

Youth Sexual Health and HIV/STI Prevention in Middle Eastern and North African Communities in Ontario (YSMENA Study)

Peer Research Associates' Manual

March 2021

This manual and all its contents have been developed by the YSMENA Study's Research Team. It has been developed for the sole purpose of peer research associate training for the YSMENA Study. If you use any parts of this manual, please cite:

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Table of Contents

Welcome	3
YSMENA Study: Introduction	4
Becoming a PRA	4
• CATIE (HIV 101) Training	4
• TCPS 2 CORE	4
Conducting the Research	7
Maintaining a Research Journal	7
6. Descriptive Journal	7
7. Reflective Journal	8
Recruiting Research Participants	8
Data Collection	9
Phase I	9
Phase II	9
Phase III	10
PRA Roles During Focus Groups	11
1. Lead Facilitator	11
2. Co-facilitator	11
3. Field Note-taker	12
Important Dates	12
Appendix I: Recruitment	13
Recruitment Text: Email and Phone	13

Welcome

Dear Peer Research Associate,

Congratulations! It is with great delight that we welcome you to the **Youth Sexual Health and HIV/STI Prevention in Middle Eastern and North African Communities in Ontario (YSMENA Study): Community-Engaged, Youth-Driven Intervention**. You have been carefully selected for your previous experience with Middle Eastern and North African communities and interest in the HIV/AIDS field; your strong communication and time management skills; and for being an advocate and change-maker/leader within your community.

Your long-built skills and qualifications in addition to the virtual training will prepare you to be a peer research associate (PRA) who is ready to run the YSMENA Study's focus groups.

For any info regarding the YSMENA Study, feel free to contact:

Dr. Roula Kteily-Hawa, Nominated Principal Investigator

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Dr. Mona Loutfy, Co-Principal Investigator

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Research Team

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YSMENA Study: Introduction

The YSMENA study is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Catalyst Grant & Planning and Dissemination Grant (# CDE 162931; #PCS 161833).

The YSMENA Study is conducted to learn more about the experiences of youth from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region living in Ontario. We want to better understand how their social environments and relationships at home, at school, and/or in the community shape their intersectional identities, and how their identities influence their sexual health. We also want to learn how we can go about developing effective HIV prevention and sexual health promotion programs for young people. PRAs are a key factor for the success of the YSMENA Study and we are excited to start working with you!

In the YSMENA Study, we are committed to working from an inclusive anti-racist, anti-oppression, and multilingual participatory framework in addressing the issue of HIV risk and sexual behaviour among MENA youth residing in Ontario. This approach takes into consideration the various determinants of health (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, race, class, violence, religion, culture, language, disability, immigration status, and socio-economic status).

Becoming a PRA

In preparation for your role as a PRA for the YSMENA Study, you will be required to complete mandatory orientation and training during January 2021. This involves the following:

- **CATIE (HIV 101) Training**

The Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) offers free self-directed courses. You are required to enroll and complete 2 courses:

- HIV Basics <https://bit.ly/3b4mX1f>
- Preventing the Sexual Transmission of HIV <https://bit.ly/3nfFTfZ>

Once completed, you will receive a certificate of completion and \$50 honorarium. Make sure to upload your certificate to your folder in the “YSMENA - PRAs” OneDrive folder no later than 2:00 PM EST on January 29th, 2021.

- **TCPS 2 CORE**

The Government of Canada’s Panel on Research Ethics offers an online tutorial – the introduction to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2). Register for the online tutorial here: <https://tcps2core.ca/register>

As of June 2019, the TCPS 2 (2014) has been updated with the TCPS 2 (2018). Once completed, you will receive a certificate of completion and \$25 honorarium. If you have completed the TCPS 2 after June 2019, you are not required to complete the online tutorial again.

Make sure to upload your certificate to your folder in the “YSMENA - PRAs” OneDrive folder no later than 2:00 PM EST on January 29th, 2021.

