

Stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes toward people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) among adolescents in Malaysia

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Introduction

- 1 The stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes toward people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) among general population lead to negative impact in terms of delayed in seeking help and treatment besides increased risk of HIV transmission (1). The attitude may be contributed by a social and cultural belief but the main problem is lack of HIV knowledge (2).
- 2 In Malaysia, the main ethnicity consists of Malay, Chinese, Indian and Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak who may have differences in the socio-cultural belief towards PLWHA. However, the adolescent population in Malaysia receives education via the main stream public education system in which some of the element sexual education are taught including HIV awareness.
- 3 This topic is categorised as among the sensitive issues in Malaysia, thus lack of study focussing on this topic particularly among adolescents.

Objective

This study aimed to determine the prevalence of stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes toward PLWHA among adolescent in Malaysia. The second objective is to compare the prevalence of HIV stigma across the sociodemographic characteristic of the adolescent population.

Table 1: Prevalence of HIV stigma toward people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) among adolescent in Malaysia.

No.	Domain	Prevalence	95% CI	
			lower	upper
1	Fear of HIV infection (Adakah anda takut bahawa anda boleh dijangkiti HIV jika terkena air liur seseorang yang menghidap HIV? Do you fear that you could contact HIV if you come into contact with the saliva of a person living with HIV?)	74.5	67.4	80.5
2	Social judgement (Adakah anda bersetuju dengan pertanyaan berikut? "Saya akan berasa malu jika ahli keluarga saya menghidap HIV." Do you agree with the following statement? "I would be ashamed if someone in my family had HIV.")	48.2	43.0	53.5
3	Anticipated stigma (Pada pendapat anda, adakah seseorang berasa ragu-ragu untuk membuat ujian HIV kerana takut akan reaksi masyarakat jika keputusan ujian adalah positif HIV? In your opinion, are people hesitant to take an HIV test due to fear of people's reaction if the test result is positive for HIV?)	63.0	58.0	67.7
4	Perceived stigma (Adakah orang yang menghidap atau disyaki menghidap HIV akan hilang rasa hormat atau kedudukan? Do people living with or thought be living with HIV lose respect or standing?)	38.7	33.8	43.8
5	Experienced stigma (Adakah anda akan membeli sayur-sayuran segar dari pekedai atau pembekal tersebut jika anda mengetahui bahawa dia menghidap HIV? Would you buy fresh vegetables from a shopkeeper or vendor if you knew that this person had HIV?)	79.3	73.8	84.0
6	Discrimination (Adakah anda berpendapat bahawa kanak-kanak penghidap HIV sepatutnya boleh bersekolah Bersama dengan kanak-kanak yang bukan penghidap HIV? Do you think children living with HIV should be able to attend school with children who are HIV negative?)	75.2	69.7	80.0
7	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) global indicator for discriminatory attitudes toward PLWHA (answered "No" to question No. 5 or No. 6)	87.9	82.0	92.1

Materials and Methods

This study utilized data from the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2020, a cross sectional study among national representative sample focussing on communicable diseases in Malaysia. A self-administered Malay validated questionnaire was used to collect data on HIV stigma via its six domains. The domains was elaborated in the table of findings (3). An ascent consent and parental consent were obtained prior the survey. A total of 705 respondent aged 13 to 19 years were extracted from the data set. A descriptive, bivariate analysis with chi square test were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.0.

Results and Discussion

The prevalence of HIV stigma was shown in Table 1 with the highest prevalence was the global indicator for discriminatory attitudes toward PLWHA (87.9%; 95% CI: 82.0, 92.1). Table 2 shows only the significant result association of the HIV stigma with ethnicity and zone of data collection. A study conducted among adolescents who living with HIV/AIDS in other county stated that the they experienced multiple form of discriminations toward themselves, families and discrimination at the healthcare setting which contributed to negative impacts (4). However, the findings in this study was a survey on stigmatising and discrimination attitudes towards PLWHA among general population of adolescent which lack of comparison with previous studies (3,5).

Table 2: The association of HIV stigma with ethnicity and zone of data collection.

Variables	Prevalence	95% CI		p-value
		lower	upper	
Ethnicity				
Malay	81.8	76.3	86.2	0.008
Non-Malay	63.4	49	75.7	
Fear of HIV infection				
Ethnicity				
Malay	57.4	52.8	61.8	<0.001
Non-Malay	35.8	26.5	46.3	
Social judgement				
Zone				
East Peninsular Malaysia	53.7	44.1	63.0	0.045
Sarawak	53.4	41.6	64.8	
South Peninsular Malaysia	52.6	45.0	60.0	
North Peninsular Malaysia	51.5	41.0	61.9	
Central Peninsular Malaysia	50.2	37.9	62.4	
Sabah & Labuan	31.7	23.0	42.0	
Anticipated stigma				
Zone				
Sabah & Labuan	71.0	61.5	78.9	0.033
Sarawak	68.6	60.2	76.0	
Central Peninsular Malaysia	66.2	56.7	74.6	
North Peninsular Malaysia	63.0	54.7	70.6	
East Peninsular Malaysia	60.2	48.0	71.3	
South Peninsular Malaysia	47.8	34.7	61.3	

Conclusion

Stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes toward PLWHA among adolescents in Malaysia is considered high and showing a geographical and ethnicity variation. Therefore, the HIV awareness programme should be promoted through school-based approach under the sexual reproductive health umbrella.

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