Previous research has shown thathaving obesity can increase the risk of developing depression. However, this is not necessarily true for all people who are overweight and could possibly be different for people with different ethnic backgrounds. In America they have found that the relationship between obesity and depression is stronger in the ethnic White and Hispanic groups compared to the African Americans. We used the HELIUS study to see initially whether having obesity or a larger waist circumference (which measures abdominal obesity) was associated with having a depressed mood and secondly whether this was the same for all six ethnic groups.

Our results showed that having obesity or a larger waist circumference was linked to having a depressed mood, however this was not consistent across all ethnic groups. The link between obesity or higher waist circumference was strongest for the Dutch and African Surinamese ethnic groups and weak for the South-Asian Surinamese, Ghanaian, Moroccan and Turkish groups. This means that obese Dutch and South-Asian Surinamese are more likely to have a depressed mood than the obese people from the other ethnic groups within HELIUS.

Based on our results we now know that health programmes aimed at reducing obesity will benefit physical and mental health in some groups, whilst in others only improvements in physical health can be expected.