“In Australia, I’ve not had anyone talk to me about it”: A qualitative study on the awareness of HIV prevention strategies among heterosexual migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries in Australia

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Background:
In Australia, HIV notifications among heterosexual people born in Sub-Saharan African countries have steadily increased, from 6.7 per 100,000 population in 2023 to 7.4 per 100,000 population in 2024. We aimed to identify gaps and areas for improvement to increase HIV awareness in this population.

Methods:
We used a purposive sampling technique to recruit participants. Eligible participants were aged 18 years and above, born in a Sub-Saharan African country, heterosexual, HIV-negative, and eligible for Medicare, Australia’s universal health insurance scheme. We conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews in-person and online between January and June 2024. We asked about knowledge of HIV and HIV prevention strategies, including HIV self-testing kits. We used a deductive descriptive qualitative analysis to interpret the data.

Results:
We interviewed 16 participants in this study (9 cisgender males and 7 cisgender females). The mean age was 36 years old. The mean length of stay in Australia was 8.7 years. Key findings include a lack of HIV awareness programs in their communities after arriving in Australia. Participants noted the persistence of HIV-related stigma that could prevent engagement with HIV education, testing and treatment. Participants were familiar with condoms, abstinence, and monogamy to prevent HIV. However, they had little knowledge of PrEP, PEP, and HIV self-testing kits. Recommendations include delivering tailored HIV education programs for different generations in the Sub-Saharan African communities, increasing awareness of biomedical HIV prevention strategies and self-testing kits, reducing HIV-related stigma, and encouraging regular HIV testing.

Conclusion:
Collaboration with heterosexual migrants from Sub-Saharan African communities to co-design a culturally appropriate HIV education program is essential. This requires

a strong commitment from the Australian government, policymakers, and key stakeholders to maintain engagement and provide sustainable funding. This would ensure that no communities are overlooked in Australia's collective mission to virtually end HIV transmissions by 2030.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.