Handgrip strength and its prognostic value for mortality in Moscow, Denmark, and England

Oksuzyan, Anna; Demakakos, Panayotes; Shkolnikova, Maria; Thinggaard, Mikael; Vaupel, James W; Christensen, Kaare; Shkolnikov, Vladimir M

Published in:
PLOS ONE

DOI:
10.1371/journal.pone.0182684

Publication date:
2017

Document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Document license
CC BY

Citation for published version (APA):
Oksuzyan, A., Demakakos, P., Shkolnikova, M., Thinggaard, M., Vaupel, J. W., Christensen, K., & Shkolnikov, V. M. (2017). Handgrip strength and its prognostic value for mortality in Moscow, Denmark, and England. PLOS ONE, 12(9), [e0182684]. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0182684

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

• Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Download date: 28. Apr. 2019
Handgrip strength and its prognostic value for mortality in Moscow, Denmark, and England

Anna Oksuzyan, Panayotes Demakakos, Maria Shkolnikova, Mikael Thinggaard, James W. Vaupel, Kaare Christensen, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov

1 Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock, Germany, 2 Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London, London, United Kingdom, 3 Scientific Institute of Pediatry at the Pirogov Moscow Medical University, Moscow, Russian Federation, 4 The Danish Twin Registry, Institute of Public Health, University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark, 5 Max Planck Odense Center on the Biodemography of Aging, Institute of Public Health, Odense, Denmark, 6 Department of Clinical Genetics, Odense University Hospital, Odense, Denmark, 7 Department of Clinical Biochemistry and Pharmacology, Odense University Hospital, Odense, Denmark, 8 National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russian Federation

* oksuzyan@demogr.mpg.de

Abstract

Background
This study compares handgrip strength and its association with mortality across studies conducted in Moscow, Denmark, and England.

Materials
The data collected by the Study of Stress, Aging, and Health in Russia, the Study of Middle-Aged Danish Twins and the Longitudinal Study of Aging Danish Twins, and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing was utilized.

Results
Among the male participants, the age-standardized grip strength was 2 kg and 1 kg lower in Russia than in Denmark and in England, respectively. The age-standardized grip strength among the female participants was 1.9 kg and 1.6 kg lower in Russia than in Denmark and in England, respectively. In Moscow, a one-kilogram increase in grip strength was associated with a 4% (hazard ratio [HR] = 0.96, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 0.94, 0.99) reduction in mortality among men and a 10% (HR = 0.90, 95%CI: 0.86, 0.94) among women. Meanwhile, a one-kilogram increase in grip strength was associated with a 6% (HR = 0.94, 95% CI: 0.93, 0.95) and an 8% (HR = 0.92, 95%CI: 0.90, 0.94) decrease in mortality among Danish men and women, respectively, and with a 2% (HR = 0.98, 95%CI: 0.97, 0.99) and a 3% (HR = 0.97, 95%CI: 0.95, 0.98) reduction in mortality among the English men and women, respectively.

Conclusion
The study suggests that, although absolute grip strength values appear to vary across the Muscovite, Danish, and English samples, the degree to which grip strength is predictive of
mortality is comparable across national populations with diverse socioeconomic and health profiles and life expectancy levels.

Introduction

Handgrip strength has been shown to predict all-cause and cause-specific mortality [1–5], old-age disability [6–8], cognitive decline [9], and hospitalization [10]. Because grip strength has these attributes, and because it is simple and inexpensive to measure, many surveys on health and mortality collect data on grip strength, and provide normative values of grip strength for various populations. However, as the growing literature on normative values suggests that they tend to differ across countries, caution is advised when applying these values internationally [11–15]. A recent systematic literature review of the published normative data for grip strength indicated that the average grip strength is substantially lower in developing regions than in developed countries [16].

Most of the previous international comparisons of grip strength and its prognostic abilities were carried out across countries with low mortality levels [17–19]. However, the results of recent research based on data from 17 countries appear to support the use of grip strength in stratifying the individual risk of death in countries with low to middle levels of economic development [20]. Yet to our knowledge, no previous studies have compared the grip strength levels and their ability to predict the stratification of the individual risk of survival of the Russian population with those of the populations of other countries.

It has been previously shown that the Russian mortality crisis is characterized by extremely high mortality levels from violence, accidents, and alcohol-related causes at working ages; and by high levels of cardiovascular disease (CVD) mortality at middle and older ages [21, 22]. From the mid-1960s to the early 2000s Russia experienced adverse mortality trends particularly in times of the socioeconomic crisis in the early 1990s with a few short-lived interruptions of these downward trends in mid-1980s due to a wide-ranging anti-alcohol campaign by Mikhail Gorbachev and 1995–97 [23, 24]. In 2004–2015, the country experienced improvements in life expectancy, largely due to substantial reductions in mortality from external causes at working ages and circulatory diseases at older ages [22, 25, 26]. Despite these recent gains, there is still a huge 10-year life expectancy gap between Russia and the western countries.

In addition to suffering from excess mortality, Russians have relatively low levels of self-rated health and of physical functioning, especially at older ages [27–30]. However, the existing studies did not show that objectively measured conventional CVD risk factors, e.g. blood pressure and blood lipids, are substantially worse in Russia than they are in low-mortality countries [31–35]. Although the prevalence levels of metabolic syndrome are relatively high among women in Russia, they are still lower than the prevalence levels found among their counterparts in the USA, and they are comparable to the prevalence levels observed in other countries with much lower mortality [36, 37].

