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Global, Regional, and National Burden of Nontraumatic Subarachnoid Hemorrhage
The Global Burden of Disease Study 2021

GBD 2021 Global Subarachnoid Hemorrhage Risk Factors Collaborators

IMPORTANCE Nontraumatic subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH) represents the third most common stroke type with unique etiologies, risk factors, diagnostics, and treatments. Nevertheless, epidemiological studies often cluster SAH with other stroke types leaving its distinct burden estimates obscure.

OBJECTIVE To estimate the worldwide burden of SAH.

DESIGN, SETTING, AND PARTICIPANTS Based on the repeated cross-sectional Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 2021 study, the global burden of SAH in 1990 to 2021 was estimated. Moreover, the SAH burden was compared with other diseases, and its associations with 14 individual risk factors were investigated with available data in the GBD 2021 study. The GBD study included the burden estimates of nontraumatic SAH among all ages in 204 countries and territories between 1990 and 2021.

EXPOSURES SAH and 14 modifiable risk factors.

MAIN OUTCOMES AND MEASURES Absolute numbers and age-standardized rates with 95% uncertainty intervals (UIs) of SAH incidence, prevalence, mortality, and disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) as well as risk factor–specific population attributable fractions (PAFs).

RESULTS In 2021, the global age-standardized SAH incidence was 8.3 (95% UI, 7.3-9.5), prevalence was 92.2 (95% UI, 84.1-100.6), mortality was 4.2 (95% UI, 3.7-4.8), and DALY rate was 125.2 (95% UI, 110.5-142.6) per 100 000 people. The highest burden estimates were found in Latin America, the Caribbean, Oceania, and high-income Asia Pacific. Although the absolute number of SAH cases increased, especially in regions with a low sociodemographic index, all age-standardized burden rates decreased between 1990 and 2021: the incidence by 28.8% (95% UI, 25.7%-31.6%), prevalence by 16.1% (95% UI, 14.8%-17.7%), mortality by 56.1% (95% UI, 40.7%-64.3%), and DALY rate by 54.6% (95% UI, 42.8%-61.9%). Of 300 diseases, SAH ranked as the 36th most common cause of death and 59th most common cause of DALY in the world. Of all worldwide SAH-related DALYs, 71.6% (95% UI, 63.8%-78.6%) were associated with the 14 modeled risk factors of which high systolic blood pressure (population attributable fraction [PAF] = 51.6%; 95% UI, 38.0%-62.6%) and smoking (PAF = 14.4%; 95% UI, 12.4%-16.5%) had the highest attribution.

CONCLUSIONS AND RELEVANCE Although the global age-standardized burden rates of SAH more than halved over the last 3 decades, SAH remained one of the most common cardiovascular and neurological causes of death and disabilities in the world, with increasing absolute case numbers. These findings suggest evidence for the potential health benefits of proactive public health planning and resource allocation toward the prevention of SAH.

Supplemental content

Group Information: GBD 2021 Global Subarachnoid Hemorrhage Risk Factors Collaborators appear at the end of the article.

Corresponding Author: Ilari Rautalin, MD, PhD, The National Institute for Stroke and Applied Neurosciences, Auckland University of Technology, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, New Zealand (ilari.rautalin@aut.ac.nz).

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Nontraumatic subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH) represents the third most common stroke type after ischemic stroke and intracerebral hemorrhage, accounting for 5% to 10% of all strokes.[1,2] Of all nontraumatic SAHs, approximately 85% are caused by the rupture of an intracranial aneurysm, which distinguishes its etiology, risk factors, symptoms, diagnostics, treatments, and outcomes from other types of stroke.[3] Even though comprehensive SAH-specific burden and risk factor estimates would be crucial for its accurate evidence-based health care planning and resource allocation, SAH is still frequently clustered with other stroke types leaving its unique epidemiology and prevention strategies obscure.

Consistent with various population-based studies worldwide,[4-6] a recent Global Burden of Diseases (GBD) 2021 stroke study reported that the age-standardized burden rates of SAH and other stroke types decreased globally with a substantial geographical variation.[2] However, because the study focused mainly on stroke in general,[2] many SAH-specific findings such as its rankings against the burden estimates of other critical health outcomes were not reported. Therefore, we decided to use the GBD 2021 dataset and focus solely on the global, regional, and national burden of SAH and its risk factors over the last 3 decades. Primarily, we hypothesized that even though the age-standardized burden rates of SAH are decreasing, they still consist of a substantial proportion of the burden related to cardiovascular, neurological, and noncommunicable diseases. This article was produced as part of the GBD Collaborator Network, and in accordance with the GBD protocol.[7]

Key Points

Question What is the global burden of nontraumatic subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH)?

Findings Results of this cross-sectional study, based on the Global Burden of Disease 2021 study, reveal that in 2021, there were 700 000 new SAH cases, almost 8 million patients with prevalent SAH, 350 000 SAH deaths, and over 10 million SAH-related disability-adjusted life-years globally. Despite decreasing age-standardized burden rates, SAH remained one of the most common cardiovascular and neurological causes of death and disability in the world.

Meaning Given the high proportional burden of SAH, study results suggest evidence for the potential health benefits of proactive public health planning and resource allocation for SAH prevention.

Methods

Overview

Details of the GBD methodology are presented elsewhere.[8,9] In brief, GBD studies have been conducted since 1990 to provide annual standardized burden estimates of critical health outcomes and their attribution to behavioral, environmental, and metabolic risks worldwide. By aiming to use all available evidence via its repeated cross-sectional study design, the GBD studies use censuses, household surveys, vital registrations, administrative data collections, disease registers, verbal autopsy tools, air pollution monitors, satellite imaging, and scientific literature as its primary data sources. Based on the actual data points and relevant predictive covariates, the final and missing data are further estimated using various statistical models for fatal and nonfatal burden estimates (eAppendix, eMethods, and eTable 1 in Supplement 1). Because the data sources and assessments of the whole time series are reevaluated and updated in pursuance of every annual release, the latest GBD results supersede the preceding estimates. In the most recent data release, the GBD 2021 study used over 607 billion data points to illustrate the annual burden of 371 diseases and injuries as well as 88 risk factors from 204 countries and territories between 1990 and 2021. The exact data sources are publicly available through the website of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.[10] Because GBD studies rely on the analysis of aggregated secondary data without the direct involvement of human subjects, individual studies based on the publicly available database do not require separate approvals from institutional review boards or informed consent from individuals whose health conditions are studied. The reporting of this manuscript followed the Guidelines for Accurate and Transparent Health Estimates Reporting (GATHER) recommendations.[11]

SAH Definition and Data Sources

In line with the definition of the World Health Organization, the GBD 2021 study defines SAH as a nontraumatic stroke type caused by bleeding into the subarachnoid space of the brain. This definition includes first-ever SAHs with aneurysmal and nonaneurysmal origins but excludes recurrent SAHs and secondary SAHs caused by intracranial traumas. Correspondingly, the study uses primarily code 430 from the *International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision* (*ICD-9*) and code I60 from the *Tenth Revision* (*ICD-10*) to identify relevant data sources and outcomes. According to the 4-level categorization of the GBD studies, SAH belongs to the most specific level 4 category being also part of the categories of noncommunicable diseases (level 1), cardiovascular diseases (level 2), and strokes (level 3). Overall, the GBD 2021 study comprises 2563 data sources for fatal SAHs, 311 data sources for nonfatal SAHs, and 36 data sources for SAH risk factors from 132 different countries/regions between 1963 and 2022 (eAppendix, eMethods, and eFigures 1-4 in Supplement 1).

Risk Factor Estimation

Similar to causes, the GBD classifies risk factors into 4 different levels from the broadest level 1 to the most detailed level 4. For SAH, the GBD 2021 study has available data for all 3 risk clusters of level 1 and 14 individual risk factors from levels 2 to 4 (eAppendix, eMethods, and eTable 2 in Supplement 1). To evaluate the association of 3 risk clusters and 14 available risk factors with SAH-specific burden, the GBD 2021 study uses a comparative assessment framework to calculate population attributable fractions (PAFs)

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defined as a theoretical proportion of burden that could be prevented by changing the exposure of the risk to the theoretical minimum risk exposure level in the population (eAppendix and eMethods in Supplement 1).[12]

Statistical Analysis

Based on the available data input sources and assumptions of geospatial relationships between relevant covariates such as smoking prevalence, systolic blood pressure, and lag distributed income per capita, the GBD uses primarily 2 statistical modeling tools, namely, cause of death ensemble modeling (fatal estimates) and disease-model bayesian meta-regression 2.1 (nonfatal estimates), to produce annual burden estimates of SAH across different population groups and geographical locations between 1990 and 2021 (Appendix, eMethods, and eTable 1 in Supplement 1).[8,9] Consistent with previous GBD stroke reports,[2,13,14] we used the absolute numbers and age-standardized (adjusted to the age structure of the GBD standard population) rates per 100 000 people of 4 outcomes to illustrate the burden of SAH as follows: (1) incidence, (2) prevalence, (3) deaths, and (4) DALYs (eAppendix, eMethods, and eTable 3 in Supplement 1). According to the cause-specific number of deaths and DALYs, we also compared the absolute burden of SAH within 3 stroke types, 11 neurological disorders including strokes, 18 cardiovascular diseases, 192 noncommunicable diseases, and 300 individual diseases/injuries on the same hierarchy level with associated deaths or DALYs (eAppendix, eMethods, and eTable 3 in Supplement 1). To present the attributions of risk factors to SAH-related DALY estimates, we presented the age-standardized PAFs in percentages and DALY rates per 100 000 people attributed to each included risk factor or cluster. Besides average global estimates in 2021, we presented all burden estimates with 95% uncertainty intervals (UIs) and stratified by sex, 4 age groups, 5 Sociodemographic Index (SDI) levels, 7 GBD super regions, 21 GBD regions, and 204 individual countries and territories (eAppendix, eMethods, and eTable 3 in Supplement 1). Lastly, we evaluated the temporal trends by comparing the burden and risk factor estimates between 1990 and 2021. All analyses of the current study are based on the publicly available GBD results[15] and visualization tools.[16] Data were analyzed from 1990 to 2021.

Results

Global Burden of SAH in 2021

Based on the overall global estimates, we observed 0.7 (95% UI, 0.6-0.8) million new SAH cases, 7.9 (95% UI, 7.2-8.6) million patients with prevalent SAH, 0.4 (95% UI, 0.3-0.4) million SAH deaths, and 10.6 (95% UI, 9.4-12.1) million SAH-related DALYs in 2021 (**Table 1**). These resulted in the age-standardized SAH incidence of 8.3 (95% UI, 7.3-9.5), prevalence of 92.2 (95% UI, 84.1-100.6), mortality of 4.2 (95% UI, 3.7-4.8), and DALY rate of 125.2 (95% UI, 110.5-142.6) per 100 000 people. Although the prevalence of SAH was higher in female individuals than in male individuals, the point estimates of other age-standardized burden figures were higher in male patients (Table 1). The rates of all burden estimates of both sexes increased along with increasing age (Table 1 and eFigure 5 in Supplement 1).

Regional and National Burden of SAH in 2021

All age-standardized burden estimates of SAH varied substantially between 204 countries and territories worldwide (**Figure 1** and eTables 4-11 in Supplement 1). By SDI level, we found the highest age-standardized prevalence as well as the lowest mortality and DALY rates of SAH in high-SDI regions (eTable 5 in Supplement 1). On the other hand, the highest age-standardized incidence, mortality, and DALY rates occurred in low-middle- and middle-SDI regions (eTable 5 in Supplement 1). According to the 7 GBD super regions, we found the lowest age-standardized mortality and DALY rates in North Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and high-income super regions, whereas the lowest incidence rates were observed in North Africa, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Latin America and the Caribbean had, in turn, the highest age-standardized rates of all 4 burden estimates (eTable 5 in Supplement 1). These geographical differences also varied slightly between male and female individuals (eTables 6 and 7 in Supplement 1) as well as between different age groups (eTables 8-11 in Supplement 1). In high-SDI regions, we observed that female individuals had higher incidence, prevalence, mortality, and DALY rates compared with males, but these differences were not observed in other SDI regions.

Temporal Changes in SAH Burden

Between 1990 and 2021, the absolute number of annual new SAH incidents increased from 0.5 to 0.7 million (37.1%; 95% UI 32.2%-42.4%) and prevalent cases from 4.9 to 7.9 million (60.2%; 95% UI, 56.9%-63.4%). Moreover, the absolute number of global deaths and DALYs due to SAH had an increasing trend since 2005 (**Figure 2**A). However, according to the age-standardized rates per 100 000 people, all burden estimates of SAH decreased worldwide between 1990 and 2021, with incidence from 11.7 to 8.3 (28.8%; 95% UI, 25.7%-31.6%), prevalence from 109.9 to 92.2 (16.1%; 95% UI, 14.8%-17.7%), mortality from 9.5 to 4.2 (56.1%; 95% UI, 40.7%-64.3%), and DALY rate from 275.9 to 125.2 (54.6%; 95% UI, 42.8%-61.9%) (Figure 2B and eTable 12 in Supplement 1). Although the absolute number of new SAH incidents and prevalence increased among all SDI levels, the increases were more evident in low- and low-middle-SDI regions where the absolute number of deaths and DALYs also increased over the whole study period (eFigure 10 and eTables 13 and 14 in Supplement 1). Moreover, we found decreasing age-standardized burden estimates in all SDI categories, but the decreases were the most evident in middle- and high-middle-SDI regions (eFigure 10 and eTables 15 and 16 in Supplement 1).

SAH Burden Compared With Other Causes

Of 300 level 4 diseases/injuries modeled by the GBD 2021 study, SAH ranked as the 36th most common cause of death (0.5%; 95% UI, 0.5%-0.6% of all deaths) and 59th most common cause of DALY (0.4%; 95% UI, 0.3%-0.4% of all DALYs) in the world (**Figure 3**). The corresponding rankings were 23rd and 39th among 192 noncommunicable diseases, 6th and 6th among 18

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Table 1. Global Number and Age-Standardized Rates With 95% Uncertainty Intervals (UIs) of Subarachnoid Hemorrhage Incidence, Prevalence, Mortality, and Disability-Adjusted Life-Years (DALYs) in 2021[a]

Group	Incidence	Prevalence	Mortality	DALY
Overall				
Absolute No. in millions (95% UI)	0.70 (0.61-0.80)	7.85 (7.16-8.58)	0.35 (0.31-0.40)	10.64 (9.40-12.12)
Age-standardized rate per 100 000 people (95% UI)	8.33 (7.34-9.48)	92.17 (84.08-100.60)	4.18 (3.66-4.76)	125.20 (110.54-142.61)
Female				
Absolute No. in millions (95% UI)	0.36 (0.32-0.41)	4.31 (3.95-4.69)	0.18 (0.16-0.21)	5.16 (4.62-5.89)
Age-standardized rate per 100 000 people (95% UI)	8.17 (7.21-9.35)	97.88 (89.66-106.58)	3.91 (3.41-4.55)	116.35 (104.22-133.10)
Male				
Absolute No. in millions (95% UI)	0.34 (0.30-0.39)	3.54 (3.22-3.89)	0.17 (0.14-0.22)	5.48 (4.50-6.90)
Age-standardized rate per 100 000 people (95% UI)	8.51 (7.48-9.65)	85.52 (77.67-93.74)	4.48 (3.64-5.56)	134.07 (109.87-167.87)
Children (0-14 y)				
Absolute No. in millions (95% UI)	0.034 (0.023-0.046)	0.21 (0.17-0.25)	0.0033 (0.0026-0.0041)	0.31 (0.25-0.37)
Rate per 100 000 people (95% UI)	1.67 (1.16-2.29)	10.27 (8.49-12.50)	0.16 (0.13-0.20)	15.29 (12.34-18.51)
Young adults (15-49 y)				
Absolute No. in millions (95% UI)	0.24 (0.19-0.30)	2.71 (2.43-3.04)	0.055 (0.047-0.067)	3.19 (2.74-3.82)
Rate per 100 000 people (95% UI)	6.13 (4.83-7.50)	68.63 (61.46-76.87)	1.39 (1.19-1.69)	80.75 (69.42-96.78)
Old adults (50-74 y)				
Absolute No. in millions (95% UI)	0.29 (0.24-0.37)	3.97 (3.55-4.42)	0.17 (0.15-0.20)	5.49 (4.85-6.26)
Rate per 100 000 people (95% UI)	17.90 (14.67-22.24)	241.76 (216.37-268.90)	10.57 (9.25-12.15)	334.32 (295.19-381.09)
Very old adults (≥75 y)				
Absolute No. in millions (95% UI)	0.13 (0.10-0.16)	0.97 (0.83-1.11)	0.12 (0.10-0.14)	1.66 (1.43-1.86)
Rate per 100 000 people (95% UI)	44.35 (35.94-54.15)	334.57 (286.56-386.05)	41.93 (35.80-47.51)	573.62 (494.79-643.62)

[a] The results are presented overall and separately for female and male individuals and 4 age groups.

cardiovascular diseases, and 5th and 6th among 11 neurological disorders including strokes (eTable 17 in Supplement 1). We observed the highest rankings and proportional burdens of SAH in many middle-SDI regions such as Latin America and East Asia but also in the high-income Asian Pacific. The lowest rankings and proportional burdens occurred in low-SDI regions, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (eTables 18 in Supplement 1).

Risk Factors Attributed to SAH Burden

Of all worldwide SAH-related DALYs in 2021, 71.6% (95% UI, 63.8%-78.6%) attributed to the 14 modeled risk factors by the GBD study (**Table 2**). By the 3 level 1 risk clusters, metabolic risks accounted for the most risk-attributed DALYs of SAH, followed by the environmental/occupational risks and behavioral risks (Table 2 and eFigure 6 in Supplement 1). The top 3 individual risk factors were high SBP (PAF = 51.6%; 95% UI, 38.0%-62.6%), smoking (PAF = 14.4%; 95% UI, 12.4%-16.5%), and ambient particulate matter pollution (PAF = 14.2%; 95% UI, 9.8%-18.0%). The rankings varied slightly between male and female individuals (eFigure 7 in Supplement 1). By SDI levels, the attribution of all risk factors combined to SAH-related DALYs was highest in the low-SDI level (PAF = 77.3%; 95% UI, 70.2%-82.7%) and the lowest in the high-SDI level (PAF = 64.3%; 95% UI, 52.3%-74.0%). This was mainly attributed to the increased proportion of environmental/occupational risks and especially the increase in the association of household air pollution, which was attributed to 35.8% (95% UI, 28.5%-42.9%) of the SAH-related DALYs in the low-SDI level and less than 0.1% (95% UI, 0-0.3%) of the SAH-related DALYs in the high-SDI level (eFigures 6-8 in Supplement 1). Between 1990 and 2021, the age-standardized DALY rate of SAH that attributed to all risk factors combined decreased by 56.6% (95% UI, 44.7%-63.7%), and this decrease was more evident in environmental/occupational and behavioral risks than in metabolic risks (Table 2).

