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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A COMPARISON OF THE AWARENESS AMONG GOVERNMENT SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS ON ORAL HYGIENE AND PREVENTIVE ORAL HEALTHCARE: ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The aim of the study is to compare and assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices of government and private primary school teachers towards oral hygiene and preventive dental health care, in Mogappair, Chennai. **Materials and Methods:** Government primary school teachers (n=21) and private primary school teachers (n=31) were recruited in this study. The subjects completed a questionnaire that aimed to evaluate teacher's knowledge, attitudes and practices on oral hygiene and preventive dental health care. **Results:** The overall awareness among teachers regarding oral hygiene and preventive oral healthcare was less, and has to be increased. Private primary school teachers were better informed and correctly answered most of the questions in the questionnaire, when compared to government primary school teachers, thus proving that they have comparatively more awareness regarding oral hygiene and preventive oral healthcare than government school teachers in Mogappair, Chennai.

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INTRODUCTION

'Oral Cavity Is The Mirror Of The Rest Of The Body'

-Sir William Osler

The very statement, implies the utmost significance of maintaining a healthy and hygienic oral cavity. While adults can take care of themselves, children should be given care by parents and teachers as they are the people who spend maximum time with them.

'Strike While The Iron Is Still Hot': Childhood being the best learning phase in a person's life, when utilized correctly could bring in constructive changes in his/her life.

And it becomes practically easier for the dental healthcare personnels, to educate the teachers; to spread awareness regarding oral hygiene, in order to improve a child's oral health status; as a child is the quintessential envoy of oral health messages to it's home.

Traditionally, school teachers have been considered as important primary agents of socialization and have been shown to influence the future knowledge, attitude and behaviour of school children (Sprouse, 1973). Primary school children spend most of their time with their teachers (Sekhar *et al.*, 2014) become second to parents in caring for them. Thus it becomes inevitable that teachers possess good awareness and a positive attitude towards oral hygiene.

It Is Easier To Build Strong Children Than To Repair Broken Adults.

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-F.Douglas

Oral hygiene practises are best developed at the earliest. Thus it becomes utterly plausible to rely on teachers to educate the students and also their parents on the significance of good oral hygiene. Children with poor oral health are 12 times more likely to have restricted-activity days (World Health Organization, 2003). This knowledge increases the significance of good oral hygiene in a child's life by many folds. Which in turn makes it even more significant to educate teachers, on the need for good oral hygiene practices in children, as they could be the best guides to their students. This calls for measures to be taken to first understand the prevalence of awareness among school teachers regarding oral hygiene and preventive oral healthcare, in order to determine the steps to further educate them regarding the same, if necessary.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the out patient department Pedodontics And Preventive Dentistry, Thai Moogambigai Dental College, Chennai. The study included 21 government primary school teachers and 31 private primary school teachers. A questionnaire having 11 questions was prepared for school teachers. The questions addressed the oral hygiene habits of the children, oral habits in children, dental visits, brushing frequency, the response and involvement of the teachers in the oral health of their students, awareness of teachers on the prevalence of preventive dental healthcare. With the permission from the principal of the school/Director of education, the dental health questionnaire was explained to the teachers, distributed to them and collected after 20 minutes. Only the teachers who were present in school on the day of the study were included in the study. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS (the statistical package for the social sciences) software version 25.

AWARENESS AMONG TEACHERS ABOUT ORAL HYGIENE AND PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- Do you know how often to visit the dentist?
 - YES/NO
- How often do you give oral health care instructions to children?
 - Once A Week/One A Month/Only Rarely/ Never
- Do you instruct children to brush their teeth twice daily?
 - YES/NO
- Do you advise children to rinse the mouth after every meal?
 - YES/NO
- Are you aware about the presence of kids mouth wash?
 - YES/NO
- If yes, how did you react?
 - Scold/ Advise/ Inform The Parents/ Do Nothing
- Do you know about flouridated tooth paste?
 - YES/NO
- Do you know that flouridated tooth paste prevents dental caries?!
 - YES/NO
- Are you aware about flouridated tablets?
 - YES/NO.
- Do you know about pit and fissure sealants?
 - YES/NO
- Do you take initiative to discuss with the parents awareness about their child's oral health status?
 - YES/NO

RESULTS

The results were tabulated, percentage was calculated and conclusions were drawn.

