

**PROMOTING ORAL HEALTH STATUS OF POOREST OF THE POOR  
FROM CULTURALLY DIVERSE AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED  
BCKGROUNDS IN URBAN SLUM AREAS OF COLOMBO, SRI  
LANKA: THE REAL CHALLENGE FOR DENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH  
PROFESSIONALS: THE TALE OF INAYA & AZMIA**

**DATE: 03/10/13**

**TIME:9.45 AM**

**VENUE: Dharma Jayanthi Preschool, De Saram Place, Colombo 15**

Inaya is a 35-year-old mother with 2-kids and an adopted son. She is underweight and complains of frequent headaches and loss of memory from recent times, as she keeps on constantly thinking of the plight of her and her family. She lives in a make-shift-house of shanties adjoining railway line in Colombo 15. Her husband is a patient suffering from chronic chest infection. He doesn't have a permanent income or job but does some odd jobs once in a while to earn some money.

Her front upper anterior teeth are grossly carious and there is a swelling too! She wants them to be attended: she thinks that her upper front two teeth are rottened and they should come out but a denture is much needed. She doesn't have money to afford it! So she has no option other than living with it.

Inaya laments as she has had schooling only upto grade 9 but she hasn't learn how to write Sinhala language. She could communicate in Sinhalese but can't write or read. She's very much willing to mingle with Sinhala Buddhists: the majority of this country and to live with co-habitation. She's grateful to the late incumbent of the temple who has helped her financially to receive treatment for her differently-abled son whose aggressive at times also with intellectual impairment.

Inaya wants to keep her hut and surrounding clean as she keeps on sweeping the garden:she's scared of dengue and wants to keep her crowded, congested environment clean in relative terms which is not a priority concern of her fellow co-habitants. She washes the urinated spots on the by lanes: she keeps white sheets as bed linen for her kids to protect them from insects and ants while they are asleep at night.

Her daughter Azmia is 4-year-old kid clad in a white shirt and a blue skirt the preschool uniform which is dirty as common to all her peers. She's wearing a matching blue stoned ear-rings. The upper two front teeth of Azmia has got decayed but rest of her milk teeth seem ok but with white debri after having the breakfast and inadequate brushing. Inaya says her daughter brushes her teeth with her assistance with a kid toothbrush and some herbal toothpaste she got at a promotional campaign held at Lady

Ridgeway Hospital. Azmia complains of pain from her gums and Inaya thinks it's due lack of vitamins.

Inaya knows fruits are good for the teeth and health of her kids, so as pulses, vegetables, rice and curry and they are the ideal substitutes for rotti, biscuit and buns even for the mid-day meal in preschool. She laments “However, I don't have money to buy all this and feed my kids with a home-made nutritious food”. My kids get this food when my husband earns some money. I myself could be a domestic helper and earn some money but I can't leave my kids as my surroundings are too bad: drug addiction is a perennial problem and there is crime and children get spoiled in no-time and they get destroyed. This happened to my brother's kids so however much we are poor I don't want leave my kids being and go for work here or abroad. There are good people who are helping me at times and once in a while I do some domestic work for a day and earn about Rs.1500.00. I used that money to settle my monthly debt for the essential rations.

I used to give money such as Rs.100.00 or 50.00 when I had for my older son and he used that money to buy sweets from the near by shop. He needed tooth extractions at LRH. I was told that as my son is a child with special needs having intellectual impairment he needed the teeth extractions under general anaesthesia. However, with my prayers the dental doctors were able to do it with local injections. I have learnt my lesson I give only Rs.5.00 for Azmia and she buys 2 packets of ice from the near by shop a day: it's not that cool due to high electricity prices so my kid wan't fall sick with it. Otherwise with sweltering heat she tens to get ice cubes from that shop and have a lot of them and catch cold and cough. These ice packets are needed to quench her thirst. Azmia's teeth are better than her brother: if I get another baby in future I want to keep his/her teeth even better.

My daughter also eats 2-4 biscuits for tea in the evening on a daily basis and she had a piece of Rotti for breakfast and mid-day meal today. She eats buns also quite often.

Inaya perceives that milk teeth are so important for a kid and they have to protected well;she also thinks that even child brushed his/her teeth twice daily consumption of sweets and sticky food should be cut down. She looks at Azmia's teeth once in a while. She is of the opinion that even a child cries in receiving dental treatment due to fear or some other reason the treatment should be completed for the benefit of child.

**The attendance of preschool kids have dropped down by 50% on that day as parents are involved in some re-settlement issues. 98% OF THEM ARE HAVING UNTREATED CARIOUS TEETH. preschool teacher says, “we had a nutrition programme for parents a mid-day meal many was given, However, it has to be given up shortly as kids used to bring**

biscuits, buns and rotti as usual” when she was inquired about the preschool mid-day meal policy....!

**INAYA & AZMIA HAVING BAD UPPER FRONT TEETH? A COINCIDENCE OR THE HALL OF MIRROR THEIR SOCIAL DETERMINANTS???**

**KEY ISSUES:**

**POOR SUFFER FROM POOR ORAL HEALTH MORE THAN THEIR BETTER-OFF COUNTERPARTS.**

**POOR COULD BECOME POORER WITH POOR ORAL HEALTH: THEY ARE NOT EASILY ACCESSING PUBLIC HEALTH FREE DENTAL SERVICES DUE TO MANY CONSTRAINTS.**

**SOCIAL DETERMINANTS/CAUSES OF THE CAUSES/ROOT CAUSES ARE REAL STUMBLING BLOCKS TO MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES EASY CHOICES.**

**CULTURALLY DIVERSE- URBAN POOR ARE TRAPPED IN THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF ABJECT POVERTY AND FOR MOST OF THEM THERE IS NO ESCAPE: INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY CYCLE.**

**POOR MOTHERS WITH POOR ORAL HEALTH DO HAVE BETTER PERCEPTIONS ON ORAL HEALTH OF KIDS BUT THERE IS A MISSION IMPOSSIBLE TO TRANSLATE THEM INTO PRACTICE DUE TO SOCIAL DETERMINANTS.**

**THE DENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES HAVE NOT NEGLECTED INAYA & AZMIA : AS THE COMMUNITY DENTAL UNIT, DENTAL INSTITUTE, COLOMBO PREDOMINANTLY CATER TO THIS GROUP OF PEOPLE AMIDST GREAT DIFFICULTIES.**