

USEFUL PREDICTORS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' CHOICES OF DIETARY PROTEIN SOURCES.

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Background: Dietary protein is important for growth, tissue repair, and human metabolism; and therefore plays a critical role in optimal health, especially during the adolescent and young adult period of life. However, protein food choices and diet patterns can vary in their impact on health, from beneficial to detrimental. University students are exposed to many factors affecting food choice.

Objective: The purpose of this study was to: **(1)** understand the factors affecting university students' choices of dietary protein **(2)** To identify the most frequently consumed protein foods in the diets of the tertiary student at 3 different universities in Trinidad **(3)** To examine possible relationships between protein food choice and demographic characteristics of the students **(4)** To compare dietary habits with respect to protein choices across the 3 main universities in Trinidad.

Design: This study employed an Observational Cross-sectional design. The habits and patterns of dietary intakes of a group of students were examined with respect to dietary protein intake using a survey. No intervention or experimental method was used and the study aimed at collection of self-reported data from anonymous volunteers. Independent variables included all demographic characteristics (age, gender, etc.) as well as university registered and living arrangements. All of the independent variables were discrete. Dependent variables focused on the dietary habits and perceptions of students with respect to various protein sources. All dependent variables were discrete. A continuous variable for each habit was developed by calculating a score for dietary habits and factors affecting dietary choices of protein

Results: Chicken is consumed most frequently by 77.1% of students. The main factors affecting protein source choices were demographic; particularly, gender, race and religion. Place of Residence affects protein consumption significantly, where those students that live on campus during the school year, consume different sources of protein than those who live at home.

Conclusion: Across the three universities, USC has the most varied consumption, particularly due to the high concentration of Seventh Day Adventist students who are restricted in meat choices, which are high protein food sources. In promoting dietary behaviour change in students' dietary choices of protein, availability is a potential avenue.

