

PARENTS' LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, AND PRACTICES OF ORAL HYGIENE AMONG CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN A SCHOOL IN MOMBASA, KENYA

Author: Shahla Khalid
BDS V, University of Nairobi, Kenya
SLGOH 2024 CLASS
khalidshahla1@gmail.com

Introduction

- Kenya bears a significant burden of dental diseases among children, with staggering prevalence rates: 75.7% for gingival bleeding, 40% for dental caries, and 41.4% for dental fluorosis¹. This burden is worse in children facing physical, intellectual, and sensory challenges who require tailored care, with their oral health often being overshadowed by their primary disabilities.
- Children with disabilities have been reported to present with increased oral pathologies². This may stem from oral developmental anomalies, difficulty to adequately perform routine self-care tasks such as brushing due to a limited ability to learn & execute simple tasks independently, or as a result of poor knowledge, attitude and practices among parents and caregivers who heavily influence oral health practices.
- This study sought to assess the knowledge, attitude and practices regarding oral hygiene among parents of children with special needs in Mombasa, Kenya.

Objectives

- To evaluate parental knowledge regarding oral hygiene maintenance among parents of children with special needs in a school in Mombasa, Kenya.
- To explore parental attitudes towards oral hygiene maintenance among parents of children with special needs in a school in Mombasa, Kenya.
- To assess parental practices related to oral hygiene maintenance among parents of children with special needs in a school in Mombasa, Kenya.

Methodology

- This study was of descriptive cross-sectional design conducted in Mombasa, Kenya in collaboration with a special needs school to access 43 parents, who were the study participants, for data collection.
- A questionnaire that sought demographic information and knowledge, attitudes and practices related to oral hygiene in children with special needs was used. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants prior to filling the form.

