

ABSTRACT

Chronic disease related lifestyles
of students on the Mona Campus,
University of the West Indies.

Nicole Denyse France

There has been an increase in the mortality from chronic noncommunicable diseases in the Caribbean which appears to be due to lifestyle changes. The present study was therefore conducted to describe the prevalence of chronic disease related lifestyles of students at the University of the West Indies, Mona campus.

Using stratified random sampling, 531 full-time first and final year undergraduate students were selected to take part in the survey. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire to measure the knowledge, attitudes and practices of these students with respect to four different aspects of lifestyle. These included dietary patterns, physical activity levels, alcohol consumption and smoking habits. Physical measurements, including body mass index (BMI), blood pressure and pulse rate as well as serum lipids, glucose and cholesterol levels, were also taken.

There was a 70% response rate and 370 students took part in the study, 244 females and 126 males. The modal age of the first year students was 19 years, while that of the final year students was 23 years.

The most popular foods which were consumed daily were rice (63%),

sugar (54%), white bread (52%), chicken (49%), and flavored drinks (49%). Fifty-five percent reported no use of discretionary salt.

Over 90% of the students said that exercise was important for good health, yet 67% were physically inactive. Students who exercised regularly did so to look good and not for health reasons while those who were not active said that they had no time.

Forty percent of the students consumed alcohol, 77% of whom were light drinkers (2 or less drinks per day) and 88% believed that excess alcohol was linked to stomach problems. Smoking was not prevalent among the sample as only 6% of the students smoked cigarettes, most of whom would like to stop. All of the students were aware of the harmful effects of smoking, cancer being the main disease identified by them.

The physical measurements indicated that few students were at risk for chronic diseases. Four percent of the students had BMI values above the ideal range, 2% had high cholesterol levels while none had high blood pressure, serum triglycerides or blood glucose levels that indicated high risk.