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**ASIAN ADOLESCENTS AN OBESITY TIME BOMB**

Public health policy makers cannot continue to ignore Asian New Zealanders, the Public Health Association conference was warned today.

An Auckland University researcher, Shirin Foroughian, told the public health delegates at the university the traditional view of New Zealanders of Asian descent as being tiny with few problems with obesity simply does not stack up any more against the evidence.

"My study of young Asians in New Zealand indicates there are large gaps in their understanding about healthy food choices and lifestyles," Ms Foroughian told the conference.

The research found that at least 36 percent of young Asian New Zealanders did not know that watching a lot of television can make you gain weight (this was compared to 22 percent of other New Zealanders); 62 percent of young Asian New Zealanders didn't know that fruit juices and cordials had as much if not more sugar than other non-diet drinks (compared with 36 percent of other New Zealanders); and about 27 percent thought skipping meals was a good way to lose weight (compared with 11 percent of other New Zealanders).

"In addition, the research shows more young Asians tend to get lunch from school canteen or don't eat lunch, eat more biscuits, potato chips or snacks, pies, takeaways or fried foods after school. These young people are definitely going to have problems with obesity and its related health concerns later in life if nothing is done to address their attitudes and behaviour."

Shirin Foroughian told the conference Asians comprise 355,000 of the current population but this will increase to 600,000 by 2020, and if nothing is done to address issues like overweight/obesity, they will burden further an already stretched health system.

"Young Asians need better access to information about food and health. We need parents and families and schools to be involved in interventions. Parents need to support their young people's desire to maintain a healthy lifestyle by offering a range of healthy food options, schools should teach

health as a compulsory subject not a voluntary one as happens now, and schools need to encourage their students spending breaks and lunchtime being active by organizing sport. Lastly, school canteens need to sell healthy food at low prices - some students tell me they would like to buy the healthy option at the school canteen but it's too expensive."

Ms Foroughian said when people think of an ethnic group with obesity problems they think of Māori and Pacific people first, then European New Zealanders but not many think of Asians.

"But we cannot ignore such a large group of New Zealanders assuming they are fine. Asians are no different from any other group and will soon face the same problems on the same scale if nothing is done."

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