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The Interplay of Loneliness, Oral Health and Quality of Life: A Study of Thai Older Adults

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed to examine the association between oral health, oral health-related quality of life (OHRQoL) and loneliness among Thai older adults.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 421 adults aged 60 and older in Ang Thong Province, Thailand. Data were collected through structured interviews and oral examinations. Loneliness and OHRQoL were assessed using the Thai version of the 6-item Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (RULS-6), and the Thai version of The Oral Health Impact Profile 14 (OHIP-14), respectively. Statistical analyses included correlation, univariate, and multivariate linear regression.

Results: The average (standard deviation) loneliness score was 7.76 (3.46). All OHIP-14 domains were significantly associated with loneliness. The strongest correlation was observed in the psychological discomfort domain ($r=0.31$), followed by the handicap domain. In the multivariate analysis, significant predictors of increased loneliness included greater age, living alone, smoking history, semi-dependence, and psychological discomfort. Interestingly, psychological disability was found to be inversely associated with loneliness.

Conclusions: Certain domains of OHRQoL, especially psychological discomfort, were positively associated with loneliness among older Thai adults. Factors such as age, living status, smoking history, and functional ability also played significant roles.

Keywords: aging, loneliness, oral health, oral health-related quality of life