



**EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORAL HEALTH EDUCATION
PROGRAMS IN IMPROVING PERIODONTAL HEALTH IN SAUDI ARABIA.
EVIDENCE BASED SCIENTIFIC REVIEW.**

Ibrahim Abduljalil Albaijan

Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia

Mohammed Ali Alqhtani

Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia

Tariq Abdulhameed Almozayen

Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia

Ali Saad Ahmed AlSalim

Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia

Hussain Awaid Alsubiai

Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia

Shahad Abdulrahman Alrsheed

Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia

Rothana Mutlaq Alshanbari

Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia

Abdulaziz Yahya Alshaikhi

Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia



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Mushari Naif Alharbi
Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia

Hassan Ahmed Alshayeb
Ministry of Health,
AlKhobar, Saudi Arabia

Abstract:

Oral health is a significant public health concern in Saudi Arabia, with periodontal disease being one of the most prevalent conditions. Community-based oral health education programs have been proposed as effective interventions to reduce the incidence and severity of periodontal diseases. This review examines the impact of such programs on improving periodontal health in Saudi Arabia, highlighting key strategies, outcomes, and challenges. By analyzing existing literature, this paper aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of these programs and their potential for further implementation.

Keywords:

Community-Based Programs, Oral Health Education, Periodontal Health, Saudi Arabia, Public Health, Oral Hygiene, Disease Prevention

Introduction

Oral health is an essential component of overall health and well-being, with periodontal diseases being among the most common and preventable conditions globally. In Saudi Arabia, periodontal diseases such as gingivitis and periodontitis are prevalent and have a significant impact on the population's quality of life, affecting both oral function and aesthetics. The primary cause of these conditions is the accumulation of plaque and bacteria, which lead to inflammation and infection of the gums and surrounding tissues. Poor oral hygiene, coupled with other risk factors such as smoking, unhealthy diet, and lack of regular dental care, has contributed to the widespread occurrence of periodontal diseases in the Kingdom. Epidemiological studies indicate that approximately 70% of adults in Saudi Arabia experience some form of periodontal disease, with a higher prevalence among older populations and those living in rural areas (1, 2). This high burden of periodontal diseases is compounded by inadequate access to dental care, particularly in underserved regions, further emphasizing the need for effective public health strategies aimed at disease prevention and early intervention.

In response to these challenges, community-based oral health education programs have emerged as a crucial public health intervention to reduce the burden of periodontal diseases in Saudi Arabia. These programs are designed to provide individuals with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to prevent and manage oral diseases. Community-based approaches, which involve local

populations in the planning and delivery of oral health interventions, have been shown to be particularly effective in addressing barriers to healthcare access and promoting sustained behavioral changes. By educating individuals about proper oral hygiene practices, the importance of a balanced diet, and the harmful effects of smoking and poor oral habits, these programs can significantly reduce the risk of developing periodontal diseases. Furthermore, the incorporation of regular screenings and preventive care through mobile clinics and outreach initiatives has made these programs even more accessible, especially in remote and rural areas where traditional dental services may not be readily available. As such, these community-based interventions hold the potential to improve the periodontal health of the Saudi population, reduce healthcare costs, and enhance the overall quality of life.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

This review aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of community-based oral health education programs in improving periodontal health outcomes in Saudi Arabia. We followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the review process. The review includes studies published until 2024, using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies. We searched the following electronic databases: PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Saudi-specific health databases (Saudi Digital Library). The search terms included combinations of "community-based oral health education," "periodontal health," "oral hygiene," "oral health education programs," "Saudi Arabia," "periodontal disease," and "oral health improvement." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the search. The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles, published in English and Arabic, and focused on human subjects.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

Evaluated the effectiveness of community-based oral health education programs on periodontal health outcomes.

Were conducted in Saudi Arabia.

Used a pre-post intervention design, randomized controlled trial (RCT), or other comparative study designs.

Reported outcomes related to periodontal health, such as clinical attachment level (CAL), probing depth, bleeding on probing, gingival index, or plaque index.

Published in peer-reviewed journals or as conference abstracts.

Studies were excluded if:

They were focused on individual-level interventions or hospital-based education programs.

They did not include periodontal health as an outcome or were focused on other aspects of oral health (e.g., dental caries alone).

They lacked primary data or were case reports, reviews, or opinion papers.

Data Extraction

Two independent reviewers (Reviewer 1 and Reviewer 2) performed the data extraction. The following data were extracted from each eligible study:

Discussion**Oral Health in Saudi Arabia: Prevalence and Challenges**

The prevalence of periodontal diseases in Saudi Arabia is alarmingly high. According to various studies, over 70% of the adult population in the Kingdom experiences some form of periodontal disease. Risk factors such as tobacco use, poor nutrition, and inadequate oral hygiene contribute to the growing burden of periodontal health problems (1, 2).

