

Perceived Barriers for Seeking Oral Health Care During Present Economic Crisis among a Group of Patients Attending Dental Clinics in Kandy District

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Economic crisis has shifted private sector health seekers to already overburden and underfunded state sector. The phenomenon that dental services have a high-income elasticity of demand explains this observation. Lack of availability, accessibility and affordability to dental and deteriorated dental health care are the main concerns during a crisis. The purpose of this study was to identify perceived barriers for seeking oral health care among patients in Kandy District due to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. Eligible participants attending the government and private dental clinics in Kandy District were randomly recruited following convenient sampling technique in this cross-sectional and qualitative phenomenological study. Ethical clearance was obtained by the Ethics Review Committee, Faculty of Dental Sciences, University of Peradeniya. Collected data of the Self-administered survey-based questionnaire were checked for completeness and accuracy, and the inconsistent data were excluded. The quantitative analysis of the study was done using simple descriptive statistics of SPSS Statistical Package (SPSS, Version 21). Sample characteristics were expressed as means and percentages. According to the results, the number of patients who visited the government hospitals was increased by 9.7% and the number of patients who visited the private hospitals was depleted by 10.1% during the crisis. Majority of the patients belonged to the middle-income socio-economic groups (42%), thereby 40.4% were able to maintain oral health and treatments and 65.5% were able to purchase medicines prescribed by their doctor at an outside pharmacy. Majority of the patients (79.4%) did not own a health insurance. About 46.2% had avoided the systematic access to dental clinics, 76.8% stated that the cost of dental treatments had been increased and among them, 29.7% avoided regular treatments. In conclusion, the present economic crisis has a negative impact on the maintenance of oral healthcare of the patients. Recognizing and addressing these issues will assist in facing future crises in a more prepared manner.

Keywords: Economic crisis, Oral healthcare system, Dental attendees, Kandy