

Review

## Oral Health, General Health, and Health-Related Quality of Life

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**Abstract:** Measuring the health-related quality of life (HQOL) has become an important endpoint in many epidemiological studies. Oral diseases, such as dental caries or periodontal disease, are prevalent and their consequences are not only physical, but also economic, social, and psychological. They can seriously impair the HQOL in many individuals and can affect various aspects of life, including oral function, appearance, and interpersonal relationships. This article briefly overviews our epidemiological research on the associations among oral health, general health, and the HQOL, including the OHQOL, in Japanese populations. It first shows the research findings from the LEMONADE study and a study of Behçet's disease (BD study). The LEMONADE study assessed whether OHQOL was associated with psychological distress and general health among apparently healthy people. The BD study investigated the oral health status of Behçet's disease patients and assessed the role of psychological distress in oral health status. In an aging society, assessing the impact of oral health status on the HQOL would be more important for patients who suffer from systemic disease with oral symptoms or dysfunction. We then started to develop a disease-specific QOL scale to evaluate dysphagia, and in particular support for improved dysphagia. The paper addresses the implications of assessing the QOL of patients with dysphagia. The development of a new QOL scale for dysphagia patients is introduced.

**Key words:** Health, Oral health, Quality of life, Behçet's syndrome, Dysphagia

J Dent Hlth 61: 149–152, 2011

### Introduction

Measuring the health-related quality of life (HQOL) has become an important endpoint in many epidemiological studies<sup>1)</sup>. Oral diseases, such as dental caries or periodontal disease, are prevalent and their consequences are not only physical but also economic, social, and psychological. They can seriously impair the HQOL in many individuals and can affect various aspects of life including oral function, appearance, and interpersonal relationships<sup>2)</sup>.

In the early 1980s, there was a paradigm shift towards accepting the fact that dental and oral diseases do impose significant burdens on the individual and community. Growing recognition of the importance of QOL in dentistry has since led to the development of a number of oral health-related QOL (OHQOL) instruments. The need to consider oral health as an integral part of health and the contribution of oral health to overall HQOL has been emphasized<sup>3)</sup>.

A recent Medline search demonstrated that the number of articles under the keywords 'quality of life' and 'oral health' had increased rapidly<sup>4)</sup>. This article briefly overviews our epidemiological research on the associations among oral health, general health, and the HQOL, including the OHQOL, in the Japanese people. The paper first presents the research findings from the LEMONADE study and a study of Behçet's disease (BD study). It then addresses the implications of assessing the QOL of patients with dysphagia. The development of a new QOL scale for dysphagia patients is introduced.

### The LEMONADE Study

Previous studies have revealed relationships between mouth and tooth problems and general health in cancer treatment and some other specific settings. However, few studies have explored such associations in a large general population. This study assessed whether OHQOL was associated with psychological distress and general health among apparently healthy people.