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AWARENESS OF HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH DENTAL PROFESSION AMONG STUDENTS OF THE SARAJEVO FACULTY OF DENTISTRY

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SUMMARY: The aim of this study was to assess awareness among the students of the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Sarajevo of the occupational health risks associated with dental profession. The research was conducted among the dental students of all years of study at the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Sarajevo, by using a tailor-made survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by 446 students. Results: 92% of students believe that dentistry is a profession that involves a high level of risk for the outbreak of occupational diseases. Students believe that practicing dentistry can most often lead to various infections (70%) and vision impairments (64%), and that the most common potential causes of occupational diseases are poor positioning and incorrect body posture during work (88%) and infections (78%). When asked whether the occupational diseases among dentists are preventable, 89% of students gave an affirmative answer, and pointed to the requirement to use Personal Protection Equipment – PPE (94%) as the most important measure for the prevention of occupational diseases among dentists. The results of the survey show that the students of dentistry at the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Sarajevo have reached a certain level of awareness of the health risks that are associated with their future profession. The students have taken a largely identical view that dentistry is a profession that involves a high level of risk for the development of occupational diseases.

Key words: occupational diseases, dentistry, students

INTRODUCTION

Dentistry is one of the occupations with a high level of risk for the development of occupational diseases and work-related health disorders. Health risks in dentistry are numerous and, in principle, they can be divided into: biological, biomechanical, chemical, physical and psychogenic. Although these groups are seen as clearly sepa-

rate from each other, in reality it is very difficult, and sometimes even impossible to identify with absolute certainty the primary cause of an occupational disease, since it is most often a result of interaction between various risk factors over a prolonged period of time (Vodanović, 2006). Biological risk factors or biohazards include microorganisms (prions, viruses, bacteria, fungi) that can cause various infections and infectious diseases (Vodanović, 2015) either directly or indirectly. One of the most important occupational diseases that is communicable is caused by hepatitis B virus (HBV) infections. Health care workers are three to six times more likely to develop hepatitis B compared with the rest of the population (Šarić & Žuškin, 2002). Biomechanical risk factors include poor positioning and incorrect body posture during work, repetitive movements, prolonged

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mechanical stress, vibrations, etc. These factors may clearly stand in the background of musculoskeletal disorders, neurologic deficits and disorders of the peripheral nervous system. Chemical risk factors include medications, dental materials, disinfectants, and can cause allergies, hypersensitivity, and skin disorders. Physical risk factors are noise, vibration, radiation, artificial lighting, polymerization light. These factors can cause hearing and vision impairments, and a number of disorders caused by excessive exposure to radiation (Vodanović, 2015). Exposure to ionizing and non-ionizing radiation in dental practice is also considerable (Firić et al., 2016). Psychogenic risk factors include stress and chronic fatigue, which can lead to depression, burnout syndrome, but also to somatic disorders (cardiovascular, digestive, etc.) (Vodanović, 2006). According to the data available in the reference works, dental practitioners and their support staff are ranked first in terms of the risks and hazards that dental medicine as a profession poses to their health (Polegubić & Dundović, 2019). In order to prevent such hazards, it would be necessary to provide quality education and training for the safe work of dental practitioners, and in turn ensure the compliance with and application of ergonomic principles in order to minimize the levels of health risks that may occur in the workplace (Polegubić & Dundović, 2019). Based on a number of surveys that were conducted among students who are the future dental practitioners worldwide, it is established that there has been substantial evidence that students possess insufficient knowledge and awareness of the risk factors and occupational diseases that a dental profession entails. Since no data was previously recorded concerning the level of knowledge and awareness among dental students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and thus also among the faculty staff at the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Sarajevo, about the mechanisms of protection in the dentist's workplace, a special purpose survey was conducted at the Faculty of Dentistry with the Clinics in Sarajevo in order to examine the actual levels of knowledge among the dental students, i.e. the future dentists about the risks associated with the dental profession, about the occupational diseases that may develop as a result of work in dental practice, including about the possibilities of their prevention. This research

