

ABSTRACT

Knowledge, attitudes and practices of university students living on halls of residence at the University of the West Indies Mona Campus, with respect to personal risk of developing chronic diseases.

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Chronic diseases are of increasing public health significance in the Caribbean and have to a large extent replaced the infectious diseases as causes of mortality and morbidity. One out of every two to four deaths in the Caribbean at the present time is due to one of the chronic diseases namely diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, malignant neoplasms and cerebro-vascular disease.

It is now widely accepted that many of these chronic diseases are lifestyle related. It is also well established that lifestyle during youth is associated with the development of chronic diseases in later life. Factors favouring the development of these diseases often antedate the appearance of disease by many years.

Lifestyle practices that favour the development of chronic diseases include poor nutrition, inadequate physical activity, smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and psychosocial stress. Obesity brought about by sedentary living and indiscriminate eating is the single most important predisposing factor for the development of chronic diseases.

This study was conducted to determine the knowledge, attitudes and practices of university students living on halls of residence at the University of the West Indies

Mona Campus as these would impact upon the students' personal risk of developing chronic diseases.

The study population consisted of 1005 university students who lived on the halls of residence, of which 411 (41%) were male and 594 (59%) were female. A stratified random sample of 150 was selected; 62 males (41%) and 88 females (59%), but the response rate produced a sample of 37 males (34%) and 71 females (66%). Data collection was done by self-administered questionnaires. Anthropometric measurements were done at the university health centre and on the halls of residence.

The results showed that knowledge of the students as they pertain to the requirements of healthy living was comprehensive. Their attitudes, however, were indifferent and their nutrition practices were not concomitant with their knowledge. Exercise practices were on the whole found to be adequate.

It is recommended that the importance of healthy lifestyles be taught in our educational institutions from kindergarten to university level and that Health Education be included in some form throughout the school curriculum.