

## THE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF ORAL HEALTH

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Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press  
1969, 167 pp., \$5.00.

This volume, sponsored by the Committee on Vital and Health Statistics Monographs of the Statistics Section of the American Public Health Association, as explained by its senior author, is an effort to “marshal, present, and document the essentials about the main problems of dentistry.” The dental “problems” encompassed are dental caries, periodontal disease, oral cancer and the major dentofacial deformities of malocclusion and cleft lip and palate.

This somewhat small volume contains five chapters, each surveying a specific oral pathology or impairment. Each chapter presents a brief epidemiologic history of the particular disease category, compiled from a wide array of sources and often from nonepidemiologic studies. A discussion of the etiology of the disorder in terms of existing knowledge is included in the analysis. Specific factors related to the distribution of the oral disorder in the population are presented in statistical detail, ranging from such demographic characteristics as age, sex, race and geographical area to sociological dimensions of socioeconomic status, religion (in some instances), family status, and other factors that might feasibly be related to the incidence and/or prevalence of these disorders.

Aspects of diagnosis and treatment of particular interest to dental practitioners are also frequently presented.

Some of the existing problems in methodology, particularly certain measurements and related indices for certain oral pathologies, are also discussed. Implications for prevention of certain disorders are presented where indicated.

An extensive bibliography is presented in an appendix along with a useful index of the contents.

This reviewer was impressed by the resourcefulness and effort put into these studies by each author-compiler. A wide array of source material in nondental as well as nonepidemiologic publications was surveyed and succinctly summarized by these researchers. Much of the data presented, however, may be termed more statistical than epidemiologic, more of a descriptive than analytic nature.

The varied quality as well as general paucity of systematic, standardized and controlled epidemiologic research on these major dental conditions, of no fault to these compilers, created a noticeable tentativeness to many of the general results and conclusions of these authors. This raises justifiable concern over the current status of research and firm knowledge of oral epidemiology and etiology. Support for dental research of all kinds, including the epidemiologic, no doubt has not been as ample or as fortunate as for medical research. This lack may be at least one major reason why dental epidemiology, as represented by this volume, cannot compare with the sophistication and development of medical epidemiology.

Nevertheless, this volume presents a valuable and useful assessment of existing epidemiologic knowledge about the major oral pathologies, the strengths and weaknesses of that knowledge and, perhaps unintentionally, reveals an alarming need for considerably more dental epidemiologic research, both in quality and quantity, range and depth, and of a systematic and progressive nature.

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