

Immigrant women more likely to be overweight during pregnancy

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A new study in the *Journal of Public Health* finds that women in Norway from immigrant backgrounds are more likely to be overweight during pregnancy.

The prevalence of obesity has increased worldwide and is a notable public health challenge. Women who are overweight or obese are more likely to suffer adverse pregnancy outcomes such as gestational diabetes, pregnancy-induced hypertension, preeclampsia, and caesarean delivery. These [women](#) are also more likely to have complications such as congenital anomalies, miscarriages, stillbirths, and preterm births.

Previous studies have shown a higher prevalence of obesity among pregnant [immigrant women](#) in Sweden, Germany, and the United States, compared with non-immigrant women. This observational study was based on Medical Birth Registry Norway and Statistics Norway. The study population consisted of 219,555 deliveries between 2006 and 2014.

Some 22.3% of the women studied were overweight. 12.2% of women were obese. The highest rates of excess weight (30.8%) and obesity (13.5%) were recorded among women from the Middle East and North Africa or with no education (30.7% and 17.2%). Some 39.5% of women studied in sparsely populated counties were overweight and obese, compared to 26.4% for women living in Oslo. Adjusted for country of birth, education level, age, parity, smoking and marital status, women in sparsely populated counties were 65% more likely to be overweight.

Women born in the Middle East and North Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa were most likely to be overweight. Women born in Asia were least likely to be overweight.

There was an inverse association between pre-pregnancy BMI and [education level](#). Women with no education had the highest prevalence (47.9%) of being overweight. In contrast, women with the highest education were least likely (22.3%) to be overweight.

"This study reveals that immigrant women from the Middle East or Africa have a notably higher prevalence of obesity than women from other parts of the world, or women born in the recipient country. Additionally, women with lower education had a higher [prevalence of obesity](#)," said Katariina Laine, head of department of obstetrics at Oslo University Hospital. "Health care providers should take these factors into consideration in planning of prenatal care. Some groups of women may need more follow-up than the healthiest women."

More information: S E Torkildsen et al, Country of birth and county of residence and association with overweight and obesity—a population-based study of 219 555 pregnancies in Norway, *Journal of Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1093/pubmed/fdz001](https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdz001)

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