

# ORAL HEALTH INDICATORS THAT DETERMINE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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**Annotation.** The article reviews aspects of oral health and psychological well-being, analyzes the complaints about oral health, which determine the psychological well-being of a person. Particular attention is paid to persons for whom a representative appearance and smile are important at work.

**Keywords:** oral health, complaints, psychological well-being

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## INTRODUCTION

Oral health is a part of a person's well-being. Daily activities related to the mouth and teeth, such as eating, talking, smiling, are factors that determine a person's well-being. Baiju, Peter, Varghese and Sivaram (2017) said that the pain felt when eating or drinking, unpleasant smell from the mouth, aesthetic problems with the mouth contribute to how a person functions in society. Impaired normal nutrition, discomfort from perceived pain, complexion due to a smile undermine a person's self-esteem and, in general, can affect the general state of health. Thus, oral health is inseparable from the general health and well-being of the body, as well as psychological.

Until recently, little attention has been paid to the psychosocial consequences of the state of oral health, since they rarely pose a threat to life. Historically, oral health has been separated from the rest of the body health. Recent research highlights that oral organ disorders have emotional and psychosocial consequences that are as serious as those caused by other medical conditions.

The impact of the oral and dental condition on various areas of the person – health, social, economic and psychological – is unquestionable. In modern society, the perception of aesthetics is highly expressed. In addition, good psychological well-being is determined by many other factors, one of which is the self-esteem and appearance of the person, which includes the condition of the teeth and mouth, and the presence and absence of illness, financial and social factors.

Although the scientific literature is full of articles about the condition of the teeth and gums, how the condition of the mouth affects a person's psychological well-being is still little known. Research on this topic has not yet been published in Lithuania. Therefore, this study aims to find out and assess the importance of dental and oral conditions for a person's psychological well-being. People of working age are a statistically large group living an active social life, so it is extremely important to study it.

**The aim** of this study was to analyze the signs of oral health that determine a person's psychological well-being.

**The objectives are:**

1. To reveal the self-assessment of the state of oral health of the research participants.
2. To identify complaints that are related to the state of oral health.
3. To evaluate indicators of psychological well-being that are determined by oral health.

**Research object:** Signs of oral health that affect the psychological well-being of persons of working age.

## RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHODS

To identify oral health complaints that determine the psychological well-being of a person, three methods were selected: systematic analysis of scientific literature, quantitative research – questionnaire survey and descriptive and graphic analysis of the results of the study. The search for sources of information published in English was carried out in EBSCO, PubMed and other databases. In February-March 2022, a quantitative survey was conducted - a questionnaire survey. Taking into account the principles of scientific research and ethical norms, an anonymous questionnaire was prepared by the authors. The questions were designed to help clarify the demographics of each respondent in the study, their oral health assessment and related complaints, as well as the psychological well-being indicators that are determined by oral health.

The questionnaire was published on the website [www.apklausa.lt](http://www.apklausa.lt). The link was shared online. The purpose of this method is to obtain information from people of working age and to find out how oral health determines their psychological well-being.

Respondents were persons of working age between the ages of 16 and 65 and over. During the survey, 117 questionnaires were filled out, two of which were not evaluated demographically. There are 115 fully completed questionnaires, their results are analyzed in this publication. The obtained data were processed using „Microsoft Office Excel“ and „Microsoft Word“ programs.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

An analysis of demographic data revealed that 115 respondents participated in the survey: 90 women (78%) and 25 men (22%). The survey included the largest number of people of working age aged 25-55 (79%). These are significant indicators, since the study aimed to find out the importance of oral health for the psychological well-being of persons of working age. Almost equal number of respondents live in rural areas (51%) and urban areas (49%). The answers showed that more than a third (37%) have a university degree, more than a quarter (27%) stated that they have a college education (see Table 1).

