Global Trend in Overweight and Obesity and Its Association With Cardiovascular Disease Incidence

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Although the global prevalence of both the overweight and obese is on the rise, there are variations among regions or countries, and sexes. Approximately half or more than half of the population are overweight/obese defined as body mass index (BMI) ≥25 kg/m² in the Americas (61.1%), Europe (54.8%), and Eastern Mediterranean (46.0%) according to the World Health Organization, while a much lower prevalence is observed in Africa (26.9%), South-East Asia (13.7%), and the Western Pacific (25.4%). Females are more likely to be overweight/obese in the Eastern Mediterranean, Africa, South-East Asia and the majority of countries in the Americas and Western Pacific but not in the most of the countries in Europe. These region-sex-ethnicity differences in prevalence may be a clue to the causes of the obesity epidemic. Epidemiological studies done in the USA, Europe, and Asia found that higher BMI was significantly associated with increased incidence of coronary artery disease (CAD) and ischemic stroke, but the association with hemorrhagic stroke incidence was not always consistent. The association of BMI with CAD and ischemic stroke was generally independent of known mediators, which would indicate the importance of controlling or preventing overweight/obesity for the prevention of cardiovascular disease.

Key Words: Coronary artery disease; Epidemiology; Ischemic stroke; Obesity; Stroke

Obesity is a state of excess fat accumulation that accompanies wide range of health disadvantages. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a body mass index (BMI) of ≥25 kg/m² as overweight, and a BMI of ≥30 kg/m² as obesity. The global prevalence of the overweight and obese is on the rise. The Global Burden of Disease Study estimated that the proportion of overweight or obese adults in 2013 was 36% in men and 37% in women worldwide. Globally, the epidemic has affected both developed and developing countries, men and women, and adults and children, although there are great variations in their prevalence and trends among regions or countries, and sexes. Because obesity is believed to cause a number of established risk factors for cardiovascular diseases (CVD) such as hypertension, dyslipidemia, and diabetes, the growing prevalence of obesity is assumed to increase the global CVD burden. However, it is also known that other changes in diet and lifestyle have led to changes in the prevalence of these risk factors, and presumably in CVD incidence. An example of this would be a dramatic decrease in stroke mortality observed after World War 2 in Japan because of the decrease in severe hypertension, although the average BMI also increased during this period. Therefore, the association of obesity with CVD remains to be investigated, especially in terms of differences in the association by time period as well as how the association (if any) would be mediated by the established risk factors. Also, there may be differences in the threshold of BMI where significant BMI would be observed, because significant differences exist in the prevalence of obesity by sex and ethnicity. Hence, we set 2 aims in this review. The first aim was to provide an overview of global trends of overweight and obesity according to the WHO regions and countries within each region by sex. The second aim was to provide up-to-date information on cohort studies that have investigated the associations of BMI with coronary artery disease (CAD) and stroke in various parts of the world.

Methods

Overweight and Obesity Trends

The review compiles the prevalence of overweight and obesity for every country in the WHO’s 6 regions of the world (Africa, the Americas, Eastern Mediterranean, South-East Asia, Western Pacific, and Europe).
Figure 1. Bar graphs showing the prevalence of overweight/obesity (BMI ≥25 kg/m²) among adults aged ≥20 years in countries of the 6 WHO regions of the world in 2008. (A–F) Estimates for every country in Africa, the Americas, East-Mediterranean, Europe, South-East Asia, and the West Pacific, respectively, for which data were available. Blue, men; red, women; green, total. Countries are sorted according to the prevalence of overweight in total population. All estimates are age standardized. BMI, body mass index; CAR, Central African Republic; DRC, Democratic Republic of the Congo; STP, Sao Tome and Principe; URT, United Republic of Tanzania (A), AB, Antigua and Barbuda; DR, Dominican Republic; SKN, Saint Kitts and Nevis; SVG, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; TT, Trinidad and Tobago; USA, United States of America (B), Iran, Islamic Republic of Iran; SAR, Syrian Arab Republic; UAE, United Arab Emirates (C), Bangladesh; China, Japan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Micronesia, Federated States of Micronesia; PNG, Papua New Guinea (F). Coefficients of variation (CV) of the prevalence of overweight/obesity were 0.47 in Africa, 0.15 in the Americas, 0.37 in the East-Mediterranean, 0.10 in Europe, 0.50 in South-East Asia, and 0.51 in West Pacific. Data were obtained from the WHO Global Health Observatory Data Repository and reproduced with permission, http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.A896?lang=en.
The data were primarily obtained from the WHO’s Global Health Observatory Data Repository (http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.A896?lang=en) in July 2014. The most recent data available (2008) were used for the analyses. Age-standardized estimates were used in preference to crude estimates so that comparison among countries and among regions would be possible. Comparisons among regions and countries have been described and reproduced here with permission from the WHO. As shown in Figures 1 and S1, countries were sorted according to prevalence in the total population. As a measure of heterogeneity within a region, the coefficient of variation (CV) of the prevalence of overweight/obesity was calculated. The 10-year trend (2000–2009) of the mean BMI in 24 selected countries (4 from each region) was also examined. The 24 countries were purposefully selected by the authors, because they are the main countries with big population in each region.

