

“Free Condoms Are Bad”: A Qualitative Study of Factors Shaping Condom Use among East Asian and Sub-Saharan African International Students in Sydney, Australia

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Background:

Less than a decade to 2030, the number of new STIs and HIV infections among young people continue to threaten Vision 2030, which aims at ending HIV, STIs and viral hepatitis by the year 2030. Condom use is one of the pragmatic interventions for preventing STIs and HIV especially among young people who constitute key population in the HIV epidemic. This study explored contextual factors that shape condom use among a sample of international students in Sydney.

Methods:

The study involved face-to-face and telephone semi-structured in-depth interviews. Data were provided by 20 international students, 10 from East Asian and 10 from sub-Saharan African backgrounds who are enrolled in various universities in Sydney. The study purposively recruited participants who self-identified as coming from East Asian and sub-Saharan African countries, are over 18 years and have spent at least three months in Australia. Interviews were transcribed, coded in NVivo and analysed using thematic content analysis.

Results:

The study findings showed that condomless sex is common among participants. Patterns in the study data revealed three themes that shape condom use among the participants. First, condom availability is associated with condom use as some participants who reported condomless sex attributed it to non-availability of condoms. Meanwhile, participants may perceive free condoms to be of low quality, and this affects access and use of such condoms. Second, condom use among participants is shaped by socio-cultural norm stigmatizing condom. This may also affect condom accessibility as this stigma may affect participants' confidence to access condoms. Finally, condom use is shaped by a need to prevent pregnancy as male and female participants cited this reason as a major motivation to use condoms during sex.

Conclusion:

The study findings contribute to evidence for tailored sexual health programmes aimed at improving HIV and STIs protective behaviour among international students in Australia.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None