

Wealthy, educated and urban women more prone to being overweight

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An international study of 55 countries has shown a marked increase in the number of overweight women globally, with wealthy, educated and urban women heavier than their counterparts.

Ph.D. candidate Md. Mehedi Hasan from The University of Queensland's Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR) said the number of overweight women increased in 50 countries in 1990 to 2018, while the number of [underweight](#) women fell in 35.

"The research shows inequalities have widened in many countries," Mr Hasan said.

"Although the prevalence of underweight women declined, this decline has been superseded by the sharp increase in number of overweight women.

"In women aged between 15 and 49, the highest increase in overweight women was in Nepal (12.4 percent) and underweight in Morocco (5.5 percent)."

The research predicted by 2030 in eight of the countries, more than half of their women would be overweight while around 20 percent of women in 22 countries would be underweight.

"Noticeable variations in underweight and overweight were observed across family wealth, women's residence, education and age," Mr Hasan said.

"The probability of eradicating these issues is nearly zero percent for all countries except Egypt, which is on track to eradicate all instances of underweight."

The study also showed malnutrition, which accounts for both under-nutrition and overweight among women of reproductive age, remained a major public health problem worldwide.

Researchers analyzed data from nearly 2.4 million [women](#) from 55 low

and middle-income countries, with the aim of helping policymakers better identify the world's most at-risk population groups.

Team member Associate Professor Abdullah Mamun said he hoped the study led to better allocation of resources and services, considering the vulnerability of the disadvantaged population.

"A [multidisciplinary approach](#) to combatting malnutrition, including changing dietary patterns and lifestyle behaviors is essential to strengthening national policies," Dr. Mamun said.

"To fight the growing problem of obesity, many [middle-income countries](#) are imposing taxes on high energy-dense foods and strengthening industry regulations to reduce consumption of such foods and drinks."

But Mr Hasan said the higher cost of healthier food options could be a burden on people with a lower income.

"Attempts must be made to make healthy foods such as grains, fruits, and vegetables available and affordable for many people by fixing prices, providing subsidies and allocating food vouchers to marginalized and vulnerable populations," he said.

The study was a collaboration between Life Course Centre researchers at ISSR, Mr Hasan, Dr. Yaqoot Fatima, Dr. Tuhin Biswas and Associate Professor Mamun, Associate Professor Ricardo J Soares Magalhaes of UQ's Spatial Epidemiology Laboratory and Professor Saifuddin Ahmed of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The research is published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

More information: Md. Mehedi Hasan et al, Double burden of

malnutrition among women of reproductive age in 55 low- and middle-income countries: progress achieved and opportunities for meeting the global target, *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41430-021-00945-y](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41430-021-00945-y)

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