

Clinical Research Results Abstract

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Perceptions of school staff, healthcare professionals and policymakers on a school-based intervention for asthma in Malaysia: A qualitative study

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Aim: During school hours, primary school staff may be responsible for making asthma management decisions about the children in their care. We explored the perceptions of school staff, healthcare professionals and policymakers on a school-based intervention for asthma in Malaysia.

Method: We purposively sampled participants from five public primary schools, two government ministries, a private school and teachers' association for focus groups/interviews conducted in English or Malay, guided by semi-structured topic guides. Focus groups/interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, entered into NVivo and analysed using thematic analysis in the original language. Interpretation was guided by field notes, awareness of reflexivity and discussions with the multidisciplinary/international team.

Results: 52 participants from Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups, provided nine focus groups and 11 interviews (May-December 2019). Of these, 46 were female; mean age was 42 years; mean working experience was 17.8 years.

Summary in Figure 1. Apart from 11 participants with personal experience of asthma and 12 who had received asthma training, overall awareness of asthma was poor. The public schools had no specific plan/policy for asthma care and the roles of teachers in managing asthma was unclear, which led to delay in treatment of symptoms/asthma attacks. Minimal or often zero communication between parents and the schools regarding asthma further contributed to poor management of asthma in schools.

Participants recognised the benefits of a 'school asthma care plan' to guide emergency management. Specific asthma education for the school community should focus on correcting misconceptions about asthma, improving communication between school and parents, and providing information and self-management activities for children and their parents. Collaboration with healthcare professionals and other bodies, e.g. parent-teacher association was important.

Conclusion: A multi-level asthma intervention for the school community is needed to improve asthma care in Malaysia. Assessing the feasibility and acceptability of a culturally tailored intervention will inform implementation.

Declaration of Interest

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the UK Department of Health and Social Care.

References and Clinical Trial Registry Information

Ethics approval was obtained from the Malaysian Medical Research Committee (ID number: NMRR-18-3136-44042) and registered at the Malaysian National Research Registry (ID number: NMRR-18-3136-44042)