

## CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

### A qualitative study into the health and social care needs and barriers to service access for Sudanese women living in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area of Sydney, Australia

2nd Asia Pacific Conference on Integrated Care, Melbourne, 11-13 November 2019

Penelope Fotheringham, Deslyn Raymond, Sarah Khanlari<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Wei Jiang<sup>1</sup>, Suzanne Gleeson<sup>1</sup>, Erin Miller<sup>1</sup>, John Esatwood<sup>1,3,4</sup>

1: Sydney Local Health District,, Sydney, School of Medicine and Public Health, Australia;

2: School of Medicine and Public Health,University of Newcastle, Newcastle, NSW, Australia;

3: Menzies Centre for Health Policy, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia;

4: School of Women's and Children Health, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia

---

**Background:** A core goal of Healthy Homes and Neighbourhoods is sector-capacity building, engagement and identification of the needs of the communities served.

**Aim:** To endeavour to identify the needs and barriers in accessing and engaging with the health and social care system for ethnically Sudanese women living in a disadvantaged suburb of Sydney.

**Methods:** Participants were recruited via direct and indirect community engagement strategies, and were invited to participate in a community consultation specifically for Sudanese women. The session was conducted in English with Arabic interpretation. Emerging key themes were recorded, summarised and analysed.

**Results:** Fifteen women participated in the community consultation. Preliminary results suggest barriers to health and social care utilisation included accessibility of appropriate housing options, cost of physical therapies and local inaccessibility of culturally appropriate primary care physicians. A key theme identified was the alienation experienced by Sudanese women who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) and who are accessing perinatal care and childbirth services.

Other emerging themes identified ways in which the health sector could deliver improved care, including better coordination of acute and community-based services, ensuring services are advertised effectively and in Arabic and improved training of birth attendants in the effects of FGM on pregnancy and birthing.

**Conclusion:** Ethnically Sudanese women who have resettled in Australia experience a range of barriers to accessing and engaging in a complex health and social care system. Further alienation occurs when women access the healthcare system specifically for perinatal care and childbirth services.

Fotheringham; A qualitative study into the health and social care needs and barriers to service access for Sudanese women living in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area of Sydney, Australia

**Lessons learned:** Access to the local community relied on long-term, consistent relationship building, identification of key leaders and shared planning and goal development. Female Genital Mutilation and its consequent morbidity is a common issue for Sudanese women who have resettled in Australia.

**Suggestions for future research:** Future research will focus on gaining information on the cultural, moral and social acceptability of FGM and the breadth of experiences of women exposed to FGM generationally and across the lifespan. Research should inform the implementation of the Sudanese community's self-determined values and needs and the facilitation of supportive partnerships to guide responses from the health and social care sector.