*Table 1*

**Demographic data of respondents**

Age of respondents	16–25	25–35	35–45	45–55	55–64	65 and older
Number of respondents	3% (n=4)	18% (n=21)	38% (n=44)	23% (n=26)	15% (n=17)	3% (n=4)
Place of residence	Urban areas			Rural areas		
Number of respondents	49% (n=56)			51% (n=59)		
Education of respondents	Higher (university)	Higher (college)	Vocational	Secondary	Elementary	
Number of respondents	37% (n=43)	27% (n=31)	23% (n=26)	10% (n=12)	3% (n=3)	

Analysis of demographic data shows that the survey participants are persons of working age representing different residential areas. The majority of respondents have a higher (university or college) education, so it is likely that health and appearance are important to them in their work activities.

The influence of the condition of the mouth and teeth on various areas of a person – health, social, economic and psychological – is undeniable. In addition, a good psychological well-being is determined by many other factors, one of which is a person's self-esteem and appearance, part of which is the condition of the teeth and mouth, as well as the presence and absence of diseases, financial and social factors. Therefore, first of all, respondents were asked to indicate how they rate their oral health condition. Summing up the obtained results, it can be seen that more than half (53% (n=61)) of the respondents rate their oral health as satisfactory, 11% (n=13) rate it as bad and only a very small part (4% (n=5)) of the respondents rate it as very good, although 31% (n=36) rate it as good (see Figure 1).

Oral health is inseparable from the general health and well-being of the body, as well as psychological. The summarized data shows that the majority of respondents rate their oral health as satisfactory or bad. Recent studies emphasize that disorders of the organs of the oral cavity have emotional and psychosocial consequences that are as serious as those caused by other health disorders. Oancea et al. (2020) say that psychological factors such as personality traits and level of self-esteem are significantly related to a person's quality of life. Therefore, the respondents were asked to indicate which oral health problems they have encountered.

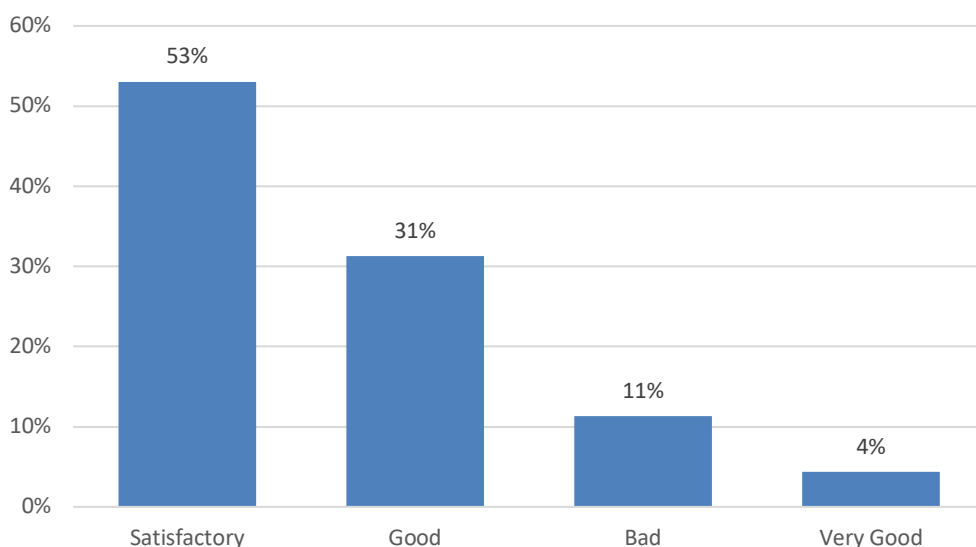


Figure 1. **Assessment of respondents' oral health**

One of the problems that causes people to experience unpleasant experiences and emotions is tooth loss. Healthy teeth are a vital component of overall well-being. Teeth help to maintain overall health during nutrition and are part of physical appearance. Tooth loss can lead to functional disorders such as chewing – a person cannot chew a variety of foods properly. When teeth are lost, changes in the appearance of the face also occur. Data from a study conducted by Gerritsen et al. (2010) show that the more teeth are lost, the greater the negative impact on psychological well-being. Individuals with poor oral health are more likely to have problems chewing food and eating in general (Park, Song, Han, Cho & Kim, 2019).

