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Original Research

Illusions of a Common Man in Dental Perspective: A Time for Eradication

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ABSTRACT

Aim: To assess the most common myths prevailing in the society and the reason behind the innocent beliefs. To compare the dental myths in population with various educational backgrounds and in medical graduates. To formulate the steps and educate the common man to come into the limelight for maintenance of oral health for better overall health. **Methodology:** A total of 194 individuals aged above 18 years were randomly included in the study and their response to the given questionnaire was obtained and analysed statistically by using SPSS version 21. **Results:** Most of the individuals believe that root canal treatment is a painful procedure (59.3%), whereas 56.2% believe that dental treatment should be avoided during pregnancy. 54.6% gave a positive response that worms cause tooth decay. 54.4% of the respondents believe that children do not need cleaning of the milk teeth, whereas 42.3% thought that diseased milk teeth don't need any treatment. More than 40% of the subjects believe extraction of the upper tooth affects vision and application of Zandu Balm or hot fermentation reduces swelling. **Conclusion:** Some of the dental myths are still persisting in all the participants of various educational backgrounds and even in medical respondents.

KEYWORDS: Education, Myth, Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

There are various didactic and clinical research activities carrying out in various fields of dentistry with highly sophisticated equipment. In such highly advancing era of innovations and creations, there are various superstitions rooted since years together in a common man obstructing him to arrive at the door steps of an oral healthcare professional, thereby hindering the prevention of disease.

No one has an idea when, where, how and why myths have come into existence. It is still a mystery, but it is a fact that no portion of the earth is free from superstitious beliefs [1]. These are inherited to the generations from years together and are prevailing in communities with strong belief of innocence in developing countries like India [2].

The term myth originates from 'mythos', a Greek word meaning speech, thought or story of unknown origin. It is a traditional story usually concerning some being, hero or event with or without a determinable basis, facts or a natural explanation [3]. Taboo comes from a Tongan word 'tabu', meaning set apart or forbidden. No taboo is known to be universal but some occur in majority of societies. Taboos may serve many functions and often in effect after original reason behind them has expired [4].

India, a well-known country for its customs, traditions and culture is not an exception. Despite development in science and technology, a large proportion of the population, having health and education within access, were not psychologically mature enough to eradicate the blind beliefs prevailing in the society. Unlike medical, people with dental or oral problem usually neglect till

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the situation worsens [5]. They usually neglect thinking that it is not a major problem of concern, or may take over the counter drugs till the problem peaks.

Hence, a study has been carried out in the state of Telangana to focus and assess the most common myths prevailing in the society, which are preventing a common man from undergoing treatment and further hindering/worsening the overall health of the individual. This study is first of its kind in the literature that has put a step forward to assess the prevalence of taboos even in medical professionals and to know the exact reason behind their belief.

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MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross-sectional questionnaire study was carried out in various regions of Telangana state from January 2015 to February 2015. 194 subjects above 18 years who voluntarily accepted to participate were included in the study. The questionnaire containing 25 common dental myths was framed and a pilot study was conducted to check the validity of the questionnaire. Based upon the results, modification was done in the design of the questionnaire. All the participants were informed and briefed regarding the purpose of the study. Age, sex and educational status of the subjects were recorded, and the subjects were divided into groups based on these criteria.

Statistical Analysis

Data was analysed using SPSS ver. 21 statistical software package. Descriptive statistics and frequency percentages were assessed. Chi-square test was used to compare the questionnaire response between medical and non-medical groups. A p value <.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

A total of 194 subjects participated in the study, among which 31 individuals belong to medical group (16%). 44.3% of subjects were males, whereas 55.7 % were females (Master Chart 1).

Out of 194 individuals, 51.0% fall under the age group of 18–29 years, whereas the other subjects with age groups 30–39, 40–49 and 50 and above fall under 24.7%, 11.3% and 12.9%, respectively (Master Chart 1). Qualification of the individuals involved in the study was also recorded and their frequency percentages were tabulated (Master Chart 1). 58.8% of the subjects in our study were in the matric to graduate level.

