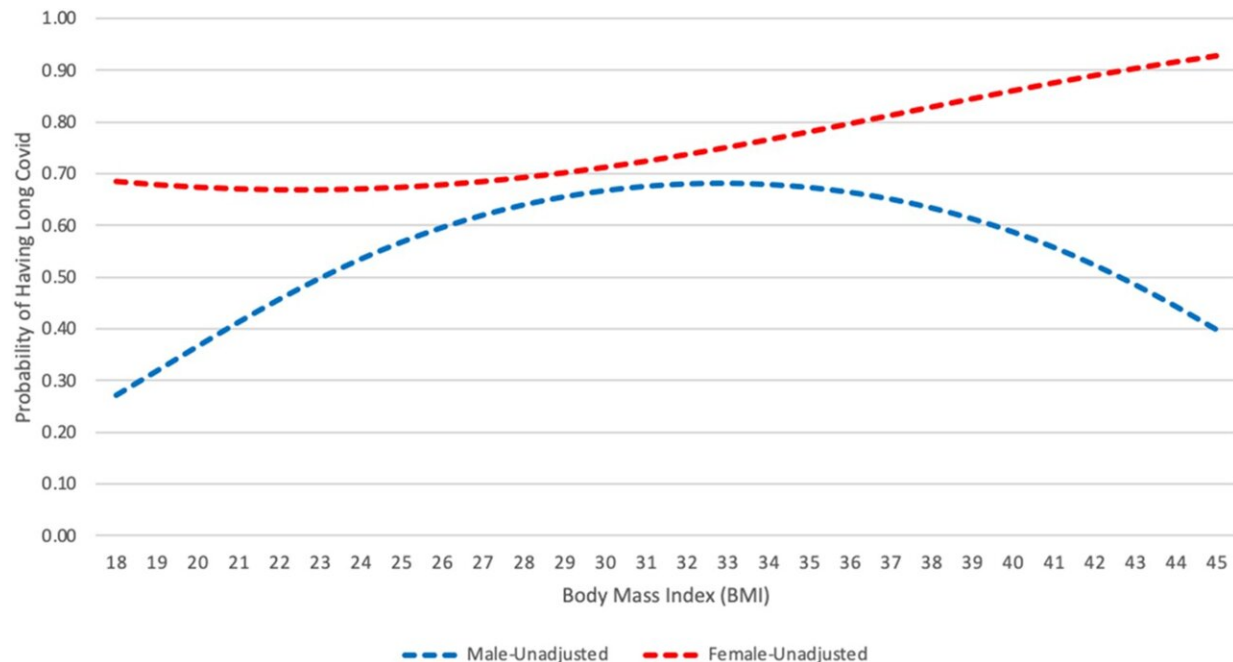


Q&A: Study finds women more likely than men to suffer from long COVID

February 19 2024, by Cam Buchan



Unadjusted relationship between BMI and Long COVID by sex. Credit: *International Journal of Obesity* (2024). DOI: 10.1038/s41366-024-01477-8

A new study by Western researchers has drawn a link between higher body mass index (BMI) in women and the likelihood of long COVID, but did not find the same link in men.

The impact of COVID-19 is still being felt across the globe. In Europe,

more than 60% of those affected by the virus experience persistent, often severe symptoms months after the acute infection subsided—a condition known as "long COVID."

Now, research led by Dr. Sarah Cuschieri with Dr. Saverio Stranges and Piotr Wilk indicates there is a higher likelihood of women suffering long COVID, and women at the higher end of the BMI spectrum are more likely to have these symptoms. The researchers from the department of epidemiology and biostatistics at Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry analyzed data collected from surveys of middle-aged and [older adults](#) in 27 countries across Europe.

[The paper](#) was published recently in the *International Journal of Obesity*.

We talked to Cuschieri about the research.

Cam Buchan: What prompted this research into long COVID?

Cuschieri: COVID-19 was a pandemic that affected every country. From the beginning, it became very clear that some of the individuals infected by COVID-19 were reporting lagging symptoms months after the acute infection had subsided.

A substantial proportion of the world's population falls within the obese category with a Body Mass Index greater than, or equal to 30 kg per square meter. These individuals have been known to be susceptible to worse COVID-19 infection outcomes. Therefore, our research aimed to find out whether these individuals were also more susceptible to long COVID and whether there was a difference between sexes.

What was the research methodology?

The project involved gaining access to the SHARE database, a Europe-based cross-country survey targeting the adult population from the age of 50 years onwards. These studies have been repeated across several years, including during the pandemic. Through collaborative work and analyses, we identified those that reported long COVID symptoms and linked this to their BMI and their sex.

What did you learn from analyzing the data?

Women were more likely than men to suffer from long COVID regardless of their BMI status. It appears that men at the highest spectrum of the BMI actually had a lower risk of long COVID than those with a lower BMI. It is important to understand there might be other factors affecting this relationship and one cannot omit the fact that a high BMI predisposes the individuals to develop other chronic diseases.

Why is this information important in understanding long COVID prevention and treatment?

An understanding of who is more susceptible to long COVID, including sex differences, allows health-care professionals as well as policymakers to establish a preventive care pathway as well as treatment plans that target at-risk individuals with an anticipated better individual outcome. The study also emphasizes the importance of sex differences when assessing the potential long-term consequences of long COVID.

Are further studies planned?

Yes. We are currently planning to continue exploring the susceptibility of long COVID across different countries and health statuses.

More information: Piotr Wilk et al, Does sex modify the effect of pre-

pandemic body mass index on the risk of Long COVID? Evidence from the longitudinal analysis of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe, *International Journal of Obesity* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41366-024-01477-8](#)

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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