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# ***Georgia Southern study shows number of obese adults trying to lose weight is decreasing***

March 13, 2017

A new Georgia Southern study shows that even though obesity in the U.S. has reached historic highs and nationwide public awareness campaigns have outlined the associated health risks, the number of overweight and obese adults trying to lose weight has steadily fallen.

The research brief, titled "[Change in percentages of adults with overweight or obesity trying to lose weight, 1988 to 2014](#)," was a student-led research effort by Kassandra Snook, Carmen Duke and Kathryn Finch, all 2016 graduates in the Master of Public Health program at the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health (JPHCOPH) at Georgia Southern. The brief was recently published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*.

"We observed a rising percentage of overweight people who believed that their body weight was just fine," said Dr. Jian Zhang, associate professor of epidemiology in the JPHCOPH, who supervised the study. "Surprisingly, my students found that no scientific effort had been made to verify this hypothesis, and we were not sure Americans were truly translating the elevated awareness about the obesity crisis into action."

The students used data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), an ongoing survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to examine the theory. They reviewed survey data from 1988-1994, 1999-2004 and 2009-2014, which revealed an alarming divergent trend: the prevalence of overweight and obesity increased, and the number of overweight and obese adults trying to lose weight decreased.

"You would hope that as being overweight and/or obese become more well-known risk factors for a variety of conditions and diseases, more people would attempt to avoid that risk," said Snook, lead author of the brief. "I think the results of this research are very significant in showing that the obesity epidemic is continuing, and will continue to worsen as long as no weight loss attempts are made."

Andrew Hansen Dr.P.H., assistant professor of community health behavior and education in the JPHCOPH, and one of the brief's co-authors and supervisors of the study, says the discussion of obesity isn't a discussion about external looks. It's a discussion about health. And with health care being one of the most relevant topics in the country right now, it's even more important to discuss the health of our citizens. "I remember a pilot once telling me, 'You have to make small corrections early to avoid huge problems later,'" he said. "And that is so true to this aspect of health as well. Screen for health issues early. Find the problems. Make the small corrections early to avoid expensive problems later."

For co-authors and mentors Hansen, Zhang and Amy Hackney, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Georgia Southern, the publication of this research brief in *JAMA* is a career highlight. For the three recent public health graduates, one of which was lead author of the brief, the publication is a career launch.

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