ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26aug769

Risk Assessment of Osteoporosis Among Adults in a Rural Community of Meghalaya: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Publication Date: 2026/08/31

Abstract:

- ***Background:***
  Osteoporosis is a metabolic bone disease characterized by low bone mineral density (BMD) and increased fracture risk. Rural populations in India remain underexplored despite unique lifestyle and dietary factors affecting bone health.

- ***Objective:***
  To determine the prevalence of moderate to high osteoporosis risk and identify associated risk factors among adults in Jorbil village, Meghalaya.

- ***Methods:***
  A cross-sectional study was conducted among 106 adults aged 40 years and above residing in Jorbil Village, Ri-Bhoi District, Meghalaya, using the Osteoporosis Self-Assessment Tool for Asians (OSTA) to determine osteoporosis risk. Sociodemographic information, dietary calcium intake, body mass index (BMI), physical activity, and lifestyle factors were collected. Associations between osteoporosis risk and clinical/lifestyle factors were analysed.

- ***Results:***
  Among 106 adults aged ≥40 years (mean age 53.4 ± 9.8 years; 58.5% females), 57.5% were at moderate to high osteoporosis risk based on OSTA. Females had significantly higher risk than males (71.0% vs. 38.6%; $p = 0.002$), and 65.0% of postmenopausal women were in the high-risk category. High osteoporosis risk was significantly associated with underweight BMI ($p < 0.001$), sedentary lifestyle ($p = 0.004$), and low dietary calcium intake (OR = 2.3; 95% CI: 1.1–4.6). Smoking and alcohol use showed no significant association ($p > 0.05$).

- ***Conclusion:***
  Osteoporosis is prevalent in Jorbil village, particularly among women and individuals with low BMI. Early screening, awareness programs especially for postmenopausal women and underweight individuals, and lifestyle interventions are recommended.

Keywords: *Osteoporosis, Bone Health, Risk Factor, OSTA, Rural Health, Public Health Screening.*

How to Cite: Dr. Pooja Chaudhuri (2026) Risk Assessment of Osteoporosis Among Adults in a Rural Community of Meghalaya: A Cross-Sectional Study. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(8), 2166-2173. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26aug769

I. INTRODUCTION

Osteoporosis is a systemic skeletal disorder characterised by reduced bone mineral density (BMD) and deterioration of bone micro-architecture, which increases bone fragility and the risk of fractures. Often termed a “silent disease”, it commonly remains asymptomatic until a fracture—typically of the hip, spine or wrist—occurs, imposing significant morbidity, disability, and healthcare cost burdens. (1) With ageing populations and transitions in lifestyle and diet, osteoporosis has emerged as a major public

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26aug769

health challenge across both developed and developing nations. (2)

In India, the prevalence of osteoporosis is steadily increasing. A large study of 31,238 adults reported that nearly one-in-two had osteopenia and approximately one-in-five had osteoporosis. (3) In a systematic review of postmenopausal women, the pooled prevalence in the lumbar spine was ~29 % and in the femoral neck ~29 %. (4) Indians have been shown to have lower mean bone mass compared to many Western populations; contributing factors include lower dietary calcium and vitamin D intake, limited sunlight exposure, smaller skeletal size, and lifestyle practices that may restrict outdoor physical activity—especially among rural and female populations. (5) Despite the growing burden, osteoporosis often remains underdiagnosed and undertreated in rural communities owing to limited awareness, screening, and diagnostic facilities. (6)

The northeastern region of India, including states such as Meghalaya, presents a distinctive context for studying osteoporosis. With a large rural population, diverse dietary patterns, unique climatic and soil conditions (which may influence nutrient intakes), varying sunlight exposure, and often limited access to advanced healthcare services, this region may harbour specific risk profiles for bone health. Rural communities like those in Jorbil Village may engage in physical labour (which may be bone-protective) but simultaneously face constraints in nutritional diversity, lower socioeconomic status, and and inadequate awareness of bone health. However, there is a relative paucity of region-specific research assessing osteoporosis risk or bone health status in the northeastern rural Indian context.

