Reflective Essay

Sarjo

[Institutional Affiliation(s)]

Author Note

Table of Contents

 [Introduction/Overview 3](#_Toc17129362)

[My Three Moments in Time 3](#_Toc17129363)

[Link to Social Determinants 6](#_Toc17129364)

[References 11](#_Toc17129365)

[Appendix – other details not able to be included in the word count 13](#_Toc17129366)

#   Introduction/Overview

As an African-Australian woman, I realize that my ethnicity, gender, cultural identity, life events, and social circumstances have had a significant influence on my personality and identity. I draw my cultural identity mainly from my ethnicity as an Australian woman of African-descent, which then reflects in the way I communicate and socialize, the beliefs and values I hold, and the way I interact with the structural forces around me. However, like others, my life has also been affected by circumstances that preordained my choices. It is important to understand and reflect over how various moments, milestones, and life events shape how I am as an Individual. In turn, these will allow me to gain a better appreciation of the needs of other ethnic minority communities in Australia. In this paper, I will recall and reflect over three moments in my life that are closely linked to the social determinants of my own health and well-being. Thereafter, I would use these insights to examine how these social factors correlate with the historical events and factors which shaped the social determinants of the Indigenous Australian community.

# My Three Moments in Time

As I recall life events and moments that have left a deep impact on me or my social circumstances, I remember the small gestures and acts of micro-aggression that I used to face at school due to my ethnicity. I was born in Australia, daughter to 2nd generation immigrants from Australia. Yet, even as a millennial who has known no country other than Australia, I saw how people had little knowledge about my background. I remember students and teachers often inquiring about where I was from or whether my parents migrated trying to flee starvation back in Africa? Even if at the implicit level, I could perceive that I was socially excluded from the rest of the class due to the colour of my skin. I remember once when as a child, we were shown the *Lion King* in class, and the teacher decided to pause the film and ask me, “Sarjo, can you translate the song for the rest of the class?” Even though I realize that homogenization and stereotyping of people of African-descent is a common issue, I commonly felt that ordinary Australians were still clueless about many aspects and held many incorrect beliefs about the community.

Another event I remember was related to my cousin, Kofi, who I had always looked up to as role model. He was very confident, well-mannered, polite, and a bright student and I remember how I would always look up to him. One day, however, I came to know about Kofi’s drug addiction. The news naturally seemed shocking and unbelievable, yet it turned out to be true. He did not seem like other guys in the street who would do drugs, and it turned out that Kofi had turned to alcohol and drugs to escape his own troubles and worries in life. It was a hard time for not just family but me also, who saw in him a person with moral values and principles. Yet, everything had now changed; his drug addiction did not just destroy him but caused his family great suffering, anxiety, and pain. Eventually, our families decided it was best to send Kofi to a rehabilitation centre for treatment. It was hard to see the pain of someone you admire dearly in such a worse condition but I was glad that he agreed for treatment. However, the event served as a reminder to me how drugs could destroy even the best among us.

Another event in my life that shook me was when my dad lost his job. My dad had worked hard and struggled throughout his life so that he could provide us with a better life in Australia. My grandparents had spent all their savings on his education, and eventually, my father landed good positions in the Australian construction industry. We had a decent quality of life and accommodation and life seemed to be progressing smoothly in this aspect. Yet, as the economy turned, the corporation that he worked for decided to cut down on employees. Among them was my dad, who was laid off alongside hundreds of other workers. Although, he tried applying for other positions, yet the construction industry was experiencing a significant downturn back then and no company was hiring. With the industry plummeting, the situation seemed hopeless and my father had to do some odd jobs to provide some income to care for the family. Yet, that income was not enough and eventually, our family savings ended. The other members of the family met my dad and assured him that they would pool in money to pay the rent until he finds a new job, and he could return the money whenever he had enough. Despite that, we were living paycheck to paycheck even after drastically cutting down on expenses. That time was particularly depressing and all I could think about those days was what I wanted to do in life, or what career I could choose that would prevent a situation like that.

# Link to Social Determinants

Throughout my life, I have seen first-hand how various circumstances such as income levels, a lack of employment, social exclusion, and social support can create situations and circumstances that affect their health and well-being. It is well-documented in literature that lower education levels, high unemployment, unaffordable housing, and other factors such as racism, discrimination, and social exclusion are active determinants in influencing health outcomes (Galobardes, Shaw, Lawlor, Lynch, & Smith, 2006; Voßemer, et al., 2018).

