

Developing an Oral Quality of Life Instrument for Adolescents

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Objective: Although several measures of oral quality of life (OQOL) exist for use with adults, there are no comparable measures for adolescents. The purpose of this project is to use item impact scores to develop an OQOL instrument for use in adolescents.

Methods: 57 items assessing the impact of oral health on physical functioning, social/role functioning, psychological well-being, health perceptions, and symptoms (pain/distress) were developed using existing questionnaires, a literature review, and focus groups. The frequency and importance of each item was assessed in one-on-one interviews with 40 adolescents. For each item, an impact score was calculated by multiplying the percentage of positive responses to the item and its mean “bother” rating. Items rated as somewhat or very important were retained and items rated as unimportant were removed from the instrument.

Results: The sample averaged 15 (sd 1.7) years, 60% male. Ethnic representation included 45% Black, 43% White and 12% Other-mostly Hispanic. Impact scores (IS) were highest for items assessing being upset (IS 80), bad breath (IS 70) and pain/distress (IS 66). The impact of oral health on psychological well-being and social/role functioning was experienced by the majority of participants. These manifested as worry (53%), anxiety about dental problems (51%), uncomfortable about self-image and appearance (53%), avoiding smiling (38%) and being teased (55%). The 32 items rated the most frequent and important included 5 items assessing symptoms, 7 items assessing physical functioning, 11 items assessing social functioning, 7 items assessing psychological well-being and 2 items assessing health perceptions.

Conclusion: Our study indicates that the majority of adolescents report that problems with oral health impacts their well-being and daily life, suggesting that oral health is an important dimension of their quality of life. This instrument will be revised and validated in subsequent work.