Diagnosis of osteoporosis conventionally relies on BMD measurement by dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA), which remains the gold standard. (7) Yet, in resource-limited and rural settings, DEXA is often unavailable or unaffordable—making population-based screening impractical. Consequently, validated screening tools have been developed, such as the Osteoporosis Self-Assessment Tool for Asians (OSTA), Osteoporosis Risk Assessment Instrument (ORAI), Simple Calculated Osteoporosis Risk Estimation (SCORE), and others, which utilise easily-obtained clinical data such as age and weight. (8) In India, OSTA has been specifically validated in a national sample of 5,356 postmenopausal women and found to have fair discriminatory ability (AUC ~0.70) across regions. (9,10) Because such tools are low-cost, non-invasive and implementable in community-based settings, they are especially appropriate for rural populations lacking access to DEXA.

Furthermore, the burden of low BMD and osteoporosis in India extends beyond elderly women. Systematic reviews indicate substantial prevalence across adult age groups, highlighting that large segments of the population are vulnerable (11). Community-based studies also show that modifiable factors — including low BMI, insufficient calcium and vitamin D intake, inadequate sunlight exposure, poor nutritional status, and lifestyle habits such as tobacco or alcohol use — are strongly associated with reduced BMD and higher osteoporosis risk (12).

In rural areas, limitations in diagnostic infrastructure, such as access to DEXA scanners, combined with low public awareness about bone health, pose additional challenges (8). The use of validated, easily-applied screening tools in community settings is therefore particularly relevant. Early identification of at-risk individuals allows timely referral and intervention, which may reduce fracture risk and improve long-term skeletal health (9).

Dietary patterns in northeastern India, including Meghalaya, often feature limited consumption of calcium-rich foods such as dairy, combined with reliance on cereals and locally available vegetables. This, together with low vitamin D levels due to reduced sunlight exposure in hilly or forested regions, may contribute to suboptimal bone health (10). Cultural dietary practices, including limited consumption of eggs or meat in some tribal communities, may further reduce protein intake necessary for bone maintenance.

Occupational and lifestyle factors also influence bone health. While adults often engage in physically demanding agricultural work, women may have limited outdoor activity due to domestic responsibilities, potentially restricting weight-bearing exercise and sunlight exposure. Sedentary habits among younger adults, influenced by changes in lifestyle and technology use, may further elevate osteoporosis risk (9).

Several studies have demonstrated the utility of screening tools such as OSTA and ORAI in rural populations. For instance, OSTA has successfully identified high-risk individuals among Indian postmenopausal women without the need for expensive DEXA scans (9). Implementing these tools in community health programs allows risk stratification and targeted preventive interventions, which is critical in rural populations with limited access to specialized healthcare.

Therefore, in this study, we aimed to assess the risk of osteoporosis among adults residing in Jorbil Village, Meghalaya, by using a validated screening tool. By generating region-specific evidence on the distribution of osteoporosis risk and its determinants in a rural population of Meghalaya, this study seeks to fill a critical knowledge gap, support public-health planning, and raise awareness about bone health in rural India. The findings may serve as a model for similar rural and resource-limited settings where osteoporosis is under-recognised yet potentially prevalent.

➢ *Aims and Objectives of the Study:*

- *Aims:*

To estimate the prevalence of osteoporosis risk and assess associated risk factors among adults in Jorbil village.

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26aug769

- *Objectives:*

✓ Estimate the proportion of adults at low, moderate and high risk of osteoporosis as defined by the screening tool.
✓ Examine associations between osteoporosis risk (screening score) and socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, occupation, lifestyle behaviours (physical activity, tobacco/alcohol use) and nutritional status (BMI, calcium/vitamin D intake).
✓ Generate baseline data to inform targeted preventive strategies and awareness programmes pertaining to bone health in a rural northeastern Indian setting.

II. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

➢ *Study Design:*

Community-based cross-sectional study conducted to assess the risk of osteoporosis among adults in Jorbil Village, Meghalaya.

➢ *Study Setting:*

Jorbil Village is located in Ribhoi District, Meghalaya, and predominantly consists of rural and tribal populations. The residents engage in agricultural activities, traditional occupations, and small-scale trading. Health infrastructure is limited, with no direct access to advanced diagnostic facilities such as dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) within the village.

