

# KNOWLEDGE, ACQUISITION AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OF HIV IN SARAWAK, MALAYSIA

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**ABSTRACT;** *AIDS occurs due to the retrovirus HIV (Human Immunodeficiency virus). In short, it is a reduction of immunity and makes the body vulnerable to infections which can cause fatality. Lately, the spread of HIV/AIDS has shown an upward trend. The purpose of this paper is to provide information on the HIV trend in Kuching and provide guidance on how to successfully address the underlying factors that could influence the HIV contraction directly. The researchers have assessed how far is the understanding of PLHIV (people living with HIV) on HIV knowledge, the way of HIV acquisition in the Kuching community, and the underlying contributing factors of HIV transmission. A total of 35 PLHIV in Kuching have answered our survey voluntarily and they were amongst the different races, religions, and sex. The researchers used the quantitative descriptive method. Findings revealed an overall 73% of the participants possessed knowledge about HIV. The highest modes of HIV transmission were through unprotected sexual relationships. Peer influence, lack of family bonding, history of abuse, and not giving importance on the HIV risk factors despite knowing that the information is readily available, were the among highest underlying contributing factors for the PLHIV to be engaged with the HIV risk behaviors. Prevention among high-risk individuals and within the community is important as there is no drug to cure AIDS and no vaccine to prevent HIV. Discrimination and stigma make people more vulnerable to HIV. This pushes them to the margins of society, where fear and poverty make access to HIV healthcare services complicated.*

**Keywords:** HIV, knowledge, way of acquisition, factors, stigma, Malaysia

## INTRODUCTION

HIV infection has now become one of the global issues. It is continuously becoming one of the critical agenda in many nations because the prevalence of HIV still fails to be controlled even though there are a lot of implementation strategies to reduce its occurrence across the world. Human Immunodeficiency Virus can lead to the slow deterioration of the body's immune system. An individual with HIV will act like an ordinary person as they look healthy and can carry out the activities of daily living (ADL) normally. People living with HIV (also seen as PLHIV) have a low level of immune system functioning. HIV damages the immune system and it also interferes with the body capabilities in fighting organisms that will lead to other vulnerable diseases. HIV is a problem among young people as well as adults. The stigma and discrimination towards HIV patients are increasing in today's modern world. These people should be treated equally, protected, and given emotional as well as motivational support for them to feel more at ease in their healing time period. Neglecting and avoiding them will lead to an increase in HIV infections and more deaths. It is our responsibility to protect everyone as human rights are universal, and no one is excluded. This paper focuses on the PLHIV in Kuching. We had asked for their consent prior to the distribution of our online-form survey questions and hope to have more participants in our future research. we had formulated questions based on our three main objectives which are trying to investigate the level of knowledge these PLHIV have about HIV, the ways of HIV acquisition among the PLHIV, and also to acquire the underlying factors contributing to HIV infection among the PLHIV in Kuching.

AIDS patients often die not due to HIV itself. But it is caused by the side effects of the viral infection. Death occurs when the victim is exposed to various illnesses and other infections as the immune system are fully paralyzed due to HIV. Thus, knowledge of HIV, early detection of cases, health care, and healthy lifestyles are the main

fortress in order to face the threat of HIV. Sexual relationships, blood and bodily fluids contraction that has been contaminated with the HIV virus, and the mother-child transmission, are still the three basic ways to transmit these viruses from individual carriers to another person. AIDS is the last stage of HIV infection in a person when there is a distressed immune system that allows all the microbes and viruses to invade the AIDS victim [1]. Someone that has been infected with HIV does not necessarily experience the clinical AIDS symptoms immediately. AIDS takes between 5-10 years to develop. This term is called the incubation period whereby it is the duration of the virus to act on the white blood cells of the infected person until it destroys and disables and paralyzes the body's defense system. When the victim's resistance reaches the most disturbing level, there will be the signs and symptoms caused by a combination of weaknesses such as Kaposi Sarcoma, Mycobacterium Tuberculosis, Pneumocystis Carinii and Candidiasis [2].

AIDS is closely linked to the moral and social issues, and in this case, the cooperation of various agencies is very important in controlling and preventing the spread of this disease. AIDS can be afflicted by various groups of people regardless of age, race, color, religion, occupation, or ethnicity. Hence, more articles need to be published regarding AIDS such as the complications and dangers of this disease if it is not prevented, the way in which this disease can infect a person, those who are at high risk for this disease, and preventive measures that are being done in order to combat the disease [3].

Malaysia is no exception to bear the burden of HIV/AIDS over the last two decades. The first case of AIDS was found in the country during the month of December in 1986 [4]. The number of HIV cases reported from 1986 to 2015 was 108,519. The number of AIDS cases reported in the same period was 22,495. About 33% of the total cases involved youth aged 20 to 29 years old [5]. The increase in the HIV infection rate in Malaysia is generally contributed by