News

NIASRA student presents at the 20th IEA World Congress on Epidemiology

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Margo Barr presented a paper entitled *'Changing accuracy of self-reported BMI over time in NSW, Australia'* at the 20th International Epidemiology Association World Congress on Epidemiology in Anchorage, Alaska on 17 to 21 August 2014. The conference theme was Global Epidemiology in a changing environment. Margo Barr is a PhD student working on *'Quantifying the quality of probability-sampled complex-design multipurpose ongoing health surveys'* at NIASRA.

Margo's presentation highlighted the importance of having reliable ongoing reporting of prevalence estimates for overweight and obesity because of their impact on cardiovascular disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer. She presented information about four studies that included prevalence estimates for overweight and obesity from both measured and self-reported data for NSW and that the differences had changed from measured data being 23.4% higher in 1995 to 5.2% higher in 2008.

Margo described her examination of the literature where she found that there were numerous studies comparing self-reported and measured over weight and obesity at a point in time however there were only three papers — US Canada comparison, US study and Ireland study — that had examined differences between overweight and obesity from self-reported and measured data over time. She highlighted that there were no Australian studies and there was conflicting experience from the overseas studies.

Margo noted that although there were numerous papers proposing correction factors for single points in time there were none that applied a correction factor over time. She presented two options to apply a correction factor over time: (i) Applying a constant such as the average of the differences being 15% in this instance; or (ii) Applying a figure derived from the exponential line of best fit for the differences between 1995 and 2008. Theses adjustments were then applied to the ongoing NSW Population Health Survey for which prevalence estimates for overweight and obesity using self-reported data had been collected since 1997. The 2012 point on the corrected lines were then compared to the 2012 prevalence estimates for overweight and obesity derived from measured data — NSW estimates from the Australian Health Study — and the option that included the changing difference was more accurate.

It appears that prevalence estimates for overweight and obesity from self-reported data are becoming more accurate over time in NSW. There is evidence from the US, using responses to questions about ideal weight and desire to lose weight, that shows a shift in social attitudes, which may make it easier to 'admit' to greater weight in surveys. Margo concluded that if adjustments are being applied to prevalence estimates for overweight and obesity from self-reported data the changing differences over time should be taken into consideration. She however stated that this work was based on only four points and highlighted the need for more studies that included both self-reported and measured height and weight NSW.

Because of the interest at the conference and from organisations collecting and reporting on the prevalence of overweight and obesity in NSW, Australia and overseas she is currently preparing a manuscript of her findings for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

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