Analysis of the results showed that 86% (n=99) had lost at least one tooth due to caries (n=55) or periodontal disease (n=17). Knowing that these are diseases that are related to human behaviour, it is likely that individuals lacked the ability or motivation to properly care for their teeth.

Another important factor that affects psychological well-being is bad breath. Many people at least once in their lives suffer from bad breath – halitosis. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether people experience it continuously or symptomatically. Bad breath is usually caused by poor oral hygiene. Bad breath affects people's social interactions in everyday life, causing personal discomfort and emotional stress (Aung et al., 2015). This is a serious problem in the social life of a person, which reduces self-confidence and directly affects his psychological well-being.

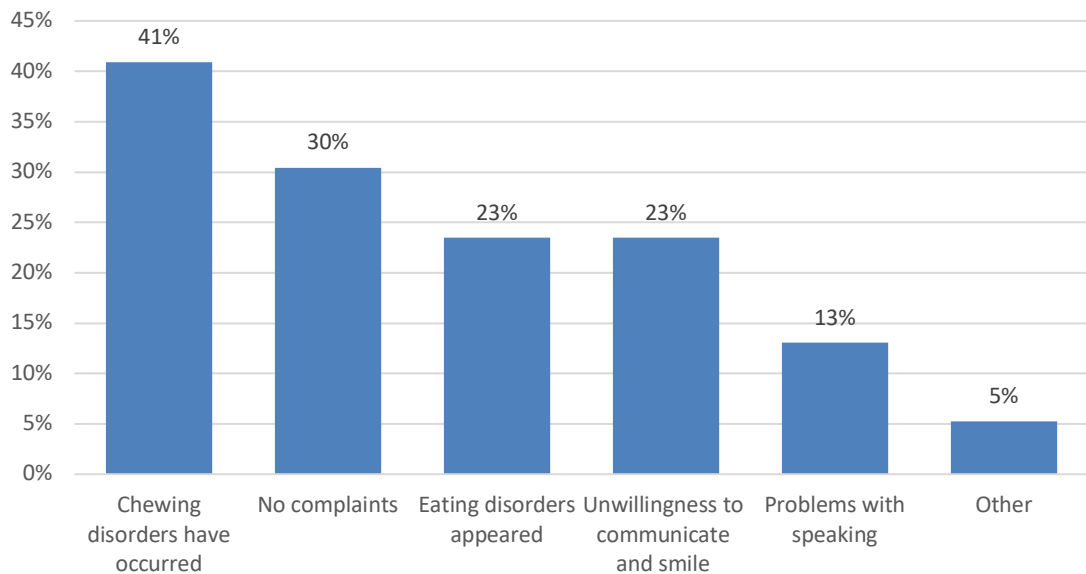
Bad breath is felt very often by 6% (n=7), 16% (n=18) - often, 72% (n=83) - sometimes and only 6% (n=7) do not have such a complaint.

People's psychological well-being is affected by the experienced toothache. Pain is a multifaceted phenomenon consisting of physiological and psychological variables associated with existing or possible tissue damage. The results of the study of Santos et al. (2019) show that toothache is the most common symptom that prompts people to consult dentists. Pain directly affects emotional, physical and psychological well-being.

The results of the survey show that 5% (n=6) often experience toothache, 80% (n=92) – sometimes, and 15% (n=17) never complained of toothache.