Review of Prospective Studies

We searched for relevant literature in PubMed using keywords: cohort study, follow up study, body weights and measures, body mass index, coronary heart/artery disease, ischemic heart disease, stroke. We restricted our search to studies of incidence because mortality would be affected by a number of other factors. As the present review was not systematic, the search was also restricted to studies published within 5 years as of June 2014. However, older literature was selected from previous reviews, meta-analyses, or consortia. CAD was defined in the studies included in the review as fatal or non-fatal myocardial infarction and sudden death within 1 h of onset of symptoms. Angina associated with cardiac procedures was not usually included as it can be influenced by the healthcare setting. Stroke was classified as ischemic or hemorrhagic. When possible, the latter was further restricted to intracerebral hemorrhage.

The following information was obtained: mean age or the range, mean BMI or the range, sample size, BMI of the reference category, lowest BMI significantly associated with the incidence, and list of confounding and mediating variables included in the statistical model. Relevant information was extracted separately for sex whenever possible.

Results

Prevalence of Overweight/Obesity

According to the estimates of the WHO, more than one-third (34.5%) of adults in the world aged ≥20 years were overweight or obese in 2008, with females (35.1%) having a slightly higher preponderance than males (33.8%). However, these figures are highly variable when separately analyzed for the 6 WHO-designated regions; the Americas, Europe, and Eastern Mediterranean regions had the highest proportion of overweight/obese adults at 61.1%, 54.8% and 46.0%, respectively. Unlike observations in the rest of the world, males in Europe were more likely to be overweight/obese than their female counterparts (Figure 2A). This also applies to some relatively high income countries in the Americas and Western Pacific region (described later).

Separate analyses for obesity show that approximately 12%
of the global adult population was obese in 2008. The Americas (26.7%), Europe (21.9%), and the Eastern Mediterranean (18.7%) were the top 3 regions with the highest burden of the disease (Figure 2B).

**Overweight/Obesity in Africa**

Overall, 26.9% of African adults were overweight or obese in 2008, with notable heterogeneity among countries (CV: 0.47). South Africa (68.0%), the Seychelles (57.7%) and Swaziland (50.3%) topped the list of African countries with the highest prevalence of overweight or obesity among adults (Figure 1A). The same 3 countries had the highest proportion of adults with obesity: South Africa (33.5%), the Seychelles (24.6%) and Swaziland (23.4%) (Figure S1A). Ethiopia (8.0%), Eritrea (10.7%) and Burkina Faso (13.0%) made the last 3 with regard to prevalence of overweight or obesity, and Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Eritrea had the lowest prevalence of obesity in the region at 1.2%, 1.7%, and 1.8%, respectively.

Generally, obesity was twice more common among females than it was among males in Africa.

**Overweight/Obesity in the Americas**

The proportion of overweight and obese adults is the highest in the Americas among the 6 WHO regions (Figures 1A, B). The prevalence of overweight/obesity and obesity was 61.9% and 26.7% in that order. In almost all countries in the region,
more than half of the population was overweight or obese. Saint Kitts and Nevis (76.2%), Belize (71.0%) and the United States of America (69.4%) were the top 3 countries with the highest proportions of overweight/obese adults in the region, while Haiti (32.0%), Guyana (44.7%) and Peru (47.9%) relatively had the lowest prevalence of the condition (Figure 1B).

The overall prevalence of overweight/obesity was slightly higher in males (62.6%) than in females (61.2%), but obesity was more common in females (29.7%) than it was in males (23.5%) (Figures 2A and B).

