

Introduction

Nursing homes are residential facilities which provide care for dependent older adults. The most recent data from the Department of Health show that 248 nursing homes are currently registered in Northern Ireland providing care for 6643 residents¹.

Dependent older adults are a vulnerable sub-section of the population who rely on carers, particularly for self-care, including maintenance of oral hygiene^{2,3,4,5}. Unfortunately upon entering the nursing care system access to dental services can become difficult as many General Dental Practitioners are reluctant to provide domiciliary care and the treatment required has become increasingly complex^{6,7}.

In order to deliver dental public health interventions for older adults, and for dental services to provide responsive and equitable care, it is important to understand the oral health status of dependent older adults living in nursing homes. To date very little dedicated epidemiological data has been collected on this patient group.

Aim

To utilise oral health screening data, collected by the Community Dental Service (CDS) in Northern Ireland, to establish an epidemiological picture of the oral health of care home residents.

Methods

In Northern Ireland the CDS provides periodic extraoral and intraoral examination of older adults living in nursing homes as part of an oral health screening programme. This allows the dental staff to identify oral health problems in order to plan patients' ongoing care. This screening data is stored by the Health and Social Care Board and is the basis for our data collection.

Oral health screening data which was collected between 31st Jan 2019 and 31st Jan 2020 was entered, cleaned and analysed. This preliminary report shows the data from 13 nursing homes in the Greater Belfast area, Northern Ireland.

Results

Oral health screening data was available for 345 residents (78% of all residents). Reasons listed for residents not undergoing an oral health screening included; "sleeping", "in hospital" and "poor cooperation". The majority of residents were dentate (n=227, 65.8%) with 15 residents experiencing dental pain at the time of screening (4.3%). The total number of teeth present ranged from 1-30 (mean=10.0). A large proportion of residents had retained roots in situ (n=135; 39.1%; range: 1-21). A total of 65 residents had dental caries charted on coronal or root surfaces (18.8%). 142 (41.2%) of care home residents wore dentures, with the majority constructed from acrylic resin (93.0%). Additional preliminary epidemiological data is shown in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