Ethnicity and one's social location plays a large role in preordaining a lot of our choices in life. The values our family holds, their connectedness to the overall community, and the type of neighbourhood that we reside in, are significantly affected by our ethnicity. In my view, Australia did not have as much exposure to other cultures as much as America and Europe did. African immigration before the 1980s was rare and, in my view, may have been the cause of this lack of exposure. Some of the implicit biases and stereotyping I experienced while growing up was the product of that inaccurate portrayal. Implicit biases often manifest themselves in the form of discrimination and social exclusion, which creates a social disadvantage in terms of opportunities, skills, community participation, and the availability of resources (AIHW, 2016). Moreover, it can lead to anxiety and long-term stress and eventually lead to disease and ill-health in the affected community.

The abuse of legal and prohibited drugs is extensively recognized as a major health concern in Australia and it comes with a broader economic and social cost. Tobacco is known to be the key cause of premature deaths than any other drug in Australia. In addition, alcohol-associated hospitals are more than that of legal drugs (Roxburgh & Burns, 2013). As was evident in the case of Kofi, drug users not only harms themselves but their family and friends are also vulnerable to major health concerns. The consequences of the use of drugs can range from mental illness to suicide and death. However, the extent to which individuals has a social life sometimes results in fewer disease and improved life expectancy. Social support is pivotal for mental wellbeing and assists the victims in dealing with material and economic sufferings. I was a witness how it was social support that eventually saved Kofi from completely destroying his life.

Furthermore, unemployment is known to correlate with higher risks of illness, mortality, and disability relative to those who enjoy stable employment (Voßemer, et al., 2018). The resulting stress from unemployment leads to a significant impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of the individual owing to the psychological and financial problems that come with it. Moreover, unemployment also correlates with education and skills; hence, people or groups that are socially excluded from society find considerable hindrances in gaining suitable and stable employment compared to native or majority populations. I witnessed how unemployment could directly affect the family’s physical and psychological wellbeing when my father was laid off. A high and stable income allows access to better services and goods, such as housing, food, and healthcare. It also allows time for individuals to engage in leisure and healthy pursuits (Galobardes, Shaw, Lawlor, Lynch, & Smith, 2006). A loss of income adversely affects access to these services and, in turn, leads to stress and ill-health.

**Link of three events to a historical landmark affecting the Indigenous community**

It is evident from the literature that the social determinants of health rest on various interconnected social factors. The health and social inequalities faced by Indigenous Australians is extensively documented in the literature (Purdie, Dudgeon, & Walker, 2010). The inequity is particularly visible in the case of lack of access to adequate healthcare, poor infrastructure in terms of sanitation, healthy housing, and waste disposal (AIHW, 2016). In particular, cultural and historical factors such as discrimination, racism, and colonialism have a strong link to Indigenous social and economic development.

It is essential to recognize the historical and socio-political factors that have contributed to these developments. As Australia was colonized, the Indigenous population suffered annihilation at various levels. The widespread massacres and introduction of newer infection diseases lead to a situation where only 10% of their population was left alive by 1850 (Purdie, Dudgeon, & Walker, 2010). The remaining population was subsequently segregated and dispossessed of their lands. At the same time, the government launched forced assimilation families which lead to the forced removal of children from their families and communities. These generations were later termed as the ‘stolen generations' (Purdie, Dudgeon, & Walker, 2010). In effect, the colonization process created long-lasting, multi-level barriers in improving the situation of Indigenous populations. Today, these barriers manifest themselves at levels such as physician-patient interaction and the delivery of care services (Waterworth, Pescud, Braham, Dimmock, & Rosenberg, 2015).

The Indigenous populations also experience disadvantage in terms of average household incomes, employment rates, and healthy living. Even if for a brief time period in life, I had seen firsthand how lower household income can provide less income for families to engage in healthy leisure activities, access healthy food, afford safe housing, and access adequate healthcare. Moreover, lower educational attainment rates and health literacy further puts the Indigenous population inside a vicious cycle that is hard to break free of. Additionally, it is not just socio-economic disadvantage which resulted from these historical events but also risk behaviours. In particular, tobacco smoking and alcohol abuse is a result of the social disruptions and stress associated with everyday life and activities that Indigenous populations continue to suffer from (Markwick, Ansari, Sullivan, Parsons, & McNeil, 2014).

