

## **BEST PRACTICE -2**

# **"EMPOWERING SMILES: BRIDGING ORAL HEALTH DISPARITIES THROUGH TRIBAL OUTREACH"**

### **Objectives:**

1. The primary objective of the program is to provide holistic care to all individuals, with a special focus on tribal communities that often face geographical isolation and economic disadvantages.

Other specific objectives of the program are as follows:

2. To provide treatment for dental ailments to those who seek it, thereby addressing their oral health needs.
3. To uplift the tribal community by improving their overall health and well-being.
4. To remove cultural taboos and norms related to oral health care within the tribal communities, promoting awareness and acceptance.

### **The Context:**

Al-Azhar Dental College, as the sole dental institution in the entire Idukki district, has undertaken significant initiatives to conduct outreach programs. The college is committed to its mission and vision, emphasizing social responsibility. Many tribal and scheduled caste communities reside in various locations across the district. These marginalized groups face lower literacy rates compared to the state average in Kerala. Providing oral health awareness to them is of utmost importance, as these communities not only suffer from economic backwardness but also adhere strictly to their cultural norms and beliefs.

### **The Practice:**

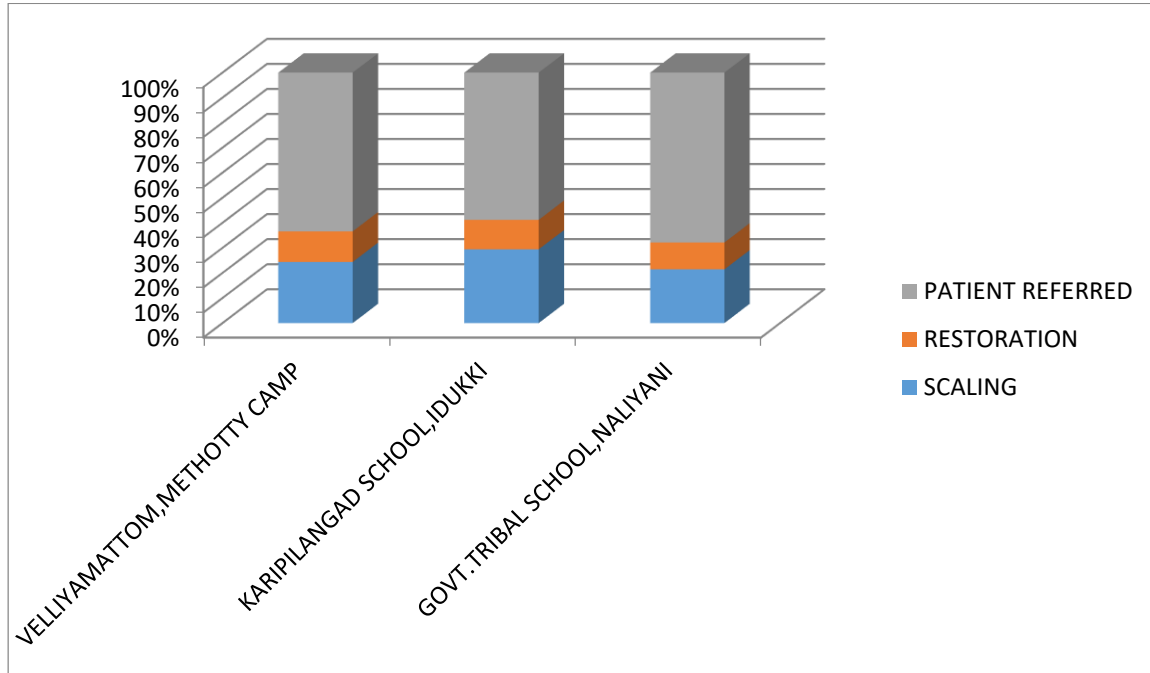
The tribal outreach programme adopts a multidisciplinary approach. Initially, efforts were made to encourage all residents of tribal areas to seek dental care. Various programs were organized in collaboration with the public health department to raise awareness and impart knowledge. These initiatives include oral health talks in nearby Anganwadi centers, oral health surveys conducted as part of ICMR STS projects and distribution of oral healthcare products among the local population.

The next step involved conducting regular dental checkup camps in these areas. Organizing camps in schools like Karipilangad School, Idukki, and Government Tribal School Naliyani ensures ongoing access to dental services. Emphasizing preventive measures like fluoride treatment and sealants showcases the program's dedication to early intervention, promoting preventive oral health care practices among school children, and their families thereby benefiting the larger community. AADC also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Velliyamattom panchayat to conduct routine dental camps in its several wards. Specialists from various fields visit the area on a rotational basis, ensuring consistent care. This arrangement has reduced the financial burden and inaccessibility to urban areas for the local population.

**Evidence of Success:**

The tribal outreach programs have yielded positive outcomes, benefiting numerous individuals and families. Camps offer immediate treatment and establish a vital referral system for complex cases, ensuring all tribal members receive necessary oral health attention.

**PATIENT STATISTICS OF TRIBAL CAMP**



**Problems Encountered and Resources Required:**

The implementation of the program has encountered several challenges, including the need to overcome cultural taboos and norms surrounding oral health. The inaccessibility of areas and limited access to resources further complicates the provision of dental care. Adequate funding is also essential to sustain and expand the program's reach and impact.

**Notes:**

Vellyamattom has a population of 19,366 individuals in 4,828 households. Females make up 49.94%, males 50.06%. Scheduled castes constitute 6.14%, and scheduled tribes 23.26%. 78.48% are engaged in main work, 21.52% in marginal activities.