

## **MOTHERS' EXPLANATORY MODELS FOR DENTAL CARIES IN LOW INCOME MEXICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN**

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to elicit the explanatory models of dental health/disease and contributing factors from mothers of low-income Mexican-American children.

**Setting and Sample:** A convenience sample of 24 Mexican American mothers and their children who receive health services from a local community clinic in San Antonio, Texas were interviewed for their views on what contributes to healthy teeth for their children.

**Method:** Three different categories of mothers were determined: 1) having children with no evidence or history of dental caries or ECC (early childhood caries); 2) having children with early signs of dental caries or ECC; 3) having children with advanced dental disease (evidence of decayed, filled, or missing teeth. Mothers of the children were interviewed to elicit their explanatory models of dental health, dental disease and common feeding practices or routines which promote or inhibit dental health. Children's teeth were examined with penlight to assess if dental decay was present and extent of disease.

**Findings:** Multiple themes were identified from the interviews including: 1) lack of knowledge concerning basic daily dental care; 2) lack of understanding concerning appropriate age to start routine dental visits; 3) continued bottle-feeding past the age of one year old; 4) lack of knowledge concerning healthy diets and cariogenic food restriction.

**Conclusion:** Little research has been done on maternal attitudes and explanatory models of dental health and disease. Since poor dentition and early childhood caries has been shown to be easily preventable, the views of how mothers of children with dental disease care for their children needs to be examined. Programs aimed at preventing dental disease and ECC should focus on mothers' understanding and attitudes in order to assist in ameliorating this highly preventable disease.

