Family planning and the Afghan community in Australia: New opportunities, new challenges

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Abstract

Statement of the Problem: Afghanistan has been a leading country of origin for refugees arriving in Australia, and this community are recognised as having unmet family planning needs. Understanding the issues of individual migrant populations is integral to developing appropriate, evidence-informed strategies. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the family planning experiences, practices, and outcomes of Afghan women and men in Australia, and describe the sociocultural context surrounding family planning in this community.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: In alignment with community-based participatory research principles, bicultural researchers were employed, and contributed to each stage of this research. A total of 58 Afghan women and men participated in focus groups and interviews. A thematic analysis framework guided data analysis. This study drew on Intersectionality, the Socioecological Model of Health, and Cultural Studies. These theoretical perspectives provided a framework to identify family planning concerns and influences, and furthermore, to consider how these change and evolve in new cultural contexts, and impact the health and wellbeing women, men, families, and communities.

Findings: Participants experienced a range of family planning challenges, including: unintended pregnancy, difficulty negotiating contraception use, and a lack of opportunity to voice sexual health needs. Living in Australia presented valuable family planning opportunities for women, such as increased access to modern contraception. However, broadly held liberal societal views within Australia created new tensions within marital relationships. This study highlights how the impact of migration on family planning can be double-edged. Whilst many aspects of health improve; new issues simultaneously emerge. Shifting social and cultural environments impact even the most private and intimate spaces. Findings offer valuable learnings for conducting sensitive, cross-cultural research; demonstrate the importance of meaningful, interdisciplinary collaboration between academia, health, and marginalised communities; and provide practice recommendations to address the family planning needs of migrant communities.

Recent Publications

1. Russo, A., Lewis, B., Joyce, A., Crockett, B., & Luchters, S. (2015). A qualitative exploration of the emotional wellbeing and support needs of new mothers from Afghanistan living in Melbourne, Australia. *BMC Pregnancy and* Childbirth. 15,197
2. Joyce, A., Foenander, E., Russo, A., Iqbal, N. (2016). *Evaluation of the preventing violence against women and their children in culturally and linguistically diverse communities project*. Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University
3. McBride, J., Russo, A., & Block, A. (2016). The Refugee Health Nurse Liaison: A nurse led initiative to improve healthcare for asylum seekers and refugees. *Contemporary Nurse, 52*,6
4. Osmani, A., Reyer, J., Osmani, A., & Hamajima, N. (2015). Factors influencing contraceptive use among women in Afghanistan: secondary analysis of Afghanistan Health Survey 2012. *Nagoya Journal of Medical Science, 77*, 551-561.
5. Rasooly, M., Ali, M., Brown, N., & Noormal, B. (2015). Uptake and predictors of contraceptive use in Afghan women. *BMC Women's Health, 15*(9).



Biography

Alana Russo has a background in health promotion and public health, with experience in program planning and evaluation, qualitative and quantitative cross-cultural research, and health service research. The majority of her work has been within the field of refugee health, in areas of women's health, sexual health, family violence, social inclusion, and culturally responsive practice. Alana has a strong interest in equity-based approaches, and is committed to working closely with culturally diverse communities on projects that will have direct translational outcomes to improve their health and wellbeing.

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