

“I felt that I have to give myself”: The influence of stigma and gender affirmation on safer-sex practices among overseas-born trans and gender diverse people in Australia

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Background:

Overseas-born trans and gender diverse people are often not included in HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs) health promotion strategies even though they are seen as a priority population. Experiencing transphobia, racism, gender dysphoria and body dysphoria could affect their views toward sex, intimacy, and safer sex practices. We aim to explore participants' perspectives on whether gender affirmation and validation played a role in their safer-sex practices.

Methods:

We recruited overseas-born trans and gender diverse people using a purposive sampling method. We conducted an in-depth, semi structured interviews between July 2024 and November 2024. We used a reflexive descriptive qualitative analysis to interpret the data.

Results:

We spoke to 11 participants, with the majority (n=8) were 30-39 years old. Participants were born in Southeast Asia, South Asia, South America, and Western Europe. Many participants reflected on their gender affirmation journey and shared their views on the role of sex and intimacy to affirm their gender identity. A few shared that they engaged in condomless anal intercourse without pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to feel loved by their sexual partners, especially after experiencing transphobia and rejection by their peers and/or family. Many reflected on the need to incorporate emotional and personal components of gender affirmation into future HIV and other STIs prevention strategies specific to this population.

Conclusion:

We concluded that HIV and other STIs health promotion strategies should incorporate the emotional aspects of social stigma, gender affirmation, sex and intimacy to better support overseas-born trans and gender diverse people in Australia. Campaigns should be co-designed by this population to truly capture their lived and living experiences. This has the potential of increasing their sexual health literacy so they can make informed decisions on their safer-sex practices.

Disclosure of interest statement:

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.