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News Release

Issued: Tuesday 17 June 2014

White Scots most likely to smoke while pregnant, study finds

White Scottish women are more likely to smoke during pregnancy than expectant mums from other ethnic groups, a study has found.

They also have the highest rates of premature births of all white mothers living in Scotland and are least likely to breastfeed after their babies are born.

The findings are only partly explained by differences in social status, such as level of education, the researchers say.

The team hopes that their findings will help them understand why there are variations in overall health and risk of diseases between different ethnic groups in Scotland.

The study, led by the University of Edinburgh, looked at census and health data on mums around Scotland and compared their pregnancy outcomes by ethnic group.

Researchers found that a quarter of white Scottish women smoked during pregnancy compared with around 15 percent of white mothers of other nationalities living in Scotland.

Indian, Pakistani and Chinese mums living in Scotland had the lowest rates of smoking during pregnancy at less than seven per cent.

Premature births were more common in white Scottish mums than most other ethnic groups. However Pakistani mums had the highest rate of early delivery, with around one in 12 babies born before the due date.

The research also found that babies born to white Scottish women had lower birthweights than those born to white women of other backgrounds living in Scotland.

Overall, babies born to mothers from minority ethnic groups had the lowest birthweights despite their mums making healthier lifestyle choices during and after pregnancy, according to the study.

The findings are important because low birth weight can be an indicator of poor health in later life and has been linked to conditions such as heart disease and diabetes.

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Understanding the factors that contribute to differences in birthweights could help to explain why these diseases are more common among certain ethnic groups, the researchers say.

Professor Raj Bhopal from the Centre for Population Health Sciences at the University of Edinburgh said: “Scotland has one of the poorest health records in Europe. It is vital that we take steps to reduce smoking during pregnancy and improve social circumstances for all Scottish mothers if we are to redress this imbalance.”

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