

The socioeconomic gap in behaviors that contribute to diseases is widening, study shows

August 2 2023



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

New research shows increasing levels of inequality in risk factors that causes higher levels of health conditions such as obesity, heart disease

and diabetes.

Findings published in *BMC Public Health* have shown an increasing divide across England—with those in lower socioeconomic positions (SEPs) recording more behaviors that put them at increased risk of diseases including cancer, diabetes, heart attacks and strokes.

While prevalence of risk factors such as smoking has reduced over time, this has not been consistent throughout society. The findings suggest that policy attention is required to tackle increasing inequalities in smoking prevalence, low fruit and vegetable consumption, and physical inactivity, and to reduce alcohol harm.

The research, a collaboration between the Universities of Warwick, University College London and Queen Mary University of London, is a time-trend analysis of data from the Health Survey for England examining the inequalities in four disease behavioral risk factors: smoking; drinking above recommended limits; insufficient fruit and vegetables consumption; and physical inactivity. These were examined in groups of people based on their level of education, [household income](#), occupation and the neighborhood they lived in.

Lead Author Fatai Ogunlayi, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick and Consultant (Acting) in Public Health at NHS England, said, "Our findings show that inequalities in behavioral risk factors are persisting or widening in England. This is a concerning trend, as these risk factors are major contributors to the burden of non-communicable diseases.

"As the Government looks to publish the Major Conditions Strategy, which aims to tackle major groups of conditions that drive ill-health and [early death](#), our study highlights that policies must be targeted to address the inequalities of risk behaviors across society.

"Behaviors that people can modify to prevent disease includes tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet and the harmful use of alcohol. Developing policies to address these [risk factors](#) will provide long-term benefits.

"One is ensuring that [local authorities](#) are able to maintain smoking cessation services, which have been cut in recent years. Another is investment in active transport planning and [green spaces](#) to encourage more physical activity."

Professor Oyinlola Oyebode at Queen Mary University of London added, "It is important that any action taken to support people to live healthy lives considers those with the least resources. Just providing people with information about what behaviors are healthy usually means that those with higher income, more education or living in richer neighborhoods can act on the information, while others are unable to."

More information: Fatai Ogunlayi et al, Trends in socioeconomic inequalities in behavioural non-communicable disease risk factors: analysis of repeated cross-sectional health surveys in England between 2003 and 2019, *BMC Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-023-16275-6](#)

Provided by University of Warwick

Citation: The socioeconomic gap in behaviors that contribute to diseases is widening, study shows (2023, August 2) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-08-socioeconomic-gap-behaviors-contribute-diseases.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.