



Dental health among adults with learning disabilities in England

During 2009/10 and 2010/11 a survey of the dental health of adults with learning disabilities was undertaken by 27 primary care trusts (PCTs) across England. The survey comprised a simple clinical examination and a questionnaire which were carried out in a variety of settings but usually in volunteers' homes. This summary compares the headline findings with those of the national Adult Dental Health Survey (ADHS) 2009.

Out of 607 volunteers 387 (64%) took part in the examination, 178 (29%) did not give consent to the examination and 10 (2%) were unable to co-operate with the examination from the start. Of those who took part 88% had a full examination and 12% had a partial examination (3% withdrew consent and 9% were unable to co-operate).

Four hundred and twenty-seven (70%) volunteers took part in the questionnaire, 53% of whom completed the questionnaire themselves and 44% had the questionnaire completed by someone else on their behalf.

Table 1 Age distribution of volunteers

Age band	ALD volunteers	ADHS volunteers
18 – 24	12%	9%
25 – 34	20%	14%
35 – 44	23%	18%
45 – 54	22%	18%
55 – 64	12%	17%
65 or over	9%	24%
Not answered/Don't know	1%	0%
No reply recorded	180 volunteers	-
Total	607 volunteers	9,663 volunteers

The presence of any natural teeth

In the 2009 ADHS 94% of adults in England were dentate (having some natural teeth) and 6% were edentate (having no natural teeth), of the volunteers in the survey of adults with learning disabilities 93% were dentate and 31 (5%) were edentate. The average number of natural teeth was 23 which was similar to the findings of the 2009 ADHS (table 2).

Table 2. Average number of present teeth by age band

Age band	ALD volunteers	ADHS volunteers
18 – 24	27	29
25 – 34	27	29
35 – 44	24	28
45 – 54	21	26
55 – 64	18	23
65 or over	14	19
Not answered/Don't know	20	-
Total	23	25

Pain

Overall, 9% of dentate adults in England reported having a problem or pain in their mouth at the time of examination, the same proportion was found among adults with learning disabilities. In England, 70% of dentate adults reported never or hardly ever feeling dental pain in the last 12 months and 8% reported feeling dental pain fairly or very often. Among adults with learning disabilities, 63% reported never or hardly ever feeling dental pain in the last 12 months and 9% reported feeling dental pain fairly or very often.

PUFA – which relates to open pulp, ulceration, fistula and abscess – is a recently developed index of clinical consequences of untreated dental caries (tooth decay). It provides a measure of extensive dental caries which is causing significant problems in need of early attention.

Overall in England 7% of dentate adults had at least one PUFA symptom, among adults with learning disabilities 8% had at least one PUFA symptom.

Oral hygiene

In England, 75% of dentate adults said that they cleaned their teeth at least twice a day, 22% said that they did this once a day, 2% less than once a day and 1% said they never cleaned their teeth. Among adults with learning disabilities, 63% reported that they brushed twice or more a day, 25% said they brushed once a day, 7% less than once a day and 3% said they never cleaned their teeth.

Presence of dental calculus (tartar)

In the ADHS, of 5,570 examined dentate adults 69% had one or more sextants with calculus, with an average of 1.8 sextants affected. In the survey of adults with learning disabilities, of 365 examined adults with calculus data collected, 75% had one or more sextants with calculus, with an average of 0.4 sextants affected.

Reported treatment

In England in the ADHS, 90% of dentate adults reported having a check-up during their last course of treatment; 50% had their teeth scaled and polished; 47% received advice on looking after their teeth; 34% had an X-ray; 28% had their teeth filled and 14% had teeth taken out.

Among adults with learning disabilities, 87% reported having a check-up during their last course of treatment; 41% had their teeth scaled and polished; 17% received advice on looking after their teeth; 20% had an X-ray; 18% had their teeth filled and 14% had teeth taken out.

Oral Health Impact Profile (OHIP)

Of dentate adults in England, 30% experienced physical pain occasionally or more often in the previous 12 months, 20% experienced psychological discomfort and 39% reported experiencing at least one problem concerning their oral health.

Among adults with learning disabilities, 26% reported experiencing physical pain occasionally or more often in the previous 12 months, 7% experienced psychological discomfort and 36% reported experiencing at least one problem concerning their oral health.

Oral Impact on Daily Performance (OIDP)

Overall in England, 33% of dentate adults reported having at least one oral health problem that caused difficulty with eating, speaking, relaxing, being sociable or doing normal jobs in

the past 12 months. In the survey of adults with learning disabilities, 41% reported having at least one oral health problem that caused difficulties.

Summary

For many measures there is apparent comparability between the ADHS results and those found for adults with learning disabilities.

There was variation in the mean number of teeth present with adults with learning disabilities having fewer teeth present than their same age ADHS volunteers. This difference increased in older age groups.

A slightly higher proportion of adults with learning disabilities had calculus and had an oral health problem that caused difficulties compared with ADHS volunteers.

A lower proportion of adults with learning disabilities reported brushing twice daily, receiving advice on self-care from the dentist, having an X-ray or having a filling during their last course of treatment and reporting experiencing psychological discomfort in the previous 12 months, compared with ADHS volunteers.

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