

Summary

Bangladeshi children living in east London have a much higher risk of poor nutrition and obesity than the average child in the UK. Poor nutrition affects people all the way to adulthood and can lead to poorer health status and chronic diseases e.g. heart disease, diabetes, oral health problems etc. For decades, various national initiatives have been rolled out in a bid to reverse the problem, but never before has a model to improve nutritional outcomes been adopted from a developing country and applied to a relevant ethnic community in the UK. The project is using a proven model from South Asia where the introduction of female health workers into local women's groups has significantly improved maternal and neonatal survival rates.

Bi-directional exchange of knowledge: adapting an intervention

The Participatory Learning and Action cycle (part of a women's group approach), recommended by WHO, mobilises communities to identify, prioritise, solve and evaluate their own needs and solutions through facilitated group discussions. The approach is proven to prevent mother and child deaths in rural settings in resource poor countries e.g. India and Bangladesh. We don't know if this approach is effective in urban settings in countries not considered resource poor. We are learning how we can adapt the Participatory Learning and Action principles, techniques and application to urban East London, using infant nutrition as an exemplar.

Research into infant feeding practices

We are investigating how parents in the Bangladeshi community feed their infants (6-24 months), with what food and why. We have trained community members as 'community researchers' to recruit members of their community, interview them and interpret the findings, and two Bangladeshi Tower Hamlets residents have been actively involved in the study as Community Facilitators. We are speaking with community members, Bangladeshi mothers, pregnant women, fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, health professionals and key community stakeholders in Tower Hamlets, and international experts with experience of the Participatory Learning and Action cycle. We will test adaptability of our urban Participatory Learning and Action cycle intervention across different sites in Tower Hamlets, and acceptability/feasibility of its integration within existing services in the Borough of Tower Hamlets

This short film shows how NEON has impacted local communities

Principal investigator: Professor Monica Lakhanpaul, UCL

Start date and duration: January 2015, four years

Partners and collaborators involved: UCL; London Borough of Tower Hamlets; The Parent and Family Support Services in Tower Hamlets; UCL Partners; British Heart Foundation and Newcastle University.