

Case Studies: Social Determinants of Sexual Health

Case 1

For about 2 weeks, Ari has been feeling groin pain. Ari is very anxious that it might be serious and is eating less and less as a way to feel in control of what's happening in her body. Ari lives in a neighbourhood where many services have been cut and the closest health clinic is 3 bus rides away. Ari can't get to the clinic before closing unless she skips two classes on Thursday. Ari's family, not knowing what's going on, is angry with her for skipping class.

- What are the root causes of Ari's difficulty in getting health care services?
- What are the root causes of the family conflict?
- Which social determinants of health are relevant here?

Case 2

Quinn was sexually assaulted at an out-of-town track and field tournament. Being the only one from their school who qualified, Quinn travelled solo. Other athletes there were top-level in the province and the ones who assaulted Quinn were known for being aggressively competitive. Once back at the school, Quinn told coaches about the incident. Their coaches dismissed the claim, saying, "Well, you knew what you were getting into. Those athletes are territorial and you went by yourself! It's just a turf thing, it's not personal. And anyway, there's nothing you can do now."

- What structures make it possible for those athletes to sexually assault others without punishment?
- What excuses and assumptions do the structures uphold?
- Which social determinants of health are relevant here?

Case 3

Rain is an intelligent and shy student who has pink hair and loves fashion. Rain is **gender non-conforming** and uses the gender pronoun "they" (instead of "he" or "she"). The annual school dance is coming up. The school has a policy that boys must wear a suit and tie and girls must wear a dress. Rain doesn't feel comfortable in either of those (but has a lot of fancy clothes they've designed themselves!). A school administrator says, "If you don't feel comfortable picking one, you don't have to come. It's that simple."

- What function does the school's policy serve? What is it trying to achieve?
- How might you change the policy so that Rain would feel comfortable going to the dance?

- Many students feel uncomfortable with strict formal dress codes. How might you change the policy so that everyone would feel more comfortable going to the dance and still give the event an important feeling?
- Which social determinants of health are relevant here?

Case 4

Kennedy wants to see a counsellor. In one of his classes, the teacher talked about sexual abuse and he thinks maybe it happened to him as a kid. But all of the examples that the teacher gave were about girls and he's not sure it counts if you're a guy. He goes to the clinic and looks around uncomfortably in the waiting room: the posters show only women and girls and the pamphlets are all about pregnancy and menstrual cycles. He leaves.

- What kinds of things may have made Kennedy feel like his experience matters and that he deserves help?
- What other kinds of things might make different people feel excluded and discounted?
- How can we know who is feeling excluded so that we can include them?
- Which social determinants of health are relevant here?

Case 5

After doing a urine test, Yuri and Yuri's partner are horrified to find out that they are pregnant. They had overheard from friends that you can't get pregnant if you pull out before ejaculation, which is what they did. They feel distraught and stressed and angry that "pulling out" didn't work. They want to talk to someone about the pregnancy but are afraid of getting in trouble and/or being forced to break up.

- What could have prevented them from having the wrong information in the first place?
- What factors could help them feel safe enough to seek support now?
Important: the question is not about who they can talk to but what it is about that person or place that would make them feel safe to talk.
- Which social determinants of health are relevant here?