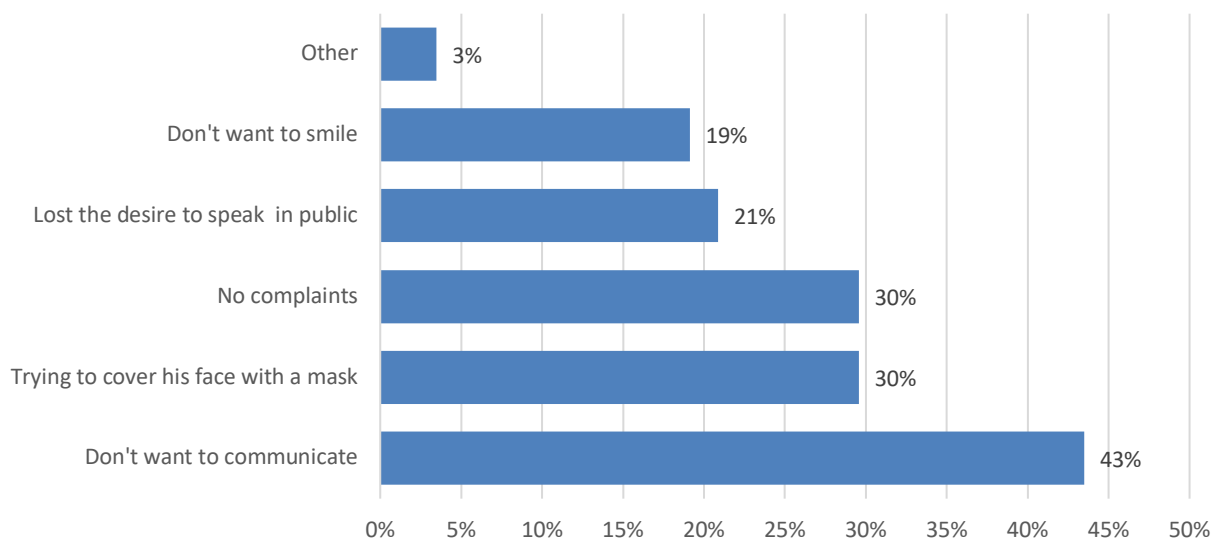
Thus, the most common signs of oral health that affect a person's psychological well-being are tooth loss, bad breath, and pain. They have more than one effect: all of them disrupt normal eating, force restrictions on social contacts, respectively, contribute to a deterioration in psychological well-being, self-esteem.

Respondents were asked to indicate the complaints they experienced due to changes in their oral health. Analysis of the results showed that the loss of the tooth resulted in chewing (41%) and eating disorders (23%). Another 23% showed unwillingness to communicate and smile (see Figure 2)



**Figure 2. Complaints of respondents about tooth loss**

An analysis of the complaints that respondents most often face when they develop bad breath, shows that 43% of those surveyed no longer want to communicate. Equally shared were the respondents (30 % each) who try to cover their faces with a mask and who have absolutely no complaints. 21% of respondents lost their desire to speak in public, and 19% of respondents no longer want to smile (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Respondents' complaints of bad breath**

After analyzing these data, it can be assumed that bad breath is a serious problem in a person's social life, which reduces the desire to communicate, self-confidence and directly affects his psychological well-being and communication.

Another question was devoted to clarify the complaints that respondents face when feeling a toothache. More than half of the respondents (60 and 51%) indicated that pain directly affected sleep and nutrition. 22% stated that they no longer want to communicate and smile. Part of the respondents (17%) experienced a decrease in their self-esteem and appearance (see Figure 4). Also, respondents noticed that after the treatment of teeth, increases in energy, so they believe that even without feeling pain, the condition of the teeth determines the general well-being.

