

# UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HEPATITIS B

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**Backgrounds:** The WHO has set a global goal to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health problem by 2030. It identifies five key areas to achieve this goal including vaccinating infants, preventing mother to child transmission, blood and injection safety, harm reduction and treatment. The WHO goal could be strengthened further by understanding the cultural and social experiences of living with hepatitis B. This information are currently lacking in the policy discourse on hepatitis B. The current study bridges this gap by reporting on the social and cultural experiences of South Sudanese people with hepatitis B in Australia.

**Methods:** A qualitative inquiry using face-to-face interviews with 15 adult South Sudanese with chronic hepatitis B in Australia informed the study. Participants were identified through purposive sampling and recruited using different strategies from within the community. All participants received information and consented to participate in the study. All interviews occurred in English, transcribed verbatim, managed with NVivo 12 plus software (QSR International, 2019), coded and analysed thematically.

**Results:** The study identified four themes. A common concern was around the progression of hepatitis B infection to liver cancer which created anxiety for early deaths. There was also concern about interpersonal relations, where participants reported experiencing social distancing and social isolations within their networks. Participants also revealed frustrations with healthcare services. The common concerns stated included receiving mixed messages about their hepatitis B, challenges with regular testing and difficulty receiving hepatitis B treatment. Participants revealed continuous emotional distress from the time of diagnosis, where they all reported continuing confusion, stress, anger and being at lost with their hepatitis B diagnosis.

**Conclusion:** The social and cultural experiences of people infected with hepatitis B must be understood and included in all policy strategies to achieve elimination of the infection. Elimination also requires meaningful involvement of people infected by the infection and adequately resourcing hepatitis B programs in disproportionately affected communities.

## Acknowledgement of affected communities in Viral Hepatitis Elimination

**Requirement 1:** I want to acknowledge and thank the people living with Viral Hepatitis who have generously participated in this research.

**Requirement 2:** The study finding was presented to the community. It is being used to support the development of hepatitis B health promotion information for the community.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** None