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 Research Report No. 45

Oral health behaviours in the Australian population 2004–06



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This report provides information on the oral health behaviours of the adult Australian population in the period 2004–06. People were asked the number of times they had brushed their teeth in the last week, and to indicate whether they regularly used either dental floss, dental tape or an interdental brush. The results were reported by sex, age group, level of education and household income for dentate people aged 15 years or more.

Main findings

- Over half the respondents (55.5%) reported brushing their teeth at least twice a day during the last week, and more than half reported regularly cleaning between their teeth (60.6%).
- A higher proportion of females than males brushed at least twice a day in the last week (58.7% compared with 41.3%), and reported regularly cleaning interdentally (56.2% compared with 43.8%).
- Brushing at least twice a day was more common among older people, but regular interdental cleaning did not vary with age.
- For adults under 60, those with a higher income, were more likely to brush their teeth at least twice a day.
- Respondents with a higher level of education were more likely to report brushing their teeth at least twice a day and to regularly clean interdentally.

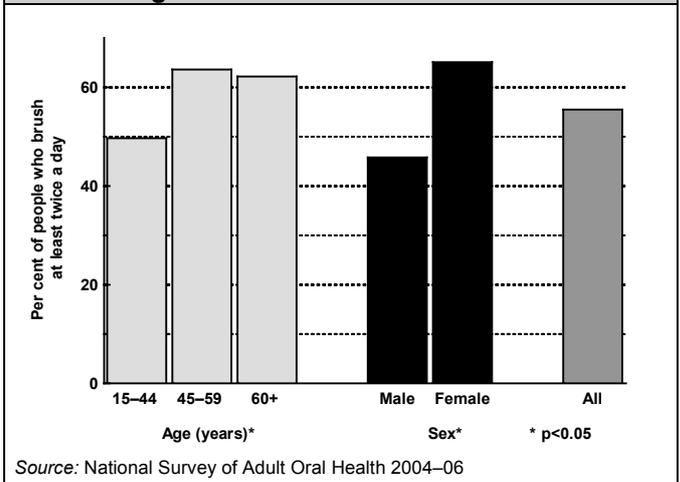
Oral health behaviours by age and sex

Toothbrushing

Overall, 55.5% reported toothbrushing at least twice a day. The prevalence of toothbrushing twice or more a day was higher in the two older

age groups (45+ years) and lowest in those aged 15–44 years (Figure 1). A higher percentage of females (65.1%) than males (45.8%) reported brushing their teeth at least twice a day.

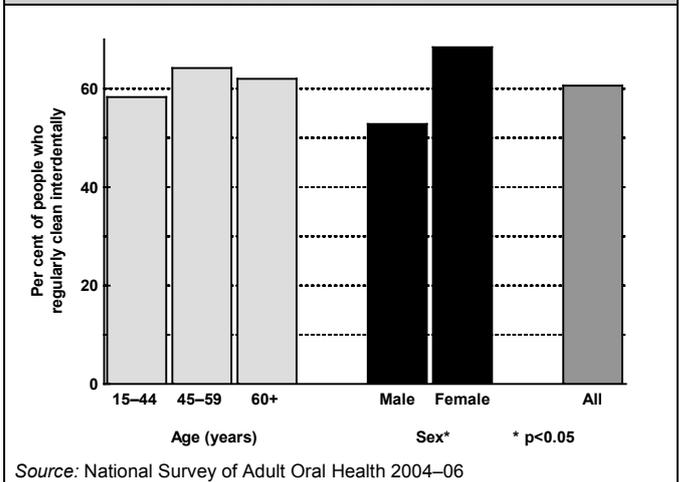
Figure 1: Toothbrushing at least twice a day by age and sex of adult Australians



Interdental cleaning

Overall, 60.6% reported interdental cleaning at least twice a day. There was little difference in the prevalence of people in each age group who used an interdental device (Figure 2). Females (68.4%) were more likely to regularly use interdental cleaning devices than males (52.8%).

Figure 2: Regular interdental cleaning by age and sex of adult Australians



Oral health behaviours by age and social characteristics: toothbrushing

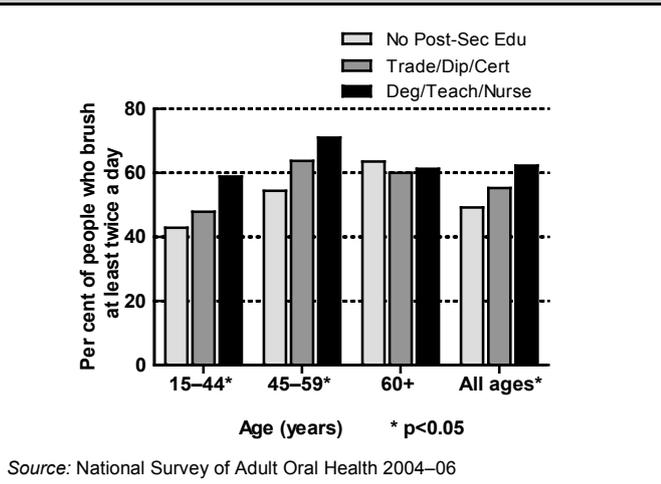
Age and education

A higher proportion of people with a degree or teaching or nursing as their highest qualification reported brushing their teeth at least twice a day in the last week (Figure 3: 62.3%) than people with a trade or diploma or certificate qualification (55.3%).

