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## Oral health, dental needs and barriers in children with an autism spectrum disorder

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Children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are a high-risk group for oral health problems due to difficulties in communication and understanding of the medical and functional need for oral health. There are no specific reports in Australia about dental health of children with ASD. We aimed to identify oral health, dental needs, oral hygiene, dental experience and related barriers to dental services of children with ASD as perceived by parents. An online survey completed by parents (n=73) of children with ASD (aged 2-17 years) was used to obtain data. Forty percent of children had oral health problems, commonly cited were stained teeth, bad breath and dental decay. The majority (53%) of children required physical, verbal or visual supports to brush their teeth with half of parents (51%) experiencing difficulties with the child's daily oral care. One third (32%) of children felt afraid or anxious to visit the dentist, commonly cited reasons were oral instrumentation, bright lights and smells. Major barrier to seeking services was the operator's lack of skills to adequately manage and treat children with ASD. Specific dental education for parents of children with ASD is imperative as part of a public dental health plan. Equally, a health promotion campaign may enhance awareness in this population about dental disease, oral hygiene and preventive measures for optimal dental health. Strategies to reduce anxiety of children with ASD when seeking dental treatment are also needed. This includes education of dental professionals about ASD and behaviour management strategies.

### Biography

Joanna Granich is the Clinical Trials Coordinator at the Telethon Kids Institute in Perth, Western Australia. Her role involves managing randomized controlled trials focused on investigating the effectiveness of medications and educational interventions for children with autism. She holds a Masters of Public Health by research from the University of Western Australia. She is also a registered sessional dental therapist in a private dental practice. She has a special interest in oral health of children with autism. Her other research interests include early intervention; complementary and alternative as well as prescribed medication use as treatments for children with autism.

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