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Could community support be the key to good health?

MRC

Medical
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Council

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Some ethnic minority groups suffer fewer mental health problems living in areas with a greater proportion of people from the same background, regardless of levels of wealth, according to a Medical Research Council (MRC)-supported study.

The study, the first of its kind, suggests there may be mental health benefits from living in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. The positive effects were particularly significant for Bangladeshi and Irish people.

Dr Jayati Das-Munshi from Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, who led the study, said:

"There is a lack of research to account for the varying rates of common mental disorders amongst ethnic minority groups living in Britain. We set out to investigate whether living in the same area has a buffer effect for minority groups by providing them with social support, networks or by reducing racism."

"The results provide compelling evidence in support of the notion that ethnically dense areas may be protective of mental health for some ethnic minority groups, despite these areas also tending to be the poorest."

The researchers used information from the Ethnic Minorities Psychiatric Illness Rates in the Community Survey (EMPIRIC) which includes participants of Irish, Black Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and White British ethnicity. Participants were aged between 16 and 75 and chosen at random from 892 areas in England. A combination of structured interviews and questionnaires were used to assess the presence of common mental disorders, the participants' experience of discrimination, and their perceived levels of social support.

At any one time, nearly one in six UK adults has a common mental disorder such as depression, therefore a core part of the MRC's strategy is to explore and unravel the associations between mental disorders and factors which affect society as a whole.

The paper, *Understanding the effect of ethnic density on mental health*