

## **7<sup>th</sup> Interscholastic Student HIV & Sexual Health Research Symposium 2021**

On Wednesday 23 June 2021 a one-day event was hosted by Auckland University of Technology's (AUT) Child and Youth Health Research Centre (CYHRC) at South Campus, Manukau City. This annual event was initiated in 2014 and is a collaboration by researchers from AUT, University of Auckland and Massey University. It aims to provide an opportunity for postgraduate students with projects focusing on Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Sexual Health to present their studies and to meet and network with other researchers with similar interests. The day was very successful, with much stimulating discussion based on the presentations; and with 40 attendees (both face to face and online) from academic, NGO and public sectors, including New Zealand Aids Foundation (NZAF), District Health Boards, GP clinics. The presentations demonstrated a wide range of topics including HIV counselling programmes in India; blood donor policies among Gay and Bisexual Men in New Zealand; and the role of social media apps in providing sexual and reproductive health information for users.

An innovation in 2021 was that of a plenary session at the end of the presentations provided a general forum for discussion about HIV and Sexual Health in a Post Covid World. Key experts and students discussed their experiences led by a panel of four HIV/Sexual Health researchers. Indigenous Pacific perspectives were also shared along with policy directions and implications. Key takeaways relevant within the post covid context were the need for more research support in the field of HIV and Sexual and Reproductive Health and the impact of HIV/Sexual Health among vulnerable marginalised groups.

Here in this special section of vol 4 of Pacific Health, 2021, we present the abstracts from the oral presentations.

Symposium Coordinators – Dr Cath Conn and Dr Radilaite Cammock

### **Abstracts**

#### **Indian HIV counselling programme made effective through Appreciative Inquiry**

Balakrishnan Nair, AUT PhD Candidate

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) counselling of high-risk groups (HRGs) of India is an under-researched area including as it pertains to the HRGs from the north Indian states. These high-risk groups are often placed at risk by a range of sociocultural norms and processes that affect how they access and engage with the Indian HIV counselling programme. Studies have shown that HIV counselling programmes can be effective in reducing risk of HIV transmission and improving the health and well-being of HRGs. However, studies show that HRGs face barriers to HIV counselling services that contributes to high HIV prevalence amongst HRGs.

This study investigates the effectiveness of the HIV counselling programme delivered to HRGs in Northern India, from the perspective of HRGs and frontline workers associated with the counselling programme. The study adopted a participatory

methodology, specifically Appreciative Inquiry (AI), both as means to elicit the perspectives of HRGs and frontline workers and through thoughtful inquiry and dialogue to identify strengths-based solutions. AI follows a 4D process within action focus groups involving the following phases - discovery, dream, design and destiny - for data collection and analysis and to culminate in solutions.

The study presents and discusses the suggestions for improvement to the delivery of HIV counselling programme. The findings have implications for the transformed approaches to addressing HIV counselling programmes for HRGs in Northern India. The study also contributes to the growing body of literature that utilises AI as a methodology, and more so in examining the issues of people at risk of or living with HIV/AIDS.

### **The future of blood donor policies for Gay and Bisexual Men (GBM) in New Zealand: Where to next?**

Koson Tony Sriamporn, PhD candidate, University of Auckland

For as long as the blood supply is reliant on voluntary donations, blood donation policies must strike a balance between the inherent risks associated with this and maximising the donor pool and ensuring that the blood is safe. In New Zealand (NZ), gay and bisexual men (GBM) are deferred from donating life-saving blood for three months since their last sexual contact with another man due to the ongoing HIV epidemic. Although GBM as a group are 873 times more likely to be diagnosed with HIV in NZ than heterosexuals, a 3-month deferral is unsustainable as it excludes many low-risk individuals from donating. Unnecessarily conservative policies can be stigmatising and discriminatory towards GBM. When blood deferral policies are perceived to be unfair, they are not likely to be complied with, thus increasing the chance of blood infections entering the blood supply.

These risks can be mitigated if NZ's blood donor policy is more equitable, better understood, and accepted by GBM. However, we lack the current and local evidence needed to inform the decision making processes in creating a more inclusive blood deferral policy. This presentation will be introducing the program of doctoral study which aims to investigate important questions regarding blood donation, focussing on their blood donation understandings, compliance, attitudes, desire to donate, and policy preferences among GBM in NZ. This study will also address the epidemiological and social conundrums we will face in trying to introduce a proportion of GBM who can donate safely into the pool of eligible donors.

### **Sexual and reproductive health and digital health promotion for young Somali in the New Zealand diaspora**

Ayan Said, PhD candidate, AUT

As the number of people in the world being forcefully displaced or seeking refuge rises, there is a growing need for New Zealand to work towards successful settlement outcomes; this includes improving the health outcomes of young people. The civil war in Somalia resulted in massive resettlement of Somali refugees, relocation from one country to another requires extensive adjustment and can result in family and social disruption as well as altered health. Having knowledge about health enables

young people to have agency over their own bodies and protects against Sexual and reproductive Health (SRH) issues. SRH in many cultures is a sensitive topic. For many African communities SRH is often regarded as taboo as cultural and religious values largely frame how SRH is understood. There is limited research about services, social and cultural barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services and education. SRH is shaped by socio- cultural factors which can act as barriers to knowledge and influence access to SRH healthcare. Health promotion plays a key role in ensuring access to appropriate health services that are culturally, religiously, and linguistically appropriate. This study seeks to generate knowledge and empower Somalia youth to develop ideas for digital health promotion tools targeting for sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Ensuring access to healthcare is a global challenge and one of the most important determinants of a population's health worldwide. This research recognises the knowledge and ideas of Somali youth in Auckland as a fundamental resource in developing digital health promotion tools for SRH health.

