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Health and well-being in ethnic minority groups influenced by social and cultural norms: A focus on South Asians in the UK

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Abstract

People of South Asian origin in the UK (with ancestral origins in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) manifest obesity-related disease more frequently that other groups and at lower levels of BMI to European populations. Whilst genetics plays a part the increased incidence of obesity could be reduced by lifestyle changes (mainly diet and exercise).

Health promotion and intervention approaches focussed on diet and physical activity changes are integrated into public health practice in the UK however, despite research since the 80'sshowing knowledge of healthy diets in this group there does not appear to be significant changes in dietary and lifestyle practices. The present research explores a number of nutrition focussed research studies which have aimed to capture the current situation and assess the wider influences on dietary change. This includes studies undertaken with hard to reach participants (ie ethnic minorities) and demonstrate access to these communities is possible for research but most importantly for interventions. Quantitative and qualitative research with men in Burnley and Medway (UK) and with women in Preston and Manchester (UK) is used to demonstrate that the barriers to health are self-efficacy and social and cultural norms. The studies also examined these inter-generational interrelationships by studying first and second generation men and women. The findings of the present research did not correspond to existing educational and behaviour change models, so a new Health Action Transition conceptual model is proposed. The model captures the important influences from a female perspective and as the usual gate-keeper to diet. Health education programmes that aim to address obesity and its associated risks in minority migrant communities must take into account the complex beliefs and practices and the multiple dimensions of religion, ethnic and social identity within the groups. Acknowledgement of these factors underpinning approaches to lifestyle behaviour and importantly dietary choices may assist the acceptability of interventions and delivery of lifestyle advice by health professionals.

Biography

Basma is a Reader in Nutrition and has recently completed her tenure as Head of Department of Clinical Sciences and Nutrition at the University of Chester, where she managed a portfolio of successful Masters and undergraduate programmes in addition to her personal research portfolioencompassing the field of nutrition and physical activity in health and disease and associated clinical and non clinical staff for over 7 years. Basma is a Nutritionist (Public Health) with over 15 years academic and community experience and has contributed to the work of both the UK Nutrition Society and Association for Nutrition. She has supervised a number of externally funded projects in nutrition. Basma's research interests are varied and include community food and nutrition projects and nutritional health of ethnic communities, which in part stems from her own experience of running community based projects. Basma's break from management will allow her to publish some of her work in this field and develop the work further. More recently Basma has extended this work to Africa and is involved in the nutrition capacity building agenda. In 2011, Basma was awarded the Academic of the Year in the UK's diaspora awards held by Asian Lite.