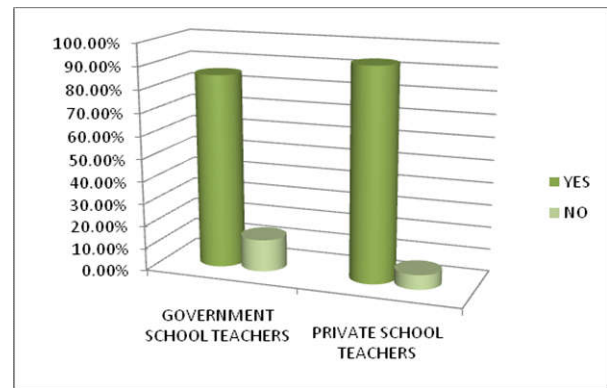


Figure 1. Depicts the teachers' instructions to their students to brush twice daily

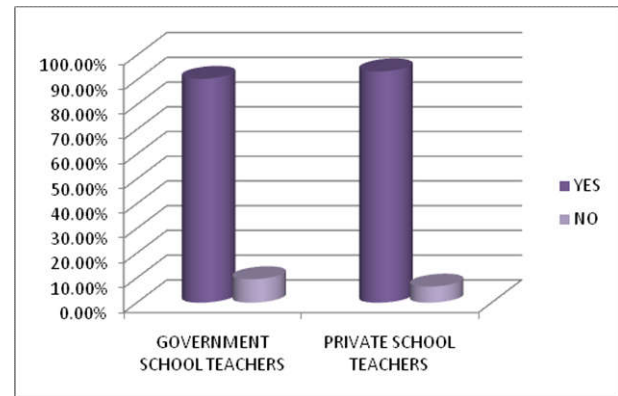


Figure 2. Show the teachers' instructions to their students regarding moth rinsing habit

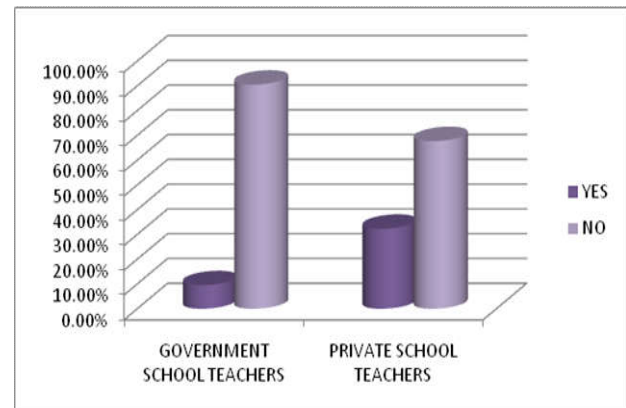


Figure 3. Shows teachers' awareness regarding kids mouthwash

This study presented a comprehensive overview of the awareness about oral hygiene and preventive oral healthcare among government and private primary school teachers in Chennai.

Awareness on dental visits: Among the 21 government primary school teachers recruited in the study, 38.1% were aware of how often to visit a dentist, whereas 61.9% were not aware of the frequency of dental visits. Out of the 31 private primary school teachers who were included in the study, 54.8% were aware of how often to visit the dentist and 45.2% were't aware of the frequency of dental visits.

Frequency of giving oral hygiene instructions: Table:1 depicts the teachers' instructions to their students to brush twice daily. 42.9% government primary school teachers never spoke to their students regarding oral healthcare, 14.3%, 19.0% and 23.8% government primary school teachers spoke

about the significance of oral hygiene and gave their students, oral healthcare instructions once a month, once a week and only rarely respectively. 6.5% private primary school teachers never spoke to their students regarding oral healthcare, 48.4%, 32.3% and 12.9% private primary school teachers spoke about the significance of oral hygiene and gave their students, oral healthcare instructions once a month, once a week and only rarely respectively.

