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# Factors affecting access to dental care among people entitled to free treatment

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## ABSTRACT

**Background and Objective:** Access to oral health care is vital for overall well-being, yet it is influenced by a complex interplay of social, cultural, economic, structural, and geographic factors. This study aimed to identify and analyze the socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes affecting access to dental care among residents of the Sheikh Zayed Hospital residential colony in Lahore, Pakistan.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional survey was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. A questionnaire based on Andersen and Aday's behavioral model of health care service use was developed and pretested through cognitive interviews to ensure clarity and relevance. Convenience sampling was employed to select 125 participants from the residential colony. Data collection involved door-to-door household surveys, demographic information gathering, and questionnaire responses. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS, focusing on descriptive statistics for categorical variables.

**Results:** The study included 125 respondents, with a majority being female (70.4%) and a mean age of 38.98 years. Educational attainment varied, with 6.4% uneducated, 44% having less than 12 years of education, and 49.6% with more than 12 years. Most respondents (61.6%) had a monthly income of ≤ 40,000 PKR. Perceived oral health was reported as good by 53.6%. Brushing twice or more daily was practised by 57.6% of participants. Although 90.4% preferred dental care, only 52.8% had visited a dentist in the past year. Key barriers to accessing dental care included work overload (43.2%), the time for dentist availability (85.6%), dependency on family members (28%), dental anxiety (19.2%), and dissatisfaction with service quality (17.6%).

**Conclusion:** Despite free dental services, psycho-social barriers limit access to care in the study population. Improving clinic availability, extending hours, and enhancing service quality could increase utilization and improve oral health outcomes.

**Keywords:** Dental care, oral health, barriers, socio-demographics, free dental services.

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