Overweight/Obesity in the Eastern Mediterranean
The Eastern Mediterranean region is home to most of the oil-rich Arab countries. Although the overall prevalence of overweight/obesity was 46.0%, country-specific figures were 55% or above in the majority of the countries, with modest heterogeneity (CV: 0.37). Gulf countries such as Kuwait (79.3%), Qatar (72.1%) and the United Arab Emirates (72.0%) had the highest proportion of overweight/obese adults in the region, while poverty-stricken countries such as Afghanistan (11.8%), Somalia (21.5%), and Pakistan (24.3%) had relatively the lowest proportion of overweight/obese people (Figure 1C).

Approximately 18.7% of adults in the region were obese. Kuwait (42.8%), Saudi Arabia (35.2%), and Egypt (34.6%) were the top 3 in the list of countries with high proportions of obese adults (Figure S1C). Afghanistan (11.8%), Somalia (21.5%), and Pakistan (24.3%) made the bottom end of the list.

Females were more likely to be overweight and obese than their male counterparts in all countries in the region.

Overweight/Obesity in Europe
The proportion of overweight/obese adults is the second largest in Europe (54.8%) in the world (Figures 2A and B). Most countries in the region had a similar prevalence of overweight/obesity (CV: 0.10); Turkey, Czech Republic and Malta had relatively the highest share at 63.8%, 61.7%, and 61.6%, respectively, whereas Tajikistan (33.3%), Turkmenistan (43.8%) and Switzerland (44.3%) had relatively the smallest number of overweight/obese adults (Figure 1D).

More than one-fifth (21.9%) of the regions’ adults were obese in 2008. The prevalence of obesity was similar across countries in the region. The same group of countries with the highest and lowest proportions of overweight people also had the highest and lowest proportion of obese people in the region (Figure S1D).

There were some peculiarities with regard to the sex distribution of overweight and obesity in the region. Overweight/obesity was more common among males than among females in most countries, but the likelihood of obesity was similar for both sexes.

Overweight/Obesity in South-East Asia
The prevalence of overweight/obesity (13.3%) and obesity (2.7%) in South-East Asia was the lowest in 2008 (Figures 2A and B) among the 6 WHO regions. However, there were notable differences across countries (CV: 0.50). The Maldives, Thailand and Bhutan had the highest proportion of both overweight/obese and obese adults in the region (Figures 1E and S1E). The prevalence of overweight/obesity in the 3 countries were 40.7%, 31.7% and 24.4%, while corresponding figures for obesity were 16.7%, 8.5% and 5.5%, respectively. In contrast, Bangladesh, Nepal, and India had the lowest proportion of adults with overweight/obesity and obesity: the prevalence of overweight/obesity was 7.7%, 9.3%, and 11.2%, whereas that of obesity was 1.1%, 1.5%, and 1.9%, in that order.

In most countries of the region, females were more likely to be overweight/obese and obese than their male counterparts.

Overweight/Obesity in the Western Pacific
The overall prevalences of overweight/obesity and obesity in the Western Pacific were 25.4% and 21.9%, respectively. However, country-specific figures showed wide variation (CV: 0.51). The prevalence of overweight/obesity exceeded 60% in most of the island countries. Nauru, Cook Islands and Tonga had 92.8%, 90.6% and 88.1% overweight/obese adults, in that order (Figure 1F). These countries also had the highest proportion of obese adults in the region at 71.1%, 64.1% and 59.5%, respectively (Figure S1F). In contrast, the prevalence of overweight/obesity in Vietnam (10.1%), Cambodia (12.7%), and Lao People’s Democratic Republic (14.8%) was the lowest in the region (Figure 1F). The same 3 countries had the lowest proportion of obese adults in the region: the prevalence of obesity was 1.6%, 2.3%, and 3.0% in Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PDR, respectively (Figure S1F).

Approximately 22.4% of adults in Japan were overweight/obese in 2008, but the proportion of obese adults was 4.5%. These figures are low in comparison to the corresponding values for Australia or New Zealand, other high-income countries in the region, but comparable to Singapore or Republic of Korea. In contrast, Japanese women had lower prevalence of overweight than women of these developed countries in the region.

Overall, overweight/obesity was more common in males than it was in females and obesity was more common in females than in males.

Trend of Mean BMI (2000–2009)
The 10-year trend of age-standardized mean BMI for 24 selected countries from each WHO region is presented (Figure 3). Generally, mean BMI steadily increased between the years 2000 and 2009 in almost all countries. In most low- and middle-income countries, females tend to have higher mean BMI than males, and the reverse was observed in high-income countries. Japanese women did not seem to experience any increase in the average level of BMI.