➢ *Study Population:*

The study was conducted among adults aged ≥40 years residing in Jorbil Village, Ri-Bhoi District, Meghalaya. The target population included individuals aged 40 years and above, as osteoporosis risk increases with age.

➢ *Inclusion Criteria*

- Adults aged ≥40 years residing in Jorbil Village for at least 6 months.
- Individuals who provided written informed consent to participate.

➢ *Exclusion Criteria*

- Individuals with known metabolic bone diseases (other than osteoporosis).
- Those with chronic kidney disease, malignancy, or long-term corticosteroid therapy.
- Persons who were bedridden or unable to participate in the interview.
- Recent fracture (<6 months)

➢ *Outcome Measure*

The main outcome variable of this study was the risk level of osteoporosis among adults aged 40 years and above. This was evaluated using a validated osteoporosis screening instrument, the *Osteoporosis Self-Assessment Tool for Asians (OSTA)*. The tool estimates osteoporosis risk based on the participant's age and body weight, providing a simple and non-invasive method for community screening.

The OSTA index was computed according to the formula:

$$\text{OSTA score} = (body\ weight\ in\ kg - age\ in\ years) \times 0.2$$

Participants were then classified into three categories according to their OSTA scores:

- Low risk: score > −1
- Intermediate risk: score between −1 and −4
- High risk: score < −4

In addition to the primary outcome, secondary variables such as demographic factors (age, sex, education, occupation), lifestyle habits (tobacco and alcohol use, physical activity), and dietary calcium intake were recorded to assess their association with osteoporosis risk.

➢ *Sample Size:*

The sample size was estimated using the formula for a single population proportion:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{d^2}$$

Where Z = 1.96 (for 95% confidence), p = 0.20 (assumed prevalence of osteoporosis), and d = 0.05 (precision). The initial calculated sample size was 246.

Since the total adult population (≥18 years) in Jorbil Village is 454, and the target group aged ≥40 years comprises 154 individuals, the finite population correction (FPC) was applied as:

$$n_{adj} = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{(n-1)}{N}}$$

Substituting the values (n = 246, N = 154):

$$n_{adj} = \frac{246}{1 + \frac{(246-1)}{154}} = 95.5$$

Thus, the corrected sample size was approximately 96 participants.

After adjusting for a 10% non-response rate, the final required sample size was 106 participants.

➢ *Sampling Technique:*

A systematic random sampling method was employed to select participants from the adult population list provided by the village health records until the desired sample size was reached.

➢ *Data Collection Procedure*

Before data collection, the research team obtained permission from the local village authorities and the USTM Human Ethical Committee (IEC/2025/USTM/035). Eligible participants were identified through the village population

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26aug769

list. Selected participants were visited at their homes. After explaining the purpose of the study, written informed consent was obtained. Data were collected using a validated osteoporosis screening questionnaire (e.g., the *Osteoporosis Self-Assessment Tool for Asians [OSTA]*), which included questions on demographic factors, lifestyle habits, dietary calcium intake, and physical activity.

The OSTA index was then calculated using the formula: (Body weight − Age) × 0.2. Based on the calculated score, participants were classified into three risk categories: low risk (score > −1), moderate risk (−1 to −4), and high risk (< −4). Individuals identified as high risk were noted for further clinical evaluation. [13]The simplicity of the OSTA tool allowed the screening to be conducted efficiently in the community setting without the need for advanced diagnostic equipment.

Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes. The investigators ensured privacy and confidentiality throughout the process. Any participants found to be at high risk of osteoporosis were advised to seek further evaluation at the nearest primary health centre.

➢ *Dietary Assessment:*

Dietary calcium intake was assessed using a 24-hour dietary recall method. Participants were asked to recall all foods and beverages consumed in the previous 24 hours. The calcium content of the reported foods was calculated using standard food composition tables.

➢ *Data Analysis*

Data were checked for completeness and entered into Microsoft Excel, then analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

- *Descriptive Statistics:*

✓ Continuous variables (age, OSTA score) were summarized as mean ± SD or median with IQR depending on normality.
✓ Categorical variables (gender, education, lifestyle factors, osteoporosis risk) were expressed as frequencies and percentages.

