A Critical Examination of the Lived Experiences of Somali Refugees Diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes and their Family Support Systems

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Given the experience with trauma and involuntary migration, research conducted on the health of refugees is concentrated on the topic of mental health (Issaka, Lamaro, & Renzaho, 2016; Patil, Maripuu, Hadley, & Sellen, 2011; Marshall et al, 2016). While important, this neglects examination of their physical health and related chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes (T2D) (Patil, Maripuu, Hadley, & Sellen, 2011). Diabetes is a major health concern for all individuals but particularly refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) who are at an increased risk of developing this disorder compared to the general host population (Njeru et al., 2015). Despite the elevated burden of T2D in this population, very little research exists to date examining the experiences of refugees from SSA living with T2D. This critical narrative inquiry is a first step to address this gap by exploring the collective experiences of Somali refugees diagnosed with T2D and their immediate family members, and analyzing their oral accounts to identify wider political, historical, and social structures that affect them and their experiences with T2D. Family members were included in this analysis as research indicates the positive role they play in the management of this disease and because Somali newcomers incorporate a collective worldview and a preference for social support from their family (Black, Maitland, Hilbers, & Orinuela, 2017; Stewart et al., 2008). Individual face-to-face interviews with adult Somali refugees living with T2D and their immediate family members over the age of 16 living in Toronto are currently being conducted to gain a better understanding of how the resettlement process impacts their management of T2D and how they come to terms with this illness. It is hoped that this study will elicit more knowledge of the collective experiences of Somali refugees with T2D and their immediate family members during their resettlement period in Canada.


