

Barriers to Obtaining Needed Dental Treatment for Head Start Children in Washington

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Objective: This study describes caregivers' perspectives on barriers to obtaining needed dental treatment for Head Start children in Southwestern Washington.

Methods: Head Start staff identified and recruited caregivers of children diagnosed as needing dental treatment based on Head Start database records. Caregivers whose children received no treatment, some treatment, or completed treatment were included. Caregivers were interviewed by telephone regarding logistical, systems, and personal barriers.

Results: Barriers experienced by caregivers varied. Those from the no-treatment group reported less favorable perceptions of dental providers and lower parental self-efficacy than those from the some-treatment and completed-treatment groups. Additionally, dental anxiety was higher among caregivers from the no-treatment and some-treatment groups in comparison to the completed-treatment group.

Conclusion: Systems barriers such as the qualities of dental providers and personal barriers including parental self-efficacy and dental anxiety may explain why some children do not complete needed dental treatment.

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