

“I Think Subconsciously That Stigma Is Still Mentally Telling Us That Sex Is Shameful”: A Youth-Led Research Project.

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Background:

In Australia, culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) young people often have challenges in developing sexual health literacy (SHL). This innovative youth-led qualitative research focused on young people of Pacific Islander (PI), Northeast (NEA) and Southeast Asian (SEA) backgrounds. Our aim was to explore the factors that contribute to cultural taboos and social norms around sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and how that influences access to SRH services.

Methods:

To ensure the research was culturally safe, a team of nine young people from PI, NEA, and SEA backgrounds codesigned ten hypothetical character stories (vignettes) about SRH topics. Each vignette drew on cultural knowledge and interactions with young people from their respective communities. Young people who identified as PI, NEA or SEA were then recruited from local community groups and peer networks to participate in focus group discussions. Eleven focus groups facilitated by young people were conducted with a total of fifty-seven participants. Data was transcribed and manually analysed by the facilitators using thematic analysis.

Results:

Findings revealed the significant role of stigma and social taboos which prevent young people learning about SRH. Participants identified the following themes as underlying issues preserving strong socio-cultural norms about SRH: 1) Limited knowledge about SRH in communities; 2) Cultural beliefs and perceptions of SRH; 3); Repercussions of challenging social norms regarding SRH; 4) Lack of health promotion programs that are culturally responsive and trauma informed. Young people desire and value the opportunity to discuss SRH despite ‘protectiveness’ around the topic. Withholding such opportunities were discovered to be a disservice to young people and their communities.

Conclusion:

This project presents novel insights highly relevant for clinical practice and community engagement. Support at systemic, community and organisational levels is fundamental in dismantling taboos and effectively enhancing SHL of diverse migrant populations in Australia.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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