Summary of Prospective Studies
CAD In general, BMI was positively associated with CAD incidence independent of confounding factors such as age, smoking, alcohol drinking, and physical activity (Table 1). The lowest BMI associated with increased risk varied by studies, in part because of different reference categories defined. Studies from the USA,12,13 Europe,14 Japan,15 and other countries16,17 showed this value to be lower than 25 in men. However, there are studies that reported the value to be 25 or greater: from the USA18 and Europe,19–22 and Japan.23,24 In women, the threshold value seems to be 25 or greater according to the reports from the USA12,13,15 and Europe,19,20,26 except for 1 study from the USA that reported 23.27 Furthermore, a few studies reported BMI of 30 or more: from the USA,28 Europe (women),19 and Japan.24

The association of BMI with the incidence CAD remained significant after inclusion of mediators such as total cholesterol, systolic blood pressure (SBP) and diabetes in the statistical model in many studies, including the Framingham Heart Study,12 JALS,15 and the Korea Medical Insurance Corporation study.17

Ischemic Stroke (Table 2) BMI was positively associated with ischemic stroke incidence independent of confounding
| Country, study name† | Year of publication | Baseline, year | Follow-up, years | Age, range or mean, years | BMI, mean, kg/m² | Sample size | Sex |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------|-----|
| USA, Framingham Heart Study† | 2000 | 1956 | Max. 24.0 | 30–62 | NA | 2,213 | M |
| USA, Nurses’ Health Study† | 2006 | 1980 | Max. 20.0 | 34–59 | NA | 88,393 | W |
| USA, Health Professionals Follow-up Study† | 2010 | 1986 | Max. 16.0 | 39–75 | 25.5 | 27,859 | M |
| USA, Nurses’ Health Study | 2010 | 1986 | Max. 16.0 | 39–65 | 25.3 | 41,534 | W |
| USA, ARIC Study† | 1998 | 1987–1989 | Mean 6.2 | 45–64 | 27.4† | 6,618 | M |
| USA, Physicians’ Health Study† | 2001 | 1988 | Mean 3.9 | 40–84 | 25.4 | 16,164 | M |
| USA, Women’s Health Study | 2008 | 1992 | Mean 10.9 | ≥45 | 26.0 | 38,987 | W |
| UK, Renfrew-Paisley Study† | 2006 | 1972–1976 | Max. 20.0 | 45–64 | 25.9† | 6,992 | M |
| UK, British Regional Heart Study | 1997 | 1978–1980 | Mean 14.8 | 40–59 | 25.5 | 7,735 | M |
| Northern Ireland and France, PRIME Cohort Study† | 2010 | 1991–1993 | Max. 10.0 | 50–59 | 25.5 | 10,602 | M |
| UK, EPIC-Norfolk Study† | 2007 | 1993–1997 | Mean 9.1 | 45–79 | 26.6 | 11,177 | M |
| UK, Scottish Health Cohort Study | 2013 | 1998–2003 | Mean 10.0 | 44.6 | NA | 9,320 | M |
| UK, Million Women Study | 2013 | 1996–2001 | Mean 9.0 | 56.0 | 26.1 | 1,178,939 | W |
| Denmark, Copenhagen General Population Study† | 2014 | 2003–2011 | Median 3.6 | 40–100 | 22.6 | 31,294 | M(−)† |
| Australian, Sax Institute’s 45 and UP Study | 2014 | 2006–2008 | Median 3.4 | 45–103 | NA | 158,546 | Combined |
| Japan, CIRCS† | 2007 | 1975–1987, varies by communities | Median 18.3 | 40–69 | 22.9† | 3,595 | M |
| Japan, JALS | 2010 | 1985–1999, varies by cohorts | Max. 20.0 | 40–89 | 23.0 | 19,760 | M |
| Japan, JPHC Study† | 2008 | 1990–1993 | Mean 9.7 | 40–69 | NA | 43,235 | M |
| Korea, Korea Medical Insurance Corporation Study | 2005 | 1990–1992 | Max. 9.0 | 35–59 | 23.0† | 133,740 | Combined |

