

Peer Support for People with Diabetes by People with Diabetes: A Model of Emotional and Psychological Well-being

A. Anwar¹, M. GUL², A. Munir³, S. Ajmal⁴.

¹Meethi Zindagi, Peer Support & Education, Lahore, Pakistan.

²Meethi Zindagi, Education & Outreach, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

³Fatima Memorial Hospital, Endocrinology, Lahore, Pakistan.

⁴Meethi Zindagi, Program Development, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

Background: Diabetes is often marred with confusion and burnout. Peer support helps overcome isolation and improves health literacy in a safe environment where peers provide mutual support. It is a new concept in context of health education, especially in limited resource settings, where the community can support the community. Meethi Zindagi has online support groups for Pakistani diabetes community. There is value in occasional direct human interaction. ThErApy Days (Tea-Days) are crafted as in-person self-help support group sessions.

Aim: To ease the burden diabetes brings to a person's life by provision of peer support & passive education to reinforce positive self-care attitude.

Method: Peer support is intrinsically organic; however commonly occurring themes were identified from online discussions. People with diabetes were trained as peer leaders. Semi-formal boardroom seating with no rank based positioning was used for small groups of 20-25 people, because of influence of the formation on interaction. Sessions started with story-telling around the selected topic to bring people together in mutually supporting roles. Experiences & coping strategies were shared. Feedback was taken to analyze the impact. Focus group discussion (FGD) was held with community members & peer leaders for improvement.

Results: 278 participants attended 14 Tea-days, held in 6 months on 5 topics in 3 cities. Topics of stigma, judgments, issues at schools and workplaces, bullying and women woes came up as popular themes. Tea-Days provided opportunity for catharsis, using ABC (Adversity, Beliefs, and Consequences) model of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). Indirect learning of management techniques was observed. 89% participants felt motivated & emotionally strong after the session. 84% wanted to recommend Tea-Days to others as peer support helped them manage diabetes better & infused positivity.

Conclusion: Mental health issues can be addressed by providing opportunities for connecting with peers, in self-help groups, implemented through trained peers. FGD's recommendations are being implemented for the future Tea-Days.

References:

1. Litchman ML, Oser TK, Hodgson L, et al. In-Person and Technology-Mediated Peer Support in Diabetes Care: A Systematic Review of Reviews and Gap Analysis. *Health Education & Behavior*. 2020;46(3):69S-80S. doi:10.1177/1090198119863768
2. Emelyanov A, 2019, Presented at IDF2019, Busan. <https://doi.org/10.26226/morressier.5d9b622cea541d6ca8493c02>