Two-Day PRA Training

The YSMENA Research Team and collaborators will deliver a 2-day online training on January 30th-31st, 2021 via Zoom. Once completed, you will receive a \$200 honorarium. The current training program is below, and while there may be few minor changes, the current version is reflective of the 2-Day PRA Training, the training topics and the confirmed speakers:

Saturday, January 30, 2021			
Time [EST]	Topic	Description	Speaker(s)
10:00-10:15	Welcome	Introductions and virtual space instructions	Dr. Roula Hawa & Research Team
10:15-10:45	Activity	Icebreaker	Research Team
10:45-11:00	YSMENA Study	Background, objectives, timelines	Dr. Roula Hawa
11:00-11:30	Research Methodology	Principles of community based participatory research	Fanta Ongoiba
11:30-11:50	Guiding Frameworks I	Anti-oppression framework	Shireen Salti
11:50-12:20	Guiding Frameworks II	Social determinants of health in Canada and globally	Dr. Susan Bartels
12:20-12:30	Stretch Break		
12:30-13:00	Study Population	Middle Eastern and Arab youth in Canada	Dr. Bessma Momani
13:00-13:30	Guiding Frameworks III	Intersectionality	Dr. Roula Hawa
	Activity 2	Building empathy and unpacking invisible privilege	Dr. Roula Hawa & Research Team
13:30-14:30	Lunch Break		
14:30-14:45	Research Design	Overarching research design, deliverables, progress	Dr. Roula Hawa
14:45-15:30	Ethics	Research ethics, confidentiality, and privacy issues	Dr. Mona Loutfy
15:30-16:00	Data Collection Overview	Focus group facilitation: obtaining informed consent; administering individual questions (participant's journal); ensuring confidentiality; maintaining your research journal	Research Team
16:00-16:15	Activity	Reflection snowball	Research Team
16:15-16:30	Session Evaluation		

Sunday, January 31, 2021

Time [EST]	Topic	Description	Speaker(s)
10:00-10:10	Activity	Self-care	Research Team
10:10-10:30	Recap	Day 1 highlights	Dr. Roula Hawa
10:30-11:00	Data Collection I: Before the Focus Group	Informed consent and pre-focus group survey	Dr. Roula Hawa and Research Team
11:00-11:45	Data Collection II: During the Focus Group	Administering individual questions (participant's journal) and conducting focus group interviews	Dr. Roula Hawa
11:45-12:00	Stretch Break		
12:00-12:30	Data Collection III: After the Focus Group	Practicing reflexivity and maintaining a research journal	Research Team
12:30-13:15	Focus Group Facilitation	Managing difficult conversations	Praney Anand
13:15-13:45	Data Analysis	Iteratively putting the pieces together	Dr. Roula Hawa
13:45-14:45	Lunch Break		
14:45-15:45	Activity	Focus group simulation	Research Team
15:45-16:00	Knowledge Dissemination	Two-day research summit	Dr. Roula Hawa
16:00-16:15	Session Evaluation		

You are now a trained PRA!

Conducting the Research

In agreeing to take part in the YSMENA Study as a PRA, you will commit to [recruiting](#) MENA youth (hereinafter referred to as the “research participants”) and [facilitating](#) 2-3 focus group sessions.

The YSMENA Study will gather primary data from seven groups:

- Three groups of self-identifying men who have sex with men,
- One group of self-identifying transgender women,
- One group of self-identifying lesbian, bisexual, and queer women,
- One group of self-identifying heterosexual men, and
- One group of self-identifying heterosexual women.

Primary data collection will take place through three rounds of focus group sessions (described in more detail below). The first and second rounds will take place one week apart. The same participants in the first focus group session will be invited to come back for a more in-depth second focus group session the following week. There will be a third round of focus group sessions that will take place 1-2 months following the second focus group, where three PRAs and 14 randomly selected research participants, who provide prior consent to participate, are invited back to give feedback on a newly designed HIV prevention intervention.

Maintaining a Research Journal

As a PRA, you are expected to keep a research journal to capture your engagement with the research process and opportunities for capacity building. Your research journal has 2 components, both of which should be completed after each focus group and before the debrief meeting with the Research Coordinator:

6. Descriptive Journal

This component of your research journal aims to accurately capture and document factual data about each focus group you conduct. A spreadsheet of the responses you submit is available in the “YSMENA - PRAs” OneDrive folder.

Descriptive Journal questions are as follows:

- How many participants attended today’s focus group?
- Describe participants’ dynamics and interactions with each other during today’s focus group. Consider things like: level of comfort and engagement, main mode of interaction (verbal, visual, chat box, use of Zoom emojis/reaction buttons), etc.
- Describe participants’ dynamics and interactions with you during today’s focus group. Consider things like: level of comfort and engagement, main mode of interaction (verbal, visual, chat box, use of Zoom emojis/reaction buttons), etc.
- Describe participants’ dynamics and interactions with the other PRAs present during today’s focus group. Consider things like: level of comfort and engagement, main mode of interaction (verbal, visual, chat box, use of Zoom emojis/reaction buttons), etc.

