

Prevalence of Myths Related to Dental Health among the Medical and Dental Students of Karachi-Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this study was to assess the prevalence of myths related to dental health, among medical and dental students of Karachi.

Study Design: Cross-sectional descriptive and analytical study

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted at three Medical and Dental colleges of Karachi (Jinnah Medical and Dental College, Ziauddin University and Dow university of Health Sciences) from August 01, 2015 to August 31, 2015.

Materials and Methods: A questionnaire consisting of close-ended questions on prevalence of myths about oral health was distributed among 300 medical and dental students of three different colleges of Karachi. Students from all levels i.e. from the first year till the final year were questioned. Convenient sampling was done. Students who did not consent to participate in the study were excluded from the study. SPSS version 20 was used for data analysis.

Results: The prevalence of myths regarding extraction of teeth was found out to be 6% and scaling was found out to be 26%. Dental students tend to believe more in these myths as compared to medical students despite their educational background. However, the incidence of belief in dental myths decreases with the increase in the level of education.

Conclusion: Dental myths are prevalent among all levels of medical and dental students more so among dental students.

Key Words: Dental Myths, Dental Students, Medical Students

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INTRODUCTION

Myth is a false belief which is generally fabricated by imagination of people but these myths are usually considered sacred and genuine by the community.¹ A dental myth usually originates from a traditional, non-scientific superstitious belief or from unqualified personnel that are associated with the dental practice.^{2,3} The anxiety among people with regard to dental health professionals has created an abundance of the dental myths. These myths were passed on by the word of mouth and have become very deeply rooted in our society. It is very difficult for the patients to differentiate between the reality and the myth. Scientifically, these are untrue perspectives that have become extensive.^{4,5} Dental myths can put our patient's oral health in danger and prevent them from getting professional dental advice and treatment.⁶ Inadequate literature is available about the prevalence of myths related to dental healthcare. Pakistan is a country having below average literacy rate, so it can be assumed

that these myths would be prevalent in such a society. Moreover, dental problems in Pakistan are common and indicate that the huge numbers of people have little or no awareness of oral health care.

Most people are not capable of differentiating between facts and myths so they follow their ancestors whole heartedly and believe in traditions religiously.⁷ It is indeed of prime importance to motivate the general population so that they realize the importance and advantages of treatment from qualified dental professionals.

Generally it is believed that myths are more prevalent in the illiterate population, so the rationale of the present study is to determine the prevalence of dental myths among students of medical and dental backgrounds in order to address these in future.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was done among the medical and dental students from first year through final year of Medicine and Dentistry, respectively. These students were selected on the basis of convenient sampling and their willingness to participate. The students were classified according to their level of education. The first year B.D.S and M.B.B.S students were taken in the

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initial level. The second year and the third year B.D.S and M.B.B.S students were included in the middle level where as the final level comprised the fourth year B.D.S and fourth and final year M.B.B.S students.

The data collection was conducted during the month of August 2015. The students of Jinnah Medical and Dental College, Ziauddin University and Dow university of Health Sciences were randomly selected for participation. The source of data was primary i.e. through a self-administered questionnaire in English Language consisting of 5 close-ended questions based on the respondents' belief on dental myths. The response options provided were yes, no and don't know.

Two common myths were found from online sources.⁸. Demographic details based on gender, study background and level of education of the students was also obtained. SPSS Software Version 20 was used for descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

A self administered questionnaire was distributed to a convenient sample of 300 students. 70 (23.3%) were male students while 230 (76.7%) were female students. 50.6 % (n=152) were included from dentistry and 49.3 % (n=148) were MBBS students.

When the students were questioned on the prevalence of dental myths 32.3 % [n=97] of all students answered that they believed in dental myths. 53 % [n=159] respondents did not believe in myths related to oral health whereas 14.6 % [n= 44] had no information. Among the medical students 27 % [n=40] strongly believed in dental myths compared to 37.5 % [n=57] dental student believers. The percentage of non-believers in MBBS and BDS is 54.7 % [n=81] and 51.3% [n=78] respectively. The students who did not know about dental myths were 18.2% [n=27] medical and 11.1% [n=17] dental. The difference between dental and medical students is noted, 37.5% of dental students believe in myths and only 27% [n=40] of medical students believed in dental myths. [Table2] 2% [n=3] of all the medical students believed that extraction of tooth affects the vision whereas 72.2% [n=107] medical students did not believe in this myth. The rest of the students had no information at all. Among the dental students 9.2% [n=14] were strong believers and 62.5 % [n=95] went against it, rest of the students had no information at all.

When the students were questioned about the myth that whether scaling causes loosening of teeth or not 25.6 % [n=38] of the medical students replied in affirmative while 64.1% [n=95] of the medical students rejected the myth. The rest had no information at all. Responses from dental students provided results that showed 27.6 % [n=42] students believed that scaling loosens teeth

and 70.3 % [n=107] did not believe in this myth. 2.1 % [n=3] of the students had no knowledge.

