

# Gaps in the Social Work Curriculum: The Preparation of Key Health Practitioners for Sexual Health Work

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## **Background:**

This study presents findings from a broader mixed methods study which mapped sexual health and well-being services in Sydney, Australia. We present social workers' reflections of working in sexual health to answer the research question: How were social workers prepared for working in sexual well-being

## **Methods:**

The mixed methods study involved a scoping review of sexual health services. Approximately 50 agencies were identified as providing sexual health services. From this convenience sample agency workers were invited to complete a survey (41 responded). From these respondents, six social workers participated in two focus groups by ZOOM which were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed

## **Results:**

The qualitative analysis process resulted in five themes. Five overarching themes emerged: (1) training path, (2) disease, disaster, and dysfunction, (3) placement, (4) being 'askable', (5) barriers. Each of these themes along with corresponding codes were described with excerpts from participants' narratives that serve to illuminate the theme.

Theme 1: *Training Path* resulted in two sub-themes: 1. *University Training: sexually silent* and *Street Training: screaming*. Theme 2: *Disease, disaster, and dysfunction* highlighted that sexuality training was often framed in a deficit lens in their social work programs. Theme 3: *Placement* highlighted the importance of social work field education placement opportunities in sexual health settings. Theme 4: *Being 'Askable'* was a key theme that emerged and was seen as a core social work skill of communication that is applicable across all fields of practice. Theme 5: *Barriers* resulting in five sub-themes: 1. Curriculum, 2. Medicalization of sexuality, 3. Social work baggage, 4. Positioning sexuality social work

## **Conclusion:**

This study uniquely adds to the current body of social work research by illuminating the gaps in social work education around sexual well-being.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

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