- Were there any questions in the interview guide that needed further clarification or elaboration? Those are questions that participants may not have understood as is. If yes, which one(s)?
- How much probing did you need to do during today's focus group? And how effective was it?
- Would you like to suggest some probes to incorporate in the upcoming focus groups? If yes, please share your suggestions.
- Are you capturing any major or recurring themes/observations? Please list them and provide brief description(s).
- Additional comments or observations you would like to share?

Submit responses to your Descriptive Journal here: [\[Google form\]](#)

7. Reflective Journal

Consider this component of your research journal to be a self-awareness exercise – an opportunity for you to internally reflect on the research process, where you are situated, and how you are impacted. A spreadsheet of the responses you submit is available to the Principal Investigators and Research Coordinator only.

Reflective Journal questions are as follows:

- How many participants attended today's focus group?
- In your opinion, what worked well today? If applicable, please share why you think it worked well.
- Did you face any challenges today? If yes, please describe the biggest challenge and your feelings towards it. If applicable, include details about what made it so challenging; how did you this challenge; and what would you do differently next time?
- Are there additional new experiences you would like to discuss or that you believe contributed to your role as a PRA?
- Did you learn/realize anything significant today? If yes, please describe it and your feelings towards it. If applicable, include details about what made it significant.
- Did you learn/experience anything new or unexpected that you would like to share in addition to the responses above? If yes, please describe it and your feelings towards it.
- Any additional thoughts, comments, or feelings you would like to share?

Submit responses to your Reflective Journal here: [\[Google Form\]](#)

Recruiting Research Participants

This involves leveraging existing networks in order to recruit eligible research participants to take part in the YSMENA Study. PRAs are encouraged to seek potentially eligible research participants via several strategies including but not limited to:

- **Recruitment flyer.** Refer to [Appendix I](#). Circulate this flyer via email to organizations you are familiar with and regularly interact with.

- **Word of Mouth (Phone).** Refer to [Appendix I](#) and use the text in the recruitment flyer to guide your phone conversation. In doing so, make sure you confirm that the potential research participant is comfortable using Zoom and has a reliable internet connection.
- **Facebook.** Share the following through Facebook networks, including organizations with which you are familiar. PRAs may also post and share the recruitment flyer on Facebook.

YSMENA Study (Youth Sexual Health and HIV/STI Prevention in Middle Eastern and North African Communities in Ontario: Community-Engaged, Youth-Driven Intervention) is inviting research study participants. The study explores how Middle Eastern and North African youth's social environments and relationships at home, at school, and/or in the community shape their intersectional identities, and how their identities influence their sexual health. The study also wants to learn how we can go about developing effective HIV prevention and sexual health promotion programs for young people.

- **Twitter.** Follow @YSMENAResearch and retweet the recruitment tweet. The Research Coordinator will notify the PRAs once this is tweeted.
- **Instagram.** PRAs may post and share the recruitment flyer on Instagram (stories and posts are acceptable).

Data Collection

All prospective research participants are required to fully understand and sign the informed consent form in Appendix II.

The Research Coordinator will be present at the beginning of all Focus Group 1s to administer the informed consent form and go over the procedure of completed the pre-focus group survey and participant journal using REDCap. Research participants must sign the informed consent form and complete the pre-focus group survey and participant journal before the PRAs can proceed with the focus group discussion. While participants are completing the pre-focus group survey (30 minutes) and participant journal (30 minutes) PRAs must be present and ready to address participants' questions or concerns.

PRAs will lead and facilitate this three-phase research study, ensuring that research participants are well equipped and informed to participate in each phase.

Phase I will involve research participants completing an internet-based pre-discussion demographic, socio-economic, and HIV risk survey. This pre-focus group survey (in Appendix II) takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. All responses to the survey are anonymous and will not be identified with research participants in any way.

