

Study reveals high obesity rates amongst immigrant children

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Credit: Flickr, TourismPEI/Heather Ogg

A new study from The Australian National University (ANU) has uncovered some alarming trends when it comes to obesity rates amongst children of Australian immigrants.

PhD candidate Tehzeeb Zulfiqar looked at data for thousands of Australian [children](#), aged from four to 11.

She found children whose mothers were born in low or middle income countries are more likely to be overweight or obese than children whose mothers come from wealthier countries like Australia.

Ms Zulfiqar says it's not just their diet that's to blame.

"When we look at diet and consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and fatty food, that's high in both Australian children and immigrant children," Ms Zulfiqar said.

"The distinctive feature between these two groups was that the immigrant children from low or middle income countries were not as physically active. Their organised sport participation was low, and they had a higher preference for sedentary activities, so they were more likely to sit and watch television or play computer games."

Research suggests there are a number of factors that contribute to this [sedentary lifestyle](#), including the high cost of organised sport, fear of racism and bullying, and concern for their child's safety among immigrant parents.

Ms Zulfiqar says in order to fix this problem, there needs to be shift in focus when it comes to Australia's healthy lifestyle policies. She's keen to see more targeted, culturally appropriate campaigns.

"Recent studies indicate that [obesity](#) in Australia has reached a point where it's not increasing, it's plateaued," Ms Zulfiqar said.

"But a focus on populations like immigrants from [low income countries](#) may make a difference in actually lowering obesity rates."

There's been a number of studies looking at different [immigrant](#) populations in countries like America, Canada and the UK - but Ms

Zulfiqar says Australia is still catching up.

"That's why we did this research. We wanted to understand if the same differences which are reported in other countries also exist in Australia."

"Global evidence suggests immigrants from low and [middle income countries](#) contribute significantly to high obesity rates in affluent countries. This is alarming for Australia where approximately half the population is either overseas born or has overseas born parents."

The ANU study also found obesity rates peak at different ages for boys and girls.

"The girls in the low-middle income cohort were more likely to be overweight and obese at younger ages, but as they grew older they lost weight. For boys, a higher percentage were overweight and obese when they were reached the older ages."

The [research paper](#) has been published in the *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*.

More information: Tehzeeb Zulfiqar et al. Drivers of Overweight/Obesity in 4–11 Year Old Children of Australians and Immigrants; Evidence from Growing Up in Australia, *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10903-018-0841-3](#)

Provided by Australian National University

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