

Story Sharing for Sexual Health: Piloting Culturally Relevant Intervention with South Asian Immigrant Women in Canada

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What Is the Purpose of this Study?

- To determine the effectiveness of using culturally relevant stories as a model for sexual health education for South Asian immigrant women in Ontario, Canada.

What Is the Problem?

- There is a scarcity of research on sexual health education among women in South Asian diasporic communities in Canada.
- Discussing sexual health and HIV prevention within the South Asian community is considered highly taboo.
- There is a need for designing culturally relevant approaches to teach about sexual health and HIV prevention.

What Are the Findings?

- Although participants found the fact sheets to be informative, they were not seen as culturally relevant.
- The educational sessions using stories were judged as more effective for sexual health education, are culturally relevant, and do more to challenge HIV stigma.
- Many participants felt that the information presented in the story sharing sessions were relevant to their community, useful for friends and families, and relatable to their lives.
- Storytelling is an effective strategy for adult sexual health education.
- Participants across both sexual health education models identified a significant gap in resources to be able to successfully navigate sexual health in their own lives; while stigma and gender norms around shyness prevented easy discussion of these topics in the family.
- Participants did identify family was an important site of sexual health conversations for which they wanted more tools and support.
- Study participants, particularly those who had the storytelling intervention talked about the importance of having a safe space to discuss taboo topics like sexual health.
- Parasocial contact hypothesis proved to be a useful approach because findings support its assertion that vicarious contact with peer educators (leaders) improves the dissemination and internalization of educational materials pursuant to sexual health.
- Women participants who are the story listeners bonded with the stories and their characters (i.e., nonthreatening learning) leading to deeper sexual health learning.
- The results of this study pave the way for future research focusing on other immigrant populations.

Who Should Care Most?

- Researchers, health care providers, practitioners, health educators, adult educators, and family life educators.

Recommendations for Action

- It is recommended that the stories come in the form of sexual health packages, where each story would include a short list of the key facts related to the health condition highlighted as well as a visual accompaniment and a list of health-related contact information.
- Based on discussions of access, language and interpretation, it is recommended that the stories continue to use simple, clear language and that as/when possible materials are translated in South Asian languages.
- Videos to animate the stories and sexual health information in general be developed if and when resources allow.
- It is strongly recommended that story-sharing and storytelling models of sexual health education be designed and offered to communities of men and those representing other racialized populations.
- Men's engagement in sexual health is recommended as men would considerably benefit from this form of dialogue and education.
- Multiple strategies and approaches towards storytelling are recommended to strengthen community knowledge of sexual health and to counter the stigma placed on sex and on people seeking support.
- Health educators and other practitioners working with immigrant communities need to draw on cultural competence as they design culturally relevant educational material and interventions, particularly in the area of sexual health and HIV prevention.