

Oral health status of Asylum Seekers

Harpreet K. Singh, RDH, MS¹, Michelle Henshaw, DDS, MPH², Thayer Scott, MPH³, Linda Piwowarczyk, MD, MPH⁴, Michael Grodin, MD⁴, and Sondra Crosby, MD⁴ – ¹Health Policy Health Services Research, Boston University School of Dental Medicine, 715 Albany street, 560, Rm 323, Boston, MA 02118, 6174141135, hksingh@bu.edu, ²Health Policy & Health Services Research, Boston University School of Dental Medicine, 715 Albany Street, 560, Boston, MA 02118, ³Department of Health Policy and Health Services, Boston University Goldman School of Dental Medicine, 560, Harrison Avenue, third floor, Boston, MA 02118, ⁴Boston Medical Center, The Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights, 1 Boston Medical Center Place, Dowling 7, Boston, MA 02118

Objective: To assess the oral health status of asylum seekers and refugees who seek services at the Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human rights (BCRHHR).

Methods: Since Oct 2000, BCRHHR has provided comprehensive medical, mental health, and dental care, coordinated with legal and social services to over 750 clients who are survivors of torture. Between Feb '02 and Dec '05, 195 clients were referred for dental assessments which were conducted by a dental hygienist in a social workers' office using disposable mirror and penlight. Referral options were discussed and an appointment was made with culturally sensitive dentists trained in providing care to trauma victims. Clients received oral health education, toothbrush, toothpaste and floss.

Results: The 195 clients were born in 41 different countries. Africa was the most prevalent region represented, accounting for almost 80% of the screened subjects. 32.8% of the clients reported pain in their mouth. Of those with oral pain, 76.7% had tooth pain, 15% had gum pain and 18.3% reported pain somewhere else in their mouth. Upon oral examination, 76.7% of the clients had untreated cavities and slightly over two thirds of individuals had some form of gum inflammation. 16% of clients' experienced oro-facial trauma from torture they had endured.

Conclusion: Asylum seekers and refugees have high levels of dental diseases. Addressing the oral health needs of this population constitutes an essential component of their overall health and contributes to their physical, mental, and social well-being.

Supported by NIDCR/NIH Grants U54 DE14264, K23 DE00454

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the relationship between oral health and overall health.
- Identify the oral health status of asylum seekers and refugees.
- Discuss the prevalence of torture among asylum seekers and refugees.

Keywords: Oral Health Needs,

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