

Perceived Knowledge and Practice of Healthy Dietary Habits among Religious Undergraduate Students in Lagos State University, Ojo

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ABSTRACT

Healthy dietary habits are a set of food and nutrition-related actions and decisions that promote overall wellbeing and lower the risk of diet-related illnesses. This study examined perceived knowledge and practice of healthy dietary habit among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University. Descriptive research design was used while 450 religious undergraduate students purposively sampled. The research instrument was a self-developed "Healthy Dietary Habit Questionnaire (HDHQ)" The reliability of the instrument was achieved using the test- retest method while Chronbach Alpha test and r-value of 0.86 was obtained. Chi-Square (X^2) test was used for all stated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. In conclusion this study found that there was significant knowledge ($X^2=173.46$, $p<0.05$ at 12°) and practice $X^2=82.160$, $p<0.05$ of healthy dietary habit among religious undergraduates in Lagos State University, Ojo. Therefore, it was recommended that religious Communities on campus should take it upon themselves to enable and empower their faithful on the need to feed on healthy diet and occasionally set the pace of what is healthy diet for consumption like avoiding serving of high caloric meals and drinks in functions.

Keywords: knowledge, practice, healthy dietary habit, and religious undergraduates

INTRODUCTION

In a world where the quest to make exploits and sustain stability is fast becoming a necessity, the place of health becomes negotiable and uncompromised. In recent times, civilization, knowledge, and importance to promote good health has increased and as such the wide majority are consciously embracing healthy practice as vehicle to their destination or actualization of their dreams (Ogunbamowo et al., 2022). Human is fundamentally influenced by nutrition, and it has long been understood that diet influences how diseases develop and are prevented (Thorburn, Macia & Mackay, 2014). The nutrients our bodies need to function at their best are provided by the food we eat, which also affects different physiological processes emanating from free radicals and antioxidants which must coexist in balance and metabolic pathways (Lobo et al., 2010).

According to the report of World Health Organization (2020), Consuming a healthy diet all of one's life aid prevention of malnutrition in all its forms as well as several diet-related non-communicable diseases and conditions (Akeredolu et al., 2009). Poverty and ignorance are the main underlying causes of malnutrition in developing nations with overpopulation an index which is more prevalent in developing nations. Hence, affect the availability of food leaving a resultant effect of under eating or overeating of foods with poor nutritional value (Abdelazeez et al., 2015). Therefore, an uncompromisable need for all undergraduate's religious students to have the right knowledge of healthy diets as well as practice them. El Ansari et al., (2018) opined that combining a balanced diet full of nutrient-dense foods with regular exercise are capable of mitigating risk of developing diseases linked to poor diet as well as enhance general health of individuals. Poor dietary choices and insufficient nutrient intake have repeatedly been linked to the emergence of chronic illnesses like obesity, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and metabolic disorders on people of different ages, tribe and religious affiliations (Boeing et al., 2012).

Academics can be tasking and demanding on students that it exerts exacerbating influence on the lifestyle student adopts while at school (Varela-Mato et al., 2021). Many students opt for consumption of fast foods and takeouts which has become increasingly popular in Western societies as well as among young people and adolescents in developing nations like Nigeria. When young people start college life, they take more control of their lifestyle, especially their eating habits and choices, most importantly when they enjoy the privilege of staying away from home or school accommodation (Bipasha & Goon, 2013). Ogunbamowo et al., (2022) opined that eating fast foods and junks is not a health promoting lifestyle as it causes increase weight gain, obesity, higher risk of heart diseases, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension later in life due to presence of high calories, unhealthy fats, and sodium in these meals. Similarly, high sugar frequently consumed in sweetened beverages, snacks, and desserts increased risk of developing dental caries, type 2 diabetes, weight gain and metabolic disorders like insulin resistance (Ogunbamowo et al., 2022).

Many undergraduates do not eat enough fruits and vegetables in their diets as they consume excessive caffeine and energy drinks while others drink alcohol indiscriminately, which in turn poise problems to the immune system, causes insomnia, anxiety and heart palpitation as well as nutritional deficiencies, liver damage and a higher risk of accidents and injuries cumulatively (Sogari et al., 2018). Essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants found in fruits and vegetables have the capacity to support a strong immune system which resultantly lower the risk of developing numerous chronic diseases and preventable health Challenges. Consequently, Irregular eating habits, such as skipping meals or eating infrequently throughout the day, can interfere with the body's metabolism harnessing the tendencies of students to experience disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder which when not controlled may have serious physical and psychological effects (Elron-Barak et al., 2014).

