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Effect of acculturation and gender on self-rated health in immigrants from Iraq to Sweden – the MEDIM population based study

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Background and Aim: The largest non-European immigrant group in Sweden today immigrants from Iraq, have a high burden of obesity, depression and type 2 diabetes. Self-rated health is an estimator of quality of life and predictor of mortality. The aim of this study was to investigate self-rated health in this immigrant population compared with the native Swedish population, and identify contributing factors.

Method: Population based study conducted 2010 to 2012 in citizens of Malmö, Sweden, 30 to 65 years of age, born in Iraq or Sweden. All participants conducted a health examination including anthropometrics, fasting samples and questionnaires covering self rated health, socioeconomic situation, acculturation-, lifestyle- and comorbidity status.

Results: in total 1336 Iraqis and 674 Swedes participated, 42 and 47% females respectively. Impaired self-rated health was identified in a greater proportion of the immigrant as compared to the native population, 44.3 vs. 22.0%, $P < 0.001$ with Iraqi females reporting the highest prevalence, 55.5%. in a multivariate logistic regression model adjusting for the confounding effect of socioeconomic and morbidity, Iraqi background and female gender remained independent risk factors for impaired self-rated health in the total study population, odds ratio (OR) 1.7, 95% CI 1.3-2.4 and OR 1.8, 1.4-2.3 respectively. Our data of a gender effect in Iraqis only was supported by an interaction between country of birth and gender, $P = 0.024$. Further, Iraqis not reading Swedish books/magazines had increased OR of impaired self-rated health 1.5, 1.1-2.0.

Conclusion: This study reports a high prevalence of impaired self-rated health in the Iraqi population in general and in Iraqi women in particular. Our data suggests that there are ethnic differences in gender effect on self-rated health and that acculturation has an impact.