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Study looks at impact of Bhangra on South Asian women's health

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Women participating in an SFU bhangra dance study to determine the role of exercise on body fat and heart health.

Simon Fraser University researchers are studying the impact of Bhangra dance and standard exercise programs on the health of post-menopausal South Asian women.

To date 50 women have completed or are currently completing sessions

and researchers are looking for more women to participate. The majority of participants are long-term, stay-home moms and housewives recruited from the Surrey community.

SFU PhD candidate Iris Lesser says the South Asian Exercise Trial (SAET) is focusing on how exercise affects body fat and cardiovascular health. Women who have completed the program say it is also having mentally positive effects.

Lesser is hoping to draw another 15 women participants to join the last of three 12-week sessions, starting in mid-August and taking place at the North Surrey Recreation Centre, a partner on the SFU study. The women need to be inactive, without diabetes or heart disease, and with a waist size greater than 80 cm.

Fitness instructor Mandeep Patrola leads the women through 60-minute sessions three times a week. "The women are providing key data for the SFU study, and learning that while exercise is important, it can also be fun," she says. "I'm already seeing a difference in these women."

The study is one of several underway by SFU's Community Health Research Team (CoHeaRT). Researchers in health sciences, kinesiology and geography are studying population health and associated determinants of obesity, heart disease and other chronic diseases, while working to develop community-based solutions to improving disease management.

Lesser says low engagement in physical activity among South Asians has been shown to explain the more than 20 per cent of the excess heart disease deaths within the population.

Inner abdominal fat, which surrounds the abdominal organs, is associated with higher health risks and has been found to be greater as an

amount of total body fat in South Asians.

"Exercise can benefit the community and have great impact through improved health as well as increased social connectedness," Lesser adds. "The South Asian community is growing and yet it is lacking the specialized cultural focus that would allow physical activity to become an integral part of one's lifestyle."

More information: Study results from the SAET are expected by the year's end. To participate in the final study session contact Lesser at 778.782.7748; iris.lesser@sfu.ca.

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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