In turn, a greater proportion in this group reported brushing their teeth two plus times per day in the last week than people without a post-secondary education (49.2%).

The 60+ age group did not share the same association of education level with frequency of brushing.

Figure 3: Toothbrushing by age and education of adult Australians

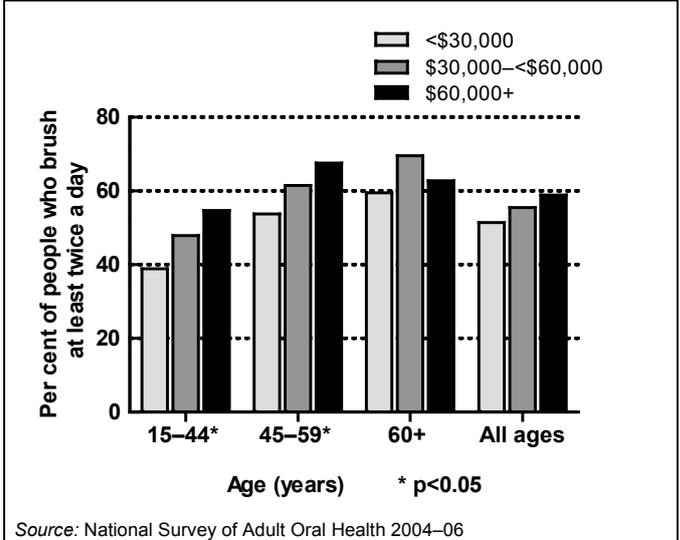


Age and income

Although there was an association with more people on higher household incomes brushing their teeth at least twice a day in the last week than people on lower household incomes, the association was not statistically significant. 58.9% of people with household incomes of \$60,000 or more brushed their teeth at least twice a day in the last week, compared with 55.5% and 51.4% of people on lower household incomes (Figure 4).

There is no apparent association between income and toothbrushing behaviour for people 60 years and over.

Figure 4: Toothbrushing by age and household income of adult Australians



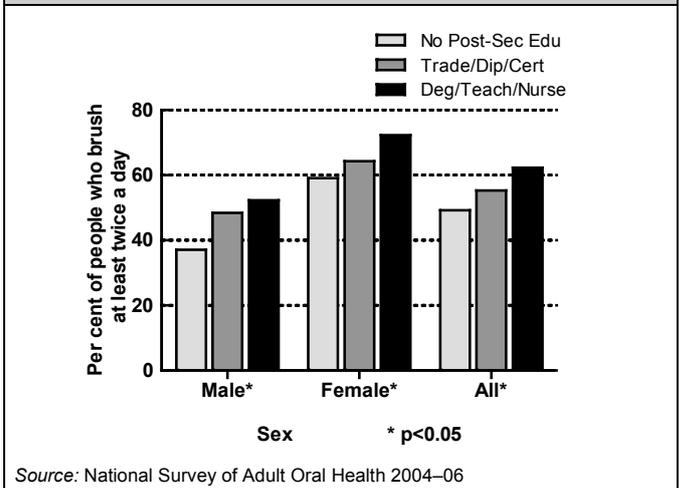
Sex and education

The higher the level of education, the higher was the proportion of people who reported brushing their teeth at least twice a day in the last week (Figure 5).

For males the proportion who brushed their teeth at least twice a day was highest for those with a degree or teaching or nursing qualification (52.3%); less for those with a trade, diploma or certificate qualification (48.4%); and less again for those people without a post-secondary education (37.1%).

The percentage of females who reported toothbrushing at least twice a day in the last week was higher at higher levels of qualification (72.9%, 64.2%, 59.1%).

