



## Assessment of Type 2 Diabetes Risk in the Population of Douala, Cameroon: An Analysis of 2,080 Cases

Evaluation du risque du diabète de type 2 dans la population de Douala, Cameroun : Une analyse de 2 080 cas

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### Article original

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The prevalence of type 2 diabetes is steadily increasing within the Cameroonian population due to the emergence of new risk factors. However, the lack of data on the risk of developing type 2 diabetes in this population may undermine the effectiveness of prevention and control strategies for this disease. This study aimed to assess the risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the population of Douala.

**Methods:** We conducted a cross-sectional study during diabetes awareness and screening activities for World Diabetes Day at the Douala General Hospital, Laquintinie Hospital, the Douala Gyneco-Obstetrics and Pediatric Hospital, and the Parcours-Vita in Douala. Sociodemographic data, diabetes diagnosis, and the risk of developing type 2 diabetes (FINDRISC score) were collected using a survey form and analyzed with R software.

**Results:** A total of 2,080 participants were included. Their mean age was  $47 \pm 12$  years, with a female predominance (61% vs. 39%). The 10-year risk of developing type 2 diabetes was 4.9%, while 27.3% had an increased risk, and 53.2% were at low risk. The prevalence of type 2 diabetes was 14.7%. Lack of physical activity, family history of diabetes, previous hyperglycemia, or therapy for hypertension were strongly associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes or an established diabetic status ( $p < 0.001$ ) in this population.

**Conclusion:** There is an urgent need to strengthen prevention strategies, particularly through education on healthy lifestyles and early screening of at-risk populations.

### RESUME

**Contexte :** La prévalence du diabète de type 2 augmente au Cameroun. Le but de cette étude était d'évaluer le risque de faire le diabète de type 2 dans la population de la ville de Douala.

**Méthodologie :** Nous avons mené une étude transversale lors des activités de sensibilisation et dépistage du diabète de la journée mondiale du diabète organisée à l'Hôpital Général de Douala, l'Hôpital Laquintinie de Douala, l'Hôpital Gynéco-obstétrique et pédiatrique de Douala et au Parcours-vita de Douala. Les données sociodémographiques, diagnostiques et l'évaluation du score de FINDRISC ont été récoltées et analysées avec le logiciel R.

**Résultats :** Nous avons inclus 2080 participants. L'âge moyen était de  $47 \pm 12$  ans avec une prédominance féminine (61%). Le risque de développer le diabète de type 2 dans 10 ans était de 4,9%, 27,3 % présentaient un risque accru, et 53,2 % étaient à faible risque. La prévalence de diabète de type 2 était de 14,7 %. L'absence d'activité physique, et les antécédents familiaux de diabète, Les antécédents d'hyperglycémie ou d'une thérapie pour hypertension étaient fortement associés à un risque accru de diabète de type 2 ou à un statut diabétique établi ( $p < 0,001$ ) dans cette population.

**Conclusion :** Le renforcement des stratégies de prévention est une urgence. L'éducation à un mode de vie sain et le dépistage précoce des populations à risque reste des défis à relever.

## Introduction

Diabetes is defined as a chronic metabolic disease characterized by persistent hyperglycemia, which has become a significant global public health challenge. This condition results from insufficient production or utilization of insulin, a hormone essential for regulating blood sugar levels (1–3). Type 2 diabetes (T2D), which accounts for nearly 90% of cases, is strongly influenced by behavioral and environmental factors. Key risk factors include advanced age, obesity, physical inactivity, a family history of diabetes, and unhealthy dietary habits, such as excessive consumption of sugars and saturated fats (4–6).

Diabetes currently affects 537 million adults worldwide, and this figure is expected to rise to 783 million by 2045 (7–9). In Africa, the prevalence is estimated at 5.1%, but it is rapidly increasing due to urbanization and lifestyle changes (10). In Cameroon, the diabetes prevalence is estimated at 6.5% and could be much higher (11). Major cities like Douala, characterized by rapid urbanization, are particularly affected. Emerging risk factors such as sedentary lifestyles, obesity, and unhealthy eating habits play a crucial role in increasing diabetes prevalence in urban populations. In Douala, these trends are exacerbated by the growing availability of processed foods, reduced opportunities for physical activity, and the stress of urban living (12).

