

OBESITY FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

ELENA RADU, LUMINIȚA CIOTARU

The paper represents the synthesis of some anthropological researches in populations, conducted between 1980–1984 in most of the historical provinces of Romania, including almost 14,600 subjects from urban and rural areas. What is highlighted, from the medical anthropology viewpoint, is the prevalence of overweight and obesity varying with urban/rural environment, geographical area and profession. In the global sample, one out of three Romanians is overweight; in a statistics by age, after the age of 50, one of two Romanians is overweight. Having considered the fact that obesity is a major risk factor in cardiovascular diseases, its precocious tracing out by means of anthropometrical methodology will contribute to launching of prevention programmes, as a result of a responsible health politics.

The anthropological research of the body mass and constitution is part of a monitoring programme for the nutritional health status of the Romanian population, with special reference to potentially pathological deviations, as underweight and overweight, included in the causative chain of cardiovascular and metabolic diseases that occupy the first places of risk in morbidity and mortality rates of the Romanian population.

Obesity represents a great burden upon individual health, the health care domain, its impact being amplified by the fact that it is both a chronic disease and a major risk factor for other degenerative and chronic diseases. Obesity is associated with high rates of morbidity and mortality, hence “the battle” for reducing the number of risk factors responsible for its incidence.

Obesity has become a public health issue especially in rich industrialized societies, and also to a high degree in the poor and less modernized ones.

Recent data indicate that the prevalence of Class II overweight range in the population aged 20–60 years is between 10 and 20% in USA Whites and most European peoples. The prevalence is higher (between 20 and 40%) in the females from the East Europe's countries and the Mediterranean area.

According to WHO publications, the highest prevalence of this overweight category in females is recorded with the Pacific Islands populations – Melanesians, Micronesians and Polynesians (between 40 and 76% of the population).