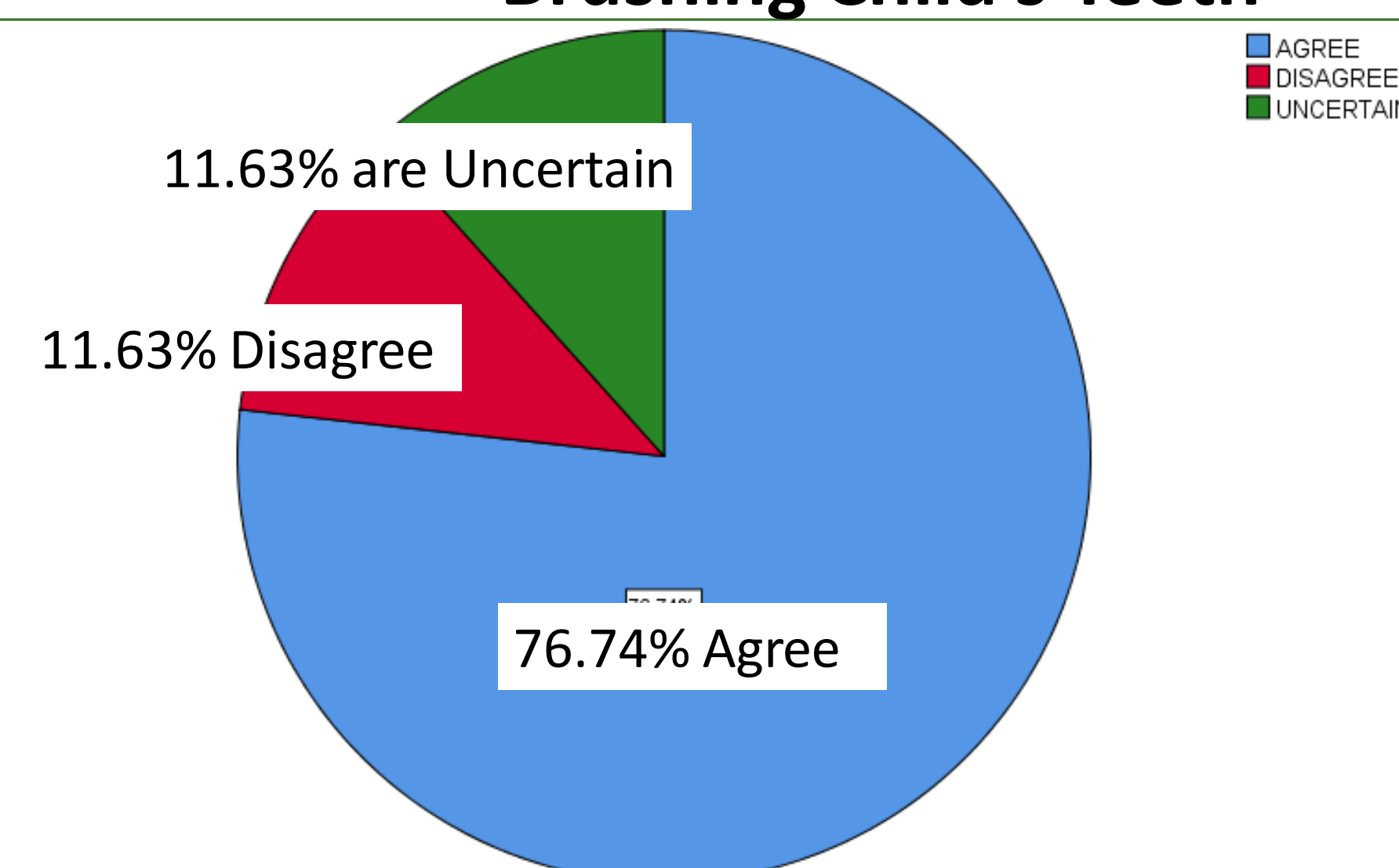
Results

- The study included 43 participants, predominantly female parents (76.7%). Majority of parents had attained higher education (62.8%), and most of the special needs children were male (69.8%).

Knowledge & Attitudes Towards Oral Hygiene

- The majority (86.0%) correctly identified decay-causing foods, 67.4% acknowledged preventive methods of tooth decay, 55.8% recognized gum disease risks, and 53.5% endorsed prevention methods of gum disease. About 60.5% were aware that brushing teeth twice a day is recommended and 76.7% recommended biannual dental visits, with 90.7% emphasizing their importance. Nearly all (95.3%) agreed on the need to brush twice a day. The majority (93.0%) disagreed with the notion that milk teeth do not require good care.
- Most participants (88.4%) agreed that poor oral health influences a child's daily activities, and all (100.0%) agreed on its link to general health. A majority (88.4%) agreed on the importance of healthy milk teeth for proper chewing, and 76.7% agreed that cleaning a child's teeth should be done by parents (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of Participants in Favor of Parents Brushing Child's Teeth



Oral Hygiene Practices

- The majority (97.7%) used toothbrushes for cleaning their child's teeth, with all using toothpaste; 79.1% chose fluoridated ones. 62.8% brushed their child's teeth twice daily. However, 60.5% didn't regularly floss their child's teeth, and only 39.5% visited the dentist twice a year. 74.4% cleaned their child's tongue while brushing. Toothbrushes were changed every 2-3 months (44.2%) or every 4-6 months (44.2%).
- Only 48.8% rinsed their child's mouth after eating. Sugary food consumption varied, with 46.5% reporting once daily and 23.3% not giving sugary foods at all.

