

Exploring Mental Health, Quality of Life, and Hypoglycaemia as Lived Experiences: Themes from a Multi-National Qualitative Survey of Adults with Type 2 Diabetes

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Abstract

The World Health Organisation characterises quality of life (QoL) as a multi-faceted construct spanning the physical, psychological, social, and environmental domains of daily life. However, in clinical and economic health studies QoL is frequently measured using health status instruments which offer relatively narrow assessments of physical and mental health (e.g., EQ-5D, SF-36). Therefore, our aim was to develop a broad, person-centred account of QoL by inviting adults with type 2 diabetes in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK to complete an online exploratory qualitative survey. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses from 71 eligible participants revealed three key themes. First, when asked to name areas of life important for their QoL, participants provided a range of responses not only in the physical (e.g., exercise) and psychological domains of QoL (e.g., mood), but in the social (e.g., family) and environmental domains (e.g., leisure opportunities) as well. Second, important life areas were proportionally more common in the social domain, and less common in the psychological domain, relative to attention given in clinical and economic studies. Finally, when asked to describe how hypoglycaemia affected important life areas, participants detailed numerous impacts across all four domains. Taken together, these themes suggest (a) health status instruments are inadequate for capturing the full scope of hypoglycaemic impacts, and (b) the lived experiences of adults with type 2 diabetes—particularly concerns related to mental health—differ in important ways from traditional clinical and economic perspectives of QoL.

Keywords: Diabetes Mellitus; Health Psychology; Low Blood Glucose; QoL; Thematic Analysis