Nearly nothing is known about how well Russians perform on grip strength tests relative to other Europeans, or have examined whether grip strength can be used to stratify individual survival risk in the Russian population, as it has in western European (EU) populations. Thus, in the present study we aim to compare the levels of handgrip strength across studies conducted in Moscow, Denmark, and England. We also compare the value of grip strength for predicting mortality in the Russian, Danish, and English populations.
The steady decline in both male and female mortality from CVD and other major causes in the UK resulted in a widening of the life expectancy gap between Russia and the UK over the period from 1970 to 2013, from 5.6 years to 13.9 years among men, and from 1.6 years to 6.5 years among women [22, 26, 38]. In addition, the UK has been shown to have life expectancy levels and causes of death that are close to the EU averages [26], and normative grip strength values that are slightly above the mean levels across 11 EU countries [13, 39]. Relative to other EU countries, Denmark has a below-average life expectancy level [40], but still much higher than in Russia (7.0 years among women and 13.2 years among men in 2013). Denmark has also one of the highest grip strength scores [39].

While it is difficult to predict how similar the prognostic importance of grip strength will prove to be across these three socio-culturally and economically distinct settings, in our study samples we expect to find that the Russians scored worse on grip strength tests than the English, and far worse than the Danes. Considering a strong sex-specific disconnect between health and survival in the Russian population [27, 41], we expect to find a greater male advantage in grip strength in the Russian than in the Danish and the English study samples. In light of previous research showing that grip strength predicts mortality at middle and older ages to similar degrees in both sexes [42, 43], we hypothesize that the predictive power of grip strength will be similar among the men and the women studied in Moscow, Denmark, and England.

Materials and methods

Study populations

The study utilized data collected by the Stress Aging and Health in Russia (SAHR) study, by the Study of Middle-Aged Danish Twins (MADT) and the Longitudinal Study of Aging Danish Twins (LSADT), and by the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA). Detailed descriptions of these studies have been provided elsewhere [44–47].

The SAHR is a prospective population-based cohort study of Muscovites aged 55 and older. The participants were randomly selected from seven epidemiological cohorts who were identified in the Lipid Research Clinics (LRC) and the MONICA studies conducted from the mid-1970s through the 1990s [46, 48]. These cohorts were randomly sampled from two typical districts of Moscow and served as the central source of information about cardiovascular risk factors and their links to mortality in the Russian population [30–32, 35]. Since these epidemiological cohorts consisted primarily of people who were living in Moscow before the mid-1980s, additional participants who had moved to Moscow after 1985 were identified from the Moscow Outpatient Clinics registry and added to the sample. The SAHR baseline survey, which was conducted between December 2006 and June 2009 and had a 66% response rate, included 1,800 participants. Although it is a population-based sample of the Moscow population, the SAHR sample differs in some respects from the entire Russian population. The most important difference is that Moscow has a greater proportion of people with higher education and higher income. The weights by age and education were estimated and are used to bring the SAHR sample closer to the national population for cross-country comparison of levels of grip strength.

Face-to-face interviews and extensive medical examinations were performed, mainly at the hospital; although a small share (8%) of the participants who were unable or reluctant to come to the hospital were interviewed at home using the hospital protocol. A substantial portion of the SAHR questionnaire was modeled on the data collection instrument used in the LSADT. The analytical sample consisted of 1,781 (54% women), after five individuals were excluded because they were not between the ages of 55 and 89, and 14 individuals were excluded because of missing data on grip strength.
Eligible participants from the MADT and the LSADT were identified through the Danish Twin Register, which is the oldest twin register worldwide [49, 50]. The MADT represented a random sample of 120 twin pairs from each birth year between 1931 and 1952, and who were thus aged 45–68 in 1998 when the baseline assessment was carried out. Of these 5280 individual twins in the sampling framework, 90 died before the time the survey was undertaken, and 4314 (83%) of the 5190 surviving twins participated in a personal interview and a health examination.

The LSADT covers twins born between 1909 and 1930. The intake survey included twins who were aged 75 or older and were living in Denmark in January 1995. Follow-up waves were conducted every second year until 2005, and new participants aged 70 or older were added in 1997, 1999, and 2001. Because the LSADT data on grip strength were first collected in the second follow-up survey in 1999, for our analysis we considered only the LSADT survey data from 1999 for existing participants and the survey data from 2001 for newly added participants (n = 2,769). After excluding 1,942 individuals who were not in the 55–89 age range at the intake examination and 354 individuals for whom grip strength measurements are missing from the combined MADT and LSADT participants (n = 7,483), our study sample consisted of 5,187 twins (2,688, or 52% of whom were women). Although the age distributions of their study populations differed slightly, the MADT and the LSADT are comparable in terms of their design, implementation, and data collection instruments. The data collection in each survey wave was carried out at the participants' homes, and no exclusion criteria were used to select eligible respondents. If an individual refused to or was unable to participate in the face-to-face interview, a proxy respondent, usually a close relative, was sought. The response rates at the baseline surveys were 83% in the MADT and 77% in the LSADT [44, 45].

The respondents of the baseline LSADT were similar to the non-respondents in terms of age distribution, zygosity, and early hospitalizations in 1977–94 [44]; although women who had been hospitalized within the last two years and women who had been using prescription medicine within the six months before and after the intake surveys were slightly overrepresented in the surveys [51]. Previous research in Denmark, Sweden, and the USA has indicated that twins are representative of the general population with respect to all-cause and cardiovascular mortality; morbidity due to diabetes, cancer, and CVD; and lifestyle characteristics [52–56].

