

Higher breast cancer risk in white women 'is due to lifestyle'

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White women are more likely get breast cancer because they have fewer children and drink more than black and Asian women, a new study concludes.

Black and Asian women will become more likely to suffer Britain's most common cancer as they adopt the habits of the rest of the country, scientists said. While it has long been known that black and South Asian women have lower rates of breast cancer, scientists now say this is likely to be because of "lifestyle and reproductive patterns" rather than any genetic differences.

Data on a million British women who are aged over 50 showed that South Asian women were 18 per cent less likely to get breast cancer than white women and that black women were 15 per cent safer. The black and Asian women also tended to drink less, have more children, breastfeed more and use less hormone replacement therapy, all of which reduce the risk of breast cancer.

For example, 69 per cent of white women said they had breastfed their children compared with 83 per cent of black women and 85 per cent of South Asian women. Three quarters of South Asian women said they were non-drinkers compared with 38 per cent of black women and 23 per cent of white

women. White women had an average of 2.1 children, Asian women 2.7 and black women 2.9.

Once scientists had adjusted for these factors, the risk was the same for all ethnic groups, they write in the *British Journal of Cancer*.

"These findings indicate that the lower incidence rates seen in South Asian and black as compared with white women in England are largely, if not wholly, because of differences in known risk factors for the disease."

Toral Gathani, from the University of Oxford, who led the study of largely postmenopausal women in England, said: "We see that the lower risk in South Asian and black women is largely explained by differences in lifestyle and reproductive patterns. It's important for all ethnic groups to understand what are the modifiable risk factors for breast cancer, such as obesity and excessive alcohol consumption, and to take measures to reduce their risk."

Every year 49,500 women are given a diagnosis of breast cancer and 11,600 die of the disease.

Julie Sharp, of Cancer Research UK, which helped fund the study, said: "Women can reduce their risk by cutting down on alcohol, keeping a healthy weight by eating a balanced diet and by keeping active."