Despite the alarming rise in diabetes prevalence in Cameroon, recent data on diabetic and prediabetic profiles remain limited. A better understanding of these profiles is essential to guide prevention and management strategies, particularly in urban areas like Douala. Therefore, our study aimed to fill this gap by evaluating the diabetic and prediabetic status of Douala residents to better inform public health decisions.

## Methods

We conducted a cross-sectional study in Douala, Cameroon, during the 2024 edition of World Diabetes Day, from November 11 to 12, 2024. Data were collected during free diabetes screening and awareness activities organized in major hospitals, including the Douala General Hospital, Laquintinie Hospital, Douala Gyneco-Obstetrics and Pediatric Hospital, as well as popular gathering places such as the Parcour-Vita in Douala during a dedicated fitness walk (Figure 1).

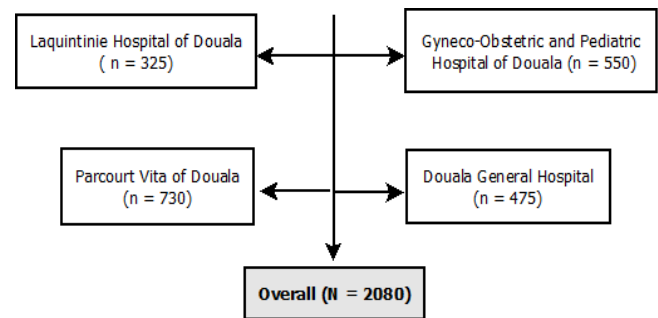


Figure 1: data collection procedure

The study was approved by the medical boards of these hospitals. We included all Douala residents who attended the screening or awareness sessions, provided informed consent, and excluded those who refused to participate.

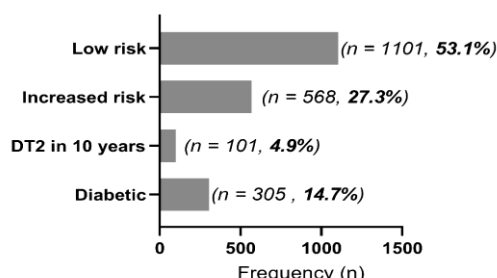
We recruited 2,080 participants, from whom we collected sociodemographic data (age, gender, marital status, and residence) and information necessary to assess diabetes risk using the FINDRISC score (age, body mass index, physical activity level, fruit and vegetable consumption, family or personal history of diabetes, hypertension, or previously detected elevated blood sugar). Data collection was performed using a validated survey form.

Diabetes risk was assessed by summing the scores of each variable's categories according to the FINDRISC scale. Participants with a FINDRISC score below 7 points were classified as low risk, between 7 and 11 points as increased risk, and between 12 and 15 points as likely to develop type 2 diabetes within 10 years. Diabetes was suspected in participants with a FINDRISC score above 15 and confirmed if fasting blood glucose and glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c) levels exceeded 1.26 g/L (7.0 mmol/L) and 6.5%, respectively, on two tests.

Data were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet and imported into R software version 4.4.2 for Windows. Qualitative variables were presented as frequencies (N, n) and percentages in tables and graphs, while quantitative variables were expressed as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation (SD). Pearson's Chi-squared test and the Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test were performed to identify associations between risk groups and compare age across groups, respectively. The null hypothesis confidence interval was set at 95%, with a 5% margin of error ( $p$ -value  $< 0.05$  was considered significant).

## Results

Among the 2,080 participants, 53.1% ( $n = 1,101$ ) had a low risk of developing diabetes, while 27.3% ( $n = 568$ ) were at an increased risk. Approximately 4.9% ( $n = 101$ ) of the participants were at risk of developing type 2 diabetes within the next 10 years, and 14.7% ( $n = 305$ ) were diagnosed with diabetes during the study (**Figure 2**).



**Figure 2:** profile of Diabetic and Prediabetic Status According to the FINDRISC Score

The mean age of our study population was  $47 \pm 12$  years. The data showed that 305 individuals (14.7%) were diabetic, 101 (4.9%) were at risk of developing type 2 diabetes (T2D) within 10 years, 568 (27.3%) had an increased risk, and 1,106 (53.2%) were at low risk. Factors such as advanced age (>50 years), female gender, and marital status (married or widowed) were associated with a higher prevalence of diabetes and increased risk. Areas of residence, such as Yassa and the village, also showed a notable concentration of cases. Statistical tests revealed significant differences ( $p < 0.001$ ) between groups for age, gender, and marital status, but not for residence (**Table 1**).