Master Chart 1: Showing general information of the study subjects

General Data	Frequency (%)
Age in years	
18–29	99 (51.0)
30–39	48 (24.7)
40–49	22 (11.3)
50 and above	25 (12.9)
Gender	
Male	86 (44.3)
Female	108 (55.7)
Qualification	
Illiterate	9 (4.6)
Below matric	31 (16.0)
Matric to graduate	114 (58.8)
Masters and postgraduate	40 (20.6)
Medical vs. non-medical	
Non-medical	163 (84.0)
Medical	31 (16.0)

Each individual response was obtained from the questionnaire and their frequency percentages were calculated and tabulated in Master Chart 2. Among all the questions listed in the questionnaire, 59.3% of the individuals have a notion that root canal treatment is a painful procedure and this has the highest prevalence of all. 56.2% of respondents believe that the dental treatment should be avoided during pregnancy. This myth accounted to be present in both medical and non-medical subjects.

A total of 54.6% of the study subjects believed that worms cause tooth decay and removing them relieves pain. 54.4% of the respondents believe that a child do not need cleaning of the milk teeth, whereas 42.3% thought that diseased milk teeth don't need any treatment. 50.0% of the individuals thought that dental

Master Chart 2: Showing response of the individuals in frequency percentages

S.No.	Questionnaire	No Idea	No	Yes
1	Removal of upper teeth affects vision	6 (3.1)	104 (53.6)	84 (43.3)
2	Worms cause tooth decay and removing them relieves pain	2 (1.0)	86 (44.3)	106 (54.6)
3	Artificial set of teeth or complete denture that is made once is forever	3 (1.5)	146 (75.3)	45 (23.2)
4	Once a decayed tooth is treated, the dental problem is over	1 (.5)	124 (63.9)	68 (35.1)
5	Professional cleaning/scaling/removal of tartar loosens the teeth	4 (2.1)	121 (62.4)	69 (35.6)
6	Dental procedures are always painful	5 (2.6)	92 (47.4)	97 (50.0)
7	Teeth become stronger by preserving the lost tooth	39 (20.1)	144 (74.2)	11 (5.7)
8	Dental treatment should be avoided during pregnancy	9 (4.6)	76 (39.2)	109 (56.2)
9	Cleaning the teeth with finger and powder is better than with toothbrush	–	162 (83.5)	32 (16.5)
10	Charcoal, salt, rice husk, tobacco etc. in powder form is better than toothpaste in cleaning teeth	4 (2.1)	126 (64.9)	64 (33.0)
11	Whether child needs cleaning of milk teeth	1 (.5)	105 (54.1)	88 (45.4)
12	Whether diseased milk teeth should be treated	1 (.5)	82 (42.3)	111 (57.2)
13	Keeping any medicament/tobacco beside a painful tooth reduces the tooth pain	3 (1.5)	106 (54.6)	85 (43.8)
14	Crowding/irregular placement of the teeth is lucky for your child	11 (5.7)	132 (68.0)	51 (26.3)
15	Eating brinjal causes tooth pain	10 (5.2)	118 (60.8)	66 (34.0)
16	Presence of teeth at birth is harmful to grandparents	11 (5.7)	161 (83.0)	22 (11.3)
17	Root canal treatment is painful	22 (11.3)	57 (29.4)	115 (59.3)
18	Caries can spread from deciduous to permanent teeth	2 (1.0)	93 (47.9)	99 (51.0)
19	Alternative to root canal treatment is extraction (pulling out the tooth)	33 (17.0)	79 (40.7)	82 (42.3)
20	Removal of wisdom teeth affects wisdom	4 (2.1)	152 (78.4)	38 (19.6)
21	Artificial tooth set contains natural teeth of other persons	4 (2.1)	162 (83.5)	28 (14.4)
22	Teeth should be buried after extraction	14 (7.2)	133 (68.6)	47 (24.2)
23	Extraction of one tooth deteriorates the whole dentition	14(7.2)	126 (64.9)	54 (27.8)
24	Swelling can be reduced by application of hot fermentation/Zandu Balm	4 (2.1)	99 (51.0)	91 (46.9)
25	Is there any relation between general health and oral health	5 (2.6)	46 (23.7)	143 (73.7)

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procedures are always painful, and 47.9% believed that caries cannot spread from deciduous to permanent teeth. 46.9% of the respondents believe swelling can be reduced by application of hot fermentation or Zandu Balm.