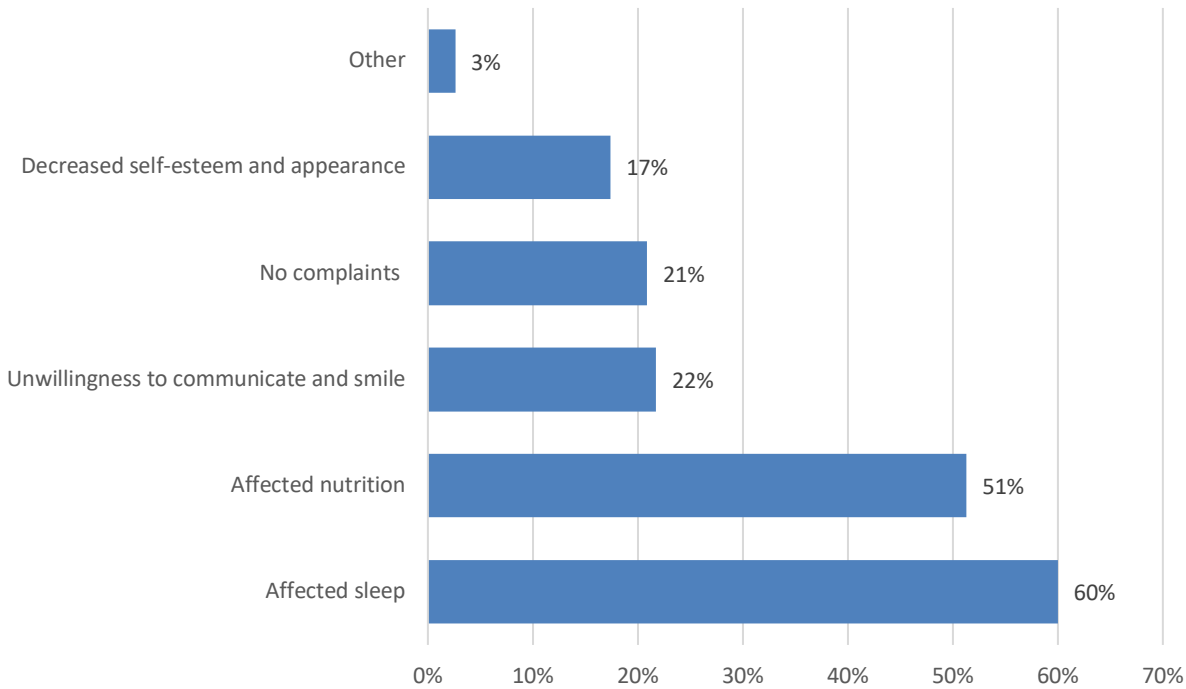


Figure 4. Respondents' complaints of toothache

Analysis of the results shows that pain directly affects emotional, physical and psychological well-being.

Analyzing the answers, how the perceived complaints affected the social life of the respondents, it was found that more than half (55%) did not affect the social life, while one third (33%) of the respondents avoided speaking in public, one fifth (20%) of the respondents began to avoid communication with friends, and 14% pointed out the emotional climate in the family has worsened (see Figure 5).

