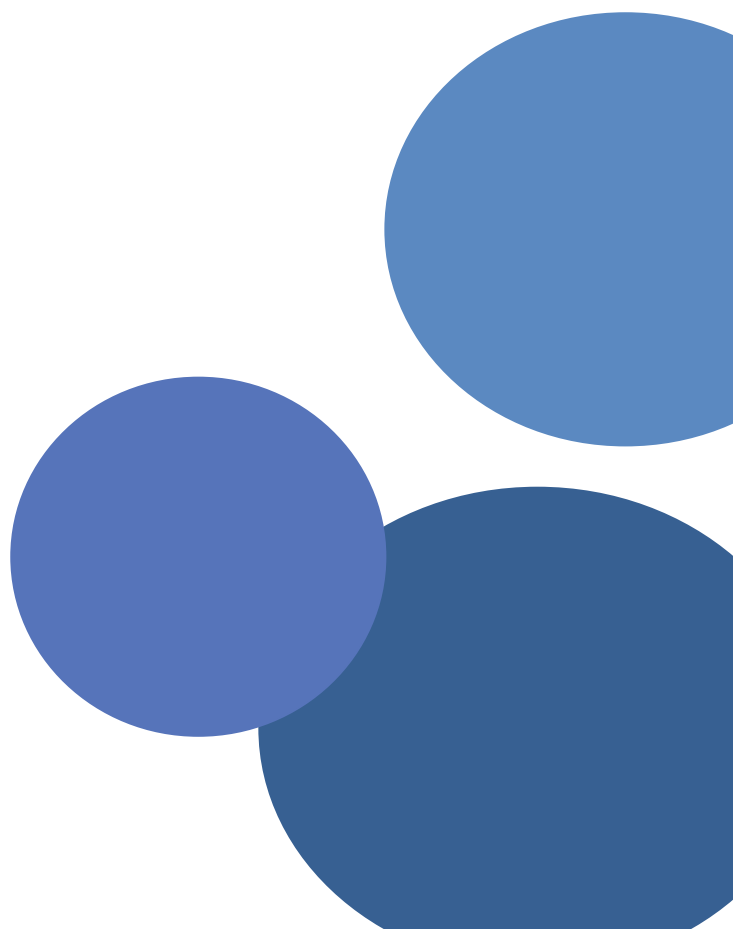


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ABSTRACT BOOK



“I Feel Safer Swimming with Sharks”: Social Connectedness for Gay Arab-Australian Men.

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Context and aim:

The experiences of navigating tensions of belonging and social connectedness among gay Arab-Australian men have yet to be explored. Despite the increasing visibility of LGBTIQ+ communities in Australia, particularly within Sydney's diverse cultural mosaic, there is limited research on the specific experiences of men who identify as both Arab and gay. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the experiences of gay Arab-Australian men in relation to belonging and social connectedness.

Methods and research findings:

This study employed a qualitative approach, conducting one-on-one interviews with gay Arab-Australian men. Participants were recruited through a mix of purposive and snowball sampling. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. Eleven men participated (aged 25–59), all self-identifying as gay or queer, and more than half residing in an area of Sydney that is characterised by a high concentration of Arab communities. Most participants identified as Christian (n=8), and of Lebanese background (n=9). Six participants had completed a postgraduate education and had full-time employment at the time of the interview (n=6).

Translational outcomes:

Three key themes emerged from the data: (1) Navigating multiple cultural dynamics; (2) Negotiating microaggressions and discrimination; and (3) Building safe and supportive networks. Gay Arab-Australian men face distinctive challenges around social connectedness due to the intersecting stigma they encounter from both their ethnic and queer communities. Given the potential risk of poor health outcomes associated with social isolation and disconnection, including limited access to mental and sexual health services, the study provides justification for the development of culturally safe public health programs for gay Arab-Australian men.

Future actions:

This study emphasises the need for intersectional approaches to understanding the intricate nature of social connectedness as a determinant of health for gay Arab-Australian men. This study supports the need for the development of culturally appropriate and inclusive public health interventions that prioritise the diverse needs of gay Arab-Australian men.