

*Original Research Article***Influence of age, gender and body mass index on the levels of glycosylated haemoglobin among non-diabetic Nigerian population****ABSTRACT**

The influence of age and gender on the levels of glycosylated haemoglobin among non-diabetic Nigerian population were investigated in this study. Seventy nine non-diabetic individuals volunteered for the study and were grouped into male and female and then into four groups according to age: ≤ 20 years, 21 - 40 years, 41 - 60 years and ≥ 61 years. Fasting blood glucose, 2-hour post-load glucose, packed cell volume and genotype analyses of subjects were initially determined to ensure that subjects were non-diabetic and had no glucose metabolic impairment. Subsequently, glycosylated haemoglobin and body mass index were measured. Student's t-test, Pearson correlation and one-way analysis of variance were used to compare the data which were presented as mean \pm standard deviation. Statistical significance was accepted at $p < 0.05$. The results obtained showed that: (1) glycosylated haemoglobin (HbA1c) significantly increased with age, (2) there is no correlation between HbA1c with gender and (3) there was a positive association between HbA1c and body mass index in normal glucose tolerant subjects. Based on the result of this study, the contributions of age and BMI to HbA1c levels should be taken into account when making diagnostic and therapeutic decisions with regard to diabetes care using HbA1c. HbA1c range of (4.0 - 5.2) % could be considered as the normal range for individuals below sixty one years while HbA1c level of $\leq 5.27\%$ is suggested for individuals above sixty years. However, further studies are required especially to investigate the non-glycaemic factors affecting HbA1c levels in normal glucose tolerant populations so as to really understand the actual role glycosylated haemoglobin values play in diabetes management and diagnosis.

Keywords: Age, gender, glycosylated haemoglobin, non-diabetic, body mass index

1. Introduction

Studies on chronic complications of diabetes established the role of glycosylated haemoglobin, HbA1c, as a marker of evaluation of long-term glycaemic control, glycaemic risk and prediction of diabetic complications, and as a screening tool for the diagnosis of diabetes [1,2]. It is considered as one of the best achievements in the history of diabetes mellitus. HbA1c is a specific haemoglobin produced by a two-stage non-enzymatic attachment of glucose molecule to the N-terminal valine of the β -chains of the haemoglobin molecule. Once formed, the HbA1c remains throughout the life span of the erythrocyte. Hence, it is primarily measured to identify the average plasma glucose concentration over the previous 2-3 months. If other factors that may affect the HbA1c levels such as haemoglobinopathies, anaemia, etc, are kept constant, normal levels of plasma glucose will produce a normal amount of HbA1c. Hence, HbA1c level will increase in a predictable way and so serves as a marker of glycaemic control. HbA1c measurement is the most preferred test by clinicians and patients for monitoring glycaemia. This is because, its measurement has substantially less biologic variability, needing no fasting or timed samples and it is a better index of overall glycaemic exposure and risk for long-term complications [3]. However, certain studies have suggested that factors such as age, gender and body mass

44 index may affect HbA1c levels and hence, its use as a marker of glycaemic control and as well as its usefulness
 45 in diabetes diagnosis and management. According to the available research reports in this regard, there seems to
 46 be no agreement on whether age and gender have significant effect on HbA1c values. While some studies
 47 suggest positive association between HbA1c levels with age and gender, [4-6], others indicated no association of
 48 HbA1c levels with neither age nor gender. [7-9]. The present study, is aimed at investigating the influence of
 49 age, gender and body mass index on the levels of HbA1c among non-diabetic Nigerian population.

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2. Materials and Methods

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2.1 Study Population

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A total of seventy-nine healthy non-diabetic Nigerian males and females of age ranging from eleven
 54 (11) to (70) years participated in the study. The subjects were a mixture of lecturers, civil servants, farmers and
 55 students with varying levels of socioeconomic status. They were apparently healthy individuals, with no
 56 identifiable disease and were not on any medications known to affect glucose metabolism. Pregnant women and
 57 individuals, who had received treatment for anaemia, received or donated blood within the last one month prior
 58 to the study, were excluded from the study.

