COMMUNITY DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS MENTAL ILLNESS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY IN RURAL SARAWAK, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Background: Numerous approaches have been taken to reduce mental health issues in the population. However, mental health problems are still arising in the population, and one of the main factors is discrimination towards the mentally ill patient. This issue is inhibiting people from seeking help. This study aimed to assess community discrimination towards people with mental illness and factors affecting it.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted with a total of 840 respondents (420 males and 420 females) from Sarawak, Malaysia aged 21 years and above. Samples were selected by gender-stratified multistage sampling. Collection of data was done using a pre-tested questionnaire to assess the discrimination towards mental illness via face-to-face interviews. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the factors affecting community discrimination towards mental illness.

Results: Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that aged between 40 to 49 years old ($p = 0.004$), aged between 50 to 59 years old ($p < 0.001$), female respondents ($p = 0.014$) and having no experience with the mentally ill patient ($p < 0.001$) appeared to be predictors for discrimination towards mental illness. The model significantly explained 6.6% of variance of discrimination score ($F_{(10,829)} = 6.91$, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: The findings suggested that community discrimination towards people with mental illness are still common in the rural population. Effective strategies to combat discrimination will need to be organised and implemented at the community level. Further research on this study in different settings is suggested to understand the associated factors better.

Keywords: Community, Discrimination, Mental Illness, Sarawak

Introduction

Mental health is an essential condition for which enables a person to function effectively in their daily activities be it school, work, or social events. Subsequently, a good mental health results in productive activities, good relationships, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with challenges. Mental illness occurs when a mental condition is distracted with significant changes in emotion, thinking or behaviour. Thus, this will lead to an individual's problem functioning in the family, work, and social activities (1). Mental illness does not discriminate, which means that anyone can be affected regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, income, social status, or other aspects of identity. However, the diagnosed mentally ill patients have been hugely discriminated by the community. Previous studies have determined the discrimination towards mentally ill patients among the community or perceived discrimination among the patients themselves (2-4).

Toner et al. (4) had conducted a study in Austria among volunteer befrienders and revealed that the respondents mostly did not discriminate against the mentally ill patients. There was a minority of the respondents who had discriminated the patients with severe mental illness against taking care of their children (4). It contradicted other studies where the majority of the respondents perceived that most of the people would discriminate the mentally ill patients from taking care of their children (2, 5). Reavley and Jorm (6) revealed that the majority of Australians (67.1%) are willing to accept people with