Dental Utilization by Low-Income Preschool Aged Children

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According to the 2000 Surgeon Generals report on oral health, dental is the most prevalent unmet health need in children. Very young, low income, minority children experience the most severe dental disease. In addition to disproportionate development of early childhood caries, disparities also may exist in accessing oral health services. Objective: This investigation sought to describe the prevalence of dental use and its disparities in low-income pre-school aged children. Methods: This study is an analysis of three linked statewide databases: birth certificates for 1992, Medicaid enrollment files for 1992-97 and Medicaid claims files for 1992-97. Our sample consists of all children who were Medicaid eligible at birth in 1992 and who meet our inclusion criteria. Dental use was defined as having one or more dental claims in Medicaid during the observation period of five years. Results: 49,795 children were Medicaid eligible and were included in the study. Of those 273 (0.5%) were Asian, 21,032 (42%) were African American, 1,247 (3%) were Hispanic, 1,040 (2%) were American Indian and 24,617 (49%) were White. Overall, 15% of the children in our sample had a dental visit before age five: 10% Asians, 28% African Americans, 17% of Hispanics, 36% Americans Indians and 20% Whites. Conclusion: Our analyses revealed that overall use of dental services by low-income children remains low, but is higher among American Indians and African Americans children when compared to White children. Supported by MCH Grant # 5 T17 MC 00015-12 and NIDCR Grant # 1K22DE14743.

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