Obesity and Disability...
disability among young women (aged 16-41) in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 Cohort (NLSY). This study builds on the previous analysis by expanding the scope of inquiry beyond young mothers to working-age adults of both genders and examines data from both the NLSY and the Panel Survey of Income Dynamics (PSID).

Findings

- The results are mixed but there is some evidence that body weight in general, and obesity in particular, raises the probability of work limitations among men.

- For women in both samples there is a positive and significant correlation between weight and work limitations.

- In the NLSY, the probability of receiving disability income is raised by 0.7 percentage points for a ten-pound gain in weight, and is raised by 6.92 percentage points by obesity for men.

- Among NLSY females, the magnitude of the impact of obesity on the probability of receiving disability income is equivalent to the effect of aging 31.5 years or losing 16.7 years of education.

Conclusion

The finding that obesity causes disability will permit more accurate projections of future DI applications and caseloads. The prevalence of obesity is expected to continue to rise, suggesting that, all else equal, DI applications and caseloads will likely continue to rise.

An important implication of our results is that the causal impact of obesity on disability income receipt is considerably stronger than one would conclude from the overall correlation between the two.

This analysis underscores the importance of conducting parallel analyses in complementary data sets. Even though the NLSY and PSID are both nationally representative and were both collected during the 1980s and 1990s, even though we estimated models with identical sets of regressors for the same age ranges, we occasionally find different results for the two samples. The fact that even nationally representative datasets collected over similar time periods can generate results that differ in important ways underscores the need to test hypotheses using multiple datasets in order to determine which results are truly robust.

Understanding the contribution of obesity to disability will also permit more accurate estimates of the total costs of obesity. Recent calculations of the cost of obesity do not correct for the endogeneity of weight, and as a result, underestimate the impact of obesity on disability and underestimate the total costs of obesity.

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The research supporting this brief is described in greater detail in MRRC working paper WP2004-089.

This work was supported by a grant from the Social Security Administration through the Michigan Retirement Research Center (Grant #10-P96362-5). The findings and conclusions expressed are solely those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Social Security Administration, any agency of the Federal Government, or the Michigan Retirement Research Center.

About the MRRC

The University of Michigan Retirement Research Center (MRRC) is supported by a cooperative agreement with the Social Security Administration.

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