

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EATING HABITS OF STUDENT IN THE FACULTIES OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE AND SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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Background- The progression from secondary school to university has been given attention, due to many associated health implications. The students' diet and food consumption patterns play an important role in overall health and bodily functions as an optimal balance of nutrients and whole foods enable optimal body performance and lower nutritional risk. Food choices at the university level may differ due to pre-existing patterns, sex, living arrangements, and knowledge. The consumption of healthy foods may be impacted due to the existence of perceived personal, social and environmental barriers.

Objective – To investigate the barriers to healthy eating, as well as the dietary habits of students, based on gender, level of study, knowledge of food and nutrition, and living arrangements.

Design- a total of 323 (161 males, 162 females) students were selected using convenience sampling. The data collection was carried out at locations both on and off the UWI, St. Augustine campus. Data was analyzed using SPSS; tests performed included Chi-squared Test, Friedman Test, Mann-Whitney, Univariate Analysis of Variance and Bivariate Correlation.

Results- Females were found to have the better eating behaviors, yet poor dietary patterns such as low fruit and vegetable consumption were observed across the sample. Students with knowledge of food and nutrition were found to have significantly better eating habits ($p=0.025$). Cost, available time (personal and family) and physical access to healthy foods at school were deemed to be the strongest of the perceived personal, social and environmental barriers, with males being the more affected sex. A significant correlation was determined between living arrangements and amount of meals consumed per day ($p=0.002$), with persons living at home consuming fewer meals as compared to those who rented.

Conclusion – Nutrition habits of students differed based on gender and knowledge/exposure to food and nutrition. There were no observed associations between students total eating habits and

their level of study or living arrangements. The main perceived barriers of healthy eating were included in busy lifestyles, high prices and physical access to foods on campus.