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# Wealth affects mobility

**If you live in South Africa, you are likely to develop walking difficulties earlier than people living in countries such as Canada or Sweden, according to a major international study conducted across 25 countries.**

Walking ability is widely regarded as one of the most important indicators of healthy ageing, because it enables people to remain independent, maintain social connections, and enjoy a better quality of life. Until now, little has been known about how walking limitations develop across different income levels.

## **RUNNING & WALKING**

In a new study published in *The Lancet*, researchers found that people living in middle-income countries, including South Africa, and low-income countries

lose their mobility earlier than those in wealthier nations, with those in the poorest countries developing walking limitations up to 12 years earlier — highlighting stark global inequalities in healthy ageing.

UWC researcher Prof Rina Swart, Head of the Department of Dietetics and Nutrition, was among the international team of researchers who contributed to the study.

Prof Thandi Puoane from the School of Public Health started the Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology (PURE) research at UWC in 2009.

The research followed more than 122000 adults over more than 15 years and analysed data from the international PURE study, which tracks how modern environments — such as dietary shifts, changes in physical activity, and

environmental factors — affect health outcomes, including the development of chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes across income levels in different countries.

## **WALKING LIMITATIONS**

Focusing on walking limitations, researchers found that these walking limitations were highest in low-income countries. These countries include Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, with 3.34 new cases per 100 person-years.

This means about three to four people out of every 100 developed a walking limitation each year.

- This figure was almost twice the rate seen in middle-income countries such as South Africa, Brazil, Russia, and Argentina.