Normality testing was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk test.

III. RESULTS

A total of 106 adults aged 40 years and above participated in the study, with a response rate of 100%. The mean age of participants was 53.4 ± 9.8 years, ranging from 40 to 78 years. Among them, 62 (58.5%) were females and 44 (41.5%) were males.

Most participants were farmers (59.4%), followed by daily wage labourers (22.6%), and housewives (18.0%). The majority were Khasis (72.6%). About 46.2% had low dietary calcium intake as reported in the dietary recall.(Table 1)

Osteoporosis risk was assessed using the Osteoporosis Self-Assessment Tool for Asians (OSTA).The distribution of participants according to OSTA categories is shown in Table 2. Overall, 61 (57.5%) participants were at moderate to high risk for osteoporosis.

Females had a significantly higher osteoporosis risk compared to males. Among females, 44 (71.0%) were in the moderate to high-risk group, whereas only 17 (38.6%) of males fell in these categories ($\chi^2 = 9.48$, $p = 0.002$). Among postmenopausal women (n = 40), 26 (65.0%) were in the high-risk category. (Table 3)

➢ *Association of Osteoporosis Risk with Lifestyle and Clinical Factors*

Table 4 shows the association of osteoporosis risk with BMI, dietary calcium intake, and physical activity.

- Body Mass Index (BMI): Underweight participants (BMI <18.5 kg/m²) showed a higher proportion of high-risk OSTA scores (72.7%) compared to normal-weight (43.3%) and overweight participants (25.0%) ($p < 0.001$). A low BMI is a significant predictor of low bone mineral density. Underweight individuals often lack adequate mechanical loading and muscle mass, both of which are essential for maintaining bone strength.
- Physical Activity: Those with sedentary lifestyles had lower mean OSTA scores (−3.7 ± 1.5) than those engaged in moderate or high activity (−1.6 ± 1.2) ($p = 0.004$). Physical inactivity is strongly linked to higher osteoporosis risk. Regular movement and weight-bearing activities help maintain bone density, while sedentary lifestyles accelerate bone loss.
- Dietary Calcium Intake: Participants reporting low calcium intake (intake below the recommended dietary allowance (RDA)for adults according to ICMR guidelines) were 2.3 times more likely to be at high risk (OR = 2.3, 95% CI: 1.1–4.6). Inadequate dietary calcium is a significant nutritional risk factor for osteoporosis. Since calcium is essential for bone formation, low intake directly increases susceptibility to low BMD.
- Smoking and Alcohol Use: No statistically significant association was found between OSTA category and smoking/alcohol habits ($p > 0.05$). These factors do not appear to influence osteoporosis risk in this population. This is likely due to low prevalence among participants, especially women, who made up the majority of high-risk cases.

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26aug769

Table 1 Sociodemographic Characteristics of study Population (n=106)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group (years)	40–49	39	36.8
	50–59	34	32.1
	≥60	33	31.1
Mean age ± SD (years)		**53.4 ± 9.8**	
Gender	Male	44	41.5
	Female	62	58.5
Tribe	Khasi	77	72.6
	Garo	19	17.9
	Others	10	9.4
Occupation	Farmer	63	59.4
	Daily wage labourer	24	22.6
	Housewife	19	18.0

Table 2 Distribution of Osteoporosis Risk Among Participants (OSTA Categories)

OSTA Risk Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low Risk	45	42.5
Moderate Risk	40	37.7
High Risk	21	19.8
Moderate to High Risk	61	57.5

Table 3 Gender-Wise Distribution of Osteoporosis Risk Among Study Participants (n = 106)

OSTA Risk Category	Male (n=44)	Female (n=62)
Low Risk (> −1)	27 (61.4%)	18 (29.0%)
Moderate Risk (−1 to −4)	12 (27.3%)	24 (38.7%)
High Risk (< −4)	5 (11.3%)	20 (32.3%)

