

# "Belief that Asians are genetically prone to vascular disease a fallacy"

## Over 6,000 people tested as part of study

Special Correspondent

**CHENNAI:** In a sample size of over 6,000 people in urban, semi-urban and rural areas of Chennai, Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur, only 240 had "normal" values when tested as part of a population-based study conducted at Sri Ramachandra University.

About 43 per cent of them had abnormal glucose metabolism; 70.3 per cent had abnormal lipid levels (cholesterol); 17 per cent had blood pressure between 140-90 mmHg; and 30 per cent had BP of 130-90 mmHg; 18 per cent were depressed; and 30 per cent had a high homocysteine level (which has a strong relationship with cardiovascular disease).

Providing details of the results of the first two phases of the study, S. Thanikachalam, principal investigator, said it was clear from the results that the belief that Asians are genetically prone to vascular disease was a fallacy. "If it was genetic, then the incidence of common conditions should be the same, irrespective of whether it is an urban, rural or semi-urban setting. But that is not true. We have used the diagnostic protocols laid down by the WHO and the Indian Council for Medical Research and our data has



**HEALTH STUDY:** Deputy Chief Minister M. K. Stalin releasing the results of a study at a function in Chennai on Friday. Health Minister M. R. K. Panneerselvam and Health Secretary V. K. Subburaj (second from left), are in the picture. — PHOTO: K. V. SRINIVASAN

been validated. Clearly, environment has a role to play," he added.

The study, which was conducted over a period of two years, randomly selected adults between the age of 20 and 65 years in the three districts, and with their consent, tested their blood for 18 parameters, Dr. Thanikachalam explained.

The project, the third phase of which was launched on Friday, is being funded by the Department of Science and Technology. G.J. Samathanam, head, DST, said a sum

of Rs.5 crore has been allotted over a three-year period to SRU for conduct of the study. "We wanted a completely unbiased scientific study that would also be a representative sample of the population... a systematic study of the onset of disease and a holistic approach to diagnosis and treatment through modern and traditional systems of medicine," he said.

Releasing the results of the first two phases and launching the third phase, M.K. Stalin, Deputy Chief Minister, said the study answered many questions re-

garding the epidemiology of chronic diseases. He wondered if it would be possible to exactly quantify the impact of lifestyle modifications, including diet and exercise, on preventing certain disease. He said the results from the study would be of great use to both State and Central governments and could influence health spending.

Health Minister M.R.K. Panneerselvam said the State government had also launched a preventive health check-up scheme for the State: Varummun Kapom Thittam and had test-

ed over 1.32 crore people so far. Of this, several had received assistance and treatment. Under the Kalaigarr Insurance Scheme, 36,692 persons had benefited so far, 80 per cent of them from cardiac surgeries.

V.K. Subburaj, Principal Secretary, Health, said the elaborate study clearly provided three tips to the public: eat healthy, exercise everyday and remain stress free. The importance of periodic testing should also be conveyed to the people, he added.

V. Kumaraswami, director (I/C), National Institute of Epidemiology (NIE), said they had worked along with SRU to analyse the data, manage, and validate it, besides aiding in extrapolation and fitting the data to the local population.

K. Satyanarayana, senior deputy director general, ICMR, said experiments around the world had shown that small changes implemented in lifestyles by involving the population could bring down health-care costs by preventing or delaying the onset of chronic diseases. S.P. Thyagarajan, Pro-Chancellor (Research), SRU, described the varsity's initiatives in research, including public-private partnerships with intra and inter-country institutions.