

‘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.
- FPV and Northern Centre Against Sexual Assault have received a grant from Victoria State Government International Student Welfare Program to co-design with international students an online RSH education course.



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