

The Perception of Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus Among College Students Age 18-24

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Abstract

Background: Diabetes Mellitus is a chronic condition that affects the body's ability to use energy in food. Diabetes impacts more than 170 million people worldwide. Previous research suggests that people with diabetes report feeling stigmatized and that there is a lack of understanding by the public. **Objective:** The objective of this study was to determine the level of diabetes knowledge among college students and their perception of people with diabetes. It was hypothesized that there is a lack of diabetes education among this group and that they would have an overall negative perception of people with diabetes.

Methods: An online survey was developed which assessed participants' knowledge of Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes and stigmas associated with the condition. Participants were recruited via email and social media. Data was analyzed using SPSS.

Results: Upon surveying participants (N=126), the majority reported knowing someone with Type 1 (63%; n=78) and/or Type 2 Diabetes (53%; n=67). Knowledge of someone with diabetes was strongly correlated with overall diabetes knowledge ($p < 0.01$). Approximately 63% (n=78) of respondents believe there is a stigma associated with diabetes. Reasons for the stigma include lack of diabetes education (63%; n=78) and negative portrayal of diabetes in the media (52%; n=65). There was a strong correlation ($p < 0.01$) between diabetes knowledge and whether or not respondents had a negative perception of people with diabetes.

Conclusions: Though the respondents reported that a stigma exists, a low percentage of respondents reported having negative perceptions of people with diabetes. This finding may be attributed to the large number of participants who knew people with diabetes, number of participants in health related majors, or those who had taken a college-level nutrition course. Future research could mitigate these variables by excluding participants in health-related majors or those who have had extensive education on the subject.

Background

Diabetes Mellitus is a chronic, lifelong condition that affects the body's ability to use the energy found in food. Diabetes Mellitus is a very prevalent health issue that impacts more than 170 million people worldwide. Both Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus are psychologically and behaviorally demanding chronic conditions. These demands necessitate those with the disease and their caregivers to take extensive responsibility in managing the condition. Diabetes management involves maintaining a highly effective level of treatment to reduce the risks of short- and long-term complications. Treatment is carried out in the context of daily life, but little research evidence is available about how the public perceives this experience. Previous research suggests that people with Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes feel the need to conceal their diagnosis, have to deal with judgmental reactions from others, and experience negative effects on relationships. Previous research also indicates that those with the condition feel that increasing the public's understanding of the disease would alleviate social stigma.

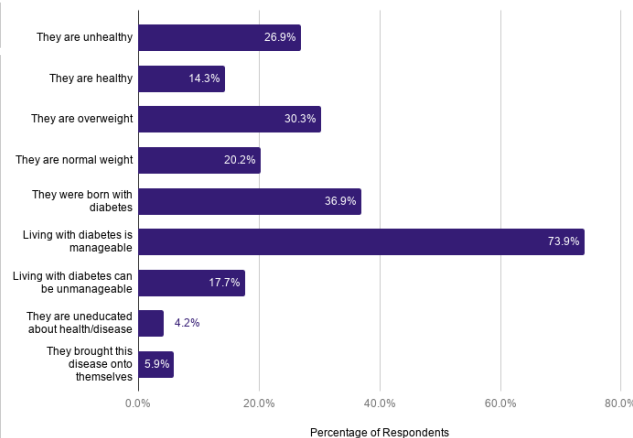
Methods

An online survey was developed using Survey Monkey which assessed participants' knowledge of Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes and stigmas associated with the condition. The study was approved by Texas Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The participants in this study included both male and female college age students, age 18-24. Participants were recruited via email and social media. Data was analyzed using SPSS.

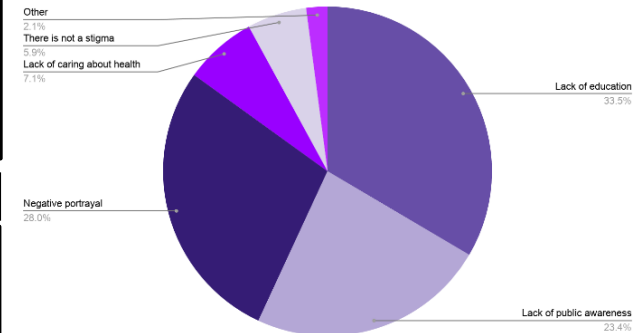
Results

Upon surveying participants (N=126), the majority reported knowing someone with Type 1 (63%; n=78) and/or Type 2 Diabetes (53%; n=67). Knowledge of someone with diabetes was strongly correlated with overall diabetes knowledge ($p < 0.01$). Approximately 63% (n=78) of respondents believe there is a stigma associated with diabetes. Factors contributing to the stigma include lack of diabetes education (63%; n=78) and negative portrayal of diabetes in the media (52%; n=65). There was a strong correlation ($p < 0.01$) between diabetes knowledge and whether or not respondents had a negative perception of people with diabetes. The majority of participants responded that they were "somewhat knowledgeable" or "very knowledgeable" about the conditions (74.2%; n=104). However, only 59.7% (n=74) were able to accurately identify characteristics of Type 1 Diabetes and 58.1% (n=72) accurately identified characteristics of Type 2 Diabetes.

Perceptions of People with Type 1 and 2 Diabetes



Factors Contributing to Stigma



Discussion & Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, the majority of participants reported that there is a stigma associated with people with Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus. Though the respondents reported that a stigma exists, a low percentage of respondents reported having negative perceptions of people with diabetes. This finding may be attributed to the large number of participants who knew people with diabetes, number of participants in health-related majors, or those who had taken a college-level nutrition course. Future research could mitigate these variables by excluding participants in health-related majors or those who have had extensive education on the subject. The study concluded that the majority of participants knew someone with Type 1 Diabetes, as opposed to Type 2 Diabetes. This was an unexpected finding given that Type 2 Diabetes is much more prevalent than Type 1 Diabetes in the United States. This finding may be attributed to the respondents' skewed perception of their own knowledge regarding these diseases. Although the majority of the respondents thought themselves to be "somewhat knowledgeable" or "very knowledgeable" about diabetes, a much smaller percentage of participants could accurately identify the difference between the two conditions. However, those who identified themselves as being knowledgeable about diabetes did report an overall positive perception of people with the disease. This indicates that increased education of the public regarding Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes may alleviate the stigma that people with diabetes often feel.