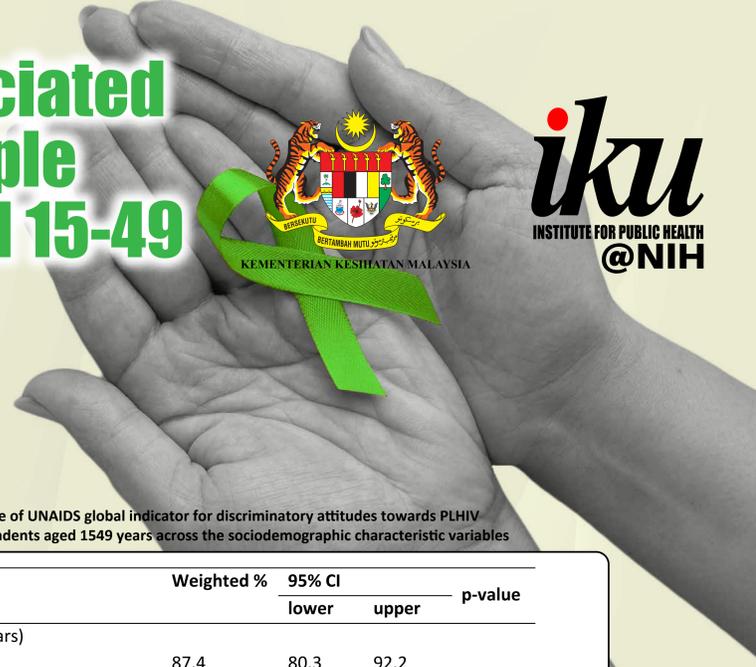


Prevalence of HIV stigma and factor associated with discriminatory attitudes toward people living with HIV (PLHIV) among people aged 15-49 years in Malaysia : A nationwide survey.

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Introduction

Stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV can have negative impacts on their well-being, social acceptance, willingness to seek medical treatment and continue with it ¹. This is often due to outdated beliefs and misinformation about HIV, leading to fear and concern about infection. Stigma can cause social isolation, mental health issues, and worsen the health outcomes of PLHIV. Untreated mental health issues among PLHIV can lead to increased risk of suicidal behavior and poor quality of life.

Objective

- This study aimed to assess the prevalence of HIV stigma and identify factors associated with discriminatory attitudes towards PLHIV among individuals aged 15-49 years in Malaysia
- To determine the predictors for discriminatory attitudes towards PLHIV among Malaysian people aged 15-49 years in which lower education level and rural residence were more likely having HIV stigma

Methodology

A nationwide cross-sectional survey to estimate prevalence of the common diseases among Malaysian population was conducted by the Institute for Public Health, Ministry of Health Malaysia according to a scheduled theme of disease. In 2020, the communicable disease theme was selected to estimate the common communicable disease and its related problem. One of the topics was HIV stigma. The selection of respondents was conducted via a multi-stage sampling approach based on the geographical enumeration blocks sampling frame supplied by Malaysian Department of Statistics (DOSM). A single proportion sample size was calculated and added with a few of population adjustments to cater survey design and complex sample data analysis. Malaysia was divided into five zones: south, central, north, east coast and Borneo region. A 113 enumeration blocks were randomly selected as the primary sampling unit and 2260 living quarters (LQs) were selected as the secondary sampling unit. All the household in the selected LQs were eligible and invited to join the study. The national survey applied both face-to-face interviews on a structured questionnaire and self-administered questionnaire for sensitive topic such as HIV stigma. A Malay version of HIV stigma was used in this study (3). The original version was in English language derived from The Global Stigma and Discrimination Indicator Working Group (GSDIWG) and STRIVE research consortium. The questionnaire has been used globally to monitor the stigmatising behaviour among general population. The questionnaire consisted of six domains such as a fear of infection, social judgement, anticipated stigma, perceived stigma, experienced stigma and discrimination. The last two domains of experienced stigma and discrimination were taken as the UNAIDS global indicator for discriminatory attitudes if the respondents answer "No" to the question. The indicator is monitored among respondents aged 15-49 years because this group is considered as the sexually active and the most productive group in people life cycle. The Malay version validated questionnaire and the HIV stigma estimate among respondents aged 13 years and above was published elsewhere (2,3)

