



National Conference under Vision Viksit Bharat @2047

on

Hypertension in Focus: An Anthropological Exploration to Health and Wellness

21st-22nd October 2024

SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE

The National Conference under Vision Viksit Bharat@2047 on “Hypertension in Focus: An Anthropological Exploration of Health and Wellness” brought together a diverse group of experts, researchers, and professionals from fields such as anthropology, public health, cardiology, neurology, social science and related disciplines. The conference focused on unravelling the complex issue of hypertension, particularly within the Indian context, through an interdisciplinary lens.

The conference was organized by the Principal Investigator, Dr N. Kiranmala Devi and Co-Investigators, Prof. K.N. Saraswathy, and Dr Abigail Lalnuneng, in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University as a part of an ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Sciences Research)-funded project titled, “Barriers and Facilitators of Hypertension Control Programs: A Study in High-Risk State, Sikkim, India”. Their study aims to evaluate the existing hypertension management programs and identify the barriers and facilitators in their implementation among the population groups of high-risk states, Sikkim, India. The study rooted in the key findings of the research conducted in Punjab by Prof. K.N. Saraswathy and Dr N. Kiranmala Devi, which further underscored the critical role of awareness and perceptions in hypertension management programs, revealing that many individuals were unaware of their condition and lacked knowledge about the disease. Misconceptions about hypertension in this community played a crucial part in shaping individuals' attitudes towards treatment. These findings underscored the importance of delving deeper into the multifaceted factors influencing hypertension to improve its management and control.

The inaugural ceremony was honoured by the presence of Chief Guest, Prof. Ratnabali, Dean, Academic Activities and Projects, University of Delhi, Delhi, along with Guest of Honour, Dr Meenakshi Sharma from ICMR, and Dr Avinash Sunthlia from the Ministry of Health, Government of India. Special collaborator, Prof. Dinabandhoo Sahoo, Head of the Department of Botany, University of Delhi, also contributed valuable insights. These distinguished leaders emphasized the importance of collaborative interdisciplinary academic research in developing better healthcare strategies and highlighted the role of awareness and lifestyle changes in managing hypertension and other non-communicable diseases, particularly given the increasing onset of these conditions at younger ages.

Prof. Rajib Dasgupta, in his insightful inaugural lecture, stressed the importance of identifying the "spider in the web" of factors contributing to hypertension, urging a more nuanced approach to understanding the root causes of this complex condition. He emphasized how social stratification is a crucial topic of study for epidemiologists pertaining to the social causation of health adversities, which is by nature political.

With a good start, this two-day conference, captured the several important aspects of Health with special emphasis on hypertension and its management.

On the first day, Dr. Manoj discussed about the elements of Program evaluation. He emphasized that program evaluation is a systematic approach used to assess the effectiveness, implementation, and outcomes of programs, ranging from media campaigns to public policies. Dr. Archisman Mohapatra's presentation also called for more indigenous, context-specific research, better lifestyle interventions, and policy-driven solutions to combat this public health challenge. The second session explored hypertension, cardiovascular health, and public health interventions, emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary approaches. Prof. R.P. Mitra framed hypertension as a "civilization disorder," linking modern lifestyle changes to its rise. Dr. Nikhil SV and Dr. Roopa Shivshankar highlighted community-based salt reduction and the India Hypertension Control Initiative's success in managing hypertension. Denny John discussed cost-effective smartphone-based screening technologies, while Dr. Urfat Anjem Mir examined socio-cultural determinants, and Dr. Vineet Chaudhary linked Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to long-term cardiovascular risks.

The second day began with high spirit and engaging discussions by leading experts. Prof. Murry commenced the session with his talk on hypertension among the older adults, emphasizing on its burden among the population. Dr. Mahajan shared the underlying aspects of hypertension through his qualitative study that revealed the socio-cultural stressors contributing to hypertension in rural Haryana. Dr. Shivani Chandel highlighted hypertension's link to cognitive decline in later life, emphasizing the need for early intervention and lifestyle modifications, elaborating through her own life incidents. Dr. Oinam Hemlata Devi explored traditional and complementary medicine for hypertension management in northeastern India, and Dr. P. Durga Rao underscored the importance of understanding cultural beliefs in disease prevention.

Further, expert Neurologist Dr. Anirudh Rao enlightened the audience about the diagnosis and symptoms of hypertension, thereby bursting the myths surrounding hypertension, emphasizing on the importance of regular blood check-ups and medication for its diagnosis and treatment. Priyanka Rani Garg highlighted how systemic barriers, like limited access to healthcare and nutritious food, exacerbate hypertension in disadvantaged communities emphasizing on the importance of equity. Dr. Pungfa discussed the role of the Beita in managing grief-induced hypertension in Manipuri society through spiritual and communal practices. Sanjenbam Yaiphaba Meitei's review on hypertension in Northeast India revealed alarming rates, with a focus on adolescent hypertension. Other studies, such as those by Huidrom Suraj Singh and Dr. Nongthombam Achoubi Devi, linked hypertension to obesity, age, and lifestyle factors, stressing the importance of community awareness and interventions. Finally, Sonal Jain presented predictive modelling as a potential tool for forecasting hypertension risk and shaping personalized healthcare strategies, concluding the discussions on a hopeful note for future estimations and preparedness.

Further remarkable presentations by doctorates, scholars, and students contributed to the enriched discussions of this conference thereby making it a success. The respective Chair and Co-Chair scored these presentations and the best three presentations were awarded with the first, second, and third prizes.

In conclusion, the conference highlighted the critical need for collaborative interdisciplinary research to tackle the complex nature of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension. Understanding the underlying socio-cultural aspects of various populations is essential for deciphering their health-seeking behaviours. By fostering awareness, promoting in-depth understanding, and providing informed care, we can develop effective care pathways for affected individuals. Furthermore, lifestyle modifications remain the most reliable and sustainable preventive measures that can be adopted to enhance overall health outcomes in the general population. Meanwhile, researchers like us are yet to identify the “spider of the web”.

