

CHALLENGES FOR RESEARCH ABOUT THE HIV CARE AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF PLHIV FROM MIGRANT POPULATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Power J¹, Le Gautier R¹, Bourne A¹, Brown G¹

¹Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University

Background: People born overseas now make up the second largest group affected by HIV in Australia. Most research related to HIV among migrant populations has focused on HIV prevention and barriers to testing. There has been relatively limited Australian research on the lived experiences of PLHIV from migrant backgrounds, including care and support needs. The aim of this paper is to describe challenges to conducting research into the care and support needs of PLHIV from migrant communities in Australia.

Methods: This paper reports results from a qualitative study in which we interviewed service providers from the HIV and/or migrant health sectors about what is currently known, and not known, about the needs of PLHIV from migrant communities and the type of research methods likely to enable effective research – and meaningful understanding – of the needs of culturally diverse communities. Ten individual interviews and one group interview were conducted, data were analysed using inductive thematic techniques.

Results: Engaging PLHIV from migrant communities in research is challenging due to language barriers, privacy concerns, mistrust or misunderstanding of research. However, extensive knowledge about issues of concern to PLHIV is held by service providers embedded in communities. This should be recorded, collated and disseminated. Research usually compares Australian-born with overseas-born PLHIV as one group. However, meaningful knowledge about people's needs and issues will only be generated by research focused on specific cultural groups, with reference to intersecting characteristics such as age, gender, sexuality and migration/refugee history. However, this research is often resource intensive and involves very small samples which makes it difficult to fund.

Conclusions: Innovative research methods are needed to improve the quality and output of research into the needs of PLHIV from migrant backgrounds. Studies will need to be small scale and involve the skills and expertise of professional staff embedded within communities.

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