

University students' Mediterranean diet adherence in North East of Italy: a pilot study, 2018

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Background:

Mediterranean Diet (MD) is associated with decreased risk of many non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and weight maintenance. No study has been conducted to better understand MD adherence among University students, especially future teachers and future experts in nutrition, in North East of Italy. Our pilot study represents a first exploration in this field among this population.

Methods:

This is a single-center, observational pilot survey. We enrolled >18 years Educational Sciences (ES) and Food Science (FS) University students attending Hygiene and Epidemiology lessons in March 2018. We performed the survey with a Mediterranean diet validated questionnaire and calculated the MD score. Based on previous studies on MD score, students were classified into High-MD adherence (score 6-14) and low-MD adherence group (score <6). Comparisons between groups were performed using a t-test, Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test, chi square test and logistic regression models as appropriate. We also evaluated BMI (body mass index) and smoke habits.

Results:

We collected and analysed 82 questionnaires: 14.6% (12) students resulted to have low MD adherence (median:5, IQR:1) and 85.4% (70) resulted to have high MD adherence (median: 8, IQR:2). Students' BMI was predominantly in the normal-weight range (median: 21,7, IQR: 4,03). Moreover, 14.6% (12) students (mean: 22 years old; SD:2) were smokers and, among non-smokers (70), 11% (9) were ex-smokers.

We performed logistic regressions that showed no clear association between MD adherence and university course (FS vs ES) (OR: 2.14, CI 95%: 0.43-10.63) and between MD and BMI (OR:1.12, CI 95% 0.88-1.42).

Conclusions:

Our pilot study shows good levels of MD adherence and attention to health status (low smoking habits prevalence and mean BMI). Further studies in larger samples and among other university courses are needed to confirm our findings.

Key messages:

- Mediterranean Diet adherence among the two university courses studied is high.
- Studies in different degree courses are needed to evaluate differences in nutrition and healthy habits among students.