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Diabetes Health Beliefs and Practices among Sri Lankan Adults with Type 2 Diabetes: An Ethnographic Study

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Background: Type 2 diabetes is a significant and growing health problem globally, including in Sri Lanka. It is currently managed by glycemic control behaviors such as diet control, regular exercise and medication adherence. Several studies have revealed that to attain a successful outcome of diabetic control requires thoughtful consideration of the sociocultural factors of individuals and communities when designing and delivering diabetic care. There is paucity of data about the impact of socio-cultural context on glycemic control behaviors among adults with diabetes.

Objectives: To explore glycemic control beliefs and practices among adults with type 2 diabetes in Sri Lanka

Methodology: This pioneer ethnographic study explored glycemic control beliefs and practices of adults with type 2 diabetes in Sri Lanka. Fourteen key informants from three ethnic groups (Sinhalese, Tamil and Moor) participated. Data were collected through participant observations with field notes and in-depth interviews in their homes. Data were analyzed by thematic analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty of Nursing, Chiang Mai University, Thailand and the Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

Results: Five major themes were identified: (i) gaining religious support (ii) changing food habits is a struggle (iii) exercising is challenging (iv) western medicine causes long-term consequences and (v) Ayurveda/traditional treatments can cure. Findings revealed unique, informative insights into socio-cultural worlds of the participants with diabetes.

Conclusions/Recommendations: Nurses should understand the traditional beliefs and practices of various ethnic groups and its impact on glycemic control behaviors. Moreover, culturally relevant policies and protocols for community care and treatment of people with diabetes are urgently required in Sri Lanka to enhance nursing care and medical treatment.

Keyword: Sri Lanka, Glycemic control behaviors, Nursing, Ethnography, Culture

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