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PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN ORAL HEALTH

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Abstract: In this article describes oral diseases remain among the most prevalent non-communicable diseases worldwide, significantly affecting quality of life and imposing a substantial economic burden on healthcare systems. Despite advances in dental technologies and clinical treatment, preventive strategies in oral health are still insufficiently implemented, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Epidemiological data reveal persistent inequalities in oral health outcomes related to socioeconomic status, education level, and access to preventive care. This study is based on a narrative analytical review of recent epidemiological reports, international oral health surveys, and peer-reviewed scientific publications published between 2015 and 2024. The analysis focuses on preventive strategies, risk factor distribution, and population-level oral disease prevalence. Comparative analysis methods were used to evaluate trends in dental caries, periodontal diseases, and oral cancer across different regions.

Keywords: oral health prevention, epidemiology, dental caries, periodontal disease, public health dentistry, preventive strategies.

Introduction. Oral health is an integral component of general health and well-being. According to global health estimates, oral diseases affect nearly 3.5 billion people worldwide, making them one of the most widespread health problems. Dental caries, periodontal diseases, and oral cancers are the leading causes of pain, discomfort, and tooth loss, negatively impacting nutrition, speech, and social interaction. Despite the preventable nature of most oral diseases, their prevalence remains alarmingly high. This paradox highlights significant gaps in preventive strategies and public health implementation. Epidemiological studies consistently demonstrate that oral diseases disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including children, elderly individuals, and people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Preventive dentistry aims to reduce the incidence and severity of oral diseases through risk factor control, early detection, and health promotion. However, the effectiveness of preventive measures largely depends on population awareness, accessibility of preventive services, and supportive health policies. Understanding epidemiological patterns is crucial for designing targeted and sustainable preventive interventions.

This article examines current preventive strategies in oral health and explores key epidemiological challenges that limit their effectiveness. By analyzing recent data and international experiences, the study seeks to identify priority directions for improving oral health prevention at the population level.

Methods. This research employs a qualitative and descriptive analytical approach based on secondary data sources. Scientific articles, epidemiological reports, and international guidelines published between 2015 and 2024 were reviewed. Sources included peer-reviewed journals, global oral health databases, and reports from international health organizations.

The selection criteria focused on:

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Studies addressing preventive strategies in dentistry
Epidemiological data on oral disease prevalence
Population-based oral health surveys
Public health and community dentistry interventions

Data were analyzed thematically, with particular attention to trends in disease prevalence, effectiveness of preventive measures, and disparities in oral health outcomes. Comparative analysis was used to identify differences between regions and population groups.

Results. Epidemiological Overview of Oral Diseases

Epidemiological data show that dental caries remains the most common chronic disease globally, affecting both children and adults. Periodontal diseases are highly prevalent among adults, with severe forms leading to tooth loss and systemic health complications. Oral cancer, although less common, presents significant mortality rates due to late diagnosis. Children in developing regions exhibit higher caries prevalence, primarily due to limited fluoride exposure and inadequate oral hygiene practices. Adults and elderly populations show increasing rates of periodontal disease associated with smoking, poor oral hygiene, and systemic conditions such as diabetes.

Preventive Strategies in Oral Health

Preventive strategies can be broadly classified into primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Primary prevention includes oral health education, fluoride use, dietary counseling, and promotion of healthy behaviors. Secondary prevention focuses on early detection through screening programs, while tertiary prevention aims to reduce complications and recurrence.

Community-based fluoride programs, including water fluoridation and fluoride toothpaste distribution, have demonstrated significant reductions in caries incidence. School-based oral health education programs contribute to improved oral hygiene practices among children. However, preventive service utilization remains low in many populations. Lack of awareness, financial barriers, and limited access to dental care services are major obstacles to effective prevention.

Discussion. The findings confirm that oral diseases remain a major public health concern despite their largely preventable nature. Epidemiological patterns reveal strong associations between oral disease prevalence and social determinants of health, including income, education, and healthcare access.

Preventive strategies are most effective when integrated into broader public health frameworks. Countries with established preventive programs demonstrate lower disease prevalence and reduced treatment costs. However, many health systems still prioritize curative care over prevention, leading to increased economic burden and health inequalities. Behavioral risk factors such as poor oral hygiene, unhealthy diets, tobacco use, and limited dental visits play a critical role in disease development. Addressing these factors requires multispectral collaboration, involving healthcare providers, educators, policymakers, and communities.

Epidemiological challenges also include inadequate data collection and surveillance systems in some regions. Reliable data are essential for monitoring trends, evaluating interventions, and allocating resources efficiently.

Conclusion. Preventive strategies are the cornerstone of effective oral health management and disease control. Epidemiological evidence highlights the urgent need for comprehensive, population-based prevention programs tailored to specific risk groups. Strengthening oral health education, expanding access to preventive services, and improving epidemiological monitoring can significantly reduce the burden of oral diseases. Policymakers and healthcare professionals

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must prioritize prevention as a cost-effective and sustainable approach to improving global oral health outcomes.

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