

Suva Residents' Views on Cancer, Diabetes and HIV in The Fiji Times

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Farzana Gounder¹

Abstract

The burden of preventable diseases is increasing in the South Pacific Island Countries and Territories. In Fiji, significant media attention and national finances are spent on public dissemination of the modifiable risk factors of chronic illnesses. However, little is known about lay societal perceptions of chronic illnesses and of people living with these illnesses. This preliminary study takes an area-situated approach to lay knowledge and examines Suva residents' moral evaluations associated with socially significant health concerns in Fiji. Using the case studies of HIV, cancer, and diabetes, the research employs content analysis to examine 144 Suva residents' Letters to the Editor, published between 2000 and 2019 in *The Fiji Times*. The findings indicate that letter writers on chronic illnesses are power sensitive, interested in governmental responsibility, and aware of the role of stigma in creating inequitable health outcomes. The study's findings locate chronic illness as not only a medical responsibility but also a social justice and human rights concern that requires a multisectoral approach, with community-tailored responses at the heart of all discussions. The lay-societal recognition of the three illnesses as being socially relevant suggests grassroots support for policies directed towards structural reforms for the prevention and management of these illnesses.

Keywords: Public Health; Media Analysis; Diabetes; Cancer; HIV

¹ Deputy Head of School (Research), School of Global Studies, IPU New Zealand Tertiary Institute, New Zealand. Email: fgounder@ipu.ac.nz