1Calculated by authors; *Result from MI; †(-) denotes without metabolic syndrome, (+) with metabolic syndrome. 1ARIC, Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities Study; CIRCS, Circulatory Risk in Communities Study; EPIC-Norfolk, European Prospective Investigation Into Cancer and Nutrition in Norfolk Cohort; JALS, Japan Arteriosclerosis Longitudinal Study; JPHC Study, Japan Public Health Center-Based Study. BMI, body mass index; CAD, coronary artery disease; CHD, coronary heart disease; DM, diabetes; FEV1, forced expiratory volume in 1 second; HC, high cholesterol or dyslipidemia or hypercholesterolemia; HDLC, high-density lipoprotein cholesterol; HTN, hypertension; HRT, hormone replacement therapy; LDLC, low-density lipoprotein cholesterol; NA, not available; M, men; W, women; MI, myocardial infarction; Ref, reference category; RTA, randomized treatment assignments; SBP, systolic blood pressure; TC, total cholesterol; TG, triglyceride. Variables: dr, drinking; edu, education; ex, physical activity or exercise; fhx, family or parental history; hx, history; meno, menopausal status; salary, income or salary; sm, smoking.
Obesity and CVD

been performed in the USA and Europe probably because hemorrhagic stroke is less prevalent. BMI values that showed a significant association with increased incidence of hemorrhagic stroke are in the range 25–30 kg/m² in studies in Asia,15,36–41 and the USA.31 After adjusting for mediators, namely SBP or hypertension, the association became attenuated in most studies.15,40,43 However, there is a study that showed increased hemorrhagic stroke risk in women with factors in studies across the USA,30–32 Europe,15,36–38 and Asia.15,36–41 A few studies found the association only in men or in women in contrast to CAD, adjusting for mediators such as SBP and diabetes significantly attenuated the association in most studies from the USA,30,32 and Europe.34 However, some studies in East Asia,36,39,41,43,44 and Finland35 indicated the associations to be independent of such mediators.

Hemorrhagic Stroke (Table 3) Relatively few studies have been performed in the USA and Europe probably because hemorrhagic stroke is less prevalent. BMI values that showed a significant association with increased incidence of hemorrhagic stroke are in the range 25–30 kg/m² in studies in Asia,15,37–39,41,43,44 and the USA.31 After adjusting for mediators, namely SBP or hypertension, the association became attenuated in most studies.15,40,43 However, there is a study that showed increased hemorrhagic stroke risk in women with

| Country, study name | Model with confounding variables | Model with mediator variables |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                     | Ref | Lowest BMI with association | Variables adjusted | Lowest BMI with association | Variables adjusted |
| USA, Framingham Heart Study12 | <23.8 | 23.8 | Age, sm | 23.8 | Plus TC |
| USA, Nurses’ Health Study17 | 18.5–22.9 | 23.0 | Age, sm, dr, fhx of CHD, meno, HRT, aspirin use | 23.0 | Plus sm, dr, fhx of MI, height, marital status, profession, HRT, saturated fat, trans fat, polyunsaturated fats, folate, vitamin E, total energy, HC, HTN, DM |
| USA, Health Professionals Follow-up Study13 | 18.5–22.9 | 23.0 | Age | 23.0 | Plus sm, dr, fhx of MI, height, marital status, profession, HRT, saturated fat, trans fat, polyunsaturated fats, folate, vitamin E, total energy, HC, HTN, DM |
| USA, Nurses’ Health Study | <24.7 | None | Age, sm, dr, ethnicity, fhx of CHD | <24.7 | None |
| USA, Physicians’ Health Study18 | <22.8 | 25.7 | Age, sm, dr, ex, RTA, fhx of MI, multivitamins, aspirin use | <22.8 | 25.7* |
| USA, Women’s Health Study25 | <25.0 | 25.0 | Age, sm, dr, RTA, parental hx of MI, HRT, dietary factors | <25.0 | 25.0 |
| UK, Renfrew-Paisley Study19 | 18.5–24.9 | 25.0, 25.0* | Age, sm, adjusted FEV1, social class | 25.0, 25.0* |
| UK, British Regional Heart Study14 | 20.0–21.9 | 24.0 | Age, sm, dr, ex, social class | 24.0 |
| Northern Ireland and France, PRIME Cohort Study23 | First quintile | 25.5 | Age, center | None |
| UK, EPIC-Norfolk Study31 | <23.9 | 24.7 | Age | 24.7 |
| UK, Scottish Health Cohort Study29 | 18.5–24.9 | 25.0 | Age, sm, dr, year of survey | 25.0 |
| UK, Million Women Study26 | 22.5–24.9 | 25.0 | Age, sm, dr, ex, social class | 25.0 |
| Denmark, Copenhagen General Population Study22 | 18.5–24.9 | 25.0 | Age, community | 25.0, 25.0* |
| Australian, Sax Institute’s 45 and UP Study16 | 20.0–22.49 | 22.5 | Age, sex, sm, dr, edu, region of residence, salary, health insurance | 25.0, 25.0* |
| Japan, CIRCS23 | <25.0 | 25.0 | Age, community | None |
| Japan, JALS15 | <21.0 | 23.0* | Age, sm, dr | 27.5* |
| Japan, JPHC Study24 | 23.0–24.9 | 30.0, 27.0* | Age | 30.0, 30.0* |
| Korea, Korea Medical Insurance Corporation Study17 | 18.0–19.0 | 23.0 | Age, sex, sm, dr, ex, health insurance | 23.0 |

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YATSUYA H et al.

