

## Special Article - Dental Health

# Dental Caries Experience among 3-5 Years Old Preschool Children in India

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## Abstract

**Background:** Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is a significant dental public health problem which affects infants and pre-school children all over the world including India and also there is scarcity of epidemiological data regarding ECC in India. Objective: To assess prevalence of Early Childhood Caries (ECC) among 3 to 5 years old preschool children in Rohtak city, Haryana, India.

**Materials & Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among 489 preschool children aged 3-5 years in Rohtak city, Haryana, India. Children were randomly selected from preschools of Rohtak. Dental Caries experience was recorded using 'def' index Gruebbel A.O, 1944 and questionnaire comprising socio-demographic details and oral hygiene practices was also used. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Chi-square tests were used for the comparison of proportions. P value < 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

**Results:** The overall prevalence of ECC was found to be 32 % with mean deft 1.085±2.27. No significant association of dental caries was found with socio-demographic factors like gender, parental education, parental occupation, socio-economic status, no. of children, birth order, type of family and oral hygiene practices.

**Conclusion:** The dental caries experience was significantly high among girls when compared to boys with direct relationship with age. Demographic factors did not play a significant role in the occurrence of dental caries.

**Keywords:** ECC; Socioeconomic status; Preschool; Children; Prevalence; Socio demographic factors; India

## Abbreviations

ECC: Early Childhood Caries; DMFT: Decayed, missing and filled teeth; DEFT: Decayed, indicated for Extraction, Filled, Teeth

## Introduction

Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is defined as "The presence of one or more decayed (non-cavitated or cavitated lesions), missing (due to caries) or filled tooth surfaces in any primary tooth in a preschool-age child between birth and 71 months of age" [1]. It is most common chronic disease in young children which may develop as soon as teeth erupts and begins as white-spot lesions in the upper primary incisors along the margins of gingival [2]. If not treated, in time, it may lead to pain, compromised mastication, malocclusion, speech problems, poor health and lower self-confidence [3]. Even though, ECC is not a life threatening disease, it is still a major dental public health problem throughout the world. It significantly affects infants and pre-school children their by leading to social, behavioral, medical, psychological, economical, and dental complications. Quality of life is also affected imposing a financial burden on their families as well [3,4].

Owing to sound scientific rationale and fact that caries is preventable, ECC is exhibiting diminishing trends in most of the developed countries, but still increasing in many developing countries and is reported to be as high as 70% [5,6]. Studies have shown that

there is a considerably high burden of ECC in India [6-8]. Descriptive studies may be helpful in designing and planning effective preventive strategies for the subjects at higher risk so as to reduce the burden of disease [9]. Rohtak city is located in Haryana, a state in North India, lies 70 km north west from New-Delhi, with a population of about one million [10]. There is a scarcity of epidemiological data regarding ECC in Rohtak city and hence the present study was carried out with an objective to assess prevalence of Early Childhood Caries among 3 to 5 years old preschool children in Rohtak city, Haryana, India.

## Materials and Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional study was designed during November 2015 to March 2016 and carried out among 3-5 years old preschool children in Rohtak city, Haryana. The study protocol was reviewed by Institutional ethical committee and was granted approval for the same (PGIDS/IEC/2015/54). Official permission was obtained from the District Education Officer and also from concerned school authorities to conduct this cross sectional study. After explaining the purpose and details of the study, a written informed consent was obtained from the parents of all children aged 3-5 years.

A multi stage cluster sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness from all parts of city. In first stage, Rohtak city was divided in to 9 clusters, and then randomly 2 clusters were chosen (Cluster 5 and Cluster 9). There are 29 schools in 9 clusters based on

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic characteristics of study population.