Results

The prevalence of discriminatory attitudes towards PLHIV, as measured by the UNAIDS global indicator, was found to be 78.7%. This study also assessed other domains of HIV stigma, including fear of HIV infection, social judgement, anticipated stigma, and perceived stigma, which were found to be prevalent at rates 64.4%, 44.9%, 57.6% and 42.2%, respectively. In the multivariable logistic regression analysis, lower education (adjustable odds ratio [aOR]: 2.42, 95% Confidence interval [CI]: 1.85, 3.15) and in rural residency (aOR: 1.57, 95% CI: 1.20, 2.04) were identified as factors associated with discriminatory attitudes towards PLHIV.

Discussion

According to the UNAIDS global indicator, 78.7% of people hold discriminatory attitudes towards PLHIV. Additionally, this study looked at other areas of HIV stigma, such as fear of infection, social judgement, anticipated stigma, and perceived stigma. These were found to be prevalent at rates of 64.4%, 44.9%, 57.6%, and 42.2%, respectively. In analyzing the data, it was discovered that lower education (adjustable odds ratio [aOR]: 2.42, 95% Confidence interval [CI]: 1.85, 3.15) and rural residency (aOR: 1.57, 95% CI: 1.20, 2.04) were both factors associated with discriminatory attitudes towards PLHIV. A study was conducted to determine the level of HIV stigma among the economically productive population in Malaysia, particularly women of reproductive age and both genders. The study also analyzed each domain of the HIV Stigma questionnaire among individuals between the ages of 15 and 49, revealing a range of 44.2% to 70.3%, with the latter indicating the experienced stigma domain. The study found that a significant proportion of the Malaysian population hold stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes towards HIV, which is supported by a low prevalence of adequate HIV knowledge (22.6%) among the general population ²

Prevalence of UNAIDS global indicator for discriminatory attitudes towards PLHIV among respondents aged 15-49 years across the sociodemographic characteristic variables

Variables	Weighted %	95% CI		p-value
		lower	upper	
Age group (years)				
15-19	87.4	80.3	92.2	
20-24	75.7	66.4	83.0	
25-49	77.4	74.0	80.4	0.030
Gender				
Male	78.3	74.1	82.1	
Female	79.1	74.9	82.7	0.782
Strata				
Urban	76.6	72.7	80.1	
Rural	86.2	83.8	88.2	<0.001
Location by zone				
Sarawak	83.8	81.1	86.3	
Sabah & Labuan	82.9	77.4	87.2	
Peninsular Malaysia	77.5	73.6	80.9	0.041
Marital status				
Married	78.7	75.1	82.0	
Unmarried	78.6	73.8	82.7	0.960
Ethnicity				
Malay	78.9	76.3	81.2	
Non-Malay	84.0	79.6	87.5	0.041
Level of education				
Primary and lower	88.3	81.4	92.9	
Secondary	84.6	81.6	87.3	
Tertiary	67.7	62.4	72.6	<0.001
Occupation				
Employed	77.9	74.8	80.7	
Unemployed	80.1	74.4	84.8	0.423

Table 2. Prevalence each domain of HIV stigma questionnaire among respondent aged 14-49 years in Malaysia.

HIV stigma domain	Weighted %	95% CI	
		lower	upper
Fear of HIV infection	64.4	60.0	68.6
Social judgement	44.9	41.9	47.8
Anticipated stigma	57.6	54.0	61.2
Perceived stigma	42.2	39.8	44.6
Experienced stigma	70.3	66.8	73.5
Discrimination	60.6	57.6	63.6
The UNAIDS global indicator for discriminatory attitudes	78.7	75.6	81.5

Conclusion

This study highlights the prevalence of HIV stigma and discrimination among individuals aged 15-49 years in Malaysia. Urgent actions are needed to address and reduce stigma and discriminatory attitudes towards PLHIV in order to achieve the goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

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Keywords

HIV stigma, discriminatory attitudes, Malaysia, nationwide survey

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