

ATTITUDES OF THE FIRST AND THE FIFTH YEAR MEDICAL STUDENTS TOWARDS PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV IN BELGRADE

Zoran Milosavljević,^{1,2} Tatjana Gazibara,³ Danijela Simić,¹ Kostas Danis⁴

¹Institute of Public Health of Serbia Dr Milan Jovanović Batut, Belgrade, Serbia

²European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), Mediterranean and Black Sea Programme in Intervention Epidemiology Training (MediPIET), Stockholm, Sweden

³University of Belgrade, Faculty of Medicine, Institute of Epidemiology, Belgrade, Serbia

⁴European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), Stockholm, Sweden

DOI: 10.5937/BatutPHCO24056M

Introduction: Attitudes towards people living with HIV (PLWH) among medical students in Belgrade vary from mostly positive to explicitly negative. We aimed to explore attitudes of the first and fifth year medical students toward PLWH and to identify predictors of positive attitudes toward PLWH.

Methodology: We conducted a cross-sectional study from March to May 2023 among medical students in the first and the fifth year in the University of Belgrade. Participants completed an online questionnaire about attitudes towards people living with HIV (PLWH). Each positive attitude was awarded one point. The sum of points represented the attitude score. The multiple liner regression model was applied to identify predictors of stronger positive attitudes.

Results: Overall, 402 (38%) students responded. The total attitudes score was similar among older and younger students (median 12 out of 19, $p=0.313$). A difference in attitude score was found between males and females in the fifth study year, where males had a stronger positive attitude score compared with females (13 vs. 12, $p=0.047$). Compared with first year students, there were 14% more fifth year students (prevalence ratio [PR]=1.14, 95%CI:1.0-1.2) who would be friends with PLWH, as well as 34% more students in the fifth year (PR=1.34, 95%CI:1.2 -1.4) who would not separate PLWH from other patients in health care institutions. Belonging to sexual minorities ($B=1.12$, 95%CI 0.29-1.95; $p=0.008$), and opting to use post-expositional prophylaxis PEP after unsafe sex ($B= 0.52$, 95%CI 0.07-0.98; $p=0.025$) were factors associated with stronger positive attitudes toward PLWH.

Conclusion: In general, most attitudes toward PLWH did not differ between the first and fifth year students. Students of homosexual/other sexualities were more likely to have stronger positive attitudes as they are sensitized to PLWH stigma. Peer education and sharing of experiences of PLWH are necessary to reduce negative attitudes and stigma among medical students in their future work in medical institutions.

Keywords: medical students, Serbia, attitudes, PLWH, stigma