

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE (15-35 YEARS), LIVING WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES, ATTENDING AN URBAN DIABETES CLINIC.

ABSTRACT

Diabetes is an increasing health challenge in South Africa and requires a good understanding and adherence to fairly complex regimes of management. Little is known about barriers to care in the South African context, particularly amongst the younger population and little is known about potential gender difference in this group. A strong need emerges to understand the lived experiences of young people facing this chronic condition. A lot has been documented about gender differences in treatment seeking behaviours from other illnesses, but not much in diabetes care. Most diabetes research is conducted using quantitative method, there is not a lot of research looking at the diabetes patients' lives.

The study explores the lived experiences of young people, aged 18-35 years, living with type 1 diabetes, attending Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital (CHBH). The study adopted qualitative methods where a phenomenological approach was used in order to enhance the understanding of the lived experiences of young people living with type 1 diabetes. Purposive sampling was used. One focus group discussion with eight young men, as well as 3 in-depth interviews with young women. All participants were accessed through attending the Baragwanath Hospital diabetes clinic, and were interviewed during a diabetes camp. It was a challenge to find patients willing to open up and provide details sought by the researcher. The saturation approach was adopted in which the small sample size was complemented by deep seated conversations held during the group discussion and the in-depth interviews. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings show that there are challenges with having to enjoy being young and managing the illness. Challenges also include stigma and limited understanding of the illness by people close to the participants. Findings also reveal that there is a positive relationship between patients and diabetes clinic staff as well as peer supporters. This aids patients with coping with the day to day challenges they grapple with as they deal with diabetes. There are some gender issues involved in living with diabetes, whereby young men usually face challenges in their sexual lives, and young women have pregnancy related challenges.

This study shows the importance of a support system in a patient's journey with diabetes. Increased understanding of barriers to care is important for effective management. Therefore, it is recommended that other clinics have a dedicated time or place that is meant for young people. It is also recommended that diabetes awareness is promoted to the general population, to aid in coping with the illness.