Press Release

For immediate release

SOUTH AFRICAN
INSTITUTE OF
RACE RELATIONS

South Africa's Leading Research and Policy Organisation

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African women and white men weigh in heaviest

A third of all African women are obese. Coloured, white, and Indian women follow closely, with around a quarter being obese. Overall, almost one third of South African women are obese. This is according to the latest *South Africa Survey,* published recently in Johannesburg by the South African Institute of Race Relations.

South African men are significantly less likely to be obese than women, fewer than one tenth being obese. Some 18% of all white men are obese, followed by 9% of Indian, 8% of coloured, and 6% of African men. These figures are obtained from the South African Medical Research Council.

Body Mass Index (BMI), calculated from a person's weight and height, is used to measure body fat and thus to determine obesity. A person is obese if their BMI exceeds 30.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) obesity was previously associated with high-income countries but is gaining prevalence in low- and middle-income countries. In October 2011 Compass Group Southern Africa, a food services company, placed South Africa third in the world in obesity rankings after the United States and Great Britain.

Lerato Moloi of the research department at the Institute said, 'Obesity is linked to a number of lifestyle diseases such as diabetes mellitus and heart disease, both of which are among the top ten causes of death in South Africa'. Between 2004 and 2009 the numbers of people who died from diabetes mellitus and certain forms of heart disease increased by 21% and 11% respectively, according to data contained in the Institute's *Survey*.

The WHO estimates that globally approximately 2.8 million people die a year as a result of being overweight or obese.

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