



F1 Disability and Dental Neglect: A Population-Based Study of 70 Patients

Emilio Nuzzolese, DDS, PhD, viale J.F. Kennedy 77, Bari, 70124, ITALY; Vitantonio Marcario, and Maria M. Lepore, RDH, Ambulatorio Nuzzolese, Viale JF Kennedy 77, Bari, 70124, ITALY; Michele Stallone, MSN, BSN, RN, Pediatric Hospital Giovanni XXIII - Bari - Italy, Via I Traversa Vittorio Veneto, 63, Giovinazzo - Bari, 70054, ITALY; Andrea Lisi, PsyD, and Egle Alfarano, PsyD, Sezione di Criminologia, Università di Bari, Piazza G. Cesare, Bari, 70100, ITALY; and Giancarlo Di Vella, PhD, Section of Legal Medicine - University of Bari, P.zza G. Cesare 11, Bari, 70124, ITALY*

After attending this presentation, attendees will learn more about child dental neglect. This abuse does not involve physical infliction of pain, but exposes nevertheless, the individuals to harm.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community demonstrating how a disability predisposes sufferers to dental neglect although preventive dentistry and appropriate diet greatly contribute to better oral health.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry has defined dental neglect as the “willful failure of the parent or guardian to seek and follow through with treatment necessary to ensure a level of oral health essential for adequate function and freedom from pain and infection.” Dental caries, periodontal diseases, and other oral conditions left untreated in children will have a negative effect on nutrition and facial growth. Dental neglect can be observed in the disabled in children and adults with severe physical or mental disorders where personal hygiene is the responsibility of the parents or guardians. In these individuals the severity of the disability often results in the inability of autonomous oral care. Parents and/or guardians should assist any the personal hygiene which these individuals are not able to conduct alone, including brushing teeth and appropriate diet.

To ascertain the association between patients with disabilities and dental neglect a population study of 70 patients with severe disabilities were observed. Dentists and dental hygienists, with the collaboration of nurses and psychologists, visited these individuals in a rehabilitation centre in Noicattaro (Bari) where they spend the day on educational and rehabilitation programs. The goal of the oral examination was to assess the condition of teeth and oral soft tissue. Parents and/or guardians were also interviewed in order to register and evaluate cultural and psychosocial backgrounds, together with knowledge of oral hygiene and tooth brushing regimes.

The results of the clinical observations showed an association between disability and dental neglect. There is evidence that having a disability predisposes sufferers to dental neglect although preventive dentistry and appropriate diet greatly contribute to better oral health. Cultural attitudes and poor knowledge of basic oral hygiene appear to be associated with dental neglect, but also insufficient provision of dental services specifically tailored to disabled patients' needs. Many caregivers neglect their oral health themselves, visiting a dental office only when in pain for emergency treatment. The Italian National Health System provides free dental care to patients with disabilities but few dental clinics are adequately equipped for disabled patients. Also community dentistry is given a low priority and there seems to be insufficient prevention and educational programs on these issues.

It is the opinion that child dental neglect is an underestimated phenomena and that oral health professionals should increase their knowledge of community dentistry and child maltreatment. Finally families should receive specific oral hygiene instructions tailored to those with disabilities.

Disability, Child Abuse, Dental Neglect