

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Oral Health Prevention Education Among Children with ASD in SCV

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Public Health in Community Health Education

By

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The graduate project of Yazmin Del toro Macias is approved:

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Abstract

Oral Health Prevention Education Among Children with ASD in Santa Clarita

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Yazmin Del toro Macias

Master of Public Health in Community Health Education

Nearly 1 in 5 children in the United States (U.S.) have special needs. The most common chronic disease among children in the U.S. is tooth decay, and it's entirely preventable. Untreated tooth decay leads to infection and pain, consequently leading to more complex, and expensive dental treatments. Children with untreated tooth decay will have a difficult time when they eat, sleep, speak, learn, and more. Tooth decay is affecting almost one billion children globally, making it a prevalent public health concern. The California Public Health Department report stated, that the children missed almost a million days of school each year due to tooth decay. Half of those days missed due to tooth decay were from kindergartners, and 70% from third-graders. In the City of Santa Clarita, the incidence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has increased by 370% in 12 years. One of the most commonly cited unmet healthcare needs for children with special needs is dental care. Children with ASD are more vulnerable to oral diseases than typically-developing individuals. This is due to their increased barriers to dental care services, medications, and dietary habits that increase risk. The current project includes prior research and interventions done on oral health prevention education amongst children with ASD. Also, a proposed intervention and strategy to be conducted by UCLA School of Dentistry, Oral Health Collaborative Consortium is covered. This proposal is evidence-based and founded on theory, utilizing constructs from the Health Belief Model. Essential to this project are the key constructs of perceived susceptibility, severity, the benefits to prevent tooth decay, and the factors that influence action (barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy). This program will help increase the quality of life, and decrease tooth decay prevalence in our vulnerable population, children with ASD.