

AN ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, BELIEFS  
AND RISK PERCEPTION OF TYPE 2 DIABETES MELLITUS  
AMONG THE ADULT POPULATION OF  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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**Background:** Diabetes Mellitus is not merely a disease, it is a global threat. It affects the health of nation worldwide. Statistics show an increase in morbidity and mortality due to Diabetes Mellitus and its many complications. Thus, no longer can countries ignore this condition and treat it as inconsequential. The epidemic is showing ever increasing prevalence and incidence, with an estimated 180 million persons worldwide having diabetes (1). So alarming are these statistics that in 2000, an estimated 7.5 million persons with diabetes died, with 2.9 million deaths attributed directly to diabetes (2).

**Objectives:** To determine the level of knowledge, attitude and risk perception of type 2 diabetes in the adult population of Trinidad, in view of the Health Belief Models and to explore some barriers to behavioural interventions

**Design:** A cross-sectional design was used and conducted via convenience sampling. Knowledge levels of the 346 respondents and risk perception were the key variables measured by means of a self-administered questionnaire. Body image perceptions via the use of silhouettes were also ascertained. Self reported anthropometry was also obtained from respondents and used to determine individuals at risk for diabetes. Reliability testing of the questionnaire, as well as the self-reported anthropometry was conducted.

**Results:** 57% of respondents had knowledge levels of type 2 diabetes < 70%. Increased perception of risk was observed with increased levels of knowledge ( $P < 0.001$ ). Risk perception was positively associated with educational status ( $P = 0.005$ ), family history of diabetes ( $P < 0.001$ ), as well as perceived body image ( $P = 0.008$ ). 52% of respondents were dissatisfied with

their current body image and desired a smaller body image, of which 54.2 % were females and 48.2% males. 40% of the study population had BMI values  $\geq 25$ , with normal ranges viewed as  $< 25$ .

**Conclusion:** Further education of the public is necessary about the serious effects of diabetes, since this proves to be an ever increasing threat. A clear understanding of the Health Belief Models and the various barriers to behavioural modifications such as educational status, would aid in the development of successful intervention strategies that must be effected at all levels of society.