

SCHOOL- BASED PROGRAMS: AN OPPORTUNITY TO DETECT CHILDREN ORAL HEALTH INEQUALITIES

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INTRODUCTION: Despite being preventable, dental caries are still, nowadays, highly prevalent among children, mainly in underprivileged populations. School based programs have been used as an instrument for survey and promote oral health. The aim of this work was to investigate oral health inequalities and related factors in school children using a school based program.

METHODS: “ParanhosSorridente” is a school-based program developed in public schools of the Paranhos parish in Oporto. This project aims to assess oral health in school children and also to develop preventive strategies, improving access to dental medical care. An oral examination was conducted to evaluate dental caries and the presence of other oral diseases. A structured questionnaire was answered, by the parents or legal guardians, to obtain socio-demographic and children oral health related behaviors. This project, carried out by supervised undergraduate dental school students, included an initial oral exam, at the University, and theoretical and practical sessions, at schools. Theoretical sessions were prepared, according to the different children age groups, and concerned oral health, such as caries’ etiology, periodontal disease, tooth-friendly diet, dental hygiene and its relevance to dental care; practical sessions included the use of dental plaque disclosing tablets and tooth-brushing techniques were taught.

Different coloured cards were given to each participant according to their dental care needs. A green card was given to children without any treatment needs; a yellow card indicated that the child needed dental treatments or fissure sealants placement, and a red card was delivered to children with severe oral condition.

Example of the activities developed at the schools and in the clinical settings



RESULTS: Parents low education was significantly associated with the presence of dental caries (DMFT ≥ 1 or dmft ≥ 1) and high unmet treatment needs, $p < 0.015$ and $p < 0.015$, respectively. Parental low education was significantly associated with unfavorable dental health related behaviors (frequency of dental brushing, dental visits in the last year, and daily use of dental floss). The proportion of dental sealants was significantly higher in children with more educated parents ($p < 0.003$).

		Mother schooling		P*	Father schooling		P*
		< 9 years	≥ 9 years		< 9 years	≥ 9 years	
Frequency of dental brushing	Once a day	169 (69.8%)	73 (30.2 %)	0.003	163 (72.2%)	63 (27.8%)	0.009
	More than once a day	245 (56.3%)	190 (43.7%)		255 (61.2%)	162 (38.2%)	
Dental appointment in the last year	No	152 (74.5 %)	52 (25.5%)	<0.015	141 (74.6)	48 (25.4%)	<0.015
	Yes	253 (54.6%)	210 (45.4%)		242 (60.9%)	175 (39.1 %)	
Daily use of dental floss	No	406 (62.8%)	241 (37.2%)	0.006	409 (66.5%)	206 (33.5%)	0.006
	Yes	12 (35.3%)	22 (64.7%)		13 (39.4 %)	20 (60.6%)	

* Bonferroni correction

CONCLUSIONS: School based programs can be valuable to detect oral health inequalities and related determinants among children.