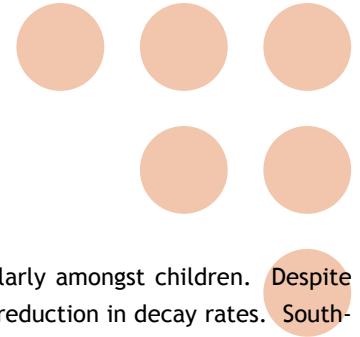


# Case Study: Water fluoridation in Southampton

Rapid independent evidence to assist with public consultation and policy making



High levels of tooth decay have been an issue for some time in Southampton, particularly amongst children. Despite extensive investments in oral health programmes for over ten years, there has been no reduction in decay rates. Southampton City PCT reported that:

- In 2006, 42% of 5-year olds had tooth decay
- In 2007, 522 children required a general anaesthetic to remove teeth, with a total of 2,903 teeth being removed

Further, tooth decay in Southampton is linked to social inequality and deprivation:

- The average number of decayed, missing or filled teeth for 5-year olds was 1.76, compared to a national average of 1.47. A census showed that in six schools in socially deprived parts of Southampton, the average number of decayed, missing or filled teeth among 5-year olds was more than 3.0.

South Central SHA conducted a public consultation process to explore fluoridating the drinking water in Southampton to reduce health inequalities and rates of decay. During the consultation, members of the public were concerned about the findings of 20 research studies and a book, which they wanted the SHA to impartially assess and consider when making its decision about fluoridation. The SHA needed these submissions analysed in under three weeks for the consultation process to run to schedule. They turned to Bazian because we are rapid, methodologically transparent, and completely independent of the NHS (and therefore more impartial from the public's POV than an internal group).

Bazian analysed the research the public had submitted to the highest academic standards, using all appropriate research protocols including those used by NICE, HTA and NIHR. We provided the SHA Board with a report in time for them to make their policy decisions.

Professor John Newton, Director of Public Health for South Central SHA: "Bazian produced high quality reports within very tight time constraints and summarised their findings in a clear and concise manner. Whether to fluoridate or not was a contentious issue, and the level of scrutiny on information published by the SHA was highly scrutinised both nationally and internationally. Bazian's independence from the SHA was important and their findings helped inform the Board paper on the scientific evidence of water fluoridation. The important work they carried out will be shared nationally with other SHA's who may be carrying out similar consultations in the future."