

Hepatitis B testing, racial discrimination in healthcare, and medical mistrust among sub-Saharan African migrants in Australia: A cross-sectional study.

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Background

Sub-Saharan African (SSA) migrants in Australia experience a disproportionate burden of hepatitis B virus (HBV). However, limited research exists on their HBV testing behaviours and the psychosocial factors influencing healthcare engagement. Understanding the impact of racial discrimination in healthcare settings and medical mistrust of Western healthcare systems is crucial to increasing HBV testing rates. This study examined HBV testing, experiences of racial discrimination in healthcare, and medical mistrust among SSA migrants in Australia.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey was conducted in 2025 among adults from SSA communities living in Australia (n=305). Data were collected on socio-demographic characteristics, HBV testing, racial discrimination in healthcare settings, and medical mistrust in the Western healthcare system. Descriptive analyses summarised prevalence estimates.

Results

Overall, 49.7% of participants reported having ever been tested for HBV. More than half (56.9%) reported receiving poorer health services “all the time or most of the time” compared to other people who are not from SSA. Additionally, 53.4% indicated that people from SSA were worried about visiting a doctor “all the time or most of the time” because they felt they would not get good healthcare because they are from SSA. Regarding medical mistrust in Western healthcare systems, 28.4% reported unwillingness to discuss their health issues with Western-trained doctors and healthcare workers, and 17.7% agreed or strongly agreed that using pharmaceutical medicine to treat HBV has more negative side effects than using traditional or herbal medicine.

Conclusion

Findings reveal structural and cultural barriers to HBV testing among SSA migrants in Australia, highlighted by experiences of racial discrimination and medical mistrust in Western healthcare systems. Culturally safe, community-engaged strategies are essential to enhance HBV testing and rebuild trust in healthcare among this population.

Keywords: Hepatitis B testing; racial discrimination; medical mistrust; sub-Saharan African migrant; Australia

Disclosure of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The Australian Government Department of Health funded this study.

AI Declaration

No AI tools were used to generate or analyse research data.