RISK FACTORS OF PERCEIVED STIGMA IN LEPROSY AFFECTED AND NON-AFFECTED PERSONS IN NON SOMBOON, KHON KHAEN PROVINCE, THAILAND

Summary:

The study was conducted among people with leprosy and people in the non-leprosy community. The study used a cross-sectional survey to assess the risk factors of perceived stigma in people with leprosy and people without leprosy in the Non Somboon community, Khon Kaen Province.

Method:

The study used a cross-sectional survey method. The survey was conducted among people with leprosy and people without leprosy. The survey was conducted using a questionnaire among 265 people with leprosy and 257 people without leprosy in the Non Somboon community.

Results:

The results partially matched the previous studies. In the group of people with leprosy, perceived stigma showed a significant statistical relationship with the following factors: job (p=0.013), lack of knowledge about leprosy (p=0.008), and organ disfigurement (p=0.004). In the group of people without leprosy, the factors that showed a significant statistical relationship with perceived stigma were age (p=0.021), duration of study (p=0.024), job (p=0.002) and lack of knowledge about leprosy.

Conclusion:

The significant risk factors that showed a significant statistical relationship with perceived stigma were lack of knowledge about leprosy, disfigurement, and avoiding stigma towards leprosy. Efforts should be made to reduce stigma towards leprosy by increasing knowledge about leprosy.
Background: Leprosy has long been seen as the epitome of stigmatization and has become a metaphor for degradation in colloquial English. The most common notion of stigma, however, still refers to people’s fear of dealing with leprosy-affected people. This is often due to a lack of scientific knowledge and suspicious ideas about the disease. This study investigated risk factors of perceived stigma in leprosy affected persons living in Non Somboon leprosy colony in Khon Kaen province, Thailand, and in non-leprosy affected persons living in the community nearby.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional study design to assess risk factors for stigma in leprosy affected and non-leprosy affected persons in Non Somboon, Thailand. 265 leprosy–affected subjects and 257 non-leprosy affected subjects were studied via questionnaire and interview.

Results: Some of the results of this study agreed with findings in earlier studies. As for leprosy-affected persons, there was a significant association between perceived stigma and occupation (p=0.013), low knowledge on leprosy (several sub-categories) and visible disfigurements (p=0.008). New risk factors were found to be the initial location of treatment (p=0.004) and the presence of ulcers (p=0.009). For non-leprosy affected subjects it was age (p=0.021), years of education (p=0.024), occupation (p=0.002) and poor knowledge on leprosy that had a significant impact on the level of perceived stigma.

Conclusions: Major factors that were associated with perceived stigma in leprosy were poor knowledge on the disease and visible or noticeable disfigurements. Strategies to reduce perceived stigma should therefore focus on the improvement of health educational programs on leprosy.

Field of Study: Public Health..................Student’s Signature........................................
Academic Year: 2012..........................Advisor’s Signature........................................