Dental caries experience of children in Northland/Te Tai Tokerau

Authors: Gowda SS et al

Summary: These researchers detail the dental caries experience of children from four Northland communities; Kaitaia, Kaikohe, Kawakawa/Moerewa and Dargaville. Of 369 5–6-year-olds and 171 12–13-year-olds who underwent dental examinations, approximately two-thirds were Māori. Almost 88% of 5–6-year-olds had experienced dental caries, and this was lower among the Pakeha/Other group, those attending higher-decile schools, and those from Dargaville. Overall caries experience was highest among Māori children, those attending lower-decile schools, and those from Kaikohe, Kawakawa/ Moerewa or Kaitaia, as was the number of untreated decayed surfaces. Almost one in four children had lost at least one tooth due to caries, and this was higher among Māori children and those from schools in more deprived areas, and lower among children from Dargaville. Caries experience was greatest among the second molars in either arch, and lowest among the mandibular incisors. Among the 12–13-year-olds, 85% had experienced dental caries. The number of untreated surfaces with decay (more than 3, on average) was considerably lower among children from Dargaville. Caries experience was greatest among the first molars in either arch (followed by the second premolars), and absent among the mandibular incisors.

Comment: Oranga niho and inequalities in dental health between Māori and non-Māori is a major concern. The prevalence of dental caries is much higher in our communities; it is also a leading cause of hospitalisation. The opportunity to address oranga niho is pertinent and will be supported by the government’s focus on Whānau Ora, including interdisciplinary care, and “better, sooner, more convenient” primary health care that will reduce acute demand at hospitals.

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Te Toi Hauora-Nui

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