College of Public Health News

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Georgia Southern University

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Georgia Southern reports on weight loss trends in overweight adolescents.

July 31, 2018

When more than a third of adolescents are overweight or obese, it may be cognitively hard for the general public to view overweight as abnormal. According to CDC, more than 70 percent of Americans age 20 and over are currently classified as overweight or obese and society is now more accepting of heavier weights among adults and adolescents. A recent report by Georgia Southern University indicated that fewer overweight/obese adolescents self-perceived as such when compared to reports from previous years (Lu H et al., 2015). To thoroughly examine the trend of weight loss among overweight and obese US adolescents, we used data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey for this study. Three survey periods were examined and classified as the early (reference), intermediate and recent period: 1988-1994, 1999-2004 and 2009-2014, respectively. Participants (N=5491) aged 16-19 were included across all survey periods. The main question of interest was “During the past 12 months, have you tried to lose weight?”. Results indicated there was a 36% decrease from 1988-1994 and further down by 44% of overweight and obese adolescents attempting to lose weight. In summation, fewer overweight and obese adolescents attempted to lose weight in 2009-2014 compared with their counterparts interviewed in 1988-1994. Additionally, more adolescents with overweight or obesity seem satisfied with their weight and not ready or motivated to engage in weight loss efforts.

“Trends in Weight Loss Efforts Among US Adolescents With Overweight and Obesity” was recently published in JAMA Pediatrics.

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Georgia Southern Examines Health Departments’ Activities to Address Health Disparities.

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Health disparities and health inequities can lead to poor health outcomes. However, health disparities continue to persist in communities across the United States, presenting a crucial public health challenge. Persisting budget cuts and workforce challenges tend to hinder local health departments’ (LHDs’) ability to assess and address health disparities.

Georgia Southern University researchers examined the extent to which LHDs’ use of informatics effects their engagement in strategies and activities addressing health disparities. Data from the 2016 Profile of LHDs was used in examining the association of informatics with 9 activities addressing health disparities/inequities.

Fifty-nine percent of LHDs used data and described health disparities in their jurisdiction, and 12% conducted original research to link health disparities to differences in social or environmental conditions. Less than 40% of LHDs prioritized resources for the reduction of health disparities. LHDs that implemented information systems had increased odds of describing the disparities in their jurisdiction ($P < .01$) and having prioritized resources for the reduction of disparities ($P < .01$). Per capita expenditures, participation in a national accreditation program process, and a larger LHD population were also positively associated with 7 of 9 activities for addressing health disparities/inequities.

As LHDs advance efforts to reduce health disparities and inequities, leadership will find informatics a useful strategy. National initiatives aimed to boost LHDs’ engagement in the reduction of disparities might benefit from our findings, positing a positive influence of informatics.

“Local Health Departments’ Engagement in Addressing Health Disparities: The Effect of Health Informatics” was recently published in Journal of Public Health Management & Practice.

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