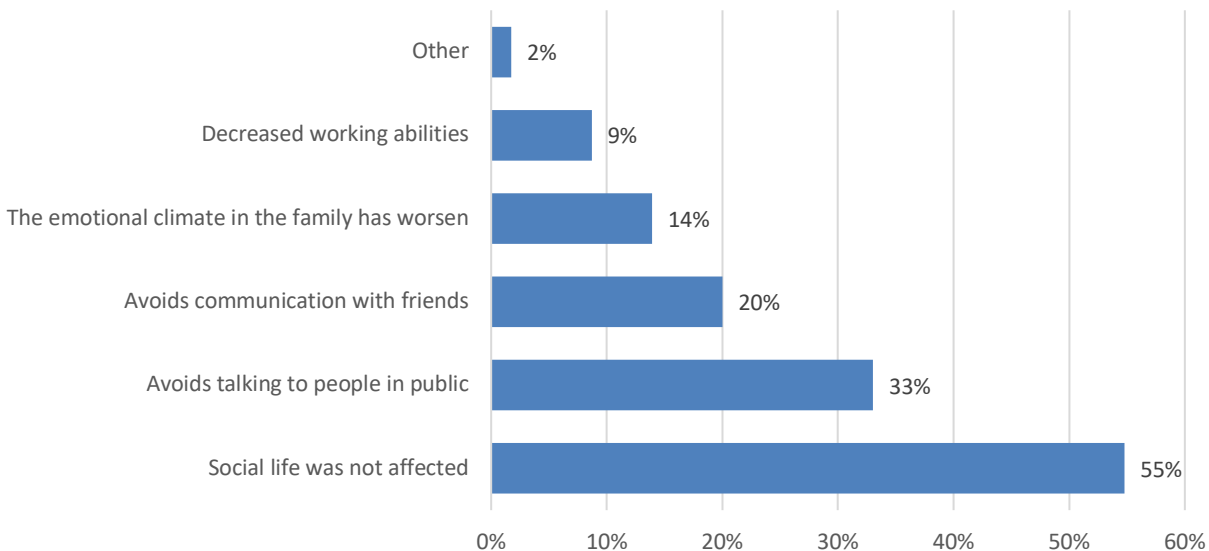


Figure 5. Impact of complaints felt by respondents on social life

Although more than half of the respondents said that the complaints they felt did not affect social life, it can be seen that individuals try to ignore the complaints they feel and not change their social life. However, the complaints felt have a direct impact on the social life of individuals, since communication with relatives and friends is avoided. Lopez et al. (2013) find that dental aesthetics play an important role in how we accept other individuals or want to establish social relationships with them.

Respondents were asked how the complaints they felt changed their attitude towards themselves. The analysis of the results showed that more than half (58%) of the persons did not change their attitude towards

themselves. While others reported feeling unattractive (25%), their self-esteem decreased (22%), and 16% of respondents reported losing their joy in life (see Figure 6).

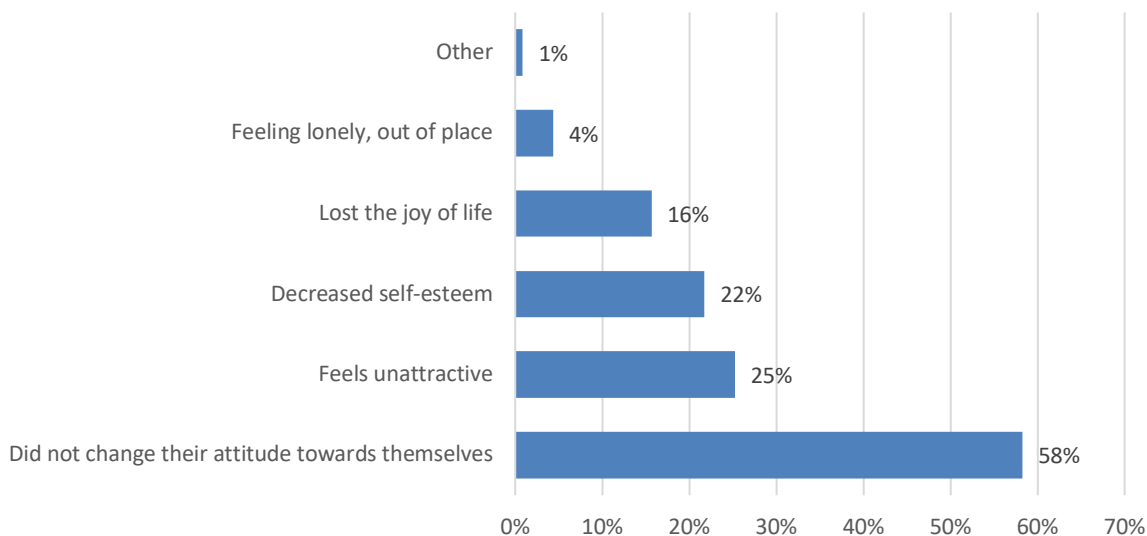


Figure 6. The impact of respondents' complaints on self-esteem

Although more than half of the respondents did not change their attitude towards themselves due to the complaints they felt, the remaining respondents say that they feel unattractive, their self-esteem has decreased, and they have lost the joy of life. A study conducted by Machado (2014) showed that smile changes significantly affect how a person is perceived and evaluated in society.

