

Ethnic minorities are 'silent sufferers' of chronic fatigue syndrome

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Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is characterized by unexplained and debilitating tiredness and is associated with headaches, disrupted sleep, muscle pain and difficulty in concentrating. New research published by BioMed Central's open access journal *BMC Medicine* shows that ethnicity, depression, lack of exercise or social support, and social difficulties are major risk factors for CFS.

A multi-institute study funded by the Medical Research Council (UK), involving researchers across London and Manchester, looked at data from over 4000 adults living in England. The result of this study showed that, on average, there is a 2.3% risk of suffering from CFS and that risk increases with age by 2% per year from the age of 35. When the researchers compared the occurrence of CFS with medical factors and exercise they found that, while both depression and anxiety were associated with a much higher risk of CFS, [moderate exercise](#) halved the risk.

Social status and adversity were also major risk factors along with cultural and [ethnic background](#). The incidence of CFS was highest amongst people who had the most difficulties with housing, finances, or had family problems, but this was balanced by levels of support within the community. Perceived cultural discrimination and insults in the workplace, or in society, along with racial and religious discrimination, were also much higher for CFS sufferers. Overall people with Pakistani, Indian or Black Caribbean backgrounds had a greater risk of CFS than the white population.

Professor Bhui from Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary, University of London said, "Earlier studies, based on attendance at clinics, indicated that CFS is a disease of white, middle class people. Our results show that CFS is more common amongst the physically inactive, those with [social difficulties](#) and with poor social support, and ethnic minorities,

especially in the Pakistani group studied, and that they are silently suffering."

More information: Chronic fatigue syndrome in an ethnically diverse population: the influence of psychosocial adversity & physical inactivity, Kamaldeep S Bhui, Sokratis Dinos, Deborah Ashby, James Nazroo, Simon Wessely, and Peter D White, *BMC Medicine* (in press)

Provided by BioMed Central

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