Table 2. Cohort Studies Reporting an Association of BMI With the Incidence of Ischemic Stroke

| Country, study name | Year of publication | Baseline, year | Follow-up, years | Age, range or Mean, years | BMI, mean, kg/m² | Sample size | Sex |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|------------|-----|
| USA, Nurses’ Health Study | 1997 | 1980 | Max. 12.0 | 34–59 | NA | 93,337 | W |
| USA, Physicians’ Health Study | 2002 | 1982 | Mean 12.5 | 53.1 | 24.9 | 21,414 | M |
| USA, ARIC Study | 2010 | 1987/1989 | Median 16.9 | 45–65 | 27.6 | 7,619 | Black M |
| USA, Women’s Health Study | 2005 | 1993 | Mean 10.0 | ≥45 | 26.0 | 39,053 | W |
| Sweden, Multifactor Primary Prevention Study | 2004 | 1970 | Max. 28.0 | 47–55 | 25.5 | 7,402 | M |
| Sweden, Swedish Women’s Lifestyle and Health Cohort Study | 2006 | 1991–1992 | Mean 11.4 | 30–50 | NA | 45,449 | W |
| Finland, Six Independent Cross-sectional Population Surveys | 2007 | 1972–1997, varies by cohorts | Mean 19.5 | 25–74 | NA | 23,967 | M |
| Japan, CIRCS | 2007 | 1975–1987, varies by community | Median 18.3 | 40–69 | 23.4 | 5,646 | W |
| Japan, JALS | 2010 | 1985–1999, varies by cohort | Max. 20.0 | 40–89 | 24.3 | 5,745 | W |
| Japan, Hisayama Study | 2011 | 1988 | Max. 12.0 | 40–79 | NA | 1,037 | M |
| Japan, JPHC Study | 2011 | 1995–1998/1999 | Median 7.9 | 45–74 | NA | 32,847 | M |
| China, China Stroke Prevention Project | 2013 | 1987 | Max. 11.0 | >35 | NA | 12,560 | M |
| China, China National Hypertension Survey | 2010 | 1991 | Mean 8.3 | ≥40 | 22.6 | 75,655 | M |
| China, Shanghai Women’s Health Study | 2009 | 1996–2000 | Mean 7.3 | 40–70 | 23.9 | 67,083 | W |
| China, Kailuan Study | 2013 | 2006–2007 | Mean 4.0 | 18–98 | 25.0 | 94,744 | Combined |
| Korea, no study name | 2004 | 1986–1990 | Max. 10.0 | 40–64 | 23.1 | 234,863 | M |
| Korea, Korean Prevention Cancer Study | 2008 | 1992–1995 | Max. 13.0 | 30–95 | 23.2 | 439,582 | W* |

1Calculated by authors, *nonsmoker. ARIC, Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities Study; CIRCS, Circulatory Risk in Communities Study; JALS, Japan Arteriosclerosis Longitudinal Study; JPHC Study, Japan Public Health Center-Based Study. BG, blood glucose; BP, blood pressure; FBG, fasting BG; OC, oral contraceptive use. Other abbreviations as in Table 1.

BMI ≥30kg/m² independent of hypertension and diabetes.44

Discussion

We confirmed a global obesity trend that is on the rise, although there are significant variations by sex, regions of the world and countries. Cultural perceptions towards obesity may serve as a possible explanation for the observed sex differences in the distribution. For instance, obesity is seen as a sign of wealth and an important attribute of beauty for women in Africa.45 Women traditionally are expected to stay at home in most of the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and this may have contributed to the observed sex disparity in the prevalence of obesity in the region. East Asian women generally had lower BMI than men and women in other regions, which may be related to social norms (pressure).46–48 These region-sex-ethnicity differences in prevalence may be a clue to the causes of the obesity epidemic. More studies, including qualitative ones that collect individual risk factors and behaviors, are warranted. One of the limitations of comparisons across countries by using international reports such as the one we used (ie, WHO Global Health Observatory Data Repository) would be differences in the survey methods, and data for some countries are estimates modeled using data from other
Obesity and CVD

although there may be lower cutoff for BMI than 25.0 (ie, 23.0), implying that the association of BMI with CVD may be linear. Future studies may provide a more accurate view regarding the threshold by using the same reference and BMI cutoff values.

