

# FACTORS INFLUENCING LIFESTYLE RISK BEHAVIORS ASSOCIATED WITH CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES AMONGST QATARI WOMEN

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## Background

In Qatar, cardiovascular diseases are a leading cause of mortality and morbidity. Cardiovascular diseases can be prevented and controlled by modifying lifestyle risk behaviours such as physical inactivity, unhealthy diet and smoking. Obesity as the result of physical inactivity and unhealthy diet raises the risk of heart diseases. Studies show that 62.6% of Qatari women were overweight. The prevalence of obesity among adult females 30 years and older is 80%. Qatar World Health Survey in 2006 showed that only 40% of Qatari women participated regularly in sports or other physical activities. Furthermore, water pipe smoking is increasing across the Eastern Mediterranean.

## Study Design

This is an Exploratory Qualitative study. Ethnographic individual in-depth interviews were conducted with 50 Arabic women, 30 years and over, with a confirmed diagnosis of CVD/coronary artery diseases and in stable condition. Interviews were conducted in Arabic by female nursing students, using a semi-structured questionnaire with open ended questions. Data collection sites: Hamad General Hospital, Cardiac Unit and Out Patient Clinic, in Doha, Qatar. Purposive sampling was used until data saturation was reached. NVivo 8 was used for data analysis.



## Research Goal

Funded by the Qatar National Research Fund, the goal of this exploratory qualitative study was to find ways to promote cardiovascular diseases prevention activities among Qatari women by exploring factors affecting women's participation in physical activities, healthy diet, and smoking.

### Research Question 1:

How do contextual factors, such as social, cultural, and economic, influence Qatari women's participation in physical activities, dietary practices, and smoking?

### Research Question 2:

How do Qatari women's knowledge of CVD/coronary artery diseases, physical activities, healthy diet, and smoking influence their participation in these activities?

### Research Question 3:

What are culturally appropriate and effective intervention strategies to promote physical activity, healthy diet, and abstinence from smoking among Qatari women?



## Findings

The following factors were found to influence Qatari women's participation on physical activities, dietary practices, and smoking.

### 1. Social Support Networks

• **Informal:** "Social support networks influence our decision to participate in physical activities, healthy diet, and smoking and especially in my own family because we base our decision on family discussion ... My family encourages me to walk. ... my children are supervising my diet and encouraging me always to maintain on that".

• **Formal:** "Before I was not doing exercise but after [my surgery], the physician instruction, I have started walking for one hour daily...the physician gave instruction and time table for doing exercise... Before the surgery my weight was 60kg ... with exercise and following instructions now I have stable weight."

• **Individual Responsibility:** "Participating in physical activities, eating healthy diet and not to smoke is a personal decision.... the women can eat healthy diet if they want ... it depends on individual awareness and carefulness about his or her health."

• **Women's responsibilities:** "Home responsibilities prevent women to exercise ... Women have reasons that prevent them from living healthy life ... they are busy with home and children responsibilities.... What prevents me is the situation at home. I can't leave children alone at home also I can't leave my parents alone."

• **Cultural Influences:** "Culture has huge impact on women decision to eat healthy and to do physical activities... women can't walk alone... she should be accompanied with one of the family members.... In Qatari culture all family members eat together ...Our foods consist of rice and meat which cook with oil and fat..., also sweet is very important in Qatari culture.... If you are invited to a party and you don't eat ... it is un respectful behavior."

• **Positive Religious Influences:** "We are Muslims and we like our lives. We are praying and fasting on time and thank Allah for everything. Smoking is forbidden in our religion. Exercise is good and our prophet Mohammed (PBUH) encourages us to do exercise .... Also Prophet Mohamed said eat 7 dates a day, he didn't say eat all dates because date contains a lot of sugar which could be harmful."

• **Changing Social, Economic and Cultural Beliefs and Practices:** "I think that most homes have servants more than they need.... Previously people were healthier because they were working at home. There was no house maid. Women were doing all household tasks alone with no help. This was exercise for them."

"Now a day a lot of Qatari women walk at Corniche and Aspire in order to maintain their health and wellness. Female becomes more oriented about their health and [more aware] of diseases associate with not exercising.... Society starts to accept that...We can do exercise by walking. Before it was not ok but now we can do that, however, we have to respect our self and others."

"I don't encourage smoking; it is the first leading cause of heart disease and lung cancer. Also it is prohibited in Islam. Previously it was not acceptable to see women smoking in Qatar... However now everything changed some Qatari women are smoking in popular [public] places. Qatar become multicultural country with a lot of immigrants who brought their culture and Qatari women affected by them .... New generation start to smoke because they think that this is part of modernization."

## Recommendations

Prevention of cardiovascular diseases and promotion of healthy lifestyle should:

- **Encourage** women to support each other in group situations, and be a role model to each other.
- **Provide** culturally appropriate public health education: health care professionals give more encouragement, and concrete and practical advice.
- **Facilitate** women's informal and formal social support networks, develop trusting relationships, cultivate family and social relationships.
- **Create** healthy environment with more recreational facilities for women and children.
- **Consider** women's situation, gender roles and expectations, their means to exercise, and socio-economic status.
- **Empower** women to take charge of their health. Arabic women are motivated to engage in healthy lifestyle. They are very creative in their ways of staying healthy.

## Significance of the study

- Detailed information will help to identify culturally sensitive, appropriate, and effective intervention/health promotion strategies that may lead to the reduction of the morbidity and mortality from CVD/coronary artery diseases for women in Qatar.
- The knowledge gained from this study may also be appropriate for health promotion and CVD/coronary artery disease prevention amongst Arabic women living in the Middle East.

## Limitations

- Due to the qualitative nature of the study generalization of the study results is not possible.
- Lack of randomization.
- A relatively small sample size was used however data saturation was reached.

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