Discussion

According to the GBD 2021 study estimates, in 2021, there were 700 000 new SAH cases, almost 8 million patients with prevalent SAH, 350 000 SAH deaths, and over 10 million SAH-related DALYs globally. This ranked SAH as the 36th most common cause of death and 59th most common cause of death and disability in the world among 300 critical health outcomes. Although the global age-standardized mortality and DALY rates of

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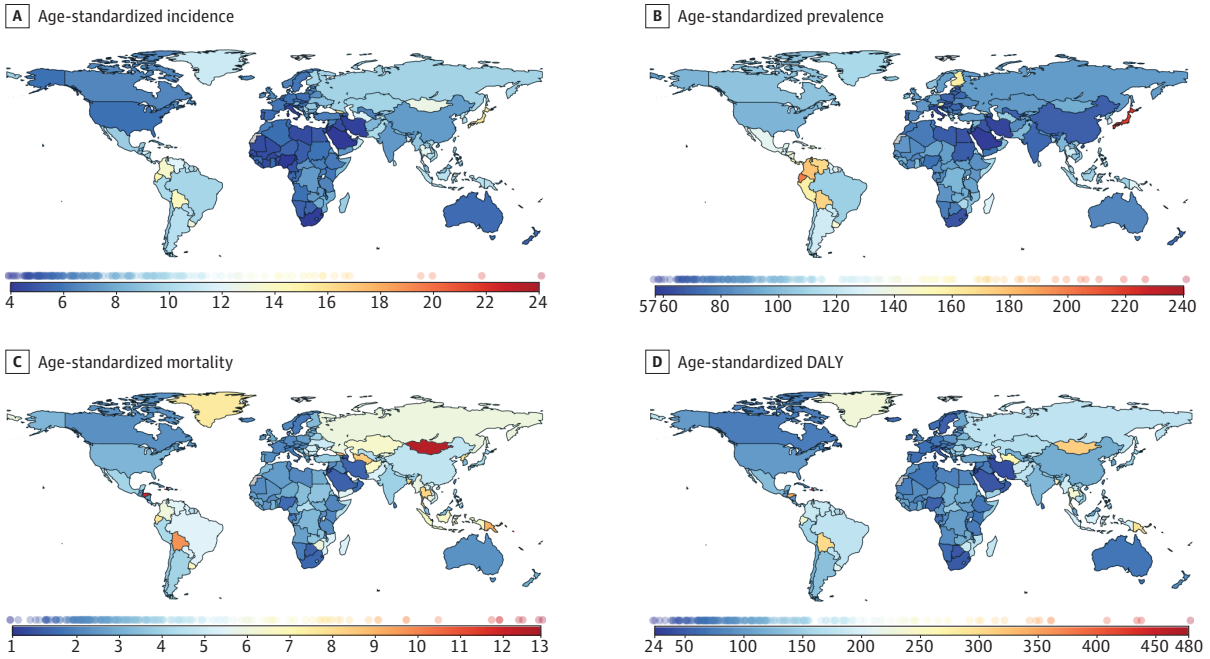
Figure 1. Worldwide Burden of Subarachnoid Hemorrhage in 2021



Age-standardized incidence (A), prevalence (B), mortality (C), and disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) (D) rates of subarachnoid hemorrhage per 100 000 people in 204 countries and territories in 2021. The circles above the scales represent the estimates from individual countries. Figure created with The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, Global Burden of Diseases Study 2021.[16]

SAH more than halved during the last 3 decades, the absolute number of patients with prevalent SAH increased by over 60% during the same period. This increase reached 105% in low-SDI levels where the absolute number of SAH-related deaths and disabilities also increased by more than 50%. Although these increases may be partially explained by improved diagnostic and documentation of SAH cases, some of these increases can be attributed to increased aging and population growth offering opportunities to reduce globally increasing SAH-related health consequences through improved prevention strategies. Without such urgent, international, and interdisciplinary actions, we can expect the absolute burden of SAH to continue to increase, particularly in low-SDI regions.

Observations about decreasing incidence and mortality rates of SAH are consistent with previous systematic reviews and pooled analyses of individual population-based cohort studies around the world.[4-6] Such favorable trends have mainly been related to the decreasing prevalence of smoking,[5,17] improved management of hypertension,[5] improved management of SAH (eg, shortened treatment delays, increasing access to neurointensive care units, and evolvements of endovascular aneurysm treatments),[18] as well as improvements in the pre-SAH interventions of persons with unruptured intracranial aneurysms (UIAs).[5,19] Notably, most of these findings originate from high-SDI regions, whereas low- and middle-SDI areas continue to face significant challenges in accessing and delivering quality health care services for patients with SAH. For example, approximately 90% of the countries in GBD regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, and Oceania have been reported to lack urgent access to advanced microneurosurgery.[20] In comparison with population-adjusted figures, previous literature on trends of absolute SAH cases, deaths, and disabilities is limited yet such estimates act as a cornerstone of worldwide public health planning and resource allocation. According to a recent policy view by the World Stroke Organization,[21] the absolute burden of SAH was predicted to increase by over 40% by 2050, which was more than the corresponding estimates of other stroke types. However, although the policy view[21] introduced extensive pragmatic solutions to reduce the global burden of stroke overall by improving its surveillance, prevention, acute care, and rehabilitation, the recommendations did not consider any SAH-specific characteristics. For instance, lower median age, female predisposition, distinct etiologies, high sudden-death rates, and unique neurosurgical treatment modalities of SAH as well as prevention possibilities of persons with UIAs were not assessed. Similarly, other key prevention guidelines on stroke, cardiovascular diseases, and neurological disorders have clustered all stroke types disregarding the distinct features of SAH,[22-25] whereas the SAH-specific guidelines have focused on in-hospital diagnostics and management rather than prevention strategies of SAH.[3,26,27] Given the distinct characteristics of SAH, its substantial proportion of global health burden, and large attribution to modifiable risk factors, guidelines on SAH-specific primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention that also consider the patients and high-risk individuals outside of the neurosurgical tertiary care are warranted in the future.

Besides surpassing the burden of most cardiovascular diseases (eg, atrial fibrillation/flutter, aortic aneurysms, heart valve

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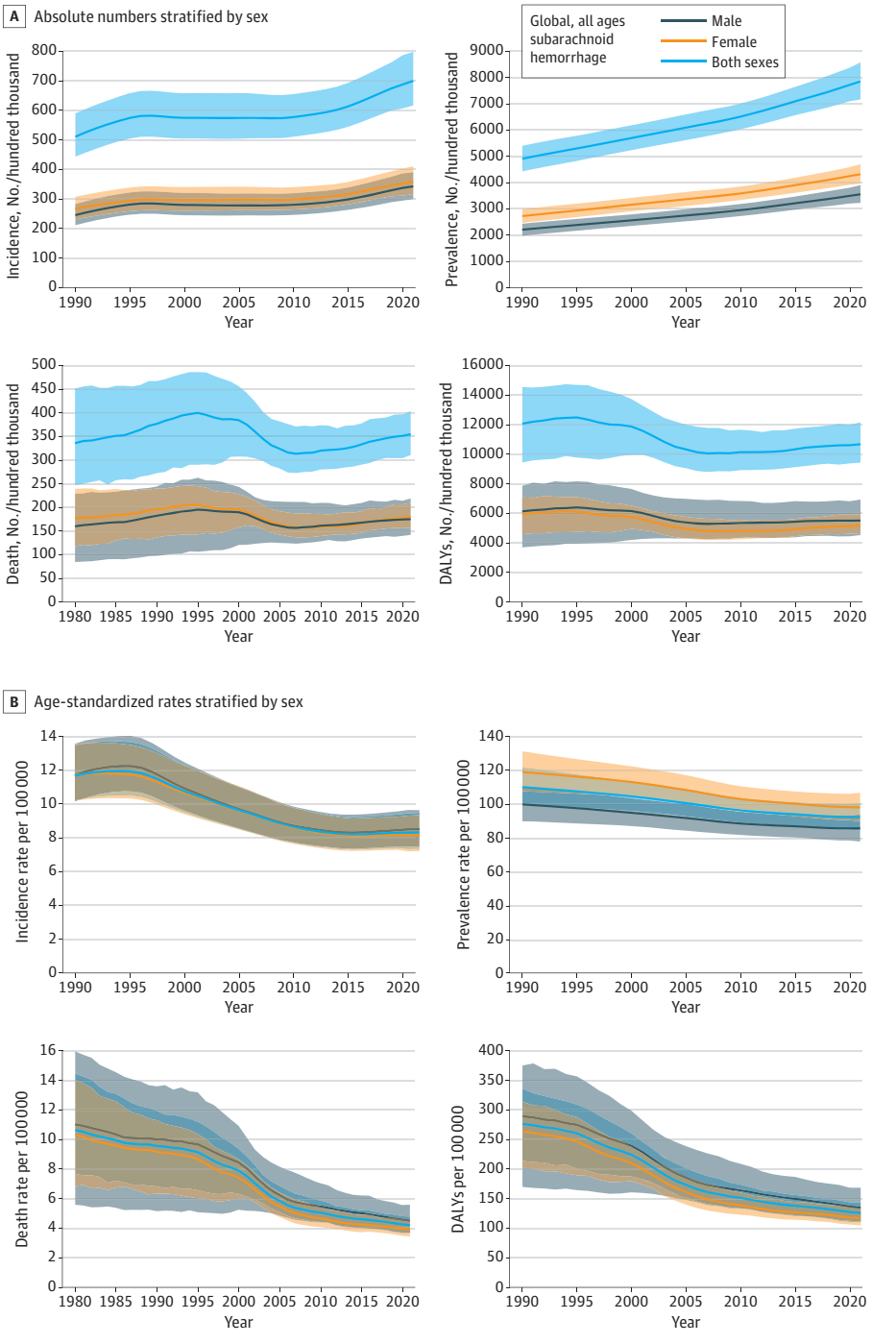
Figure 2. Changes in the Incidence, Prevalence, Deaths, and Disability-Adjusted Life-Years (DALYs) of Subarachnoid Hemorrhage in the World Between 1990 (Deaths Since 1980) and 2021



Results are presented as absolute number (A) and age-standardized rates (B) per 100 000 people as well as stratified by sex. Solid lines represent the changes in point estimates, and shaded areas represent 95% uncertainty intervals. Figures created with The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, Global Burden of Diseases Study 2021.[15]

diseases, peripheral arterial diseases, endocarditis, and myocarditis) and neurological disorders (eg, Parkinson disease, tension-type headache, motor neuron diseases, and multiple sclerosis), the global number of SAH deaths and disabilities also exceeded various other life-threatening infections (eg, encephalitis, hepatitis, and deaths due to meningitis), cancers (eg, brain, prostate and cervical cancers, leukemias and lymphomas), and injuries (eg, physical violence by firearms and sharp objects, sexual violence and nature disasters). Given that most of these causes in GBD studies are combinations of various 3-character *ICD* health conditions, our findings suggest that SAH is not only a common but also one of the most common cardiovascular and neurological causes of death and disabilities. Similarly high proportional burdens have also been reported in previous studies,[28,29] which is understandable given the relatively low median age of SAH com-

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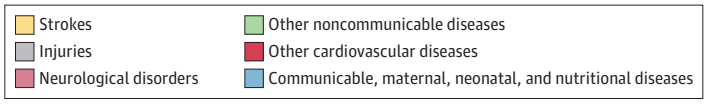
Figure 3. The Most Common Causes of Death and Disability-Adjusted Life-Years (DALYs) in the World in 2021



Cause of death	Ranking	% of All deaths (95% UIs)
Ischemic heart disease	1	13.25 (12.27-13.87)
COVID-19	2	11.63 (10.79-12.48)
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	3	5.48 (4.96-5.92)
Ischemic stroke	4	5.29 (4.78-5.64)
Intracerebral hemorrhage	5	4.87 (4.49-5.19)
Other COVID-19 pandemic-related outcomes	6	3.96 (3.10-5.23)
Lower respiratory infections	7	3.22 (2.94-3.44)
Tracheal, bronchus, and lung cancer	8	2.97 (2.71-3.20)
Alzheimer disease and other dementias	9	2.88 (0.75-7.39)
Type 2 diabetes	10	2.37 (2.21-2.48)
Hypertensive heart disease	11	1.96 (1.66-2.15)
Diarrheal diseases	12	1.72 (1.19-2.37)
Drug-susceptible tuberculosis	13	1.54 (1.35-1.76)
Colon and rectum cancer	14	1.54 (1.42-1.63)
Stomach cancer	15	1.41 (1.22-1.57)
Falls	16	1.18 (1.00-1.28)
Malaria	17	1.10 (0.40-2.28)
Neonatal preterm birth	18	1.09 (0.93-1.27)
Self-harm by other specified means	19	1.02 (0.94-1.08)
Breast cancer	20	0.99 (0.92-1.05)
Neonatal encephalopathy due to birth asphyxia and trauma	21	0.89 (0.76-1.04)
Esophageal cancer	22	0.79 (0.71-0.88)
HIV/AIDS resulting in other diseases	23	0.76 (0.67-0.87)
Pancreatic cancer	24	0.75 (0.68-0.79)
Chronic kidney disease due to type 2 diabetes	25	0.70 (0.60-0.83)
Chronic kidney disease due to hypertension	26	0.67 (0.56-0.77)
Pedestrian road injuries	27	0.65 (0.58-0.70)
Motor vehicle road injuries	28	0.64 (0.60-0.69)
Asthma	29	0.64 (0.53-0.82)
Prostate cancer	30	0.64 (0.56-0.69)
Chronic hepatitis B including cirrhosis	31	0.64 (0.55-0.73)
Parkinson disease	32	0.57 (0.52-0.61)
Rheumatic heart disease	33	0.55 (0.48-0.65)
Chronic hepatitis C including cirrhosis	34	0.54 (0.47-0.63)
Cirrhosis due to alcohol	35	0.52 (0.44-0.61)
Subarachnoid hemorrhage	36	0.52 (0.45-0.59)
Atrial fibrillation and flutter	37	0.50 (0.43-0.54)
Chronic kidney disease due to other and unspecified causes	38	0.45 (0.38-0.52)
Other cardiomyopathy	39	0.45 (0.41-0.49)
Urinary tract infections and interstitial nephritis	40	0.44 (0.40-0.48)
Cervical cancer	41	0.44 (0.41-0.47)
Drowning	42	0.40 (0.38-0.43)
Other non-Hodgkin lymphoma	43	0.38 (0.35-0.41)
Brain and central nervous system cancer	44	0.38 (0.33-0.43)
Congenital heart anomalies	45	0.37 (0.31-0.45)
Motorcyclist road injuries	46	0.35 (0.31-0.38)
Neonatal sepsis and other neonatal infections	47	0.34 (0.29-0.39)
Paralytic ileus and intestinal obstruction	48	0.34 (0.30-0.38)
Peptic ulcer disease	49	0.34 (0.29-0.40)
Other malignant neoplasms	50	0.33 (0.30-0.35)
Bladder cancer	51	0.33 (0.30-0.36)
Other neonatal disorders	52	0.33 (0.23-0.39)
Other cardiovascular and circulatory diseases	53	0.33 (0.30-0.36)
Meningitis	54	0.32 (0.26-0.39)
Lip and oral cavity cancer	55	0.31 (0.28-0.32)
Chronic kidney disease due to glomerulonephritis	56	0.29 (0.24-0.33)
Protein-energy malnutrition	57	0.28 (0.25-0.31)
Interstitial lung disease and pulmonary sarcoidosis	58	0.28 (0.24-0.31)
Ovarian cancer	59	0.27 (0.25-0.29)
HIV/AIDS - drug-susceptible tuberculosis	60	0.27 (0.21-0.33)
Liver cancer due to hepatitis B	61	0.27 (0.22-0.32)
Endocrine, metabolic, blood, and immune disorders	62	0.26 (0.23-0.28)
Cirrhosis due to other causes	63	0.26 (0.20-0.31)
Gallbladder and biliary tract cancer	64	0.25 (0.21-0.29)
Physical violence by firearm	65	0.25 (0.24-0.27)
Kidney cancer	66	0.24 (0.22-0.25)
Alcohol use disorders	67	0.23 (0.19-0.25)
Aortic aneurysm	68	0.23 (0.20-0.25)
Liver cancer due to hepatitis C	69	0.22 (0.18-0.25)
Physical violence by other means	70	0.21 (0.20-0.22)
Nonrheumatic calcific aortic valve disease	71	0.21 (0.18-0.23)
Idiopathic epilepsy	72	0.21 (0.17-0.22)
Gallbladder and biliary diseases	73	0.19 (0.17-0.23)
Acute myeloid leukemia	74	0.19 (0.17-0.22)
Pancreatitis	75	0.18 (0.16-0.21)

Cause of DALY	Ranking	% of All DALYs (95% UIs)
COVID-19	1	7.37 (6.54-8.25)
Ischemic heart disease	2	6.55 (5.90-7.17)
Lower respiratory infections	3	2.87 (2.48-3.24)
Neonatal preterm birth	4	2.79 (2.44-3.13)
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	5	2.77 (2.47-3.03)
Intracerebral hemorrhage	6	2.76 (2.46-3.04)
Other COVID-19 pandemic-related outcomes	7	2.69 (2.06-3.61)
Type 2 diabetes	8	2.61 (2.34-2.92)
Ischemic stroke	9	2.44 (2.19-2.68)
Low back pain	10	2.42 (1.86-3.06)
Diarrheal diseases	11	2.05 (1.65-2.50)
Neonatal encephalopathy due to birth asphyxia and trauma	12	2.03 (1.73-2.33)
Malaria	13	1.91 (0.78-3.71)
Tracheal, bronchus, and lung cancer	14	1.62 (1.41-1.82)
Major depressive disorder	15	1.59 (1.14-2.12)
Other musculoskeletal disorders	16	1.56 (1.17-2.05)
Age-related and other hearing loss	17	1.53 (1.14-2.00)
Falls	18	1.52 (1.33-1.71)
Migraine	19	1.49 (0.23-3.15)
Drug-susceptible tuberculosis	20	1.48 (1.30-1.67)
Anxiety disorders	21	1.47 (1.06-1.91)
Alzheimer's disease and other dementias	22	1.26 (0.62-2.64)
Dietary iron deficiency	23	1.12 (0.81-1.50)
Self-harm by other specified means	24	1.08 (0.97-1.18)
HIV/AIDS resulting in other diseases	25	1.02 (0.90-1.17)
Hypertensive heart disease	26	0.88 (0.74-0.99)
Motor vehicle road injuries	27	0.86 (0.80-0.93)
Colon and rectum cancer	28	0.85 (0.76-0.93)
Neonatal sepsis and other neonatal infections	29	0.81 (0.70-0.94)
Stomach cancer	30	0.79 (0.68-0.92)
Congenital heart anomalies	31	0.77 (0.64-0.93)
Asthma	32	0.74 (0.63-0.90)
Pedestrian road injuries	33	0.74 (0.66-0.82)
Breast cancer	34	0.72 (0.65-0.78)
Neck pain	35	0.71 (0.50-0.94)
Other neonatal disorders	36	0.70 (0.51-0.85)
Alcohol use disorders	37	0.59 (0.49-0.70)
Other gynecological diseases	38	0.55 (0.39-0.72)
Drowning	39	0.55 (0.49-0.61)
Schizophrenia	40	0.51 (0.38-0.65)
Meningitis	41	0.50 (0.39-0.65)
Motorcyclist road injuries	42	0.49 (0.43-0.53)
Chronic hepatitis B including cirrhosis	43	0.48 (0.40-0.56)
Idiopathic epilepsy	44	0.48 (0.38-0.59)
Rheumatic heart disease	45	0.47 (0.41-0.54)
Esophageal cancer	46	0.45 (0.39-0.52)
Endocrine, metabolic, blood, and immune disorders	47	0.45 (0.36-0.57)
Osteoarthritis knee	48	0.41 (0.21-0.80)
Chronic hepatitis C including cirrhosis	49	0.41 (0.34-0.49)
Protein-energy malnutrition	50	0.41 (0.35-0.47)
Near vision loss	51	0.40 (0.18-0.76)
Autism spectrum disorders	52	0.40 (0.28-0.56)
Chronic kidney disease due to other and unspecified causes	53	0.40 (0.36-0.43)
Pancreatic cancer	54	0.39 (0.35-0.44)
Chronic kidney disease due to type 2 diabetes	55	0.39 (0.33-0.45)
Opioid use disorders	56	0.39 (0.32-0.45)
Cirrhosis due to alcohol	57	0.39 (0.32-0.46)
Chronic kidney disease due to hypertension	58	0.38 (0.32-0.44)
Subarachnoid hemorrhage	59	0.37 (0.32-0.43)
Other congenital birth defects	60	0.37 (0.30-0.49)
Dysthymia	61	0.36 (0.24-0.49)
Physical violence by firearm	62	0.35 (0.32-0.38)
Other cardiovascular and circulatory diseases	63	0.35 (0.31-0.40)
HIV/AIDS - Drug-susceptible tuberculosis	64	0.34 (0.27-0.42)
Cervical cancer	65	0.34 (0.31-0.39)
Physical violence by other means	66	0.33 (0.31-0.36)
Edentulism	67	0.33 (0.23-0.43)
Other exposure to mechanical forces	68	0.32 (0.26-0.38)
Other mental disorders	69	0.31 (0.21-0.44)
Brain and central nervous system cancer	70	0.31 (0.27-0.36)
Other unintentional injuries	71	0.30 (0.23-0.36)
Conflict and terrorism	72	0.30 (0.25-0.38)
Other cardiomyopathy	73	0.30 (0.26-0.33)
Fire, heat, and hot substances	74	0.29 (0.24-0.34)
Atrial fibrillation and flutter	75	0.29 (0.25-0.34)

Rankings of the 75 most common causes of death and DALYs in the world in 2021 presented as percentages with 95% uncertainty intervals.

bined with high sudden-death, short-term case-fatality, and morbidity rates. For example, according to a previous nationwide study from Finland,[28] aneurysmal SAH represented the 18th most common cause of death in middle-aged people (40-64 years old). By similar age stratification in the GBD 2021 study, consistent findings occurred not only in Finland but also in other Nordic and Western European countries with universal health care, and registration structures emphasizing the substantial role of SAH among the most common causes of premature mortality in working-age individuals (eFigure 9 in Supplement 1).