**Table 1:** sociodemographic factors by diabetic status

| Sociodemographic factors  | Overall (N = 2,080) | Diabetic (N = 305) | DT2 in 10 Years (N = 101) | Increased Risk (N = 568) | Low Risk (N = 1,106) | p-value |
|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---------|
| <b>Age (years)</b>        | 47±12               | 54±11              | 49±7                      | 52±11                    | 42±11                | <0.001  |
| <b>Age_groups</b>         |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| 17-50                     | 1,315 (63%)         | 136 (6.5%)         | 53 (2.5%)                 | 226 (11%)                | 900 (43%)            |         |
| >50                       | 765 (37%)           | 169 (8.1%)         | 48 (2.3%)                 | 342 (16%)                | 206 (9.9%)           |         |
| <b>Gender</b>             |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| Female                    | 1,262 (61%)         | 228 (11%)          | 86 (4.1%)                 | 301 (14%)                | 647 (31%)            |         |
| Male                      | 818 (39%)           | 77 (3.7%)          | 15 (0.7%)                 | 267 (13%)                | 459 (22%)            |         |
| <b>Matrimonial status</b> |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| Married                   | 1,220 (59%)         | 166 (8.0%)         | 48 (2.3%)                 | 414 (20%)                | 592 (28%)            |         |
| Single                    | 710 (34%)           | 82 (3.9%)          | 53 (2.5%)                 | 121 (5.8%)               | 454 (22%)            |         |
| Widowed                   | 150 (7.2%)          | 57 (2.7%)          | 0 (0%)                    | 33 (1.6%)                | 60 (2.9%)            |         |
| <b>Residence</b>          |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | na      |
| Yassa                     | 585 (28%)           | 123 (5.9%)         | 15 (0.7%)                 | 180 (8.7%)               | 267 (13%)            |         |
| village                   | 224 (11%)           | 57 (2.7%)          | 38 (1.8%)                 | 74 (3.6%)                | 55 (2.6%)            |         |
| nyalla                    | 142 (6.8%)          | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 62 (3.0%)                | 80 (3.8%)            |         |
| Yatchika                  | 117 (5.6%)          | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 0 (0%)                   | 117 (5.6%)           |         |
| Makepe                    | 99 (4.8%)           | 51 (2.5%)          | 48 (2.3%)                 | 0 (0%)                   | 0 (0%)               |         |
| Lendi                     | 78 (3.8%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 0 (0%)                   | 78 (3.8%)            |         |
| Ndogbong                  | 75 (3.6%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 50 (2.4%)                | 25 (1.2%)            |         |
| Logpom                    | 70 (3.4%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 0 (0%)                   | 70 (3.4%)            |         |
| Ndog-passi                | 64 (3.1%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 0 (0%)                   | 64 (3.1%)            |         |
| Japoma                    | 63 (3.0%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 43 (2.1%)                | 20 (1.0%)            |         |
| Youpoue                   | 51 (2.5%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 51 (2.5%)                | 0 (0%)               |         |
| Cité berge                | 44 (2.1%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 0 (0%)                   | 44 (2.1%)            |         |
| Logbaba                   | 41 (2.0%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 41 (2.0%)                | 0 (0%)               |         |
| Ari                       | 38 (1.8%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 0 (0%)                   | 38 (1.8%)            |         |
| Ngodi bakoko              | 38 (1.8%)           | 38 (1.8%)          | 0 (0%)                    | 0 (0%)                   | 0 (0%)               |         |
| Banga bakoko              | 37 (1.8%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 37 (1.8%)                | 0 (0%)               |         |
| Bonaberi                  | 37 (1.8%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 0 (0%)                   | 37 (1.8%)            |         |
| Cité des palmiers         | 37 (1.8%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 0 (0%)                   | 37 (1.8%)            |         |

