

Considering Obesity in Research Design Exercise

Instructions:

The sample abstract below is a fabrication that includes actual language and design elements from several research articles submitted to journals for publication. This exercise provides practice in considering obesity and weight analysis in research and seeing weight bias in research.

Read the sample research abstract below and answer the following questions:

1. Is the purpose of the study bias free?
2. Do the study methods match the purpose?
3. What do you think about the sampling method?
4. Consider the conclusions. Do the data support the conclusions? Explain why or why not.
5. How might this study design have been improved?

Sample Research Abstract

Purpose Obese mothers have lower rates of breastfeeding. With 37% of the world's reproductive aged women being fat, determining targeted programs in nutrition and the benefits of breastfeeding for obese women is needed. This study aimed to discover the reasons why obese women do not breastfeed.

Methods This was a mixed methods study drawn from an ethnically diverse population of 2000 women with mixed BMIs including underweight and obese women. All women attended a large urban maternity clinic. A survey was sent to all women eliciting general mental and physical health status. Follow-up phone interviews were done on a random sample of 10% from each weight group.

Results The survey response rate was underweight 4.5% (n=90), normal 29.2% (n=583), overweight 15.9% (n=317), obese 6.4% (n=127), for an overall response rate of 55.9% (n=1117). There were no differences in dietary and activity patterns between weight groups on survey or interview data. Likewise, survey data found differences in self-perceived physical and mental health between weight groups. Underweight and obese women were less likely to breastfeed than normal weight mothers (43% and 21% respectively).

Conclusions Underweight women may have lower protein in the milk which is less satisfying to the newborn with subsequent early weaning. Obese women might have more body image problems and struggle with fat stigma making them less likely to breastfeed. Targeted intervention programs are needed for the obese that stress prenatal nutrition, appropriate weight gain and the importance of breastfeeding.