

Hepatitis B related Stigma among Chinese Immigrants Living with Hepatitis B Virus in Australia: A Qualitative Study

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Background: Chinese Australians are over-represented among people living with hepatitis B virus (PLWHBV) but experience poor access to healthcare. Given the historical discriminatory policies against PLWHBV in mainland China and the increased migration of Chinese people to Australia, a more culturally inclusive response to HBV is needed among this population to improve their engagement with HBV healthcare.

Methods: This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of stigma and discrimination among Chinese Australians living with HBV originally from mainland China. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted by a researcher with a Chinese background in 2019-2020. Sixteen Chinese PLWHBV were recruited across Sydney and Melbourne through advocacy and support groups. Data analysis was informed by the Health Stigma and Discrimination Framework that articulates the stigmatisation process across the socio-ecological spectrum and highlights the interaction between layered stigmas.

Results: Findings show that HBV-related stigma has mostly been driven by knowledge deficits about HBV and fear of HBV infection. HBV-related stigma was mostly demonstrated in social isolation including isolation imposed by family and the community and employment restrictions in China workplace. HBV-related stigma was related to the ethnic and cultural background of PLWHBV in Australia. Findings also revealed the interaction among HBV-related stigma and stigmas associated with migration status, social status and occupation among the participants.

Conclusions: This study explored the social and cultural construction of HBV-related stigma, the intersection between this stigma and other layered stigmas, and the profound impacts of these stigmas on the participants. A multi-level holistic approach to address HBV-related stigma and intersecting stigmas is recommended to improve social inclusion and health outcomes of PLWHBV with a Chinese background.

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