In line with various population-based cohort studies reporting not only associative[30-33] but also causal relationships,[34-37] high SBP and smoking were the 2 leading risk factors with the largest attribution to the burden of SAH. Because our findings suggest that eliminating these 2 risk fac-

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Table 2. Age-Standardized Proportions, Absolute Numbers, and Age-Standardized Rates of Subarachnoid Hemorrhage (SAH)–Related Disability-Adjusted Life-Years (DALYs) Attributed to Risk Factors in 2021 and Their Changes Between 1990-2021

Risk factors	Age-standardized proportion of SAH-related DALYs attributed to risk factors		Absolute number of SAH-related DALYs attributed to risk factors		Age-standardized SAH-related DALY rate per 100 000 people attributed to risk factors	
	In 2021, PAF (95% UI)	Change between 1990 and 2021, % (95% UI)	In 2021, No. in millions (95% UI)	Change between 1990 and 2021, % (95% UI)	In 2021, rate per 100 000 (95% UI)	Change between 1990 and 2021, % (95% UI)
All risk factors	71.54 (63.17 to 76.16)	−4.31 (−9.28 to −0.69)	7.72 (6.52 to 9.11)	−10.97 (−25.53 to 12.05)	89.60 (75.68 to 105.80)	−56.59 (−63.73 to −44.65)
Behavioral risks	28.69 (19.40 to 38.78)	−21.44 (−32.59 to −12.40)	3.11 (2.08 to 4.32)	−28.15 (−43.50 to −5.46)	35.96 (23.98 to 49.92)	−64.42 (−71.68 to −52.92)
Diet high in red meat	−7.03 (−29.02 to 9.97)	11.16 (−7.28 to 65.75)	−0.75 (−3.10 to 1.06)	−3.20 (−22.94 to 41.12)	−8.77 (−36.12 to 12.25)	−49.39 (−60.41 to −25.46)
Diet high in sodium	8.93 (2.00 to 19.81)	−26.72 (−55.54 to −10.93)	0.98 (0.22 to 2.24)	−30.57 (−60.70 to 3.40)	11.19 (2.54 to 25.86)	−66.82 (−81.00 to −51.07)
Diet low in fiber	4.01 (−1.20 to 8.35)	−17.91 (−23.83 to −10.94)	0.43 (−0.13 to 0.91)	−29.03 (−39.30 to −13.66)	5.03 (−1.50 to 10.68)	−62.79 (−68.34 to −54.13)
Diet low in fruits	9.01 (−0.67 to 16.39)	−6.80 (−10.25 to −2.27)	0.97 (−0.07 to 1.82)	−17.90 (−28.77 to −0.63)	11.29 (−0.80 to 21.15)	−57.75 (−63.42 to −48.31)
Diet low in vegetables	1.44 (−0.16 to 2.99)	−12.35 (−27.08 to 0.82)	0.16 (−0.02 to 0.33)	−24.39 (−36.82 to −10.52)	1.82 (−0.19 to 3.81)	−60.01 (−66.55 to −52.45)
Secondhand smoke	4.66 (3.20 to 6.15)	−21.57 (−29.18 to −14.28)	0.51 (0.34 to 0.67)	−29.33 (−40.62 to −10.15)	5.84 (3.91 to 7.85)	−64.39 (−70.47 to −54.14)
Smoking	14.43 (12.36 to 16.45)	−24.05 (−33.60 to −6.70)	1.57 (1.28 to 1.90)	−31.23 (−44.19 to −4.46)	18.07 (14.72 to 21.86)	−65.67 (−72.32 to −51.79)
Environmental/ occupational risks	32.73 (25.80 to 39.46)	−24.89 (−31.47 to −17.71)	3.53 (2.64 to 4.59)	−30.29 (−43.65 to −5.99)	41.05 (30.76 to 53.24)	−65.95 (−72.61 to −53.59)
Ambient particulate matter pollution	14.20 (9.82 to 17.97)	44.32 (9.41 to 92.37)	1.53 (1.03 to 1.97)	34.74 (−1.61 to 87.79)	17.77 (11.98 to 22.81)	−34.50 (−52.60 to −8.18)
High temperature	1.13 (0.21 to 2.46)	79.32 (−116.49 to 446.78)	0.12 (0.02 to 0.27)	52.84 (−49.56 to 310.51)	1.43 (0.27 to 3.14)	−18.67 (−107.51 to 159.93)
Household air pollution from solid fuels	10.29 (5.50 to 17.36)	−59.68 (−75.02 to −40.14)	1.12 (0.58 to 1.96)	−62.11 (−77.49 to −40.99)	12.96 (6.67 to 22.68)	−81.68 (−89.17 to −71.32)
Lead exposure	6.18 (−0.81 to 13.75)	−14.54 (−19.14 to −7.03)	0.67 (−0.09 to 1.49)	−20.21 (−34.56 to 6.26)	7.76 (−1.03 to 17.25)	−61.32 (−68.44 to −48.24)
Low temperature	4.48 (3.76 to 5.27)	−27.51 (−32.60 to −22.58)	0.48 (0.39 to 0.58)	−34.82 (−46.98 to −13.73)	5.60 (4.62 to 6.77)	−67.19 (−73.42 to −56.35)
Metabolic risks	52.54 (38.93 to 63.50)	12.43 (5.88 to 20.57)	5.68 (4.15 to 7.12)	6.67 (−11.02 to 32.31)	65.78 (48.06 to 82.57)	−48.93 (−57.56 to −36.01)
High body mass index	4.92 (0.00 to 10.99)	233.52 (−671.23 to 1668.40)	0.53 (0.00 to 1.19)	199.02 (−624.52 to 1533.99)	6.14 (0.00 to 13.85)	53.22 (−346.64 to 686.75)
High systolic blood pressure	51.57 (37.95 to 62.61)	10.96 (4.62 to 18.43)	5.58 (4.05 to 7.06)	5.35 (−12.47 to 30.77)	64.58 (46.84 to 81.79)	−49.59 (−58.30 to −37.25)

Abbreviations: PAF, population attributable fraction; UI, uncertainty interval.

tors would more than halve the burden of SAH, their prioritization is justified when placing prevention strategies for SAH. For example, advertisement bans, age restrictions, increased taxation, health education, cessation support, and prohibition of smoking in public places, and work environments including the hospitality industry represent evidence-based strategies that reduce smoking initiation and prevalence in populations.[38] Similarly, improvements in diagnostics, medications, and lifestyle interventions on weight, salt intake and diet, especially among people with a high risk of hypertension, are known to decrease the disease burden of high blood pressure.[39] In addition, the GBD 2021 estimates suggest that ambient and household air pollution have a comparable attribution to SAH burden with smoking which further highlights the importance of system-level disease prevention through policy changes rather than placing all burden on the individuals. Having said that, previous studies on the associations of air pollution and stroke risk have often clustered SAH with other stroke types and do not consider the potential confounding/mediating effects of other concurrent SAH risk factors.[37,40-44] Similar limitations occur in the evidence of many dietary factors,[45] including moderate to high consumption of alcohol.[31,32,37,46] Regarding high BMI, previous evidence suggests that after considering the indirect effects via smoking and hypertension, the independent role of BMI on SAH risk is negligible[47] but it may be associated with poor SAH outcomes.[48] As additional potential risk factors that were assessed for stroke in general but not for SAH in the GBD 2021 study, low physical activity[34,37,49-51] and adverse lipid profile[52,53] have also been associated with a higher risk of SAH whereas the independent effect of high blood glucose and diabetes on SAH risk is more controversial.[32,34,54,55]

Limitations

Even though the present study constitutes, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive analysis of the global, regional, and national burden estimates of SAH and their time trends, attributions to modifiable risk factors, and comparisons to other critical health outcomes, it also has limitations. First, due to the limited amount of SAH-specific data sources from various individual countries and population groups, many reported burden and risk factor estimates rely more on pre-

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dictive covariates and assumptions of geographical similarities than actual high-quality observations. Given that the incidence and mortality estimates of SAH vary substantially both between[4-6] and within countries,[56-58] findings from population groups with limited or no actual data sources (eg, many individual countries) should be interpreted with caution and against other available evidence due to the increased risk of systematic selection, measurement, and detection biases. For example, of all 2910 SAH-specific data sources in the GBD 2021 study, only 22 originated from Sub-Saharan Africa including door-to-door prevalence surveys from Benin,[59] Ghana,[60] and Nigeria,[61] admission data from a rural Nigerian hospital,[62] and administrative cause-of-death registrations from Cape Verde, Ghana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Based on such scattered and sporadic data collections that invariably miss, eg, sudden-death SAHs without routinely conducted postmortem examinations, it seems probable that the GBD 2021 study underestimates the burden of SAH in many low-SDI regions from Sub-Saharan Africa. This lack of high-quality input data may also explain why female predisposition was not observed outside of high-SDI regions despite the consistent evidence from previous population-based studies.[5,32,63,64] Nevertheless, our findings about the exceptionally low burden of SAH in many low-SDI regions rather emphasize the importance of high-quality disease surveillance than support a favorable situation in these regions. Second, even though the GBD 2021 study uses numerous data sources across the world, the data from several relevant publications especially focusing on SAH risk factors have not been incorporated as part of its prediction models. In fact, all SAH-specific risk factor data sources of the GBD 2021 study focus on dietary risks or lead exposure, whereas the relative risk estimates of other exposures are based on the stroke literature in general. Therefore, the reliability of covariate-driven risk factor estimations of the GBD study could likely be improved by performing an updated systematic review gathering the most recent and relevant published risk factor data for SAH.[37] This would also enable the assessment of independent pathways and interactions of relevant SAH risk factors more comprehensively. Third, because the GBD 2021 study did not record the different etiologies of nontraumatic SAHs and most data sources were based on registration codes without external case validation, our findings should be applied cautiously to aneurysmal SAHs. Fourth, because the current GBD dataset did not include information about the regional and temporal changes in SAH diagnostics and treatment, future studies are still needed to determine the exact reasons for our epidemiological observations and establish pragmatic solutions for decreasing the global burden of SAH. For example, high-quality comparisons focusing on worldwide and temporal differences in prehospital, in-hospital, and posthospital care of SAH would be of great importance. Lastly, the current GBD data release included a limited number of data sources for the most recent years, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Although no significant changes in the SAH burden were observed during the peak pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, future data releases may offer more comprehensive insights into the potential effects of COVID-19 and related shifts in health care systems on the global burden of SAH.

Conclusions

Despite decreasing age-standardized burden rates, SAH remains one of the most common cardiovascular and neurological causes of death and disability globally with constantly increasing absolute case numbers. Moreover, over 70% of the SAH-related burden appears to be attributed to modifiable risk factors, most importantly to high systolic blood pressure and smoking. Given the substantial and potentially preventable impact of SAH on global health, consideration of its distinct features from other stroke types in evidence-based public health planning, resource allocation, and prevention strategies is warranted. Besides efforts to decrease global hypertension and smoking rates, enhancing in-hospital patient care, the availability of diagnostic tools, neurosurgical tertiary care, and identification of UIAs among patients with a high SAH risk could serve as justified targets for future improvements, especially in low and middle SDI regions. At the same time, many countries, especially from Sub-Saharan Africa, do not have any SAH-specific data sources; this emphasizes the importance of international and interdisciplinary collaboration to produce more reliable burden estimates of SAH from these regions.

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GBD 2021 Global Subarachnoid Hemorrhage Risk Factors Collaborators: Ilari Rautalin, PhD; Victor Volovici, PhD; Benjamin A. Stark, MA; Catherine O. Johnson, PhD; Jaakko Kaprio, PhD; Miikka Korja, PhD; Rita V. Krishnamurthi, PhD; Balakrishnan Sukumaran Nair, MPH; Annemarei Ranta, PhD; Gabriel J. E. Rinkel, PhD; Mervyn D. I. Vergouwen, PhD; Yohannes Habtegiorgis Abate, MSc; Hedayat Abbastabar, PhD; Foad Abd-Allah, MD; Atef Abdelkader, PhD; Parsa Abdi, BEng; Arash Abdollahi, MD; Auwal Abdullahi, PhD; Olugbenga Olusola Abiodun, FWACP; Richard Gyan Aboagye, MPH; Mohamed Abouzid, PharmD; Dariush Abtahi, MD; Samir Abu Rumeileh, MD; Ahmed Abualhasan, MD; Hasan Abualruz, PhD; Hana J. Abukhadijah, MPH; Ahmed Abu-Zaid, PhD; Lawan Hassan Adamu, PhD; Isaac Yeboah Addo, PhD; Rufus Adesoji Adedoyin, PhD; Oyelola A. Adegboye, PhD; Saryia Adra, MD; Leticia Akua Adzigbli, BSc; Williams Agyemang-Duah, PhD; Bright Opoku Ahinkorah, MPhil; Aqeel Ahmad, PhD; Danish Ahmad, PhD; Amir Mahmoud Ahmadzade, MD; Ali Ahmed, PhD; Haroon Ahmed, PhD; Syed Anees Ahmed, PhD; Budi Aji, DrPH; Mohammed Ahmed Ahmed Al-Kaif, PhD; Yazan Al-Ajlouni, MD; Ziyad Al-Aly, MD; Mohammed Albashtawy, PhD; Mohammed Usman Ali, MSc; Sheikh Mohammad Alif, PhD; Yousef Alimohamadi, PhD; Syed Mohamed Aljunid, PhD; Mahmoud A. Alomari, PhD; Ahmad Alrawashdeh, PhD; Mohammed A. Alsabri, MD; Rustam Al-Shahi Salman, PhD; Awais Altaf, PhD; Alaa B. Al-Tammemi, MPH; Nelson Alvis-Guzman, PhD; Hassan Alwafi, PhD; Mohammad Al-Wardat, PhD; Yaser Mohammed Al-Worafi, PhD; Hany Aly, MD; Mohammad Sharif Ibrahim Alyahya, PhD; Karem H. Alzoubi, PhD; Reza Amani, DVM; Tarek Tawfik Amin, MD; Alireza Amindarolzarbi, MD; Ganiyu Adeniyi Amusa, MD; Deanna Anderlini, MD; Dhanalakshmi Angappan, MD; Abhishek Anil, MD; Boluwatife Stephen Anuoluwa, MPH; Saleha Anwar, PhD; Anayochukwu Edward Anyasodor, PhD; Geminn Louis Carace Apostol, MD; Jalal Arabloo, PhD; Demelash Areda, PhD; Johan Ärnlöv, PhD; Anton A. Artamonov, PhD; Kurnia Dwi Artanti, DrPH; Ashokan Arumugam, PhD; Zahra Aryan, MD; Mohammad Asghari-Jafarabadi, PhD; Mubarek Yesse Ashemo,

