

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.