

National Prevalence of Obesity

Prevalence of overweight and obesity in Sri Lankan adults

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Summary

The aim of the study was to determine the prevalence of overweight, obesity and abdominal obesity, and the underlying socio-demographic correlates among Sri Lankan adults. Data were from 4532 adults aged ≥ 18 years randomly selected for a national level study on diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Weight, height and waist circumference (WC) were measured and body mass index (BMI) calculated. The mean (95% confidence interval) BMI and WC were 21.1 kg m⁻² (20.9–21.3), 22.3 kg m⁻² (22.1–22.4) and 78.0 cm (77.5–78.6) and 77.5 cm (77.0–78.0) for males and females, respectively. According to the proposed World Health Organization cut-off values for Asians, the percentage of Sri Lankan adults in the overweight, obese and centrally obese categories were 25.2%, 9.2% and 26.2%, respectively. Based on the cut-offs for Caucasians, these were 16.8%, 3.7% and 10.8%. Our findings were compatible with prevalence of obesity in regional countries. In addition, female sex, urban living, higher education, higher income and being in the middle age were shown to be associated with overweight and obesity in Sri Lankans. In conclusion, we have documented a relatively high prevalence of overweight and obesity, particularly, abdominal obesity among adults in Sri Lanka which is a middle-income country. Urgent public health interventions are needed to control the problem at an early stage.

Keywords: BMI, obesity, socio-demographic factors, Sri Lanka.

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Introduction

Undernutrition and infectious diseases were traditionally considered as major health problems in the developing world (1). Therefore, little attention was paid to obesity and associated non-communicable diseases by healthcare workers, policy makers, researchers as well as the society itself. The prevalence of obesity is on the rise at an alarming rate worldwide (2). Developing countries, particularly in South Asia, have not been spared (3). South Asian populations suffer obesity-associated complications at a lower body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference (WC) (4,5). Nevertheless, little interest was shown to obesity and associated chronic, non-communicable diseases in South

Asia. There were no published data on national level prevalence of obesity among Sri Lankan adults.

The aim of the present study was to determine the prevalence of overweight (OW), obesity and abdominal obesity (AO) and the underlying socio-demographic correlates among Sri Lankan adults.

Methods

Study population

Sri Lanka is an island located 20 km south of the Indian subcontinent. It is a middle-income country with a population of over 19 million people (6). Data on