

An Exploration of the Experiences of People Living with Diabetic Foot Ulcers: A Qualitative Study



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Introduction

- Diabetic foot ulcers (DFUs) are a severe complication of diabetes mellitus due to uncontrolled blood glucose levels and peripheral nerve damage. ¹
- Having a DFU has a significant impact on the quality of life and lived experiences of individuals. ²
- In the Thai context, there are many factors that affect diabetes management such as religion, beliefs and culture. ^{3,4,5}
- These factors impact on how people with DFUs manage their diet and blood glucose levels. There is limited literature exploring the experiences of people with a DFU in specific ethnic groups.

Aim

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of people with DFUs in Thailand.

Methods

- A descriptive qualitative design
- Purposive sampling was applied at the outpatient diabetes clinic at a large teaching hospital in northern Thailand.
- A semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct in-depth interviews with 13 participants.
- Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. ⁶

References

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Findings

Theme 1: Living with Consequences of Diabetic Foot Ulcers

“Normally, I would do work every day, such as farming or gardening. But diabetic foot ulcers are a big problem for me. I can't go anywhere because of diabetic foot ulcers. I am afraid to get them wet because that will make them hard to heal. I have to wait at home till they are healed.” (Fang)

Sub-themes

1. Less energy and mobility
2. Negative mental impact
3. Lifestyle change
4. Blood glucose fluctuations
5. Mobilising personal coping strategies

“My energy level is very low and everything I do makes me feel tired. Even if I wish to do small things it will make me very tired.” (Sawang).

“Just let it be. I might not suffer at all. If it's going to happen, I will just let it happen. My advantage is that I am not easily stressed. So, it will not bother me anymore. ... When I "Thum Jai" (think positive) it goes away.” (Rat)

Theme 2 Managing Diabetic Foot Ulcers

“I thought the holy doctor may help me. I went to see holy doctor, because the doctor told me to accept amputation. The holy doctor chewed the cumin and put it into the wound...(Fang)

I tried to reduce the amount of dessert and sweet foods. Previously, I ate 1 small bowl but at the moment I eat only 1-2 spoons. (Chee)

Sub-themes

1. Modern wound care
2. Complimentary wound care
3. Protecting the feet
4. Managing diet
5. Receiving social support

It's like a jelly. It was stimulating and my wound healed quickly. My son bought it for me from Bangkok. (Team)

“I'm using an alcohol and saline solution for wound dressing. I then cover the wound with gauze. I do this every evening after showering.” (Fang)

Conclusion

- Understanding the lived experiences of Thai people with DFU’s will assist health care professionals to ensure that cultural and spiritual beliefs are considered when developing a collaborative plan of care for individuals with DFU’s.
- Knowledge of the lived experiences can be used to improve education practices and ensure self-care management strategies are understood by people with DFUs.