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Socio-Economic Status, Treatment Approach and Recurrence of Childhood Caries

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Objectives Social inequalities are associated with poor oral health. The aim of the present study is to assess the effect of socioeconomic levels on the number of caries, the use of general anesthesia (GA) and the recurrence of caries after treatment.

Methods This 4-year prospective cohort study was completed in a private dental practice. Dental charts were reviewed for 1739 patients between 2-10 years old who had comprehensive dental care by four dental practitioners. To participate in the study, patients had to attend the recall appointment with the dentist or the hygienist. Patients with severe medical conditions were not included. The sample for this study included 198 children. The practitioners provided information on the number of caries each participant presented at baseline, the type of treatment (conventional versus GA), the frequency of follow-up visits and the occurrence of new caries. A questionnaire including oral hygiene and eating habits was completed for each participant.

Results Of the 198 children, 177 (89.3%) had private health insurance (group 1), the remaining 21 (10.7%) benefited from social insurance (group 2). At baseline, 51% of the children in group 1 had no caries, 21% had 1-3 caries and 28% presented more than 4 caries. Almost all children in group 2, presented more than 4 carious lesions. 13% of the children from group 1 and 72% from group 2 received GA for treatment, the remaining received conventional dental treatment. At follow-up, almost all children belonging to group 2 (95%) and 36% belonging to group 1, presented new caries. Significant differences were found regarding oral hygiene habits. However, no differences were found on eating habits.

Conclusions Socioeconomic inequalities play an important role on the initial number of caries, the choice of treatment (GA vs conventional treatment) and the occurrence of new caries.