

Risk factors for non-communicable diseases in Iraq

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On 21st July 2016, Ministry of Health in Iraq, in collaboration with World Health Organization and the Central Statistical Organization at Ministry of Planning, has held a symposium to launch the results of the National Survey of the Risk Factors of Non-communicable Diseases.

The stages of this survey, (planning, preparation, implementation and evaluation), have completed in about a year. Data collection was done in November and December 2015. The sample was multistage cluster sampling, 4071 persons from all Iraqi provinces including Kurdistan have been selected. Unfortunately Anbar, Ninawa, and Salah Addin provinces were excluded from the survey due to security problems.

The survey is implemented in 3 steps. The **first step** is to answer a questionnaire form that included demographic questions and questions about some habits and behaviour of the participants like drinking of alcohol, smoking, salt consumption, physical exercise and many others. The **second step** is physical examination to measure height, weight, waste circumference, blood pressure and visual acuity. The **third step** is to do some laboratory investigations like measurement of blood sugar, total cholesterol, triglyceride, LDL, HDL, and salt in 24 hours urine.

The objectives of the survey are to:

1. Detect the trend of distribution of risk factors in Iraq.
2. Discover the undiagnosed cases of some diseases like hypertension and diabetes mellitus.
3. Evaluate preventive programmes and plans of controlling non-communicable diseases.
4. Provide indicators for the national strategy for prevention and controlling of non-communicable diseases.
5. Updating the Iraqi parameters with regard to implementation of the United Nation political declaration on NCDs.

Probably it is too early to discuss the results of this survey (this article is written in less than 24 hours after the symposium) but here let us concentrate on some of these results: Over 5 million persons (35.6 %) have hypertension, about 2 million (13.9 %) have diabetes mellitus, about two thirds of Iraqi are overweight or obese, about one third have more than 3 risk factors, and 12 % have high risk for cardiovascular diseases. See [table 1](#).

In conclusion we are endemic with non-communicable diseases and their risk factors. Their burden on people and the community in general is much more than the burden of communicable diseases, and road traffic accidents. A national based plan with sharing of community is needed to combat this big challenge.

Table 1: Risk factors for non-communicable diseases for adult > 18 years in Iraq 2015.

Risk factors	Male %	Female %	Total %	No of cases
Smoking	38.0	1.9	20.7	3 093 140
Drinking alcohol	1.1	0	0.6	89 656
Low Eating vegetables and fruits	80.2	78.1	79.2	11 834 623
Low physical activity	34.9	60.0	47.0	7 023 072
Overweight	33.1	30.6	31.9	4 766 723
Obese	25.6	42.6	33.5	5 005 806
High blood pressure	36.5	34.5	35.6	5 304 660
High blood sugar	14.0	13.7	13.9	2 077 036
High lipids	39.8	39.5	39.6	5 917 311
High salts	82.1	78.4	80.7	12 058 765
≥3 risk factors	37.6	38.4	38.4	5 737 999
High risk of CVD	16.1	8.4	12.0	1 793 124