

PREFERENCE FOR LONG-ACTING INJECTABLE ANTIRETROVIRAL TREATMENT AMONG MALAYSIAN PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

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Background:

Since 2010, approximately 3000 new HIV cases have been reported annually, in Malaysia. At end 2022, oral antiretroviral treatment (ART) uptake by people-living-with-HIV (PLHIV) was at 68%, indicating Malaysia may be unable to achieve the treatment cascade “95-95-95” targets set by UNAIDS. Long-acting injectable ART (LAI-ART) has the potential to improve treatment adherence. This study aimed to determine the preference and concerns for LAI-ART among PLHIV.

Methods:

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Study announcements were circulated by peer-led organisations; potential participants were informed to contact the researchers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or via Zoom, in English and Malay languages, with self-identified PLHIV. The 45-60 minute interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was applied, starting with data coding using NVIVO 12 from which themes were developed.

Results:

Participants ($n=29$) were cisgender men ($n=22$) of which $n=19$ were men-who-have-sex-with-men, cisgender women ($n=4$), and transgender women ($n=3$), aged between 20-64 years. Most were of Malay ethnicity ($n=24$), Chinese ($n=4$) and other ($n=1$). Participants were located across several jurisdictions with half residing in Kuala Lumpur. Most participants reported a preference for LAI-ART citing less disruption to daily life and travel (pills removed), privacy (minimising stigma), reduced dosage, and likely improved treatment adherence. They favoured LAI-ART doses at two, three or four monthly intervals. However, every participant raised concerns about LAI-ART cost; they accessed treatment free-of-charge at government hospitals/clinics. They will not switch to LAI-ART if out-of-pocket payment is required. Other concerns related to potential side effects, effectiveness of long-acting ART, delayed or missed dose, and increased interaction with health services.

Conclusion:

Participants expressed preference for LAI-ART due to its convenience and potential for improved adherence, however, concerns about cost and potential side effects were raised. Addressing affordability and efficacy will be crucial for the successful implementation of LAI-ART in Malaysia.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None