

Differing lifestyles: A study of ethnicity and health

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In recent years, the UK government has made bold statements regarding the recommendations for living a healthy life; including guidelines for how much fruit and how many vegetables we should eat daily, along with the ideal amount of physical activity we should do in order to avoid the risks of obesity. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the research found that men from most of the minority ethnic groups studied, and women from Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups, are more likely than their white counterparts to eat the recommended five portions of fruit or vegetables a day. Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and women and Indian and Chinese women are less likely to be as physically active.

The research, conducted by Vanessa Higgins and Professor Angela Dale of the Centre for Census and Survey Research at the University of Manchester, examined differences in [dietary patterns](#), physical activity and obesity among ethnic groups in England. The study found that females who have migrated to England as an adult are more likely than those born in England to eat their five-a-day.

However, the study found that Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and women, and also Indian and [Chinese women](#), are less likely to be as physically active as the Department of Health recommends. This result was consistent after accounting for respondents' age, level of education, [economic status](#), whether they were born in England or overseas, their [household income](#) and the level of deprivation in the area they live.

It is shown that education is an important predictor of physical activity, diet and obesity, and in particular, a mother's level of education, influences the physical activity, diet and obesity of their daughters. In addition, the level of maternal physical activity is strongly associated with child physical activity and mothers who eat their five-a-day are more likely to pass on these good habits to their children; where parents are obese, there is a greater risk that the children will also become obese.

Miss Higgins stated: "The low levels of physical activity among Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and women suggest that policies aimed at increasing physical activity should target these ethnic groups. Other studies have suggested that cultural barriers may prevent Pakistani and Bangladeshi women from participating in some forms of physical activity, however as levels were low among women and men, they cannot be simply explained by cultural barriers that are specific to women".

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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