

A reason to smile: New immigrants respond best to oral hygiene campaign

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Tapping into the desire to have an attractive smile is the best motivator for improving oral hygiene, and new immigrants are the most receptive to oral health messages, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Authors Shuili Du (Simmons College), Sankar Sen (City University of New York), and C.B. Bhattacharya (Boston University) evaluated the effectiveness of an oral health outreach program in disadvantaged communities. They found that focusing on the social benefits of having a beautiful smile was the most effective strategy for improving dental hygiene habits among participants.

"Our findings suggest that, among children from less acculturated families, participation in this oral health program leads to not only more favorable beliefs about the health-related (preventing cavities and gum diseases) and psychosocial (beautiful smile and self-confidence) benefits of oral care behavior, but also an increase in oral care behavior such as brushing, flossing and dental checkups," write the authors.

The research found that families that had been in the United States longer were less responsive to the program's messages than new immigrants.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2002), there is a "silent epidemic" of dental and oral diseases in disadvantaged communities, particularly among children of minority

racial and ethnic groups. The researchers conducted focus groups of participants in urban areas with large Hispanic populations. Those participants were parents of children in the national oral health outreach program that was launched in 2000, with the involvement of a corporate sponsor, the Boys and Girls Club of America, the American Dental Association, and dental schools.

And here's good news for the corporate sponsor: the parents who participated in the program said they intended to reciprocate by purchasing the sponsor's products. "Their intention to reciprocate toward the company is proportionate to their perceptions of how much the program has helped their children and family," the researchers conclude.

Source: University of Chicago Press Journals

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