

Changes in Socioeconomic Inequalities in the Use of Dental Care Following Major Healthcare Reform in Chile, 2004–2009

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Abstract

The study examines changes in the distribution and socioeconomic inequalities of dental care utilization among adults after the major healthcare reform in Chile, 2004–2009. We evaluated the proportion of people who visited the dentist at least once in the previous two years, and the mean number of visits. These outcome variables were stratified by sex, age (20–39, 40–59, 60–63; ≥64 years), educational level (primary, secondary, higher), type of health insurance (public, private, uninsured), and socioeconomic status (quintiles of an asset-index). We also used the concentration index (C_{index}) to assess the extent of socioeconomic inequalities in the use of dental care, stratified by age and sex as a proxy for dental care needs. The use of dental care significantly increased between 2004 and 2009, especially in those with public health insurance, with lower educational level and lower socioeconomic status. The C_{index} for the total population significantly decreased both for the proportion who used dental care, and also the mean number of visits. Findings suggest that the use of dental care increased and socioeconomic-related inequalities in the utilization of dental care declined after a Major Health Reform, which included universal coverage for some dental cares in Chile. However, efforts to ameliorate these inequalities require an approach that moves beyond a sole focus on rectifying health coverage.

Keywords: [utilization](#); [access](#); [oral health care](#); [insurance](#); [health guarantee](#); [social inequalities](#); [Chile](#)