

Infrastructural and Community Factors Influencing Healthcare Access of Sexual Minorities: A Narrative Synthesis of Existing Literature and Lessons for Hong Kong

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Abstract

Background: In Hong Kong, sexual minorities are a vulnerable group. The lack of anti-discrimination legislations makes it difficult for them to access important civic rights, including equal access and treatments of healthcare services. This narrative synthesis aims to explore how different factors could hinder or facilitate the access to healthcare services of sexual minorities. Findings would then be interpreted in light of the Hong Kong context to maximise applicability to the local environment.

Method: Healthcare access was defined as the following outcomes: patients' ability to seek care, patients' ability to engage, and the acceptability of an offered service. A comprehensive search for full-text articles in English was conducted on 4 databases. Inclusion criteria were original studies investigating the direct impacts of a specific factor (barrier/ facilitator) on the aforementioned outcomes. Studies underwent full-text and abstract screening before data extraction. Findings across different studies exploring the same factor were then analysed to identify any recurring themes. Studies were categorised into two groups according to their research scope: community (MESO-level) and systemic (MACRO-level).

Results: 15 and 17 studies were included for the MESO and MACRO levels, respectively. At both levels, discrimination and stigma was a key barrier explored. At the MESO-level, inequality in healthcare provision and promotion was a prominent barrier; at the MACRO-level, lack of awareness and education in healthcare providers and/or users was the most noted barrier. Patient-centered and culturally specific practices was the most researched facilitator at both levels. Recurring themes were identified from multiple factors; some factors exhibited thematic consistencies across MESO and MACRO levels.

Discussion and conclusion: The findings of this review highlight that the topic of sexual minorities and healthcare access is complex and dynamic. Key lessons for the Hong Kong society include the following: at the systemic level, anti-discriminatory laws should be urgently implemented and enforced, which, when coupled with community-based approaches such as establishing safe spaces, would provide synergistic effects that promote equality in healthcare access of sexual minorities in a heteronormative society. Within healthcare settings, an inclusive design to incorporate sexual minorities' perspectives through remodelling and training of service providers are essential.