

## BASCD 2022 ABSTRACT 15

**Are inequalities in NHS primary-care dental services in Scotland widening with COVID-19?**

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**Background:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had major impacts on health services and health inequalities. Dental services have been particularly affected, but the full scale of the impact on access to dental care, population oral health, and inequalities in oral health has yet to be fully understood.

**Objectives:**

To evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on socioeconomic inequalities in access to primary care dental services among children and adults in Scotland.

**Methods:**

NHS Scotland primary-care dental service data on patient contacts for the pre-pandemic period (January 2019 to January 2020) and the most recent three months (December 2021 to February 2022) including patients' area-based Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) category for children and adults, alongside population denominator-data for the same period were analysed. Absolute and relative inequalities were calculated using the slope index of inequality (SII) and relative index of inequality (RII) respectively.

**Results:**

From the first lockdown (March 2020) there was a dramatic fall to near zero contacts, followed by a slow recovery to currently 45% pre-pandemic contact levels. The pre-pandemic SII was 26.7 and in the most recent period had reduced to 15.95, indicating a reduction in absolute inequalities, which would be expected due to the reduced levels of activity across the whole population. However, the RII rose from 0.29 pre-pandemic to 0.37 in the recent period, indicating an increase in relative inequalities.

**Conclusion:**

COVID-19 dramatically reduced access to NHS dental services in Scotland, and as dental services recover there has been an increase in inequalities in access.

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