Obesity and poverty: Exploring its determinants among poor women living in urban slums in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Background:

Obesity has been considered to be one of the major contributors to the global burden of disease in developed countries. Poor nations with a double burden of nutrition problems, have mostly sought policy interventions for under nutrition. Data from national surveys reveal that obesity, especially among women, as a problem in Indonesia. However, the relationship of obesity to poverty, food security and nutrition has not been explored. These risk factors for obesity and social aspects of food distribution were studied in women living in urban slums.

Method:

Using a matched case-control design, data was collected from 140 women in urban slums in Yogyakarta city. In-depth interviews were conducted with 18 women to obtain insight to social aspects of food purchase and distribution. Conditional logistic regression models were used to analyze the quantitative data and content analysis was used with qualitative data.

Result:

Food insecurity was found among 89 per cent of households. There were 35 per cent of households that received food donations (without payment) at least twice a month. Low physical activity (<600 MET mins) was the main predictor of obesity [OR 9.2; CI 2.6-32.4], while daily energy intake [OR 1.7; CI 0.3-9.2], food donation [OR 1.7; CI 0.6-4.2] and income level were not statistically significant. Our qualitative study showed that low-income women could not afford healthy food especially fruit. A lack of knowledge about affordable and healthy food was also found among the women in the study.

Conclusion:

This study addressed an emerging policy problem in developing countries. In this group of women, while poverty is not directly predictive of obesity, qualitative findings show that poverty contributed to the lack of physical activity and affordability of healthy food. Policy interventions need to consider action to reduce these risk factors.

Keywords: obesity, low-income, women