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MPH; Tahira Ashraf, MS; Mohammad Athar, PhD; Seyyed Shamsadin Athari, PhD; Avinash Aujayeb, MBBS; Adedapo Wasiu Awotidebe, PhD; Sina Azadnajafabad, MD; Shahkaar Aziz, MS; Ahmed Y. Azzam, MD; Giridhara Rathnaiah Babu, PhD; Nasser Bagheri, PhD; Pegah Bahrami Taghanaki, MD; Saeed Bahramian, MD; Ruhai Bai, MD; Atif Amin Baig, PhD; Abdulaziz T. Bako, PhD; Ovidiu Constantin Baltatu, PhD; Kiran Bam, MPH; Maciej Banach, PhD; Soham Bandyopadhyay, MPH; Biswajit Banik, PhD; Mainak Bardhan, MD; Suzanne Lyn Barker-Collo, PhD; Till Winfried Bärnighausen, MD; Hiba Jawdat Barqawi, MPhil; Lingkan Barua, MPH; Mohammad-Mahdi Bastan, MD; Sanjay Basu, PhD; Shelly L. Bell, PhD; Isabela M. Bensenor, PhD; Alemshet Yirga Berhie, MSc; Kebede A. Beyene, PhD; Akshaya Srikanth Bhagavathula, PhD; Sonu Bhaskar, MD; Ajay Nagesh Bhat, MD; Vivek Bhat, MBBS; Gurjit Kaur Bhatti, PhD; Jasvinder Singh Bhatti, PhD; Ali Bijani, PhD; Boris Bikbov, MD; Mekuriaw Mesfin Birhan, MSc; Mulugeta M. Birhanu, MSc; Veera R. Bitra, PhD; Archith Boloor, MD; Hamed Borhany, MD; Susanne Breitner, DSc; Hermann Brenner, MD; Raffaele Bugiardini, MD; Norma B. Bulamu, PhD; Zahid A. Butt, PhD; Lucas Scotta Cabral, MD; Florentino Luciano Caetano dos Santos, PhD; Daniela Calina, PhD; Luis Alberto Cámera, MD; Luciana Aparecida Campos, PhD; Ismael Campos-Nonato, PhD; Angelo Capodici, MD; Felix Carvalho, PhD; Carlos A. Castañeda-Orjuela, PhD; Alberico L. Catapano, PhD; Luca Cegolon, PhD; Joshua Chadwick, MD; Chiranjib Chakraborty, PhD; Promit Ananyo Chakraborty, MPH; Sandip Chakraborty, MVSc; Rama Mohan Chandika, PhD; Gashaw Sisay Chanie, MSc; Vijay Kumar Chattu, MD; Anis Ahmad Chaudhary, PhD; Gerald Chi, MD; Fatemeh Chichagi, MD; Patrick R. Ching, MD; Hitesh Chopra, PhD; Sonali Gajanan Choudhari, MD; Enayet Karim Chowdhury, PhD; Dinh-Toi Chu, PhD; Sheng-Chia Chung, PhD; Alyssa Columbus, MS; Michael H. Criqui, MD; Alanna Gomes da Silva, PhD; Mohammad Amin Dabbagh Ohadi, MD; Omid Dadras, PhD; Xiaochen Dai, PhD; Koustuv Dalal, PhD; Lachlan L. Dalli, PhD; Emanuele D'Amico, MD; Mohsen Dashti, MD; Kairat Davletov, PhD; Vanessa De la Cruz-Góngora, PhD; Shayom Debopadhaya, BS; Ivan Delgado-Enciso, DSc; Emina Dervišević, PhD; Vinoth Gnana Chellaiyan Devanbu, MD; Syed Masudur Rahman Dewan, PhD; Amol S. Dhane, MBA; Mahmoud Dibas, MD; Thanh Chi Do, MD; Thao Huynh Phuong Do, MD; Sushil Dohare, MD; Mohamed Fahmy Doheim, MD; Klara Georgieva Dokova, PhD; Deepa Dongarwar, MS; Mario D'Oria, MD; Ojas Prakashbhai Doshi, MS; Rajkumar Prakashbhai Doshi, MD; Robert Kokou Dowou, MPhil; Haneil Larson Dsouza, MD; Siddhartha Dutta, MD; Arkadiusz Marian Dziedzic, DSc; Abdel Rahman E'mar, MD; David Edvardsson, PhD; Defi Efendi, MSN; Ferry Efendi, PhD; Nevine El Nahas, MD; Islam Y. Elgendy, MD; Muhammed Elhadi, MD; Chadi Eltaha, MD; Mohd. Elmagzoub Eltahir, PhD; Theophilus I. Emeto, PhD; Natalia Fabin, MD; Adeniyi Francis Fagbamigbe, PhD; Ayesha Fahim, PhD; Ildar Ravisovich Fakhradiyev, PhD; Jawad Fares, MD; Pawan Sirwan Faris, PhD; Nelsensius Klau Fauk, PhD; Timur Fazylov, MD; Ginenus Fekadu, PhD; Nuno Ferreira, PhD; Getahun Fetensa, MSc; Florian Fischer, PhD; Matteo Foschi, MD; Ni Kadek Yuni Fridayani, MS; Abduzhappar Gaipov, PhD; Avi A. Gajjar, MBA; Aravind P. Gandhi, MD; Balasankar Ganesan, PhD; Ravindra Kumar Garg, MD; Miglas Welay Gebregergis, MSc; Mesfin Gebrehiwot, DSc; Teferi Gebru Gebremeskel, PhD; Molla Getie, MSc; Delaram J. Ghadimi, MD; Fataneh Ghadirian, PhD; Sulmaz Ghahramani, MD; Afsaneh Ghasemzadeh, MD; Ramy Mohamed Ghazy, PhD; Maryam Gholamalizadeh, PhD; Sherief Ghozy, MD; Artyom Urievich Gil, PhD; Jaleed Ahmed Gilani, MD; Elena V. Gnedovskaya, PhD; Pouya Goleij, MSc; Alessandra C. Goulart, PhD; Barbara Niegia Garcia Goulart, DSc; Shi-Yang Guan, MD; Sapna Gupta, MSc; Farrokh Habibzadeh, MD; Mostafa Hadei, PhD; Najah R. Hadi, PhD; Samer Hamidi, DrPH; Nasrin Hanifi, PhD; Graeme J. Hankey, MD; Netanja I. Harlianto, MD; Josep Maria Haro, MD; Faizul Hasan, PhD; Hamidreza Hasani, MD; Md Saquib Hasnain, PhD; Mahgol Sadat Hassan Zadeh Tabatabaei, MD; Johannes Haubold, MD; Rasmus J. Havmoeller, PhD; Simon I. Hay, FMedSci; Youssef Hbid, PhD; Golnaz Heidari, MD; Mohammad Heidari, PhD; Mehdi Hemmati, MD; Yuta Hiraike, PhD; Nguyen Quoc Hoan, DDS; Ramesh Holla, MD; Mehdi Hosseinzadeh, PhD; Sorin Hostiuc, PhD; Junjie Huang, MD; Hong-Han Huynh, BS; Bing-Fang Hwang, PhD; Segun Emmanuel Ibitoye, PhD; Nayu Ikeda, PhD; Adalia Ikiroma, PhD; Mehran Ilaghi, MD; Olayinka Stephen Ilesanmi, PhD; Irena M. Ilic, PhD; Milena D. Ilic, PhD; Md. Rabiul Islam, PhD; Nahlah Elkudssiah Ismail, PhD; Hiroyasu Iso, MD; Gaetano Isola, PhD; Masao Iwagami, PhD; Louis Jacob, MD; Abdollah Jafarzadeh, PhD; Akhil Jain, MD; Ammar Abdulrahman Jairoun, PhD; Mihajlo Jakovljevic, PhD; Abubakar Ibrahim Jatau, PhD; Talha Jawaid, PhD; Sathish Kumar Jayapal, PhD; Jost B. Jonas, MD; Nitin Joseph, MD; Mikk Jürisson, PhD; Vidya Kadashetti, MDS; Rizwan Kalani, MD; Vineet Kumar Kamal, PhD; Arun Kamireddy, MD; Tanuj Kanchan, MD; Himal Kandel, PhD; Jafar Karami, PhD; Ibraheem M. Karaye, MD; Yeganeh Karimi, MD; Arman Karimi Behnagh, MD; Faizan Zaffar Kashoo, MSc; Gbenga A. Kayode, PhD; Foad Kazemi, MD; Emmanuelle Kesse-Guyot, PhD; Yousef Saleh Khader, PhD; Inn Kynn Khaing, MPH; Fayaz Khan, PhD; Mohammad Jobair Khan, MPH; Haitham Khatatbeh, PhD; Moawiah Mohammad Khatatbeh, PhD; Hamid Reza Khayat Kashani, MD; Khalid A. Kheirallah, PhD; Feriha Fatima Khidri, PhD; Moein Khormali, MD; Atulya Aman Khosla, MD; Kwanghyun Kim, PhD; Yun Jin Kim, PhD; Adnan Kisa, PhD; Sezer Kisa, PhD; Mika Kivimäki, PhD; Ali-Asghar Kolahi, MD; Farzad Kompani, MD; Oleksii Korzh, DSc; Karel Kostev, PhD; Nikhil Kothari, PhD; Kewal Krishan, PhD; Varun Krishna, MD; Vijay Krishnamoorthy, MD; Mohammed Kuddus, PhD; Mukhtar Kulimbet, MSc; Setor K. Kunutsor, PhD; Maria Dyah Kurniasari, PhD; Dian Kusuma, DSc; Ville Kytö, MD; Carlo La Vecchia, MD; Chandrakant Lahariya, MD; Daphne Teck Ching Lai, PhD; Hanpeng Lai, PhD; Tri Laksono, MS; Tea Lallukka, PhD; Kamaluddin Latief, PhD; Kaveh Latifinaibin, MD; Nhi Huu Hanh Le, MD; Thao Thi Thu Le, MD; Munjae Lee, PhD; Seung Won Lee, MD; Wei-Chen Lee, PhD; Yo Han Lee, PhD; Jacopo Lenzi, PhD; Matilde Leonardi, MD; Ming-Chieh Li, PhD; Xiaopan Li, PhD; Stephen S. Lim, PhD; Jialing Lin, PhD; Xuefeng Liu, PhD; Valerie Lohner, PhD; László Lorenzovici, MSc; Paulo A. Lotufo, DrPH; Giancarlo Lucchetti, PhD; Jay B. Lusk, MD; Ricardo Lutzky Saute, MD; Hawraz Ibrahim M. Amin, PhD; Armaan K. Malhotra, MD; Kashish Malhotra, MBBS; Ahmad Azam Malik, PhD; Deborah Carvalho Malta, PhD; Mohammad Ali Mansournia, PhD; Lorenzo Giovanni Mantovani, DSc; Emmanuel Manu, PhD; Hamid Reza Marateb, PhD; Mirko Marino, PhD; Seyed Farzad Maroufi, MS; Ramon Martinez-Piedra, BSc; Santi Martini, PhD; Miquel Martorell, PhD; Roy Rillera Marzo, MD; Yasith Mathangasinghe, PhD; Elezebeth Mathews, PhD; Andrea Maugeri, PhD; Steven M. McPhail, PhD; Asim Mehmood, PhD; Man Mohan Mehndiratta, MD; Kamran Mehrabani-Zeinabad, PhD; Ritesh G. Menezes, MD; Sultan Ayoub Meo, PhD; Atte Meretoja, MD; Tomislav Mestrovic, PhD; Chamila Dinushi Kukulege Mettananda, PhD; Tomasz Miazgowski, MD; Ana Carolina Micheletti Gomide Nogueira de Sá, MSc; Giuseppe Minervini, PhD; Le Huu Nhat Minh, MD; Andreea Mirica, PhD; Erkin M. 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Affiliations of GBD 2021 Global Subarachnoid Hemorrhage Risk Factors Collaborators: Department of Neurosurgery, Helsinki University Hospital, Helsinki, Finland (Rautalin, Korja); The National Institute for Stroke and Applied Neurosciences, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand (Rautalin); Department of Neurosurgery, Erasmus University Medical Center, Rotterdam, Netherlands (Volovici); Center for Experimental Microsurgery, Iuliu Haţieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Cluj-Napoca, Romania (Volovici); Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle (Stark, Johnson, Dai, Hay, Lim, Mestrovic, Mokdad, Murray, Razo, Stanaway, Wolde, Roth, Feigin); Institute for Molecular Medicine FIMM, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland (Kaprio); National Institute for Stroke and Applied Neurosciences, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand (Krishnamurthi, Feigin); National Institute of Stroke and Applied Neurosciences, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand (Nair); Department of Medicine, University of Otago, Wellington, New Zealand (Ranta); Department of Neurology, Capital & Coast District Health Board, Wellington, New Zealand (Ranta); Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery, University Medical Centre Utrecht, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands (Rinkel); Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands (Vergouwen); Department of Clinical Governance and Quality Improvement, Aleta Wondo General Hospital, Aleta Wondo, Ethiopia (Abate); Advanced Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Abbastabar); Department of Neurology, Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt (Abd-Allah, Abualhasan); Department of Mathematics and Sciences, Ajman University, Ajman, United Arab Emirates (Abdelkader); Department of Medicine, Memorial University, St John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada (Abdi); Minimally Invasive Surgery Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Abdollahi); Department of Physiotherapy, Bayero University Kano, Kano, Nigeria (Abdullahi, Awotidebe, Usman); Department of Physiotherapy, Federal University Wukari, Wukari, Nigeria (Abdullahi); Department of Internal Medicine, Federal Medical Centre, Abuja, Nigeria (Abiodun); Department of Family and Community Health, University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho, Ghana (Aboagye); Department of Physical Pharmacy and Pharmacokinetics, Poznan University of Medical Sciences, Poznan, Poland (Abouzid); Department of Anesthesiology, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Abtahi); Department of Neurology, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Halle (Saale), Germany (Abu Rumeileh); Department of Nursing, Al Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan (Abualruz); Medical Research Center, Hamad Medical Corporation, Doha, Qatar (Abukhadijah); Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine, Alfaisal University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Abu-Zaid); College of Graduate Health Sciences, University of Tennessee, Memphis (Abu-Zaid); Department of Human Anatomy, Federal University Dutse, Dutse, Nigeria (Adamu); Department of Anatomy, Bayero University Kano, Kano, Nigeria (Adamu); School of Medicine, University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Addo); Centre for Social Research in Health, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Addo, Okeke); Department of Medical Rehabilitation, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria (Adedoyin); Menzies School of Health Research, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia (Adegboye); Clinical Sciences Department, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (Adra, Barqawi, Talaat); Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho, Ghana (Adzigbli, Dowou); Department of Public Health Sciences, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada (Agyemang-Duah); School of Public Health, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Ahinkorah); Department of Medical Biochemistry, Shaqra University, Shaqra, Saudi Arabia (A. Ahmad); School of Medicine and Psychology, Australian National University, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Australia (D. Ahmad); Public Health Foundation of India, Gandhinagar, India (D. Ahmad); Department of Neuroscience, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran (Ahmadzade); Department of Pharmacy Practice, Riphah Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Islamabad, Pakistan (A. Ahmed); Division of Infectious Diseases and Global Public Health (IDGPH), University of California San Diego, San Diego, California (A. Ahmed); Department of Biosciences, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan (H. Ahmed); Brody School of Medicine, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina (S. A. Ahmed); Faculty of Medicine and Public Health, Jenderal Soedirman University, Purwokerto, Indonesia (Aji); Department of Cardiology, Fudan University, Shanghai, China (Ahmed Al-Kaif); School of Medicine, New York Medical College, Valhalla (Al-Ajlouni); Department of Epidemiology, Columbia University, New York, New York (Al-Ajlouni); Department of Research and Development, Washington University in St Louis, St Louis, Missouri (Al-Aly); Clinical Epidemiology Center, US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), St Louis, Missouri (Al-Aly); Department of Community and Mental Health, Al al-Bayt University, Mafraq, Jordan (Albashtawy); Department of Medical Rehabilitation (Physiotherapy), University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Nigeria (Ali); Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China (Ali, M. J. Khan, Usman); Institute of Health and Wellbeing, Federation University Australia, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (Alif, Banik); School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (Alif); Pars Advanced and Minimally Invasive Medical Manners Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Alimohamadi); Department

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of Public Health and Community Medicine, International Medical University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Aljunid); International Centre for Casemix and Clinical Coding, National University of Malaysia, Bandar Tun Razak, Malaysia (Aljunid); Department of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Sciences, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan (Alomari); Department of Rehabilitation Sciences and Physical Therapy, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan (Alomari); Department of Allied Medical Sciences, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan (Alrawashdeh); Department of Emergency Medicine, Sana'a University, Sanaa, Yemen (Alsabri); Pediatric Emergency Medicine Department, St Christopher's Hospital for Children, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Alsabri); Centre for Clinical Brain Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom (Salman); Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan (Altaf); Research, Policy, and Training Directorate, Jordan Center for Disease Control, Amman, Jordan (Al-Tammemi); Applied Science Research Center, Applied Science Private University, Amman, Jordan (Al-Tammemi); Research Group in Health Economics, Universidad de Cartagena, Cartagena, Colombia (Alvis-Guzman); Research Group in Hospital Management and Health Policies, Universidad de la Costa (University of the Coast), Barranquilla, Colombia (Alvis-Guzman); Department of Clinical Pharmacology and Toxicology, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia (Alwafi); Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan (Al-Wardat); Department of Medical Sciences, Azal University for Human Development, Sana'a, Yemen (Al-Worafi); Department of Clinical Sciences, University of Science and Technology of Fujairah, Fujairah, United Arab Emirates (Al-Worafi); Department of Pediatrics, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio (Aly, E'mar); Faculty of Medicine, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan (Alyahya); Department of Pharmacy Practice and Pharmacotherapeutics, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (Alzoubi); Department of Clinical Pharmacy, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan (Alzoubi); Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Human Toxicology, University of Iowa, Iowa City (Amani); Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, Iowa City, Iowa (Amani); Public Health and Community Medicine Department, Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt (Amin); Department of Radiology and Radiological Science, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland (Amindarolzarbi); Department of Medicine, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria (Amusa); Department of Internal Medicine, Jos University Teaching Hospital, Jos, Nigeria (Amusa); Centre for Sensorimotor Performance, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia (Anderlini); Neurology Department, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia (Anderlini); Department of Child Neurology, Oregon Health and Science University, Portland (Angappan); Department of Pharmacology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Jodhpur, India (Anil, Saravanan, Shamim, S. Singh, Tiwari); All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhubaneswar, India (Anil); Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, University of Medical Sciences, Ondo, Ondo, Nigeria (Anuoluwa); Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Basic Sciences (CIRBSc), Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India (Anwar); School of Chemical and Life Sciences (SCLS), Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, India (Anwar); Rural Health Research Institute, Charles Sturt University, Orange, New South Wales, Australia (Anyasodor, Ross, J. Sun); School of Medicine and Public Health, Ateneo De Manila University, Pasig City, Philippines (Apostol); Inter-Agency Committee on Environmental Health, Department of Health Philippines, Manila, Philippines (Apostol); Health Management and Economics Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Arabloo); College of Art and Science, Ottawa University, Surprise, Arizona (Areda); School of Life Sciences, Arizona State University, Tempe (Areda); Department of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden (Ärnlöv); School of Health and Social Studies, Dalarna University, Falun, Sweden (Ärnlöv); Institute for Biomedical Problems, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia (Artamonov); Division of Epidemiology, Universitas Airlangga (Airlangga University), Surabaya, Indonesia (Artanti); Department of Physiotherapy, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (Arumugam); Department of Physiotherapy, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India (Arumugam); Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts (Aryan); Non-communicable Diseases Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Aryan, Bastan, Rashidi, Nazila Rezaei, Negar Rezaei); Cabrini Research, Cabrini Health, Malvern, Victoria, Australia (Asghari-Jafarabadi); School of Public Health and Preventative Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (Asghari-Jafarabadi); Department of Public Health, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia (Ashemo); Department of Public Health, Wachemo University, Hossana, Ethiopia (Ashemo); University Institute of Radiological Sciences and Medical Imaging Technology, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan (Ashraf); Department of Medical Genetics, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia (Athar); Science and Technology Unit, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia (Athar); Department of Immunology, Zanjan University of Medical Sciences, Zanjan, Iran (Athari); Northumbria HealthCare NHS Foundation Trust, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom (Aujayeb); School of Nursing and Public Health, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa (Awotidebe); Department of Surgery, Washington University in St Louis, St Louis, Missouri (Azadnajafabad); Leeds Institute of Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Medicine, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom (Azadnajafabad); Institute of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, The University of Agriculture, Peshawar, Pakistan (Aziz); ASIDE Healthcare, Lewes, Delaware (Azzam); Faculty of Medicine, October 6 University, 6th of October City, Egypt (Azzam); Department of Population Medicine, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar (Babu); Health Research Institute, University of Canberra, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Australia (Bagheri); Department of Biostatistics, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran (Bahrami Taghanaki); School of Medicine, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran (Bahramian); School of Public Affairs, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing, China (Bai); International Medical School, Management and Science University, Alam, Malaysia (Baig); Department of Neurosurgery, Houston Methodist Hospital, Houston, Texas (Bako); College of Medicine, Alfaisal University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Baltatu); Center of Innovation, Technology and Education (CITE), Anhembi Morumbi University, São José dos Campos, Brazil (Baltatu); Department of Medicine, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia (Bam, Olaiya); Department of Hypertension, Medical University of Lodz, Lodz, Poland (Banach); Polish Mothers' Memorial Hospital Research Institute, Lodz, Poland (Banach); Nuffield Department of Surgical Sciences, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom (Bandyopadhyay); Department of Neurosurgery, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom (Bandyopadhyay); Manna Institute, University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, Australia (Banik); Miller School of Medicine, University of Miami, Miami, Florida (Bardhan); School of Psychology, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand (Barker-Collo); Heidelberg Institute of Global Health (HIGH), Heidelberg University, Heidelberg, Germany (Bärnighausen, Mohammed); T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts (Bärnighausen); Department of Non-communicable Diseases, Bangladesh University of Health Sciences, Dhaka, Bangladesh (Barua); School of Medicine, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Bastan); Center for Primary Care, Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts (Basu); School of Public Health, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom (Basu, Hbid); School of the Environment, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (Bell); School of Health Policy and Management, Korea University, Seoul, South Korea (Bell); Department of Internal Medicine, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (Bensenor); Department of Nursing, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia (Berhie); Department of Pharmaceutical and Administrative Sciences, University of Health Sciences and Pharmacy in St Louis, St Louis, Missouri (Beyene); School of Pharmacy, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand (Beyene); Department of Public Health, North Dakota State University, Fargo (Bhagavathula); Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Mayo Clinic, Jacksonville, Florida (Bhagavathula); Global Health Neurology Lab, NSW Brain Clot Bank, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Bhaskar); Division of Cerebrovascular Medicine and Neurology, National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center, Suita, Japan (Bhaskar); Department of General Medicine, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Mangalore, India (A. N. Bhat); Department of Internal Medicine, St John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Bangalore, India (V. Bhat); Department of Medical Lab Technology, Chandigarh University, Mohali, India (G. K. Bhatti); Department of Human Genetics and Molecular Medicine, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, India (J. S. Bhatti); Social Determinants of Health Research Center, Babol University of Medical Sciences, Babol, Iran (Bijani); Scientific-Tools.Org, Bergamo, Italy (Bikbov); Department of Biomedical Sciences, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia (Birhan); Stroke and Ageing Research Group, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia (Birhanu, Dalli); Department of Nursing, St Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College, Addis Ababa,

