

## Introduction

Critical thinking is the cornerstone of dental hygiene practice. Hygienists in practice and education work with patients of all ages to assess their personal oral hygiene needs, and educate them about interdental needs and interdental cleaning techniques such as flossing<sup>(1-2)</sup>. Recently, a much-publicized report, *Medical Benefits of Dental Floss Unproven* by the Associated Press (AP) stated the federal government no longer supported flossing as effective due to the lack of longitudinal clinical studies<sup>(3)</sup>.

The inaugural study of the new Dental Hygiene Sub Group of the South Texas Oral Health Network (STOHN) gathered data from practicing dental hygienists (DH) and educators (DHE) to characterize what effect this AP report had on their attitudes about presenting flossing to their patients. The specific aims were to assess DH/DHEs awareness of the report and examine the effect it had on their attitudes toward flossing.

## Methods

A cross-sectional mixed-method web-based survey, using the platform Qualtrics®, was sent to DH members of STOHN and to practicing DHs and DHEs through the Texas Dental Hygiene Association’s membership database. All data were de-identified and aggregated for anonymity. The invitation to participate included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, a link to the AP report in question, consent information, and a link to the survey. There were 71 respondents. Descriptive statistics were summarized with sample size, mean, and standard deviation. Categorical and binary outcomes were summarized with frequencies and percentages. Narrative data was grouped by theme.

Demographic Variable	Percent (n)
<b>Sex</b>	
Other	3% (2)
Female	97% (64)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
Asian American	9.1% (6)
Non-Hispanic White	72.7% (48)
Non-White Hispanic	18.2% (12)
<b>Age</b>	
25-35	12.1% (8)
36-45	21.2% (14)
46-54	25.8% (17)
56 or over	40.9% (27)
<b>Type of Dental Hygiene Education</b>	
Certified Program	15.2% (10)
Associate Degree	51.5% (34)
Bachelors	33.3% (22)
<b>Work Status</b>	
Full-time	69.7% (46)
Part-time	28.8% (19)
Retired	1.5 (1)

## Findings

### Awareness

Forty-nine (77%) of participants were aware of the AP report prior to the study. Out of those, they reported learning about the report by:

- Patients, Family, and Friends (33%)
- Social Media (21%)
- Dental Hygiene Co-Worker (17%)
- Dentist Employer (5%)
- This Survey (2%)

\*Note: Seven people did not answer this question.

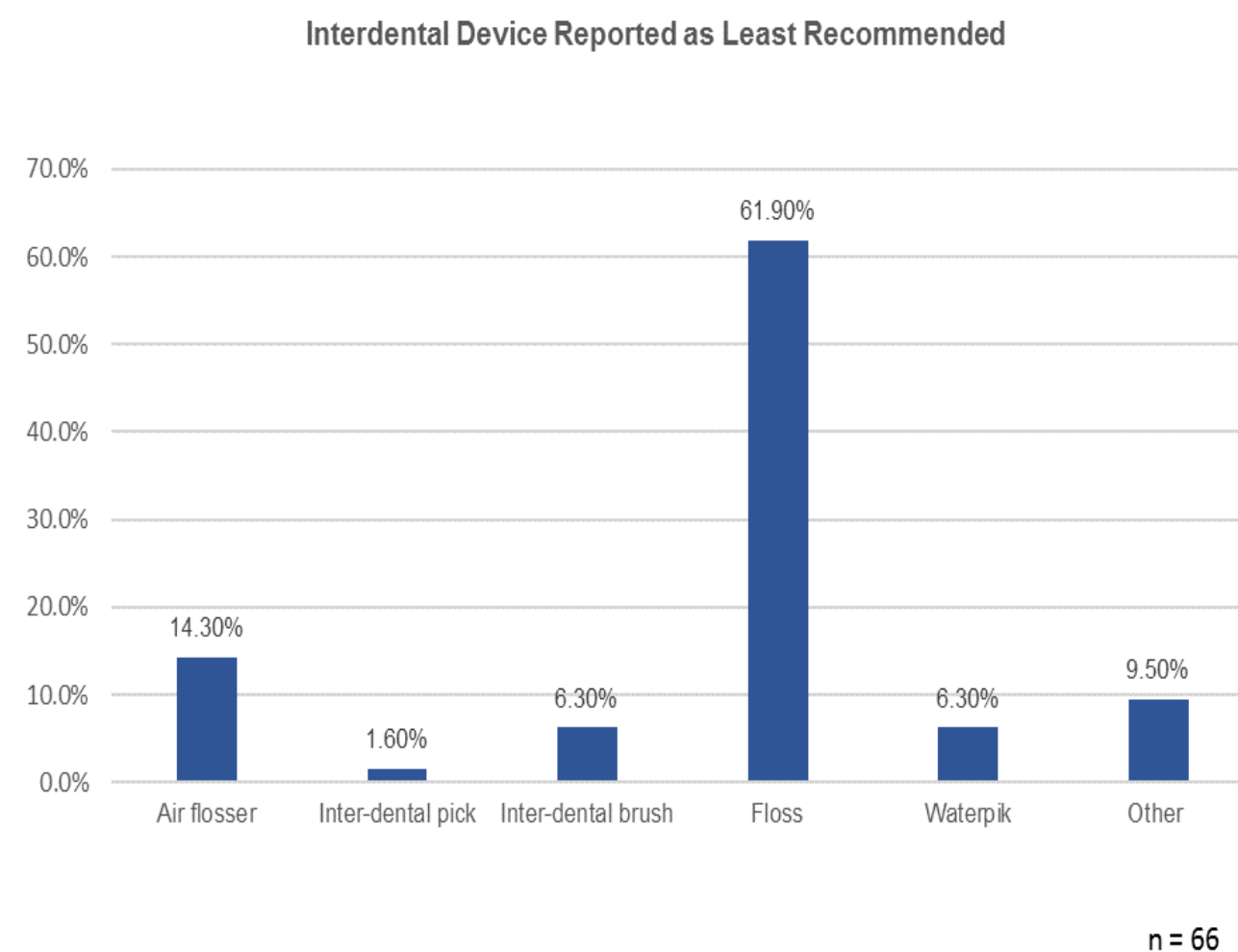
### Confidence in the AP Report

While some participants agreed with the AP report that there was “no evidence” supporting flossing (44%), many (49%) felt the references used by the report were not reliable.

### Recommendations Made for Interdental Cleaning

Data demonstrated that flossing was by far (62%) the least recommended device used for interdental cleaning

*“Clinicians ultimately hold the experience and knowledge to exercise the best judgements in the interests of our patients.”*



## Results

### Change in patient interaction

Only (41%) stated the AP report changed their discussion with their patients about flossing. Below are some of the detailed participant responses.

*“I let them know some type of interdental cleaning is still important.”*

*“I individualize their oral health instruction and let them know why the toothbrush can't reach the proximal surfaces.”*

## Conclusion

Initial reactions to the AP report caused many to have low levels of confidence in the resources it utilized. That being said, the AP report motivated dental hygienists in private practice and education to discuss the evidence about flossing with their patients. They continue to use their expertise and critical thinking skills to determine the best-individualized oral care techniques for their patients

## References

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2. Sambunja D, Nickerson JW, Poklepovic T, Johnson TM, Imail P, Tugwell P, Worthington HV. Flossing for the management of periodontal diseases and dental caries in adults. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2011, Issue 12.
3. Donn J. Medical benefits of floss unproven. (August 2, 2016) Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/f7e66079d9ba4b4985d7af350619a9e3>

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