Dietary habits significantly affect disease risk, with both specific nutrients and dietary composition playing important role and as such numerous dietary habits had been reported to be connected to various metabolic syndrome symptoms in adults (Shang et al., 2012). Elron-Barak et al., (2014) opined that diets high in saturated fats and cholesterol have shown association with higher risk of cardiovascular diseases because increase blood cholesterol levels also cause the formation of arterial. Just like obesity, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndromes have all had great potentials to emanate from excessive consumption of processed and sugary foods like soft drinks and sweetened beverages (Datt et al., 2023).

In contrast, developing or adopting a lifestyle or habit where healthy diet high in nutrients is consumed daily will aid the management and prevention of many diseases. A healthy diet that includes enough fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats supplies the necessary vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and phytochemicals to support optimal physiological functions and advance general wellbeing (Stadimayr et al., 2023). For instance, diets high in plant-based fibers like coconut, beans, lentils, avocados, and carrots have been linked to a lower risk of digestive disorders, certain cancers, and cardiovascular diseases (Fan et al., 2023).

Additionally, numerous studies have been conducted to determine the potential disease-modifying effects of nutrients and bioactive substances. It has been demonstrated that the omega-3 fatty acids, which are present in fatty fish, walnuts, and flaxseeds, can reduce inflammation and lower the risk of cardiovascular diseases (Chedid et al., 2023). Also, antioxidants, like the vitamins C and E found in fruits and vegetables, protect the body from oxidative stress and may lower the risk of developing certain cancers and age-related macular degeneration (Mansour et al., 2023). It is crucial to remember that individual differences in genetics, metabolism, and lifestyle choices and religious affiliations can affect how nutrition affects a person's susceptibility to disease as a holistic approach is necessary due to the complex interplay of various dietary factors and their cumulative effects on health.

It has long been understood that there is a strong correlation between healthy eating habits and overall wellbeing. However, one topic that hasn't gotten much attention is how religious practices and beliefs affect undergraduate students' dietary decisions. The undergraduate experience being a crucial period in life, is heavily characterized by gaining newfound independence, being exposed to various

lifestyles, and forming personal values, including religious beliefs. Religious beliefs have a significant influence on how people perceive and interact with the world. Howbeit it is conceivable that these beliefs apply to dietary decisions. What people choose to eat, when they choose to eat it, and how they prepare and consume it are all frequently influenced by religious beliefs and practices (Roudsari et al., 2017). Many religions have dietary rules or restrictions that may affect nutrition. The types of foods eaten, for instance, can be influenced by religious dietary laws, such as vegetarianism in some Hindu and Buddhist traditions and halal dietary laws in Islam which nutritional balance of the diet may be impacted by these restrictions (Fuseini, 2017).

Consecutively, numerous religions include fasting or avoid consuming foods as part of their rituals. For example, Muslims and Christians both observe fasting during the month of Ramadan and lent period respectively which affects calorie intake and nutrient balance during these period (Papazoglou et al., 2022). Traditional foods that are associated with religious holidays frequently have special cultural and spiritual meanings and these foods may have nutritional attributes that are regarded favorably in the context of the religion (Kulwick, 2021). Islam, for instance, includes the killing of ram as festival meals with symbolic meanings during the Ramadan Kareem. Religious teachings many times offer advice on how to stay healthy, which may have an impact on dietary decisions. Additionally, some religions may advocate restraint and avoid excessiveness, which may have effects on binge eating and obesity (Garnett, 2014). However, food preferences may be influenced by developed compassion and non-violence in some religions towards animals by minimizing harm to animals hence, opting to practice vegetarianism.

While religion can influence food choices, it's important to understand that individual practices can vary greatly depending on individual interpretations, culture, and regional food availability (Lunner Kolstrup et al., 2013). Some religious traditions place a strong emphasis on eating with awareness and purpose. Slower eating, savoring flavors, and attention to the act of nourishing the body may result from this, which may affect digestion and satisfaction. In many cultures, gatherings and festivals, there are increased reasons for food sharing which promotes and strengthens cultural or religious identity (Perry, 2017). The connection between people and nature is emphasized strongly in some indigenous and nature-based religions. Religious texts frequently contain dietary recommendations and prohibitions, and followers may interpret these tenets differently, thereby influencing their eating habits and preferences. Understanding the eating patterns of religious undergraduates can therefore provide important insights into the complex relationship between nutrition and faith. This research therefore aims to assess the knowledge and practices of healthy dietary habits among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University.

The specific purposes of the study were:

1. To determine the knowledge of healthy dietary habits among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State?
2. To determine the practice of healthy dietary habits among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State?

