

## Influence of Lifestyle on the Health Status of Students of Tertiary Institutions in Benue State, Nigeria.

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### Abstract

*Lifestyle and its effects on health has been the subject of interest recently. Living a healthy lifestyle and having a decreased risk of killer diseases is of utmost importance. This study examined the influence of dietary intake, sexual behaviour and physical activity as lifestyle on the health status of tertiary institution students in Benue State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey design was adapted for the study; Samples of 685 respondents were randomly selected from a total population of 13,992 students. Data were collected using a self-developed and validated questionnaire with the reliability of 0.742 Cronbach Alpha. Frequency counts, percentages and chi square were used to analyze the generated data. The study found out that dietary intake ( $\chi^2=338.445, df=3, p<0.05$ ), sexual behaviour ( $\chi^2=680.133, df=3, P<0.05$ ) and physical activity ( $\chi^2=520.670, df=3, P<0.05$ ) had significant influence on the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue state. The researcher therefore, recommended that students should be properly educated on effects of lifestyle such as dietary intake, sexual behaviour and physical activity on their health status thereby taking informed decision to avoid negative lifestyle.*

**Keywords:** lifestyle, health status,

### Introduction

The prevalence of overweight, obesity and other chronic diseases have increased in the last decades worldwide and are now being termed public health epidemic. The main risk factors for the obesity and other chronic disease are related to today's lifestyle (Daniel & Denys, 2004). They also added that nowadays, the highest consumption of fattening food associated with lack of time and other new technologies that have replaced much of the basic physical activities that led people to get fatter and sick.

Lifestyle and its effects on health has been the subject of interest recently. There is overwhelming evidence that behavioural factors influence health but their combined effects on the general population is less well documented (Kham, Warcham & Lubem, 2004). Evidence from epidemiological studies, human environmental trials and animals models, together with potential mechanism of biological action lead one to conclude that much behavior are, in fact, contributing causes (casual risk factors) of specific diseases. Behavioural determinant of health and disease status can be found for almost every disease through behavioural risk factors, or through behavioural factors that influence physiological risk factors or through behavioural factors that influence treatment and prognosis (Schwarzer, 2008). Many undergraduates are youths who encounter numerous health risk factors why growing up to adult hood, many of these health risk factors affect quality of life and life expectancy.

Studies have revealed the vulnerability of youths to poor eating habits. Youths are said to be in the habit of eating "junks" (Papadaki & Scott, 2005). This type of eating habit has also been observed among Nigerian tertiary institution students (Ajala, 2006). It is observed that, these poor eating habits arise from lack of knowledge of the cumulative effects of their eating habits. This is a grave concern in Nigeria where there is an increase in fast food centers (Akinwusi & Ogundele, 2005). In recent years, developing countries like Nigeria have been experiencing a nutritional transition in food choices from a typical starchy (mainly carbohydrate diets) to the fast foods pattern and as a result the dietary habits of young adults like tertiary institution students have been affected. Over the years, nutritional status of students has been observed to be influenced by both socio-economic and demographic factors. Despite the sensitivity of students to food, it is surprising to note that their nutritional status is not satisfactory. Today, there are no longer any central feeding facilities for students in tertiary institutions in years back, government subsidized food for tertiary students. However, in recent years students are fully responsible for securing their own food. This has affected the quality and quantity of food consumed by students. One of the greatest problem facing students today is lack of information on what their body need nutritionally. It has also been observed that most students lack adequate fund or divert (fund) feeding money to other frivolities and so skip some meals. These unhealthy habits lead to mal-nutrition.

Healthy dietary intake is essential for growth, development, health and well-being. Researchers have shown that healthy dietary intake is one of many factors that potentially influence a child development besides genetics, socio- economic status, environmental and behavioural factors (Benton, 2008).

Carmen (2011) stated that eating healthy diet may help prevent certain diseases. This may stem from weight loss, where an overweight person has an increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol and

stroke. However, a healthful diet may help reduce your risk for heart disease. Araoye and Araoye (2010) confirmed that what we eat can greatly affect our health and well-being.

