

The frequency and main characteristics of obesity in undocumented migrants receiving medical assistance from a charitable organisation in Italy.

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Background: Obesity is continually growing not only in medium- and high-income countries but also in low-income countries, from where increasing numbers of migrants arrive in Western countries. We aimed to investigate the frequency and characteristics of obesity in a sample of undocumented migrants, a population for which official health data are not available.

Methods: We collected demographic and socio-economic data and information on medical diagnoses and pharmacologic treatments for 341 undocumented migrants consecutively attending the outpatient clinic of a big non-governmental organisation in Milan, Italy, from March to July 2023. To measure obesity, we used both body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference (WC). We used multivariate robust Poisson regression models to calculate prevalence ratios (PRs) and 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs) of overweight or obesity according to socio-demographic conditions and other risk factors. Results: Using BMI, the proportion of migrants with obesity was 28.7% (95% CI 24.0–33.0%) and those with overweight represented 32.3% (95% CI 27.3–37.5%). Obesity was more frequent among Asians (53.9%, 95% CI 37.2–69.9%), followed by Latinos (38.7%, 95% CI 29.6–48.5%) and Eastern Europeans (38.2%, 95% CI 25.4–52.3%). Using WC, 68.3% (95% CI 63.1–73.2%) of migrants had values suggestive of overweight or obesity. In the multivariate analyses, overweight and obesity were more frequent in migrants with older age, with a stable employment, and who had been present in Italy for a long time, as well as in those with CV diseases. Moreover, individuals with obesity needed more medications for the cardiovascular system and for the alimentary tract and metabolism. Conclusions: In our sample of undocumented migrants, overweight and obesity were frequent, representing an important public health issue, considering the difficulty experienced by such individuals in finding access to both prevention and healthcare services.

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