The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) is a prospective study of community-dwelling residents of England aged 50 or older. At its launch in 2002–03, the ELSA had a nationally representative sample of 11,391 participants. The participants were recruited from nationally representative samples that had been used earlier by the Health Survey for England, and were selected through a multi-staged stratified random probability design. A detailed profile of the ELSA can be found at: http://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/. The ELSA collects interview and health examination data at regular two- and four-year intervals, respectively. The first wave of health examination data was collected during the first follow-up in 2004–05. The analytical sample consisted of 5,852 individuals (3,084, or 53% of whom were women) who were selected among the 7,666 individuals who consented to take part in a health examination in 2004–05 (out of an initial sample of 8,780 individuals who took part in the first wave of follow-up interviews in 2004–05), and after 704 participants were excluded because they were outside of the 55–89 age range, and 1,114 individuals were excluded because of missing or incomplete data. Among all of the individuals eligible to participate, the response rate in the first follow-up examination in 2004–05 was 82%. The response rate for the health examination was 71% among all of the individuals who were eligible to participate in the first follow-up in 2004–05, and was 88% among all of the individuals who were interviewed in the first follow-up in 2004–05 [47, 57].
Grip strength

In all three settings, grip strength in kilograms was measured by using a Smedley dynamometer (TTM; Tokyo, Japan), with the upper arm being held against the trunk and the elbow in a 90-degree flexion [15, 46](see http://bit.ly/1TeAJwU). Three trials with brief pauses were performed for each hand, and the subjects are encouraged to exert the maximal effort. The participants who made fewer than three attempts, or for whom there was a difference of 20 kg or more between the two measures, were excluded. The maximal handgrip strength of six measures was used in the present analyses.

The percentage of missing observations on grip strength due to the exclusion criteria and proxy respondents was 5.8%. In the Danish surveys, missing values on grip strength were related to being a woman, being older, reporting poor general health, and having lower cognitive functioning as measured by an immediate recall test. Information on grip strength was missing for 14 individuals (0.8%) in the SAHR, 354 twins in the Danish samples (4.7% of all of the 7,483 intake participants), and 113 individuals in the ELSA (1.5% of the 7,666 individuals who participated in the health examination in 2004–05).

Potential confounders

In the Danish surveys, height and weight were collected through self-reports. In the SAHR, a wall-mounted stadiometer and calibrated scales were used to measure body height and weight, respectively. In the ELSA, nurses measured the participants’ weight without shoes and any bulky clothing using a portable stadiometer, and their standing maximum height in the Frankfort plane using a portable electronic scale.

In all three studies, the participants’ educational level was categorized as primary, secondary/middle, or high. In the Danish surveys the participants’ educational level was ascertained by asking them two questions: one about the type of elementary school they attended, and another about the level of vocational education they received after leaving elementary school. In the SAHR similar information about the participants’ educational level was collected using one question. The ELSA collected information on educational attainment, which was used to derive the education variable. Individuals with foreign educational qualifications were excluded from the present analyses.

Smoking status was defined as never smoker, former smoker, or current smoker. Cognitive function was assessed using a recall test that asked participants to recall immediately a list of 12 nouns (in the SAHR and the LSADT) or 10 words (in the ELSA) [58, 59]. The total number of correctly recalled words was computed as a total score. To assess their history of chronic diseases and conditions, the participants were asked whether they had been ever told by a doctor that they had any of a list of diseases, with the response options being “no,” “have had,” and “have now” in the SAHR and the LSADT 1999 and 2001; and “yes” and “no” in the LSADT 1995 and 1997. The number of chronic conditions was calculated on the basis of this list of 14 conditions (diabetes, chronic bronchitis, Parkinson’s disease, cancer, stroke, myocardial infarction, angina, arrhythmia, hypertension, heart failure, hyperthyroidism, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis, and asthma). In the ELSA, no information on thyroid disease was collected.

Mortality follow-up

To ensure that the maximum length of the follow-up in the three study populations was similar, vital status was ascertained through January 2014 in Moscow; through January 1, 2006, in Denmark via the linkage to the Central Personal Register; and through February 2013 in the...
ELSA. The average follow-up time was 6.2 years (range: 0.01, 7.21) in Moscow, 5.9 years (range: 0.01, 7.19) in the MADT and the LSADT, and 7.5 years in the ELSA. Due to the additional exclusion of individuals with missing values on confounders, the analytical sample for the survival analysis consisted of 1,739 participants (956 women, 55%) in Moscow, 5,041 (2,619 women, 52%) participants in Denmark, and 5,852 (3,084 women, 53%) participants in England. By the end of the follow-up period, there were 288 deaths (17% of the study sample, 192 (67%) men) in the SAHR, 974 (19% of the study sample, 532 (55%) men) deaths in the MADT and the LSADT, and 925 (16%, 518 (56%) men) deaths in the ELSA.

Statistical analysis

Since the age distribution differed across the studies, we restricted the age range in our analysis to 55–89. We performed direct age standardization using the standard European population in order to compare overall grip strength across the countries [60, 61]. In the cross-country comparison of grip strength, we used post-stratification weights that adjust for differences in age and education (within each sex) between the sample and the Russian population (based on the 2002 census). The survival analysis was based on unweighted data.

Cox proportional hazard regression models were used to estimate the change in mortality for every kilogram change in grip strength in the total and sex-specific samples. In all of the models we used age as the time scale, and assessed the risk from the age at the measurement of grip strength to the age at death or the end of the follow-up, whichever came first. Adjustments were made for height, weight, education, and smoking status. A sensitivity analysis was performed by adding to the model immediate recall, a number of chronic conditions, or self-rated health.

A two-tailed p-value of less than 0.05 was considered to be significant. All of the analyses were performed using STATA, version 14.0 [62]. The proportional hazards assumption for each covariate was tested on the basis of Schoenfeld residuals after fitting a model. To account for within-twin-pair similarity, robust standard errors were estimated that allow clustering within twin pair and that assume independence of each pair [63].

The study involves secondary data analysis of existing survey data. The LSADT and the MADT were approved by the ethical committee assigned through the Danish National Committee on Biomedical Research and the Danish Data Protection Agency. The SAHR was approved by the Ethical Committee of the State Research Centre for Preventive Medicine, Moscow, Russia; and by the Institutional Review Board at Duke University, Durham, USA. Ethical approval for all of the ELSA waves was granted by the National Research Ethics Service.

