

THE EFFECT OF DIET, LIFESTYLE AND ENVIRONMENT IN TWO GROUPS OF EUROPEAN BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE STUDENTS (UK-SPAIN)

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Previous studies on diet and lifestyle have revealed a set of concerning health problems across European student populations. This study uses combined methods of physical anthropology and personal questionnaires to compare patterns of diet and lifestyle, along with anthropometric indices in two student samples (N=200 each, 50% males, 50% females) at Manchester University, England, and at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (U.A.M), Spain. We analyzed data on social and economic background, BMI, gender, lifestyle, food and dietary intake patterns, in order to assess differences between populations, test for nutrition-related health issues, and to propose corrective changes. The results reveal cultural differences regarding nutrition between the two countries, reflected in consumption patterns and food habits, but also certain similarities. The consumption of dietary supplements was far higher in Manchester than in U.A.M students. We found that all students were getting higher than recommended energy levels from fats and from protein and lower from carbohydrates. The least fat intake levels were detected in the female Spanish group and caloric values were close but below RDA recommendations. The study highlights a need for a strategy that should be gender-specific, as well as for the necessity of a multi-level methodology when tackling nutritional issues. Despite a B.M.I. within the normal ranges, the study underscores the necessity for further promotion of nutritional information. A main concern for health authorities should be that, despite high profile campaigning in a well-educated population, damaging nutritional patterns appear to persist in student youth.

Key words: foods habits, nutrition, university students, gender differences, Manchester, Madrid, BMI.

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