



DENTAL HYGIENE | ORAL-SYSTEMIC LINK | BRAIN

Severity of mental health symptoms linked to higher risk of oral diseases

Providers may expect higher levels of oral disease among patients with adverse mental health conditions.

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Providers may expect higher levels of oral disease among patients with adverse mental health conditions, according to a study presented on March 17 at the annual meeting of the American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research (AADOOCR) and the Canadian Association for Dental Research in Portland, OR.

A group led by Alex Kalaigian of the University of California, San Francisco School of Dentistry

analyzed self-reported data from 30,753 participants in a national longitudinal study of tobacco use.

"These results may inform both medical and dental communities in diagnosing and providing treatment to individuals suffering from mental illness," AADOCR noted in a news release.

The analysis compared the prevalence of six oral health outcomes (self-rated oral health, bleeding gums, loose teeth, tooth loss, gum disease, and bone loss) according to the severity of mental health problems. Mental health symptoms were grouped into three disorder categories: internalizing, externalizing, and substance use.

Cross-sectionally, all six adverse oral health outcomes demonstrated a statistically significant greater prevalence over increasing severity of mental health symptoms, according to the findings. Kalaigan found that symptoms of internalizing problems are a plausible risk factor for future adverse oral health, independent of substance use problems.

Longitudinally, associations with externalizing and substance use symptoms largely dissipated, yet multiple associations with internalizing symptoms persisted, the researchers noted. For example, the adjusted odds of bone loss around teeth were 1.79 times greater at high versus none/low categories of internalizing symptoms, while the adjusted odds of bleeding gums were 1.40 times greater at high versus none/low categories of internalizing symptoms.

The research was presented during a session titled "Psychological Factors for Oral Health," which occurred on March 17, 2023.

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