Another question looked at how respondents believed the complaints they felt affected their emotional well-being. Almost half (49%) of the respondents do not feel an emotional change, and almost a third (28%) of the respondents indicate that they have become angrier and more irritable. A quarter (26%) of the respondents indicated that they started to feel ashamed of themselves, almost a fifth (22%) of the respondents felt sad and disappointed (see Figure 7).

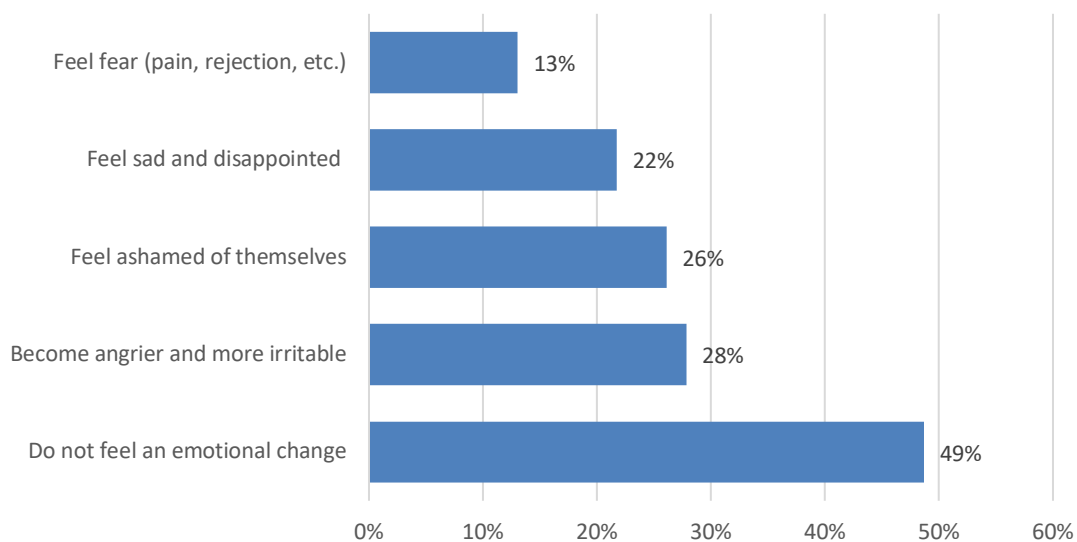


Figure 7. The impact of complaints felt by respondents on emotional well-being

Summing up the answers, it can be seen that the complaints felt by a large part of the respondents affect their emotional well-being. Although, according to the rest of the respondents, they do not feel an emotional change due to oral health complaints. It has been proven that a person's psychological well-being is directly related to mental and physical health, so the topic of well-being, which has been relevant at all times, has recently been more often referred to as "psychological well-being".

According to Machado (2014), during social interaction, attention is mainly directed to the face, mouth and eyes of the speaker, which are used to express facial expressions. Since the mouth is in the center of the face, the smile plays a very important role in communication and affects the overall impression. It can be said that the aesthetics of a smile is also closely related to the psychological state of a person. Baiju et al. (2017) claim that pain when eating or drinking, bad breath, aesthetic oral problems contribute to how a person functions in society. Negative changes in the smile affect personality, emotional stability, dominance, sexuality and communication with other people.

Loss of teeth, bad breath, and toothache affect a person's psychological well-being. In addition, oral health is also influenced by certain social factors, such as lower incomes, access to oral care services, as well as oral hygiene habits of individuals and poor oral health literacy. All these factors are very important for people of working age to lead an active social life.

