

“THE PROBLEM IS SEXUAL HEALTH STUFF...IT’S HARD TO FIND A SPOT FOR EVERYONE”: GENDER VARIANT AND SEXUALLY DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES OF (SEXUAL) HEALTH SERVICES

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Background: Sexual health education, prevention and care is often comprehended through binary, linear identity narratives, not recognising the complexity and diversity of sex and gender experiences and realities of non-binary genders. These traditional approaches are not meeting the needs of the increasing population of gender variant and sexually diverse young people (GVSDYP) in Australia. Understanding the sexual health knowledge and practices of GVSDYP is essential to ensure sexual health care services are responsive.

Methods: The *Sexual Health of Queer Young People in Queensland* study (SHYQQ), is a qualitative longitudinal, participatory study in partnership with Open Doors Youth Service, exploring the sexual health experiences and needs of GVSDYP, including factors influencing their access to sexual health services and HIV prevention strategies. Thematic analysis was undertaken. This presentation describes experiences of accessing (sexual) health care from round one in depth interviews with 40 GVSD young people.

Results: Participants described much resiliency in their (nonlinear) trajectories of gender/ sexual identities and complex journeys accessing health care services. GVSD identities influenced access to health care, social networks and support. Most participants used the internet and localised social networks for accessing social support, education and information about health services.

Health service barriers were experienced at both the health system level (poor trans/gender variant cultural competency, cost, waiting times, and availability) and individual level (limited sexual health literacy, fear of accessing sexual healthcare, experiences of stigma/discrimination). Most participants accessed bulk-billing GPs who had poor sexual health and trans/gender variant knowledge.

Discussion: There is urgent need for sexual health literacy promotion, and sexual health service models that engage GVSDYP. We will discuss the next stages of research to be undertaken by our research group, partnering with GVSDYP to develop a localized social marketing product co-designed with young people to enhance their pathways to clinical services in Queensland.

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