

## **WCM-Q research investigates oral health in Qatar**

**Doha – 15 May, 2017:** An in-depth study by researchers at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) has shed light on the factors affecting oral health in Qatar.

The WCM-Q team analyzed data from the STEPS survey conducted in 2012 by the World Health Organization in collaboration with the Supreme Council of Health (now the Ministry of Public Health) and discovered that approximately 40 percent of Qataris rated their own oral health as either poor or average.

The research also found that women, people with diabetes, older people, people with lower levels of educational attainment and people who smoke or use smokeless tobacco products like snuff or chewing tobacco were more likely to report their oral health as poor than other groups. Women were also more likely than men to report problems such as mouth pain, trouble chewing and embarrassment over the appearance of their teeth, the study found.

Dr. Sohaila Cheema, Director of WCM-Q's Institute for Population Health, is one of the lead authors of the research, which is entitled Oral health behavior and factors associated with poor oral status in Qatar: results from a national health survey. The study has now been published in the prestigious *Journal of Public Health Dentistry*.

Dr. Cheema said: "Oral health is an integral component of overall health and a very important determinant of quality of life. People with poor oral health often suffer pain and difficulty eating, and they may also have speech problems and suffer from low self-esteem. This research helps us to understand the true nature of oral health among Qataris and could prove very useful to help formulate effective public policy to protect oral health."

The anonymous STEPS survey asked 2,496 Qataris (1,053 men and 1,443 women) a variety of questions about their oral health, such as how they rated the state of their teeth and gums, how many natural teeth they had and whether they used removable dentures. The WCM-Q team then collated this data and used statistical analysis to categorize each respondent's oral health as 'good', 'average' or 'poor'. They then cross-referenced this information with basic personal data such as gender, age, tobacco use, health status and education level to build up a detailed picture of oral health status within a social context.

The survey also quizzed participants about their methods of maintaining oral health. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority use a toothbrush (96.7 percent), while 27.6 percent said they use dental floss and 30.6 percent said they use miswak, the traditional teeth-cleaning twig made from the salvadora persica tree, which has natural antibacterial qualities. Surprisingly, the study found no association between body mass index and oral health, contrary to findings in other countries, such as the US and Jordan.



The paper was produced with contributions from the Ministry of Public Health, the Department of Dentistry at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), the Primary Health Care Cooperation (PHCC), the European Institute of Oncology in Milan, Italy and the New York Medical College in the US.

Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Al-Thani, Director of Public Health in the Ministry of Public Health, said: “The study findings can be helpful in planning appropriate dental awareness campaigns and at the same aid dentists in better evaluating and managing their patients.” He added: “We are glad to cooperate with the Institute for Population Health, Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar on studies that help us better understand the problems of public health importance in the State of Qatar.”

Dr. Ravinder Mamtani, Senior Associate Dean for Population Health, Capacity Building and Student Affairs at WCM-Q, is also a lead author of the paper. He said: “An estimated 3.9 billion people worldwide suffer from oral disease and up to 20 percent of adults worldwide have severe periodontitis so oral health is a very important component of public health. Understanding more about the oral health situation in Qatar therefore makes a significant contribution to ongoing efforts to protect public health here.

“We are grateful to the Ministry of Public Health, the Department of Dentistry at HMC and our other collaborators for their excellent contributions to this important piece of work.”

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**Photo Caption:**

Photo1: Dr. Ravinder Mamtani

**About Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar**

Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar is a partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation. It offers a comprehensive six-year medical program leading to the Cornell University M.D. degree with teaching by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty and by physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Aspetar Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, the Primary Health Care Corporation, the Feto Maternal Center, and the Sidra Medical and Research Center who hold Weill Cornell appointments. Through its biomedical research program, WCM-Q is building a sustainable research community in Qatar while advancing basic science and clinical research. Through its medical college, WCM-Q seeks to provide the finest education possible for medical students, to improve health care both now and for future generations, and to provide high quality health care to the Qatari population.

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