Similarly, the colonial period of Australia witnessed a pervasive form of racism. Indigenous populations were restricted from practising their traditional way of life. Geographical restrictions barred them from leaving designated areas while forced assimilation policies prohibited them from practising their culture, speaking the traditional language, or passing down their traditions and history. The subsequent loss of life, liberty, and dignity altered the native populations' social and cultural behaviour (Waterworth, Pescud, Braham, Dimmock, & Rosenberg, 2015). The implicit forms of stereotyping and racism I felt growing up was enough to cause me certain stress in life; yet, I cannot fathom how it would feel like to have your entire culture, history, and dignity stripped from you. These historical incidents carried long term emotional and social consequences and led to the social exclusion that people saw in contemporary times. It also explains why there continues to be lower levels of trust, loss of productivity, and poor health choices among the community. Even today Indigenous populations estimated to experience at least one incident of racism in a year (Markwick, Ansari, Sullivan, Parsons, & McNeil, 2014).

To conclude, I understand how my life experiences have shaped my understanding of the issues faced by ethnic minorities, and in particular, the Indigenous Australian community. Reflecting on how these cultural and social determinants shaped my health and wellbeing, it becomes easier for me to understand how the circumstances, in which Indigenous Australians live and grow in, affect these outcomes. Hence when providing care to the community, it is important to be sensitive to the historical, cultural, and political factors that have created the circumstances that are leading to poor health behaviours or choices, and to address those issues in a culturally sensitive manner.

# References

AIHW. (2016, September 13). *Australia's health 2016*. Retrieved August 19, 2019, from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/australias-health-2016/contents/determinants

Galobardes, B., Shaw, M., Lawlor, D. A., Lynch, J. W., & Smith, G. D. (2006). Indicators of socioeconomic position (part 1). *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 60*(1), 7-12. Retrieved from https://jech.bmj.com/content/60/1/7

Markwick, A., Ansari, Z., Sullivan, M., Parsons, L., & McNeil, J. (2014). Inequalities in the social determinants of health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: a cross-sectional population-based study in the Australian state of Victoria. *International Journal for Equity in Health, 13*(1), 91-101. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4209035/

Purdie, N., Dudgeon, P., & Walker, R. (2010). *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice* (1st ed.). Canberra, ACT: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Roxburgh, A., & Burns, L. (2013). *Accidental drug-induced deaths due to opioids in Australia.* Sydney, NSW: National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre. Retrieved from https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/accidental-drug-induced-deaths-due-opioids-australia-2013-0

Voßemer, J., Gebel, M., Täht, K., Unt, M., Högberg, B., & Strandh, M. (2018). The Effects of Unemployment and Insecure Jobs on Well-Being and Health: The Moderating Role of Labor Market Policies. *Social Indicators Research, 138*(3), 1229-1257. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11205-017-1697-y#citeas

Waterworth, P., Pescud, M., Braham, R., Dimmock, J., & Rosenberg, M. (2015). Factors Influencing the Health Behaviour of Indigenous Australians: Perspectives from Support People. *PLoS One, 10*(11), e0142323. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4658065/