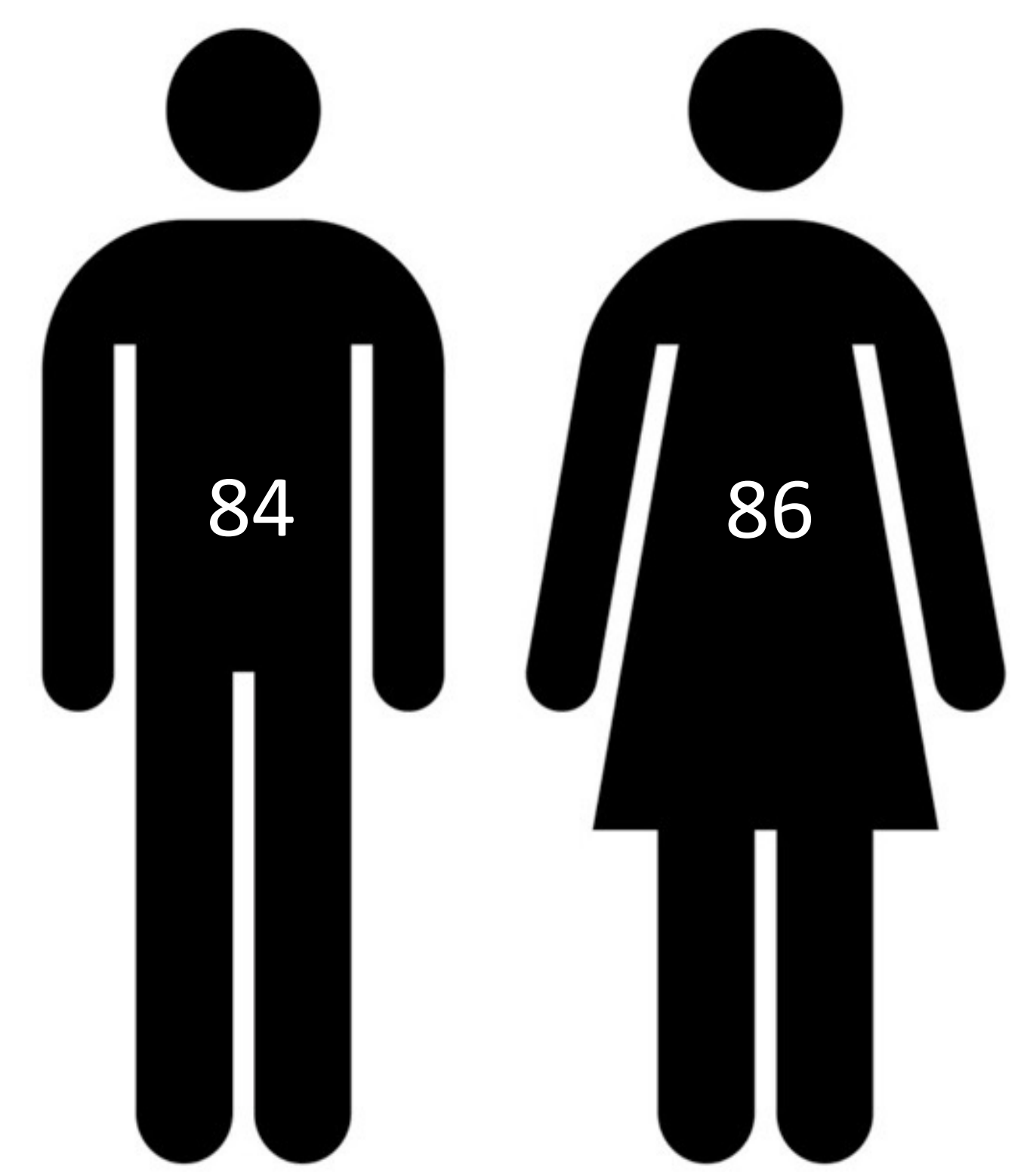


Figure 1: Mean age of Male and Female Residents

	Male	Female
Proportion - n(%)	114 (33.0)	231 (67.0)
Age - mean (SD)	83.6 (9.3)	86.4 (8.1)
Dentate - n(%)*	82 (36.1)	145 (63.9)
Edentulous - n(%)*	32 (27.1)	86 (72.9)
Number of Remaining Teeth – mean(SD)**	15.4 (7.4)	15.2 (7.1)
Number of Retained roots - mean (SD)**	2.4 (3.5)	1.8 (3.0)
Number of Carious Lesions – mean (SD)**	0.6 (1.3)	0.5 (1.2)

* stated as a total of those dentate and edentulous respectively
** stated as mean and SD of dentate residents only

Figure 3: Proportion of Dentate and Edentulous Residents (%)

