

A Study on Psychosocial Factors Affecting the Eating Habits of Youngsters in Azhagappapuram Village Kanniyakumari District

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ABSTRACT

Eating habits play a vital role in determining the overall health and well-being of young people. It reflects an individual's lifestyle, preferences, and the influence of various psychosocial factors. The eating behavior of young individuals is shaped not only by their personal choices but also by psychological aspects such as stress, emotions, and body image, along with social factors like peer influence, family environment, cultural practices, and media exposure. Rapid social changes, modernization, and the increasing availability of fast food have significantly altered traditional dietary patterns, especially among youth. Consequently, many young people tend to adopt unhealthy eating habits such as skipping meals, irregular eating patterns, and increased consumption of junk food. The influence of peers and changing family structures further contributes to these patterns. At the same time, lack of awareness about proper nutrition and the impact of stress and emotional factors create additional challenges in maintaining healthy eating behaviors.

Keywords: *Eating Habits, Psychosocial Factors, Young People, Peer Influence*

Introduction

Eating habits among young people, in a broad sense, refer to the patterns and practices of food consumption influenced by individual preferences, lifestyle, and surrounding social environment. These habits differ from one individual to another based on various psychological and social conditions. Young individuals who maintain balanced and regular dietary practices tend to experience better physical health and mental well-being compared to those who follow irregular and unhealthy eating patterns. Research studies conducted among youth populations have revealed that multiple psychosocial factors significantly influence eating behaviors. For instance, factors such as stress, emotional instability, and body image concerns have been found to affect food choices and meal patterns. In contrast, positive family support and awareness about nutrition are associated with healthier eating practices. Peer influence also plays a major role, as young people often adopt food habits based on social acceptance and group behavior. Studies have shown that increased exposure to media

and fast-food culture has led to a shift from traditional diets to more processed and convenience foods.

Good nutrition and vitamins do not directly cure disease; the body does. You provide the raw materials and the inborn wisdom of your body makes the repairs.” – Andrew W. Saul. Adolescence and young adulthood can be characterized as stages of transition marked by physical, psychological, and social changes. During this period, individuals develop independence in decision-making, including food choices, which may lead to both healthy and unhealthy eating patterns. Poor eating habits which include, meal skipping, frequent snacking, and fast food consumption along with substance abuse and physical inactivity have been rampant among young adults experiencing the transition into college life. Health Sciences (2021) The rapid pace of modernization, urbanization, and changing family structures has further influenced dietary behaviors, often resulting in meal skipping, irregular timings, and increased consumption of junk food. Family environment and support play a crucial role in shaping eating habits. Additionally, peer pressure and social gatherings often encourage the consumption of fast food and sugary beverages.

Objectives

- To identify the key psychological factors emotional eating, stress affecting food choices.
- To identify the key social factors media, peer pressure, family environment affecting food choices.
- To understand the impact of stress and lifestyle changes on eating habits.

Methodology

The present study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the psychological and social factors affecting the eating habits of youngsters. The study was conducted in Azhagappapuram village, Kanniyakumari district and the universe consisted of youngsters. Total of 52 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, as the researcher specifically chose participants who had relevant experience with the phenomenon. Primary data were collected directly from the respondents using a self-prepared questionnaire, along with observation and field notes to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. A pre-test was conducted with a small number of respondents to ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions. The collected data were analyzed using statistical tools such as mean and standard deviation with the help of SPSS software. This methodological approach helped in systematically understanding both the cultural and psychosocial aspects of eating habits.

Analysis and Interpretation

Distribution of the personal demographic of the respondents

Sl. No	Variables	Category	No	Mean	SD
1	Age	18–20	29	21.45	3.82
		21–22	14	20.10	4.24
		23–24	8	19.60	4.10
		Above 24	1	18.90	3.95
2	Birth Order	First	43	21.50	3.70
		Second	9	20.20	4.10
		Others	3	19.80	4.50
3	Occupation	Student	44	21.30	3.85
		Others	11	20.00	4.20
4	Family Type	Nuclear	29	21.40	3.75
		Joint	23	20.80	4.00
		Others	3	19.50	4.30

- 68% more than half of respondents were aged 21–26years
72% of the respondents belonged to low & middle socio-economic background
65% more than half of respondents had education below higher secondary level
- 78% of the respondents reported peer influence affects behavior. 75% of the respondents experienced family conflicts
- 70% of the respondents faced financial problems 88% maximum number of respondents benefited from group support
- 85% maximum number of respondents identified emotional triggers. 82% maximum number of respondents showed low self-esteem
- 90% near to 100% of respondents experienced psychological stress 92% near to 100% of respondents positively to counselling

Distribution of dependent variables of the study

Sl. No	Variables	Category	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Psychological Factors	Low concentration	16	29.1%
		Emotional Eating	43	78.2%

		Body Image concern	25	45.5%
		Stress and anxiety	17	30.9%
		Lack of appetite control	39	70.9%
2	Social Factors	Peer pressure	44	80.0%
		Media exposure	24	43.6%
		Academic Stress	16	29.1%
		Family Influence	8	14.5%
		Lifestyle changes	30	54.5%

The above table shows how different factors influence respondents' eating behavior.

Peer Pressure (80.0%) has the highest percentage, indicating that a majority of respondents are influenced by their friends or social circle in shaping their eating habits. This suggests that social environments play a dominant role in food choices.

Lifestyle Changes (54.5%) is the second highest category, showing that more than half of the respondents experience changes in eating patterns due to mood, routine, or daily habits. This reflects the impact of modern lifestyles on dietary behavior. Media Exposure (43.6%) indicates that a considerable proportion of respondents are influenced by online content, advertisements, or food trends. However, its impact is moderate compared to peer influence.

Academic Stress (29.1%) shows that nearly one-third of respondents tend to change their eating habits when stressed, suggesting that stress-related eating is present but not as dominant.

Family Influence (14.5%) has the lowest percentage, indicating that fewer respondents are affected by family-related factors in their eating behavior compared to other influences.

Suggestion

- Promote nutrition awareness among young people through regular education programs.

- Encourage families to maintain regular meal patterns and healthy food practices.
- Strengthen positive peer influence to support healthy eating habits.
- Provide healthy food options in schools and colleges.
- 5. Reduce the consumption of fast food and processed items.
- 6. Increase awareness about the impact of media on food choices.
- 7. Address stress and emotional issues through counseling and support.
- 8. Encourage community participation in promoting healthy lifestyles.
- 9. Support government nutrition programs and ensure their proper implementation.
- 10. Promote traditional, nutritious, and locally available foods.

Conclusion

The study shows that psychosocial factors in shaping the dietary behavior of youth. The analysis reveals that peer pressure (80.0%) is the most significant factor influencing respondents' eating behavior, followed by lifestyle changes (54.5%) and media exposure (43.6%). This indicates that social interactions and modern lifestyle patterns strongly shape food choices. In contrast, academic stress (29.1%) has a moderate influence, while family influence (14.5%) plays a relatively minor role in affecting eating habits. Overall, the findings suggest that external social and environmental factors (especially peer pressure and lifestyle changes) have a greater impact compared to internal or family-related influences. Thus, it can be concluded that improving eating behavior requires greater focus on social awareness, healthy lifestyle practices, and responsible media influence.

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