was aimed at assessing the level of awareness among the students of the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo of the occupational health risks associated with dental profession.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey concerning the level of knowledge about the health risks associated with the dental profession conducted among the dental students was made by using a tailor-made survey questionnaire that contained a number of questions important for achieving the set goals. The questionnaire was disseminated in the academic year 2019/2020 to students of all years of dentistry studies at the Faculty of Dentistry with the Clinics of the University of Sarajevo. Completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous. The survey questionnaire consisted of ten multiple-choice questions, of which seven were arranged in such a way that the respondents were allowed to select only a single possible answer, while to the remaining three of these ten multiple-choice questions the respondents were offered the possibility of providing multiple answers. The questionnaire was completed by 446 (61%) students out of a total of 732 active students at the Faculty of Dentistry with the Clinics of the University of Sarajevo in the academic year 2019/2020. A statistical analysis was performed by using the "MS Excell 2007" computer program (Microsoft Office 2007, Microsoft, and Redmond, WA) and "SPSS Statistics 21.0 for Windows" (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). A descriptive and non-parametric statistical analysis was conducted, and the chi-square test was applied.

RESULTS

The questionnaire was completed by 446 students, which represents 61% of the total of 732 active students at the Faculty of Dentistry with Clinics of the University of Sarajevo in the academic year 2019/2020. The highest number of the surveyed students attend the final, sixth year of study, which is a total of 102 (22.5%) students. The lowest number of students was surveyed in the third year of study, only 27 (6%) students, noting that the number of the least active students is

actually highest in the third year of study, which is only 75 of them. Finally, 307 female and 139 male students were surveyed. According to the results of the χ^2 test, the difference did not prove to be statistically significant in relation to the students' gender by year of study – ($p > 0.05$) (Table 1).

Out of a total of 446 students, 410 of them believe that dentistry is a profession that involves a high level of risk for the development of occupational and work-related diseases. As the most common potential causes of occupational diseases, the students have identified: poor positioning and incorrect body posture during work – 391 student responses (88%), and infections – 346 responses (78%). Students have reported that noise and allergies to dental materials and equipment are the least common potential causes of the disease. Out of the total number of students, 291 of them claim to have heard information about occupational diseases during the lectures at the faculty only occasionally, 143 students claim to have often heard about occupational diseases, while only 12 students claim to have never heard about occupational diseases associated with dental profession. The difference in responses also proved to be statistically significant in relation to the year of study – ($p < 0.05$). Out of a total of 446 students who answered the question, 256 students claim to have been familiar with the term “ergonomics”, while 190 students are not familiar with this term. The difference also proved to be statistically significant when it comes to the awareness of the concept of ergonomics among

students by year of study – ($p < 0.05$). When asked whether dentistry can pose a realistic hazard to the health of dentists, 402 students have answered this question in the affirmative, and 44 students answered it in the negative. The greatest number of respondents have indicated that health can be endangered in terms of *visual impairment* – which was the answer given by 287 students (64%), and *infection* - which was the answer given by 312 students (70%). Hearing disorders and oncological diseases are seen by students to be the least common health hazards. As the most common potential causes of occupational diseases the students have identified: *poor positioning and incorrect body posture during work*, which was the answer given by 391 students (88%), and *infections*, which was the answer given by 346 students (78%). Students have stated that *noise* and *allergies* to dental materials and equipment are the least common potential causes of the disease. A total of 399 students have stated that occupational diseases among dental practitioners are highly preventable. No record of any statistically significant difference was found in student responses by year of study – ($p > 0.05$). A number of students have indicated that, in order to prevent occupational diseases, practitioners should be required to wear Personal Protection Equipment – PPE (the answer by 419 students) and protective gloves (the answer by 424 students), although the vast majority of students have also mentioned other measures, such as, for example: ergonomically designed instruments and equipment, vaccination, protective masks, etc. Out of a total of 438 respondents who

