Hypertension, a non-communicable disease, is now considered a major public health challenge because of its widespread prevalence globally coupled with its huge morbidity and mortality burden, which is largely preventable if early detection and prompt initiation of management is done. Hypertension’s prevalence is increasing especially in the developing world but despite this, its awareness among hypertensives is low. This study aimed at determining the prevalence of hypertension among adult attendees of the General Outpatient Clinic of the Federal Medical Centre, Owerri, determining proportion of hypertensives who were aware of their hypertensive status and identifying risk factors of hypertension in the study population.

A cross-sectional analytical study was conducted between October and November 2010 at the General Outpatient Clinic of the Federal Medical Centre, Owerri. A total of 257 consenting and eligible adult patients made up of 135 males and 122 females, aged 18 years and above, were selected by systematic random sampling method on a daily basis throughout the study period. Data was collected with researcher-administered questionnaires as well as clinical and biochemical measurements. The questionnaires sought information on socio-demographic characteristics, awareness of hypertensive status as well as risk factors for hypertension like physical activity, alcohol intake, smoking, diabetes and family history of hypertension. Clinical measurements included blood pressure and anthropometric measurements while blood samples were taken for glucose estimation. Data were analysed using the statistical package for social sciences.
The overall prevalence of hypertension was 34.6%. The prevalence was higher in females than in males (37.7% vs 31.9%, P=0.325). 56.2% of hypertensives were aware of their hypertensive state prior to the study. Hypertension was significantly associated with age (P<0.001), marital status (P<0.001), educational level (P=0.009), occupation (P<0.001), family history of hypertension (P=0.008), diabetes (P=0.001) and obesity (P=0.007). Following a multiple regression analysis, hypertension was independently associated with age, family history of hypertension and occupation (retirees, traders, farmers and the unemployed) and marital status (being widowed).

Hypertension is prevalent in our environment, the rate from this study being higher than that from most studies in our environment. The results from the study underscore the need for governmental policies and programmes directed at increased detection and management of hypertension in the populace.