Despite the high burden, there are significant challenges in the prevention and management of periodontal diseases in Saudi Arabia. These include limited access to dental services in rural areas, low public awareness of periodontal disease risks, and insufficient integration of oral health education into school curriculums (3, 4).

Community-Based Oral Health Education Programs

Community-based oral health education programs are designed to address these challenges by raising awareness and promoting preventive oral health behaviors. These programs typically involve educational campaigns, oral hygiene workshops, and regular screenings to identify early signs of periodontal disease. In Saudi Arabia, several initiatives have been introduced at both the local and national levels.

Types of Community-Based Programs

School Programs: Programs targeting children and adolescents in schools aim to educate young people about the importance of oral hygiene and diet. These programs often include oral health check-ups and workshops led by dental professionals (5).

Workplace and Community Outreach Programs: Health campaigns targeting workers in various sectors, as well as rural and urban populations, provide oral health education materials, demonstrations, and screenings to increase awareness and promote better oral hygiene practices (6).

Telemedicine and Mobile Health Programs: With advances in technology, mobile health (mHealth) platforms and telemedicine consultations have been increasingly used in Saudi Arabia to extend oral health education to remote areas (7).

Impact of Community-Based Programs on Periodontal Health**Improvements in Knowledge and Awareness**

Several studies have documented significant improvements in participants' knowledge of oral health following participation in community-based programs. These programs have successfully informed the public about the link between poor oral hygiene and periodontal diseases, leading to changes in attitudes and behaviors (8, 9).

In one study, a community-based oral health education program in Riyadh resulted in a 35% increase in participants' knowledge of proper brushing techniques and the importance of flossing. Additionally, surveys conducted post-intervention showed a notable reduction in smoking rates and sugar consumption, both of which are key risk factors for periodontal disease (10).

Behavioral Changes and Oral Hygiene Practices

One of the primary goals of community-based education is to promote behavior change. Studies indicate that these programs have led to improvements in oral hygiene practices, such as increased frequency of tooth brushing and use of interdental cleaning devices (11, 12).

A study conducted in Jeddah observed that participants in a community program were more likely to brush their teeth at least twice daily and adopt other preventive measures, including using mouthwash and regular dental check-ups (13).

Reduction in Periodontal Disease Incidence

Research suggests that community-based interventions have had a positive impact on reducing the incidence of periodontal diseases. Regular educational interventions have been shown to lead to reduced gum inflammation and less severe periodontal disease over time (14, 15).

A longitudinal study in Al-Khobar found that after two years of oral health education in schools, the prevalence of gingivitis among children decreased by 30%, and fewer students presented with signs of early periodontitis (16).

Challenges and Limitations

While community-based oral health education programs have proven effective, there are several challenges that hinder their full potential:

Limited Reach in Rural Areas

Despite efforts to reach underserved populations, many rural communities in Saudi Arabia continue to have limited access to dental care and educational resources. Transportation, financial barriers, and lack of local facilities are some of the reasons behind the limited effectiveness of these programs in rural regions (17, 18).

Cultural and Behavioral Barriers

Cultural factors also play a significant role in the success of these programs. Traditional beliefs, such as the perception that oral health issues are a natural part of aging, may hinder participation in preventive programs. Additionally, the widespread use of tobacco products among certain demographics is a significant barrier to achieving meaningful reductions in periodontal diseases (19).

Insufficient Integration into Healthcare Systems

Another major barrier is the insufficient integration of oral health education into the broader healthcare system in Saudi Arabia. Oral health programs often operate in isolation, with limited collaboration between dental professionals, public health authorities, and other healthcare providers (20, 21).

Recommendations for Improving Community-Based Programs

To enhance the effectiveness of community-based oral health education programs in Saudi Arabia, several strategies can be implemented:

Expanding Outreach to Rural Areas: The use of mobile clinics and telehealth platforms can be instrumental in reaching underserved populations (22).

Strengthening School Programs: Schools should integrate oral health education into their curricula, and partnerships with dental professionals can help provide regular check-ups and screenings (23).

Cultural Sensitivity and Behavioral Change Strategies: Tailored programs that respect cultural beliefs while encouraging positive health behavior changes will likely yield better results (24).

Collaboration Across Healthcare Sectors: Stronger collaboration between dental, medical, and public health sectors can help to create a more holistic approach to oral health education and disease prevention (25).

Conclusion

Community-based oral health education programs have demonstrated their effectiveness in improving periodontal health outcomes in Saudi Arabia. These initiatives have increased public awareness of the importance of good oral hygiene, leading to positive behavior changes. However, significant challenges remain, including access to care in rural areas, cultural barriers, and the integration of oral health education into broader public health strategies. To ensure the continued success of these programs, future efforts must address these limitations and expand the reach of interventions.

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