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Title of Research *	Geographic variation in perceived dentist busyness
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Introduction & Purpose *

Self-reported measures of workload (“busyness”) can be used to assess dentist workforce capacity. Perceived workload has been assessed through surveys using a standard busyness question. A high proportion of dentists in an area who report being too busy may indicate that demand for dental care is greater than the existing supply of services. The objectives of this study were to describe demographic and practice characteristics associated with reported dentist busyness and to identify counties with an under-supply of dentists as measured by the proportion of dentists reporting being “too busy”.

Experimental Design *

A survey of licensed dentists in Iowa in November 2010 evaluated factors related to practice workload. Perceived busyness was assessed, along with practice arrangement, workload, and demographic characteristics. Practice urbanicity was categorized based on county Rural-Urban Commuting Codes(RUCCs). Self-reported busyness was categorized as “too busy”, “comfortable patient load”, or “not busy enough”. Chi-square tests were used to compare respondents categorized by busyness and practice urbanicity. ESRI ArcMap was used to create maps displaying busyness at the county level.

Results *

720 of 1,139 general dentists returned surveys, for a response rate of 63%. Dentists reported working a mean of 38.2 hours/week(SD 9.2). Approximately 13% reported working <32 hours/week. There was no statistically significant difference in reported busyness by sex or practice arrangement. Dentists ≥ 55 years old and those in non-metro counties were more likely to report being “too busy”. Approximately 30% of dentists in non-metro counties reported being “too busy” compared to only 18% of dentists in metro counties.

Conclusions *

Dentists practicing in non-metro areas of Iowa are more likely to be older and to feel either over-worked or too busy to treat all patients who requested care. Replacing these dentists as they approach retirement is even more important considering that the existing workforce already perceives itself as insufficient to treat local populations.