

The relationship between oral-health-related quality of life and general health in the elderly

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It is known that oral health can have an impact on older individuals' quality of life. However, elderly patients despite presenting poor oral health, in general, might not perceive this as a major problem to their quality of life, particularly as they get older. Whether their general health plays a role in understanding this paradox is not known. Understanding this relationship can facilitate integration of oral services in primary care and improve access to dental treatment to older individuals.

Objectives: To assess the oral-health-related quality of life in a population of independent-living Irish elderly and its possible association with their overall health status.

Methods: Baseline data from all older patients recruited to participate in two different randomised controlled clinical trials assessing interventions for caries and tooth replacement were analysed. In both trials, data were collected from 2 different centres, Cork University Dental School and Hospital (CUDSH) and St Finbarr's Hospital (SFH), in Cork. Patients' responses to OHIP-14 and EQ-5D questionnaires were assessed and linear regression analysis used to check the relationship between them.

Results: The patient sample comprised 146 (44.6%) male and 181 (55.4%) female participants, with a mean age of 73.96 (Min: 60.58, max: 91.53, SD:6.9). The mean OHIP-14 score recorded for the entire patient sample was 9.36 (SD=7.4) and EQ-5D 0.78. When checking for the association between OHIP scores and EQ-5D, the crude model showed a decrease in 5.149 in OHIP scores (improvement in oral health quality of life) with an increase of 1 unit EQ-5D (improvement in general health). In the adjusted models, OHIP differences increased significantly when adjusting for hospital and study.

Conclusion: General health might be associated with the way patients perceive their oral health. However, factors such as age, being on medication and oral health status may play a role in this association.

Keywords: Oral-health-related quality of life, general health, elderly