Reviewer's report

Title: Oral Health-related Cultural Beliefs for four racial/Ethnic Groups: Assessment of the Literature

Version: 2 Date: 29 October 2007

Reviewer: H. Asuman Kiyak

Reviewer's report:

The premise of this manuscript is quite worthy, i.e. the importance of examining the impact of cultural beliefs and values on oral health status and behavior. However, this literature review does not fulfill its promise and seems to wander through a vast literature that includes studies of nationalities in their own countries vs. those who have immigrated to the U.S. or U.K. (e.g. Chinese), a mixture of studies focused on different nationalities being used to represent all people of that ethnic group (e.g. Puerto Rican parents' values being described as “Hispanic” without any caveats for the fact that only Puerto Ricans were studied), and a tendency to use the same narrow focus for which they criticize some of the studies they apparently read and rejected. The resulting manuscript therefore appears to be a hodgepodge of publications that do not necessarily identify unique ethnic/cultural values but that just happened to be conducted among a particular ethnic group. Indeed, the fact that this review did not examine studies that compared oral health beliefs and values across ethnic groups weakens the conclusions. Indeed, it is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the role of cultural differences in oral health based on the studies reviewed here.

More specific concerns are listed below:

(1) The authors provide a good rationale to limit their literature review to systematic studies with Figure 1, but these criteria were not always followed, as evidenced by many of the selected studies.

(2) There is no rationale for selecting several studies of Chinese in China and Hong Kong, and reviewing them as if they represent “minority groups” in the same way as other studies of Chinese in the UK and US, and Hispanic immigrants to the U.S. For example, they spend a great deal of time reviewing TCM (p. 13-14) among Chinese, but it is unclear if they are implying these practices apply to Chinese immigrants since all the studies they describe were conducted in Hong Kong or China. This approach becomes even more confused in the Discussion section (see p. 24), where the authors imply that they are focusing on minorities in the U.S. but they have selected many studies of nationalities in their own countries, particularly Chinese.

(3) The authors attribute several beliefs and practices to a particular ethnic group because the study they refer to focuses on that particular group, but in fact many of these beliefs are found in multiple ethnic minorities and immigrant populations: e.g. on p. 15 they note that Chinese [immigrants?] do not consider treatment for...
primary teeth as essential, but this has also been observed among Hispanic parents and immigrants from developing countries. Another example appears on p. 17, where they describe Hispanic/Latino child-rearing practices that include giving babies a bottle with sweetened liquid or a pacifier dipped in honey. This occurs in other cultures as well, although it may not have been documented in the articles they selected.

(4) The authors do not always link their assertions with specific articles; for example, they state on p. 21 that “tooth loss in old age is commonly accepted as a norm in all 4 cultural groups” but no references are provided for this.

(5) It is unclear why they chose to focus on Filipinos; this is not a widely studied group and their own review points out that only 2 studies were available on this immigrant population. Why were Filipinos specifically selected rather than some other groups of immigrants or native populations (e.g. American Indians, using data from the International Collaborative Study II, conducted in the 1980s)?

(6) There is also a concern with examining a particular subgroup of immigrants (e.g. Puerto Ricans) and generalizing them to Hispanics in general, as with their description of reference #72 on p. 17-19.

(7) Given their interest in qualitative research, it is surprising that the authors have not cited any of the papers by MacEntee and colleagues at UBC, who have conducted several qualitative studies of minority elders’ beliefs about the value of teeth.

(8) The manuscript is replete with grammatical and typographical errors, including many places where articles (“The” and “A”) are missing. In addition, note on p. 15 that the Wong (2005) paper is cited by date rather than a superscript.