Figure 5: Toothbrushing by sex and education of adult dentate Australians

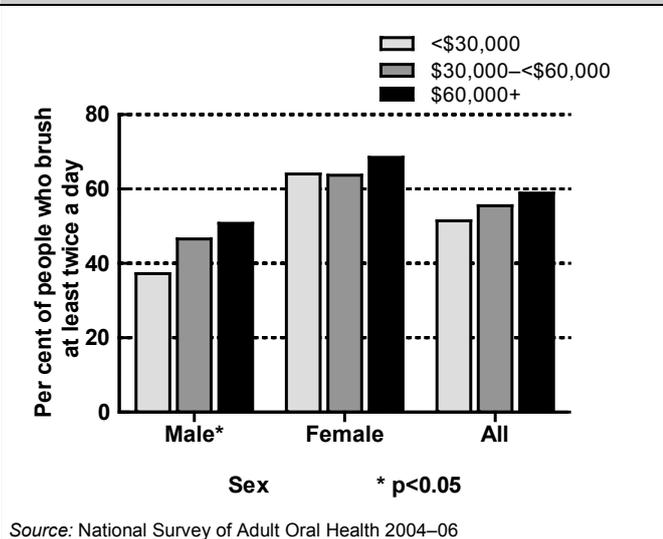


Sex and income

For males the higher the household income, the greater was the proportion of people who reported brushing their teeth at least twice a day in the last week (Figure 6). Over half (50.8%) of the males with a household income of \$60,000 or more brushed their teeth at least twice a day in the last week. This percentage was 46.6% for males with an income between \$30,000 and \$60,000, and 37.2% for males with a household income under \$30,000.

For dentate females there was no difference in the proportion who brushed their teeth at least twice a day in the last week between the three household income groups.

Figure 6: Toothbrushing by sex and household income of adult dentate Australians



Oral health behaviours by age and social characteristics: interdental cleaning

Age and education

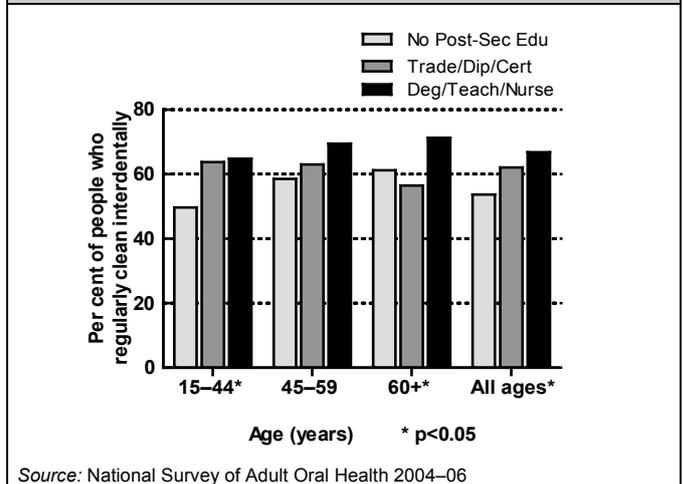
The higher the level of qualification of each age group, the greater was the proportion of people who reported regularly cleaning between their teeth (Figure 7: 53.7%, 62.1% and 66.8%).

In the youngest group (15-44 years of age) the proportion of people without a post-secondary education who reported regularly cleaning interdentally was lower (49.7%) than in the two groups of people with a post-secondary education (63.8% and 64.7%).

However, in the middle-aged group (45-59 years) there was no statistically significant difference in the proportion of people who regularly clean

interdentally between the three education-based groups. On the other hand, in the group aged 60+ years there was a higher proportion of people who regularly cleaned interdentally in the most qualified group (71.3%) than in the other two groups (56.5% and 61.2%).

Figure 7: Interdental cleaning by age and education of adult dentate Australians

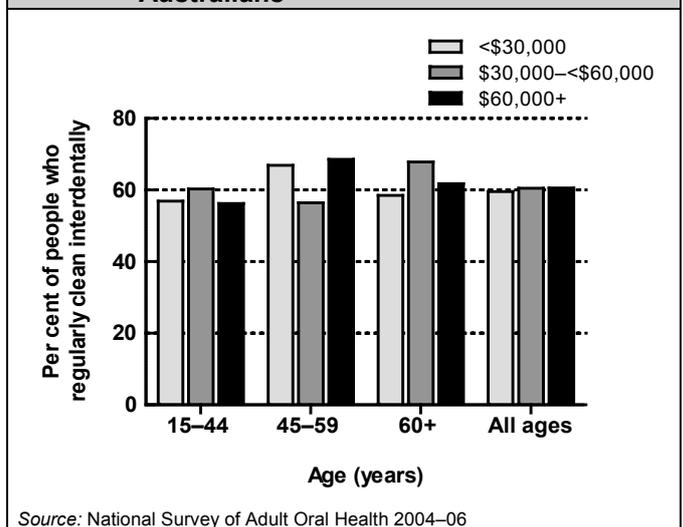


Age and income

There was little difference between the three income groups in the proportion of people who reported regularly cleaning between their teeth (Figure 8).

Similarly, there was no statistical difference between income groups in the proportion of people who reported regular interdental cleaning in the youngest (15-44 years) or oldest age groups (60+ years). However, in the middle-aged group (45-59 years) the middle income group (\$30,000-\$60,000) had a lower proportion of people who reported cleaning interdentally (56.4% compared with 66.9% and 68.6%).