HYPOTHESES

The following research hypotheses were postulated for the study:

1. There will be no significant knowledge of healthy dietary habits among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State.
2. There will be no significant practice of healthy dietary habits among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design of survey type was adopted because of its capability to examine the relationship between variables under study, hypotheses testing and development of generalization. The population of the study consists of all religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University, in

fifteen faculties (schools inclusive) which included Agriculture, Arts, Basic Medical Sciences, CESSSED, Clinical Sciences, Communications, Dentistry, Engineering, Education, Law, Library, Management Sciences, Science, Social Sciences and Transport. The sample for this study comprised Four hundred and fifty (450) undergraduate Students in Lagos State University, Lagos State. A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting two hundred and twenty-five (225) respondents each from LASU Christian and Muslim Communities respectively. The research instrument for this study was a self-developed questionnaire, titled "Healthy Dietary Habits Questionnaire (HDHQ)". The questionnaire was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A contained demographic data of respondents while Section B was structured to test the hypotheses. The questionnaire adopted a four (4) point Likert modified scale ranging from Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The face and content validity of the instrument were ascertained by experts from the departments of Food Technology, Yaba College of Technology and Department of Human Kinetics, Sports and Health Education, Lagos State University, Ojo. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach alpha technique. An r-value of 0.86 was obtained and used as basis for instrument adoption for data collection. Four hundred and fifty (450) copies of the questionnaires were distributed to respondents and collected on the spot by the researcher with the help of three trained research assistants. Copies of the administered questionnaires were checked to ensure that they were well completed. Daily review meetings were held at the beginning and end of each day with the research assistants while data collection lasted two weeks. Data collected were analyzed using appropriate descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages for data presentation while inferential statistics of chi-square (χ^2) was used to test all stated hypothesis at 0.05 alpha level of significance. SPSS 23 was used for analyzing the data collected.

RESULTS

Data presentation

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by age, gender, religion, work experience and level of education

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	324	72.0
Female	126	28.0
Total	450	100.0
Age		
Below 20	45	10.0
20-29 years	77	17.1
30-39 years	112	24.9
40-49 years	99	22.0
50 years above	117	26.0
Total	450	100.0
Christian Classification		
Catholic and Anglican	30	6.7
Pentecostal and charismatic	221	49.1
Mainline Protestants	15	3.3
Evangelical missionary	70	15.6
Indigenous	94	20.9
Non-denominational	20	4.4

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Total	450	100.0
Years of Leadership		
1-5	175	38.9
6-10	133	29.6
11-15	87	19.3
16-20	40	8.9
21 years above	15	3.3
Total	450	100.0

Table 1 showed that 108 (24.0%) of the respondents were Male while 342 (76.0%) of the respondents were female. Consecutively, table revealed that 117 (26.0%) of the respondents were below 18 years of age while 117 (26.0%) were in the age range of 18-20 years, 99 (22.0%) were in the age range of 21-23 years, 72 (16.0%) were in the age range of 24-26 years and 45 (10.0%) were 27 years and above. Also, the table revealed that 225 (50.0%) of the respondents practiced Christianity and Islam respectively. Further, the table revealed that the five levels (100, 200, 300, 400 and others) identified had 90 (20.0%) of the respondents each. While 423 of the respondents (94.0%) lived off campus and only 27(6.0%) of the respondents lived on campus.

HYPOTHESIS ONE

There will be no significant knowledge of healthy dietary habits among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State. This hypothesis was tested using Chi Square at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented on the table below.

Table 2: Chi-square result on the knowledge of healthy dietary habits among religious undergraduates in LASU

Options	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	X ²	Sig
Strongly agree	183	33.0	41.0	173.46	0.000
Agree	172	33.0	43.0		
Disagree	27	23.0	-31.0		
Strongly Disagree	68	23.0	31.0		
Total	450				

Table 2 projects the data collected from the respondents on hypothesis one. It shows that 183 of the respondents strongly agreed to the items on having knowledge of healthy dietary habit, 172 of the respondents agreed while 27 of the respondents disagreed and 68 respondents strongly disagreed to the items respectively. Further, the table reveals a calculated X² value of 173.46 which is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ at 12° of freedom hence the rejection of the null hypothesis. It therefore implies that there was significant knowledge of healthy dietary habit among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State.