# Appendix – other details not able to be included in the word count

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Criteria****The characteristic or outcome that is being judged.** | **Standards (The standard of performance)** |
| HD | D | C | P | NN | **Self assess** |
| **Brevity, clarity, sequencing and consistency of information.** **Written - with spelling, grammar, paragraph structure and use of terminology that meets academic standards****Presentation – accurate and clear recording****5 marks** | You provide an excellent introduction to your reflective written submission or presentation that highlights the import moments in your life Your reflection report is well written and presents a credible narrative that paints a holistic picture of 3 events in your life. No spelling and punctuation errorsExcellent verbal communication in presentation [4-5] | Your general introduction is good, with a clear summary of the key points to be covered that highlight the import moments in your lifeYou have met the academic standards for writing and present a credible narrative that paints a holistic picture of 3 events in your life. Only a few spelling and punctuation errors evident. Your paragraph structure is good and appropriate language used. Clear verbal communication in presentation easily interpreted. [3.5-4] | You introduce the reflection yet have not stated clearly enough what is covered. Your submission reads well, though lacks a logical flow of ideas. The narrative is consistent yet misses some key points. Problems may include some sentences being a bit confusing and/or rambling; good use language, but some paragraphs missing a key idea or focus, to enable a flow of information.Verbal communication in presentation is not fluid and marker has difficulty impetrating the key message [3-3.5] | Your introduction is very brief and doesn’t adequately state what the key events will be covered. The narrative is simplistic and while it outlines personal events it is not easy to follow for the marker. There are a number of spelling and grammatical errors throughout, which detract from your content and flow of ideas. You need to review correct paragraph structure. Verbal communication in presentation difficult to follow [2.5 -3] | Your introduction is absent and doesn’t state the key reflection elements or the context of the presentation.Many spelling and punctuation errors. Errors may include unclear sentence structure, no use of meaningful paragraphs to allow logical flow of content, poor use of language. Poop prestation with no clear focus. You need to consult with the Study and Learning Centre for assistance with writing and or presentation skills. [0-2.5] |  |
| **Criteria****The characteristic or outcome that is being judged.** | **Standards (The standard of performance)** |
| HD | D | C | P | NN | **Self assess** |
| **Personal reflection of 3 personal events and links to social determinants of health.****3 appropriate photos that capture this event** **10 marks** | You provide an excellent and in-depth reflection of the 3 events that impacted on your own social determinants of health.Your written narrative or presentation flows logically, and you mention all the relevant social, political and cultural events that may have influenced the event. You provided at least 3 images that accurately support your narrative  [8-10] | You provide a well-constructed and in-depth reflection of 3 very relevant events that impacted on your own social determinants of health.Your written narrative or presentation flows well, and you mention most of the relevant social, political and cultural events that may have influenced the event. You provided at least 3 images that have supported your narrative  [7-8] | You provide a sound reflection of 3 relevant events that impacted on you, some linked to social determinants of health.Your written narrative or presentation flows well, and you mention a few relevant social, political and cultural events that may have influenced the event. You provided at least 3 images that have supported your narrative, but the marker is unclear of the reason you chose them  [6-7] | You provide a barely adequate reflection of 3 relevant events that impacted on you, with few links to social determinants of health.Your written narrative or presentation does not flow well. Little mention of any relevant social, political and cultural events that may have influenced the event. You provided some images that have supported your narrative, but the marker is unclear of the reason you chose them  [5-6] | You provide an inadequate reflection of relevant events that impacted on you, with no links to social determinants of health.Your written narrative or presentation does not flow well. No mention of any relevant social, political and cultural events that may have influenced the event. You provided unrelated images to support your narrative, but the marker is unclear of the reason you chose them [0-5] |  |
| **Link of 3 events to a historical landmark of what was affecting the Indigenous community at that time and potential social determinants** **10 Marks** | You provide an excellent link of your 3 events to an accurate timeline of events that would have impacted on an Indigenous person. You present a credible argument that demonstrates an understanding of how all these historical events that shaped the social determinants of an Indigenous person [8-10] | You provide an evidence-based link of your 3 events to an timeline of events that would have impacted on an Indigenous person. You present a credible argument that demonstrates an understanding of how historical events that may have shaped the social determinants of an indigenous person [7-8] | You provide an adequate link of your 3 events to some events that would have impacted on an Indigenous person. You present a sound narrative that shows some understanding of how some of the historical events may have shaped the social determinants of an indigenous person [6-7] | You provide a barely adequate link of your 3 events to any events that would have impacted on an Indigenous person. You present a brief statement that shows little understanding of how some of the historical events may have shaped the social determinants of an indigenous person [5-6] | You provide an inadequate link of your 3 events to any events that would have impacted on an Indigenous person. No understanding of how some of the historical events may have shaped the social determinants of an indigenous person.[0-4.9] |  |
| **Criteria****The characteristic or outcome that is being judged.** | **Standards (The standard of performance)** |
| HD | D | C | P | NN | **Self assess** |
| **Effectively links evidence-based information to the historical data****Intext referencing used throughout. Referencing formatted in accordance with APA requirements****5 marks** | You effectively linked quality evidence to support the historical context of the 3 personal events reported and the link to an indigenous person’s historical influences. Your intext referencing and final reference list demonstrate a high level of consistency and are formatted correctly and according to APA guidelines.[4-5] | You provide good evidence the historical context of the 3 personal events reported and the link to an indigenous person’s historical influences. Your use of intext referencing is good, and generally consistent. Reference list indicates good use of APA guidelines for most reference citations.Please read comments made throughout which indicate where improvements can be made[3.5-4] | The references used provide adequate evidence supporting the historical context of the 3 personal events reported and the link to an indigenous person’s historical influences. However, you have not searched widely enough in some areas. Intext referencing is used throughout but is inconsistent. You need to review the use of quotes and paraphrasing intext. Your use of et al. is incorrect.Your reference list is not in alphabetical order.You must review the APA guidelines. [3-3.5] | Your use of evidence-based information is limited and reflects inadequate research. You have not been consistent in your citation of references throughout this paper. You have not formatted your intext referencing according to APA. Your reference list is not formatted correctly.Your reference list is missing some information and does not adhere completely to APA requirements. [2.5- 3] | No evidence to support your response.Your lack of supporting evidence indicates inadequate research into the context of the 3 personal events.[0-2.5] |  |
| **Comments** |