Background

- Infection control measures in the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted lifestyle.
- Changes in physical activity varies across population.
- Hong Kong university students have not been studied before.

Objective and Hypothesis

- To identify factors contributing to these changes if any.
- Cross-sectional self-administered online questionnaire.
- Inclusion criteria: medical and nursing students from The University of Hong Kong (HKU).
- Data analysis by Chi-square test, logistic regression and McNemar Analysis.
- Approved by Institutional Review Board of the HKU/Hospital Authority Hong Kong West Cluster. (IRB Reference Number: UW 20-773)

Results and Discussion

- 394 completed questionnaires were collected.

Dietary Changes

- 38% reported decreased consumption of main meals.
- Around half reported increased consumption of snacks.
- ‘Changes to daily schedule’ is the only factor influencing eating habits with statistical significance.
- Majority do not consider health awareness and fitness concerns when adopting dietary habits.

Exercise

- Around 20% report increased exercise intensity, duration, and frequency, similar to that in the SARS outbreak (Lau et al, 2006; “Chronology of the SARS”, n.d.).
- Male sex is associated with greater decreases in exercise frequency.
- Individuals physically active before the pandemic see a 60% drop in exercise frequency, intensity and duration.
- Individuals not physically active before the pandemic see an increase in exercise frequency.

Health Awareness

- 72.3% of the respondents were in favour of vaccination during the pandemic, which was strongly associated with attitude towards vaccination before COVID-19.
- Among those who expressed a change in attitude, 84% and 16% became more favourable and less favourable of vaccination respectively.
- Promotion of vaccinations was a significant factor of consideration in those with positive change in attitude.
- Fear of infection may explain a negative change in attitude (Hung et al, 2020).
- Most respondents (91.6%) reported an increase in health awareness during COVID-19. Logistic regression reveals ‘health promotions’ as most associated with increased hygiene awareness; ‘news’ coming second.

Strengths

- Large sample size of 394 participants for the specific target population of university students studying healthcare-related degrees reduces variation and contributes to strong statistical power of the study.
- To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind that investigates the impact of COVID-19 on Hong Kong people’s health awareness and physical activity.

Limitations

- Broad categorical data were collected. We recommend investigation into ordinal data as an extension of this study.

Conclusion

- The COVID-19 pandemic had negative impacts on dietary habits of HKU healthcare students.
- Changes in exercise habits differ across different groups of HKU healthcare students.
- Generally, the COVID-19 pandemic had positive impacts on health awareness of HKU healthcare students.
- This study informs the directions of future public health campaigns that promote healthy lifestyle habits, especially during the pandemic.

References


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The Impacts of COVID-19 on Physical Activity, Dietary Changes and Health Awareness of University Students in Hong Kong: A Cross-Sectional Study

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