

# Do women living with human immunodeficiency virus experience stigma and discrimination when accessing sexual and reproductive health services in government health facilities in Malaysia?

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of WLHIV are essential to their well-being, just like women in the general population. Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess stigma and discrimination related to SRH services faced by WLHIV in government health facilities in Malaysia. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted in April 2022 in fifty-five government health facilities in Malaysia. A validated self-administered questionnaire with five SRHR-related items was used to assess stigma and discrimination faced by WLHIV. This survey was carried out online using a web-based platform. **Results:** Overall, 141 WLHIV participated in this study. This study found that a small percentage of WLHIV experienced stigma when accessing SRH-related care and services. This included them being informed that they could only receive antiretroviral therapy (ART) if they used contraception (23%), and if they fed their infant formula rather than breast milk (33%). Thirteen percent and 22% of them stated that they had been advised by healthcare providers not to have sex and not to get pregnant, respectively. None of them claimed that they had been advised or forced to terminate pregnancy. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study indicated that there is still stigma against WLHIV among healthcare providers. However, when WLHIV sought for SRH-related care and services, this stigma was not manifested as discriminatory action by healthcare providers. Ethics and professionalism are upheld through giving good care and services to WLHIV. Thus, intervention programs to combat stigma are still needed to maintain continuous excellent service delivery.

**Keywords:** WLHIV, sexual health, women, stigma