

Our strengths, our stories: Doing strengths-based sexual health research with Aboriginal young people in western Sydney

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Presentation type: research-based oral presentation

Theme: Social political and culutral aspects

Keywords: Priority populations, sexually transmitted infections, reproductive health, social sciences

Background. Much existing research on Aboriginal young people's sexual health is overly focussed on risk and the problems that can arise in sexual relationships. In this presentation, we describe our approach to countering this negative and deficit-based focus in research with Aboriginal young people in western Sydney. In this presentation we outline the development of research questions, the participatory data collection methods and the co-design approach to presenting research findings.

Methods: A focus on strengths and self-determination was used from the beginning, by establishing research questions in consultation with Aboriginal partners, and by focussing on young people's agency, how they cultivate sexual wellbeing, and how community and culture supports this. We purposely chose qualitative peer-led research methods that recognise that young people hold expert knowledge about their own experiences, communities and cultures. Peer-interviewing was used to tap into existing social networks where trust and rapport already existed.

Results. Fourteen Aboriginal young people aged 16-21 years (five men and nine women) were employed as paid researchers to interview Aboriginal young people within their networks. Interviewers were recruited through Aboriginal community organisations and undertook four days of research training before conducting their interviews. Together, peer interviewers interviewed 37 Aboriginal young people. Peer interviewers also contributed to the Aboriginal governance of the project and to a data analysis workshop to co-design a poster presentation for communicating research findings in their own words (available for viewing at this conference).

Conclusion. Strengths-based research with Aboriginal young people involves starting with research questions that foreground young people's creativity and agency, requiring their participation and governance throughout the research process.

Aboriginal governance: The project has a team of Chief Investigators that includes five Aboriginal people. It is governed by an Aboriginal Advisory Group and Aboriginal people are

employed on the research team. Ethics were secured from the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW.

Disclosure of interest: none

Acknowledgement of funding: This research is part of the Australian Research Council Linkage Project LP170100190 'Fostering the sexual well-being of Aboriginal young people by building on social, cultural and personal strengths and resources. The project is a partnership between UNSW, Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District, South Western Sydney Local Health District and Family Planning NSW, together with investigators from the University of Sydney, University of Melbourne, University of British Columbia and Charles Darwin University. The project investigators include Joanne Bryant, Reuben Bolt, Michael Doyle, Dean Murphy, Carla Treloar, Stephen Bell, Simon Graham, Christy Newman, Annette Browne, Peter Aggleton, Jessica Botfield, Robert Hardy, Ben Davis, Bronwyn Leece, Linda Stanbury, Elizabeth Brown, Karen Beetson, Voula Kougelos, and Megan Brooks. We are grateful for the excellent assistance of Kacey Martin, Kim Beadman, Mitchell Beadman, Jessica Wilms, Tamika Briggs, and Kristy Gardner. National Health & Medical Research Council Investigator grant supports the salary of Simon Graham (number: 2009727).