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New study finds rising prevalence of high blood pressure in Seychellois teens

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Blood pressure reading. (Wikimedia) Photo License: CC-BY-SA 3.0 . A national survey released last year on non-communicable diseases (NCD) in the Seychelles, conducted between 2013 and 2014 have shown that around three quarters of the archipelago's population was overweight, leading to secondary health complications such as hypertension and diabetes.

(Seychelles News Agency) - A new **study** has pointed to a worrying rise in **high blood pressure** among adolescents in the Seychelles.

An estimated 14.3 percent of children aged between 10 and 19 years old have been found to be suffering from the condition, almost double the proportion recorded in 1998 in Seychelles, a 115-island archipelago in the western Indian Ocean.

Dr. Pascal Bovet and Dr. Jude Gedeon from the Seychelles Ministry of Health were involved in the **study**, which compared blood pressure and body weight readings of adolescents between 10 to 19 years between four countries: the Seychelles, the **United States**, **China** and **South Korea** over 15 years' worth of national data sets.

"Indeed, the prevalence of children with elevated blood pressure in Seychelles has nearly doubled between 1998 and 2012, consistent with the almost doubling of the prevalence of overweight and **obesity** in the interval," Dr. Bovet told SNA.

"This **study** was led by a Chinese colleague, Professor Bo Xi, of Shandong University, **China**, and a few colleagues, including us, who were interested in developing international norms of blood pressure in children and adolescents," he added.



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File Photo: Dr Pascal Bouvet (centre left) and Dr Jude Gedeon (centre right) and colleagues disseminated their findings from a report on non-communicable diseases (NCD) in Seychelles to the media in June 2015. (Seychelles Nation) Photo License: CC-BY-NC



A developing country dilemma

According to Dr. Bovet, there are very few countries which have measured blood pressure over time in samples of children representative of the whole population over time, adding that there are none in the African region besides Seychelles, which has been recording blood pressure and body weight in children since 1998.

According to this data, the prevalence of overweight or obese adolescents in Seychelles has reached over 27 percent, and Dr. Bovet believes that the prevalence of **obesity** is strongly linked to the number of adolescents with hypertension.

Data released by the **World Health Organisation** in January 2015 [revealed that the Seychelles was the fattest nation in Sub-Saharan Africa](#). That raises the risks of secondary illnesses linked to **obesity** such as hypertension.

However, although the prevalence of overweight and obese adolescents in the **United States** was at 41.2 percent in 2012, **hypertension** among this age group was only at 1.7 percent, a strong indicator that there is a difference between developed and developing countries when it comes to the management or prevention of hypertension.

Interestingly, **South Korea** was the only country to have recorded a decrease in the prevalence of **hypertension** among adolescents, which fell from 12.6 percent - the highest of all four countries - in 1997-1998 to just 3.7 percent in 2011-2012, but the researchers are unsure of the exact reasons behind the decrease.

"Our **study** did not include data on the risk factors of elevated blood pressure beyond overweight [but] Korea is well known to have been able to maintain traditional healthy nutrition patterns over time, despite rapid socio-economic development," Dr Bovet said.



A raging epidemic: Data released by the **World Health Organisation** in January 2015 revealed that the Seychelles was the fattest nation in Sub-Saharan Africa. That raises the risks of secondary illnesses linked to **obesity** such as hypertension. (Seychelles News Agency) Photo License: CC-BY

Sugar, salt and exercise

Blood pressure is measured with two readings: the systolic pressure, which is the force at which your heart pumps blood around your body, over the diastolic pressure, which is the resistance to the blood flow in the blood vessels. **High blood pressure**, also known as **hypertension**, puts extra strain on your blood vessels, heart and other organs, which can then lead to heart attacks, strokes and other symptoms of cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Elevated blood pressure is often described as a silent killer, and according to the **World Health Organisation** complications related to this health condition [account for some 9.4 million deaths worldwide every year](#).

Dr. Bovet explained that while complications of **hypertension** mostly occur in middle-aged or older adults, elevated blood pressure develops early in life, so programmes to prevent elevated blood pressure should therefore also target children and adolescents.

While **obesity** is the largest single cause of **high blood pressure**, lack of physical activity and increased salt intake is also an important risk factor of elevated blood pressure.

"It is quite likely that salt intake has increased in Seychelles, possibly in relation to the larger availability in Seychelles of salty or fatty processed foods, such as junk food, pizzas, salty snacks, etc. over the past decade," he told SNA.



File Photo: Seychellois ladies sweating it out at the gym. Although physical **exercise** is highly recommended as a **healthy lifestyle** choice, changing lifestyles in the island nation have led to an upswing in fast, convenient takeaway food consumption and a drop in physical activity. (Gilly Jean, Seychelles News Agency) Photo License: CC-BY

A national concern

Dr. Bovet believes the **study** emphasises the need for intervention at a national level to address the epidemic of **obesity** in both children and adults, for example, interventions to promote smaller portions of food and limiting the intake of sugary drinks and snacks.

Dr. Bovet says that Seychelles has taken action in recent years to address these issues, including the implementation of a policy to limit access to soft drinks and unhealthy foods in schools as well as various **exercise** and educational **healthy lifestyle** programmes.

"The cabinet of ministers has just adopted, a few days ago, a national strategy to prevent non-communicable diseases, including elevated blood pressure and overweight," he told SNA. "The strategy defines national targets and indicators, and provides a menu of cost-effective interventions to reduce non-communicable diseases."

According to Dr. Bovet, while medical treatment is important for those people who have developed diabetes, **hypertension**, stroke or heart attacks, prevention remains the key strategy to decrease risk factors in the population and reduce the burden of these diseases on the national health system.

"Because these diseases develop from an early age, a life-course approach is needed," he explained. "Prevention relies on healthy lifestyles and diet choices by individuals but, most importantly, public health interventions are needed in all sectors to enable individuals to adopt healthy behaviours."

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Tags: high blood pressure, hypertension, United States, China, South Korea, study, obesity, World Health Organisation, exercise, healthy lifestyle



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