‘It’s like the blind leading the blind’: Exploring the reproductive and sexual health of international students in Australia

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BACKGROUND & AIM

• International students have poorer sexual health knowledge than local students and face barriers to accessing reproductive and sexual health services, including Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) restrictions to pregnancy-related services in the first 12 months.

• Little research directly explores the experiences of international students as they relate to reproductive and sexual health (RSH) and OSHC

• **Aim:** to explore international students’ understanding of OSHC in relation to RSH and the accessibility of RSH information

METHODS

• Semi-structured interviews with international students studying at universities in Melbourne

• Average length 52 minutes, interviews audio recorded and transcribed

• **Thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke 2006)
RESULTS:

• We identified 3 key themes:

  • **Institutions have a responsibility of care:** “I think everyone should be given equal, equal rights when it comes to health. I think that it is not fair to sort of prioritise [local students] because both, both lives are important.” (Jack, Male, Malaysia)

  • **Uncertainty about pregnancy options:** “Is [abortion] legal here? ... It’s something that is done very secretly back home.” (Evelyn, Female, Philippines)

  • **Challenges navigating the health system:** “Some friends of mine were looking at IUDs [intrauterine devices] but nobody knew how much they cost, and people are like, ‘So where do we get it? Where the heck do we get it?’” (Kemala, Female, Indonesia)
CONCLUSIONS/IMPLICATIONS:

• International students reported low levels of awareness about OSHC restrictions, limited understanding of pregnancy related options, and challenges navigating their insurance in a foreign healthcare system.

• Students desired better sign posting of the inclusions and exclusions of their OSHC and how to access RSH services.

• RSH education should be available throughout one’s degree, as students’ interest and comfort engaging in RSH information may change over time.

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