

# 1 in 5 children in Sweden overweight

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University of Gothenburg, Sweden - and Karolinska Institutet have carried out the first ever national study of the prevalence of overweight and obesity in schoolchildren. It reveals that one in five children in Sweden is overweight, and that there is a link between low levels of education and overweight children.

Published in the online version of the journal *Obesity Reviews*, the study was part of a European project, the WHO European [Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative](#), that involved 14 European countries.

"There has previously been a lack of national data on the prevalence of [overweight](#) and obesity in children both in Sweden and internationally," says Agneta Sjöberg, researcher at the Sahlgrenska Academy's Public Health Epidemiology Unit. "This is the first national survey of the prevalence of overweight and obesity among schoolchildren to be carried out in Sweden."

The study involved collecting data from 94 randomly chosen schools from the north to the south of Sweden and included 4,600 children aged 7-9.

"We've now got a national figure for the prevalence of overweight and obesity in 7-9 year olds," says Sjöberg. "17% were overweight, including 3% who were obese."

The researchers also observed differences with lower prevalence of overweight and obesity among children who live in urban areas

compared to those in smaller towns and rural areas.

"This is because more highly-educated people live in the big cities than in smaller towns and rural areas," says Sjöberg. "We found that the difference in the prevalence of overweight and obesity depends largely on the general level of [education](#) in the area where the children live." It is already known that overweight and obesity are more common in children in areas with a low socioeconomic status than in areas where much of the population has a high socioeconomic status.

Overweight and [obesity](#) in childhood often follow children into adulthood and carry a greater risk of poor health in the future. The researchers believe that it is therefore important to identify groups who are at greatest risk and who would therefore benefit from health campaigns. Previous studies have shown that the need for such campaigns is greatest in urban areas where much of the population has a low socioeconomic status.

"On the basis of our results, we think it would also be beneficial to run health campaigns and work preventatively in smaller towns and rural areas," says Sjöberg.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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