

Title

Socioeconomic status and health behaviors as determinants of wellbeing of chronic patients: an analysis of their trends in Italy

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Background

The incidence of chronic diseases is dramatically increasing (Horton, 2005; Andersen and Gudnason, 2012) and the trend is not likely to change spontaneously in the near term (Rothenberg and Kaplan, 1990). According to the WHO the 68% of all the deaths in 2014 was caused by chronic diseases (WHO, 2015).

In Italy, more than 2 million people live in conditions of disability (Massucci *et al.*, 2010). Since chronic conditions are expected to increase with the population aging, Italy, that is the country with the biggest over the age of 65 European population (Massucci *et al.*, 2010), has the necessity to adopt new approaches to healthcare management system to tackle the increasing demand.

Despite it is widely accepted in the Literature that chronic conditions are strictly connected to the wellbeing of individuals (Glasgow *et al.*, 1997; Peyrot and Rubin, 1997; Mehta *et al.*, 1999; de Groot *et al.*, 2001; Eiser *et al.*, 2001; Assari, 2014), further research is needed to understand which are the socioeconomic characteristics and the health behaviors that may affect the chronic conditions, and that, in turn, influence patients' wellbeing. The understanding of these aspects is important to ensure the sustainability of the National Healthcare System, aimed at bearing the costs of treatments for chronic patients', while ensuring good quality.

Objectives

Along with this study, differences across **diseases** will be considered. In particular, fatal (e.g. heart disease, stroke, and cancer) and non-fatal (e.g. arthritis and asthma) chronic diseases (Hayward *et al.*, 2000) will be considered to overcome the lack of studies comparing socioeconomic differences across them (Dalstra, 2005).

With reference to **socioeconomic conditions**, geographical area, sex and age will be investigated. First, since in Italy the income differences across regions are significant, this study aims at analyzing whether socioeconomic characteristics and health behaviors differ significantly across Italian regions and, in turn, wellbeing is differently influenced according to the geographic location. Second, this study will investigate whether differences in the chronic disease distribution across gender affect their wellbeing in presence of chronic diseases. Third, this study aims at investigating whether age differences matter for the wellbeing of chronic patients.

According to the Literature, incorrect **health behaviors** are among the most important causes for developing diseases (Steptoe and Wardle, 2001). Since there is uncertainty about the magnitude of differences between chronic diseases, this study aims at analyzing their impact on chronic patients' wellbeing in the Italian context.

Data

Along with this study, the survey “Indagine Multiscopo sulle Famiglie, Condizioni di salute e ricorso ai servizi sanitari”, carried out by ISTAT will be used (years 1994, 1999-2000, 2004-2005, 2012-2013). This survey is based on direct interviews on a representative sample of Italian households living all over Italy. The survey collects many information related to **socioeconomic characteristics**, health behaviors, and patients’ wellbeing. In particular, a one-dimensional index of wealth from assets and living standards collected during the interviews, will be derived through principal component analysis (Vyas and Kumaranayake, 2006).

Methodology

On the methodological side, the Wagstaff and van Doorslaer concentration index (Wagstaff and Van Doorslaer, 2000), with the correction proposed by Erreygers (Erreygers, 2009), will be computed for each available year, in order to observe if the concentration in chronic disease prevalence change over the time. Subsequently, the Erreygers index will be decomposed into the contributions of socioeconomic status and health behaviors (Doorslaer, Koolman and Jones, 2004) which helps identify the drivers of inequality among wellbeing of chronic patients.

Expected Results

This study will explore the differences among chronic patients’ wellbeing in terms of socioeconomics conditions and health behaviors. Considering the socioeconomic status of chronic patients, gender and age effects are expected to be detected. The previous Literature differentiated between the most and the less well-off, and, therefore, the concentration of wellbeing among the affluent is expected to show relevant differences between different chronic conditions. Considering health behaviors, according to previous Literature, the prevalence of lower wellbeing is expected to be concentrated among chronic patients with less healthy lifestyle. Finally, this study will identify the differences in the determinants of fatal and non-fatal chronic diseases.

