

**Exploring Cultural Barriers Limiting Success in Weight Loss Management:
A Qualitative Study**

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INTRODUCTION:

Malaysia is an ethnically and culturally diverse country. Data from NHMS 2015 revealed that 30.0% of the population are overweight and 17.7% obese (IPH 2015). Despite various efforts made by the Malaysian Ministry of Health (MoH) and various other agencies, rates of overweight and obesity are still increasing. Cultural norms in Malaysia are heavily driven surrounding food. Thus, this study aimed at exploring cultural barriers limiting weight loss management success in a selected population in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY:

This study employed a qualitative exploratory method using a semi-structured interview on 46 individuals (28 females; 18 males; age range 23-59 years old) working in the health sector in Malaysia. They were purposely selected with past or current weight loss experience. Interviews were recorded, translated verbatim and analysed thematically using the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as a guide.

RESULTS:

Under the cultural sub-domain of the SCT; parked under social structure revealed several key factors: existing living (eating) culture, working culture; intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as barriers in ensuring success to weight loss management. Participants perceived that peer pressure plays a significant role in success or failure and having strong intrinsic motivation and a small amount of extrinsic motivation is sufficient in ensuring success to weight loss management.

CONCLUSION:

Culture and motivation plays a significant role in weight loss management and all future weight loss intervention should take these key factors into account in ensuring the success of such interventions.

Key words: Weight loss, obesity, overweight, behaviour, culture.