Table 1. Distribution of surveyed respondents by gender and year of study

Tablica 1. Raspodjela anketiranih ispitanika prema spolu i godini studija

Year of study	Male		Female		Total	% of total number of enrolled students
	N	%	N	%	N	
1.	20	31	44	69	64	51
2.	24	33	49	67	73	50
3.	9	33	18	67	27	36
4.	24	27	64	73	88	79
5.	24	26	68	74	92	63
6.	38	37	64	63	102	78
Total	139	31	307	69	446	

$\chi^2 p > 0.05$

answered the question about whether they received the hepatitis B vaccine, 273 students have responded in the affirmative, while 165 students have responded that they never received any such vaccine. The difference proved to be also statistically significant when it comes to the number of vaccinated students by year of study – ($p < 0.05$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary table of the survey on health risks associated with dental profession

Tablica 2. Sažeta tablica istraživanja o zdravstvenim rizicima povezanim sa zubarskom profesijom

Year of study	N	%
Year one	64	14
Year two	73	16
Year three	27	6
Year four	88	20
Year five	92	21
Year six	102	23
I think that dentistry is an occupation that involves high levels of risk for the development of occupational diseases?	N	%
YES	410	92
NO	36	8
During my studies I have heard about occupational diseases associated with the dental profession	N	%
Often	143	32
Sometimes	291	65
Never	12	3
I am familiar with the term ergonomics	N	%
YES	256	59
NO	190	41
The practice of dentistry may pose a hazard to my health	N	%
YES	402	90
NO	44	10
The practice of dentistry may cause...	N	%
Infections	312	70
Vision impairments	287	64
Potential causes of occupational diseases in dentistry	N	%
Poor positioning and incorrect body posture during work	391	88
Infections	346	78

Occupational diseases among dental practitioners are preventable	N	%
YES	399	89
NO	47	11
In order to prevent the development of occupational diseases among dental practitioners it is important to wear...	N	%
Protective gloves	424	95
Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)	419	94
I have received a vaccine against hepatitis B	N	%
YES	273	63
NO	165	37

$\chi^2 p > 0.05$

DISCUSSION

Many surveys conducted among dental students around the world have confirmed that students do not possess an adequate level of knowledge and awareness of occupational health hazard factors. Although dentistry is considered to be a profession involving a high level of risk for the development of occupational diseases, education on these topics is not a common part of the curriculum in dentistry schools in many countries (Ayatollahi et al., 2012). The health risks associated with the dental profession are well known; however, the availability of data concerning the prevalence of occupational and work-related diseases is quite limited. This data is usually only available in countries with large populations and large numbers of dental practitioners. Data for smaller countries is usually missing (Matoš et al., 2016). One of these countries that does not have relevant data on occupational diseases and diseases associated with the practice of dentistry is Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is why this research tried to emphasize the importance of educating the students about such diseases, which is the first and most important step in their prevention. Out of the total number of active students at the Faculty of Dentistry with the Clinics of the University of Sarajevo in the academic year 2019/2020, just 61% of them have completed the questionnaire. When asked whether they consider dentistry to be an occupation involving high levels of risk for the development of occupational and work-related diseases, students of all years have given