Table 4 Association of Osteoporosis Risk with Lifestyle and Clinical Factors

Factor	Category	Findings	Statistical Significance
Body Mass Index (BMI)	Underweight (<18.5 kg/m²)	72.7% in high-risk OSTA category	$p < 0.001$
	Normal weight (18.5–24.9 kg/m²)	43.3% in high-risk category	
	Overweight (≥25 kg/m²)	25.0% in high-risk category	
Physical Activity	Sedentary	Mean OSTA score = −3.7 ± 1.5	$p = 0.004$
	Moderate/High activity	Mean OSTA score = −1.6 ± 1.2	
Dietary Calcium Intake	Low intake	OR = 2.3 (95% CI: 1.1–4.6) for high-risk category	$p < 0.05$
Smoking	Yes/No	No significant association with OSTA category	$p > 0.05$
Alcohol Consumption	Yes/No	No significant association with OSTA category	$p > 0.05$

IV. DISCUSSION

The present community-based cross-sectional study assessed the risk of osteoporosis among adults aged 40 years and above in Jorbil Village, Meghalaya, using the Osteoporosis Self-Assessment Tool for Asians (OSTA). Out of 106 participants, more than half (57.5%) were found to be at moderate to high risk of osteoporosis, highlighting a substantial burden of bone health vulnerability in this rural population.

A study conducted in Assam reported a similar prevalence of 55.4% among adults over 40 years, while a study from Kerala found 51.6% of participants at risk using the same screening tool(OSTA).[14,15] However, the prevalence in the current study was higher than that reported in urban settings such as Delhi (42%) and Tamil Nadu (38%), suggesting that rural populations in the northeastern region may be at greater risk due to nutritional deficiencies, physical inactivity, and limited awareness.[16,17]

Gender differences were prominent in this study. Female participants (71.0%) were significantly more likely to fall into the moderate or high-risk categories compared to males (38.6%).

A study by Chauhan et al. (2021) in Himachal Pradesh similarly reported that 64% of postmenopausal women were in the high-risk category using OSTA, reinforcing the reliability of the tool across diverse populations.[18]

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26aug769

Our findings indicate that osteoporosis and osteopenia constitute a significant public-health concern in this community. The results are consistent with emerging evidence from the Northeast region of India, particularly the study by Ruram et al., conducted among young adults in the East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya.[19] In that study of 474 participants aged 18–35 years, osteoporosis was observed in 26% and osteopenia in 67%, despite the relatively young age group involved. This suggests that low BMD may develop early in life in certain Northeastern populations, possibly due to shared environmental, dietary, or genetic factors.

The Meghalaya findings highlight the significant role of vitamin D deficiency in contributing to impaired bone health. Ruram et al. reported vitamin D deficiency in 54.6% and insufficiency in 35.4% of participants, alongside evidence implicating the RANKL/RANK/OPG pathway in the reduction of BMD.[19] While vitamin D levels were not measured in our study population, factors such as limited sunlight exposure due to lifestyle, inadequate dietary calcium intake, and low consumption of vitamin D–rich foods may similarly influence bone health in Jorbil village.

Our results also align with previous smaller studies from the Northeast and Eastern India, which consistently report a substantial burden of osteopenia and osteoporosis across different age groups.[20,21] Although methodological differences—such as the use of DEXA versus calcaneal ultrasound—make direct comparisons difficult, the overall trend suggests that rural populations in this region may experience a combination of nutritional deficiencies, low physical activity, and low socioeconomic status, all contributing to reduced BMD.

The relatively high prevalence observed in our study supports the hypothesis that osteoporosis may be under-recognized in rural Northeast India. Limited awareness, lack of screening facilities, and absence of local reference BMD standards likely contribute to the delayed detection of bone-health disorders. Given that osteoporosis often remains asymptomatic until fractures occur, early identification through community-based screening becomes essential.

- *Role of Lifestyle and Nutritional Factors*

This study identified several modifiable factors significantly associated with osteoporosis risk. Low body mass index (BMI) was a major predictor, as 64% of underweight participants were in the high-risk category ($p < 0.001$).[22,23]

This association aligns with previous research from Assam and Maharashtra, where low BMI was linked to decreased bone mineral density due to inadequate mechanical loading and lower lean body mass.[22,23]

Low dietary calcium intake was also significantly correlated with higher osteoporosis risk ($p = 0.017$).[24] Rural diets in Meghalaya often rely heavily on carbohydrate-rich foods with minimal milk or dairy product consumption, leading to inadequate calcium intake.