The findings on hypothesis one revealed that there was significant knowledge of healthy dietary habit among religious undergraduates in Lagos State University, Lagos State. Many of the students' responses aligned with positive knowledge of healthy dietary habits like avoidance of snacks, soft drinks, and a need to consume more fruits while being hydrated. This finding correlates Yahia et al (2016) in their study that assessed weight status, eating patterns, physical activity, dietary beliefs, and nutrition-

al knowledge among Central Michigan University students. The cross-sectional study carried out in the fall of 2011 and spring of 2012 revealed that the students had satisfactory knowledge of Dietary habits and as a result more than half of the students take two cups of fruits and vegetables as well as two glasses of milk daily and showed high level of knowledge on healthy dietary habit to be adopted for the promotion of their health.

Also, this study corroborates Hoque et al (2016) knowledge-based study which researched on students' level of knowledge on nutritional benefits of food that they consume. The researcher believed students had knowledge of healthy dietary habits as many of them agreed that foods like deep-fried drumsticks and hamburgers are high in saturated fat and cholesterol.

This is evidential in what the result of this study revealed in accordance with the items addressing undergraduate students' knowledge of healthy habits. The students showed knowledge that consumption of high caloric meals like burns, fries and fast food would predispose them to obesity and cardiovascular diseases later in life. Consumption of soft drinks and beverages with high sugar content were neither beneficial as they predispose them to high glucose/ sugar which may result in prevalence of diabetes 2 later in life if not curtailed. Consecutively, skipping meals and fasting for a long time without feeding on highly nutritious meals to cushion the deficiencies would leave the health of faithful in debilitating condition. Hence, the knowledge of the importance of fruits and berries will help the body be it in its best possible state.

HYPOTHESIS TWO

There will be no significant practice of healthy dietary habit among undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State. This hypothesis was tested using Chi Square at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented on the table below.

Table 3: Chi-square result on the practice of healthy dietary habits among religious undergraduates in LASU

Options	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	X ²	Sig
Strongly agree	135	63.0	61.0	82.160	0.000
Agree	162	65.0	61.0		
Disagree	90	32.0	-59.0		
Strongly Disagree	63	32.0	-59.0		
Total	450				

Table 3 projects the data collected from the respondents on hypothesis two. It shows that 135 of the respondents strongly agreed to the items on having practice of healthy dietary habit, 44 of the respondents agreed while 109 of the respondents disagreed and 231 respondents strongly disagreed to the items respectively. Further, the table reveals a calculated X² value of 82.16 which is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ at 12⁰ of freedom hence the rejection of the null hypothesis. It therefore implies that there was significant practice of healthy dietary habit among undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State.

The findings on hypothesis two revealed that there was significant practice of healthy dietary habit among religious undergraduates in Lagos State University, Lagos State. More than 70% of the students maintain good hydration, eat good fruits and resort to eating home-made foods showing that there was significant practice of healthy dietary habits. However, 53.2% of the respondents still prefer soft-drinks and snacks due to their tight daily schedules. The finding of this study disagrees with Vibhute et al (2018) study on eating habits of college students at a health institute in western Maharashtra, India. A total of 130 students including 74 girls and 56 boys, took part in the study. The results revealed that 98 (or 75%) of the participating students consume only 1-2 portions of fruits and vegeta-

bles daily while 24 (18%) were underweight, and 11 (8%) were either overweight or obese respectively showing that a reasonable number of them do not practice healthy dietary habits. Also, Beaulieu & Best, (2022) examined how religion and gender are associated with disordered eating. The study revealed that respondents without any religious affiliations practiced healthy dietary habits compared to others who were affiliated with a particular religion.

The findings of this study gave an insight into undergraduate students' dietary habits in the Lagos State University. Results revealed many strongly agreed to practicing healthy habits through eating of fruits especially oranges at least once daily, avoid skipping meal and make out time to eat good meals from cafeterias in the school before lectures or during their free periods on campus. Based on the high knowledge they had of good dietary habits many of the, prefer consumption of water at room temperature due to its numerous health benefits. Few of the students that didn't practice healthy dietary habit complained of lack of on-campus accommodation as a factor responsible.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that.

1. There was significant knowledge of healthy dietary habit among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State.
2. There was significant practice of healthy dietary habit among religious undergraduate students in Lagos State University, Lagos State.

Based on the conclusion of this study, it was recommended that.

1. Experts of health education should develop improved awareness for religious undergraduate students on the need to eat healthy diet in a quest to promote their health and keep them free from food related diseases.
2. Religious communities on campus should take it upon themselves to enable and empower their faithful on the need to feed healthy diet and occasionally set the pace for healthy diet for consumption like avoiding serving of high caloric meals and drinks in functions.
3. Similarly, the government in collaboration with the school management should provide large and conducive accommodation with kitchen space on campus to help students have an organized and hitch free academic schedules.

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