Variables included in the statistical models varied among studies as well. Models with similar or same variables would be informative when comparing the results to infer differences by ethnicity, sex or other traits of the studied population. Another limitation of the present review is that we only collected studies on BMI. Studies using other obesity measures may have yielded different results.

Also, this was not a systematic review. Information provided here may not be thorough. However, we believe that obesity, however it is measured, significantly increases the risk of CAD and ischemic stroke and probably hemorrhagic stroke.

countries and specific country characteristics. 2

We also found that higher BMI was significantly associated with increased incidence of CAD and ischemic stroke and to a lesser degree with the incidence of hemorrhagic stroke among relatively recent studies included in the review. However, these findings are somewhat inconsistent with old (baseline years being 1960s to 1970s) studies carried out in Japanese 49,50 or in African Americans.51,52 This might be related to the fact that hypertension without being overweight used to constitute most of the cases of hypertension in rural communities in Japan in the 1960s, but it decreased significantly by the 1980s, accompanied by increases in the proportion of hypertension among the overweight.53

BMI cutoff value differed by studies, which precluded definite statement about the threshold. However, BMI ≥25.0 kg/m² would be a reasonable representation of increased CVD risk,
From the viewpoints of public health and preventive medicine, the association of BMI with CAD and ischemic stroke independent of known mediators indicates the importance of controlling or preventing overweight/obesity, because it would benefit us through unknown pathways. Recent trends in rising BMI would likely offset advancing medical and behavioral management of established risk factors, especially hypertension. Because many people still live where medical management is not so available, the global burden of obesity, and moreover, the double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases, will likely increase if this trend continues.

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### Table 3. Cohort Studies Reporting an Association of BMI With the Incidence of Hemorrhagic Stroke

| Country, study name† | Year of publication | Baseline, year | Follow-up, years | Age, range or mean, years | BMI, mean, kg/m² | Sample size | Sex |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-----|
| USA, Nurses’ Health Study* | 1997 | 1980 | Max. 12.0 | 34–59 | NA | 93,337 | W |
| USA, Physicians’ Health Study* | 2002 | 1982 | Mean 12.5 | 34–59 | 23.4 | 21,414 | M |
| USA, Women’s Health Study* | 2005 | 1993 | Mean 10.0 | ≥45 | 26.0 | 39,053 | W |
| Sweden, Multifactor Primary Prevention Study* | 2004 | 1970 | Max. 28.0 | 47–55 | 25.5 | 7,402 | M |
| Sweden, Swedish Women’s Lifestyle and Health Cohort Study* | 2006 | 1991–1992 | Mean 11.4 | 30–50 | NA | 45,449 | W |
| Finland, Six Independent Cross-sectional Population Surveys* | 2007 | 1972–1997, varies by cohort | Mean 19.5 | 25–74 | NA | 23,967 | M |
| Japan, JALS* | 2010 | 1985–1999, varies by cohort | Max. 20.0 | 40–89 | 23.0 | 19,760 | M |
| Japan, Hisayama Study* | 2011 | 1988 | Max. 12.0 | 40–79 | NA | 1,037 | M |
| Japan, JPHC Study* | 2011 | 1995/1998–1999 | Median 7.9 | 45–74 | NA | 32,847 | M |
| China, China Stroke Prevention Project* | 2013 | 1987 | Mean 9.1 | ≥35 | NA | 12,560 | M |
| China, China National Hypertension Survey* | 2010 | 1991 | Mean 8.3 | ≥40 | 22.6 | 75,655 | M |
| China, Shanghai Women’s Health Study* | 2009 | 1996–2000 | Mean 7.3 | 40–70 | 23.9 | 67,083 | W |
| China, Kailuan Study* | 2013 | 2006–2007 | Mean 4.0 | 18–98 | 25.0 | 94,744 | Combined |
| Korea, no study name* | 2004 | 1986–1990 | Max. 10.0 | 40–64 | 23.1 | 234,863 | M |
| Korea, Korean Prevention Cancer Study* | 2008 | 1992–1995 | Max. 13.0 | 30–95 | 23.2 | 439,582 | W* |

†Calculated by authors, *Result from intracerebral hemorrhage; †nonsmoker. CIRCS, Circulatory Risk in Communities Study; JALS, Japan Arteriosclerosis Longitudinal Study; JPHC Study, Japan Public Health Center-Based Study. Abbreviations as in Tables 1,2.

