



PRESS STATEMENT

IMR 02/15

12 October 2015

Modern lifestyle increasing risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease even among rural adults

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are on the rise in Papua New Guinea according to a study recently completed by the PNG Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR).

The study, which involved nearly 800 adults randomly selected from communities in the Asaro valley, West Hiri Motuan villages and Karkar Island, found: 18.7% of participants had elevated blood glucose levels, a risk factor for Type II diabetes; 17.7% had elevated cholesterol, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease; and 15.9% met criteria for hypertension.

In addition, a staggering 67.4% met criteria for ‘substantially increased risk of metabolic complications’ based on their waist-to-hip ratio, 43.5% were anaemic and 43% reported daily tobacco use, a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases and numerous cancers e.g. lung and mouth cancer.

Dr Justin Pulford, a lead scientist on the study, expressed a particular concern for the findings from the Asaro Valley and Karkar Island.

“What I find most concerning about the study findings are the high levels of elevated cholesterol and hypertension found among adults living in the rural areas of Asaro Valley and Karkar Island. Elevated cholesterol and hypertension were almost entirely absent in these communities as recently as the 1990s, suggesting a rapid change in diet and lifestyle has occurred. These lifestyle changes may lead to substantial health problems in mid-to-late life unless effective prevention programs are implemented. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be happening”.

Dr Patricia Rarau, a fellow lead scientist on the study, commented on the implications for the PNG health system.

“I am very worried about the additional burden NCDs will place upon the PNG health system. Type II diabetes requires treatment for life. Coronary heart disease often results in expensive and highly specialised heart surgery. This type of care is not readily available in PNG and it will require an enormous investment in our health services if we hope to provide effective treatment for all. Our best strategy is to immediately invest in NCD prevention programs before the NCD epidemic gets further out of hand”.

The study was completed in collaboration with the University of Papua New Guinea, the University of Queensland, the University of Tokyo and the University of Auckland and was funded by Exxon Mobil PNG as part of the PNGIMR/Exxon Mobil PNG 'Partnership in Health Program'.

The full study report is available on the PNGIMR website (<http://pngimr.org.pg>).

Contacts:

Dr Justin Pulford- E:justin.pulford@pngimr.org.pg, Tel: +675 532 2800 /

Fax: +675 532 1998 / E-mail: justin.pulford@pngimr.org.pg

Media Contact: Joanne Wayang, Communications Officer

E-mail: joanne.wayang@pngimr.org.pg, Tel: +675 5322800 / Fax: +675 5321998