Preface

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This international collaborative study has provided a framework for the development of explanatory models of health inequalities in childhood dental caries. By taking a truly multidisciplinary approach, the initial studies undertaken have given fresh insight to this important international area.

The consortium developed under a grant from the National Institute of Dento-Cranial Research (NIDCR) comprised 44 researchers from 18 countries around the world. Nearly 3,000 children aged 3 to 4 years and their families participated in 17 countries and over 2,000 dentists in 14 countries. This substantial undertaking represents the first global research initiative to a common protocol addressing some of the underlying factors in early childhood caries among children of different ethnic backgrounds living in a variety of cultural and health settings.

The research has produced a systematic review of the literature, described the children’s bacteriological profiles, the family’s beliefs and attitudes to their children’s oral health and health-related behaviours, and begun to explore dentists’ attitudes and the influence of health service systems on their perceived ability to provide preventive and restorative care. The formative studies undertaken provide new data showing how parents’ attitudes and beliefs about oral health-related behaviour are associated with the likelihood of their children developing caries. The study found clear variations for different ethnic and socio-economic groups that separately impact on their children’s oral health.

A valuable framework has been provided for prospective observational and intervention investigations to study and improve child oral health. The group are to be congratulated on their work and the important role of the World Health Organization’s Collaborating Centres is recognised.

As both Chief Dental Officer for England and Co-Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Transcultural Oral Health, I welcome the publication of this important contribution to the literature in this field.

Raman Bedi