Community-based dental program: Parental perceptions of child’s oral health

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BACKGROUND
- Oral disease decreases the ability of a child to learn.
- Rural and minority children are at an increased risk for oral disease.
- Socioeconomic status may affect parent/guardian perception of oral health and how it relates to quality of life.
- Parent/guardian perception of the relationship between oral health and quality of life could affect dental service utilization.

OBJECTIVE
- To explore parent/guardian perceptions of their child’s oral health and compare perceptions to the child’s clinical oral health status.

METHODS
- A cross-sectional study, conducted September 2019 to January 2021.
- Structured telephone and in-person interviews for questionnaire completion.
- Convenience sample of 150 adult parents/guardians of children enrolled in a school-based oral health prevention program operated.
- Clinical data collected by calibrated dentists, fourth-year dental students, and public health hygienists using portable equipment in elementary schools and the Bertie County Health Department.

RESULTS
- The mean age was 8.4 years (range 2-18).
- 49% males, 80% Black, 19% White, and 0.6% Hispanic.
- 82% of children were enrolled in a government-funded dental insurance program
- 11.3% had no dental insurance.
- Over 27% had active dental disease.
- 70.7% of parents/guardians whose child had active dental disease reported the oral health of their child to be excellent, very good, or good.
- 2.7% of children had urgent dental needs, and 50% of the parents/guardians of these children reported their child’s oral health status as excellent, very good, or good.
- Of the children with no active dental disease, over 33% of parents/guardians reported their child’s oral health as fair or poor.

CONCLUSIONS
- Parent/guardian perceptions often do not align with a child’s oral health.
- Strategies to improve parent/guardian awareness of child oral health are needed.

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