Figure 2. Frequency of Flossing Child's Teeth

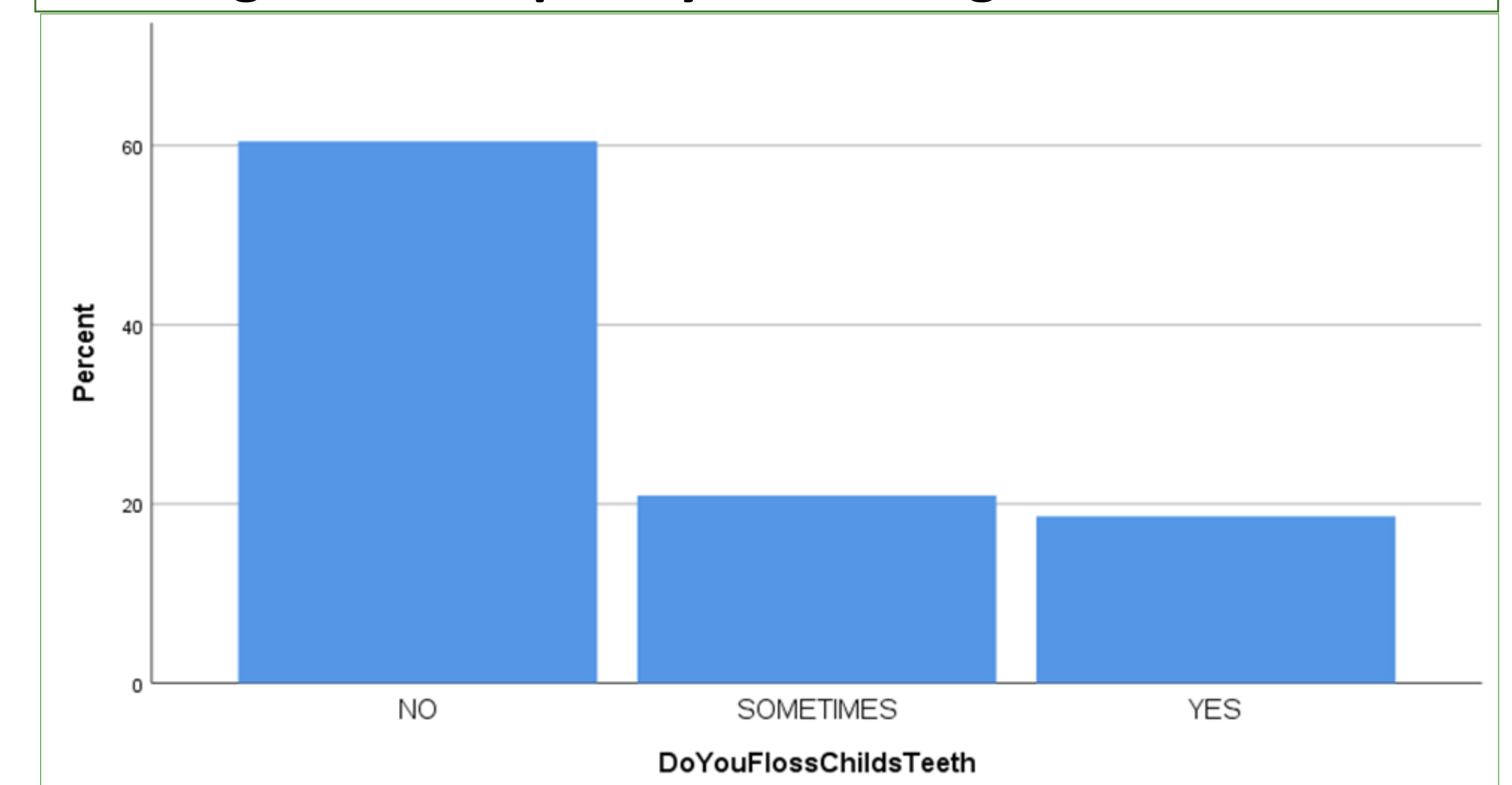


Figure 2. Of the participants, 60.5% of parents reported not flossing their child's teeth, 20.9% occasionally flossed their child's teeth while only 18.6% regularly flossed their child's teeth

Comparison between Knowledge/Attitude & Practices

Aspect	Knowledge/Attitude (%)	Practice (%)
Regular Dental Visits	High level of knowledge on the ideal frequency of visits (76.7%)	Fewer participants actually seek regular care (39.5%)
Frequency of Brushing (Twice a Day)	High level of knowledge on agreeing to the importance of brushing twice a day (95.3%)	Participants actually implementing twice a day brushing (62.8%)
Flossing teeth regularly	Level of knowledge on gum disease prevention methods (53.5%)	Implementation (18.6%)

Table 1. There was a high level of knowledge and positive attitude towards oral hygiene practices, but discrepancies in actual practices. Most parents agreed on the importance of regular dental visits and brushing twice a day, but a smaller proportion reported regular flossing (18.6%).

Additionally, while almost all parents used toothbrushes and toothpaste to clean their child's teeth, fewer engaged in tongue cleaning and rinsing after eating (48.8%), indicating a gap between knowledge/attitude and actual practices.

Conclusion

The study suggests that while parents of children with special needs in the studied school in Mombasa, Kenya, exhibit good knowledge and positive attitudes towards oral hygiene, there is room for improvement in translating this knowledge into consistent oral hygiene practices for their children.

Scan Here for References

