
Is Obesity Only the Individual's Responsibility?



Research based on 5425 citizens' responses to a questionnaire survey has illuminated that obesity causes are linked to various factors in addition to the individual's current socioeconomic circumstances, including childhood experiences, particularly those of abuse. The study was carried out by Project Professor TAMORI Yoshikazu (Division of Creative Health Promotion) et al.'s research group at the Kobe University Graduate School of Medicine.

Conventionally, there is a tendency to perceive individuals who are overweight as lacking the willpower to improve their lifestyle habits. However, this research study has revealed that in women, obesity in adulthood is linked not only to factors such as social environment (for example, economic circumstances and education), but also to childhood experiences, in particular abuse. This suggests that improving child welfare, such as by increasing abuse prevention measures, will also help to prevent obesity in adults.

Findings show that in women, obesity was related to the individual's social and economic background (for example, factors such as marital status, economic circumstances, educational background, and childhood experiences of abuse by a parent). The same connection was not found in results from male participants

This study is the first in Japan to illuminate the connection between abuse during childhood and obesity in adulthood. Socioeconomic factors also have an impact on obesity in women. Therefore, it is important to approach obesity prevention efforts not only from a medical standpoint but also from a societal perspective, including the authorities.

Obesity is increasing worldwide against a background of lifestyle habits such as overeating and insufficient exercise. In Japan, approximately 1 in 3 men and 1 in 5 women are overweight. Obesity causes various disorders such as Type-2 diabetes, dyslipidaemia, high blood pressure, heart disease, fatty liver, stroke and sleep apnoea, thus shortening healthy life expectancy.

There is a strong relationship between obesity and lifestyle habits, however it has been reported overseas that various aspects of individuals' social backgrounds also have an effect. In Japan, this kind of survey study had yet to be carried out. In addition, there are racial and cultural differences between Japan and overseas.

Therefore, this study aimed to understand the relationship between obesity and social background based on the results of a survey carried out in Japan. Revealing the relationship between obesity and the individual's social background will make a large contribution towards measures to tackle and prevent obesity.

The main causes of obesity are conventionally considered to be overeating and insufficient exercise. Consequently, there is a tendency to perceive those who are overweight as lacking in self-discipline and being weak-willed. However, this study has revealed that in women, the social background of the individual is also connected to the onset of obesity. This highlights the importance of taking social factors into account when implementing policies to tackle obesity.

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