

Private Outpatient Utilisation among B40: Who are they?

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: Everyone deserves an equitable chance to access health care. Income-related inequality occurs when there are disparities in health care utilisation across different income groups. This paper aimed to describe the characteristics of those utilised private outpatient services among the bottom 40% of the Malaysian household income (B40) group.

Methods: This study used data from the National Health Morbidity Survey 2019. The B40 group followed the definition defined by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM). Descriptive analysis was performed using STATA version 12, with survey weights applied. A total of 879 respondents, estimated to represent 1.3 million B40 adults aged 18 years and above in Malaysia who utilised outpatient care in the past 2 weeks prior to the survey were included for analysis.

Results: Overall, 28.2% (95% CI: 23.5-33.5) of adults who utilised private outpatient services were in the B40 group. Amongst the B40 who utilised private outpatient services, higher proportion were females (55.6%, 95% CI: 45.9-64.7), residing in urban locality (77.3%; 95% CI: 70.3-83.1), married (64.5%, 95% CI: 55.6-72.5) and in the age group of 18-34 years old (41.7%, 95% CI: 33.0-50.1). Of these, majority received secondary education (43.6%, 95% CI: 34.1-53.6), working (68.3%, 95% CI: 58.7-76.6) and had employer health coverage (61.3%, 95% CI: 51.4-70.4). Most of them reported health problems in the past 2 weeks prior to the interview (88.0%, 95% CI: 79.8-93.1), rated their health status as good to excellent (63.2%, 95% CI: 53.5-71.9), and had no history of diabetes, hypertension or hypercholesterolemia (69.4%, 95% CI: 60.7-76.9). More than half of the B40 group paid for outpatient services out-of-pocket (60.5%, 95% CI: 50.4-69.8), with a median of RM 70 (IQR: 45,107).

Discussion: About 1 in 3 adults who utilised the private outpatient services were in the B40 group. Despite many health packages and policies being designed to protect and benefit the B40 group, many B40 households opted for private health services using out-of-pocket payments. Although some might be covered by employer healthcare plans, further research is needed to explore their unmet needs in healthcare utilisation.

KEYWORDS: outpatient care, health care utilisation