

**Determinants of dental health care utilization in Portugal**Óscar D. Lourenco<sup>1</sup>, [Carlota Quintal](#)<sup>1</sup>, Pedro L. Ferreira<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup>CEISUC, CEISUC, Coimbra, PortugalContact: [osl@fe.uc.pt](mailto:osl@fe.uc.pt)

**Objectivos (Objectives):** Dental health care has some specificities, namely the existence of a small number of dental diseases, whose occurrence and diagnosis are more predictable; the possibility of learning about the quality of dental services; and the fact that prevention is more effective than in general health - dental patients are becoming more consumers of care, imposing their own preferences, instead of patients. Additionally, and importantly, in the majority of countries, private fee-for-dental service payment is the traditional form of reimbursement in dentistry – issues of access to health care are likely to emerge. The objective of this paper is to identify the determinants of the utilization of dental health care, with a particular focus on income.

**Metodologia (Methodology):** The variable adopted to reflect dental care utilization is an ordinal variable with 3 categories: 1 – the individual did not visit the doctor in the last year; 2 – the individual visited the doctor between 1 and 3 times in the last year and 3 – the individual visited the doctor more than 3 times in the last year. Given the features of this variable we estimated an ordered probit model and a modified count data model to explore our research question. In what concerns the covariates, we used socio-economic and health status variables. Data come from the Portuguese National Health Survey, 1998 edition. This dataset is the latest available regarding dental care utilization.

**Resultados (Results):** Being male, single, older as well as living in a rural area has a negative, and statistically significant, impact on dental care utilization. Contrarily, years of schooling, income and municipal purchasing power positively affect utilization. Occupational and health status variables are not significant and among lifestyles, only being sedentary has a significant and negative impact on utilization. Regarding insurance coverage, NHS and ADSE (civil servants) imply lower utilisation compared to other more generous subsystems.

**Conclusões (Conclusions):** In this study, we showed which characteristics affect dental care utilisation. In the case of income, it is statistically significant but its marginal impact is actually low. However, because the supply of dental services is very limited within the NHS, insurance coverage (NHS and ADSE) is not only statistically significant but it also has a non-negligible marginal effect. One avenue to improve this work is to consider the private health insurance status of the individuals as a covariate. However, due to self-selection issues, this covariate is endogenous, calling for more sophisticated regression models. Subject to availability, the inclusion of other variables (caries, missing teeth, oral hygiene habits, time costs) should also be considered.