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A Cross-National Comparison of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Low Birthweight in the United States and England

Objective: This study uses two new nationally representative surveys to compare racial/ethnic differences in low birthweight in the US and England.

Methods: Risk factors and rates of low birthweight are compared across groups for singleton births within each country (whites, blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians in the US; whites, blacks, and Asians in England). Crude rates and rates adjusted for socioeconomic status and behaviors are compared. Additional comparisons are limited to native-born mothers.

Results: Racial and ethnic disparities in low birthweight are as large in England as in the US. Socioeconomic status and behaviors explain little of the variation across racial/ethnic groups in either country.

Conclusions: Health disadvantages associated with being a minority do not appear to be a uniquely American phenomenon. Universal health care alone may not be sufficient to reduce racial/ethnic disparities in LBW.