The majority (75% (n=86)) of the respondents stated that a representative image and a smile are needed in the workplace. Therefore, it was investigated what influence it had on their emotional well-being. Less than half (40%) of those surveyed indicated that they feel stressed because of possible bad breath. A third (31%) of the respondents indicated that they were ashamed of their imperfect smile, while 29% of the respondents did not feel any emotional change (see Figure 8)

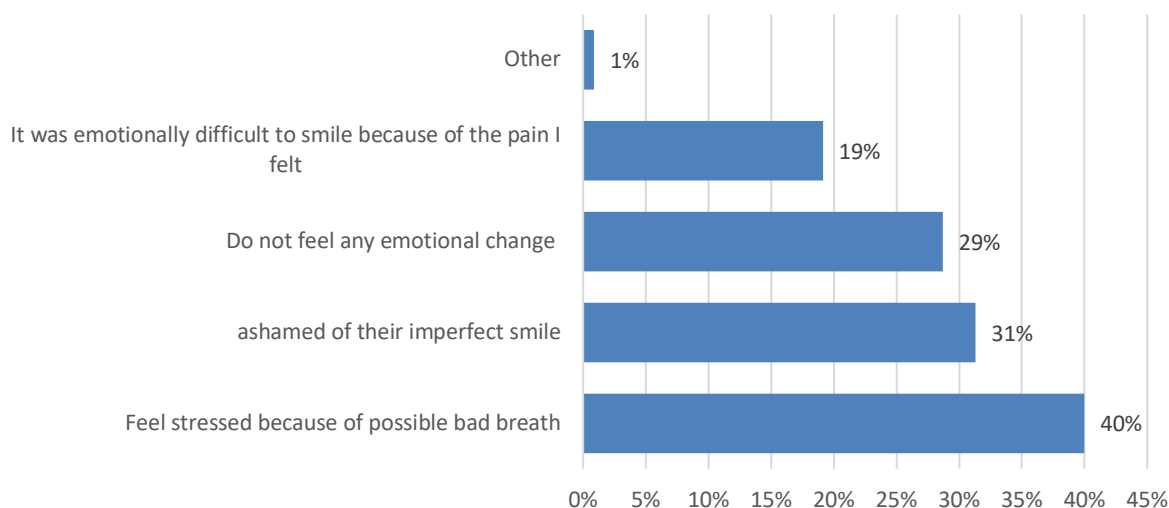


Figure 8. The influence of respondents' smile on their emotional well-being

The obtained data show that the representative image and smile are important for the majority of the respondents and they experience emotional discomfort due to these shortcomings. In the conducted survey, respondents indicated tooth loss, bad breath, and toothache as the most common oral health symptoms that affect a person's psychological well-being. These signs have several effects: they all disrupt normal eating, communication, the desire to smile, and accordingly contribute to deteriorating psychological well-being and self-esteem.

Although the results of the study clearly showed that respondents need a representative appearance and a beautiful smile, it would be valuable to expand the sample of subjects in order to obtain more accurate data. In addition, in order to delve deeper into the problem, it would be appropriate to include in the sample persons who are in direct contact with customers in their work activities and provide services to them. This was not detailed in this article.

Good psychological well-being determines a person's functioning in society, health, self-esteem and ability to communicate. In addition, it concerns mental and physical health, of which oral health is a part. The study showed that the majority of respondents say that they feel the negative impact of oral health symptoms on their social life, emotional well-being and self-esteem, but these symptoms have little impact on their lives. This would indicate that people of working age in Lithuania tend to ignore the impact of perceived oral health complaints on their psychological well-being.



## CONCLUSIONS

- More than half of the participants rate their oral health as satisfactory. The most common problems are tooth loss, bad breath and toothache.
- As a result of oral health complaints, study participants lost the desire to communicate and smile, and their nutrition was disturbed.
- Oral health problems have an impact on social life, self-perception and emotional well-being. And the representative appearance and smile required at the workplace increase anxiety, shame and emotional experiences, but many individuals tend to ignore the impact of these complaints on their psychological well-being.

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