59

2.2 Ethical Clearance

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Considering the nature of this research involving human volunteers, ethical clearance (with certificate
 61 number: NHREC/05/01/2008B-FWA00002458-1RB00002323) was sought and obtained from the University of
 62 Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu State. Informed consent was also obtained prior to the study,
 63 from all participating subjects. For minors, that is those subjects below the age of eighteen years of age, consent
 64 was obtained through their parents or guardians.

65

2.3 Experimental Design

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Glucose tolerance test (comprising of fasting blood sugar and 2-hour postload glucose tests), packed
 67 cell volume and haemoglobin genotype determination were performed as a screening criteria for participation in
 68 the study. The subjects were grouped according to gender. Each of the gender group was subdivided into four
 69 subgroups according to age-ranges (in years):

AgeGroups (in years)	Gender	
	Men	Women
≤ 20		
21-40		
41 – 60		
≥ 61		

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2.4 Anthropometric Data Collection

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The body weight of subjects were measured in kg with minimal amount of clothing using Hana
 72 Bathroom Scale while their heights were measured to the nearest 0.1cm with the subject standing erect,
 73 barefooted and without scarf or cap against a wall using a calibrated ruler. The body mass index (BMI) was
 74 calculated as the ratio of body weight in kg to the height in square meters.

75

2.5 Sample Collection

76

Whole blood was used in all the analysis. Blood for fasting blood glucose measurement was collected
 77 from subjects by finger-prick after an overnight fast (8-12hours). While blood for 2-hour post-load glucose
 78 measurement was collected from subjects by finger-prick after 2 hours of high glycaemic meal (Lucozade boost)
 79 containing 75g glucose for all adults and adjusted for weights in children. About 5 millimetres of venous blood

80 was collected from each subject and transferred into appropriately labelled EDTA bottle for glycosylated
81 haemoglobin, packed cell volume, and genotype analysis.

82 2.6 Biochemical Analysis

83 Fasting blood glucose and 2-hour post-load glucose were determined based on the glucose oxidase
84 method as described by Trinder, [10]. Determination of glycosylated haemoglobin (HbA1c) was carried out
85 using an ion-exchange kit (VitroScient) designed based on the method described by Trivellietal. [11]. Packed
86 cell volume was determined by the centrifugation method as described by the National Committee for Clinical
87 Laboratory Standards [12]. Haemoglobingenotypedeterminationwas by the electrophoresis method as described
88 by Schneider [13].

89 2.7 Statistical Analysis

90 Student's t-test, Pearson correlation and One-way analysis of variance, (ANOVA) were used to compare the
91 data using statistical product for service solutions (SPSS) version 18 software. The results were presented as
92 mean \pm standard deviation for continuous variables. Statistical significance was accepted at $p < 0.05$.

93 3. Results

94 3.1 Levels of Glycosylated Haemoglobin (HbA1c) According to Age

95 Table 1 shows the mean HbA1c levels according to age only. Results obtained show that the mean levels of
96 HbA1c increased across the age groups. The increases were significant ($p < 0.05$) compared to the age group " \leq
97 20" year-old as the baseline.

98 **Table 1: Mean HbA1c of Subjects Based on Age**

Age groups (years)	HbA1c (%)
≤ 20	4.27 ± 0.64 (22)
21-40	$4.97 \pm 0.61^*$ (24)
41-60	$5.13 \pm 0.71^*$ (23)
Above 60	$5.26 \pm 0.49^*$ (10)

99 Values represent mean \pm standard deviation.

100 *. Means are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

101 (n = 79)

102 n = number of subjects.