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Ethiopia (Birhanu); Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana (Bitra); Department of Internal Medicine, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Mangalore, India (Boloor, Reddy); Internal Medicine Department, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Borhany); Institute for Medical Information Processing, Biometry, and Epidemiology, LMU Munich, Neuherberg, Germany (Breitner); Institute of Epidemiology, Helmholtz Zentrum München (German Research Center for Environmental Health), Neuherberg, Germany (Breitner); Division of Clinical Epidemiology and Aging Research, German Cancer Research Center, Heidelberg, Germany (Brenner); Department of Medical and Surgical Sciences, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy (Bugiardini); Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute, Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia (Bulamu); School of Public Health Sciences, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada (Butt); Al Shifa School of Public Health, Al Shifa Trust Eye Hospital, Rawalpindi, Pakistan (Butt); Department of Neurology, Porto Alegre Clinical Hospital, Porto Alegre, Brazil (Cabral); Department of Interventional Neuroradiology, Hospital Moinhos de Vento, Porto Alegre, Brazil (Cabral); Harvard Business School, Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts (Caetano dos Santos); Department of Clinical Pharmacy, University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova, Craiova, Romania (Calina); Department of Internal Medicine, Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina (Cámera); Board of Directors, Argentine Society of Medicine, Buenos Aires, Argentina (Cámera); Institute of Biomedical Engineering, Anhembi Morumbi University, Sao Jose dos Campos, Brazil (Campos); Department of Biomedical Engineering, Center of Innovation, Technology and Education (CITE) at São José dos Campos Technology Park, Sao Jose dos Campos, Brazil (Campos); Center for Nutrition and Health Research, National Institute of Public Health, Cuernavaca, Mexico (Campos-Nonato); Department of Health Management (Direzione Sanitaria), IRCCS Istituto Ortopedico Rizzoli, Bologna, Italy (Capodici); Interdisciplinary Research Center for Health Science, Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa, Italy (Capodici); Research Unit on Applied Molecular Biosciences (UCIBIO), University of Porto, Porto, Portugal (Carvalho); Colombian National Health Observatory, Instituto Nacional de Salud (National Institute of Health), Bogota, Colombia (Castañeda-Orjuela); Epidemiology and Public Health Evaluation Group, National University of Colombia, Bogota, Colombia (Castañeda-Orjuela); Department of Pharmacological and Biomolecular Sciences, University of Milan, Milan, Italy (Catapano); MultiMedica Sesto San Giovanni IRCCS, Sesto San Giovanni, Italy (Catapano); Department of Medical, Surgical, and Health Sciences, University of Trieste, Trieste, Italy (Cegolon, D'Oria); Public Health Unit, University Health Agency Giuliano-Isontina (ASUGI), Trieste, Italy (Cegolon); Non-communicable Diseases Division, National Institute of Epidemiology, Chennai, India (Chadwick); Department of Biotechnology, Adamas University, Kolkata, India (C. Chakraborty); Institute for Skeletal Aging & Orthopedic Surgery, Hallym University, Chuncheon, South Korea (C. Chakraborty); School of Population and Public Health, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (P. A. Chakraborty); State Disease Investigation Laboratory, Animal Resources Development Department, Agartala, India (S. Chakraborty); Department of Clinical Nutrition, Jazan University, Jazan, Saudi Arabia (Chandika); Department of Clinical Pharmacy, University of Gondar, Gondar, Ethiopia (Chanie); Temerty Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (Chattu); Department of Community Medicine, Datta Meghe Institute of Medical Sciences, Sawangi, India (Chattu); Department of Biology, Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Chaudhary); Division of Cardiovascular Medicine, Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts (Chi); Department of Scientific Research, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Chichagi); Division of Infectious Diseases, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond (Ching); Centre for Research Impact & Outcome, Chitkara University, Rajpura, India (Chopra); Department of Community Medicine, Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Wardha, India (Choudhari); School of Public Health, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia, Australia (Chowdhury); Department of Epidemiology and Preventative Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (Chowdhury); The Interdisciplinary Research Group on Biomedicine and Health, VNU International School (VNUIS), Hanoi, Vietnam (Chu); Faculty of Applied Sciences, VNU International School (VNUIS), Hanoi, Vietnam (Chu); Department of Health Informatics, University College London, London, United Kingdom (Chung); Health Data Research UK, London, United Kingdom (Chung); Department of Biostatistics, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland (Columbus); Department of Family Medicine and Public Health, University of California San Diego, La Jolla (Criqui); School of Nursing, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil (da Silva); Department of Neurosurgery, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Dabbagh Ohadi); Department of Global Public Health and Primary Care, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway (Dadras); Iranian Research Center for HIV/AIDS (IRCHA), Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Dadras); Department of Health Metrics Sciences, School of Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle (Dai, Hay, Lim, Mokdad, Murray, Sartorius, Stanaway, Roth); Institute for Health Sciences, Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall, Sweden (Dalal); Department of Medical and Surgical Sciences and Advanced Technologies "GF Ingrassia," University of Catania, Catania, Italy (D'Amico, Maugeri); Immunology Research Center, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran (Dashti, Ghasemzadeh); Health Research Institute, Kazakh National Medical University, Almaty, Kazakhstan (Davletov); Center for Evaluation and Surveys Research, National Institute of Public Health, Cuernavaca, Mexico (De la Cruz-Góngora); Medical College, Albany Medical College, Albany, New York (Debopadhaya); School of Medicine, University of Colima, Colima, Mexico (Delgado-Enciso); Department of Research, State Cancerology Institute of Colima, IMSS-BIENESTAR, Colima, Mexico (Delgado-Enciso); Department of Forensic Medicine, University of Sarajevo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dervišević); Chettinad Hospital & Research Institute, Chettinad Academy of Research and Education, Chennai, India (Devanbu); Department of Pharmacy, United International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh (Dewan); Pharmacology Division, Center for Life Sciences Research Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh (Dewan); Research and Development Cell, Dr. D. Y. Patil Vidyapeeth, Pune (Deemed to be University), Pune, India (Dhane); Research Unit, Sulaiman Al Rajhi University, Qassim, Saudi Arabia (Dibas); Department of Medicine, Pham Ngoc Thach University of Medicine, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (T. C. Do, A. T. Tran); Department of Medicine, Can Tho University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Can Tho, Vietnam (T. H. P. Do); Department of Epidemiology, Jazan University, Jazan, Saudi Arabia (Dohare); Neurology Department, Alexandria University, Alexandria, Egypt (Doheim); Department of Social Medicine and Health Care Organisation, Medical University of Varna, Varna, Bulgaria (Dokova); Health Science Center, University of Texas, Houston (Dongarwar); Cardio-Thoraco-Vascular Department, Azienda Sanitaria Universitaria Giuliano Isontina, Trieste, Italy (D'Oria); Independent Consultant, South Plainfield, New Jersey (O. P. Doshi); Department of Cardiology, Hackettstown Medical Center, Hackettstown, New Jersey (R. P. Doshi); Newton Medical Center, Sparta, New Jersey (R. P. Doshi); Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India (Dsouza); Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore, Mangalore, India (Dsouza); Department of Pharmacology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Rajkot, India (Dutta); Department of Conservative Dentistry with Endodontics, Medical University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland (Dziedzic); School of Nursing and Midwifery, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (Edvardsson, M. A. Rahman); Department of Pediatric Nursing, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia (D. Efendi); Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, University of Indonesia Hospital, Depok, Indonesia (D. Efendi); Advanced Nursing Department, Universitas Airlangga (Airlangga University), Surabaya, Indonesia (F. Efendi); Neurology Department, Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt (El Nahas); Division of Cardiovascular Medicine, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky (Elgendy); Division of Cardiology, Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts (Elgendy); Faculty of Medicine, University of Tripoli, Tripoli, Libya (Elhadi); Houston Methodist Hospital, Houston, Texas (Elhadi); Department of Pediatrics, University of Texas, Dallas (Eltaha); Department of Education, Ajman University, Ajman, United Arab Emirates (Eltahir); Department of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia (Emeto); Independent Consultant, Bologna, Italy (Fabin); Department of Epidemiology and Medical Statistics, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria (Fagbamigbe); Research Centre for Healthcare and Community, Coventry University, Coventry, United Kingdom (Fagbamigbe); Department of Oral Biology, Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan (Fahim); Director of the Scientific and Technological Park, Kazakh National Medical University, Almaty, Kazakhstan (Fakhradiyev); Department of Neurological Surgery, Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois (Fares); Department of Biology, Salahaddin University-Erbil, Erbil, Iraq (Faris); Department of Biology, Cihan University-Erbil, Erbil, Iraq (Faris); Centre for Public Health, Equity and Human Flourishing, Torrens University Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia (Fauk); Institute of Resource Governance and Social Change, Kupang, Indonesia (Fauk);

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Laboratory of Experimental Medicine, Kazakh National Medical University, Almaty, Kazakhstan (Fazylov); Department of Infectious Diseases and Public Health, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China (Fekadu); Department of Pharmacy, Wollega University, Nekemte, Ethiopia (Fekadu); Department of Social Sciences, University of Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus (Ferreira); Department of Nursing, Wollega University, Nekemte, Ethiopia (Fetensa); Institute of Public Health, Charité Medical University Berlin, Berlin, Germany (Fischer); Department of Neuroscience, Multiple Sclerosis Research Center, Ravenna, Italy (Foschi); Department of Biotechnological and Applied Clinical Sciences, University of L'Aquila, L'Aquila, Italy (Foschi); Graduate Institute of Injury Prevention and Control, Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan (Fridayani); Department of Medicine, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan (Gaipov); Department of Neurosurgery, Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Penn Medicine, Philadelphia (Gajjar); Neurosurgical Service, KK Women's and Children's Hospital, Singapore (Gajjar); Department of Community Medicine and Family Medicine, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Nagpur, India (Gandhi); Institute of Health and Wellbeing, Federation University Australia, Churchill, Victoria, Australia (Ganesan, Unsworth); Department of Neurology, King George's Medical University, Lucknow, India (Garg); Department of Midwifery, Adigrat University, Adigrat, Ethiopia (Gebregergis); Department of Environmental Health, Wollo University, Dessie, Ethiopia (Gebrehiwot); Department of Reproductive and Family Health, Axum College of Health Science, Axum, Ethiopia (Gebremeskel); College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia (Gebremeskel, Naik); Department of Medical Laboratory Science, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Getie); School of Medicine, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Ghadimi); Psychiatric Nursing and Management Department, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Ghadirian); Health Policy Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran (Ghahramani); Tropical Health Department, Alexandria University, Alexandria, Egypt (Ghazy); Family and Community Medicine Department, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia (Ghazy); Cancer Research Center, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Gholamalizadeh); Departments of Radiology and Neurosurgery, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota (Ghozy); Country Office, World Health Organization (WHO), Astana, Kazakhstan (Gil); Department of Medicine, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan (Gilani); Third Department of Neurology, Research Center of Neurology, Moscow, Russia (Gnedovskaya); Department of Genetics, Sana Institute of Higher Education, Sari, Iran (Goleij); Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran (Goleij); Department of Epidemiology, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (A. C. Goulart); Postgraduate Program in Epidemiology, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil (B. N. G. Goulart); Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Anhui Medical University, Hefei, China (Guan); Department of Toxicology, Shriram Institute for Industrial Research, Delhi, India (Gupta); Global Virus Network, Middle East Region, Shiraz, Iran (Habibzadeh); Department of Health in Emergencies and Disasters, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Hadei); Department of Clinical Pharmacology and Medicine, University of Kufa, Najaf, Iraq (Hadi); School of Health and Environmental Studies, Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates (Hamidi); Department of Critical Care and Emergency Nursing, Zanjan University of Medical Sciences, Zanjan, Iran (Hanifi); Centre for Neuromuscular and Neurological Disorders, The University of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia, Australia (Hankey); Stroke Research Centre, Perron Institute for Neurological and Translational Science, Perth, Western Australia, Australia (Hankey); Faculty of Medicine, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands (Harlianto); Department of Radiology, University Medical Center Utrecht, Utrecht, Netherlands (Harlianto); Research Unit, Parc Sanitari Sant Joan de Deu, Barcelona, Spain (Haro); Department of Mental Health, Biomedical Research Networking Center for Mental Health Network (CiberSAM), Madrid, Spain (Haro); Faculty of Nursing, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand (Hasan); Department of Ophthalmology, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Hasani); Department of Pharmacy, Marwadi University, Rajkot, India (Hasnain); Sina Trauma and Surgery Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Hassan Zadeh Tabatabaei, Khormali, Rahimi-Movaghar); Department of Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology and Neuroradiology, University Hospital Essen, Essen, Germany (Haubold); Institute of Artificial Intelligence in Medicine, University Hospital Essen, Essen, Germany (Haubold); Skaane University Hospital, Skaane County Council, Malmö, Sweden (Havmoeller); UK Dementia Research Institute Care Research & Technology Centre, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom (Hbid); Independent Consultant, Santa Clara, California (G. Heidari); Community-Oriented Nursing Midwifery Research Center, Shahrekord University of Medical Sciences, Shahrekord, Iran (M. Heidari); Department of Medicine, MedStar Health, Washington DC (Hemmati); Department of Medicine, Georgetown University, Washington DC (Hemmati); Graduate School of Medicine, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan (Hiraike); School of Dentistry, Hanoi Medical University, Hanoi, Vietnam (Hoan); Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India (Holla, Unnikrishnan); School of Computer Science, Duy Tan University, Da Nang, Vietnam (Hosseinzadeh); Mental Health Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Hosseinzadeh); Department of Legal Medicine and Bioethics, Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, Romania (Hostiuc); Department of Clinical Legal Medicine, National Institute of Legal Medicine Mina Minovici, Bucharest, Romania (Hostiuc); Faculty of Medicine, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China (Huang); International Master Program for Translational Science, Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan (Huynh); Department of Occupational Safety and Health, China Medical University, Taiwan, Taichung, Taiwan (Hwang); Department of Occupational Therapy, Asia University, Taiwan, Taichung, Taiwan (Hwang); Department of Health Promotion and Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria (Ibitoye); International Center for Nutrition and Information, National Institutes of Biomedical Innovation, Health and Nutrition, Tokyo, Japan (Ikeda); Collaborative Alliance Research and Education (CARE) Programme, Episcope Research Service, Aberdeen, Scotland (Ikiroma); Neurology Research Center, Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran (Ilaghi); Kerman Neuroscience Research Center, Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran (Ilaghi); West Africa RCC, Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Abuja, Nigeria (Ilesanmi); Department of Community Medicine, University College Hospital, Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria (Ilesanmi); Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia (I. M. Ilic, Santric-Milicevic); Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Kragujevac, Kragujevac, Serbia (M. D. Ilic); School of Pharmacy, BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh (Islam); Department of Clinical Pharmacy & Pharmacy Practice, Asian Institute of Medicine, Science and Technology, Bedong, Malaysia (Ismail); Malaysian Academy of Pharmacy, Puchong, Malaysia (Ismail); Public Health Department of Social Medicine, Osaka University, Suita, Japan (Iso); Department of General Surgery and Medical-Surgical Specialties, University of Catania, Catania, Italy (Isola); Department of Health Services Research, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan (Iwagami); Department of Non-Communicable Disease Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, United Kingdom (Iwagami); Department of Physical and Medicine, Université Paris Cité, Paris, France (Jacob); Research and Development Unit, Biomedical Research Networking Center for Mental Health Network (CiberSAM), Barcelona, Spain (Jacob); Department of Immunology, Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran (Jafarzadeh); Department of Immunology, Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences, Rafsanjan, Iran (Jafarzadeh); Department of Leukemia, The University of MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, Texas (Jain); Department of Health and Safety, Dubai Municipality, Dubai, United Arab Emirates (Jairoun); The World Academy of Sciences UNESCO, Trieste, Italy (Jakovljevic); Shaanxi University of Technology, Hanzhong, China (Jakovljevic); School of Pharmacy and Pharmacology, University of Tasmania, Hobart, TAS, Australia (Jatau); Department of Pharmacology, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Jawaid); Centre of Studies and Research, Ministry of Health, Muscat, Oman (Jayapal); Rothschild Foundation Hospital, Institute of Molecular and Clinical Ophthalmology Basel, Paris, France (Jonas); Singapore Eye Research Institute, Singapore, Singapore (Jonas); Department of Community Medicine, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Mangalore, India (Joseph, Mithra); Institute of Family Medicine and Public Health, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia (Jürisson); Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology, Krishna Vishwa Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Karad, India (Kadashetti); Department of Neurology, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington (Kalani); Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, National Institute of Epidemiology, Chennai, India (Kamal); Department of Biostatistics, Indian Council of Medical Research, New Delhi, India (Kamal); Russell H. Morgan Department of Radiology and Radiological Science, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland (Kamireddy); Department of

