

YOUNG ABORIGINAL PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH STI TESTING IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA

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Background:

Australian surveillance data document higher rates of sexually transmissible infections (STIs) among young Aboriginal people (15-29 years) in remote settings than non-Aboriginal young people. Rigorous qualitative research can enhance understanding of how to increase access to clinic-based STI testing. This paper documents factors influencing young Aboriginal people's engagement with clinic-based STI testing in two remote settings in the Northern Territory, Australia.

Methods:

In-depth interviews with 35 young Aboriginal men and women aged 16-21 years; thematic analysis examining their perceptions of access to clinic-based STI testing.

Results:

- 1) Individual level barriers included limited knowledge about asymptomatic STIs, attitudinal barriers to testing for symptomatic STIs, and lack of skills to communicate about STIs with health service staff.
- 2) Social influences impacted STI testing. In one setting, social networks enabled intergenerational learning about sexual health and facilitated accompanied health clinic visits for young women.
- 3) Health service provision influenced STI testing. In one setting, barriers were associated with clinic location, appointment procedures, and waiting rooms/times. Yet in another setting, outreach strategies by male health workers provided young Aboriginal men with opportunities to learn about sexual health, initiate trusting relationships with clinic staff, and gain access to clinics.
- 4) Where individual, social and health service barriers co-exist, more needs to be done to support STI testing among young Aboriginal people.

Conclusion:

This is the first socio-ecological analysis of factors influencing young Aboriginal people's perspectives on clinic-based STI-testing in the Northern Territory.

Strategies to improve STI testing uptake must tackle the overlapping social and health service factors that discourage young people from seeking sexual health support. Qualitative research of the kind undertaken helps ensure lived experience informs health service delivery and strategies to reduce barriers to, and increase uptake.

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