

The weight of success: The body mass index and economic well-being in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper shows that body mass increases almost linearly with economic resources among Black South Africans. Furthermore other measures of “success” (e.g. education) are also associated with increases in body mass. This is true both in 1998 (the Demographic and Health Survey) and 2008 (National Income Dynamics Survey). This suggests that body mass can be used as a crude measure of well-being. Used in this way it suggests that unemployment is involuntary. This is true even if we control for household fixed effects.