Phase II will involve research participants' completion of an electronic individual journal at the beginning of the first focus groups. This individual journal (in Appendix II), that gathers

information about their experiences in accessing healthcare services and about the intersection of their sexual and ethnic identities, takes approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. Research participants' responses to the journal questions are anonymous and will not be identified with them in any way. PRAs are required to be available to help clarify or explain questions in the language preferred by the research participant.

Phase III will involve **2 sequential virtual focus group discussions** with 4-10 MENA youth, facilitated by PRAs. Each focus group discussion will be conducted via Zoom and will last approximately 2-2.5 hours (30-40 minutes for research participants to complete the individual journal, followed by 1.5-2 hours for the focus group discussion). All focus group discussions will be recorded, and the audio recordings will then be transcribed verbatim (with personal identifiers, such as names, removed). Research participants may choose to use a pseudonym during the focus group discussions.

- ***Focus Group 1.*** PRAs will invite research participants to share their thoughts on accessing sexual healthcare services, as well as your perspectives on MENA youth within their community and on how their experiences, cultural, gender, and sexual identities affect their sexual health.

At the beginning of the focus group session, PRAs will provide instructions for completing the individual journal. PRAs will read the journal questions reflective of the particular focus group and explain each question in detail. They can translate each question, if needed and provide examples and answer questions from participants. Those participants who may need extra help may stay longer on Zoom to ask PRAs more questions. PRAs can email the Arabic version of the journal to those participants who may need a translated journal. Research participants will then turn off their audio and video **for 30-40 minutes to complete their individual journals** by submitting them via One Drive. Once a research participant submits the individual journal, they are to join the Zoom session for the focus group questions.

Then, PRAs will ask research participants to share their ideas on how sexism, racism, homophobia, and other forms of social exclusion affect young people's sexual practices and HIV/STI risks. The Lead Facilitator and Co-facilitator will ask questions according to the focus group 1 interview guides in Appendix II, such as: *“What are the sexual-related activities among youth in your community (especially risky activity)? How are these sexual-related activities and associated problems (STIs) affecting youth in your community? In your opinion, what are the underlying reasons for youth's initiation of risky sexual activity?”*

At the end of the first focus group session and before research participants return to the second focus group interview session, PRAs will ask that participants complete a take-home activity – to reflect on what they discussed in the first focus group, talk with friends, look up information on the internet, and outline what they think is the most effective youth-driven strategy to promote sexual health among MENA youth.

- Focus Group 2 (1 week after Focus Group 1). PRAs will invite research participants to share their ideas on effective youth-driven sexual health promotion strategies in the format of a 2-minute pitch where they sell their key ideas of this strategy to the rest of the group. After everyone in the focus group has presented their ideas, the PRAs will discuss all the ideas with the large group. PRAs will also present to participants other youth driven strategies that have been found in the literature. Then, the PRAs and the research participants will work together in small groups of 4-5 members to collectively develop the most effective, youth-relevant, and innovative sexual health promotion strategy for MENA youth living in Ontario.
- Focus Group 3 (optional) (1-2 months after Focus Group 2). The PRAs and 14 research participants (two randomly selected from each of the seven groups) will be invited back to provide feedback on the newly designed sexual health promotion and HIV prevention intervention. Research participants may choose to not proceed with Focus Group 3 should they be selected by indicating their preference at the end of the Informed Consent Form (Part B).

It is important that all research participants be respectful to one another. Research participants who are not respectful may be approached by the PRAs to discuss the best course of action, which may include the research participant being asked to leave the focus group session.

PRA Roles During Focus Groups

There will be three PRAs present for each focus group occupying one of three roles. Please arrange amongst yourselves who will occupy which role for each focus group and make note of that in the “PRA Roles During Focus Groups” spreadsheet in the “YSMENA - PRAs” OneDrive folder: Focus Groups - Data Collection > PRA Roles During Focus Groups. While the Lead Facilitator and Co-facilitator may choose to alternate roles for focus groups 1 and 2, the Field Note-taker must be the same PRA for focus groups 1 and 2.

1. **Lead Facilitator.** First, this PRA will be responsible for reading the focus group 1 introductory script in Appendix II, after which the two other PRAs will introduce themselves. Then, this PRA will also be responsible for facilitating an ice-breaker activity before officially starting the focus group discussions. Questions highlighted in **green** in the focus group 1 interview guides and focus group 2 interview guide in Appendix II are this PRA’s responsibility, however, an organic flow to the discussions is highly encouraged and preferred.