Results

Table 1 shows characteristics of the SAHR, the MADT, the LSADT, and the ELSA samples. On average Muscovite women were heavier than Danish and English women, and Muscovite men and women were older and more educated than their Danish and English counterparts. It should be noted, however, that the comparison of education levels across different settings should be done with caution as similar educational levels may have different definitions and may imply different levels of wealth and prestige within each country. The percentages of women who were never smokers and the percentage of participants who had at least one chronic disease were much higher in Moscow than in Denmark and England.

The men in Moscow had lower levels of grip strength than the men in Denmark except at the ages 80–89 years. At all ages, except 80 year and above, Muscovite men performed somewhat worse than their English counterparts. The corresponding gap was statistically significant.
for the ages 70–74 years and for all ages combined (Table 2 and Fig 1). The women in Moscow had substantially less grip strength than the women in Denmark and England at all ages, except in the age groups 80–84 and 85–89. The age-standardized grip strength among the male SAHR participants was about 2 kg and 1 kg lower than that of the Danish male twin participants and the ELSA male participants, respectively. The age-standardized grip strength of the women in Moscow was 1.9 kg lower than that of the women in Denmark, and was 1.6 kg lower than that of the women in England. The cross-country gaps became 0.2 kg greater when the high educational levels of the Muscovite sample were accounted for. The gender difference in grip strength favoring men was substantial, and was similar across the three settings: 16.3 kg in the SAHR, 16.4 kg in the MADT and the LSADT, and 15.7 kg in the ELSA.

Table 3 presents the hazard ratios (HRs) for grip strength in total and sex-specific samples for Moscow, Denmark, and England. In the base model adjusted for gender, height and weight, a one-kilogram increase in grip strength was associated with a 5% (hazard ratio [HR] = 0.95, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 0.93, 0.96), a 6% (HR = 0.94, 95%CI: 0.93, 0.95), and a 3% (HR = 0.97, 95% CI: 0.96, 0.98) mortality reduction in the Moscow, Danish, and English total samples, respectively (Table 3). A one-kilogram increase in grip strength was associated with a 4% (HR = 0.96, 95%CI: 0.94, 0.98) and a 10% (HR = 0.90, 95% CI: 0.86, 0.94) reduction in mortality among the Russian men and women, respectively (Table 3). Similarly, HR of mortality per one-kilogram increase in grip strength was 0.94 (95% CI: 0.93, 0.95) among the Danish men and 0.93 (95% CI: 0.91, 0.95) among the Danish women.

The predictive ability of grip strength was slightly lower in the ELSA: it was 3% (HR = 0.96, 95% CI: 0.96, 0.99) among the men and 4% (HR = 0.96, 95%CI: 0.94, 0.98) among the women. The predictive value of grip strength remained essentially unchanged in all three settings after successive adjustments were made for education and smoking (Model 2, Table 3 and Fig 2), as

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the Muscovite, Danish, and English samples.

|                      | SAHR    | MADT and LSADT | ELSA    |
|----------------------|---------|----------------|---------|
|                      | Men     | Women          | Men     | Women          | Men     | Women          |
| N                    | 835     | 960            | 3585    | 3898           | 2768    | 3084           |
| Mean (SE)            | 69.3 (0.28) | 68.2 (0.23)  | 64.5 (0.19) | 66.4 (0.20)  | 66.9 (0.16) | 67.4 (0.16)  |
| Age                  |         |                |         |                |         |                |
| Height (cm)          | 834     | 958            | 2620    | 2910           | 2768    | 3084           |
| Weight (kg)          | 834     | 958            | 2616    | 2894           | 2768    | 3084           |
| Education            |         |                |         |                |         |                |
| Primary              | 94      | 73             | 789     | 1488           | 951     | 1512           |
| Secondary            | 326     | 106            | 1246    | 857            | 930     | 890            |
| High                 | 389     | 108            | 506     | 516            | 887     | 682            |
| Smoking status       |         |                |         |                |         |                |
| Never smoked         | 279     | 773            | 518     | 1250           | 951     | 1512           |
| Ex-smoker            | 342     | 106            | 1079    | 765            | 930     | 890            |
| Current smoker       | 212     | 81             | 1021    | 893            | 887     | 682            |
| No. of chronic conditions |       |                |         |                |         |                |
| None                 | 98      | 56             | 1274    | 1200           | 709     | 681            |
| 1                    | 159     | 120            | 671     | 876            | 871     | 940            |
| 2                    | 162     | 193            | 379     | 482            | 650     | 756            |
| 3+                   | 412     | 590            | 299     | 358            | 538     | 707            |

* N–sample size, SE–standard error, SAHR–Study of Stress, Aging, and Health in Russia, MADT–the Study of Middle-Aged Danish Twins, LSADT–the Longitudinal Study of Aging Danish Twins, ELSA–the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0182684.t001
well as when cognitive functioning, the number of chronic conditions, and self-rated health were included into the models (S1 and S2 Tables). The associations between grip strength and mortality were similar among the men and the women in Denmark and in England, while in Moscow the reduction in mortality for grip strength per one-kilogram increase was larger among the women than among the men.

Discussion

The results of the present study suggest that the grip strength levels of the study participants in Moscow were lower than those of the study participants in Denmark and in England, and this disadvantage was more pronounced at younger than at older ages. These findings point toward possible influence of mortality selection, suggesting that in a population exposed to much higher mortality, such as Moscow, survivors to old ages are becoming relatively stronger compared to lower mortality populations. It has previously been shown that Danish men and women have very high scores on grip strength test at middle and older ages [17, 64]. Genetic
factors and gene-environment interactions have been suggested as possible explanations for cross-country differences in muscle strength. The study participants in Moscow had lower grip strength than their counterparts in most of the countries included in the Survey of Health.

Fig 1. Cross-sectional age trajectories of grip strength in Moscow, Denmark, and England. 

