Assessing the attitude and perception of community members and health workers regarding leprosy stigma

Silatham Sermrittirong*, Wim H. van Brakel**

*Raj Pracha Samasai Institute (RPSI), DCC, Thailand
**Athena Institute, VU University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Introduction

- the incidence of leprosy has declined, but the proportion of newly detected cases with grade 2 disability has not

- stigma related to leprosy was partly held responsible for the delayed presentation, the main cause of disability
Introduction

Purposes:
- to measure the attitudes and the perception of community members (CM) and health workers (HW) towards leprosy

Expected outcome:
- baseline data for those who are interested in launching de-stigmatizing interventions
Materials and Methods.

**Study area:** four sub-districts of Chaiyaphum

**Respondents:** community members

**Data collection:** In-depth interviewed

   Explanatory Model Interview Catalogue (EMIC) stigma scale.

**Data analysis:** frequency, t-test
Results

Both of CM&HW had negative attitude and perceived that people affected by leprosy had been stigmatized by the community.
Results

Qualitative results
- respondents perceived leprosy as a disease characterised by dirtiness, bad odour, oozy wounds, unpleasant skin, and impairments
- respondents thought leprosy was hereditary and incurable
Results

Qualitative results (continued)
- people affected by leprosy tried to keep others from knowing their disease status
- people affected by leprosy practice self-stigma by not participating in community activities, and reduced use of health services
Results

Qualitative results (continued)
- CM practiced stigmatizing behaviour towards people with leprosy-related disability by avoiding them and backbiting
- HW spent as possible with people with leprosy-related disability
Perception of stigma among CM&HW towards leprosy: shame

1. Keep others from knowing?
   - CM: 60.6% yes, 8.1% possibly
   - HW: 49.2% yes, 36% possibly

2. Does leprosy cause shame in your community?
   - CM: 47.9% yes, 14.8% possibly
   - HW: 38.1% yes, 34.7% possibly

3. Others think less of a person with leprosy?
   - CM: 50% yes, 17.8% possibly
   - HW: 32.6% yes, 38.6% possibly
Perception of stigma among CM&HW towards leprosy: marriage & work prospect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>CM</th>
<th>HW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Would leprosy be a problem for a person to get married?</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Would having leprosy cause difficulty for a person to find work?</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Would community members like to buy food from a person affected by leprosy?</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

- Stigma against leprosy may result in quality of life of those affected and hampers their access to health care services.

- De-stigmatizing interventions should be conducted based on local beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions.
Thank you