

Student Diet & Health Concerns

by William Martin

Introduction

The obesity epidemic observed in the UK and other Western nations over the past two decades has “increased the focus on eating habits of the nation” (James, 2008, p. S120). In an attempt to promote better health of the population and reduce the burden of obesity and related health conditions on the NHS, the recent government white paper Healthy Lives, Healthy People (HM Government, 2010, p. 19) has identified improvements in diet and lifestyle as a priority in public health policy.

Eating Habits of University Students

Home leavers

It is widely accepted that **students leaving home** to attend university are likely to experience a significant shift in their lifestyle, including their diet, and this is supported by research evidence from the UK and other European countries (Papadaki et al., 2007, p. 169). This may encompass increased alcohol intake, reduced intake of fruit and vegetables, and increased intake of processed or fatty foods, “as well as impacting on overall eating patterns” (Arnot, 2010, online; Dodd et al., 2010, p. 73; Spanos & Hankey, 2010, p. 102).

Gender

Some studies have suggested that there may be different patterns of unhealthy eating amongst male and female groups of students. For example research conducted by Dr. Ricardo Costa and Dr. Farzad Amirabdollahian at **Coventry University** found that male students may be at risk of what they term “disordered eating patterns”. In addition, the study also suggests that males are at greater risk of not eating five portions of fruit and vegetables per day. This research is based on a substantial sample size, using data derived from in-depth interviews with approximately 130 undergraduates, although there are plans to increase this to include nearly 400 participants. It is acknowledged by the researchers that this may represent only those events occurring at one university, although there are also plans to expand the study sample across another two universities in the future (Arnot, 2010, online).