

**ORAL HEALTH LITERACY, ORAL HEALTH CARE-SEEKING
BEHAVIOUR AND PERCEIVED ORAL HEALTH STATUS OF
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS BY THEIR CARERS**

ABSTRACT

Background: Children with special health care needs (CSHCN) are dependent on their carers to take care of them, especially for their health and oral health care needs. In this context, the status of their oral health is very much depending on their carer's care and efforts. Carers' oral health literacy (OHL) is a very important determinant of oral health status, which will determine the oral health care-seeking behaviour (OHCSB) and related to how the carers would perceive the oral health status of their CSHCN. Perception on the oral health status of the CSHCN by their carers is an important indicator of the carers' level of OHL and OHCSB. **Objectives:** The study was aimed to determine the carers' OHL score and levels, OHCSB score, and perception on the oral health status of the CSHCN by their carers. Furthermore, it was also to determine the comparison between the carers' OHCSB score with the different OHL levels, and the association between perception of carers on the oral health status of the CSHCN with OHL levels of the carers. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted for 82 primary carers of the CSHCN of 3-17 years of age. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to assess the Oral Health Literacy in Malay Language (OHLI-M) Score for the Reading Comprehension component, Oral Health Care-Seeking Behaviour (OHCSB) and the perception of the carers towards oral health status of the CSHCN. Another face-to-face interview was conducted for the OHLI-M Numeracy component. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. **Results:** The mean (SD) total OHLI-M score was 75.7 (13.55) and the OHLI-M levels were: "Adequate"-61%, "Marginal"-25.6%, "Inadequate"-13.4%. The

mean (SD) OHCSB score was 10.3 (3.18). The perception of CSHCN's oral health status by their carers was: "Very Good"-8.5%, "Good"-39.0%, "Fair"-29.3%, "Poor"-20.7%. There was no statistically significant difference between OHCSB scores and different OHLI-M levels of the carers ($p=0.758$). It was also found that OHLI-M levels of carers was not statistically significant associated to their perception towards oral health status of the CSHCN ($p=0.666$). **Conclusion:** In this centre-based CSHCN's carers samples, the total OHLI-M scores was good with most carers having "Adequate" OHLI-M level. Even though there was no difference between OHCSB score and OHLI-M levels; and no association between the carers' OHLI-M levels and their perception towards the oral health status of the CSHCN, more focus is needed in this area for the benefits of the CSHCN.

Keywords: oral health literacy, oral health care-seeking behaviour, CSHCN