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0182684.g001

Table 3. Mortality per 1-kg increase in grip strength in Moscow, Denmark, and England.

|                  | SAHRa | MADT and LSADT | ELSA  |
|------------------|-------|---------------|-------|
|                  | HR    | 95%CI         | p-value | HR  | 95%CI         | p-value | HR  | 95%CI         | p-value |
| Total sample     |       |               |         |     |               |         |     |               |         |
| Model 1b         |       |               |         |     |               |         |     |               |         |
| Grip             | 0.95  | 0.93 0.96     | <0.001  | 0.94| 0.93 0.95     | <0.001  | 0.97| 0.96 0.98     | <0.001  |
| Model 2          |       |               |         |     |               |         |     |               |         |
| Grip             | 0.95  | 0.94 0.97     | <0.001  | 0.94| 0.93 0.95     | <0.001  | 0.98| 0.97 0.99     | <0.001  |
| Men              |       |               |         |     |               |         |     |               |         |
| Model 1          |       |               |         |     |               |         |     |               |         |
| Grip             | 0.96  | 0.94 0.98     | <0.001  | 0.94| 0.93 0.95     | <0.001  | 0.97| 0.96 0.99     | <0.001  |
| Model 2          |       |               |         |     |               |         |     |               |         |
| Grip             | 0.96  | 0.94 0.99     | <0.001  | 0.94| 0.93 0.95     | <0.001  | 0.98| 0.97 0.99     | <0.001  |
| Women            |       |               |         |     |               |         |     |               |         |
| Model 1          |       |               |         |     |               |         |     |               |         |
| Grip             | 0.90  | 0.86 0.94     | <0.001  | 0.93| 0.91 0.95     | <0.001  | 0.96| 0.94 0.98     | <0.001  |
| Model 2          |       |               |         |     |               |         |     |               |         |
| Grip             | 0.90  | 0.86 0.94     | <0.001  | 0.92| 0.90 0.94     | <0.001  | 0.97| 0.95 0.98     | <0.001  |

aHR–hazard ratio, CI–confidence interval, SAHR–Study of Stress, Aging, and Health in Russia, MADT–the Study of Middle-Aged Danish Twins, LSADT–the Longitudinal Study of Aging Danish Twins, ELSA–the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing

bModel 1: Grip + height, weight, and gender (in the total sample only); Model 2: Grip + height, weight, education, smoking status, and gender (in the total sample only)

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0182684.t003

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0182684.t003
Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE)[39]. According to the SHARE data, only the participants in Spain and in Italy had similar or slightly lower levels of grip strength than the participants in Moscow. Our finding that the SAHR participants had less grip strength than the LSADT, the MADT, and the ELSA participants is in line with the results of previous studies that showed that people living in Russia were in worse reported health than people living in Central and Eastern European countries or in Sweden [28–30].

A recent study in the North-West Russia has attempted to provide normative values of grip strength in the Russian population [65]. The levels of grip strength indicated among SAHR participants are lower than those reported by this study [65]. It should be noted, however, the study has a very small sample of 611 people aged 65 years and older selected from one polyclinic and utilized a non-standard dynamometer. The authors provide no information about the recruitment procedure and response rate, as well as they do not report or adjust for educational composition of the sample.

Interestingly, we found that the Danish men and women had more grip strength than their English counterparts, even though life expectancy was higher in the UK than in Denmark (by
0.97 years for men and by 0.76 years for women) in 2005, when wave 2 of the ELSA was initiated [38]. This outcome is in line with the findings of a recent study conducted in 13 European countries and in the United States showing that the countries with the highest life expectancy at age 80 are not necessarily the countries with better health [66]. The results from the SHARE study demonstrate that there is a clear increase in grip strength levels from the south to the north of Europe that does not correspond with the current geographical mortality patterns at older ages [39]. Taken together, these findings suggest that the correlation across countries between grip strength and life expectancy is rather weak.

Our analyses showed that the mortality reduction per one-kilogram increase in grip strength in the male samples was slightly higher in Denmark than in the other countries, and was lowest in England. In the female samples, the mortality reduction per one-kilogram increase in grip strength was slightly higher in Moscow than in the other countries, and was again lowest England. However, the overlapping 95% CIs suggest that even though there were substantial differences between Russia and Denmark in terms of their grip strength levels, their economic development levels, their health care and social systems, and their cultures; the associations between grip strength and mortality were similar in Moscow and Denmark. The associations between grip strength and mortality in England differed slightly from those in Denmark (both men and women) and among the SAHR participants (men only). In the present study, the HRs estimated for the male populations were very close to the HR of 0.97 (95% CI: 0.96, 0.98) per one-kilogram increase of grip strength found in a meta-analysis study [19]. Our results for the ELSA female participants were similar to the estimates provided by Cooper et al., although we found that the mortality reduction was slightly higher among the women in Moscow. These discrepancies may be due to methodological differences, as some of the studies included in the meta-analyses did not provide sex-specific estimates [19].

The study of grip strength in the North-West Russia showed that in the model adjusted for age, sex, and comorbidity the hazard ratio for the lowest decile of maximum grip strength was 1.60 (95% CI: 1.14, 2.24), which is comparable to the estimates found in the SAHR sample (HR = 2.39 95% CI: 1.14, 5.02 analysis not shown here) despite methodological differences between these two studies concerning sample selection, measurement tool, and adjustment for covariates [65].

Our expectation that the gender difference in grip strength would be greater in Moscow than in Denmark or in England was premised on previous findings indicating that women in Moscow are more disadvantaged in terms of their general health, physical functioning, and depression symptomatology than women in Denmark [41]. Surprisingly, we found that the male-female difference in grip strength was similar across the study populations in Moscow, Denmark, and England. This outcome may suggest that the magnitudes of the gender differences in objective health measures are more similar across populations than they are in subjective measures. Furthermore, our finding that the associations between grip strength and mortality are similar among men and women is consistent the results of previous empirical studies on middle-aged and older populations [42, 43]. However, our finding of 95% CIs of hazard ratios for grip strength for the women in Moscow is rather wide due to the small number of deaths, and the male-female difference in the prognostic value of grip strength for mortality may have become more apparent if the follow-up had been longer.

