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Eating behaviour and well-being: an analysis on the Aspects of Italian daily life”

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Abstract

Nutrition related diseases have reached epidemic proportions in Western Countries. Because of the huge economic costs and the impact on human well-being, nutrition and related disease have become a major public health concern. In this research paper we analyse the factors determining obesity, starting from the ISTAT multipurpose survey “Aspects of Italian daily life” on the households, carried out in 2012. The analysis was based on multiple correspondence analysis and using logistic regression models. Starting from the main variables related to nutritional habits, eating habits and eating out, sedentary lifestyle, socio-economic status indicators that imply a different diet we have tried to shed light on the main factors responsible for obesity. From this evidence we tried to suggest the policy interventions can be implemented in order to act on the problem.

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1. Introduction

Nutrition related diseases have reached epidemic proportions in Western Countries. Worldwide obesity has more than doubled since 1980 when only 1 on 10 people were obese. According to WHO estimates in 2014, 39% of adults aged 18+ were overweight and 13% were obese. The problem of obesity has risen worldwide, representing a public health problem with significant economic and social consequences. In Europe, more than 50% of people among

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males and more than 40% among females are overweight. OCSE forecasting (2011 Fit non fat) show that in the following decades overweight and obesity will increase more and more also in countries where the problem is still not important. Because of the huge economic costs and the impact on human well-being, nutrition and related disease have become a major public health concern. The causes of overweight and unhealthy diet, which are of interest for socio-economic aspects, are attributable to socio-environmental and psychological factors that, together, determine the "behaviour" and "decision making" of the consumer. Understanding the causes of consumer food choices is necessary to design interventions for rebalancing the market in an attempt to stem the failures.

The first question of the problem of obesity-related research is the study of the causes that determine it. This has long been addressed by various disciplines, not only medical but also socio-economic, anthropological and behavioural, taking into account the multi-causal nature of the phenomenon and its socio-economic and health impact. There are several approaches to the study of obesity that have analysed socio-environmental factors, physical inactivity, psychological, pharmacological, genetic and metabolic causes. So even in a strictly economic view, overweight and unhealthy eating are all problems, which are expressed by the "consumer behaviour" in the early stages of selection, purchase and consumption of food. Several studies detected and showed the association between BMI and the increase of chronic diseases like high blood pressure, ischemic heart and brain disease, tumours, diabetes, osteoporosis, and psychological problems such as low levels self-esteem and depression. It is therefore strategic for the policy makers to understand the causes of obesity, in order to act on the citizen-consumer and to design interventions that act on the consumer and on companies to correct market inefficiencies that are often connected to these phenomena.

In this research paper, the data have been collected from the multipurpose Italian survey "Aspects of daily life" which was conducted by Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2012. The considered variables are weight and height (to compute the body mass index –BMI), socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age class, educational level, residence), life habits (physical activity) and nutritional habits (modalities and frequency of consumption of certain foods, attention to "food").

The present study is limited to non-diabetic people aged 18-64 years for the following reasons: i) diabetes affects eating and nutritional habits of overweight or obese people; ii) the data show that the consumption of meals outside the home during the working day can relate almost exclusively to people in working age.

The analysis was based on a multiple correspondence approach using logistic regression models.

Starting from the main variables related to nutritional habits, eating habits and eating out, sedentary lifestyle, socio-economic status indicators that imply a different diet we have tried to shed light on the main factors responsible for obesity. From this evidence we tried to suggest the policy interventions can be implemented in order to act on the problem.

2. Literature review: Obesity, food choices and lifestyles.

Analysing the causes of obesity that are of interest in terms of socio-economic factors,, there are different contributions that address and interpret the problems of obesity in a strictly economic view. The problem of obesity takes a multicausal dimension, which is expressed by the "consumer behaviour" in the early stages of selection, purchase and consumption of food. The nutritional habits, therefore the aspects of variety and balanced diet, have been studied using several approaches, in particular in relation to the aspects related to lifestyle, such as the study of Basu (et al. 2013) on the consumption of soft drinks and obesity and the research of Smith (et al. 2012) on the consequences of sedentary life. Moreover, regarding lifestyle, we found research papers that showed the impact of alcohol consumed before or with meals that tends on one hand to increase food intake and on the other hand, as shown by epidemiological data, to protect against obesity if moderate, particularly in women. In contrast, higher intakes of alcohol in the absence of alcohol dependence may increase the risk of obesity (Traversy and Chaput, 2015; Yeomans 2010). Moreover, some other studies have suggested that eating patterns, which describe eating frequency, the temporal distribution of eating events across the day, breakfast skipping, and the frequency of eating meals away from home, may be related to obesity (Ma. et al., 2003). Other researches showed how the socio-economic status was studied in terms of the impact on different diets. A correlation was found between socio

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