|            |           |           |        |           |           |
|------------|-----------|-----------|--------|-----------|-----------|
| Dakar      | 36 (1.7%) | 36 (1.7%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%)    | 0 (0%)    |
| PK11       | 33 (1.6%) | 0 (0%)    | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%)    | 33 (1.6%) |
| Brazaville | 32 (1.5%) | 0 (0%)    | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%)    | 32 (1.5%) |
| PK14       | 31 (1.5%) | 0 (0%)    | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%)    | 31 (1.5%) |
| Kotto      | 30 (1.4%) | 0 (0%)    | 0 (0%) | 30 (1.4%) | 0 (0%)    |
| new bell   | 27 (1.3%) | 0 (0%)    | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%)    | 27 (1.3%) |
| Omnisport  | 26 (1.3%) | 0 (0%)    | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%)    | 26 (1.3%) |
| Souboum    | 25 (1.2%) | 0 (0%)    | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%)    | 25 (1.2%) |

**DT2:** Type 2 Diabetic, Data are presented as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation (sd), number of cases (N) and percentage (%). P-value: Pearson's test of independence and the Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test were used to compare mean ages and to test for dependence between diabetic status groups. For these tests, the confidence interval for the null hypothesis was set at 95% and the margin of error at 5% (p significant if  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2:** components of the FINDRISK score

| Components of the FINDRISK score                | Overall (N = 2,080) | Diabetic Status    |                           |                          |                      | p-value |
|---|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---------|
|   |                     | Diabetic (N = 305) | DT2 in 10 Years (N = 101) | Increased Risk (N = 568) | Low Risk (N = 1,106) |         |
| <b>Age groups (years)</b>                       |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| 17-50   | 1,315 (63%)         | 136 (6.5%)         | 53 (2.5%)                 | 226 (11%)                | 900 (43%)            |         |
| >50   | 765 (37%)           | 169 (8.1%)         | 48 (2.3%)                 | 342 (16%)                | 206 (9.9%)           |         |
| <b>Daily physical activity</b>                  |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| No  | 1,201 (58%)         | 177 (8.5%)         | 101 (4.9%)                | 300 (14%)                | 623 (30%)            |         |
| Yes   | 879 (42%)           | 128 (6.2%)         | 0 (0%)                    | 268 (13%)                | 483 (23%)            |         |
| <b>Family history of diabetes</b>               |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| No  | 1,349 (65%)         | 136 (6.5%)         | 48 (2.3%)                 | 151 (7.3%)               | 1,014 (49%)          |         |
| Yes   | 731 (35%)           | 169 (8.1%)         | 53 (2.5%)                 | 417 (20%)                | 92 (4.4%)            |         |
| <b>FFVCF</b>                                    |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| Not Every Day                                   | 1,857 (89%)         | 305 (15%)          | 53 (2.5%)                 | 541 (26%)                | 958 (46%)            |         |
| Every Day                                       | 223 (11%)           | 0 (0%)             | 48 (2.3%)                 | 27 (1.3%)                | 148 (7.1%)           |         |
| <b>HUTH</b>                                     |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| No  | 1,827 (88%)         | 156 (7.5%)         | 38 (1.8%)                 | 527 (25%)                | 1,106 (53%)          |         |
| Yes   | 253 (12%)           | 149 (7.2%)         | 63 (3.0%)                 | 41 (2.0%)                | 0 (0%)               |         |
| <b>History of elevated blood glucose</b>        |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| No  | 1,788 (86%)         | 163 (7.8%)         | 38 (1.8%)                 | 525 (25%)                | 1,062 (51%)          |         |
| Yes   | 292 (14%)           | 142 (6.8%)         | 63 (3.0%)                 | 43 (2.1%)                | 44 (2.1%)            |         |
| <b>Body Mass Index (BMI) (kg/m<sup>2</sup>)</b> |                     |                    |                           |                          |                      | <0.001  |
| Above 30  | 927 (45%)           | 152 (7.3%)         | 101 (4.9%)                | 257 (12%)                | 417 (20%)            |         |
| Between 25 and 30                               | 694 (33%)           | 153 (7.4%)         | 0 (0%)                    | 186 (8.9%)               | 355 (17%)            |         |
| Less than 25                                    | 459 (22%)           | 0 (0%)             | 0 (0%)                    | 125 (6.0%)               | 334 (16%)            |         |

**DT2:** Type 2 Diabetic, FFVC : Frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption, HUTH: Having undergone therapy for hypertension; Data are presented number of cases (N) and percentage (%). P-value: Pearson's test of independence is used to test for dependence between diabetic status groups. For these tests, the confidence interval for the null hypothesis was set at 95% and the margin of error at 5% (p significant if  $p < 0.05$ ).