Whether the available country-specific data are comparable is one of the key concerns researchers have when conducting comparison studies. Although the same devices and protocols were used to measure grip strength in the three studies, some portion of the variation in grip strength may be due to differences in the response rates and in the data collection procedures. For example, in Moscow and in Denmark the interviews and the performance tests were conducted in a single day, whereas in England the main interview was followed by a
health examination, which was conducted by a nurse visit. The approach used in England may have resulted in a higher degree of selectivity in the study, which could have to some extent influenced the levels and predictive ability of grip strength. Although reported chronic conditions were much more prevalent among the participants in Moscow than among the participants in Denmark or in England, the adjustments for cognitive function and number of chronic conditions barely modified the predictive ability of grip strength in the three study settings (S1 Table). It is possible that some residual confounding may have affected this association, despite our attempts to adjust for several potential confounders. Furthermore, due to insufficient power it was not possible to investigate the question of whether the association between grip strength and mortality changes with age. However, a recent study conducted in Norway showed that the associations were similar across age groups and in both genders[42].

Our findings are based on a large-population-based sample of the general Moscow population. Although weighting allows adjusting for the differences in the educational structure between the study sample and the total Russian population, it is still questionable how generalizable are our results to Russia as a whole.

The present study adds to a growing body of research evidence indicating that grip strength is a powerful predictor of mortality across individuals, and that its predictive abilities are comparable across countries with diverse socioeconomic conditions, cultural circumstances, health profiles, and life expectancy levels. Despite the apparent differences in levels of grip strength, we found that the grip strength-mortality associations in Moscow were quite similar to those in Denmark and in England.

Supporting information

S1 Table. Hazard ratios for grip strength per 1-kg increase in total and gender-specific samples of Muscovite, Danish, English populations.

S2 Table. Hazard ratios for grip strength per 1-kg increase in men and women in Moscow, Denmark, and England.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Evgeny Andreev at the New Economic School in Moscow and to Alexander Deev at the National Research Center for Preventive Medicine (NRCPM) in Moscow for their data cleaning and processing efforts; and to Svetlana Shalnova at the NRCPM for her major contributions to the collection, handling, and processing of various biological markers, and for her help in ensuring the quality of these data.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Anna Oksuzyan, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov.

Data curation: Anna Oksuzyan, Panayotes Demakakos, Maria Shkolnikova, Mikael Thinggaard, Kaare Christensen, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov.

Formal analysis: Anna Oksuzyan, Panayotes Demakakos, Mikael Thinggaard.

Funding acquisition: Maria Shkolnikova, James W. Vaupel, Kaare Christensen, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov.

Methodology: Anna Oksuzyan, Mikael Thinggaard, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov.
Project administration: Maria Shkolnikova, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov.

Resources: Maria Shkolnikova, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov.

Supervision: James W. Vaupel, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov.

Visualization: Anna Oksuzyan.

Writing – original draft: Anna Oksuzyan, Panayotes Demakakos, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov.

Writing – review & editing: Anna Oksuzyan, Panayotes Demakakos, Maria Shkolnikova, Mikael Thinggaard, James W. Vaupel, Kaare Christensen, Vladimir M. Shkolnikov.

References

1. Fujita Y, Nakamura Y, Hiraoka J, Kobayashi K, Sakata K, Nagai M, et al. Physical-strength tests and mortality among visitors to health-promotion centers in Japan. Journal of Clinical Epidemiology. 1995; 48(11):1349–59. PMID: 7490598

2. Rantanen T, Harris T, Leveille SG, Visser M, Foley D, Masaki K, et al. Muscle strength and body mass index as long-term predictors of mortality in initially healthy men. J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci. 2000; 55(3):M168–73. PMID: 10795731

3. Ortega FB, Silventoinen K, Tyynelä P, Rasmussen F. Muscular strength in male adolescents and premature death: cohort study of one million participants 2012-2013. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ameage.2014.06.002 PMID: 25143248

4. Ling CHY, Taekema D, de Craen AJM, Gussekloo J, Westendorp RGG, Maier AB. Handgrip strength and mortality in the oldest old population: the Leiden 85-plus study. Canadian Medical Association Journal. 2010; 182(5):429–35. https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.091278 PMID: 17398228

5. Sasaki H, Kasagi F, Yamada M, Fujita S. Grip strength predicts cause-specific mortality in middle-aged and elderly persons. The American Journal of Medicine. 2007; 120(4):337–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2006.04.018 PMID: 17028113

6. Rantanen T, Gurulik JM, Foley D, Masaki K, Leveille S, Curb JD, et al. Midlife hand grip strength as a predictor of old age disability. JAMA. 1999; 281(6):558–60. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.281.6.558 PMID: 10022113

7. Giampaoli S, Ferrucci L, Cecchi F, Lo Noce C, Poce A, Dima F, et al. Hand-grip strength predicts incident disability in non-disabled older men. Age Ageing. 1999; 28(3):283–8. https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/28.3.283 PMID: 10475865

8. Taekema DG, Gussekloo J, Maier AB, Westendorp RGG, de Craen AJM. Handgrip strength as a predictor of functional, psychological and social health. A prospective population-based study among the oldest-old. Age and Ageing. 2010; 39(3):331–7. https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afq022 PMID: 20219767

9. Alfaro-Acha A, Snih SA, Raji MA, Kuo Y-F, Markides KS, Ottenbacher KJ. Handgrip Strength and Cognitive Decline in Older Mexican Americans. The Journals of Gerontology Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences. 2006; 61(8):859–65.

