



**Kerman University of Medical Sciences
Faculty of Management and Medical Informatics**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science (MSc)**

**Title:
Identifying the barriers and challenges of the elderly in using oral
and dental services from their and providers' perspectives in
Kerman city: Providing a solution**

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Abstract

Introduction and Objectives: With the rapid growth of the elderly population in Iran and worldwide, the oral and dental health of this age group has become an important priority in public health systems. Oral health in older adults is not limited to physiological functions; it also plays a crucial role in improving quality of life, maintaining self-esteem, and facilitating social interactions. Nevertheless, older adults utilize dental services less frequently than other age groups, and numerous barriers hinder their access to such services. Therefore, the present study was conducted to identify the barriers and challenges to the utilization of oral and dental health services among older adults in the city of Kerman from the perspectives of both the elderly themselves and service providers, and to propose practical solutions.

Method: This qualitative study was conducted using a conventional content analysis approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 older adults, 8 dentists, and 3 elderly health experts in Kerman, who were selected using purposive and snowball sampling methods. Data were analyzed using the method proposed by Grane Heim and Lundman. The criteria of Guba and Lincoln were applied to ensure the credibility and reliability of the data collection process.

Results: Barriers experienced by older adults in receiving oral and dental health services were categorized into five main themes: structural and systemic factors, quality and equipment, educational and awareness-related factors, physical and functional limitations, and psychological and social consequences. Dentists reported seven main themes of challenges related to the study topic, including interactive and communication issues with older adults, physical and cognitive factors, procedural and managerial challenges in treatment, providers' skills, education and knowledge, infrastructural and equipment-related issues, financial and economic factors, and cultural and social influences affecting the treatment process. Furthermore, from the perspective of elderly health experts, the challenges were grouped into four main themes: the absence of an organized structure and service package for geriatric oral health, policy-making and governance issues, financial, insurance, and economic challenges, and infrastructural and physical limitations in service delivery.

Discussion and Conclusion: Barriers to the utilization of oral and dental health services among older adult's stem from interconnected challenges that require a comprehensive and multisectoral approach. Designing a dedicated service package for older adults, expanding insurance coverage, developing infrastructure and mobile services, enhancing dentists' training

in geriatric dentistry and behavioral management, and increasing public awareness could play an important role in reducing the barriers faced by older adults in accessing oral health services.

Keywords: Elderly, Oral and dental health care, Dentist, Challenges, Barriers, Qualitative research.