

ABSTRACT

Dental caries is a destructive process causing decalcification of the protective part of the tooth (enamel, dentine) leading to decay of the tooth. This continuous damage to the tooth causes cavities, pain, tooth loss and poor health. What prompted the researcher to study on dental caries is a result of the increasing numbers of patients with dental caries as revealed in the dental officers records in the past three years, despite the fact that oral care given and dental care seem an easy activity an individual can perform.

The study aimed at finding out the factors influencing dental caries among patients attending the dental clinic at Mulago, with specific emphasis on the socio-demographic factors, knowledge levels of the clients, patients' oral hygiene practices and the socio-economic factors.

A cross-sectional study design was used with both quantitative and qualitative methods employed. Purposive sampling was used to obtain the study population of age group six years and above who were diagnosed with dental caries particularly those who consented to participate in the study. Questionnaires were designed and administered to the respondents and results were presented on charts, tables and graphs then analyzed using the SPSS computer programme.

The study found out that: the socio-demographic factors significantly influenced dental caries with the (p-value=0 .000) for all the variables. Dental caries majorly affected the female (55%) youth aged 16-25 years (40%) residing in the urban areas (73%). Dental caries cuts across irrespective of the level of education and occupational status.

Knowledge level on dental caries proved to be a significant factor influencing dental caries. The knowledge gap on the causes of dental caries greatly influenced dental caries with the chi-square value of 157.088 while the rest of the factors had p-values .000 indicating that all of them affected dental caries significantly. Knowledge proved to be of great importance as regards to how much preventive methods were employed by the respondents.

The study also identified that there were inadequate oral hygiene practices which significantly influenced dental caries with most of the factors having p-values of 0.000. the number of times respondents brushed their teeth was found to have the biggest effect on dental caries with the highest chi-square value of 193.75, but what patients did when they fell sick of dental caries had no significant effects on dental caries with the p-value 0.151.

In summary the inadequate oral hygiene practices coupled with the knowledge gap need to be addressed by the government through the health workers who must empower the community with knowledge through health education. This helps the community to employ preventive measures of dental caries and maintain their oral health. This can only be possible if the government prioritize dental care and allocate more resources towards oral care.