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Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Jodhpur, India (Kanchan); Save Sight Institute, University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Kandel); Sydney Eye Hospital, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Kandel); Laboratory Science Department, Khomein University of Medical Sciences, Khomein, Iran (Karami); Department of Immunology, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Karami); School of Health Professions and Human Services, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York (Karaye); Department of Anesthesiology, Montefiore Medical Center, Bronx, New York (Karaye); Cardiovascular Diseases Research Institute, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Karimi); Endocrine Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Karimi Behnagh); Department of Echocardiography, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Karimi Behnagh); Department of Physical Therapy and Health Rehabilitation, Majmaah University, Majmaah, Saudi Arabia (Kashoo); International Research Center of Excellence, Institute of Human Virology Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria (Kayode); Julius Centre for Health Sciences and Primary Care, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands (Kayode); Department of Neurosurgery, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland (Kazemi); Department of Human Nutrition, National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, Jouy-en-Josas, France (Kesse-Guyot); Sorbonne Paris Nord University, Bobigny, France (Kesse-Guyot); Department of Public Health, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan (Khader, Kheirallah); Department of Public Health and Health Policy, Hiroshima University, Hiroshima, Japan (Khaing); Department of Physical Therapy, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (F. Khan); Faculty of Nursing, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan (H. Khatatbeh); Department of Basic Medical Sciences, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan (M. M. Khatatbeh); Department of Neurosurgery, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Khayat Kashani); Department of Biochemistry, Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences, Jamshoro, Pakistan (Khidri); Department of Internal Medicine, Corewell Health East William Beaumont University Hospital, Royal Oak, Michigan (Khosla); Department of Medical Oncology, Miami Cancer Institute, Miami, Florida (Khosla); Graduate School of Public Health, Yonsei University, Busan, South Korea (K. Kim); School of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Xiamen University Malaysia, Sepang, Malaysia (Y. J. Kim); School of Health Sciences, Kristiania University College, Oslo, Norway (A. Kisa); Department of International Health and Sustainable Development, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (A. Kisa); Department of Nursing and Health Promotion, Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway (S. Kisa); Brain Sciences, University College London, London, United Kingdom (Kivimäki); Department of Public Health, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland (Kivimäki, Lallukka); Social Determinants of Health Research Center, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Kolahi, Nikoobar, Rashidi); Children's Medical Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Kompani); Department of General Practice and Family Medicine, Kharkiv National Medical University, Kharkiv, Ukraine (Korzh); Department of Epidemiology, IQVIA, Frankfurt am Main, Germany (Kostev); University Hospital Marburg, Marburg, Germany (Kostev); Department of Anaesthesiology and Critical Care, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Jodhpur, India (Kothari); Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India (Krishan); Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India (Krishna); Department of Anesthesiology, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (Krishnamoorthy); Department of Anesthesiology & Pain Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle (Krishnamoorthy); Department of Biochemistry, University of Hail, Hail, Saudi Arabia (Kuddus); Atchabarov Scientific-Research Institute of Fundamental and Applied Medicine, Kazakh National Medical University, Almaty, Kazakhstan (Kulimbet, Zhumagaliuly); Center of Medicine and Public Health, Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University, Almaty, Kazakhstan (Kulimbet); Section of Cardiology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada (Kunutsor); Translational Health Sciences, University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom (Kunutsor); Faculty of Medicine and Health Science, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga, Indonesia (Kurniasari); Nursing School, Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan (Kurniasari); Department of Health Services Research and Management, City University of London, London, United Kingdom (Kusuma); Faculty of Public Health, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia (Kusuma); Clinical Research Center, Turku University Hospital, Turku, Finland (Kytö); Heart Center, University of Turku, Turku, Finland (Kytö); Department of Clinical Sciences and Community Health, University of Milan, Milan, Italy (La Vecchia); Integrated Department of Epidemiology, Health Policy, Preventive Medicine and Pediatrics, Foundation for People-centric Health Systems, New Delhi, India (Lahariya); Centre for Health: The Specialty Practice, New Delhi, India (Lahariya); School of Digital Science, Universiti Brunei Darussalam (University of Brunei Darussalam), Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei (D. T. C. Lai); Institute of Applied Data Analytics, Universiti Brunei Darussalam (University of Brunei Darussalam), Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei (D. T. C. Lai); Department of Occupational and Environmental Health, Yangzhou University, Yangzhou, China (H. Lai); Department of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, Northern Jiangsu People's Hospital, Yangzhou, China (H. Lai); Department of Physiotherapy, Universitas Aisyiyah Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (Laksono); Institute of Allied Health Sciences, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan, Taiwan (Laksono); Centre for Family Welfare, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia (Latief); Department of Global Health and Health Security, Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan (Latief); Department of Anesthesiology, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Latifinaibin); Faculty of Medicine, University of Medicine and Pharmacy at Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (N. H. H. Le); Department of Cardiovascular Research, Methodist Hospital, Merrillville, Indiana (N. H. H. Le); University of Medicine and Pharmacy at Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (T. T. T. Le); Department of Medical Science, Ajou University School of Medicine, Suwon, South Korea (M. Lee); Department of Precision Medicine, Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon-si, South Korea (S. W. Lee); Department of Family Medicine, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston (W.-C. Lee); Department of Preventive Medicine, Korea University, Seoul, South Korea (Y. H. Lee); Department of Biomedical and Neuromotor Sciences, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy (Lenzi); UO Neurologia, Salute Pubblica e Disabilità (The Neurology, Public Health and Disability Unit), Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Neurologico Carlo Besta (IRCCS Foundation Carlo Besta Neurological Institute), Milan, Italy (Leonardi); Department of Health Promotion and Health Education, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan (M.-C. Li); Department of Health Management Center, Fudan University, Shanghai, China (X. Li); International Centre for Future Health Systems, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Lin); Lerner Research Institute, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio (Liu); Department of Quantitative Health Science, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio (Liu); Department of Cardiology, University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany (Lohner); Department of Health Economics, Syreon Research Romania, Targu Mures, Romania (Lorenzovici); Department of Doctoral Studies, George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Targu Mures, Targu Mures, Romania (Lorenzovici); Department of Medicine, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (Lotufo); School of Medicine, Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora, Brazil (Lucchetti); Department of Population Health Sciences, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (Lusk); Department of Neurosciences and Behavioral Sciences, University of São Paulo, Ribeirão Preto, Brazil (Lutzky Saute); Department of Chemistry, Salahaddin University-Erbil, Erbil, Iraq (M. Amin); Department of Medical Biochemical Analysis, Cihan University-Erbil, Erbil, Iraq (M. Amin); Department of Neurosurgery, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (A. K. Malhotra); Rama Medical College Hospital and Research Centre, Uttar Pradesh, India (K. Malhotra); Institute of Applied Health Research, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom (K. Malhotra, Thayakaran); Rabigh Faculty of Medicine, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (Malik); Department of Maternal-Child Nursing and Public Health, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil (Malta, Micheletti Gomide Nogueira de Sá); Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Mansournia); School of Medicine and Surgery, University of Milan Bicocca, Monza, Italy (Mantovani); Laboratory of Public Health, Instituto Auxologico Italiano IRCCS (Italian Auxological Institute), Milan, Italy (Mantovani); Department of Population and Behavioural Sciences, University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho, Ghana (Manu); Department of Biomedical Engineering, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran (Marateb); Biomedical Engineering Research Center (CREB), Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (Barcelona Tech - UPC), Barcelona, Spain (Marateb); Department of Food, Environmental and Nutritional Sciences (DeFENS), University of Milan, Milano, Italy (Marino); Faculty of Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Maroufi); Non-Communicable Disease Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Maroufi); Department of Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health, Pan American Health Organization, Washington, DC (Martinez-Piedra); Faculty of Public Health, Universitas Airlangga (University of Airlangga),

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Surabaya, Indonesia (Martini); Indonesian Public Health Association, Surabaya, Indonesia (Martini); Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, University of Concepción, Concepción, Chile (Martorell); Centre for Healthy Living, University of Concepción, Concepción, Chile (Martorell); Faculty of Humanities and Health Sciences, Curtin University, Sarawak, Malaysia (Marzo); Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Monash University, Subang Jaya, Malaysia (Marzo); Department of Anatomy and Developmental Biology, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia (Mathangasinghe); Department of Anatomy, Genetics and Biomedical Informatics, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka (Mathangasinghe); Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod, India (Mathews); Australian Centre for Health Services Innovation, Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove, Queensland, Australia (McPhail); Digital Health and Informatics Directorate, Queensland Health, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia (McPhail); Department of Public Health, Jazan University, Jazan, Saudi Arabia (Mehmood, Rajpoot); Neurology Department, Janakpuri Super Specialty Hospital Society, New Delhi, India (Mehndiratta); Department of Neurology, Govind Ballabh Institute of Medical Education and Research, New Delhi, India (Mehndiratta); Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran (Mehrabani-Zeinabad); Division of Forensic Medicine, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Dammam, Saudi Arabia (Menezes); Department of Physiology, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Meo); General Administration Department, Helsinki University Hospital, Helsinki, Finland (Meretoja); School of Health Sciences, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (Meretoja); University Centre Varazdin, University North, Varazdin, Croatia (Mestrovic); Department of Pharmacology, University of Kelaniya, Ragama, Sri Lanka (Mettananda); Clinical Medicine Department, Colombo North Teaching Hospital, Ragama, Sri Lanka (Mettananda); Department of Propedeutics of Internal Diseases & Arterial Hypertension, Pomeranian Medical University, Szczecin, Poland (Miazgowski); Multidisciplinary Department of Medical-Surgical and Dental Specialties, Univerity of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli," Naples, Italy (Minervini); Saveetha Dental College and Hospitals, Saveetha University, Chennai, India (Minervini, Tovani-Palone); International Ph.D. Program in Medicine, Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan (Minh); Research Center for Artificial Intelligence in Medicine, Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan (Minh); Department of Statistics and Econometrics, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania (Mirica); Internal Medicine Programme, Kyrgyz State Medical Academy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (Mirrakhimov); Department of Atherosclerosis and Coronary Heart Disease, National Center of Cardiology and Internal Disease, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (Mirrakhimov); Department of Radiology, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran (Mirza-Aghazadeh-Attari); Social Determinants of Health Center, Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Urmia, Iran (Mirza-Aghazadeh-Attari); Division of Cardiology, St Vincent College, Worcester, Massachusetts (Mishra); Center for Brain and Health, New York University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (A. Z. Mohamed); College of Health Science, University of Hargeisa, Hargeisa, Somalia (A. I. Mohamed); Institute of Health Science, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia (A. I. Mohamed); College of Medicine, University of Duhok, Duhok, Iraq (Mohammad); School of Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Mohammadi); Modeling in Health Research Center, Shahrekord University of Medical Sciences, Shahrekord, Iran (Mohammadian-Hafshejani); Health Systems and Policy Research Unit, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria (Mohammed); Institute of Clinical Physiology, National Research Council, Pisa, Italy (Molinaro); Department of Mathematics, The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan (Momani); Nonlinear Dynamics Research Center (NDRC), Ajman University, Ajman, United Arab Emirates (Momani); AI & Cyber Futures Institute, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia (Moni); The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia (Moni); Faculty of Medicine, Birjand University of Medical Sciences, Birjand, Iran (Moodi Ghalibaf, Rajabpour Sanati); Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (M. Moradi); Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences, Sanandaj, Iran (Y. Moradi); Computer, Electrical, and Mathematical Sciences and Engineering Division, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, Thuwal, Saudi Arabia (Moraga); International Laboratory for Air Quality and Health, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia (Morawska); Department of Radiology, University of Tripoli, Tripoli, Libya (Msherghi); Amity Institute of Pharmacy, Amity University, Noida, India (Munjal); Research and Analytics Department, Initiative for Financing Health and Human Development, Chennai, India (Nagarajan); Department of Research and Analytics, Bioinsilico Technologies, Chennai, India (Nagarajan); Department of Engineering, Western Sydney University, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Naik); Heart Failure Research Center, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran (Najdaghi, Davani); Neuroscience Research Center, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran (Najdaghi); Department of Physiotherapy, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Nakhostin Ansari); Research Center for War-affected People, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Nakhostin Ansari); University Institute of Public Health, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan (Nargus); Department of Dental Public Health, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (Natto); Department of Health Policy and Oral Epidemiology, Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts (Natto); College of Medicine and Health Sciences, United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates (Nauman); Department of Circulation and Medical Imaging, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway (Nauman); School of Medicine, Xiamen University, Xiamen, China (Nawsherwan); Department of Forensic Medicine, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India (Nayak); Department of Health Promotion, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Zahedan, Iran (Nazri-Panjaki); Department of Anatomy and Embryology, Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, Romania (Negoi); Department of Cardiology, Cardio-Aid, Bucharest, Romania (Negoi); Department of Cardiovascular Diseases, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Nematollahi); Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom (Newton); Department of Neurosciences, Kenya Medical Research Institute Wellcome Trust Research Programme, Kilifi, Kenya (Newton); Cardiovascular Laboratory, Methodist Hospital, Merrillville, Merrillville, Indiana (D. H. Nguyen); Department of Allergy, Immunology and Dermatology, Hanoi Medical University, Hanoi, Vietnam (D. H. Nguyen); Faculty of Medicine, Duy Tan University, Da Nang, Vietnam (H. T. H. Nguyen); Institute for Research and Training in Medicine, Biology and Pharmacy, Duy Tan University, Da Nang, Vietnam (H. T. H. Nguyen); Cardiovascular Research Department, Methodist Hospital, Merrillville, Illinois (H. Q. Nguyen); Department of Surgery, Danang Family Hospital, Danang, Vietnam (P. T. Nguyen); Department of General Medicine, University of Medicine and Pharmacy at Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (V. T. Nguyen); International Islamic University Islamabad, Islamabad, Pakistan (Niazi); Institute for Mental Health Policy Research, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (Nigatu); Departamento de Clínica Médica, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil (Nogueira de Sá); Global Research Institute, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan (Nomura); Department of Global Health Policy, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan (Nomura); Division of Cardiology, University of California San Francisco (Noubiap); Department of Radiology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota (Nugen); School of Information, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley (Nugen); Center of Excellence in Reproductive Health Innovation (CERHI), University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria (Nzoputam); Department of Applied Economics and Quantitative Analysis, University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania (Oancea); PSSM Data Sciences, Pfizer Inc, Groton, Connecticut (Oduro); Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (Ojo-Akosile); Health Promotion Research Center, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Zahedan, Iran (Okati-Aliabad); University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Okeke); Department of Food and Nutrition, Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea (Okekunle); College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria (Okekunle); Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (Olagunju); Department of Psychiatry, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria (Olagunju); Center for Clinical and Epidemiological Research, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (A. B. Oliveira); Associação Brasileira de Cefaleia em Salvas e Enxaqueca (ABRACES), São Paulo, Brazil (A. B. Oliveira); Cardiology Department, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (G. M. M. Oliveira); Department of Community Medicine, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria (Olorukooba); Slum and Rural Health Initiative Research Academy, Slum and Rural Health Initiative, Ibadan, Nigeria (Olufadewa); Faculty of Public Health, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria (Olufadewa); Department of Biotechnological and Applied Clinical Sciences, University of L'Aquila, L'Aquila, Italy (Ornello); Department of Neurology, ASL Avezzano-Sulmona-L'Aquila, L'Aquila, Italy (Ornello); One Health Global Research Group, Universidad de las Americas (University of the Americas), Quito, Ecuador (Ortiz-Prado); School of

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Medicine, Western Sydney University, Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia (Osuagwu); Department of Optometry and Vision Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (Osuagwu); Faculty of Medicine, University Ferhat Abbas of Setif, Setif, Algeria (Ouyahia); Division of Infectious Diseases, University Hospital of Setif, Setif, Algeria (Ouyahia); Department of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria (Owolabi); Department of Medicine, University College Hospital, Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria (Owolabi); School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland (Ozair); Miami Cancer Institute, Baptist Health South Florida, Miami (Ozair); Department of Respiratory Medicine, Jagadguru Sri Shivarathreeswara University, Mysore, India (P A); National School of Public Health, Institute of Health Carlos III, Madrid, Spain (Padron-Monedero); Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Mangalore, India (Padubidri); Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Harokopio University, Athens, Greece (Panagiotakos); Board of Directors, National Public Health Organization, Athens, Greece (Panagiotakos); School of Medicine, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom (G. D. Panos); First Department of Ophthalmology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece (G. D. Panos); Department of Neurology, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland (L. D. Panos); Department of Neurology, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus (L. D. Panos); Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Thessaly, Larissa, Greece (Pantazopoulos); Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland (Pantazopoulos); Department of Epidemiology and Community Health, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (Parikh); Department of Biomedical Data Science, Stanford University, Stanford, California (Park); Global Health Governance Programme, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom (J. Patel); School of Dentistry, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom (J. Patel); Department of Neurology and Public Health, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, New York (U. K. Patel); Second Department of Cardiology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece (Patoulias); Clinical Research Department, IRCCS Fondazione Don Carlo Gnocchi, Milan, Italy (Pedersini); School of Global Public Health, New York University, New York (Peprah); School of Population Health, Curtin University, Bentley, Western Australia, Australia (Pereira); Centre for Fertility and Health, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Oslo, Norway (Pereira); Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar (Perianayagam); Mario Negri Institute for Pharmacological Research, Bergamo, Italy (Perico, Remuzzi); Department of Food, Environmental and Nutritional Sciences, University of Milan, Milano, Italy (Perna); Facultad de Medicina (Faculty of Medicine), Diego Portales University, Santiago, Chile (Petermann-Rocha); School of Cardiovascular and Metabolic Health, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom (Petermann-Rocha); School of Pharmacy, University of Nizwa, Nizwa, Oman (Philip); Research Center of Neurology, Moscow, Russia (Piradov, Feigin); Research School of Chemistry and Applied Biomedical Sciences, Tomsk Polytechnic University, Tomsk, Russia (Plotnikov); Siberian State Medical University, Tomsk, Russia (Plotnikov); Department of Epidemiology and Evidence-Based Medicine, I.M. Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, Moscow, Russia (Polibin); University Medical Center Groningen, University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands (Postma); Center of Excellence in Higher Education for Pharmaceutical Care Innovation, Universitas Padjadjaran (Padjadjaran University), Bandung, Indonesia (Postma); Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Rourkela, Rourkela, India (Pradhan); Department of Clinical Research and Epidemiology, Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences, New Delhi, India (Prasad); Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Informatics, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (Puvvula); Cihan University-Sulaimaniya Research Center, Cihan University-Sulaimaniya, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq (Qasim); Department of Cardiology, Guiqian International General Hospital, Guiyang, China (Qian); UO Neurologia, Salute Pubblica e Disabilità (The Neurology, Public Health and Disability Unit), Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Neurologico Carlo Besta (IRCCS Foundation Carlo Besta Neurological Institute), Milan, Italy (Raggi); Department of Medical Laboratory Technologies, Alnoor University, Mousl, Iraq (Rahim); Al-Noor Center of Research and Innovation, Alnoor University, Mousl, Iraq (Rahim); Department of Population Science and Human Resource Development, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh (M. Rahman); Institute of Health and Wellbeing, Federation University Australia, Berwick, Victoria, Australia (M. A. Rahman); Future Technology Research Center, National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, Yunlin, Taiwan (Rahmani); Student Research Committee, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Rahmanian); Department of Community Medicine, Employees' State Insurance Model Hospital, Chennai, India (Rajaa); Centre for Chronic Disease Control, New Delhi, India (Rajput); Department of Clinical Sciences, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (Ramadan); Department of Cardiology, Mansoura University, Mansoura, Egypt (Ramadan); Department of Radiology, Stanford University, Stanford, California (Ramasamy); School of Nursing & Health Sciences, Hong Kong Metropolitan University, Hong Kong, China (Ramazanu); Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore (Ramazanu); Health Economics and Outcomes Research Department, Agios Pharmaceuticals, Cambridge, Massachusetts (Rane); Department of Pharmaceutical Economics and Policy, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Boston (Rane); Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts (Rashedi); Department of Epidemiology, Non-Communicable Diseases Research Center (NCDRC), Tehran, Iran (Rashedi); Department of Family Medicine, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka (Rathish); Department of Primary Care and Public Health, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom (Rawaf, Tabche); Academic Public Health England, Public Health England, London, United Kingdom (Rawaf); Department of Biological Sciences, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Egypt (Redwan); Department of Protein Research, Research and Academic Institution, Alexandria, Egypt (Redwan); Endocrinology and Metabolism Research Institute, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Negar Rezaei); Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences, Rafsanjan, Iran (Rezaeian); Community Health Department, Federal University of Ceará, Fortaleza, Brazil (Rocha); Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia (Rodriguez); Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom (Rodriguez); Department of Clinical Research, University of Sao Paulo, Ribeirão Preto, Brazil (Roever); Gilbert and Rose-Marie Chagoury School of Medicine, Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon (Roever); Maurizio Bufalini Hospital, Cesena, Italy (Romoli); Fondazione Policlinico Universitario A. Gemelli, Cuore Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Catholic University of Sacred Heart), Rome, Italy (Romozzi); Department of Analytical and Applied Economics, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, India (Rout, Swain); RUSA Centre of Excellence in Public Policy and Governance, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, India (Rout); Department of Biochemistry and Food Analysis, Patuakhali Science and Technology University, Patuakhali, Bangladesh (N. Roy); Department of Labour, Directorate of Factories, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata, India (P. Roy); Cardiovascular Department, Zagazig University, Zagazig, Egypt (Saad); Faculty of Medicine, Gonabad University of Medical Sciences, Gonabad, Iran (Saadatian); Infectious Diseases Research Center, Gonabad University of Medical Sciences, Gonabad, Iran (Saadatian); Department of Epidemiology, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Sabour); Department of Neurology, University of L'Aquila, L'Aquila, Italy (Sacco); College of Medicine, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (Saddik, Saleh); School of Population Health, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Saddik, X. Xu); Department of Biostatistics, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran (Sadeghi); Institute of Medical Science, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (Saeed); Hurvitz Brain Sciences Research Program, Sunnybrook Research Institute, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (Saeed); Sharjah Institute of Medical Sciences, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (Saheb Sharif-Askari); Center for Global Health Research, Saveetha University, Chennai, India (Sahebkar); Biotechnology Research Center, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran (Sahebkar); Department of Analytical & Applied Economics, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, India (Sahoo); Department of Health and Kinesiology, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (Sajib); Department of Integrated Health Education, Federal University of Espirito Santo, Vitória, Brazil (Salaroli); Faculty of Pharmacy, Mansoura University, Mansoura, Egypt (Saleh); Institute of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan (Samodra); Benang Merah Research Center (BMRC), Minahasa Utara, Indonesia (Samodra); Department of Anatomy, Ras Al Khaimah Medical and Health Sciences University, Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates (Samuel); Department of Entomology, Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt (Samy); Medical Ain Shams Research Institute (MASRI), Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt (Samy); School of Public Health and Health Management, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia (Santric-Milicevic); Indira Gandhi Medical College and Research Institute, Puducherry, India

