

The Impact of Dental Care Inequality in Southern California Schools:
Addressing the Issue Through an Ecological Level of Analysis

Chelsea Kwan – Reflective Essay (693 words)

The interest in my research project, which I have been working on over the past year in different classes and at my middle school fieldwork placement, all began thanks to the Hannon Library. On December 5, 2018, @lmulibrary posted a photo on Instagram advertising a pick-of-the-week book on display in the Popular Reading section. The book was titled *Teeth: The Story of Beauty, Inequality, and the Struggle for Oral Health in America* by Mary Otto. Based on my own experience growing up in a provider dead zone and after studying abroad in Ecuador over Summer 2018, my interest in the state of dental healthcare in America was peaked. I checked the book out from the library in December, and my interest in the topic grew exponentially as I learned about the dramatic socioeconomical divide in dental healthcare quality.

The next semester, in Spring 2019, I took the Community Psychology class taught by Dr. Phaizon Wood as part of my master's in counseling program. Our final project was to write a paper looking at an issue faced by populations in Southern California and evaluate the problem through an ecological level of analysis. I knew immediately that I wanted to focus on dental inequality. I once again checked out *Teeth* from the LMU library, and relied on many different research tools available to students in order to complete my research paper.

My research began by utilizing the library LibGuide for the Counseling Program. I utilized PsycINFO, a research database with peer-reviewed journal articles, to begin to search for published research on my topic. PsycINFO has been an invaluable tool in the research for all of my papers during my psychology undergraduate degree and in graduate school. The best research article I found through PsycINFO was actually looking at the exact population I wanted

to talk about in my paper: low-income schools in Los Angeles (Seirawan, Faust, & Mulligan, 2012)! In my seven years in academia, I do not know that I have ever found a research article so specifically tailored to my paper topic.

Because I also wanted to utilize recent, local data and information for my paper, I utilized newspaper articles and corporation memos to support the arguments in my research paper. Of course, I evaluated the sources for credibility and only used briefings from dependable and established organizations such as the American Dental Association, the California Dental Association, and the L.A. Trust. Though these sources are credible and well-known, their writings will of course be more biased to advocate for providing more dental health care services. Though I had never heard of the website “WalletHub” before, I decided to utilize their article on “States with the Best & Worst Dental Health” because at the bottom of the webpage the author cited credible sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to prove where they compiled their statistics and rankings.

Finally, I wanted to get first-hand reports on the status of dental inequality in Southern California schools; therefore, I reached out to personally interview credible sources including Dr. Sanaz “Sunny” Fereshteh, the Director of the University of Southern California’s Mobile Dental Clinic; Francis Walsh, the Oral Health Program Manager at The L.A. Trust for Children’s Health; and Susan Becker, the Assistant Principal at John Muir Middle School in South Los Angeles, which had taken advantage of the USC Mobile Dental Clinic’s services. Both Dr. Fereshteh and Ms. Walsh provided me with additional articles to reference and contacts to reach out to in order to further develop my paper.

A year of research and the development of the passion for this topic began with a simple Instagram post by the Hannon Library. I took advantage of many different research avenues in

order to develop an in-depth understanding of the topic, including checking out books from the library, using LibGuides, websites, local newspaper articles, and personal interviews. This research experience was the hardest I have ever worked in order to write an impactful and meaningful paper, and I believe that utilizing sources both inside and outside the Hannon Library contributed to the effectiveness and strength of my research paper.