

CHRONIC DISEASES RISK FACTORS AND ACCESS TO HEALTH EXAMS AMONG WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Aims of the study

Using data from the *World Health Survey* (WHS) carried out in South Africa in 2003, the aim of this study is to establish chronic diseases risk factors and access to preventive exams for cervical and breast cancer among South African women.

Methods

The *sample* consisted of 1236 South African women, with a mean age of 38.0 years (Std Err=0.42). Most (56.6%) had completed primary and more education, 62.2% were single, separated, divorced or widowed, were not working for pay (66.5%), 58.6% resided in urban areas and 72.2% had piped water access.

Measure

The variables used in this analysis were: (1) sociodemographic; (2) access to health services: gynecologic exam and mammography (3) chronic disease risk factors: body mass index, smoking habit, alcohol drinking, physical activity, fruit and vegetables consumption; and (4) social capital and stress.

Results

The most prevalent risk factors were never having had mammography (83.3%), not having had a pap smear examination in the past 3 years (82.9%), <5 units per day fruit and vegetable intake (69.5%), overweight or obese (62.5%), and 33.4% were physically

inactivity (<150 min/week). Younger age, higher educational levels, being married or cohabiting and access to piped water were significantly associated with preventive exam for cervical cancer and mammography. This study found clustering among risk factors. Among the women participants, 15.5% had two chronic disease risk factors, 36.7% had three risk factors and 32.0% four out of seven risk factors. High correlations were found between overweight and lack of cancer screening, inactivity and insufficient intake of fruits and vegetables and lack of cancer screening, and insufficient intake of fruits and vegetables was highly associated with lack of cancer screening.

Conclusion

There is a need to develop health promotion programmes directed at the female population so as to modify risk factors for chronic diseases including periodic health exams and improving access for disadvantaged communities to preventive health exams in South Africa.