

Breaking down the barriers: Increasing access to preventative oral health

care for underinsured Latino children

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Background

- ◆ Although preventable, dental disease is the most common chronic infectious disease among children, with Latino children suffering disproportionately.
- ◆ Latino children experience a higher prevalence of caries than do children of any other racial/ethnic group in the United States. Additionally, young Latino children, those age five and younger, have higher rates of early childhood caries (ECC) than any other racial/ethnic group.
- ◆ Caregivers serve as gatekeepers to their child's oral health; however, they are faced with numerous barriers in accessing preventative oral health services for their children.

Collaboration

- ◆ San Francisco State University Masters of Public Health Program in Community Health Education
- ◆ Center for the Vulnerable Child at Children's Hospital & Research Center Oakland

Target Population

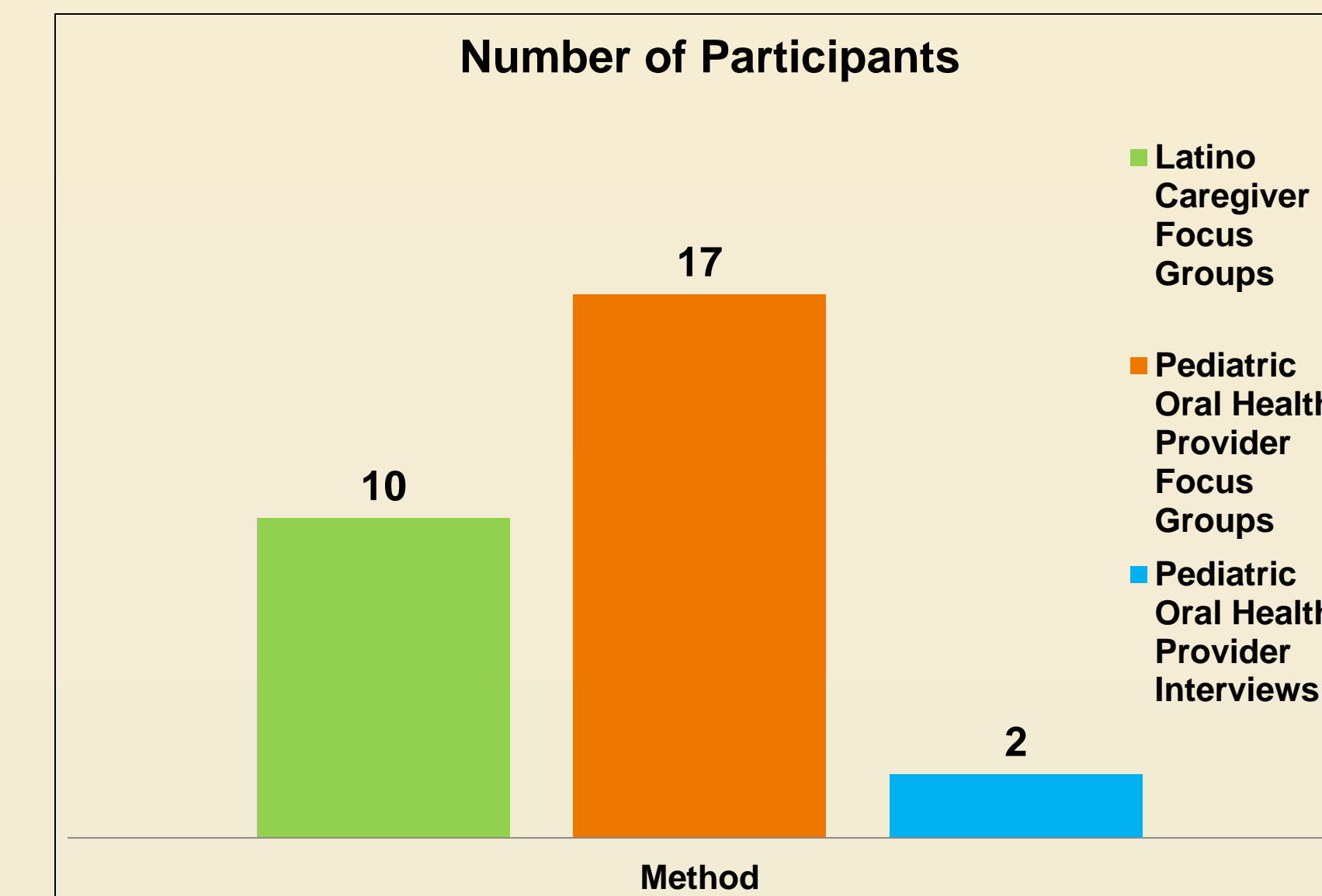
- ◆ Latino parents and guardians of underinsured children aged five and younger who reside in Northern Alameda County of California.
- ◆ Oral health providers and office staff who serve underinsured Latino children aged five and younger in Northern Alameda County of California.
- ◆ *Underinsured* is defined as a child that has no insurance or insufficient insurance to cover all the dental services needed.

Purpose

- ◆ Assess the barriers and opportunities to accessing preventative oral health care for underinsured Latino families with children aged five and younger in Northern Alameda County of California.
- ◆ Explore the extent to which caregivers' attitudes and beliefs regarding the importance of oral health, caregivers' experiences receiving oral health services for their children, and pediatric oral health providers' experiences providing oral health services, aides or hinders access to preventative oral health services for uninsured, Latino children.

Methods

- ◆ Focus groups with adult caregivers of underinsured Latino children aged five and younger who reside in Northern Alameda County, CA.
- ◆ Focus groups with pediatric oral health providers and office staff who work in Northern Alameda County, CA.
- ◆ Interviews with pediatric oral health providers who work in Northern Alameda County, CA.



Findings

- 1) There are gaps in caregiver knowledge regarding the oral health care of underinsured Latino children aged five and younger living in Northern Alameda County.
- 2) Language barriers between caregivers and providers inhibit communication of knowledge and utilization of oral health services.
- 3) Negative attitudes and behaviors of dental office staff discourages caregivers of Latino children aged five and younger in Alameda County from utilizing oral health services.
- 4) Obtaining the finances and/or insurance coverage necessary to fund oral health care services is a significant barrier.
- 5) Lack of pediatric dentists in Northern Alameda County serving underinsured Latino children aged five and younger limits caregivers ability to obtain oral health services for their children.
- 6) Social and cultural practices may influence the development of dental disease in underinsured Latino children aged five and younger in Northern Alameda County.
- 7) Pediatricians are viewed as the primary source of information about oral health care by caregivers of underinsured Latino children aged five and younger Northern Alameda County.

Recommendations

- 1) Create educational tools aimed to improve overall knowledge about to oral health care and services.
- 2) Establish a partnership between medical and dental providers in order to provide consistent care and oral health information to caregivers.
- 3) Create policy changes that will integrate dental teaching clinics and state licensure with providing oral health services in communities of need.
- 4) Improve access to oral health care by increasing dental insurance coverage and proposing feasible financial arrangements for underinsured families.
- 5) Develop employee training programs that educate dental office staff on how to be more culturally competent and hospitable.

Conclusion

- ◆ Due to the fact that Northern Alameda County is similar to the rest of California, solutions that work in Northern Alameda may be able to serve as a model for the state as a whole.
- ◆ Ultimately, the goal of these recommendations is to contribute to existing literature regarding effective ways to improve access to preventative oral health care and eliminate health disparities among young, underinsured Latino children. These recommendations are intended to inform the practice of all pediatric oral health providers and organizations in order to deliver optimal oral health care and improve oral health outcomes.

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