

FACTORS INFLUENCING TRANSGENDER AND MALE SEX WORKER ACCESS TO SEXUAL HEALTH CARE, HIV TESTING AND SUPPORT

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Background:

Globally, male and trans sex workers are reported to be at elevated risk of HIV. However, literature on their sexual health behaviours and needs is limited. Data suggests 20% of workers are male or trans. We investigated sexual health and HIV prevention behaviours of male and/or trans sex workers in Queensland, focusing on newer technologies including PrEP and rapid HIV testing, to determine their needs. This is the first qualitative research on male and trans sex workers in Australia.

Methods:

35 sex workers in Queensland were interviewed by peer researchers. Workers were urban and regional, and various ages, nationalities and socioeconomic backgrounds. Interviews discussed work practices, stigma, sexual health, testing, and HIV knowledge and attitudes.

Results:

Participants reported diligent sexual health practices, even those working outside of regulated settings. Most experienced stigma in healthcare and other settings. Most were familiar with rapid testing, and some relied solely on rapid testing for their sexual health checks. Migrant workers in particular reported not knowing how to access other sexual healthcare. Many were familiar with PrEP and some had used it. Attitudes were divided, with some seeing PrEP as valuable, and others holding concerns, either seeing it as a risk for other STIs, or fearing it was an 'experimental' drug. Asked about their needs as workers, most discussed the need to reduce stigma and for law reform around sex work.

Conclusion:

Trans and male sex workers in Queensland are generally well informed about sexual health, with many accessing newer HIV prevention and testing technologies. Healthcare workers must be trained to work with sex workers and people of diverse genders and sexualities, to reduce stigma and improve access to care. Sex workers must be made aware of friendly, accessible sexual health facilities. Decriminalisation is increasingly demanded by sex workers to ensure safe conditions.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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