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# The Situation and Factors Associated with Dental Caries Among Preschool Children in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, Thailand

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**Abstract** Background: Early childhood caries (ECC) remains a major public health concern and is influenced by interactions among children, environmental, and dental care factors. Purpose: This study aimed to determine the prevalence of dental caries and identify factors associated with dental caries among preschool children in Nakhon Si Thammarat

Province. Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 435 children aged 3-5 years and their primary caregivers. Oral health was assessed by preliminary visual screening, and caregivers completed structured questionnaires on demographic characteristics, oral health attitudes and practices, and dental service utilization. Generalized estimating equations (GEEs) were used to account for clustering within child development centers. Results: Dental caries was identified in 52.6% of children, and 55.6% had visible oral uncleanliness. In multivariable GEE analysis, higher caregiver oral health care practice scores were associated with lower odds of dental caries (AOR = 0.05; 95% CI: 0.02-0.14;  $p < 0.001$ ). Children whose caregivers had an educational level below a bachelor's degree had higher odds of dental caries (AOR = 3.03; 95% CI: 2.09-4.41;  $p < 0.001$ ). Children who were never or only sometimes taken to a dentist for toothache also had higher odds of dental caries (AOR = 1.95; 95% CI: 1.31-2.90;  $p = 0.001$ ). Conclusions: Dental caries remains common among preschool children in southern Thailand. Strengthening caregivers' practical oral health care skills and promoting preventive rather than symptom-driven dental care may support caries prevention.

#### Keywords

**Author Keywords:** [situation](#); [factors](#); [dental caries](#); [preschool children](#)

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#### Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

#### Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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