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(Saravanan); Department of Food Processing Technology, West Bengal State Council of Technical Education, Malda, India (Sarkar); Department of Oral Pathology and Microbiology, Dr. D. Y. Patil Vidyapeeth, Pune (Deemed to be University), Pune, India (G. S. Sarode, S. C. Sarode); Faculty of Medicine, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia (Sartorius); Nuffield Department of Medicine, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom (Sartorius); UGC Centre of Advanced Study in Psychology, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, India (Satpathy); Udyam-Global Association for Sustainable Development, Bhubaneswar, India (Satpathy); Dobney Hypertension Centre, The University of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia, Australia (Schlaich); Hypertension and Kidney Disease Laboratory, Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (Schlaich); Department of Health Sciences, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Araranguá, Brazil (Schneider); Cardiovascular Research Center, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts (Schuermans); Department of Cardiovascular Sciences, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Leuven, Belgium (Schuermans, Van den Eynde); Department of Community Oral Health and Clinical Prevention, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Selvaraj); Emergency Department, Manian Medical Centre, Erode, India (Senthilkumaran); Digestive Diseases Research Institute, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Sepanlou); Non-communicable Disease Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran (Sepanlou); Department of Medicine and Surgery, Government Doon Medical College, Dehradun, India (Sethi); National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Institutes of Health, Rockville, Maryland (Seylani); Department of Global Public Health, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden (Shaaban); Department of Neurology, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Shafie); Center for Medical and Bio-Allied Health Sciences Research, Ajman University, Ajman, United Arab Emirates (Shahwan, Shamsi, Zyoud); Independent Consultant, Karachi, Pakistan (M. A. Shaikh); Department of Neuro-Physiotherapy, Independent Consultant, Thane, India (S. Z. Shaikh); Centre For Interdisciplinary Research In Basic Sciences (CIRBSc), Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India (Shamsi); Science Department, Kazakh National Medical University, Almaty, Kazakhstan (Shamsutdinova); College of Nursing and Health Sciences, Jazan University, Jazan, Saudi Arabia (Shanawaz); Amity Institute of Public Health, Amity University, Noida, India (Shannawaz); Department for Evidence-based Medicine and Evaluation, University for Continuing Education Krems, Krems, Austria (Sharifan); Sina Hospital, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Sharifan); Department of Medicine, Korea University, Seoul, South Korea (Sharifi Rad); Institute of Forensic Science & Criminology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India (Sharma); Department of Nursing, Arba Minch University, Arba Minch, Ethiopia (Shashamo); K S Hegde Medical Academy, Nitte University, Mangalore, India (M. Shetty); Manipal College of Dental Sciences, Mangalore, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Mangalore, India (P. K. Shetty); National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Tokyo, Japan (Shigematsu); Department of Veterinary Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Sokoto, Nigeria (Shittu); Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland (Shiue); Martti Ahtisaari Institute, University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland (Shiue); Neurological Surgery, Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois (Shlobin); Department of Medical-Surgical Nursing, Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, Sari, Iran (Shorofi); Department of Nursing and Health Sciences, Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia (Shorofi); Unit of Basic Medical Sciences, University of Khartoum, Khartoum, Sudan (Siddig); Department of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands (Siddig); Department of Biochemistry, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, India (B. Singh); Department of Radiodiagnosis, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bathinda, India (Paramdeep Singh); Department of Human Genetics, Punjabi University, Patiala, India (Puneetpal Singh); Department of Health Education and Promotion, Jazan University, Jazan, Saudi Arabia (Sobia); Department of Systemic Pathology, Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine, Middletown, New York (R. Solanki); Department of Pathology, American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine, Cupecoy, Saint Martin (R. Solanki); Department of Biochemistry, American University of Integrative Sciences, Bridgetown, Barbados (S. Solanki); Student Research Committee, Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Urmia, Iran (Soraneh); School of Medicine, Babol University of Medical Sciences, Babol, Iran (Soraneh); 3rd Department of Cardiology, University of Athens, Athens, Greece (Spartalis); Department of Pharmacology, RAK Medical and Health Sciences University, Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates (Srinivasamurthy); Department of Public Health, Kandahar University, Kandahar, Afghanistan (Stanikzai); Nutrition and Dietetics Department, Federal Research Institute of Nutrition, Biotechnology and Food Safety, Moscow, Russia (Starodubova); Department of Internal Disease, Pirogov Russian National Research Medical University, Moscow, Russia (Starodubova); Institute of Integrated Intelligence and Systems, Griffith University, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia (J. Sun); Department of Biomedical Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia (Z. Sun); Department of Clinical Research and Development, LUXMED Group, Warsaw, Poland (Szarpak); Collegium Medicul, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland (Szarpak); Department of Neurology, Neurocenter of Southern Switzerland (NSI), Lugano, Switzerland (Tabaee Damavandi); Department of Medical Informatics, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran (Tabatabaei); Clinial Research Development Unit, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran (Tabatabaei); Department of Basic Medical Sciences, Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran (Tabatabaeizadeh); Department of Internal Medicine, Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran (Tabatabaeizadeh); Department of Environmental, Agricultural and Occupational Health, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha (Taiba); Sri Ramachandra Medical College and Research Institute, Chennai, India (Taiba); Department of Pathology, Alexandria University, Alexandria, Egypt (Talaat); Department of Epidemiology, Stellenbosch University, Cape Town, South Africa (Tamuzi); Department of Medicine, Northlands Medical Group, Omuthiya, Namibia (Tamuzi); Department of Surgery, National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore (Tan); Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Temsah); Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of California San Francisco (Teramoto); School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Mandi, Mandi, India (Thakur); Public Health Department, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, Kochi, India (Thankappan); Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom (Thayakaran); Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (Thirunavukkarasu); Faculty of Public Health, Universitas Sam Ratulangi (Sam Ratulangi University), Manado, Indonesia (Ticoalu); Department of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada (Tonelli); Institute of Public Health, Jagiellonian University Medical College, Kraków, Poland (Topor-Madry); Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Tariff System, Warsaw, Poland (Topor-Madry); School of Medicine, Indiana University, Indianapolis (J. T. Tran); Department of Internal Medicine, University of Medicine and Pharmacy at Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (T. H. Tran); Department of Business Analytics, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, Dartmouth (T. H. Tran); Molecular Neuroscience Research Center, Shiga University of Medical Science, Shiga, Japan (Tran Minh Duc); Rigshospitalet, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark (Truelsen); Faculty of Medicine, Nam Can Tho University, Can Tho, Vietnam (Truyen); School of Pharmacy, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan, Taiwan (Tsai); Centre for Neonatal and Paediatric Infection, St George's University of London, London, United Kingdom (Tsai); Natural and Medical Sciences Research Center, University of Nizwa, Nizwa, Oman (Ullah); Department of Cardiovascular, Endocrine-metabolic Diseases and Aging, National Institute of Health, Rome, Italy (Unim); Department of Neuroscience, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia (Unsworth); Department of Informatics and Radiology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota (Vahdati); College of Health and Sport Sciences, University of Bahrain, Zallaq, Bahrain (Vaithinathan); Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Urmia, Iran (Valizadeh); College of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Jazan University, Jazan, Saudi Arabia (Varghese); UKK Institute, Tampere, Finland (Vasankari); Faculty of Medicine and Health Technology, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland (Vasankari); Raffles Neuroscience Centre, Raffles Hospital, Singapore, Singapore (Venketasubramanian); Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore (Venketasubramanian); Department of Health Policy and Management, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland (Vervoort); Department of Physiotherapy, Universidad Europea de Madrid (European University of Madrid), Villaviciosa de Odón, Spain (Villafañe); Department of Cardiology, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, New York (Vinayak); Department of Molecular Epidemiology, Research Institute for Systems Biology and Medicine, Moscow, Russia (Vladimirov); Department of Information Technologies and Management, Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, Dolgoprudny, Russia (Vladimirov); School of Population Health and Environmental Sciences, King's College London, London, United

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Kingdom (Wafa); NUST School of Health Sciences, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan (Waheed); Operational Research Center in Healthcare, Near East University, Nicosia, Turkiye (Waheed); Department of Interventional Radiology, University of Miami, Miami, Florida (Wahood); Department of Psychiatry, Haramaya University, Harar, Ethiopia (Walde); School of Life Course and Population Sciences, King's College London, London, United Kingdom (Wang, Wolfe); Department of Community Medicine, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe); Institute of Clinical Epidemiology, Public Health, Health Economics, Medical Statistics and Informatics, Medical University Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria (Willeit); Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom (Willeit); National Data Management Center for Health (NDMC), Ethiopian Public Health Institute, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Wolde); NIHR Biomedical Research Centre, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital and Kings College London, London, United Kingdom (Wolfe); Emergency medicine and critical care nursing, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia (Wubie); School of Public Health, Zhejiang University, Zhejiang, China (Xiao); Department of Public Health Science, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle, Washington (Xiao); Department of Endocrinology, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, China (S. Xu); School of Medicine, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York (S. Xu); Cardiovascular Program, The George Institute for Global Health, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (X. Xu); Department of Public Health, Juntendo University, Tokyo, Japan (Yamagishi, Yonemoto); Department of Public Health Medicine, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan (Yamagishi); Faculty of Medicine, Juntendo University, Tokyo, Japan (Yano); Department of Medicine, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran (Yarahmadi); Department of Medicine, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran (Yarahmadi); Research Center of Physiology, Semnan University of Medical Sciences, Semnan, Iran (Yaribeygi); The George Institute for Global Health, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom (Yaya); National Center for Chronic and Noncommunicable Disease Control and Prevention, Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Beijing, China (Ye); The George Institute for Global Health, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Ye); Department of Pediatrics, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, South Korea (Yon); Department of Biostatistics, University of Toyama, Toyama, Japan (Yonemoto); Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Wuhan University, Wuhan, China (Yu); Sant'Elia Hospital, University of Catania, Caltanissetta, Italy (Zanghì); Research and Development Department, Sina Medical Biochemistry Technologies, Shiraz, Iran (Zare); Department of Bioengineering and Therapeutical Sciences, University of California San Francisco (Zastrozhin); Department of Administration, PGxAI, San Francisco, California (Zastrozhin); Department of Neurology, Xuanwu Hospital, Beijing, China (C. Zhang); Department of Neurology, PLA Rocket Force Characteristic Medical Center, Beijing, China (C. Zhang); School of Public Health, Wuhan University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China (Y. Zhang); Hubei Province Key Laboratory of Occupational Hazard Identification and Control, Wuhan University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China (Y. Zhang); School of Public Health, Wuhan University, Wuhan, China (Z.-J. Zhang); Tianjin Medical University General Hospital, Tianjin Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Tianjin, China (Z. Zhang); College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Hebei University, Baoding, China (Zhao); School of Humanities and Management, Zhejiang Chinese Medical University, Hangzhou, China (Zhou); Department of Epidemiology, University of Washington, Seattle (Zia); Institute of Public Health and Social Sciences, Khyber Medical University, Peshawar, Pakistan (Zia); Department of Biochemistry and Pharmacogenomics, Medical University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland (Zielińska); Division of Cardiology, University of Washington, Seattle (Roth).

Author Contributions: Dr Rautalin had full access to all of the data in the study and takes responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.
Concept and design: Rautalin, Volovici, Rinkel, Feigin, Stark, Johnson, Abdelkader, Abdullahi, Aboagye, Abualhasan, Abualruz, Adra, Adzigbli, Agyemang-Duah, D. Ahmad, Aji, Alif, Alomari, Amusa, Anuoluwa, Anyasodor, Arabloo, Areda, Aryan, Azzam, Bahramian, Bai, Bardhan, Bärnighausen, Bell, Bhagavathula, Bhaskar, Borhany, Chadwick, S. Chakraborty, Choudhari, da Silva, D'Amico, Debopadhaya, Dibas, T. Do, Dongarwar, R. Doshi, E'mar, Eltahir, Fagbamigbe, Fares, Faris, Fauk, Fetensa, Gebregergis, Ghadirian, Gholamalizadeh, Ghozy, Gupta, Hanifi, Hassan Zadeh Tabatabaei, Hay, Hoan, Hosseinzadeh, Huang, Isola, Jain, Jakovljevic, Kadashetti, Karaye, Kayode, K. Kim, A. Kisa, S. Kisa, Kolahi, Kytö, Lahariya, Latief, Latifinaibin, N. Le, M. Lee, S. Lee, W. Lee, Leonardi, Liu, Mantovani, Mathangasinghe, Menezes, Mohammad, Mokdad, M. Moradi, Y. Moradi, Msherghi, Murray, Najdaghi, Nargus, Natto, Hau Nguyen, P. Nguyen, Okati-Aliabad, Olagunju, Ortiz-Prado, Owolabi, Pedersini, Petermann-Rocha, Piradov, Puvvula, Rahim, Rahmani, Rashedi, Roever, P. Roy, Saadatian, Saleh, Samy, Satpathy, Schlaich, Schneider, Selvaraj, Sethi, Seylani, Shaaban, Shannawaz, Sharifi Rad, Shiue, Spartalis, Stanaway, J. Sun, Swain, Tabche, Tan, Tiwari, A. Tran, Tsai, Vahdati, Van den Eynde, Yarahmadi, Ye, Yon, Yonemoto, Zanghì, Zastrozhin, Y. Zhang, Zhou.
Acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data: Rautalin, Volovici, Kaprio, Korja, Krishnamurthi, Nair, Ranta, Vergouwen, Feigin, Stark, Johnson, Abate, Abbastabar, Abd-Allah, Abdi, Abdollahi, Abdullahi, Abiodun, Aboagye, Abouzid, Abtahi, Abu Rumeileh, Abualhasan, Abukhadijah, Abu-Zaid, Adamu, Addo, Adedoyin, Adegboye, Ahinkorah, A. Ahmad, D. Ahmad, Ahmadzade, A. Ahmed, H. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, Aji, Ahmed Al-Kaif, Al-Ajlouni, Al-Aly, Albashtawy, Ali, Alimohamadi, Aljunid, Alomari, Alrawashdeh, Alsabri, Al-Shahi Salman, Altaf, Al-Tammemi, Alvis-Guzman, Alwafi, Al-Wardat, Al-Worafi, Aly, Alyahya, Alzoubi, Amani, T. Amin, Amindarolzarbi, Amusa, Anderlini, Angappan, Anil, Anuoluwa, Anwar, Apostol, Arabloo, Johan, Artamonov, Artanti, Arumugam, Asghari-Jafarabadi, Ashemo, Ashraf, Athar, Athari, Aujayeb, Awotidebe, Azadnajafabad, Aziz, Azzam, Babu, Bagheri, Bahrami Taghanaki, Baig, Bako, Baltatu, Bam, Banach, Bandyopadhyay, Banik, Bardhan, Barker-Collo, Barqawi, Barua, Bastan, Basu, Bensenor, Berhie, Beyene, Bhagavathula, Bhaskar, A. Bhat, V. Bhat, G. Bhatti, J. Bhatti, Bijani, Bikbov, Birhan, Birhanu, Bitra, Boloor, Borhany, Breitner, Brenner, Bugiardini, Bulamu, Butt, Cabral, Caetano dos Santos, Calina, Cámera, Campos, Campos-Nonato, Capodici, Carvalho, Castañeda-Orjuela, Catapano, Cegolon, Chadwick, C. Chakraborty, P. Chakraborty, Chandika, Chanie, Chattu, Chaudhary, Chi, Chichagi, Ching, Chopra, Choudhari, Chowdhury, Chu, Chung, Columbus, Criqui, Dabbagh Ohadi, Dadras, Dai, Dalal, Dalli, Dashti, Davletov, De la Cruz-Góngora, Debopadhaya, Delgado-Enciso, Dervišević, Devanbu, Dewan, Dhane, Dibas, T. Do, T. H. Do, Dohare, Doheim, Dokova, D'Oria, O. Doshi, R. Doshi, Dowou, Dsouza, Dutta, Edvardsson, D. Efendi, F. Efendi, El Nahas, Elgendy, Elhadi, Eltaha, Emeto, Fabin, Fagbamigbe, Fahim, Fakhradiyev, Fares, Fazylov, Fekadu, Ferreira, Fischer, Foschi, Fridayani, Gaipov, Gajjar, Gandhi, Ganesan, Garg, Gebregergis, Gebrehiwot, Gebremeskel, Getie, J. Ghadimi, Ghahramani, Ghasemzadeh, Ghazy, Ghozy, Gil, Gilani, Gnedovskaya, Goleij, A. Goulart, B. Goulart, Guan, Gupta, Habibzadeh, Hadei, Hadi, Hamidi, Hanifi, Hankey, Harlianto, Haro, Hasan, Hasani, Hasnain, Hassan Zadeh Tabatabaei, Haubold, Havmoeller, Hbid, G. Heidari, M. Heidari, Hemmati, Hiraike, Holla, Hostiuc, Huynh, Hwang, Ibitoye, Ikeda, Ikiroma, Ilaghi, Ilesanmi, I. Ilic, M. Ilic, Islam, Ismail, Iso, Iwagami, Jacob, Jafarzadeh, Jairoun, ABUBAKAR, Jawaid, Jayapal, Jonas, Joseph, Jürisson, Kadashetti, Kalani, Kamal, Kamireddy, Kanchan, Kandel, Karami, Karaye, Karimi, Karimi Behnagh, Kashoo, Kayode, Kazemi, Kesse-Guyot, Khader, Khaing, F. Khan, M. Khan, H. Khatatbeh, M. Khatatbeh, Khayat Kashani, Kheirallah, Khidri, Khormali, Khosla, K. Kim, Y. Kim, A. Kisa, S. Kisa, Kivimäki, Kompani, Korzh, Kostev, Kothari, Krishan, Krishna, Krishnamoorthy, Kuddus, Kulimbet, Kunutsor, Kurniasari, Kusuma, Kytö, La Vecchia, Lahariya, D. Lai, H. Lai, Laksono, Lallukka, Latief, N. Le, T. Le, M. Lee, Y. Lee, Lenzi, M. Li, X. Li, Lin, Lohner, Lorenzovici, Andrade Lotufo, Lucchetti, Lusk, Lutzky Saute, H. Amin, A. Malhotra, K. Malhotra, Malik, Malta, Mansournia, Manu, Marateb, Marino, Maroufi, Martinez-Piedra, Martini, Martorell, Marzo, Mathangasinghe, Mathews, Maugeri, McPhail, Mehmood, Mehndiratta, Mehrabani-Zeinabad, Menezes, Meo, Meretoja, Mestrovic, Mettananda, Miazgowski, Micheletti Gomide Nogueira de Sá, Minervini, M. Le, Mirica, Mirrakhimov, Mirza-Aghazadeh-Attari, Mishra, Mithra, Abdalla Mohamed, Ahmed Mohamed, Mohammadi, Mohammadian-Hafshejani, Mohammed, Mokdad, Molinaro, Momani, Moni, Moodi Ghalibaf, Y. Moradi, Moraga, Morawska, Msherghi, Munjal, Nagarajan, Naik, Nakhostin Ansari, Nargus, Narimani Davani, Nauman, ., Nayak, Nazri-Panjaki, Negoi, Nematollahi, Newton, D. Nguyen, Hien Nguyen, P. Nguyen, V. Nguyen, Niazi, Nigatu, Nikoobar, Nogueira de Sá, Nomura, Noubiap, Nugen, Nzoputam, Oancea, Oduro, Ojo-Akosile, Okati-Aliabad, Okeke, Okekunle, Olagunju, Olaiya, A. Oliveira, G. Oliveira, Olorukooba, Olufadewa, Ornello, Osuagwu, Ouyahia, Owolabi, Ozair, P A, Padron-Monedero, Padubidri, Panagiotakos, G. Panos, L. Panos, Pantazopoulos, Parikh, Park, J. Patel, U. Patel, Patoulias, Peprah, Pereira, Perianayagam, Perico, Perna, Philip, Piradov, Plotnikov, Polibin, Postma, Pradhan, Prasad, Puvvula, Qasim, Qian, Raggi, Rahim, Rahimi-Movaghar, Mosiur Rahman, Muhammad Aziz Rahman, Rahmanian, Rajaa, Rajabpour Sanati, Rajpoot, Rajput, Ramadan,

