attitude towards oral health are influenced by better knowledge in taking care of their teeth. Studies have showed that appropriate oral health education can help to cultivate healthy oral health practice (Ab-Murat and Watt, 2006). The change to healthy attitude and practice can be occurred by given adequate information, motivation and practice of the measures to the subjects (Smyth *et al.*, 2007). In order to create such health education, the assessment of knowledge, attitude and practice is essential (Al-Omiri *et al.*, 2006).

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