mostly affirmative answers, so that on average 92% of students consider dentistry to be a risky profession in this regard. When asked whether they ever had the chance to hear about occupational diseases during their studies, most students said that they listened to such contents only occasionally (65% of students), but never as part of a separate subject or lectures designed exclusively to cover that particular topic. In a similar survey conducted among dental students in Saudi Arabia, 93% of students have stated that they never attended any lectures on dental ergonomics (*Al-mosa & Zafar, 2019*). In a study involving five different dentistry faculties in Malaysia, the authors find that 58% of the total number of surveyed students do not study ergonomics as a separate subject at their faculty (*Khan & Chew, 2013*). Our research shows that slightly more than one half of the surveyed students (59%) know the actual meaning of the term „ergonomics“, while 41% of students are not familiar with it at all. The lack of knowledge about dental ergonomics has proven to be a universal problem as many worldwide studies have shown similar results (*Alyahya et al., 2018, El-sallamy et al., 2018, Madaan & Chaudhari, 2012*). According to the analysed results, students of the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo believe that practicing dentistry can most often lead to infections (70%) and visual impairments (64%). Students believe that hearing disorders (15%) and oncological diseases (16%) are the least likely to occur as occupational diseases among dentists. Disorders of the musculoskeletal system, as occupational risks that are also associated with dentistry profession, are mentioned by a surprisingly small percentage of students (26%). A survey similar to ours was conducted among dental students in Croatia at the University of Zagreb (*Matoš et al., 2016*). There was also a major trend among students indicating that with the years of study grows also the level of awareness of the health diseases posed by the dental profession. Contrary to our research, students in Zagreb have mentioned disorders of the musculoskeletal system (60.2%) as the most common disorders and diseases associated with dental practice (*Matoš et al., 2016*). According to this data, the fact that only 26% of students at the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo have recognized musculoskeletal disorders as occupational disorders among dentists can be considered quite disconcerting. In a number of

surveys conducted in Denmark, Israel, the USA, and Norway, 38–82% of dentists have experienced some sort of back or neck pain once or on multiple occasions over a one-year period. Research shows that the pain was associated with poor positioning and awkward body posture during the performance of dental interventions (*Madaan & Chaudhari, 2012, Osborn et al., 1990, Szymańska, 2002*). In 40% of dentists, the pain requires further treatment (*Vodanović, 2015*). Although the musculoskeletal disorders appear to be the leading cause of health problems for most dentists in terms of their higher frequency, the results of this research have shown that dental students in Bosnia and Herzegovina have taken a totally different view in this respect. Many studies conducted among dental students around the world have shown that there is a huge prevalence of the reported pain and disorders associated with the musculoskeletal system among the students of dentistry, which often increases as they advance to more senior years of study (*Rising et al., 2005, Movahhed et al., 2013, Hayes et al., 2009, Melis et al., 2004, Thornton et al., 2008, De Carvalho et al., 2009*). Based on such data, we can come to the conclusion that most students see the occupational diseases among dentists as primarily infectious diseases, i.e. infections, and that their prevention of occupational diseases is aimed at protection from biological materials that could transmit infection through certain pathogens. This is confirmed by the very fact that a large percentage of students (89%) have also mentioned vaccination as a measure of protection. Through the survey questionnaire used in this study, the students had the opportunity to state whether they ever received the hepatitis B virus vaccine, where 63% of the total number of surveyed students were reported to be vaccinated against hepatitis B, while 37% of students did not receive the hepatitis B vaccine. This relatively low rate of vaccination among students is quite surprising, considering the fact that the students have indicated infection as one of the leading risks factors for the development of occupational diseases among dentists, and vaccination as one of the most important preventive measures in the practicing dentistry. These figures show a very low rate of vaccinated students at the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo, in comparison with the results of research conducted among dental students in Yemen,

where the percentage of vaccinated students was as high as 70.7% (*Halboub, 2015*). The low rate of vaccinated dental students in Bosnia and Herzegovina is particularly worrying when compared to the high rates of vaccinated dental students in Brazil (90.8%), the United Arab Emirates (95.8%), and Canada (100%) (*De Souza et al., 2006, Rahman et al., 2013, McCarthy et al., 2000*). However, this rate appears to be considerably higher compared to a survey conducted among dental students in India, where only 38% of students were vaccinated (*Singh et al., 2011*). When asked whether the development of occupational diseases among dentists is preventable, 89% of the students surveyed in our research have given an affirmative answer. Students of the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo tend to indicate that, in order to prevent occupational diseases, dental practitioners should be required to wear Personal Protection Equipment – PPE (94%), although the vast majority of students have also mentioned other protection measures (vaccination, ergonomically designed instruments and equipment, a frequent change of body posture during work). According to a survey conducted at the Faculty of Dentistry in Zagreb, most students also tend to believe that occupational diseases are preventable, while the percentage of students who have taken such a view is ever increasing as they advance to more senior years of study. As the main way to prevent occupational diseases among dentists, students have reported the use of protective masks (35.8%) and gloves (31%) (7). The limitations of every, but also of this survey, need to be viewed in terms of representativeness of the selected sample. The survey was conducted on a sample of 446 students of the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo. The respondent groups are properly arranged by year of study of the respondents, i.e. from the freshmen year to the sixth final year of study. What is more, the survey covered male and female students of the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo only, which was quite sufficient for the needs of this research. However, if the actual intent is still to get the data on the level of the entire Bosnia and Herzegovina, it would be necessary to conduct research within other dental schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The limitation of the survey is ascribable to the

