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CAN HEALTHY LIFESTYLE MODIFY RISK FACTORS FOR DEMENTIA? FINDINGS FROM A PILOT POPULATION-BASED SURVEY

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Introduction: Aspects of lifestyle are a key component to successful ageing and reducing the risk of cognitive impairment. Many developing countries, including India, currently have a much lower rate of dementia in people of the same age in the UK (Alzheimer's Disease International 2008), in contrast to the higher prevalence rates of cardiovascular risk factors (reviewed in Misra and Kurana, 2009).

Objectives: Compare lifestyle choices in a developed and a developing country, that show contrasting dementia prevalence rates.

Aims: Identify protective factors that may reduce dementia prevalence.

Methods: A total of 251 participants at public meetings (123 in Newcastle and 128 in Chennai) on ageing completed a questionnaire voluntarily regarding their lifestyle, health status, 4-item GDS, and their subjective perception of their mental and physical health. The two groups had similar sociodemographic characteristics.

Results: Diabetes was three times more prevalent in the Chennai group ($p=0.001$) but a significantly higher proportion of the Chennai population reported receiving treatment for diabetes ($p=0.012$). Vegetarian diet was more frequent in the Chennai cohort ($p=0.000$), as well as curry consumption ($p=0.000$). The Newcastle group consumed more alcohol ($p=0.000$) and practiced exercise less often ($p=0.005$). Not surprisingly, 95% of the Indian is religious, in contrast to 59.7% of the English ($p=0.000$).

Conclusions: Type of diet, curry and alcohol consumption, and religious or spiritual beliefs, were the most significantly different, and may therefore confer protective advantages for dementia. Other explanations could be a higher proportion of uncontrolled diabetes and inactive people in the Newcastle sample.