THE IMPACT OF EATING HABITS ON THE NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS IN BARBADOS

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**Background:** Human immunodeficiency virus is a life debilitating disease that aggressively attacks the immune system of an infected person. In Barbados, though the prevalence of HIV/AIDS has remained constant over the years, there is lack of documented information in respect to the impact of eating habits on nutritional status as well as effectiveness of treatment.

**Objective:** To evaluate the impact of dietary habits on nutritional status of people living with HIV/AIDS infection by assessing nutritional and clinical parameters.

**Design:** A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted, which utilized a structured questionnaire, anthropometric measurements and CD4/Viral Load from pre-existing records to assess the nutritional status of people living with HIV/AIDS infection in Barbados. An outpatient clinic and nutrition center at the Vashti Inniss Empowerment Center. The population sample (n = 106) consisted of n = 49 males and n = 57 females medically diagnosed with HIV/AIDS and registered at the Ladymeade Reference Unit and or the National HIV/AIDS Food Bank. Random convenient sampling was used.

**Results:** Females had significantly higher body fat percentages (p <0.001) and body mass index (p <0.001). Males had significantly lower CD4 count (p <0.049) and significantly higher viral load (p <0.006). Significant correlation between dietary intake and nutritional status was observed predominantly in the male population. 71% of the patients exhibit signs of food insecurity but there was no significant difference between the two genders (p = .845).

**Conclusion:** There was lack of significant associations between eating habits and nutritional status among the target population. However, the results of the study revealed that the potential risk for co-morbidities among female patients was prevalent, and males exhibited signs of poor disease outcomes. Food insecurity is a growing concern that needs immediate address.