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Ethnic variations in alcohol risks raise concerns, scientists say

Irish people living in Scotland are up to twice as likely to be hospitalised – or to die – from alcohol-related diseases as White Scottish people, research suggests.

Women from a mixed ethnic background living in Scotland were also at twice the risk of White Scottish people, a study into alcohol-related illness and death in Scotland shows.

People from a Chinese or Pakistani background had the lowest risks of alcohol-related illness or death, although they were at greatest risk of other liver diseases such as viral hepatitis.

Researchers say that lessons should be learned from communities with low rates of death and illness from alcohol use. They hope that the findings will inform public health policy on alcohol use, pricing and taxation for the whole population of Scotland.

Scientists from the University of Edinburgh studied ethnic variations in the rates of hospital admission and death resulting from alcohol use. Their study – the first to use a reliable measure of ethnicity – used data from the NHS and the 2001 Census.

The study used the rate of disease in the White Scottish population – Scotland's largest ethnic group – as its benchmark. The findings showed that compared with rates for White Scottish people, the risks of alcohol-related disease hospitalisations or deaths for Irish people living in Scotland increased by 82 per cent for men and 55 per cent for women.

Corresponding risks of alcohol-related disease hospitalisations or deaths for women of mixed ethnicity in Scotland increased by 99 per cent compared with White Scottish women.

For Chinese populations in Scotland, the risks of alcohol-related disease hospitalisations or deaths for men and for women each decreased by around 45 per cent. For Pakistani populations, the risks of alcohol-related disease hospitalisations or deaths decreased by 33 per cent and 52 per cent for men and women respectively compared with White Scottish people.

Dr Neeraj Bhala, who conducted the study at University of Edinburgh's Centre for Population Health Sciences, said: "The ethnic variation in the alcohol and liver-related hospitalisations and deaths in Scotland found in this large-scale study is a cause for concern."

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“We have important lessons to learn about preventing these alcohol- and liver-related deaths, and we should look to communities with typically low levels of alcohol consumption to help develop policies that benefit the whole population of Scotland.”

The findings have been published in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*.

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