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age(in years)	3	121	25.8
	4	205	43.7
	5	143	30.5
Gender	Male	271	57.8
	Female	198	42.2
Mother's education	High school	63	13.4
	Above High school	402	85.7
Mother's occupation	Employed	119	25.3
	Unemployed	346	73.8
Socio-economic status	Upper	35	7.5
	Upper middle	316	67.4
	Lower middle	97	20.7
	Upper lower	19	4.1
	Lower	2	0.4
No. of children	1	109	23.2
	2 or more	360	76.8
Child position	1 <sup>st</sup>	257	54.8
	2 <sup>nd</sup> and above	212	45.2
Type of family	Nuclear	189	40.3
	Joint	280	59.7

geographical locations. A total of 5 schools from cluster number 5 and 4 schools from cluster number 9 were randomly chosen through lottery method. Finally from each selected school every odd roll numbered children in the age group of 3-5 years were enrolled to reach a sample of 469. Children present on the day of examination and who were willing to participate in the survey were included whereas uncooperative, children with history of systemic diseases and developmental anomalies and whose parents did not give consent were excluded. Sample size of 469 for the study was calculated at 41% prevalence derived from pilot study and 5% margin of error.

Data collection included combination of questionnaire administration and clinical examination for the caries assessment. Questionnaire comprised of data regarding socio-demographic characteristics and oral hygiene practices of study subjects and was sent to their homes to be filled by their parents. Type III clinical examination was carried out at preschool by a single calibrated examiner using mouth mirror and explorer under natural light. Dental caries experience was recorded using 'def' index Gruebbel A.O, 1944 [11]. The training and calibration of investigator was done prior to the pilot study in the Department of Public health Dentistry. The inter examiner reliability was 85%. After questionnaire recording, health education brochures were distributed to all preschool children to be given to their parents for creating awareness.

Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Chi-square tests were used for the comparison of proportions. P value < 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

**Table 2:** Prevalence of Early Childhood Caries and association between different characteristics of study population.

Variable	Categories	Caries prevalence	χ <sup>2</sup> (d.f.) p-value
Age(in years)	3	22.3	7.024 (2) * < 0.05
	4	35.6	
	5	35.0	
Gender	Male	30.3	0.878 (1) > 0.05
	Female	34.3	
Mother's education	High school	31.7	0.002 (1) > 0.05
	Above High school	32.0	
Mother's occupation	Employed	30.1	2.248 (1) > 0.05
	Unemployed	37.4	
Socio-economic status	Upper	22.9	1.755 (3) > 0.05
	Upper middle	32.6	
	Lower middle	32.0	
	Upper lower	38.1	
	Lower	32.0	
No. of children	1	24.8	3.396 (1) > 0.05
	2 or more	34.2	
Child position	1 <sup>st</sup>	30.0	1.068 (1) > 0.05
	2 <sup>nd</sup> and above	34.4	
Type of family	Nuclear	32.3	0.012 (1) > 0.05
	Joint	31.8	

\*significant at p < 0.05

## Results

The present study was conducted among 469 study subjects who were in the age group of 3-5 years where 271(57.8%) were boys and 198(42.2%) were girls (Table 1). The mean age of study population was 4.05±0.749 years (Table 2). The overall prevalence of ECC was found to be 32 % with mean deft 1.085±2.27. Mean deft was higher in girls (1.131±2.294) than boys (1.052 ±2.255) (Table 3).

Higher caries prevalence (35.6%) was found in 4 years old children than 3 and 5 years and it was found to be statistically significant. Caries prevalence showed no significant association to mother's education. Children of non-working mothers had higher caries prevalence (37.4%) than those of working mother (30.1%). It was observed that caries prevalence was not significantly associated to socio-economic status in present study. Caries prevalence in children who were single to their parents (24.8%) was lower than those who had one or more siblings and also it was lower in children with first birth order. It was observed that caries prevalence in children in nuclear family 32.3% which was higher than those in joint family (31.8%) (Table 2). The mean def is highest among 4 years old female subjects (Table 3). A total of 62 children requiring immediate care were referred to the department and treated.

## Discussion

Epidemiological studies from all over the world have showed that dental caries is one of the most widely distributed chronic diseases. Despite availability of evidence based preventive strategies, the burden of dental caries is increasing in India which makes it necessary