(Table 3 continued the next page.)
| Country, study name                              | Model with confounding variables | Model with mediator variables |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| USA, Nurses’ Health Study<sup>10</sup>         | <21.0                            | None                           |
|                                                | None                             | None                           |
|                                                | Age, sm, dr, ex, OC, meno, HRT, time period, aspirin use, antioxidant score | None                           |
|                                                | None                             | Plus HTN, DM, HC                |
| USA, Physicians’ Health Study<sup>11</sup>     | <23.0                            | 30.0                           |
|                                                | None                             | None                           |
|                                                | Age, sm, dr, ex, hx of angina, fx of MI prior to 60 years of age, RTA | None                           |
|                                                | None                             | Plus hx of HTN, DM, HC          |
| USA, Women’s Health Study<sup>13</sup>         | <20.0                            | None*                          |
|                                                | None                             | None*                          |
|                                                | Age, sm, dr, ex, HRT             | None*                          |
| Sweden, Multifactor Primary Prevention Study<sup>18</sup> | 20.0–22.49                      | None*                          |
|                                                | None*                           | None*                          |
|                                                | Age, sm, ex, ftx of stroke, occupational class, stress | None*                          |
|                                                | None*                           | Plus SBP, HTN treatment, DM, serum TC |
| Sweden, Swedish Women’s Lifestyle and Health Cohort Study<sup>19</sup> | 20.0–24.9                       | None*                          |
|                                                | None*                           | None*                          |
|                                                | Age, sm, dr, edu, age at first birth, use of OC | None*                          |
| Finland, Six Independent Cross-sectional Population Surveys<sup>20</sup> | 18.5–24.9                        | None                          |
|                                                | None                            | None                           |
|                                                | Age, sm, dr, edu, study year, ftx of stroke | None                           |
|                                                | None                            | Plus SBP, TC, hx of DM          |
| Japan, JALS<sup>21</sup>                      | <21.0                            | 27.5                           |
|                                                | 25.0                             | Age, sm, dr                     |
|                                                | None                             | None*                          |
|                                                | None                             | None*                          |
| Japan, Hisayama Study<sup>22</sup>            | <21.0                            | 25.0                           |
|                                                | None                             | Age                            |
|                                                | None                             | None                           |
| Japan, JPHC Study<sup>23</sup>                | 23.0–24.9                        | None*                          |
|                                                | 30.0*                           | Age, study community            |
|                                                | None*                           | None*                          |
|                                                | None*                           | Plus sm, dr, HTN, DM            |
| China, China Stroke Prevention Project<sup>24</sup> | 18.5–24.9                        | None                           |
|                                                | None                            | Age, sm, dr, edu                |
|                                                | None                            | None                           |
|                                                | None                            | Plus hx of DM, HTN heart disease |
| China, China National Hypertension Study<sup>25</sup> | 18.5–24.9                        | None                           |
|                                                | None                            | Age, sm, dr, edu, residence area |
|                                                | None                            | None                           |
|                                                | None                            | Plus hx of DM, HTN heart disease |
| China, Shanghai Women’s Health Study<sup>26</sup> | <21.1                            | 26.6*                          |
|                                                | None                            | Age, sm, dr, edu, occupation, salary, meno, use of OC, HRT, aspirin, intake of saturated fat, vegetables, fruits, sodium |
|                                                | None                            | None                           |
|                                                | None                            | Plus SF, DM, HTN heart disease  |
| China, Kailuan Study<sup>27</sup>             | <22.05                           | 27.7                           |
|                                                | None                            | Age, sex, sm, dr, ex, edu, salary, marital status |
|                                                | None                            | None                           |
| Korean, no study name<sup>28</sup>            | 22.0–23.9                        | 24.0*                          |
|                                                | None                            | Age, sm, dr, ex, salary         |
|                                                | 26.0*                           | None                           |
|                                                | Plus BP, BG, TC                 |
| Korean, Korean Prevention Cancer Study<sup>29</sup> | 18.5–19.9                        | 28.0*                          |
|                                                | None                            | Age, dr, ex                     |
|                                                | None                            | None                           |
|                                                | None                            | Plus FBG, SBP, TC               |

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**Supplementary Files**

**Supplementary File 1**

Figure S1. Bar graphs showing the prevalence of obesity (BMI ≥30 kg/m²) among adults aged ≥20 years in countries of the 6 WHO regions of the world in 2008.

Please find supplementary file(s): http://dx.doi.org/10.1253/circj-CJ-14-0850