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Ramasamy, Ramazanu, Rane, Rashedi, Rashidi, Rathish, Rawaf, Razo, Reddy, Redwan, Remuzzi, Nazila Rezaei, Negar Rezaei, Rezaeian, Rocha, Rodriguez, Roever, Romoli, Romozzi, Ross, Rout, N. Roy, Saad, Sabour, Sacco, Saddik, Sadeghi, Saeed, Saheb Sharif-Askari, Sahebkar, Sahoo, Sajib, Salaroli, Samodra, Samuel, Samy, Santric-Milicevic, Saravanan, Sarkar, G. Sarode, S. Sarode, Sartorius, Satpathy, Schuermans, Senthilkumaran, Sepanlou, Sethi, Shaaban, Shafie, Shahwan, M. Shaikh, S. Shaikh, Shamim, Shamsi, Shamsutdinova, Shanawaz, Sharifan, Sharifi Rad, Sharma, Shashamo, M. Shetty, P. Shetty, Shigematsu, Shittu, Shlobin, Shorofi, Siddig, B. Singh, Paramdeep Singh, Puneetpal Singh, S. Singh, Sobia, R. Solanki, S. Solanki, Soraneh, Spartalis, Srinivasamurthy, Stanaway, Stanikzai, Starodubova, Z. Sun, Swain, Szarpak, Tabaee Damavandi, Tabatabaei, Tabatabaeizadeh, Taiba, Talaat, Tamuzi, Temsah, Teramoto, Thakur, Thankappan, Thayakaran, Thirunavukkarasu, Ticoalu, Tonelli, Topor-Madry, Tovani-Palone, J. Tran, T. Tran, Tran Minh Duc, Truelsen, Truyen, Tsai, Ullah, Unim, Unnikrishnan, Unsworth, Usman, Govindaraj Vaithinathan, Valizadeh, Van den Eynde, Varghese, Vasankari, Venketasubramanian, Vervoort, Villafañe, Vinayak, Vladimirov, Wafa, Waheed, Wahood, Walde, Wang, Wickramasinghe, Willeit, Wolde, Wolfe, Wubie, Xiao, S. Xu, X. Xu, Yamagishi, Yano, Yarahmadi, Yaribeygi, Yaya, Ye, Yonemoto, Yu, Zare, Zastrozhin, C. Zhang, Y. Zhang, Zhi-Jiang Zhang, Zhiqiang Zhang, Zhao, Zhou, Zhumagaliuly, Zia, Zielińska, Zyoud, Roth.

Drafting of the manuscript: Rautalin, Volovici, Abualhasan, Abualruz, Abu-Zaid, Ahinkorah, A. Ahmed, Ahmed Al-Kaif, Al-Ajlouni, Albashtawy, Al-Tammemi, Alwafi, Amindarolzarbi, Amusa, Arabloo, Artanti, Azzam, Babu, Baig, Bardhan, Bhagavathula, Bhaskar, V. Bhat, G. Bhatti, Capodici, Cegolon, Chadwick, Chanie, Debopadhaya, Delgado-Enciso, Dhane, T. Do, Dongarwar, E'mar, Edvardsson, Elhadi, Eltaha, Fagbamigbe, Fares, Fekadu, Ferreira, Fetensa, Gajjar, Garg, Gil, Gupta, Hanifi, Hasan, Hassan Zadeh Tabatabaei, G. Heidari, Ibitoye, Isola, Kamireddy, Kashoo, Kayode, Khosla, A. Kisa, S. Kisa, Lahariya, T. Le, Malik, Manu, Marzo, Maugeri, Mehrabani-Zeinabad, Meo, Moodi Ghalibaf, Nagarajan, Najdaghi, Nargus, Natto, Nematollahi, D. Nguyen, Hau Nguyen, Hien Nguyen, P. Nguyen, V. Nguyen, U. Patel, Perna, Pradhan, Puvvula, Rajaa, Rashedi, Roever, Ross, Saddik, Samy, G. Sarode, Satpathy, Selvaraj, Sethi, Shaaban, Shafie, Shannawaz, Sharifi Rad, Shigematsu, R. Solanki, Spartalis, Stanikzai, Starodubova, Tamuzi, Tiwari, Tsai, Govindaraj Vaithinathan, Yarahmadi, Yonemoto, Zastrozhin.

Critical review of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Rautalin, Kaprio, Korja, Krishnamurthi, Nair, Ranta, Rinkel, Vergouwen, Feigin, Stark, Johnson, Abate, Abbastabar, Abd-Allah, Abdelkader, Abdi, Abdollahi, Abdullahi, Abiodun, Aboagye, Abouzid, Abtahi, Abu Rumeileh, Abualhasan, Abukhadijah, Abu-Zaid, Adamu, Addo, Adedoyin, Adegboye, Adra, Adzigbli, Agyemang-Duah, Ahinkorah, A. Ahmad, D. Ahmad, Ahmadzade, A. Ahmed, H. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, Aji, Ahmed Al-Kaif, Al-Ajlouni, Al-Aly, Albashtawy, Ali, Alif, Alimohamadi, Aljunid, Alomari, Alrawashdeh, Alsabri, Al-Shahi Salman, Altaf, Al-Tammemi, Alvis-Guzman, Alwafi, Al-Wardat, Al-Worafi, Aly, Alyahya, Alzoubi, Amani, T. Amin, Amindarolzarbi, Amusa, Anderlini, Angappan, Anil, Anuoluwa, Anwar, Anyasodor, Apostol, Arabloo, Areda, Johan, Artamonov, Arumugam, Aryan, Asghari-Jafarabadi, Ashemo, Ashraf, Athar, Athari, Aujayeb, Awotidebe, Azadnajafabad, Aziz, Azzam, Babu, Bagheri, Bahrami Taghanaki, Bahramian, Bai, Baig, Bako, Baltatu, Bam, Banach, Bandyopadhyay, Banik, Bardhan, Barker-Collo, Bärnighausen, Barqawi, Barua, Bastan, Basu, Bell, Bensenor, Berhie, Beyene, Bhagavathula, Bhaskar, A. Bhat, V. Bhat, G. Bhatti, J. Bhatti, Bijani, Bikbov, Birhan, Birhanu, Bitra, Boloor, Borhany, Breitner, Brenner, Bugiardini, Bulamu, Butt, Cabral, Caetano dos Santos, Calina, Cámera, Campos, Campos-Nonato, Capodici, Carvalho, Castañeda-Orjuela, Catapano, Cegolon, Chadwick, C. Chakraborty, P. Chakraborty, S. Chakraborty, Chandika, Chattu, Chaudhary, Chi, Chichagi, Ching, Chopra, Choudhari, Chowdhury, Chu, Chung, Columbus, Criqui, da Silva, Dabbagh Ohadi, Dadras, Dai, Dalal, Dalli, D'Amico, Dashti, Davletov, De la Cruz-Góngora, Debopadhaya, Delgado-Enciso, Dervišević, Devanbu, Dewan, Dhane, Dibas, T. Do, T. H. Do, Dohare, Doheim, Dokova, Dongarwar, D'Oria, O. Doshi, R. Doshi, Dowou, Dsouza, Dutta, E'mar, Edvardsson, D. Efendi, F. Efendi, El Nahas, Elgendy, Elhadi, Eltaha, Eltahir, Emeto, Fabin, Fagbamigbe, Fahim, Fakhradiyev, Fares, Faris, Fauk, Fazylov, Fekadu, Ferreira, Fetensa, Fischer, Foschi, Fridayani, Gaipov, Gajjar, Gandhi, Ganesan, Garg, Gebregergis, Gebrehiwot, Gebremeskel, Getie, J. Ghadimi, Ghadirian, Ghahramani, Ghasemzadeh, Ghazy, Gholamalizadeh, Ghozy, Gil, Gilani, Gnedovskaya, Goleij, A. Goulart, B. Goulart, Guan, Gupta, Habibzadeh, Hadei, Hadi, Hamidi, Hanifi, Hankey, Harlianto, Haro, Hasan, Hasani, Hasnain, Hassan Zadeh Tabatabaei, Haubold, Havmoeller, Hay, Hbid, G. 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Oliveira, Olorukooba, Olufadewa, Ornello, Ortiz-Prado, Osuagwu, Ouyahia, Owolabi, Ozair, P A, Padron-Monedero, Padubidri, Panagiotakos, G. Panos, L. Panos, Pantazopoulos, Parikh, Park, J. Patel, U. Patel, Patoulias, Pedersini, Peprah, Pereira, Perianayagam, Perico, Perna, Petermann-Rocha, Philip, Piradov, Plotnikov, Polibin, Postma, Pradhan, Prasad, Puvvula, Qasim, Qian, Raggi, Rahim, Rahimi-Movaghar, Mosiur Rahman, Muhammad Aziz Rahman, Rahmani, Rahmanian, Rajaa, Rajabpour Sanati, Rajpoot, Rajput, Ramadan, Ramasamy, Ramazanu, Rane, Rashedi, Rashidi, Rathish, Rawaf, Razo, Reddy, Redwan, Remuzzi, Nazila Rezaei, Negar Rezaei, Rezaeian, Rocha, Rodriguez, Roever, Romoli, Romozzi, Ross, Rout, N. Roy, P. Roy, Saad, Saadatian, Sabour, Sacco, Saddik, Sadeghi, Saeed, Saheb Sharif-Askari, Sahebkar, Sahoo, Sajib, Salaroli, Saleh, Samodra, Samuel, Samy, Santric-Milicevic, Saravanan, Sarkar, G. Sarode, S. Sarode, Sartorius, Satpathy, Schlaich, Schneider, Schuermans, Selvaraj, Senthilkumaran, Sepanlou, Sethi, Seylani, Shaaban, Shafie, Shahwan, M. Shaikh, S. Shaikh, Shamim, Shamsi, Shamsutdinova, Shanawaz, Shannawaz, Sharifan, Sharifi Rad, Sharma, Shashamo, M. Shetty, P. Shetty, Shigematsu, Shittu, Shiue, Shlobin, Shorofi, Siddig, B. Singh, Paramdeep Singh, Puneetpal Singh, S. Singh, Sobia, R. Solanki, S. Solanki, Soraneh, Spartalis, Srinivasamurthy, Stanaway, Stanikzai, Starodubova, J. Sun, Z. Sun, Swain, Szarpak, Tabaee Damavandi, Tabatabaei, Tabatabaeizadeh, Tabche, Taiba, Talaat, Tamuzi, Tan, Temsah, Teramoto, Thakur, Thankappan, Thayakaran, Thirunavukkarasu, Ticoalu, Tonelli, Topor-Madry, Tovani-Palone, A. Tran, J. Tran, T. Tran, Tran Minh Duc, Truelsen, Truyen, Tsai, Ullah, Unim, Unnikrishnan, Unsworth, Usman, Vahdati, Govindaraj Vaithinathan, Valizadeh, Van den Eynde, Varghese, Vasankari, Venketasubramanian, Vervoort, Villafañe, Vinayak, Vladimirov, Wafa, Waheed, Wahood, Walde, Wang, Wickramasinghe, Willeit, Wolde, Wolfe, Wubie, Xiao, S. Xu, X. Xu, Yamagishi, Yano, Yarahmadi, Yaribeygi, Yaya, Ye, Yon, Yonemoto, Yu, Zanghì, Zare, Zastrozhin, C. Zhang, Y. Zhang, Zhi-Jiang Zhang, Zhiqiang Zhang, Zhao, Zhou, Zhumagaliuly, Zia, Zielińska, Zyoud, Roth.

Statistical analysis: Rautalin, Stark, Johnson, Abate, Abbastabar, Abdi, Abdullahi, Adegboye, Ahinkorah, A. Ahmad, D. Ahmad, Aji, Ali, Alif, Aljunid, Al-Wardat, T. Amin, Amindarolzarbi, Amusa, Apostol, Artamonov, Asghari-Jafarabadi, Athari, Azzam, Bako, Baltatu, Banik, Bardhan, Bastan, Beyene, Bhagavathula, Bhaskar, A. Bhat, G. Bhatti, J. Bhatti, Borhany, Campos-Nonato, Chanie, Chattu, Chopra, Choudhari, Dai, Debopadhaya, Delgado-Enciso, T. Do, O. Doshi, Dsouza, Fagbamigbe, Fakhradiyev, Ganesan, Ghazy, Ghozy, Guan, Gupta, Hanifi, Harlianto, Haro, Hasnain, Havmoeller, Hbid, G. Heidari, Hemmati, Hosseinzadeh, Hostiuc, Islam, Jacob, Jayapal, Joseph, Jürisson, Kamal, Kandel, Kashoo, Kayode, Kesse-Guyot, Khader, Kheirallah, Khosla, K. Kim, A. Kisa, S. Kisa, Kusuma, Lahariya, Latief, S. Lee, W. Lee, Liu, Mansournia, Maroufi, Martinez-Piedra, Mathangasinghe, Maugeri, McPhail, Mehmood, Mehrabani-Zeinabad, Mirza-Aghazadeh-Attari, Mohammad, Mohammadian-Hafshejani, Moni, Nagarajan, Natto, Nayak, Nazri-Panjaki, Hau Nguyen, Hien Nguyen, P. Nguyen, Niazi, Nzoputam,

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Oancea, Okati-Aliabad, Olagunju, Ouyahia, Panagiotakos, G. Panos, Parikh, Park, U. Patel, Peprah, Philip, Pradhan, Qasim, Rahmani, Rajaa, Rajput, Ramasamy, Razo, Roever, Ross, Rout, Saddik, Sahoo, Samuel, Samy, Sarkar, Satpathy, Sethi, Shafie, Shamsutdinova, Shanawaz, Shannawaz, Sharifi Rad, M. Shetty, P. Shetty, Spartalis, Stanikzai, Starodubova, Swain, Tabatabaei, Thayakaran, Tsai, Govindaraj Vaithinathan, Wafa, Wang, Wickramasinghe, Willeit, S. Xu, Yarahmadi, Ye, Yonemoto, Zastrozhin, Zhou, Zyoud.
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Supervision: Volovici, Kaprio, Feigin, Abtahi, A. Ahmed, Albashtawy, Alwafi, Aly, Alzoubi, Amusa, Anderlini, Anil, Athari, Azzam, Babu, Banach, Bardhan, Bärnighausen, J. Bhatti, Borhany, Calina, Cámera, Capodici, Cegolon, Criqui, D'Amico, Dervišević, Devanbu, Dibas, T. Do, D'Oria, Elgendy, Fazylov, Fetensa, Ghozy, Hasan, Hassan Zadeh Tabatabaei, Hwang, Isola, Jawaid, Jürisson, Karaye, Khosla, K. Kim, Y. Kim, Kothari, Kulimbet, La Vecchia, Lahariya, Latifinaibin, Lenzi, X. Li, Lohner, Andrade Lotufo, Malik, Marino, Miazgowski, Micheletti Gomide Nogueira de Sá, Minervini, Mirrakhimov, Mishra, Mokdad, Molinaro, Moni, Murray, Negoi, Nogueira de Sá, Osuagwu, J. Patel, U. Patel, Piradov, Puvvula, Rahim, Rajaa, Rashedi, Rodriguez, Romozzi, Saheb Sharif-Askari, Satpathy, Schneider, Selvaraj, Shamim, Sharifi Rad, Spartalis, Stanaway, Z. Sun, Swain, Szarpak, Tabaee Damavandi, Unnikrishnan, Unsworth, Vahdati, Valizadeh, Van den Eynde, Villafañe, Wahood, Yano, Ye, Yon, Zanghì, Zhiqiang Zhang, Zhao.

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