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Perceptions and prevention practices on malaria among the indigenous Orang Asli community in Kelantan, Peninsular Malaysia

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Abstract

Background: Malaysia is on track towards malaria elimination. However, several cases of malaria still occur in the country. Contributing factors and communal aspects have noteworthy effects on any malaria elimination activities. Thus, assessing the community's knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) towards malaria is essential. This study was performed to evaluate KAP regarding malaria among the indigenous people (i.e. Orang Asli) in Peninsular Malaysia.

Methods: A household-based cross-sectional study was conducted in five remote villages (clusters) of Orang Asli located in the State of Kelantan, a central region of the country. Community members aged six years and above were interviewed. Demographic, socio-economic and KAP data on malaria were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics.

Results: Overall, 536 individuals from 208 households were interviewed. Household indoor residual spraying (IRS) coverage and bed net ownership were 100% and 89.2%, respectively. A majority of respondents used mosquito bed nets every night (95.1%), but only 50.2% were aware that bed nets were used to prevent malaria. Nevertheless, almost all of the respondents (97.9%) were aware that malaria is transmitted by mosquitoes. Regarding practice for managing malaria, the most common practice adopted by the respondents was seeking treatment at the health facilities (70.9%), followed by self-purchase of medication from a local shop (12.7%), seeking treatment from a traditional healer (10.5%) and self-healing (5.9%). Concerning potential zoonotic malaria, about half of the respondents (47.2%) reported seeing monkeys from their houses and 20.1% reported entering nearby forests within the last 6 months.

Conclusion: This study found that most populations living in the villages have an acceptable level of knowledge and awareness about malaria. However, positive attitudes and practices concerning managing malaria require marked improvement.

Keywords: Knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP), Malaria, *Plasmodium knowlesi*, Indigenous population, Malaysia

Background

Malaria, a febrile illness affecting people of all age groups, is a life-threatening parasitic disease with high morbidity and mortality worldwide. Approximately 230 million people are affected by malaria resulting in the deaths of 405,000 people globally in 2019 [1]. In Malaysia, significant progress towards the national elimination

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