Physiologically, the changes in reproductive organs that occur in the life of adolescents often serve as a motivating force in their quest to experiment with sex. The researcher observed that some adolescents naturally explore and take risk in many aspects of their lives, including sexual relationships. In Nigeria, researchers have confirmed that risky sexual behaviours are associated with young people (Okafor & Obi, 2005). These risky behaviours include; multiple sexual partners, low and inconsistent use of condom, anal and oral sexual intercourse. These risky sexual activities make this group prone to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unwanted pregnancies and their complications. It is of concern that many young people do not perceive their high-risk status in spite of indulging in unsafe sexual practices. The majority of students in tertiary institutions are single, young adults who easily fall prey to exuberance coupled with the liberal nature of campus life that predispose them to high risk sexual behaviour. Sexual risk behavior that included having multiple sex partners, not using condoms, anal and oral sex are more common among the lower class, adolescents, females and those living off campus. Economic reasons are major factors that encourage risky sexual behaviour in the females. The urge to have sex and curiosity, tended to favour such experimentation in the males (Okafor & obi, 2005).

Physical activity levels are decreasing among young people in countries around the world, especially in poor urban areas. Low participation in exercise among tertiary institution students is attributed to barriers such as; lack of knowledge, motivation, time and social support, laziness, perceived lack of safety and confidence (Ogunjimi, Akpan & Ikorok, 2012). The benefits of physical activities are well documented and are enormous. However, the participation in physical activity is still low. Tertiary institution students find themselves in a precarious situation where regular physical activity is not built into the academic programme. Inactivity and low levels of physical activities are predisposing factors for many chronic diseases which are showing an increase in prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa generally and Nigeria in particular. There is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence on the positive effect of physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle (Corbin & Pangrazi, 1999). Worldwide, there has been a large paradigm shift towards less physically demanding work. Urbanization has resulted in several environmental factors, which discourage participation in physical activity. Physical activity goes a long way in enhancing well-being as it contributes to developing healthy bones, efficient heart and lung function, as well as improved motor skills and cognitive functions (Corbin & Pangrazi, 1999).

Physical activity also plays a vital role in the life prevention and management of overweight and obesity. Research has shown that people who exercises regularly, hardly become overweight or obese (Suoke & Amindu, 2007).

Today chronic non-communicable diseases are the major causes of death and disabilities worldwide. Bad nutritional habits and lack of physical activity are lifestyle engaged in by target population for this study. Hence the thrust of this study is to examine the influence of lifestyle on the health status of tertiary institution students in Benue State, Nigeria.

## Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adapted. Six hundred and eighty six students of seven tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria were randomly selected as sample for the study. A self-developed and validated questionnaire with the title Influence of Lifestyle on Health Status Questionnaire ILHSQ' with the reliability index of 0.742, was used for data collection. The questionnaire was in two sections, section A focused on the Bio data of the respondents while section B was designed to measure the influence of lifestyle on health status. The collected data was analyzed using inferential statistics of chi-square to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results and Discussion

### Hypothesis one:

Dietary intake will not significantly influence the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria

Table 1: Summary of Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) analysis of dietary intake and health status

	Observed	Expected	$\chi^2$ cal	$\chi^2$ tab	df	P	Remarks
Strongly Agree	309	171.25	338.445	7.82	3	.000	Significant
Agree	272	171.25					
Disagree	66	171.25					
Strongly Disagree	38	171.25					
Total	685	685.00					

$\chi^2 = 338.445$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.05$

The findings of the study as presented in table one revealed that 309 of the respondents strongly agree that dietary intake has an effect on the health status of the students of tertiary institutions in Benue state, 272 agreed while 66 disagreed and 38 strongly disagreed. The table also showed the calculated  $\chi^2$  value of 338.445 while the critical value is 7.82 with three (3) degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance since the calculated  $\chi^2$  value was greater than the table value, the null hypothesis which stated that dietary intake will not significantly influence the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria was rejected. It then means that dietary intake had significant influence on the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria.

