STRESS AND COPING IN MEXICAN AMERICANS WITH TYPE 2 DIABETES

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Purpose: Diabetes affects 25.8 million people in the United States and type 2 diabetes accounts for 90% to 95% of diagnosed diabetes cases. Persons with type 2 diabetes often experience stress when managing this illness. Stress can negatively impact patients’ abilities to self-manage and control their diabetes. Managing stress levels can improve health outcomes, such as hemoglobin A1C and blood pressure. The purpose of this study is to 1) identify concerns of stress, 2) explore health problems related to stress, and 3) identify how stress is managed in Mexican Americans with type 2 diabetes.

Methods: The research design used for this study is qualitative descriptive. A secondary analysis of audio-recordings from educational sessions with 30 Mexican American adults with type 2 diabetes was conducted using data from the Home-Based Diabetes Symptom Self-Management Education for Mexican Americans study (A. Garcia, P.I.). Data were extracted from educational sessions led by registered nurses, each lasting 30-120 minutes. Participants were asked about their emotions and stress-related problems regarding type 2 diabetes in the course of the educational interactive sessions. Miles and Huberman’s qualitative content analysis method was used to code participants’ responses to questions about sources of stress, affects of stress, and stress management strategies, to cluster the patterning code, then to identify into main themes from the interviews.

Findings: Content analysis is in progress but preliminary analysis of 20 participants’ data has led to identification of themes for each of the three study purposes. The main theme of concerns of stress is We are Stress, meaning that stress is how participants perceive their emotions and life events. Stress can be a normal part of life, caused by people, by lack of control or money, or by trying to find a balance in life. The main theme about health problems related to stress is Mind and Body Changes, such as lack of concentration, depression, insomnia and headaches. Insomnia accounts for lack of sleep, trouble staying asleep, and trouble going to sleep. Other health problems related to stress were type 2 diabetes, stomachaches, and high blood pressure. The main theme that emerged about stress management is Acceptance. Accepting the stress allowed them to manage the stress. Most people managed stress by staying busy (e.g., by reading books, writing in a journal, cleaning the house, and doing outside activities), meditation and prayer, or finding a solution that would reduce their stress.

Conclusions: Mexican Americans with type 2 diabetes discussed stress in terms of their emotions and life events. Participants did not discuss type 2 diabetes when identifying stressors or discussing stress management, but they did identify type 2 diabetes as a health problem related to stress. In general, if the participants accepted stress, they managed it in a positive manner. Future studies should explore ways nurses can help patients identify and accept and manage their stressors to improve their diabetes outcomes.

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