

## ABSTRACT

### Introduction

Common oral diseases comprising dental caries, periodontal disease and oral cancer denote public health problems compounded by dental workforce shortage. Prevention and control of those diseases underpinned by oral health promotion utilizing Mothers' Support Groups (MSG) could be considered an effective strategy in this regard.

### Objective

To determine the prevalence of self-reported oral health problems, oral health knowledge and the perception of oral health promotion among members of Mothers' Support Groups in Dodangoda Medical Officer of Health (MOH) area

### Methods

It was a descriptive cross sectional study. The study sample included all the members in all MSGs in Dodangoda MOH area who had more than six months experience as a member of a MSG. Accordingly 415 members were interviewed using an interviewer administered, close ended questionnaire. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Chi-square test was used to detect associations at 5% significance level.

### Results

The response rate was 99%. Majority (73.7%) of the members was housewives whereas 38.9% belonged to 31-40 age category, 43.8% had less than one year of service and 76.4% had passed GCE O/L. Majority (83.2%) had satisfactory oral health knowledge, with a mean of 65.1 ( $SD=13.3$ ) and a median of 65. Knowledge gaps were observed in the areas related to maternal, infant and child oral health. The prevalence of self-reported oral health problems among MSG members was 35.3% (95% CI 30.4 - 39.9%). The majority (24.8%) belonged to the oral health problem category of dental pain and sensitivity. Most (92.7%) of the members accepted the importance of oral health promotion, 94.2% wanted to learn more about oral health and 52% had time for oral health promotion. Only few (24%) had participated in oral health related training programmes and only 15.3% had supported Public Health Midwife (PHM) in oral health promotional activities. Members' good oral health knowledge was significantly associated with their higher level of education ( $p=0.008$ ), participation in oral health related training programmes ( $p=0.009$ ) and support given for PHM ( $p=0.041$ ).

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Since the majority of MSG members have an interest and satisfactory oral health knowledge, they can be easily utilized for oral health promotion at the grass-root level. Knowledge gaps on maternal, infant and child oral health among members of MSG should be addressed by appropriate strategies to harness their potential to strengthen oral health promotion in maternal and child health care package.

**Key words** : Self-reported oral health problems, oral health knowledge, oral health promotion, Mothers' Support Groups