**Hypothesis 2:**

Sexual behaviour will not significantly influence the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Summary of Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) analysis of sexual behaviour and health status

Responses	Observed	Expected	$\chi^2$ cal	$\chi^2$ tab	df	P	Remarks
Strongly Agree	439	171.25	680.133	7.82	3	.000	Significant
Agree	200	171.25					
Disagree	23	171.25					
Strongly Disagree	23	171.25					
Total	685	685.00					

$\chi^2 = 680.133$ , df = 3, p < 0.05

The study findings in table 2 showed that 439 of the respondents strongly agreed that sexual behaviour has an effect on the health status of the students of tertiary institutions in Benue state, Nigeria. 200 agreed, while 23 disagreed and 23 strongly disagreed. The table also showed calculated  $\chi^2$  value of 680.133 while the critical value is 7.82 with three(3) degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance since the calculated  $\chi^2$  value was greater than the table value, the null hypothesis which stated that sexual behaviour will not significantly influence the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria was rejected. It then means that sexual behaviour had significant influence on the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria.

**Hypothesis 3:**

Physical activity will not significantly influence the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) analysis of physical activity and health status

Responses	Observed	Expected	$\chi^2$ cal	$\chi^2$ tab	df	P	Remark
Strongly Agree	418	171.25	625.020	7.82	3	.000	Significant
Agree	220	171.25					
Disagree	31	171.25					
Strongly Disagree	16	171.25					
Total	685	685.00					

$\chi^2 = 625.020$ , df = 3, p < 0.05

The study findings in table 3 showed that 418 of the respondents strongly agreed that physical activity has an effect on the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. 220 agreed while 31 disagreed and 16 strongly disagreed. The table also showed the calculated  $\chi^2$  value 625.020, while the critical value is 7.82 with three (3) degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated  $\chi^2$  value, the null hypothesis which stated that physical activity will not significantly influence the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria was rejected. It then means that physical activity had a significant influence on the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria.

**Discussion of the Findings**

The study found out that dietary intake was a significant factor influencing the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. From the study it was found that tiredness, indigestion, mood swing and obesity were the significant effects of diet on health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. Students become tired when they fail to eat, suffer indigestion when they eat late, have mood swings when they eat some kinds of food or fail to eat, suffer indigestion when they always over-feed. According to Jere (1996), eating foods that contain sugar and starch triggers the release of serotonin, a neurotransmitter. This

neurotransmitter improves mood, reduces depression and induces calmness. He further said that there are many food components that affect mood such as tryptophan and amino acid found in some foods like nuts, poultry and dairy. This is in line with Payne and Dale (2002), who identified some dietary disorders that are frequently seen among college students which include; anorexia, bulimia, nervosa, and night eating.

The finding on sexual behaviour and health status revealed that sexual behaviour was a significant factor influencing the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. Sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancies and abuse among others are the significant effects of sexual behaviour like having multiple sex partners, non-use of condoms, and pre-marital sex increases the chances of becoming pregnant at a tender age. Physicians for Life (2010) opined that forced pre-marital love making will lead to mental depression and dilemma. Another emotional stress effect is the stress of worrying about unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

The finding on physical activity and health status revealed that physical activity was a significant factor influencing the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. From the study, it was found that obesity, mental well-being, reduction of depression and strengthening of bones/muscles were the significant effects of physical activity on the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. This finding is in line with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2007), which observed that physical activity enhances one's mental well-being and promotes healthy musculoskeletal function throughout life and strengthens bones and muscles which does not only support and help the body to move but also ensure that the body is able to carry out daily activities.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that, dietary intake significantly influenced the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. This means that when students indulge in poor diet they suffer tiredness, indigestion, mood swing and obesity. It is also concluded that sexual behavior significantly influenced the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. This means that when students engage in negative sexual behaviours they may contract sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), pregnancy or be sexually abused. It is also concluded that physical activity significantly influenced the health status of students of tertiary institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. This means when students are indulged in carrying out physical activity, their mental well-being is enhanced, depression is reduced, bones/muscles are strengthened and obesity is prevented.

Based on the outcome of the research, the following are recommended.

- Seminars and workshops should be organized for students by the school authority on nutritious meal choices to establish long term habits of healthful eating.
- Negative sexual behaviours like indecent dressing, premarital sex, and prostitution among students should be prohibited by the school authority.
- The school authority in conjunction with the student union should provide avenues for students to exercise frequently.

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