At the end of focus group 1, this PRA will be responsible for reading the focus group 1 closing script and focus group 2 closing script in Appendix II. Then, this PRA will share screen to explain the different types of effective youth HIV prevention interventions.

2. **Co-facilitator.** This PRA will be responsible for questions highlighted in **yellow** in the focus group 1 interview guides and focus group 2 interview guide in Appendix II. However, an organic flow to the discussions is highly encouraged and preferred.

The Lead Facilitator and Co-facilitator may probe as necessary.

- 3. Field Note-taker.** This PRA will not be responsible for any questions in the focus group 1 interview guides. Instead, this PRA is responsible for taking down detailed notes and observations during the focus groups using the focus group 1 field note-taker form and focus group 2 field note-taker form in Appendix II. At the end of each focus group 1, it is this PRAs responsibility to upload the completed field note-taker form to the “YSMENA - PRAs” OneDrive folder, using this file naming format: “*Focus Group Round, Group Category, Your Last Name*” (and example would be *FG1 MSM Ezzeddine*).

During focus groups 2, this PRA will share screen to display the excel spreadsheet and fill it in as participants share their ideas in the format of a 3-5-minute elevator pitch.

Important Dates

Overarching Item	Timeline
Participating in PRA training	January 30-31, 2021
Weekly check-in meetings with PRAs	Starting January 12, 2021
Focus groups 1 and 2	February 1-19, 2021
Focus group 3	March 22-31, 2021
Qualitative and quantitative data analysis	May-July 2021
YSMENA Summit	October 2021

Appendix I: Recruitment

Recruitment Text: Email and Phone

Please customize the salutation to reflect the contact's name.

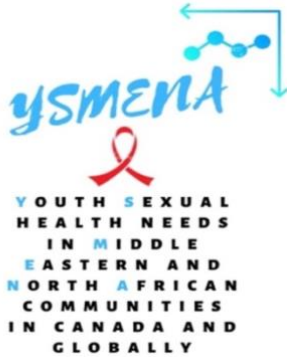
Email subject line: Call for Research Participants

Dear Friend,

The YSMENA Study (Youth Sexual Health and HIV/STI Prevention in Middle Eastern and North African Communities in Ontario: Community-Engaged, Youth-Driven Intervention) is inviting research study participants. YSMENA explores how Middle Eastern and North African youth's social environments and relationships at home, at school, and/or in the community shape their intersectional identities, and how their identities influence their sexual health. The study also wants to learn how we can go about developing effective HIV prevention and sexual health promotion programs for young people.

Please find the recruitment flyer attached and contact us if you are interested in participating or would like more information. Feel free to share this with your networks.

The next page will be your email attachment. A PDF of the one-page recruitment flyer is available in the "YSMENA - PRAs" OneDrive folder.



RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

**Youth Sexual Health and HIV/STI Prevention in Middle Eastern and North African Communities in Ontario (YSMENA Study):
Community-Engaged, Youth-Driven Intervention.**

Research Study Team:

Dr. Roula Hawa, Nominated Principal Investigator, Brescia University College at Western University & The Ontario HIV Treatment Network

Dr. Mona Loufy, Co-Principal Investigator, University of Toronto

We are looking for youth living in Ontario who self-identify as Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) men who have sex with men; lesbian, bisexual, or queer women; transgender women; and heterosexual men and women to participate in our study. We want to better understand how their social environments and relationships at home, at school, and/or in the community shape their identities, and how that influences their sexual health. Your commitment will involve completing **1 survey**, **1 journal writing activity** and **2 group discussions** conducted one week apart (about 2.5 hrs/group discussion). If interested, there will also be an opportunity to be randomly selected to participate in a **third group discussion**. This research will be conducted electronically.

- Is your background Middle Eastern or North African?**
- Are you 16-29 years old?**
- Are you living in Ontario?**
- Are you comfortable with English?**
- Have you engaged in any sexual activity over the past year?**
- Are you interested in sexual health research?**

Then we invite YOU to participate in our study!

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and confidential. Participants will be compensated \$50 for each group discussion.

If you're interested in participating, please sign up here: [\[Google Form\]](#)

If you want to learn more, please contact the Research Team at ysmenastudy@gmail.com

YSMENA Study is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Catalyst Grant & Planning and Dissemination Grant (# CDE 162931; #PCS 161833)