Figure 8: Interdental cleaning by age and household income of adult dentate Australians

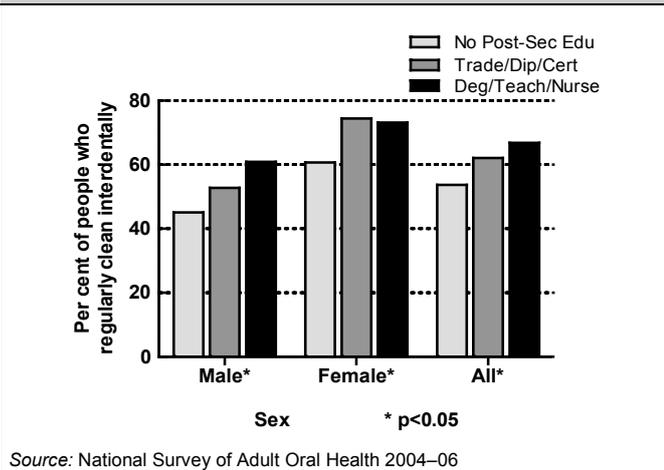


Sex and education

Fewer females without a post-secondary education reported regularly cleaning interdentally (60.7%) than those with a post-secondary education (Figure 9: 74.4% and 73.2%).

In the case of males, a lower level of education was associated with a decreasing proportion of people who reported regularly cleaning their teeth interdentally (60.9%, 52.8% and 45.1%).

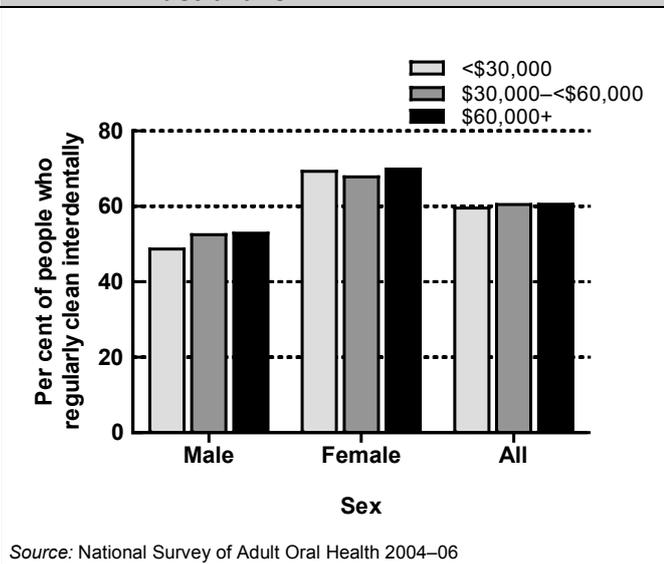
Figure 9: Interdental cleaning by sex and education of adult dentate Australians



Sex and income

For both the male and female groups there was no statistically significant difference by household income group in the proportion of dentate adults who reported regularly cleaning interdentally (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Interdental cleaning by sex and household income of adult dentate Australians



Data collection

Data presented in this publication are from the National Survey of Adult Oral Health 2004–06. A sample of 14,123 persons aged 15 years and over participated in the telephone interview component of the survey. Sample sizes varied between states and territories according to their estimated resident populations, with the largest sample from New South Wales (3,621 persons) and the smallest from the Australian Capital Territory (984 persons). Dental examinations were carried out on 5,505 subjects, and a questionnaire that included items on oral health behaviours was completed by 4,170 people.

The oral health behaviour survey questions included:

1. In the last week, how many times did you brush your teeth?
2. Please indicate whether you regularly use either dental floss, dental tape or an interdental brush.

Data were weighted to represent the age and sex distribution of the Australian population at the time of the survey. Where attention is drawn to differences, the results are statistically significant at the 5% level.

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Further information can be obtained from Len Crocombe by email leonard.crocombe@adelaide.edu.au or phone (08) 8303 7326.

The AIHW Dental Statistics and Research Unit (DSRU) is a collaborating unit of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, established in 1988 at The University of Adelaide and located in the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health (ARCPOH), School of Dentistry, The University of Adelaide. DSRU aims to improve the oral health of Australians through the collection, analysis and reporting of information on oral health and access to dental care, the practice of dentistry and the dental labour force in Australia.

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AIHW Dental Statistics and
Research Unit
ARCPOH, School of Dentistry
The University of Adelaide
SOUTH AUSTRALIA 5005

Email: aihw.dsr@adelaide.edu.au
Phone: 61 8(08) 8303 4051
Fax: 61 8(08) 8303 3070
www.arc poh.adelaide.edu.au