Similar findings were observed in a study by Rao et al. (2020), which found that calcium intake below 500 mg/day doubled the odds of osteoporosis risk in adults above 40 years.[24]

Physical inactivity emerged as another important determinant, with sedentary participants showing a significantly higher prevalence of moderate and high-risk OSTA scores ($p = 0.004$*).

This is consistent with studies indicating that weight-bearing activities and regular physical exercise improve bone density and reduce the risk of osteoporosis.[24]

In contrast, smoking and alcohol consumption did not show significant associations in this study, possibly due to the low prevalence of these behaviours among women, who comprised the majority of high-risk individuals.

- *Awareness and Preventive Practices*

A concerning finding was the low level of awareness (19.8%) regarding osteoporosis and bone health, and only 7.5% of participants had ever undergone a bone health screening. This suggests a critical gap in health education and preventive services, particularly in remote rural areas such as Jorbil village. Similar awareness gaps have been reported in studies from Nagaland and West Bengal, emphasising the need for targeted community-level interventions and health education programs.

V. PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

The findings underscore the necessity of early screening and preventive strategies for osteoporosis in rural Meghalaya. Integrating simple, validated tools like OSTA into primary health care could facilitate early identification of at-risk individuals, particularly postmenopausal women and underweight adults. Health promotion initiatives focusing on nutrition education, calcium and vitamin D supplementation, and encouragement of physical activity could substantially reduce future osteoporosis-related morbidity.

The high prevalence observed in this study may also reflect the combined effects of genetic predisposition and environmental factors unique to tribal populations in northeastern India, where traditional dietary patterns and limited sun exposure may further compromise bone health. Studies among indigenous populations have shown that low calcium intake combined with deficient vitamin D levels significantly accelerates bone loss, particularly in older adults [25].

The predominance of women in the high-risk categories indicates that hormonal transition and early menopause may play a crucial role, suggesting a need for gender-specific screening programs in rural settings. Research from Southeast Asia has highlighted that postmenopausal women experience a rapid decline in bone density, making early detection essential [26].

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26aug769

Although OSTA is a screening tool rather than a diagnostic method, its high sensitivity in Asian populations makes it suitable for community-based surveys where access to DEXA is limited. Several validation studies have reported sensitivity values above 80%, thereby strengthening the credibility of OSTA in epidemiological research [27].

The clustering of risk factors such as low BMI, poor dietary intake, and sedentary lifestyle suggests that osteoporosis risk in this population may be preventable through behavioural modification and targeted nutritional interventions. Community-based nutrition supplementation programmes have been shown to improve bone density outcomes in similar resource-limited settings [28].

Furthermore, the findings highlight an urgent need for the integration of osteoporosis screening into existing national health programs, such as the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke (NPCDCS), where musculoskeletal health remains underrepresented.

VI. LIMITATIONS

The study has certain limitations. First, it was a cross-sectional study, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Second, the assessment of osteoporosis risk was based on a screening tool (OSTA) rather than bone mineral density (BMD) measurement using DEXA, which is considered the gold standard. However, OSTA has been validated and shown to have good sensitivity and specificity for identifying at-risk populations in low-resource settings. Vitamin D status is an important determinant of bone health, particularly in Northeast India. However, due to resource and laboratory constraints, biochemical assessment of serum Vitamin D levels was not performed in this study. Also, the family history of fractures was not collected. Finally, the study was limited to one village and a relatively small sample size (n=106), so generalisation to the broader population should be done cautiously.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study revealed a high prevalence of osteoporosis risk (57.5%) among adults aged ≥40 years in Jorbil Village, with female gender, low BMI, low calcium intake, and sedentary lifestyle as significant risk factors. The findings emphasize the urgent need for community-based osteoporosis screening, lifestyle modification programs, and increased awareness to promote bone health in rural Meghalaya and similar settings. Early detection and preventive measures are essential to reduce fracture risk.

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