Awareness regarding oral habits: 90.5% of the government primary school teachers advised their students against practising an oral habit like thumbsucking or nail biting, whenever they noticed it and 9.5% of them went beyond advising and scolded their students for repeatedly practising an oral habit at school, but no one of them took any initiative to inform the kid's parents regarding their children's oral habit. Whereas, 83.9% private primary school teachers advised, 9.6% of them scolded their students against practicing an oral habit at school and 3.6% of these teachers went as far as informing the child's parents regarding his/her oral habit.

Awareness about benefits of fluoride, flouridated toothpastes and tablets and pit and fissure sealants: 14.3% of government primary school teachers were aware about the presence of flouridated toothpastes and 85.7% were not aware of the same, 19% knew that using a flouridated toothpaste could prevent dental caries and 81% did not, 4.8% knew the existence of flouridated tablets and 95.2% did not, 4.8% knew about pit and fissure sealants as a preventive dental procedure and 95.2% did not. 45.2% of private primary school teachers were aware about the presence of flouridated toothpastes and 54.8% were not aware of the same, 38.7% knew that using a flouridated toothpaste could prevent dental caries and 61.3% did not, 9.7% knew the existence of flouridated tablets and 90.3% did not, 12.9% knew about pit and fissure sealants as a preventive dental procedure and 87.1% did not.

Initiative to interact with parents regarding their child's oral healthcare: 66.7% of the government primary school teachers took the initiative to interact with their student's parents regarding their child's oral health status and 33.3% did not. 74.2% of the private primary school teachers took the initiative to interact with their student's parents regarding their child's oral health status and 24.8% did not.

DISCUSSION

Oral health is important for overall health and good quality of life. Some common oral diseases are dental caries, periodontal diseases, malocclusion, oral sub-mucous fibrosis, oral cancer, cleft lip and cleft palate etc. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Oral health is a state of being free from chronic mouth and facial pain, oral and throat cancer, oral sores, birth defects such as cleft lip and palate, periodontal (gum) disease, tooth decay and tooth loss, and other diseases and disorders that affect the oral cavity (<https://mohfw.gov.in/basicpage/national-oral-health-programme-nohp>. 2019). Oral diseases affect all age groups (<https://mohfw.gov.in/basicpage/national-oral-health-programme-nohp>. 2019) Oral health awareness is very significant to improve the oral health of individuals thereby, improving the overall quality of life. School teachers play a prime role in introducing and imparting oral health knowledge to primary school children. This study was conducted with the objective of assessing the attitude of primary school teachers on the awareness of oral hygiene and

preventive oral healthcare and compare the same between government and private school teachers. Of the 52 primary school teachers who were recruited in the study, 21 worked for government schools and 31 worked for private schools. More private school teachers (93.5%) instructed their students to brush twice daily, when compared to government school teachers (85.7%). This is similar to a study conducted by Ankita Mota *et al.* (2016) in Mumbai, India, wherein they reported that 88.7% of their participant teachers believed that a child should brush at least twice a day (Mota, 2016) Nora M *et al.* (2017) in Riyadh City, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, have also reported similar results in their study, according to which government school teachers (32.5%) had lower awareness on how many times to brush one's teeth, when compared to private school teachers (48.1%). (Meshal, 2017). 54.8% private school teachers knew how often to visit the dentist which is comparatively higher than government school teachers, among whom only 38.1% were aware of how often to visit the dentist. This is contradicting the study conducted by Nora M *et al.* (2017) in Riyadh City, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where they reported that government school teachers (83%) had slightly higher awareness on how often to visit the dentist when compared to private school teachers (77.8%).(6) Private school teachers gave oral hygiene instructions to their students more frequently (once a month-48.4%) than government school teachers (once a month-14.3%). Lai *et al.*(2016) have showed in their study, that the dental knowledge and habits significantly improved in children who received oral hygiene program and supervised tooth brushing for one semester (Lai, 2016). Thus if teachers providing oral hygiene instructions to their students, is made a part of their curriculum, it could bring in anabolic changes in our population.

