

# Study reveals extent of physical inactivity disparities in England

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England is building up a large future health problem in the amount of individuals who are physically inactive according to new research published today [01 Aug]. The study, which examined data on over one million adults in England, reveals nearly 80 per cent of people do not hit national physical activity government targets and finds disparities between inactivity and socioeconomic status.

The ESRC-funded study, led by University of Bristol researchers, analysed data on over a million adults from the [Active People Surveys \(APS\)](#) that included details on an individual's socioeconomic position (comprising education, income and local area deprivation), physical activity levels and local [geographical factors](#) such as weather and access to sport facilities and green spaces.

Overall the team found fewer than ten per cent of the [adult population](#) in England who can walk do not even walk for five minutes continuously in a four-week period and nearly 80 per cent of people do not hit government physical activity targets of [moderate exercise](#) at least 12 times in a four-week period. Forty-six per cent of adults had not walked for leisure for 30 minutes continuously, while 88 per cent had not swum and 90 per cent had not used a gym. Around 20 per cent of the population over the age of 16 do minimal levels of physical activity.

Furthermore, the findings provided evidence of a direct correlation between an individual's education, [household income](#) and local area deprivation and level of physical activity. Those who possess a higher socioeconomic position have increased levels of physical activity and adults who are degree-educated were shown only to have a 12 per cent chance of being physically inactive, while those with no qualifications are three times as likely to be physically inactive.

Physical inactivity was found to be significantly related to local-area deprivation with local authorities that have a greater number of sports facilities and higher rates of new expenditure, the less likely individuals were to be physically inactive. Finally, the findings show the impact of warm weather in England promotes overall physical activity.

Carol Propper, Professor of Economics at Bristol's Centre for Market and Public Organisation, said: "Physical inactivity is the most important modifiable health behaviour for chronic disease so knowing who is physically inactive is important for designing cost-effective policy interventions. These findings show physical inactivity in England has a large socioeconomic gradient with clear evidence of independent disparities by gender, ethnic group, age, geographic area and [socioeconomic position](#).

"They suggest that financial as well as cultural barriers need to be

overcome to reduce the prevalence of [physical inactivity](#)."

**More information:** Farrell, L. et al. The Socioeconomic Gradient in Physical Inactivity in England, Global strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. Geneva: WHO, Geneva 2004.

[www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/publications/papers/2013/wp311.pdf](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/publications/papers/2013/wp311.pdf)

Provided by University of Bristol

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