**Table 3:** Dental caries experience among study population.

Age (in years)	Male	Female	Total
3	0.731 ± 1.726	0.535 ± 1.437	0.661 ± 1.626
4	1.387 ± 2.659	1.465 ± 2.798	1.420 ± 2.712
5	0.851 ± 1.977	1.087 ± 1.953	0.965 ± 1.962
<b>Total</b>	1.052 ± 2.255	1.131 ± 2.294	1.085 ± 2.2695

to adopt and implement effective oral health policy. Caries prevalence in present study was found to be lower than many Indian studies reported by Tyagi P et al [5], Singh S et al [4] and Chandermohan et al [12]. This can be attributed for the fact that Rohtak is an endemic fluoride area and beneficial effects of naturally occurring fluorides may be the reason. The prevalence of ECC differs widely worldwide, ranging from 2.1% in Sweden to 85.5% in rural Chinese children [12]. This could be due to dissimilarities in ethnicity, dietary factors, cultural practices, perceived importance of oral health along with variations in case definitions and diagnostic criteria used for caries evaluation.

The mean deft in 4 years old children was significantly higher than 3 and 5 years age group which was similar to the results reported by Singh S et al [4] and Schroth et al [13]. A higher prevalence among a younger age group of an irreversible condition might indicate erroneous result despite utilizing best feasible sampling methodology. The 'd' score contributed maximally for 'def' scores which was similar to that reported by Singh S et al [4], Mahejabeen R et al [14] and Tyagi R [15]. This reflects that services available may remain unutilized due to lack of felt needs among population, disparity in treatment seeking behavior in developing versus developed countries which implicates the need for different approaches in these areas.

Higher caries prevalence was observed in girls than boys and the findings were similar to that reported by Gaidhane et al [6] and Aggarwal D et al [16] though the difference was not statistically significant. These findings were not in agreement with studies done at Lucknow where males were more affected [17]. Authors attributed this to difference to diet, geographical location and cultural differences giving more priority to males.

Kuriakose S et al [3] highlighted a strong association between oral hygiene practices and the working status of their mother. In current study, children of working mothers had lower caries prevalence than non-working mothers which was similar to that reported by Kuriakose S et al [3] and Gaidhane et al [6] which might be related to better awareness regarding oral health in them. Furthermore children of exclusive homemakers have increased servings of diet frequently leading to improper dietary practices.

Higher caries prevalence was reported in lower socio-economic class in present study which corroborates with findings of Gaidhane et al [6] and Sogi et al [18]. This disparity in dental caries experience according to socio-economic status can be explained by differences in their oral habits, sugar consumption, use of fluoride in its various forms and oral hygiene practices in addition to utilization of oral health services. Number of vendors per unit length of road increases from medium to high density areas [19] which might be responsible for ease of availability of cariogenic food, thereby increasing caries experience in high density areas which are usually inhabited by lower

socio-economic strata.

Children with first birth order showed lesser caries experience than children with subsequent birth orders in present study which was in disagreement with Dilley et al [20] who hypothesized that most children at higher caries risk would be the first-born children are at higher risk because parental knowledge and experience in child rearing would be less. Though, no significant association was found between the birth order of the child and dental caries further studies should be done to explore the relationship.

The present study, demonstrated high caries prevalence in children who are a part of nuclear families which might be due to more care of children in joint family systems and also nuclear family tend to fulfil more demands of children. Also lower caries experience was associated to good oral hygiene practices like brushing twice daily, supervised brushing, changing toothbrush in three months or when bristles fray present study similar to that reported by Kuriakose S et al [3]. They found 76.1% of children having brushing habit twice a day were caries free and recommended that parental assistance and guidance are essential to reduce the risk of developing caries.

ECC is a chronic disease which affects infants and children worldwide. In present cross-sectional study, no significant association of dental caries was found with socio-demographic factors like gender, parental education, parental occupation, socio-economic status, no. of children, birth order, type of family and oral hygiene practices showing a change in trend of dental disease which needs to be verified by further studies. As burden of dental caries is high, so treatment of dental caries would impose a great financial burden, hence effective preventive strategies should be developed and implemented. Poor perception among parents regarding various oral health problems leads to discrepancy in felt and normative needs and hence health education programs should be conducted regarding importance of oral health.

## Conclusion

The dental caries experience was significantly high among girls when compared to boys with direct relationship with age. Demographic factors did not play a significant role in the occurrence of dental caries.

## Recommendations

Current health policy in India focuses on mother and child health care, however oral health being an important component of overall health is being neglected and thus it is imperative that policy makers should consider integrating oral health care interventions into other national health programs.

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