A total of 43.8% individuals thought that placing any medicament or tobacco beside a painful tooth reduces the tooth pain, and 43.3% respondents believe that removal of upper teeth affects vision, whereas the 53.6% subjects do not. 42.3% of the subjects opt for extraction rather than root canal treatment. An attempt was also made for the first time in the literature to assess and compare the questionnaire response between medical and non-medical subjects and the significant differences in their response is given in Master Chart 3. Out of 194 subjects, 163 belong to non-medical group, whereas 31 were among medical subjects. 19 medical and 50 non-medical subjects believe that professional cleaning or scaling loosens the teeth ($p < .004$). The myth, dental procedures are always painful, was noticed in 88 non-medical and 9 medical subjects ($p < .038$).

Highly statistical significant difference ($p < .007$) was found where 114 non-medical and 30 medical subjects

Master Chart 3: Comparison between responses of medical and non-medical subjects

S.No.	Questionnaire	Group	No Idea	No	Yes	*p* value
1	Professional cleaning/scaling/removal of tartar loosens the teeth	Non-medical	4	109	50	.004
		Medical	0	12	19	
2	Dental procedures are always painful	Non-medical	4	71	88	.038
		Medical	1	21	9	
3	Teeth become stronger by preserving the lost tooth	Non-medical	38	114	11	.007
		Medical	1	30	0	
4	Dental treatment should be avoided during pregnancy	Non-medical	9	69	85	.026
		Medical	0	7	24	
6	Crowding/irregular placement of the teeth is lucky for your child	Non-medical	11	114	38	.048
		Medical	0	18	13	
7	Eating brinjal causes tooth pain	Non-medical	10	91	62	.004
		Medical	0	27	4	
8	Root canal treatment is painful	Non-medical	22	43	98	.024
		Medical	0	14	17	
9	Caries can spread from deciduous to permanent teeth	Non-medical	2	69	92	.002
		Medical	0	24	7	
10	Alternative to root canal treatment is extraction (pulling out the tooth)	Non-medical	33	63	67	.022
		Medical	0	16	15	
11	Artificial tooth set contains natural teeth of other persons	Non-medical	4	144	15	.000
		Medical	0	18	13	
12	Swelling can be reduced by application of hot fermentation/Zandu Balm	Non-medical	4	74	85	.001
		Medical	0	25	6	

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do not agree with the myth, teeth become stronger by preserving the lost one. This study also revealed that 85 non-medical and 24 medical respondents believe that dental treatment should be avoided during pregnancy ($p < .026$).

The misconception crowding/irregular placement of the teeth is lucky for your child was not agreed by 38 non-medicals and 13 medical subjects ($p < .048$). With regard to the myth eating brinjal causes tooth pain, 27 medical and 91 non-medical participants do not agree ($p < .004$). In our study, 98 non-medical and 17 medical subjects believe that root canal treatment is painful ($p < .024$). A statistically significant difference ($p < .002$) was obtained, where 24 medical and 69 non-medicals believe that decay does not spread from deciduous to permanent dentition. Alternative to root canal treatment is extraction (pulling out the tooth) was believed by 67 non-medical and 15 medical subjects ($p < .02$).

The myth, artificial tooth set contains natural teeth of other persons was not believed by 144 non-medical and 18 medical respondents ($p < .000$), whereas trying self-care like heat therapy and application of Zandu Balm for swelling was also not preferred by 74 non-medical and 25 medical subjects ($p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

In early days, root canal treatment was very painful. But with the latest technologies and anaesthetics techniques, root canal treatment became more comfortable than it was before.