lack of any previous surveys in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with which the results of our conducted survey are comparable, which is why the surveys conducted in other European countries and worldwide were used during the process of drafting the survey questionnaire and for the mutual comparison of the survey results. Interestingly enough, the data shows that a higher percentage of students attending the lower years of study at the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo recognize stress as a potential cause of occupational diseases among dentists compared with the number of students attending the higher years of study, but there is also the fact that students do not tend to refer to musculoskeletal disorders as major health problems which occur during the work in dental practice. Such survey results open the possibility of conducting a series of broader research on the topic of occupational diseases in the dental profession, and the elimination of dilemmas that were demonstrated in this survey.

CONCLUSION

During their studies, the students of dentistry at the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo have had the opportunity to hear only occasionally about the occupational diseases among dentists. Nevertheless, the results of the study show that students possess an adequate level of awareness of the occupational health diseases associated with their future occupation. Students of the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo have mostly shared the identical view that dentistry is a profession that involves a high risk of occupational diseases, noting that the level of awareness that practicing dentistry may pose a potential hazard to their health is increasing as they advance to more senior years of their studies. Students have indicated infections and visual impairments as the leading health problems associated with their future profession. The students of the Faculty of Dentistry in Sarajevo have taken the overall view that occupational and work-related diseases are preventable, while the survey results show that they also possess an adequate level of knowledge about the measures required to be taken in order to prevent this type of disease.

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SVIJEST O ZDRAVSTVENIM RIZICIMA POVEZANIM SA STOMATOLOŠKOM PROFESIJOM MEĐU STUDENTIMA SARAJEVSKOG STOMATOLOŠKOG FAKULTETA

SAŽETAK: Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je procijeniti svijest studenata Stomatološkog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Sarajevu o rizicima zdravlja na radu povezanim sa stomatološkom profesijom. Istraživanje je provedeno među studentima stomatologije svih godina studija na Stomatološkom fakultetu Univerziteta u Sarajevu, korištenjem anketnog upitnika po mjeri. Upitnik je popunilo 446 učenika. Rezultati: 92 % učenika vjeruje da je stomatologija profesija koja uključuje visoku razinu rizika od izbijanja profesionalnih bolesti. Studenti vjeruju da bavljenje stomatologijom najčešće može dovesti do različitih infekcija (70 %) i oštećenja vida (64 %) te da su najčešći potencijalni uzroci profesionalnih bolesti loše pozicioniranje i nepravilno držanje tijela tijekom rada (88 %) i infekcije (78 %). Na pitanje je li profesionalne bolesti kod stomatologa moguće spriječiti, 89 % učenika odgovorilo je potvrdno i istaknulo zahtjev da se kao najvažnija mjera za prevenciju profesionalnih bolesti kod stomatologa koristi oprema za osobnu zaštitu - OZO (94 %). Rezultati ankete pokazuju da su studenti stomatologije na Stomatološkom fakultetu Univerziteta u Sarajevu postigli određenu razinu svijesti o zdravstvenim rizicima koji su povezani sa njihovom budućom profesijom. Studenti su zauzeli uglavnom identično stajalište da je stomatologija profesija koja uključuje visoku razinu rizika za razvoj profesionalnih bolesti.

Ključne riječi: profesionalne bolesti, stomatologija, student

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