103 Numbers in parentheses indicate number of subjects in different age groups.

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105 3.2 Levels of Glycosylated Haemoglobin (HbA1c) According to Gender

106 The Table 2 shows the mean HbA1c levels according to gender at different age groups. There was a
107 sequential increase along the age groups in both men and women. The increases observed were significant
108 ($p < 0.05$) when compared to the baseline (" ≤ 20 " year-old age group) within each gender but not across gender.
109 The highest elevation of HbA1c occurred between the age groups " ≤ 20 " year-old and "21 to 40" year-old, in
110 both gender, with differences of 0.67 % and 0.76 % respectively. Men had higher mean HbA1c levels than
111 women across the age groups.

112

113 **Table 2: Mean Glycosylated Haemoglobin of Subjects Based on Gender**

Age groups (years)	Men (n = 40) HbA1c (%)	Women (n = 39) HbA1c (%)
≤ 20	4.42 ± 0.72 (12)	4.08 ± 0.51 (10)
21-40	5.09 ± 0.57^a (12)	4.84 ± 0.64^b (12)

41-60	5.18 ± 0.64 ^a (11)	5.09 ± 0.79 ^b (12)
Above 60	5.27 ± 0.67 ^a (5)	5.25 ± 0.30 ^b (5)

114 Values represent mean ± standard deviation.
 115 ^a means are statistically significant at p < 0.05 within the men gender
 116 ^b means are statistically significant at p< 0.05 within the women gender
 117 n = number of subjects.
 118 Numbers in parentheses indicate number of subjects in different age groups.

119
 120 **3.3 Mean Body Mass Index of Subjects Based on Age**

121 Table 3 shows the mean values for body mass index of the subjects based on age only. The average body mass
 122 index showed an increasing trend up to the age group “41 to 60” year-old and then declined slightly. These
 123 values significantly (p<0.05) increased along the age groups when the age group “≤ 20” year-old was used as
 124 the baseline.

125 **Table 3: Mean Body Mass Index of Subjects Based on Age**

Age Groups (years)	BMI [Kg/m ²] (n = 79)
≤ 20	19.4 ± 4.1*(22)
21-40	24.2 ± 3.8* (24)
41-60	26.6 ± 4.1* (23)
Above 60	26.0 ± 2.7* (10)

126 Values represent mean ± standard deviation.
 127 *. Means are statistically significant at p< 0.05
 128 n = number of subjects. Numbers in parentheses indicate number of subjects in different age groups.
 129

130 **4. Discussion**

131 This study investigated the influence of age and gender on the levels of glycosylated haemoglobin (HbA1c)
 132 among non-diabetic Nigerian population. Glucose tolerance tests (i.e. fasting blood sugar and 2-hour post-load
 133 glucose tests), genotype analyses, packed cell volume, body mass index and HbA1c measurements, and
 134 questionnaire on medical history and lifestyle were carried out on the subjects. Apart from the body mass index
 135 and HbA1c measurements, the questionnaire and the other tests were done to ensure that the subjects had no
 136 identifiable diseases and were not on any medication known to affect glucose metabolism. Subjects were
 137 grouped into men and women, and then into four groups according to age groups: ≤ 20 years, 21-40 years, 41-60
 138 years and ≥61 years.

139 The results obtained from this study, showed positive association of HbA1c with age in non-diabetics. The mean
 140 values of HbA1c was observed to significantly (p<0.05) increase with increase in age (Table 1). This result is in
 141 agreement with the results of previous investigators [5, 6, 14-19]. The positive significant association of HbA1c
 142 with age observed in our study, could be attributed to certain factors unrelated to glycaemia, since the subjects
 143 have no glucose metabolic impairment. An example of non-glycaemic factors is the changes in the rate of
 144 glycosylation associated with the ageing process [14]. There is a usual tendency for the body’s metabolic
 145 machinery to decrease in efficiency with ageing. It is documented that, the basal metabolic rate (BMR) usually
 146 decreases by 2% per decade of adult life [20]. Our results, however, differed with other previous studies that
 147 showed no association between age and HbA1c levels [7-9].

