

Myths and Taboos in Dentistry

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ABSTRACT

As a developing country, India faces many challenges in meeting the health needs of its citizens. Cultural influence can be seen in all fields of health and medicine, and dentistry is no exception. Dentists are often faced with many myths and other unconfirmed beliefs passed down from generation to generation. Some of these myths have a significant impact on people's oral health. Understanding the myths and misconceptions about oral disease is important to providing good health care and education to patients and healthy people. It is true that cultural beliefs still affect people's oral health. This can represent a significantly increased pool of limited nursing knowledge, and understanding oral disease myths and misconceptions can be useful for both patients and healthy individuals. If the community is educated about prevention and proper treatment, the myths surrounding the concept of dentistry will be dispelled and dental health will improve throughout the community. Therefore, this review aims to clarify myths and taboos related to oral and dental health that are widespread in our society.

Key words: myths, false beliefs, folklore, taboos, dentistry, culture

INTRODUCTION

Oral diseases are very prevalent throughout the world and affect a significant proportion of the world's population. And the burden of this malnutrition falls more on the vulnerable and poor populations. Most of this population is illiterate. Their awareness and knowledge about the importance of oral health is generally low. Oral health is an important but neglected part of overall health and well-being among children and adults. Oral health problems such as dental caries, periodontitis and oral diseases are global health problems. This is found in various populations belonging to developed and developing countries.¹

Majority of India's population lives in rural areas. The population of India consists of people of different cultural and religious backgrounds. People believe in spiritual healing and alternative forms of medicine, preferring to visit local traditional healers. All these factors contribute to the prevalence of health myths in Indian society. Culture has its own influence on health and disease. Cultural influences are evident in every aspect of health and medical practice, and dentistry is no exception. Society and culture related behavior patterns have a major impact on population health outcomes.²

Myths and Taboos in Dentistry: Myths are defined as stories shared by a group of people which are a segment of their cultural identity. They have a significant impact on people's lives and their lifestyles including seeking treatment during illness.³ A myth is generally believed to be but a false belief, or an imaginary or fanciful understanding and undoubtedly a false perspective. It breeds on humans ignorance and imagination about what he/she does not know.¹ Myths are deeply embedded in society, so it is difficult to break the chain. Taboo is a strong social prohibition relating to any area of human activity or social custom that is sacred and forbidden based on moral judgment and religious belief.⁴ It was found that traditional Indian beliefs and taboos were correlated inversely with preventive dental health behavior in the population.⁵

Gradually with the development of education, these taboos and beliefs are disappearing, but still they persist and are commonly encountered. The field of dentistry is no exception to these cultural beliefs. Regarding tooth and tooth ache there have been various superstitions; the popular ones are described in this study. Traditional Indian beliefs and taboos

were found to correlate inversely with preventive dental health behavior in the population.⁶ There are many dental myths, some of which relate to children, some have to do with old age and some have to do with religion.¹

False Belief Related To Oral Hygiene --

Belief:- Stoppage of brushing due to bleeding gums

Fact:- It shouldn't be as it will aggravate the problem by more accumulation of calculus and plaque which further increases inflammation leading to progressive gum disease .

Belief:- Using neem twigs or charcoal or ashes and salt rather than toothpaste for brushing.

Fact:- Charcoal is coarse and salt also is abrasive so usage of such things may lead to abrasion of teeth and may cause damage to Periodontal ligament causing sensitivity. And, use of neem twigs or dattons may cause gingival trauma, though it is better to use for massaging and it's antimicrobial and antiplaque property useful to decrease caries activity.

Belief:- Brushing teeth using finger rather than toothbrush

Fact:- Finger can't reach all the tooth surfaces while toothbrushes can reach most of it and can clean better than finger

Belief:- Flossing harms the gums

Fact:- Flossing helps to clean those tooth surfaces where even toothbrush can't reach. Thus it maintains good gingival health too

Belief:- Longer and vigorous brushing makes your teeth more clean and white.

