

## Sentiments Expressed in Relation to Tooth Loss: A Qualitative Study Among Edentulous Saudis

Ridwaan Omar, BSc, BDS, LDS, MSc, FRACDS, FDSRCSEd<sup>a</sup>

Esam Tashkandi, BDS, MS, FDSRCSEd, PhD<sup>b</sup>

Tariq Abduljabbar, BDS, MS, PhD<sup>b</sup>

Mohamed Aleem Abdullah, BDS, MDS<sup>c</sup>

Riyadh F. Akeel, BDS, MS, PhD<sup>c</sup>

**Purpose:** The objective was to explore and gain insight into the sentiments surrounding tooth loss in a group of edentulous Saudis. **Materials and Methods:** Using a qualitative methodology, 44 edentulous patients who were receiving complete denture treatment were interviewed in private, in the Arabic language. Interviews were tape recorded and semistructured, following a list of predetermined and piloted topics, but dialogue also took place, with the freedom for both interviewer and interviewee to explore areas of interest. All recordings were transcribed, translated into English, and interpreted independently by two members of the team to identify the core themes associated with tooth loss. **Results:** The mean age of participants was 58.9 years (range 35 to 72 years), and they had been edentulous for a mean of 7.1 years (range 3 months to 22 years). The main themes related to tooth loss were unqualified acceptance, inevitability with old age, behavior changes with respect to eating comfort, aged appearance, self-responsibility, positively perceived benefits, high prosthetic expectations and reduced level of denture satisfaction, and some need for privacy. **Conclusion:** The lack of any outward indication that participants experienced bereavement suggests that outlook on life can influence the impact of tooth loss. Participants' unqualified acceptance of their edentulous fate, yet their clear need to "normalize" oral function, reflects a degree of pragmatism toward life events. The strong influence of religion in Saudi society is a possible factor in the sentiments expressed. *Int J Prosthodont* 2003;16:515-520.

The impact poor oral health can have on quality of life is well-recognized.<sup>1-3</sup> It is also known that neither oral ill health nor an individual's perceived oral status depend solely on clinical factors. Many social and functional factors, which may or may not be affected by the presence of disease, are important intervening variables in determining oral health-related quality of life.<sup>4-6</sup> Specifically, the loss of teeth results in significant disabilities, which can profoundly disrupt social activities.<sup>7</sup> Tooth loss is very traumatic and upsetting and is regarded as a serious

life event<sup>8</sup> that requires significant social and psychological readjustment.

Edentulous and partially dentate people harbor a wide range of long-term feelings about tooth loss.<sup>7,9,10</sup> Underlying feelings of loss can, in part, explain chronic dissatisfaction with complete dentures, and the observation that even those who appear to be coping well with dentures retain similar depths of feeling suggests that the impact of tooth loss should not be misjudged.<sup>7,9,11</sup>

Cultural traditions and lifestyle play an important role in shaping attitudes and values. For example, regardless of age and gender, Chinese people believe that they are susceptible to dental disease, that one should expect to lose teeth in older age, and that nothing can be done to prevent it.<sup>12</sup> Cross-cultural differences in the range and intensity of feelings expressed about tooth loss have been reported. Although groups of edentulous people from Britain and Hong Kong expressed similar difficulties in coming to terms with tooth loss, Hong Kong Chinese generally felt more handicapped in their daily activities, as well as less

<sup>a</sup>Professor, Department of Prosthetic Dental Sciences, College of Dentistry, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>b</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Prosthetic Dental Sciences, College of Dentistry, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>c</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Prosthetic Dental Sciences, College of Dentistry, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

**Reprint requests:** Dr R. Omar, Department of Prosthetic Dental Sciences, College of Dentistry, King Saud University, PO Box 60169, Riyadh 11545, Saudi Arabia. Fax: + 966 1 488 5241. e-mail: romar.ksa@zajil.net