

Ethnic minority women more likely to believe that cancer is deadly and down to fate

March 1 2016

Women from ethnic minorities in the UK are more likely to believe that cancer is incurable and is down to fate than their white counterparts, according to a Cancer Research UK study published in the *British Journal of Cancer* today.

The researchers - from the Cancer Research UK Health Behaviour Research Centre, based at University College London (UCL) - believe that this may explain why women from [ethnic minority](#) backgrounds are less likely to attend [cancer](#) screening or see their doctor about cancer symptoms.

They surveyed 720 White British, Caribbean, African, Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi women.

Nearly a quarter of Caribbean women (23 per cent), and at least half of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women (50 per cent, 52 per cent, and 63 per cent respectively) believed that getting cancer was 'fate', compared to six per cent of White British women.

Between a quarter and a third (26 and 38 per cent) of the women from ethnic minorities believed that cancer was incurable, but no White British women thought this.

The study also looked at fear of cancer and found that about a third of Indian and African women (34 and 33 per cent) feared cancer, compared with only 15 per cent of Bangladeshi women.

Regardless of ethnic origin, women who had migrated to the UK as children felt more uncomfortable thinking about cancer than UK-born women (30 per cent compared with 15 per cent). The same was true for those who did not speak English very well (31 per cent compared with 19 per cent) and those who found it difficult to understand health information (35 per cent compared with 18 per cent).

A previous study of the same women showed that those from ethnic minority backgrounds were less likely to attend cervical screening.

Jayshree Jhala, 78, grandmother of four, from Luton, was diagnosed with breast cancer after a routine mammogram - she had a mastectomy then chemotherapy. Jayshree said: "After recovering from my treatment I decided that I wanted to put my experience towards helping other women in the Asian community. I felt that if my help could help save one person's life then I had made a difference.

"In my work I see that some people aren't willing to share their experiences and keep their illnesses a secret as they feel that people will think badly of them and that it could have a negative impact on their families. The language barrier can also be an issue. In this day and age - when medicine and research have made great advances - cancer shouldn't still be seen as a taboo subject or as a death sentence."

Lead author Charlotte Vrinten, from the Cancer Research UK Health Behaviour Research Centre, said: "It's alarming to see such high percentages of women feeling afraid of cancer. We know that fearing cancer means some people avoid taking part in cancer screening or seeing their doctor with symptoms, and there's evidence that this is true for white women and those from ethnic minority backgrounds too. This may be especially true when [women](#) also believe that nothing can be done about cancer.

"Undue fear of cancer may cost some people their lives if it means they avoid cancer screening or seeing their doctor with symptoms, so it's important that we get the message out there that cancer outcomes are improving and that cancer doesn't have to be dreaded like it used to be."

Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK's head of health information, said: "Spotting cancer early is important as it means treatment is more likely to be successful. Symptoms are more likely to be caused by something much less serious than cancer, but if you spot something that isn't normal for you, getting it checked out promptly could save your life.

"While one in two of us will get cancer in our lifetimes, half of those diagnosed now survive their cancer for 10 years or more and research is helping us find better treatments and save more lives every day."

More information: Charlotte Vrinten et al. Cancer fear and fatalism among ethnic minority women in the United Kingdom, *British Journal of Cancer* (2016). [DOI: 10.1038/bjc.2016.15](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2016.15)

L A V Marlow et al. Understanding cervical screening non-attendance among ethnic minority women in England, *British Journal of Cancer* (2015). [DOI: 10.1038/bjc.2015.248](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2015.248)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

Citation: Ethnic minority women more likely to believe that cancer is deadly and down to fate (2016, March 1) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-03-ethnic-minority-women-cancer-deadly.html>

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