Age (>50 years), lack of physical activity, and a family history of diabetes were strongly associated with an increased risk of diabetes or an established diabetic status ( $p < 0.001$ ) in our study population. Approximately 63% of individuals were aged 17 to 50 years, while 37% were over 50 years old, with the latter group exhibiting a higher risk. Among those with regular physical activity, only 6.2% were diabetic, compared to 8.5% among those without physical activity.

A family history of diabetes was reported by 35% of participants, significantly impacting the risk.

Daily fruit and vegetable consumption remained low (11%), while participants with a BMI above 30 were common (45%), further reinforcing the link to diabetes. Lastly, a history of elevated blood sugar or therapy for hypertension were also notable contributing factors ( $p < 0.001$ ) (**Table 2**).

## Discussion

Our study revealed a diabetes prevalence of 14.7% among the residents of Douala, with 4.9% at risk of developing type 2 diabetes within 10



years (by 2035) and 27.3% at increased risk. These percentages align with similar studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa, where rapid urbanization and lifestyle changes are driving a significant rise in diabetes prevalence. For instance, Guariguata et al. (2014) and Zimmermann et al. (2018) estimated a regional average prevalence of 7.1%, with higher rates in urban areas (13,14). This highlights the role of urbanization in the epidemiological transition of diabetes in Africa.

In a study in Ghana, Bosu et al. (2015) demonstrated that diabetes prevalence in urban areas was three times higher than in rural areas (15). This disparity can be attributed to increased access to processed foods high in sugars and fats and reduced physical activity, possibly explained by the rise of sedentary leisure activities such as social media usage. Visceral fat, commonly associated with obesity, secretes inflammatory cytokines like TNF- $\alpha$ , which disrupt insulin signaling and promote insulin resistance, as demonstrated by Kahn et al. in 2006 (16).

In a more recent study by Liu et al. (2024), rapid urbanization and sedentary lifestyles were strongly correlated with the global increase in diabetes prevalence. This aligns with our findings, where lack of physical activity was significantly associated with an increased risk of diabetes ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Family history of diabetes, reported by 35% of participants, is consistent with observations by the IDF (2021), which emphasizes the importance of genetic factors in the development of type 2 diabetes. Genomic studies have identified mutations in genes such as TCF7L2, associated with impaired insulin secretion and elevated blood glucose levels (17).

The low consumption of fruits and vegetables, observed in 11% of participants, reflects a trend documented in several African studies. For instance, Parit Hiri-O-tappa (2024) showed that diets high in processed foods increased metabolic risks, whereas diets rich in fiber and antioxidants could reduce oxidative stress, thereby protecting pancreatic  $\beta$ -cells (4).

Obesity, present in 45% of participants, is a critical factor. A recent meta-analysis by Zheng et al. (2018) confirmed that high BMI is directly linked to an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, primarily through insulin resistance induced by abdominal fat (18).

The findings of this study underscore the need to strengthen prevention programs focusing on health education, promotion of physical activity, and improved dietary habits. Targeted public health policies, such as those suggested by Hu et al. (2003), could significantly reduce the burden of diabetes in urban populations in Cameroon, including Douala (19).

## Conclusion

Our study highlighted a significant prevalence of diabetes and prediabetic states in the Douala population, with key risk factors including lack of physical activity, family history of diabetes, low consumption of fruits and vegetables, and high BMI. These findings emphasize the urgency of implementing targeted prevention strategies, including education on healthy lifestyles, promotion of regular physical activity, and improved access to healthcare, to mitigate the growing diabetes burden in this population.

**Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationship that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Authors' contributions:

MEND and AD designed the experimental approach and the writing plan. MEND, OS and NMWS recruited the participants and carried out the laboratory analyses. MEND and NMWS carried out the statistical analysis. NMWS drew all the figures. MEND wrote the draft. OS, NBV, and AD reviewed the manuscript. All the authors mentioned made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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