

Neighborhoods impact health of South Asian women in US

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South Asian women in the U.S. are less likely to have high blood pressure when they have a high sense of "neighborhood cohesion"—a feeling they know most of their neighbors and could trust them, a new study says.

The researchers found a 12-percent-lower chance of hypertension among South Asian women who had a higher sense of neighborhood bonding and safety than women living in neighborhoods with less cohesion.

"Women may have a more direct connection between [health](#) and neighborhood than men, partly because they spend more time in family care, interacting in the neighborhood," said Dr. Pooja Lagisetty, a research fellow at the University of Michigan Health System.

The study, published in the Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health, said almost 60 percent of the women interviewed stayed at home, while 61 percent of the men were employed and worked away from home.

This is the first time researchers have studied neighborhood cohesion diabetes and [high blood pressure](#) exclusively in a South Asian population in the U.S.—and with good reason. They have a considerable higher prevalence of diabetes and hypertension—23 percent compared to 6 percent in whites and 13 percent in Chinese-Americans.

Lagisetty and colleagues used the MASALA dataset (Mediators of Atherosclerosis in South Asians Living in America), which has South

Asian participants from San Francisco and the Chicago area. The dataset was created in 2010 and now has more than 900 people.

In the study, the participants were asked to choose statements that described their neighborhoods: "Most people in the neighborhood know each other" and "Most people in the neighborhood can be trusted," among others.

The researchers said the neighborhoods affect health by reducing stress, improving social connections and enforcing norms.

Lagisetty, the primary author of the study, is a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation clinical scholar who will spend two years developing her research areas—at the intersection of [chronic health problems](#) with urban planning and social and cultural environments.

"As a physician, we don't always think about the patient's home environment, but [neighborhoods](#) matter," she said. "This study shows us that a sense of belonging and security has a direct effect on health."

The study is titled "Neighborhood Social Cohesion and Prevalence of Hypertension and Diabetes in South Asian Population."

More information: Neighborhood Social Cohesion and Prevalence of Hypertension and Diabetes in a South Asian Population. *J Immigr Minor Health*. 2015 Nov 2. [Epub ahead of print]

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