The students were asked if they had ever experienced the above stated myths themselves or if their acquaintance had experienced it. 16.8% [n=25] medical students had experienced the myth either themselves or their acquaintance had experienced it while 79 % [n=117] had not experienced it. However, 26.3 % [n=40] of dental students had experienced it (either self or through acquaintance) and 69 % [n=105] had not experienced it.

The impact on the students who had experienced the myths was that 10.1 % [n=15] of the medical students never visited a dentist again. 6.7 % [n=10] visited dentist for professional advice. 4.7 % [n=7] took home remedy. 11.4 % [n=17] did not show any impact despite their belief in dental myths and 4% [n=6] changed the dentist. Among the dental students 9.2 % [n=14] never visited a dentist, 15.1% [n=23] visited dentist for treatment, 4.6 % [n=7] took home remedy, 11.1% [n=17] did not show any impact despite their belief in dental myths and 7.8% [n=12] changed the dentist.

Table No.1: Demographic characteristics:

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	70	23.3
Female	230	76.7
Total	300	100
Educational Background		
Dental Students	152	50.6
Medical Students	148	49.3
Total	300	100
Level of Education		
A. Initial Level		
Medical Students	68	22
Dental Students	52	17.3
B. Middle Level		
Medical Students	36	12
Dental Students	73	24.3
C. Final Level		
Medical Students	44	14.6
Dental Students	27	9

Table No.2: Prevalence of Dental Myths:

Specialty	Number	Percentage
Medical Students		
Yes	40	27
No	81	54.7
Don't know	27	18.2
Dental Students		
Yes	57	37.5
No	78	51.3
Don't know	17	11.1

DISCUSSION

Dentistry is the arts and science which promotes the management of oral diseases and maintains dental health in our community.⁹ There is a vast difference in oral hygiene practices and protocols among various countries. These differences occur due to their population's level of awareness about oral health, traditional and cultural beliefs and socio-economic development of the country.¹⁰ Myths can be prevalent in a culture for a majority of different reasons like lack of education, religious misconceptions and deep seated social beliefs which are usually carried on from one generation to the following generation.¹¹ Myths in medicine and particularly in dentistry are quite common.¹² It is seen that although the students are from medical and dental backgrounds and belong to the educated sector but they still believe in dental myths and have misconceptions about dental health.

It is often challenging, yet extremely important to change the mindset and educate the population.¹³

The population (dental and medical students) was chosen as they are an ideal representative of the educated youth of Karachi.

In the current study it was seen that belief in dental myths are more prevalent in the female gender as 33.4% (n= 77) of all females believed in myths whereas only 28.5% (n= 20) males believed in the myths which shows that females are more superstitious and emotionally biased. However; Nasir et al. reported that 24.8% of their male respondents believed strongly in the dental myths while 20% of females were strong believers of myths.⁷ The level of students in which these beliefs are more prevalent is the initial level, as 34.1% (n=41) of the first year believed in myths, 31.1% (n=34) of the middle level i.e. second and third years firmly believed, whereas only 30.0% (n= 22) of the final level believed in myths. This shows that as they advance in academics their misconceptions are cleared and they educate themselves with facts rather than fiction. The results showed that more students believed that scaling loosens teeth compared to the other myth. This also revealed that even medical/dental students still believe in false stories despite the recent advancements in the field of medicine and dentistry. Saravanan and his co-worker also observed that a higher number of respondents from his study population believed that scaling has an effect on tooth structure (34%) compared to the effect of extraction on vision (20%).¹⁴

The students were asked about their personal experience or the experience of their acquaintance. The results show that 69% (n=104) of the dental students and 79% (n=116) of the medical students had no experience of dental myths, either themselves or through their acquaintances. Only 26.3% (n= 48) dental students and 16.8% (n=32) of the medical students had

experienced the myth. It is seen here that more dental students seem to have experienced these myths despite the fact that they are from the dental background. They seem to believe that scaling loosens teeth. This may be because the dental students have observed that when calculus is removed, mobility of the teeth increases.

The students who had experienced the myth were asked in the questionnaire about the impact of the experience. 9.2% (n=14) dental and 10.1% (n=15) medical students replied that they never visited the dentist again, whereas 15.1% (n=23) dental and 6.7% (n=10) medical replied that they visited the dentist for professional advice as before. Only 4.6% (n=7) dental and 4.7% (n= 7) medical students started taking home remedy. 11.1% (n=17) dental and 11.4% (n=17) medical students did not do anything. Only about 7.8% (n=12) dental and 4.0% (n=6) medical students changed the dentist after the experience. So, the impact shows that roughly about a quarter of the study population either did not do anything or they continued to seek professional advice from qualified dentists.

CONCLUSION

The current study shows that dental myths are more prevalent among the dental students than in the medical students despite their professional education background. It was also observed that as the level of education increases, the belief in these myths tend to gradually diminish.

Recommendations: It is our duty to promote dental health education among all sectors of the community including our health care professionals (belonging to medicine and dentistry), so that people visit qualified dental surgeons for professional advice and treatment without the fear of losing their vision and loosening of their teeth.

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