

# Oral Health Perceptions: A Qualitative Study across Racial and Ethnic Groups

Loren Taylor, Kim Gorner, Ananya Chatterjee, Michael Vang, B.A., Emily Spotts, B.A., Nadeen Salhadar, B.A., Joseph D. Hovey, Ph.D., and Andrew L. Geers, Ph.D.

The University of Toledo | Loren.Taylor2@rockets.utoledo.edu

## BACKGROUND

- Dental phobia is an excessive and persistent fear of dentists and dental stimuli, resulting in the avoidance of dental care and distress during dental visits (American Psychological Association, 2022).
- Dental fear is a key psychological predictor of oral health behavior and is linked to an increased likelihood of oral health disease.
- It has been theorized that dental anxiety is reinforced by cultural beliefs, but very little research has identified the beliefs that vary across different cultural groups.
- Understanding different cultural beliefs surrounding dental health may help us understand how dental fear develops and how to best intervene to improve dental outcomes.

## METHOD

### Participants:

- Community members ( $N = 200$ ) were recruited from Prolific in exchange for compensation.
  - $M_{age} = 29.96$  years old,  $SD_{age} = 10.94$ )
  - 25% Black/African American, 24% White, 22.5% East Asian, 20% Latinx/Hispanic, 6.5% Two or more ethnicities, 1.5% South Asian, .5% American Indian/Alaska Native
  - 42.5% were working full-time
  - 42.0% did not identify with a religion
  - 53.5% reported being single
  - 87.5% reported having health insurance
    - 68.5% reported their health insurance covered dental health; 51.0% reported feeling their dental insurance covered enough

## METHOD

### Procedure:

- Participants answered free response questions regarding oral health beliefs and behaviors.
- Following each question, participants were asked in what way they believed culture played a role in their previous response.
- Inductive coding was used to analyze data.

### Example Question:

- Can you tell me about the different behaviors individuals from your culture engage in regarding their teeth and dental health? These could be beneficial, non-beneficial, or neither. These could be typical actions and habits, or what they tend not to do. What kind of activities might they do that we should know?

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### Results and Conclusion:

- Results identified key themes (e.g., societal expectations and social norms), see figure below.
- Coding is currently underway to determine if these themes diverge across racial and ethnic groups.
- Our findings will provide clues as to how dental fear development may vary across cultures and will help us understand the links between cultural beliefs and oral health and aid dentists and clinicians.

### Future Direction and Limitation:

- Participants were recruited from only four main cultural groups, and results may not be applicable to those cultural groups not recruited for participation.
- Future research should examine different cultural groups and their beliefs regarding oral health and dental fear.

## RESULTS