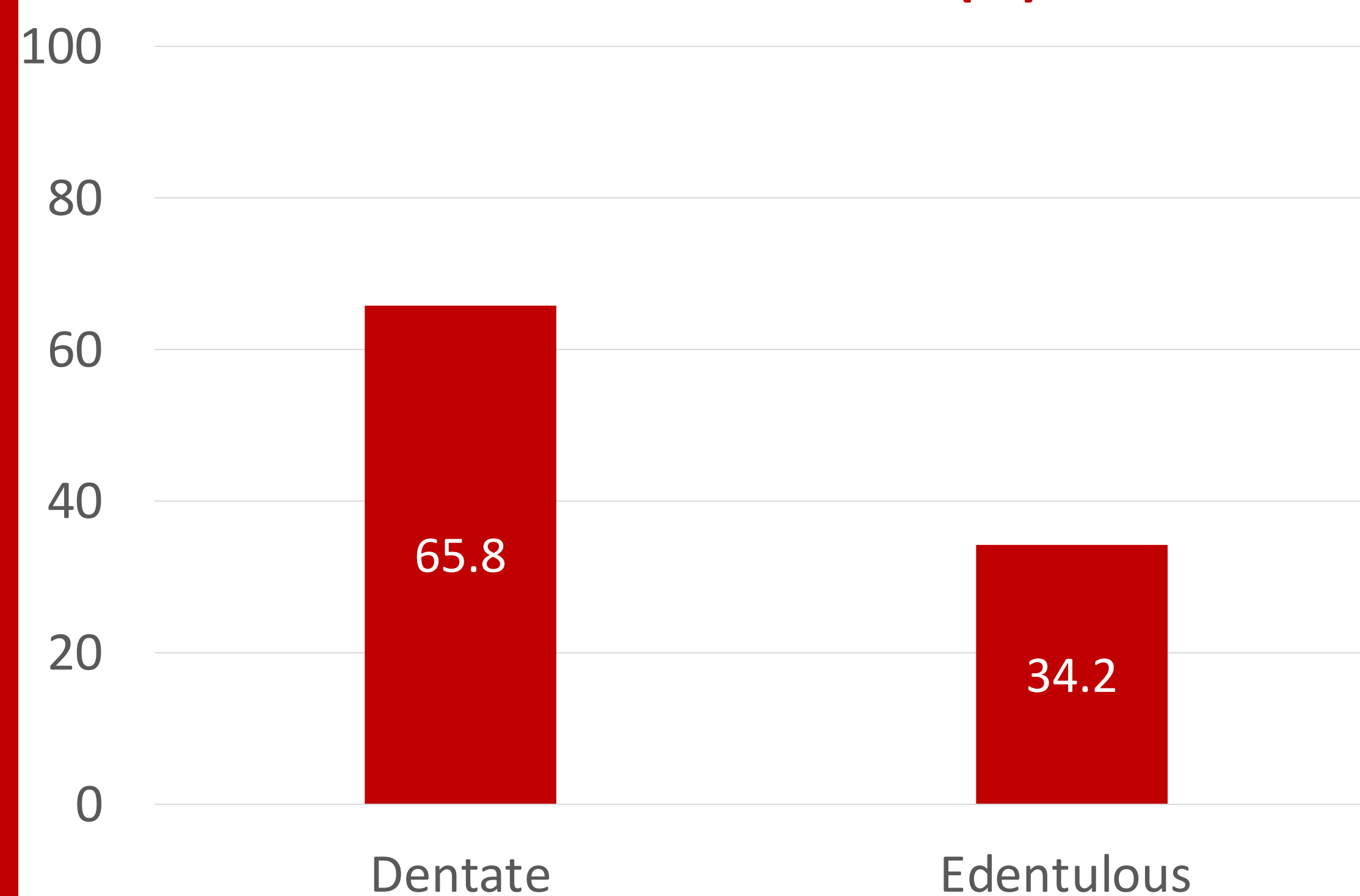
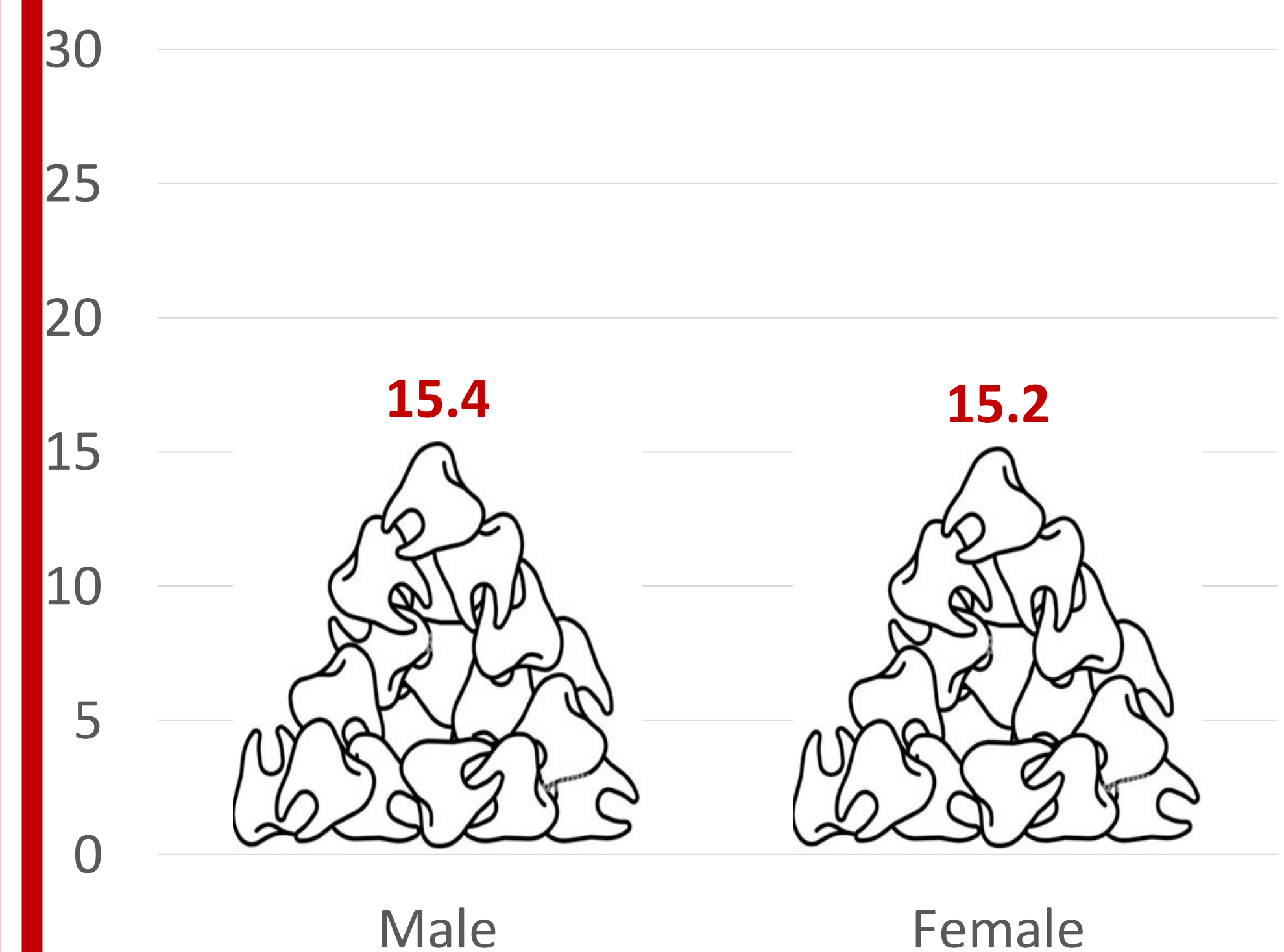


Figure 4: Mean Number of Teeth in Male and Female Residents



Conclusions

Although these are preliminary results, it should be noted that almost two thirds of care home residents in this sample were dentate (65.9%). A large proportion of residents had active caries (18.8%) and large numbers of retained roots (39.0%). These results should be interpreted with caution as the challenges encountered in data collection within the care home setting may mean that clinical examinations have reduced accuracy.

Action and Recommendations

This project will continue to collect data from all Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland to provide epidemiological data on the oral health status of care home residents. When complete, this data will inform oral health policy for this patient cohort.

References

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