



HEALTHY LIFE STYLES AS A RESPONSE TO THE FEAR OF FALLING SICK

Public and private health spending in Italy amounts to approximately 125 billion euros every year. This does not include the expenditure for activities such as gym, sports and others that contribute indirectly to preventive healthcare of Italian citizens.

Overall it is a huge, ever increasing financial outlay, a reflection of the importance Italians give to their health. It is however also associated with a widespread fear of becoming ill.

Worthy of note is that Italians fear the loss of self-sufficiency more than dying, meaning they fear the impact that an illness would have on their quality of life and individual independence more than death.

The disease Italians fear most is cancer. 67.5% of respondents identify this as the disease which would affect their health and quality of life most, followed at a good distance by heart diseases (23.9%), brain diseases (21.8%), depression (11.4%) and vascular and circulatory problems (10%) (table 1).

Cancer scares the youngest people most, almost 73% of 18 to 29 year olds and almost 75% of 30 to 44 year olds. The fear of heart diseases (identified by over 28% and cardio vascular and circulatory diseases indicated by 12.1% of those over 64) is greater in older people compared to other age groups.

Despite the availability of unquestionably better cancer therapies and constantly improving survival rates, allowing us to say that *a cure is possible*, cancer causes fear at least initially. However when people have already had personal or indirect experience of cancer, once they get over the fear the most frequent reaction is that of wanting to fight it (33.5% of interviewees, with 43% of university graduates) (table 2).

Our unique individual perception of health explains these fears and reactions. People are convinced that good health and the fight against disease go hand in hand and good health is not purely a result of destiny or chance. Individual responsibility and acquisition of habits to protect our health play an important role in this.

This perception is even truer for prevention so it is not mere chance that almost 84% of Italians believe the main cause of cardiovascular disease can be put down to personal habits and lifestyles, while 44.5% of them also believe that hereditary factors play a role, and just over 30% blame the environment in which we live (table 3).

Over 89% of University graduates believe individual lifestyle choices are important for health protection. This percentage is only slightly lower among persons with a lower educational level.

Table 1 – Diseases which could harm our health or quality of life, according to age (% value)

<i>Which of the following diseases could affect the quality of your life and health?</i>	18-29 years	30-44 years	45-64 years	65 years and over	Total
Cancer	72.7	74.7	64.2	59.1	67.5
Heart diseases	21.5	22.0	23.7	28.4	23.9
Brain diseases	15.1	19.8	25.0	25.1	21.8
Depression	12.2	12.8	12.0	7.9	11.4
Vascular and circulatory diseases	8.1	8.8	10.8	12.1	10.0
Osteoporosis	2.9	5.1	7.6	7.0	5.9
Kidney disease	2.3	1.5	3.2	5.1	3.0
Gastric disease	0.6	1.1	3.5	1.9	1.9
Sexual dysfunction	0.6	1.1	0.3	1.4	0.8

The total is over 100 as multiple responses were allowed

Source: FBM-Censis survey, 2006

Table 2 - Common reactions upon receiving a cancer diagnosis, according to whether the person has experience of it or not (*% value*)

	Direct/indirect experience of cancer		Total
	Yes*	No	
Fear	37.8	35.3	36.7
Desire to fight back	35.8	30.2	33.5
Depression	21.5	24.9	23.1
Anger	15.1	20.4	17.4
Helplessness	16.6	15.6	16.2
Resignation	12.6	11.3	12.1
Lack of trust	8.0	12.9	10.2

(*) These are interviewees who have had personal experiences with cancer or have had indirect experience through friends or family members

The total is over 100 as multiple responses were allowed

Source: FBM-Censis survey, 2006

Table 3 - Opinions regarding the main causes of cardiovascular diseases, according to educational level (*% value*)

According to you, which are the main causes of cardiovascular disease?	None or elementary school	Lower	Upper secondary	University	Total
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secondary

Personal habits and lifestyle	75.5	87.3	82.8	89.4	83.8
Hereditary factors	35.0	41.4	49.0	45.5	44.5
Environmental conditions	30.8	23.9	32.5	34.8	30.3
Drug use	12.6	10.4	7.1	12.9	9.5

The total is over 100 as multiple responses were allowed

Source: Censis survey, 2007