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Community Health / Policy

Abstract Title

Barriers and Strategies for Inclusive Reproductive Health Research: A Mixed-Methods Study

Background

Reproductive health research has historically excluded Sexual and Gender Minorities (SGM) and racialized individuals, limiting the equity and generalizability of findings.

Objective

This study aimed to identify barriers to participation in reproductive health research and strategies to improve outreach, inclusion, and trust, with a focus on underrepresented communities.

Methods

A mixed-methods design was employed, including online surveys ($n = 272$) and virtual focus groups with community members. Quantitative analyses compared trust in researchers across demographic groups, using chi-squared tests of independence. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed using ATLAS.ti software to identify barriers, community-specific concerns, and recommendations. Informed by focus group feedback, a community-informed outreach campaign was implemented using inclusive language and visuals across three poster designs, promoted on Instagram.

Results

Quantitative findings showed that non-heterosexual participants reported significantly lower trust in researchers compared to heterosexual participants ($p = 0.015$), while no significant differences were found between BIPOC and non-BIPOC respondents. Qualitative analysis identified three overarching barriers: (1) lack of trust in researchers and health care, (2) stigma and shame surrounding reproductive health, and (3) logistical challenges. Community-specific issues included the exclusionary impact of gendered language for SGM participants and hypervigilance among BIPOC participants. The community-informed Instagram campaign resulted in a twelve-fold increase in survey responses, demonstrating the effectiveness of inclusive outreach strategies.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of community-driven approaches in reproductive health research. Trust is fostered through affirming language, diverse research teams, and meaningful engagement. Participants emphasized the need for transparency, collaboration, and recognition of lived experiences. These findings provide practical guidance for researchers seeking to engage underrepresented populations and underscore the need for clearer institutional frameworks to support ethical and inclusive community engagement throughout the research process.

Authors

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