

# Attitudes towards vasectomy and its acceptance as a method of contraception among clinical-year medical students in a Malaysian private medical college

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**INTRODUCTION** This study explored attitudes towards vasectomy and its acceptance as a method of contraception among clinical-year medical students, and determined the association between their demographic characteristics, and attitudes and acceptance.

**METHODS** A cross-sectional survey was conducted among clinical-year medical students from a Malaysian private medical college using a self-administered questionnaire.

**RESULTS** There were 330 participants with a female preponderance and a mean age of  $22.0 \pm 1.1$  years. The largest proportion of respondents were from Year 3. The vast majority were ethnically Malay (91.8%) and followed Islam (92.4%). Overall, 60.9% of participants had a positive attitude towards vasectomy and 76.0% showed good acceptance. Gender, academic year, ethnicity and religion variables were not associated with attitudes and acceptance ( $p > 0.05$ ). A significantly higher proportion of male respondents thought that vasectomy was religiously forbidden and would give a bad impression. A significantly higher proportion of Year 5 students agreed to the statement 'I would recommend vasectomy to relatives, friends and people close to me' compared to Year 3 and 4 students.

**CONCLUSION** Students' perception of vasectomy as a contraceptive method was encouraging. Our results suggest that their knowledge improved as medical training progressed, and attitudes evolved for the better irrespective of their traditional, cultural and religious beliefs – highlighting the importance of providing students with evidence-based learning about male sterilisation, which is more cost-effective and is associated with lower morbidity than female sterilisation. A qualitative study involving students from different ethnicities and religions would provide a better understanding of this subject.

*Keywords: acceptance, attitude, Malaysia, medical students, vasectomy*

## INTRODUCTION

The population of Malaysia was estimated to be 31 million as of January 2016.<sup>(1)</sup> In 2014, the country's fertility rate was two per woman aged 15–49 years.<sup>(2)</sup> The contraceptive prevalence rate in Malaysia for all methods was 55.0%, while the rate of vasectomy, a method of permanent sterilisation for men, was very low (0.1%) compared to female sterilisation (6.6%).<sup>(3)</sup>

The major ethnic groups in multiracial Malaysia are the Malays or Bumiputera (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%) and Indians (7.3%).<sup>(4)</sup> Islam is most widely followed, by 61.3% of citizens, followed by Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%), Hinduism (6.3%) and others.<sup>(5)</sup> Therefore, healthcare providers need to be aware of and recognise the potential influence of divergent religious and cultural factors on the acceptance and practices of different contraceptive methods among the varied population. Even within a religion, teachings on this subject may be interpreted in variable ways. Equally important is the role of cultural factors in couples' decisions about family size and contraception.<sup>(6)</sup>

Studies on the acceptance and practices of contraception among various populations have drawn interesting conclusions. For instance, certain misconceptions have been reported among Indian medical students about modern contraceptive

methods and the impact of sex education.<sup>(7)</sup> Although the students demonstrated positive attitudes towards contraception and premarital counselling, the influence of traditional values and negative provider attitudes was also recognised.<sup>(7)</sup> More than 80% of Nigerian resident doctors were convinced that the average male Nigerian would not accept vasectomy, while over 60% considered female sterilisation to be a more appropriate permanent contraceptive method.<sup>(8)</sup> An Iranian study, on the other hand, reported an increasing trend in vasectomy rates from 2005 to 2007 and significant positive associations between male and female educational levels and opting for vasectomy.<sup>(9)</sup> Even so, another Indian study reported that literacy was not a prerequisite for choosing vasectomy.<sup>(10)</sup> Current information on medical students' views of vasectomy, a procedure that is widely considered to be superior to female sterilisation in terms of morbidity and cost-effectiveness,<sup>(11)</sup> would help educationists to understand prevailing perceptions.

In the Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery programme at Universiti Kuala Lumpur Royal College of Medicine Perak (UniKL RCMP), Perak, Malaysia, more than 90% of the students are Malay and Muslim, with a minority who are Indian, Chinese and or of other ethnicities. The female-to-male ratio among medical

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