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Lack of exercise 'a key factor' behind high heart disease death rates in UK South Asian communities



Friday 3 December

Physical inactivity is a major underlying factor in high heart disease death rates in Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in the UK, even taking into account other risks such as smoking and pre-existing health conditions, according to new research funded by the National Prevention Research Initiative (NPRI). The study, published in the British Medical Journal's *Heart* today, revealed that a person of South Asian descent is likely to have a heart attack 10 years earlier than their white counterparts in the UK. The findings underline the importance of prioritising exercise campaigns in these communities.

The study examined health and lifestyle data from over 15,000 participants, including 2,100 South Asian volunteers, who took part in two major health surveys for England in 1999 and 2004 and agreed to be followed up over 6 years. Detailed analysis revealed that South Asians, specifically Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations, in the UK were three times more likely to take no exercise at all compared with the UK white population and also three times more likely to die from heart disease.

The aim of the study was to examine the role of physical activity in explaining the heightened risk of death from heart disease in the UK South Asian population compared with a UK white population.

Dr Mark Hamer, from the University College London and senior author of the study said:

"A complex mix of genetics and environment comes into play when we examine the likelihood of death from heart disease. We've known for a while that South Asian populations have a genetic increased likelihood of heart disease compared with other ethnic groups. Our new research looked at other behavioural factors that might also play a role. Physical inactivity emerged as a key factor, contributing over 20% towards the increased risk of death from heart disease in South Asian communities. It's clear we need better targeted health campaigns promoting exercise to these communities – if we could encourage more physical activity we could really drive down these mortality rates."

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is the UK's biggest killer, causing around 88,000 deaths in the UK each year. The study was funded by the National Prevention Research Initiative (NPRI), a – large consortium of government departments, research councils and major medical charities that work together to encourage and support research into chronic disease prevention. The Medical Research Council (MRC) is one of the NPRI partners and manages the initiative on behalf of the partnership.

World-class research which examines how lifestyle choices affect our health is a key part of the MRC's strategy. Sound science provides the foundation for good health policy and can help to determine the most

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effective strategies for tackling lifestyles that are detrimental to health.

The NPRI Funding Partners which supported this research are British Heart Foundation; Cancer Research UK; Department of Health; Diabetes UK; Economic and Social Research Council; Medical Research Council; Health and Social Care Research and Development Division of the Public Health Agency (HSC R&D Division) for the Northern Ireland; Chief Scientist Office, Scottish Government Health Directorate; The Stroke Association; Welsh Assembly Government and World Cancer Research Fund. Further information on the NPRI is available at <http://www.npri.org.uk>

Ends

