### Introduction

- Sexual health includes the physical, mental, and social wellbeing in regards to sexuality (World Health Organization, 2016).
- Ability to properly access health services directly correlates to positive sexual health outcomes (DiCenso et al., 2001).
- University students are often sexually active (Chanakira, O’Callahan, Goyer, & Freeman, 2014).
- Important that they have access to sexual health services.
- Newcomers to Canada experience barriers to accessing services (Maticka-Tyndale, Shirpak, & Cinchion, 2007; Salehi, 2011; Sales & Flicker, 2010).
- International students may experience particular barriers/facilitators.
- Limited research on their access and use of sexual health services in North America.

### Research Question

What are the key barriers and/or facilitators that international students at Dalhousie University perceive and experience in accessing and using sexual health services in Halifax, Nova Scotia?

### Methods

#### Methodology and Methods
- Exploratory qualitative study using one-on-one, face to face interviews.
- Recruitment and Participants:
  - Facebook group and snowballing.
  - 4 international students between the ages of 19 and 30, enrolled at Dalhousie University.

#### Data Collection
- Sociodemographic profile questionnaire.
- Audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews.
- E.g. “Can you tell me about any experiences you have had attempting to access and/or use sexual health services in Halifax?”

#### Data Analysis
- Interviews transcribed verbatim.
- Thematic coding: key concepts and themes.
- Constant comparative method.

### Findings

#### Barriers and Facilitators at the Interpersonal Level (one-on-one interactions and relationships)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative experiences with health professionals (e.g. Delay in receiving results)</td>
<td>Information obtained through friends (on and off campus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure of costs associated with using sexual health services – international student health plan coverage</td>
<td>Positive experiences with health professionals (e.g. Professionalism, respect)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenges with appointment bookings, waiting times, and hours of operation</td>
<td>The availability of translation services</td>
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#### Barriers and Facilitators at the Community Level (factors within Dalhousie and Halifax)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information on available sexual health services not provided by services at Dalhousie that international students tend to use</td>
<td>Information on available sexual health services provided by services at Dalhousie that international students tend to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual health information obtained through the Internet</td>
<td>Benefits of off campus services (e.g. &quot;more open and available&quot;)</td>
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#### Barriers and Facilitators at the Societal/Cultural Level (e.g. social and cultural norms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties associated with being in a new setting (on and off campus)</td>
<td>Phoning off campus services to avoid face-to-face interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language barriers</td>
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<td>Differences in sexual beliefs and practices between Canadian culture and other cultures</td>
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### Discussion

#### Interpersonal Level
- Some participants had overall positive experiences with health professionals; however, others experienced negative attitudes.
- Literature shows that such negative attitudes can increase access to sexual health services.

#### Community Level
- Most participants found that they were not provided with information on available sexual health services in Halifax.
- International students pay higher tuition fees than local students: costs are a concern.
- Unsure of their health plan coverage.
- One participant found off campus sexual health services to be more helpful.

#### Societal/Cultural Level
- Language barriers and cultural differences in sexual beliefs and practices consistently emerged in the literature and in this study.
- One participant mentioned the benefits of translation services; however, others still faced language barriers.

### Implications

- Addressing barriers and strengthening facilitators may help inform and improve access to and use of sexual health services.
- Expand knowledge of sexual health (e.g. off campus) and translation services.
- Future research is needed with more international students across Canada to gain more in-depth knowledge about whether there are similar barriers and facilitators to accessing sexual health services in different places.

### References


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