148 Secondly, this study showed no significant association between HbA1c and gender. However, slight differences
 149 were observed between the HbA1c values in men and that in women across the age groups (Table 2). The lower
 150 values of HbA1c observed in women compared to that in men may be due to differences in haemoglobin levels

151 in men and women. Men and women usually have different mean haemoglobin levels in venous blood: women
152 usually have mean levels approximately 12% lower than men [21]. Literature further indicates that the male sex
153 hormone, testosterone, has direct positive effect on erythropoietin and hence the red blood cell concentration
154 [22, 23]. This really accounts for the higher haemoglobin content in healthy men compared to that in healthy
155 women of same age and race. Also, evidence shows that the female hormone, oestrogen, is implicated in
156 suppressing erythropoiesis in women *in vitro* [24] and *in vivo* [23, 25]. Hence lower haemoglobin content in
157 women. Glycosylation begins during erythropoiesis and so is directly related to the amount of HbA1c that
158 would be formed. Our result is similar to the studies by Faerch *et al*, and that of Gulliford and Ukoumunne. Both
159 found somewhat higher levels of HbA1c in men compared to women which were not significant [26,27].
160 Likewise, Wiener and Roberts stated that they found no relationship between the levels of HbA1c with gender
161 [8]. Modan *et al* and Simon *et al* out rightly stated that they found no association of HbA1c with gender [19, 28].
162 Despite this, other studies reported significant positive relationship between HbA1c and gender [6, 14].

163 Thirdly, in our study, HbA1c levels positively correlated ($p=0.01$) with body mass index (BMI). An increase in
164 BMI was accompanied by increase in HbA1c level. This association remained even after adjusting for age. This
165 is in agreement with the results of previous researchers. The study of Gulliford and Ukoumunne on the
166 determinants of HbA1c in general population, showed that HbA1c increased with BMI and with increasing
167 waist-hip circumference ratio [28]. Yang *et al* and Paniet *al*, as well noted positive association between the
168 levels of HbA1c and BMI [14, 15]. Likewise, Simon *et al*, found higher levels of HbA1c in obese persons
169 (defined as $>28\text{kg/m}^2$). However, after adjustment for age, the association became non-significant. On the
170 contrary, Modan *et al*, found no significant correlation between BMI and HbA1c [28], while surprisingly,
171 Shultis *et al* found suggestive evidence of inverse associations between body size and body composition and
172 HbA1c [16].

173 The contribution of the present study to the existing literature lies on the fact that the subjects of this study were
174 of the West African origin. To the best of our knowledge there is no study on the effect of age, gender and BMI
175 that has been carried out among the West African population. Likewise, this study made sure that all relevant
176 age-groups were captured.

177 However, it is noteworthy to state that there are some limitations in this study. One was that the sample size was
178 relatively small especially at the one extreme end of the age groups (i.e. the age group 'above 60 years old').
179 This was mainly due to cultural superstition that is associated with the use of human samples (e.g. blood) as well
180 as due to the invasiveness and the need for repeating the experiment.

181

182 **5. Conclusion**

183 In summary, our study showed that age and BMI positively associated with HbA1c in non-diabetic Nigerian
184 population. The positive association of HbA1c with age has clinical consequences. One such consequence, is in
185 the management of older diabetic patients who are usually prone to the risk of hypoglycaemia due to anti-
186 diabetic drug overuse. Since certain factors unrelated to glycaemia may be contributing to increase in HbA1c
187 levels in non- diabetic normal glucose tolerant individuals as noted earlier, it goes to imply that the current
188 HbA1c targets [American Diabetes Association, (HbA1c<7%) or the American College of Endocrinology
189 (HbA1c $\leq 6.5\%$)] for diabetics, which did not take into account the contribution of age may need to be reviewed
190 and the age factor taken into account in order to minimize the risk of hypoglycaemia and other medication side
191 effects. This study also showed that there is no significant correlation between HbA1c and gender even though
192 there were certain association, with men having higher values than women.

193 Further studies is required especially to investigate the non-glycaemic factors affecting HbA1c levels in normal
194 glucose tolerant populations so as to really understand the actual role glycosylated haemoglobin play in diabetes
195 management and diagnosis.

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