10. Cawthon PM, Fox KM, Gandra SR, Delmonico MJ, Chiou CF, Anthony MS, et al. Do muscle mass, muscle density, strength, and physical function similarly influence risk of hospitalization in older adults? Journal of the American Geriatrics Society. 2009; 57(8):1411–9. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-5415.2009.02366.x PMID: 19682143

11. Kamarul T, Ahmad TS, Loh WY. Hand grip strength in the adult Malaysian population. Journal of orthopaedic surgery (Hong Kong). 2006; 14(2):172–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/230949900601400213 PMID: 16914783.

12. Bohannon RW, Peolsson A, Massy-Westrop N, Desrosiers J, Bear-Lehman J. Reference values for adult grip strength measured with a Jamar dynamometer: a descriptive meta-analysis. Physiotherapy. 2006; 92(1):11–5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physio.2005.05.003

13. Dodds RM, Syddall HE, Cooper R, Benzeval M, Deary IJ, Dennison EM, et al. Grip strength across the life course: normative data from twelve British studies. PLoS ONE. 2014; 9(12):e113637. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0113637 PMID: 25474696

14. Ribom EL, Mellström D, Ljunggren Ö, Karlsson MK. Population-based reference values of handgrip strength and functional tests of muscle strength and balance in men aged 70–80 years. Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics. 2011; 53(2):e114–e7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.archger.2010.07.005 PMID: 20708281

15. Frederiksen H, Hjelmbo J, Mortensen J, McGue M, Vaupel JW, Christensen K. Age trajectories of grip strength: Cross-sectional and longitudinal data among 8,342 Danes aged 46 to 102. Annals of Epidemiology. 2006; 16(7):554–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepidemi.2005.10.006 PMID: 16406245
22. Grigoriev P, Meslé F, Shkolnikov VM, Andreev E, Fihel A, Pechholdova M, et al. The Recent Mortality Decline in Russia: The Story So Far. International Network for the History of Public Health; 2004. Special Collection 2:45–70.

23. Shkolnikov VM, Andreev EM, Leon DA, McKee M, Meslé F, Vallin J. Mortality Reversal in Russia: The Challenge and the Opportunity. Population and Development Review. 2004; 30(3):471–80. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2004.00652.x

24. Bobak M, Kristenson M, Pikhart H, Marmot M. Life span and disability: a cross sectional comparison of Russian and Swedish community based data. BMJ. 2004; 329(7469):676. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.38202.667130.55

25. Bobak M, Richards M, Malutina S, Kubinova R, Peasey A, Pikhart H, et al. Association between Year of Birth and Cognitive Functions in Russia and the Czech Republic: Cross-Sectional Results of the HAPIEE Study. Neuroepidemiology. 2009; 33(3):231–9. https://doi.org/10.1159/000229777 PMID: 19641328

26. Hoff A. Population Ageing in Central and Eastern Europe: Societal and Policy Implications: Ashgate; 2011.

27. Dennis BH, Zhukovsky GS, Shestov DB, Davis CE, Deev AD, Kim H, et al. The Association of Education with Coronary Heart Disease Mortality in the USSR Lipid Research Clinics Study. International Journal of Epidemiology. 1993; 22(3):420–7. https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/22.3.420

28. Shvetsova O, Oganov RG, Williams DH, Irving SH, Abernathy JR, Deev AD, et al. Association of high-density-lipoprotein cholesterol with mortality and other risk factors for major chronic noncommunicable diseases in samples of US and Russian men. Annals of Epidemiology. 1995; 5(3):179–85. https://doi.org/10.1016/1047-2797(94)00104-2 PMID: 7606306

29. Sidorenkov O, Nilsson O, Breen T, Martlushov S, Arkhipovsky VL, Gribkovski AM. Prevalence of the metabolic syndrome and its components in Northwest Russia: the Arkhangelsk study. BMC Public Health. 2010; 10(1):23. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-10-23 PMID: 2085638

16. Dodds RM, Syddall HE, Cooper R, Kuh D, Cooper C, Sayer AA. Global variation in grip strength: a systematic review and meta-analysis of normative data. Age and Ageing. 2016. https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afv192 PMID: 26790455

17. Andersen-Ranberg K, Petersen I, Frederiksen H, Mackenbach J, Christensen K. Cross-national differences in grip strength among 50+ year-old Europeans: results from the SHARE study. Eur J Ageing. 2009; 6:227–36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-009-0128-6 PMID: 28796606

18. Oksuzyan A, Crimmins E, Saito Y, O’Rand A, Vaupel JW, Christensen K. Cross-national comparison of sex differences in health and mortality in Denmark, Japan and the US. Eur J Epidemiol. 2010; 25(7):471–80. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10654-010-9460-6 PMID: 20495953.
Grip strength in Moscow, Denmark, and England

37. Metelskaya VA, Shkolnikova MA, Shalnova SA, Andreev EM, Deev AD, Jdanov DA, et al. Prevalence, components, and correlates of metabolic syndrome (MetS) among elderly Muscovites. Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics. 2012; 55(2):231–7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.archger.2011.09.005 PMID: 21955584

38. Human Mortality Database. University of California, Berkeley and Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research. (www.mortality.org). [Internet]. [cited 08.02.2016].

39. Andersen-Ranberg K, Petersen I, Frederiksen H, Mackenbach JP, Christensen K. Cross-national differences in grip strength among 50+ year-old Europeans: results from the SHARE study. Eur J Ageing. 2009; 6. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-009-0128-6 PMID: 28798606

40. Jarner SF, Kryger EM, Dengsoe C. The evolution of death rates and life expectancy in Denmark. Scandinavian Actuarial Journal. 2008;(2–3):147–73.

41. Oksuzyan A, Shkolnikova M, Vaupel JW, Christensen K, Shkolnikov VM. Sex differences in health and mortality in Moscow and Denmark. Eur J Epidemiol. 2014; 29(4):243–52. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10654-014-9893-4 PMID: 24668060

42. Strand BH, Cooper R, Bergland A, Jørgensen L, Schirmer H, Skirbekk V, et al. The association of grip strength from midlife onwards with all-cause and cause-specific mortality over 17 years of follow-up in the Tromsø Study. Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health. 2016. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2015-206776 PMID: 20453156

43. Oksuzyan A, Maier H, McGue M, Vaupel JW, Christensen K. Sex Differences in the Level and Rate of Change of Physical Function and Grip Strength in the Danish 1905-Cohort Study. Journal of Aging and Health. 2010; 22:589–610. https://doi.org/10.1177/089826431032090684 PMID: 20405842.

