

Awareness, knowledge and attitudes towards epilepsy among rural populations in East Coast Peninsular Malaysia: A preliminary exploration

Abstract

This study was carried out to gauge the preliminary insight regarding epilepsy among the rural society. The purposes of this study were: (1) to determine general level of awareness, knowledge and attitudes (AKA) towards epilepsy among rural communities, (2) to compare the AKA level based on socio-demographic characteristics and (3) to investigate rural cohort's perception of the best epilepsy treatment, preference for epilepsy information delivery and preference for mode of transportation to seek medical treatment. This prospective, cross sectional study included a sample of 615 rural residents enrolled via cluster sampling in East Coast region of Peninsular Malaysia (mean age = 41.6 ± 18.02 , female = 56.6%, married = 65.5%, Malay = 94.0%, monthly income \leq RM 500 = 56.9%). The Total AKA level was generally low (2.66 ± 0.7). Gender-wise no significant difference was shown regarding AKA level ($p > 0.05$). However, respondents with higher education significantly possessed better attitudes and higher Total AKA level compared to those with lower education level ($p < 0.001$). Employed respondents reported significantly more favourable attitudes than unemployed respondents ($p = 0.011$). Additionally, higher income rural cohorts possessed both significantly better attitudes and better AKA. These rural communities perceived modern medicine as the best epilepsy treatment (56.60%), preferred to obtain direct epilepsy-related information from health personnel (60.4%) and chose to use their own car to seek medical treatment in hospital (76.30%). The outcomes of this preliminary study signified the need to devise a dedicated epilepsy education program for implementation among rural residents. Increased AKA level in the society could enhance the people's acceptance, reduce stigmatisation and improve health-related quality of life (HRQoL) for epilepsy patients and their family.