

## 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’Cathain, Goyder, & Freeman, 2014)
  - Important that they have access to sexual health services
- Newcomers to Canada experience barriers to access (Maticka-Tyndale, Shirpak, & Chinichian, 2007; Salehi, 2011; Salehi & 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

The data was organized into three levels: Interpersonal, community, and societal/cultural  
**Barriers and Facilitators at the Interpersonal Level (one-on-one interactions and relationships)**

Barriers	Facilitators
Negative experiences with health professionals (e.g. Delay in receiving results)	Information obtained through friends (on and off campus)
	Positive experiences with health professionals (e.g. Professionalism, respect)

### Barriers and Facilitators at the Community Level (factors within Dalhousie and Halifax)

Barriers	Facilitators
Information on available sexual health services not provided by services at Dalhousie that international students tend to use	Information on available sexual health services provided by services at Dalhousie that international students tend to use
Unsure of costs associated with using sexual health services – international student health plan coverage	The availability of translation services
Challenges with appointment bookings, waiting times, and hours of operation	Sexual health information obtained through the Internet
	Benefits of off campus services (e.g. “more open and available”)

### Barriers and Facilitators at the Societal/Cultural Level (e.g. social and cultural norms)

Barriers	Facilitators
Difficulties associated with being in a new setting (on and off campus)	Phoning off campus services to avoid face-to-face interaction
Language barriers	
Differences in sexual beliefs and practices between Canadian culture and other cultures	



## Discussion

### Interpersonal Level

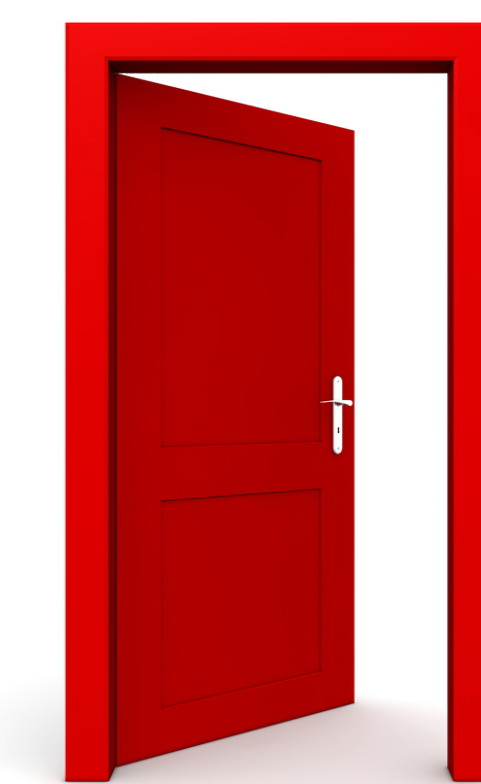
- Some participants had overall positive experiences with health professionals; however, others experienced negative attitudes
- Literature shows that such negative attitudes can decrease access to sexual health services

### 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

## Contact Information

Stefanie Machado  
Email: stefanie.machado@dal.ca  
linkedin.com/in/stefaniemachado

## References

- Chanakira, E., O’Cathain, A., Goyder, E. C., & Freeman, J. V. (2014). Factors perceived to influence risky sexual behaviour among university students in the United Kingdom: A qualitative telephone interview study. *BMC Public Health*, 14(1), 1055–1079. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-14-1055
- DiCenso, A., Borthwick, V. W., Busca, C. A., Creatura, C., Holmes, J. A., Kalagian, W. F., & Partington, B. M. (2001). Completing the picture: Adolescents talk about what’s missing in sexual health services. *Journal of Public Health*, 92(1), 35–38. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/docview/231996587/fulltextPDF/5A394FC2E5F24AB1PQ/1?accountid=10406>
- Maticka-Tyndale, E., Shirpak, K. R., & Chinichian, M. (2007). Providing for the sexual health needs of Canadian immigrants: The experiences of immigrants from Iran. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 98(3), 183–186. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/docview/231995988/fulltextPDF/491212E1E9A24312PQ/1?accountid=10406>
- Salehi, R. (2011). *Indicators of access to sexual health services for Toronto newcomer youth*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Salehi, R. & Flicker, S. (2010). Predictors of exposure to sexual health education among teens who are newcomers to Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 19(4), 157–167. Retrieved from [http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/docview/862095023?rft\\_id=info%3Aaxr1%2Fsid%3Aprimo](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/docview/862095023?rft_id=info%3Aaxr1%2Fsid%3Aprimo)
- World Health Organization. (2016). *Sexual health*. Retrieved from [http://www.who.int/topics/sexual\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/sexual_health/en/)

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Lois Jackson, Dr. Karen Gallant, Dr. Jacqueline Gahagan, Dr. Brad Meisner, and my friends and family both near and far for their continual guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this project.