44. Christensen K, Holm NV, McGue M, Corder L, Vaupel JW. A Danish population-based twin study on general health in the elderly. J Aging Health. 1999; 11(1):49–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/089826439901100103 PMID: 10848141

45. Gaist D, Bathum L, Skytte A, Jensen TK, McGue M, Vaupel JW, et al. Strength and anthropometric measures in identical and fraternal twins: no evidence of masculinization of females with male co-twins. Epidemiology. 2000; 11(3):340–3. PMID: 10784255.

46. Shkolnikova M, Shalnova S, Shkolnikov V, Metelskaya V, Deev A, Andreev E, et al. Biological mechanisms of disease and death in Moscow: rationale and design of the survey on Stress Aging and Health in Russia (SAHR). BMC Public Health. 2009; 9(1):293. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-9-293 PMID: 19678931

47. Sen A. Poverty and famines: an essay on entitlement and deprivation: Oxford university press; 1981.

48. Glei DA, Goldman N, Shkolnikov VM, Jdanov D, Shalnova S, Shkolnikova M, et al. To what extent do biomarkers account for the large social disparities in health in Moscow? Social Science & Medicine. 2013; 77(0):164–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.11.022

49. Skytte A, Christiansen L, Kyvik KO, Boedker FL, Hvidberg L, Petersen I, et al. The Danish Twin Registry: Linking Surveys, National Registers, and Biological Information. Twin Research and Human Genetics. 2012;FirstView:1–8. https://doi.org/10.1017/thg.2012.77 PMID: 23084092

50. Skytte A, Kyvik K, Holm NV, Vaupel JW, Christensen K. The Danish Twin Registry: 127 birth cohorts of twins. Twin Res. 2002; 5(5):352–7. https://doi.org/10.1375/13690520232090684 PMID: 12537858.

51. Oksuzyan A, Petersen I, Stovring H, Bingley P, Vaupel JW, Christensen K. The male-female health-survival paradox: A survey and register study of the impact of sex-specific selection and information bias. Annals of Epidemiology. 2009; 19(7):504–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2009.03.014 PMID: 19457685

52. Christensen K, Wieke A, Skytte A, Holm NV, Vaupel JW, Yashin AI. Cardiovascular mortality in twins and the fetal origins hypothesis. Twin Res. 2001; 4(5):344–9. https://doi.org/10.1375/1369052012506 PMID: 11869487.

53. Oeberg S, Cnattingius S, Sandin S, Lichtenstein P, Morley R, Iliaou AN. Twinship influence on morbidity and mortality across the lifespan. International Journal of Epidemiology. 2012; 41(4):1002–9. https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dys067 PMID: 22576952

54. Petersen I, Nielsen MF, Beck-Nielsen H, Christensen K. No evidence of a higher 10 year period prevalence of diabetes among 77,885 twins compared with 215,264 singletons from the Danish birth cohorts 1910–1989. Diabetologia. 2011; 54(8):2016–24. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00125-011-2128-2 PMID: 21487729

55. Andrew T, Hart DJ, Snieder H, Spector TD, MacGregor AJ. Are Twins and Singletons Comparable? A Study of Disease-related and Lifestyle Characteristics in Adult Women. Twin Research and Human Genetics. 2001; 4(6):464–77. https://doi.org/10.1037/twin.4.6.464

56. de Geus EJC, Posthuma D, Ijzerman RG, Boomsma DI. Comparing Blood Pressure of Twins and Their Singleton Siblings: Being a Twin Does Not Affect Adult Blood Pressure. Twin Research. 2001; 4 (5):385–91. https://doi.org/10.1375/1369052012560 PMID: 11869493
57. Cheshire H, Cox K, Lessof C, Taylor R. Retirement, health and relationships of the older population in England: The 2004 English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (Wave 2). Chapter 12. Methodology. England: The Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2006.

58. Guven C, Lee WS. Height and cognitive function at older ages: Is height a useful summary measure of early childhood experiences?. Health Economics. 2013; 22(2):224–33. https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.1827 PMID: 22231981

59. Maurer J. Height, education and later-life cognition in Latin America and the Caribbean. Economics & Human Biology. 2010; 8(2):168–76. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ehb.2010.05.013

60. Eurostat. Revised European Standard Population 2013 http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guidance/health-and-life-events/revised-european-standard-population-2013---2013-esp-/index.html: Office for National Statistics; 2013.

61. Chiang CL. The life table and its applications1984.

62. StataCorp. Stata Statistical Software: Release 14.0. College Station, TX 77845, USA StataCorp LP; 2014.

63. Lin DY, Wei LJ. The Robust Inference for the Cox Proportional Hazards Model. Journal of the American Statistical Association. 1989; 84(408):1074–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/01621459.1989.10478874

64. Jeune B, Skytthe A, Cournil A, Greco V, Gampe J, Berardelli M, et al. Handgrip strength among nonagenarians and centenarians in three European regions. J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci. 2006; 61(7):707–12. PMID: 16870633

65. Turusheva A, Frolova E, Degryse J-M. Age-related normative values for handgrip strength and grip strength’s usefulness as a predictor of mortality and both cognitive and physical decline in older adults in northwest Russia. J Musculoskeletal Neuronal Interact. 2017; 17(1):417–32. PMID: 28250246

66. Solé-Auró A, Crimmins EM. The Oldest Old Health in Europe and the United States. Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics. 2013; 33(1):1–33. https://doi.org/10.1891/0198-6794.33.3