

# ACCESSING SEXUAL HEALTHCARE: EXPERIENCES OF ARAB-AUSTRALIAN GAY, BISEXUAL, QUEER, AND OTHER MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN (GBQM)

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## Background:

Improving access to sexual healthcare is crucial for the wellbeing of all individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities such as Arab-Australian gay, bisexual, queer, and other men who have sex with men (GBQM), who encounter unique challenges stemming from their diverse cultural, religious, and sexual identities. Despite growing recognition of the importance of intersectionality in understanding health disparities, Arab-Australian men represent an underexplored subgroup within the larger Australian GBQM population. Given the significance of cultural and social factors in shaping health-seeking behaviours, there is a pressing need to investigate the experiences of this population in accessing sexual healthcare.

## Methods:

This qualitative study involved one-on-one semi-structured interviews with participants recruited through mixed purposive and snowball sampling methods. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed.

## Results:

Eleven self-identified gay/queer men, mostly of Christian (n=8) and Lebanese background (n=9), aged 25-59, and residing in Sydney, took part in the study. Six participants held postgraduate degrees and had full-time employment at the time of the interview. Three distinct themes impacting Arab-Australian GBQM's access to sexual healthcare were identified: (1) individual – despite majority having high-level sexual health literacy, fear of sexual identity disclosure emerged as a barrier; (2) systemic – including experiences of discrimination and lack of knowledge among some healthcare providers; and (3) sociocultural – heteronormative and religious ideologies played a significant role in creating unwelcoming environments.

## Conclusion:

This study identifies the multifaceted barriers to accessing certain health services for Arab-Australian GBQM. Addressing these challenges is essential to reduce HIV/STI risks and improve sexual health outcomes for GBQM from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Urgent future research should explore a broader range of Arab-Australian GBQM experiences, including those with lower health literacy and/or less connected to services. Further, advocacy and policy efforts are imperative to dismantle barriers, enhance cultural competence among healthcare providers, and foster inclusive environments.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None