Fact:- Maximum time spend on brushing your teeth is 2-3 min, increase in duration may lead to attrition, abrasion and damage to gums

Belief:- Poor cleanliness of teeth is the only reason for foul odour or bad breath.

Fact:- Main reason for foul odour can be systemic disease or stomach problems/ acidity inspite maintaining the good oral hygiene.

Folk Tale Related To Extraction--

Belief:- Extraction of teeth leads to weakening of eye sight.

Fact:- The bone harboring the tooth sockets is different from the eye orbit thus under no circumstance eyesight can be lost by extraction of teeth[11] .

Fictitious Story Related To Tooth Decay--

Belief:- Caries is caused by the amount of sugar eaten.

Fact:- Not only the sugar intake amount but it's sticky form or frequent eating habit are the main culprit behind causing caries. On the contrary dental problems can be even worst if oral hygiene is poor even though sugar consumption is too low.

Belief:- Once restored tooth do not require future treatment.

Fact:- If not maintained restored tooth may develop caries again.

Believe:- Worms causes dental caries

Fact:- People believe tooth decay is caused by worms and demands to show them after removal of caries due to the fake stories they heard.

Misconception Related To Scaling --

Belief:-Complete oral prophylaxis or scaling loosens the teeth.

Fact:-Removal of hard calculus, slight mobility can occur as calculus was binding teeth together, but it disappears as healing of supporting periodontal structures occurs.

Misbelief Regarding Milk Teeth --

Belief:-No treatment required for deciduous dentition or milk teeth. The most widely believed myths about oral health in India are milk teeth need not be cared for because they last only for a few years and these teeth will anyway be replaced by permanent teeth.

Fact:-Care of milk teeth is very important, this is not entirely true as early loss of milk teeth will interfere with chewing and affect the child's nutrition, leads to drifting of the adjacent teeth and closure of some of the space that is required for the succeeding permanent teeth to erupt into. Such a loss of space will cause the permanent teeth to erupt in irregular position and result in crowding. In fact it is advised to visit dental clinic when the child is 6 month and also to clean baby's gum pad everyday by gentle massage.

Fairy Stories –

- A false belief that worms, present in tooth decay is believed to be removed through ear in some rural areas and this is more convincing to people to belief that worms has been removed.
- To get stronger and more whitish tooth, exfoliated deciduous tooth to bury under soil or under tree or to throw on the top of the roof then in return permanent tooth will erupt straight

DISCUSSION

These social convictions appear to be inflexible as they have a hale affect on the population as the convictions hail from the ancestors. The explanation behind these social convictions and conventional practices are complex and multi-factorial. These discoveries done by Indian studies were similar to previous studies led by Kumar et al⁷, Kocher⁸, Chen and Stone⁹, Nagaraj¹⁰ et al . The younger generation had a more positive recognition compared to older population which demonstrates that they are better informed about oral health issues. Likewise, the educated participants responded more positively towards the perception in question compared to un-educated participants. The geriatric populace for the most part acquires solid social and convention convictions, which leaves a lifelong effect on their oral health behaviour. To overcome this problem, education should be provided at all age levels which help in inner cognizance raising, thus reducing unfortunate conduct and practices.¹¹

A population may have many myths for a number of reasons, including inadequate education, cultural values, and societal misconceptions. In most cases, they are handed down from one generation to the next. Given how deeply ingrained it is in society, it is challenging to break this chain. It's crucial to be aware of the myths and misunderstandings that are common among the population because doing so will help the dentist treat people well and educate them about their health. Based on the results of this study, emphasis should be placed on dispelling the myths about oral health in both individual and communal settings. To provide dental health education, it is necessary for dentists, public health experts, non-governmental organisations (NGO's), and grassroots workers to coordinate their efforts.

CONCLUSION

The pervasiveness of myths about dentistry emerged among study population which could be related to poor early health seeking behaviour and poor compliance with treatment. Myths and misconceptions associated with dental treatment and custom practices were significantly among uneducated and more seasoned population. Lack of education and absence of information are observed to be the main convicts and they act as hindrances for the utilization of dental service.

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