

Ethnic differences in diet, physical activity and obesity

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Aim

To provide an improved understanding of patterns of healthy eating and physical activity that underlie ethnic differences in obesity.

Objectives:

- To identify ethnic differences in healthy eating, physical activity and obesity in relation to age, gender, generation and other factors such as social class, educational level, religion, length of residence.
- To understand how parental characteristics, including diet, physical activity and obesity, impact on these outcomes for children.
- To identify change in physical activity and obesity between 1999 and 2004 for different ethnic groups (and eating patterns as far as possible).

Background

Obesity is a well established risk factor in many health problems, including arthritis, stroke, heart disease, cancer and diabetes. In England more than half of all adults are classified as being overweight or obese; among children aged 2-15, over one in five boys (22%) and over one in four girls (27%) are overweight or obese. This study is concerned with ethnic differences in two of the most important factors in causing obesity: diet and physical activity. The Department of Health has set recommended levels for both and has launched public education campaigns to meet those levels. However, such intervention strategies need to recognize cultural and gender differences both between and within ethnic groups.

Methods

This study will analyse data from the 1999 and 2004 ethnic boosts of the Health Survey for England, paying particular attention to gender, age, generation and socio-economic differences within ethnic groups. The survey allows us to link information between children and parents and thereby establish the relationship between parental behaviour and children's eating patterns and level of physical activity. Data is available for 1999 and 2004 and so we are also able to ask whether there is any observed change of behaviour in response to government campaigns. The project will also include a small element of methodological work related to dealing with item non-response. We plan to use imputation methods to deal with missing data and will compare the results with the results obtained by ignoring missing data.

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