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Cousin marriages cited as significant factor in Bradford child deaths

Fatal genetic conditions more common in children of south Asian heritage in West Yorkshire city, study says



The report says south Asian children were overrepresented in the study compared with the population of Bradford. Photograph: Alamy

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Marriage between cousins leading to fatal genetic conditions remain a factor

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More than two-thirds of these deaths, 67%, involved children under the age of one, most of whom died within 28 days.

Children of south Asian heritage were overrepresented in the figures compared with the population of the Bradford district, according to the report, with 45 (65%) of the children being of south Asian background. Those of south Asian heritage comprise 37% of Bradford's under-18 population.

Thirty of the 69 deaths (43%) were categorised as chromosomal, genetic and congenital anomalies, conditions that are more common in families with parents who are related.

The report also found that Bradford had a higher proportion of deaths attributable to chromosomal, genetic and congenital anomalies than nationally (25%).

The report's authors recommended "genetic counselling" and ensuring families were made aware of the risks of consanguineous marriages, which could help reduce the number of children who die of genetic disorders at a young age.

It added: "South Asian children are overrepresented particularly in category 7 deaths (genetic conditions). Around one-third of all category 7 deaths in Bradford are autosomal recessive in nature, and this type of condition is twice as likely to occur if the couple are consanguineous than in the whole population; also, in some families where the rare genes which cause autosomal recessive conditions are common and cousin marriage has been practised for several generations the risk can be much higher.

"Consanguinity is common in south Asian families locally and 53% of all south Asian children who died due to category 7 as a whole are from families who have married their cousin."

Other risk factors in child deaths included obesity and smoking.

A spokesperson for Bradford council said: "We are working closely with the NHS and other key partners to make sure families and individuals at most risk are given genetic counselling so that they can make informed choices about having children in the future.

"Families at risk are supported in making choices by their GPs and if appropriate referral to Bradford's specialist genetics services which hold regular local clinics for families.

"Families from all communities can be affected by genetic disorders and we are continuing to develop a range of services to support everyone and are constantly working to improve the information available to people across the Bradford district."

In May 2017 a report found that one in five child deaths in an east London borough occurred because the mother and father were related.

Redbridge council found deaths of children from parents who were known consanguineous couples - meaning second cousins or more closely related - accounted for 19% of 124 cases reviewed in the borough between 2008 and 2016.

- This article was amended on 18 February 2019 so that the subheading made explicit - as had the main heading - that study findings on south Asian cousin marriage related to specifically to Bradford.

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