### **HIV prevention features in social media dating apps for Men Who Have Sex With Men in New Zealand**

Wenjie Li, PhD candidate, AUT

Men who have sex with men (MSM) have suffered a disproportionate burden with HIV in New Zealand. Social media dating apps have become popular as a platform for MSM to discover and meet one another. Since these apps are often used to arrange sexual encounters, they may also provide suitable platforms for communication and initiatives related to HIV prevention. However, very little is known about the strategies that MSM social media dating apps employ to promote HIV prevention intervention. Furthermore, there are no guidelines on best practices for HIV prevention intervention through apps. This study aims to investigate these issues and points out to what extent MSM social media dating apps promote HIV prevention awareness messages in New Zealand.

First, MSM social media dating apps available in the iOS App Store and Google Play Store were selected using matching keywords. Search results are filtered to keep the MSM social dating app relevant. Then a checklist was applied to test these apps, which include HIV prevention features, to determine what HIV prevention features are present in social media dating apps for MSM.

Preliminary results have shown that such features are uncommon. Moreover, apps with HIV features in other countries do not present the before-mentioned features on the New Zealand version. A deeper understanding of the efficacy of HIV prevention interventions in MSM social media dating apps will benefit both the MSM community and the general public. Furthermore, the study can strengthen the communication and awareness of HIV among app developers, public health professionals and policymakers.

## **Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Black Creatives in Auckland**

Adetoun J Nnabugwu, PhD candidate, AUT

Having access to quality information and services on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is a basic human right. However, some barriers deeply rooted in inherent lifestyle and transgenerational practices continue to hinder young people, more so, those with black heritage living in diaspora. In Auckland, the lack of information about SRH issues, including the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), stigma and discrimination about STIs including HIV/AIDS, is a fundamental challenge among black people. Indigenous values and cultural complexities pertaining to SRH at the community level is another. Furthermore, migration and dissociation from one's ethnic culture coupled with the pressure to adapt to a new environment and people is yet another layer of burden.

By adopting a critical participatory action research approach, this research explores how young black creatives in Auckland can cocreate innovative solutions that gives them a voice about their SRH and have access to essential information and services.

This is expected to create an avenue for young black creatives to be empowered, utilising creativity to carve a niche of protection, promoting meaningful participation in practice and policy uptake on SRH programming for young blacks in Auckland. By this, they may also contribute to bridging the gap in health inequities. Pertinent to SRH futures, it would provide knowledge on the role played by creative blacks in diaspora contexts, and how those delivering SRH initiatives can better collaborate with them. It would also help young Africans to overcome prevailing cultural and environmental challenges they face on SRH in different sometimes new to them contexts.

## **The role of Participatory Action Research (PAR) for co-creation of sexual and reproductive health promotion for young women from the Indian Subcontinent living in New Zealand**

Darinka Sousa, MPhil candidate, AUT

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) promotion is very important to ensure young women are well informed, and it can support good decision making. However, SRH is considered a taboo in the South Asian context and therefore is not an aspect of life that is discussed. With modernisation of society, one would expect that this would change. However, the reality is far from it, including in the realm of sex education in schools, with parents and teachers pushing the responsibility on to others. Sex education in schools and at home are typically the first threads of sexual health promotion.

There is a growing trend for young women from the Indian Subcontinent to migrate to New Zealand. These young women may be caught within the paradox of experiencing two contrasting cultures: a more open society in New Zealand and a culturally driven restrictive society in their home countries. Experiencing such a paradox can make it challenging for young women to find services that are acceptable or appropriate.

Prosumerism is an emerging concept in the field of health promotion, combining notions of the passive consumer with an active producer. It involves co-creation of health promotion and is based on the premise that people are more likely to consider information as acceptable if they were involved in its preparation. Such health promotion is also more likely to represent the voices of the participants. The PAR process was used to engage a research team of young women diaspora living in Auckland, New Zealand consisting of the primary researcher and participants as co-researchers. The cocreation group shared their experiences and preferences for SRH, and developed initial ideas for internet based tools, a promising mechanism for the future. From this a framework of inter-locking circles was created to present the process of developing, through action cycle, culturally appropriate SRH promotion.

### **Old to new media and its implication for youth sexual health promotion in India and Nigeria**

Anjali Bhatia and Adetoun J. Nnabugwu, PhD candidates, AUT

Youth sexual health promotion remains a vital challenge in both India and Nigeria. Drawing on the two contexts, we explore the literature to critically review how the media (both old and new) have influenced youth and how the different medium might inform sexual health promotion among this group. The world has seen an enormous transition from localised (print and mail, analogue media such as television and movies) to digitalized and cloud-based information and communication spaces (web-based search engines, games, and social media applications), with youth as predominant actors in and contributors to these changes.

This review seeks to understand how old and new media may have shaped youth sexual health promotion and how future media might play a role in youth sexual health promotion. The review draws from research and local projects relating to India and Nigeria. The link between these two countries is that both have large youth populations with good access to smartphones and both countries have had a significant media industry, that of Bollywood and Nollywood, very popular with audiences. There are indications in the literature that the direction of flow is towards a greater emphasis on new media which forefronts innovation, collaboration and prosumerism – that is, from passive consumer to more active consumer-producers. It is proposed that this provides new opportunities and imperatives for youth sexual health promotion such that new media is disrupting the norms in significant ways that rather than being ignored, it needs to be better understood in a digital age.