Blue-collar Southern Working Women: Periodontitis and Barriers to Accessing Dental Care

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Oral Health Works (OHW) is a five-year workplace intervention and oral health promotion for blue-collar women employed in small factories in three counties in rural eastern North Carolina. **Purpose:** The purpose of OHW is to evaluate the impact of a social ecological change model and community-based participation to improve personal oral hygiene and reduce inflammatory markers. This analysis assessed factors associated with self-report of no dental care in >1 year. **Methods:** Baseline data from initial questionnaires and periodontal exams among employees of 3 intervention (N = 115) and 1 control worksite (N = 78) are presented. **Results:** Mean age was 40.6 yrs (SD=10.3). Racial groups were 33% African-American, 10% Hispanic/Latino, and 46% White. Nearly 83% spoke English; 24% did not complete high school; 33% were current or former smokers. While 78% carried dental insurance, 37% had not been to the dentist in more than a year. Participants reported cost (30%) and fear (10%) barriers to regular dental care; 30% sought dental care only when in pain. Periodontitis defined as $\geq$ 25% of sites with PD$\geq$4mm and bleeding occurred in 47% of those with no dental care in >1 year (OR=3.0, 95%CI=1.6, 5.6). Participants included in this definition of periodontitis averaged 19 sites with attachment loss $\geq$ 3mm (SD=24.5). An unconditional logistic regression model revealed that those with no dental care in >1 year were 3.9 times less likely to participate in dental insurance benefits (95%CI=1.2, 11.9), 2.5 times more likely to be < 40 yrs of age (95%CI=1.0, 6.4), and 9.6 times more likely to report cost as a barrier to dental care (95%CI=4.0, 23.2). **Conclusion:** In spite of workplace availability of dental insurance, blue collar workers report barriers to oral care, including cost, and evidence signs of active oral inflammation and periodontitis. Supported by: NIH P60 DE13079 and CDC U48/CCU409660.

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