

Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To compare the eating patterns and behaviours of teenage students and to determine whether there were gender differences.

METHODS: A cross-sectional survey was carried out among teenage males and females (14-16-years) from selected classes in a secondary school situated in north Trinidad. Participants completed a self-administered questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic items, Eating Attitude test-26 (EAT-26), a Body Silhouette Chart and the SF-12 Health Survey Scoring Demonstration instrument. Anthropometric measurements were done to determine BMI, %BF, Upper Mid-arm Circumference, Skinfold Triceps and Waist Circumference.

RESULTS: Ninety five students participated in the survey and males (n = 34) were significantly taller ($p < 0.002$) than females (n =61) while females had a higher level of adiposity ($p <0.001$). Females were significantly more likely than males to consider themselves to be of mixed race (59.0 vs.35.3) while a significantly higher proportion of males were of Afro decent (58.8 vs. 29.5) than females (< 0.002). A larger percentage of the males desired a heavier body image than females. A significant proportion of females than males desired a body image size smaller than their normal weight ($p <0.049$). Females had a significantly ($p <0.001$ higher correlation than males between actual BMI based on heights and weights, and their current body figure ($r = 0.75$ vs. $r = 0.56$). There were no significant differences in EAT-26 score ≥ 20 , eating disorder behaviour and their quality of life (QOL).

CONCLUSION: Although the risks for eating disorders such as eating binges were low in this group of teenage students, there were gender differences in the level of concern over eating patterns and behaviours.