

## *Kanching Manis: Culture and Diabetes in Malay Society*



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IAS Meeting Room 2.27, Level 2, FASS Building

### Speakers' Profile



Dr. Saiful Islam is a Medical Anthropologist based in the Sociology and Anthropology programme at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam. He holds a PhD from the National University of Singapore, an MPhil from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and an MA from the University of Dhaka. His research interests include lay understandings of chronic diseases, gender and health, healing systems, political economy of healthcare, and environment, health and sustainable development. His articles appear in such journals as *Medical Anthropology*, *Asian Social Science*, the *Anthropologist*, and *Harvard Asia Quarterly*. His two single-authored book manuscripts on Health and Development are currently under review with Routledge and Springer.



Dr. A.H.M. Zehadul Karim is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at International Islamic University Malaysia. He has been in the universities for the last 35 years teaching and holding several high-profile administrative positions in the academic arena. Dr. Karim received his MA and PhD degrees in Anthropology from Syracuse University, USA and holds an MA degree in Sociology from Dhaka University, Bangladesh. He has so far written 120 articles in the form of publications in international journals, paper presentations in international conferences abroad and research reports. He has four published books.

### Abstract

Most studies on diabetes have been biomedical, focusing on the treatment and management of this disease with very little or no attention to the understanding, experiences and responses to this illness by actual diabetic patients. How do diabetic patients explain their condition and what do they think about why they have been affected by diabetes? Why do many diabetic patients still continue their detrimental lifestyles, ignoring medical advice? How does culture influence the understanding of and response to this illness? This study goes beyond the biomedical model of diabetes and incorporates a cultural framework to understand this disease.

It is recognized that diabetes is mostly a disease of lifestyle, affected by food-intake behaviour and a sedentary way of life. Preventive measures of diabetes require a major modification in lifestyles, which relate to the culture of a specific group of population. It is therefore important to understand the lifestyle of the people who are affected by diabetes. We need to understand their food-intake behaviour, lifestyles, and even socio-cultural and religious belief systems that significantly shape the subjective perception of this disease. Many interventions in managing diabetes do not produce optimum success, simply because they only focus on "modifying risk factors in individuals" without understanding their actual way of life. Thus, simply blaming the individuals as responsible for diabetes limits our understanding of it. To successfully combat this public health crisis, this study suggests a more compassionate consideration of the particular socio-cultural, politico- historical and environmental contexts within which an individual suffering from diabetes becomes an integral part.