In fact, a recent survey showed that patients who underwent root canal treatment described it as 'painless' procedure six times more likely than patients who have not undergone the treatment. Our study results were similar to the study done by Mythri *et al.*

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[6]. The perception of dental treatment being painful might be due to the subjects being apprehensive for taking intraoral injections, fear and anxiety of the subject, and most of the times, they tend to visit an oral healthcare professional only when the problem worsens.

Both medical and non-medical individuals of our study population believed that dental procedures should be avoided during pregnancy which was comparable with the study done by Mythri *et al.* [6]. Taking into consideration the exposure to radiographs during pregnancy, it is possible to perform them by following the basic care like short exposure time, use of ultrasensitive radiographic films and lead apron. Although it is known that the younger the cell, the greater the risk of teratogenicity, there is no evidence in the literature that dental radiation in first trimester of pregnancy can harm the baby and cause teratogenic effects. Hence, dental radiographs with precautionary measures can be taken undoubtedly when needed.

Although considering the use of vasoconstrictor in local anaesthetics, no scientific literature contraindicates their use during pregnancy, particularly in healthy pregnant women during the dental treatment. But it should be remembered that usage of local anaesthetic without a vasoconstriction could lead to a painful treatment, causing the release of harmful endogenous agents [7].

Our study group also believed the myth that milk teeth need not be cared for because these teeth will anyway be replaced by permanent teeth. Our results were similar to the study done by Mythri *et al.* [6] and Kochhar *et al.* [8]. This myth is not true because early loss of milk teeth will interfere with chewing and affect the child's nutrition, leads to drifting of the adjacent teeth and closure of the space that is required for the erupting permanent teeth. This loss of space will result in both skeletal as well as dental malocclusion of permanent teeth. Hence milk teeth must be cared for as equally as the permanent teeth. It is advisable to clean baby's gum pads everyday by gentle massage both before and after the teeth erupt [9].

In earlier days, although extraction of the upper teeth, extra-oral injection was given close to the infra-orbital foramen below the eye sight, and as the anaesthesia lasts for longer time – the belief might have come. There are many people whom we notice wearing complete dentures without eyesight too [10]. Hence, people may relate that extraction of upper teeth affects vision which is comparable with the study done by Mythri *et al.* [6], Kochhar *et al.* [8] and Nagaraj *et al.* [11].

Our study subjects believed that worms cause tooth decay and removing them relieves pain. This illusion might be because of the prevalence of the quacks everywhere since years. When a person approaches these quacks due to the tooth ache, with some amount of spiritual authority they show that worm has been removed from their teeth, which is responsible for tooth ache, which is often more reflective and convincing to the patient [12].

In toothache, hot compressions externally relieve pain initially, but later on, results in cellulites cause more inconvenience to the patient. Most of the individuals even thought that placing any medicament or tobacco beside a painful tooth reduces the tooth pain. There might be a reduction in the pain initially because of the emollient effect of the tobacco, but it may become a habit and addiction, further worsening the oral health by turning into carcinoma [10].

General population thinks that there is no need of a regular dental check-up, because dental diseases are not life threatening and can be taken care of with routine medicines available through local pharmacy without consultation of dental surgeon. Some people are quite poor who cannot afford high-cost dental treatments [13]. These are some of the common reasons for which a common man avoids dental treatment.

CONCLUSION

Like in developed countries, awareness and research have increased in the field of dentistry, but a balance has not established between the equipment introduced and the individuals undergoing dental treatment. This may be due to lack of awareness regarding the importance of oral health, or prevalence of quack dentistry, and most important are the taboos that are deep rooted in the individuals from generations.

Hence, individuals from all the communities/educational backgrounds must be educated to maintain good oral health and must be enlightened about the various myths and prevent their spread for the betterment of the both today and society of tomorrow.

Even though it's a tougher task to eradicate the prevailing taboos, one must educate the general population by

1. Conducting the camps and organising the door-to-door awareness programmes both in rural as well as in urban areas, educating the importance of oral health for overall health and motivating them to undergo treatment.
2. Chapters regarding oral health care must be included in the text books.
3. A column at the end of the prescription should give information and enlighten about various misconceptions.

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