

INCLUSIVE SMILES – AN ORAL HEALTH AWARENESS CAMPAIGN FOR CAREGIVERS AND CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a diverse range of conditions, as defined by the World Health Organization, characterized by varying degrees of difficulty with social interaction and communication. Numerous studies have highlighted that children with ASD and other Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN) are particularly susceptible to oral health issues, including dental caries, periodontal diseases, and dental traumatic injuries.

Objectives

1. To improve oral health practices among children with ASD and their caregivers in Ibadan and Lagos, by increasing their knowledge of good oral hygiene habits
2. To provide comprehensive information to participants on accessible and appropriate sources for seeking professional dental care in Ibadan and Lagos.
3. To determine the baseline knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) regarding oral health among CSHCN with ASD and their caregivers in Ibadan and Lagos, Nigeria.

Methods

Quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design which will begin with a pre-intervention survey to establish the baseline knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding oral health among the target population. Then, an educational intervention will involve education of the caregivers and children on appropriate oral hygiene practices, dietary advice & dental healthcare utilization, followed by a post-intervention survey to measure the impact of the intervention. The project site will be two homes for CSHCN in Oyo and Lagos, Nigeria respectively.

Results

While we await ethical approval to carry out the study, similar studies done in other countries have demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted oral health education programs in improving oral health of children with ASD and other CSHCN. For instance, a study by Ferro et al. demonstrated the effectiveness of preventive oral health programs tailored to disabled individuals in Italy, resulting in a reduction of oral health ailments among the participants.



Fig 1. Proposed chart for visualising data generated from survey

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study will provide valuable insights into the oral health knowledge, attitudes, and practices of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their caregivers in Nigeria. By disseminating this information, we can raise awareness and promote positive oral health behaviors within this population. Furthermore, the findings can serve as a foundation for developing targeted policies and healthcare strategies to optimize oral health outcomes for children with ASD in Nigeria.



REFERENCES