As children spend most of their time at school and eat at least one meal at school, they need to be instructed on the benefits of rinsing their mouths after every meal and encouraged to do so. 90.5% and 93.5% of government school teachers and private school teachers advised their students to rinse their mouths after every meal. There was no significant difference between government and private primary school teachers in this aspect. Vidhya Sekhar *et al.* (2014), in their study in Pondicherry (Sekhar, 2014) have found that 87% of the teachers, involved in their study, themselves rinsed their mouths after every meal. From this, it could be inferred that when teachers themselves practice a habit, they will be bound to encourage their students to do the same. But studies regarding good oral hygiene practices among teachers in this population has to be further conducted. Teachers in this study, had very less awareness regarding the presence of kids mouthwash, wherein 9.5% of government and 32.3% private primary school teachers knew that kid's mouthwash was available in the market. 90.5% and 9.5% of government primary school teachers who noticed oral habits (thumb sucking and nailbiting) in their students, advised them against the habit and scolded them for it respectively. But none of them went as far as informing the parents about their child practicing a habit at school. 83.9%, 9.7% and 6.5% of private primary school teachers who noticed their students practicing an oral habit at school, advised them against the habit, scolded them and informed their parents about their habit respectively. Teachers knowledge about fluoride being a preventive agent for dental caries was very less, though it was comparatively more in private school teachers (38.7%) than in government school teachers (19.0%). This is similar to the reports by Harold D *et al* (1999) in Jerusalem, Israel, who in their study

have stated that only 13.3% of the participant teachers knew that fluoride has a role in arresting dental caries (Sgan-Cohen, 1999). This study clearly shows that teachers lack knowledge about fluoride and its role in dentistry, which calls for steps to be taken to improve their knowledge regarding the caries preventive property of fluoride and its significance. Awareness about the presence of fluoridated toothpaste among private school teachers (45.2%) is almost three times that of government school teachers (14.3%). Awareness about pit and fissure sealants and fluoride tablets was less in both private and government school teachers, wherein together, only 9.6% and 7.7% new about pit and fissure sealants and fluoride tablets. Paul lang *et al.* (1988), in their study in Michigan have stated that the effectiveness of fissure sealants and fluoride tablets as preventive regimens was unknown by 59% and 48% of respondents, respectively. (9) It is a worrisome fact that before almost thirty years, the knowledge regarding fluoride tablets and pit and fissure sealants is still very less in our population when compared to the study by Paul lang *et al.* in 1988. Awareness about pit and fissure sealants and fluoride tablets were greater in private school teachers 12.9% and 9.7% respectively when compared to government school teachers, where only 4.8% of them were aware about both. 66.7% government school teachers and 74.2% private school teachers took initiative to know about the knowledge of and intimate the parents about their children's oral health status, which though being a high percentage, could be increased to a great extent, as a combined co-ordination is necessary between the teachers and the parents in order to improve the oral hygiene of budding children. This result seems to be slightly greater when compared to the study conducted by Ankita Mota, Kunal C. Oswal, Dipti A. Sajnani and Anand K. Sajnani (2016) in Mumbai, India, wherein they reported that 54.8% of their participant teachers never discussed the oral health of children with their parents during parents meet (Mota, 2016).

Conclusion

In our study, private primary school teachers were better informed and correctly answered the questionnaire in comparison to the government primary school teachers, thus proving that they have comparatively more awareness regarding oral hygiene and preventive oral healthcare than government school teachers.

The overall awareness among teachers regarding oral hygiene and preventive oral healthcare is less, and has to be increased. As teachers in general are more receiving to new knowledge, dental health campaigns would definitely aid to improve their knowledge and bring about constructive changes in this issue.

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