

FACTORS AFFECTING EATING HABITS OF AMONG ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Malnutrition is not the same thing as hunger, although they often go together. People who are chronically malnourished lack the nutrients needed for proper health and development. Someone can be malnourished for a long or short period of time, and the condition may be mild or severe. People who are malnourished are more likely to get sick and, in severe cases, might die. Good nutrition is the bedrock of lifelong health, and it begins in infancy. Healthy eating can stabilize children's energy, sharpen their minds, and even out their moods, unfortunately, kids are bombarded by message that can counteract efforts. Between peer pressure and the constant television commercials for junk foods, getting children to eat well might seem more futile than fruitful. Eating becomes a social activity in this stage of life. Your kids probably spend more time in school than they do at home, eat meals at friend's houses; and adopt eating habits from their peers. It can be difficult to ensure they are getting adequate nutrition when you are not around to monitor their choices, so try to maintain regular family mealtimes. **Objective:** This study aimed to determine the extent of influence of the factors affecting the eating habits of among elementary students of Al-Quwayiyah, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. **Methods:** Descriptive method of quantitative research was used by the researcher involving 284 students from the different elementary schools of Al-Quwayiyah, Riyadh. A simple random sampling was used to determine the sample size and utilized 5% margin of error. Arabic translated self-questionnaire was used to determine the extent of influence of the factors affecting the eating habits of the students. A four-point scale was employed in the questionnaire with its descriptive equivalence. Chronbach's Alpha determined that the questionnaire has a reliability status with 0.79 results and was translated and validated by different lecturers and professors working in College of Applied Medical Sciences, Shaqra University. **Results:** Family factors garnered the highest weighted mean which is 3.36 interpreted as always influential. Social or peer factor resulted to seldom influential which has 2.95 weighted mean and lastly Media factor is sometimes influential with an average weighted mean of 2.57. **Conclusion** Family factor was claimed by the respondents to have the greatest influence in affecting their eating habits. While, social and media factor were considered the second most influential in affecting the eating habits of the respondents.

KEYWORDS: Eating Habits, Factors Influencing, Malnutrition.

INTRODUCTION

Obesity is a major global public health problem.^[1] It is the cause of variety of health problems that are considered chronic in nature which in turn are the primary drivers of healthcare spending, disability and deaths. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes childhood obesity as a significant challenge of the 21st century as the number of overweight children under the age of five is projected to be more than 42 million. In Saudi Arabia, it has been documented that in the period from 1998 to 2005, the prevalence of obesity among adolescents increased significantly.^[2,3]

Malnutrition is not the same thing as hunger, although they often go together. People who are chronically malnourished lack the nutrients needed for proper health and development. Someone can be malnourished for a long or short period of time, and the condition may be mild or severe. People who are malnourished are more likely to get sick and, in severe cases, might die. Good nutrition is the bedrock of lifelong health, and it begins in infancy. Healthy eating can stabilize children's energy, sharpen their minds, and even out their moods, unfortunately, kids are bombarded by message that can counteract efforts.

Family Factors, since parents provide food for their household, they have a huge influence on their child's diet and eating habits. Parents and caregivers influence children's eating through the type of foods they provide, how meals are structured, their parenting style, role modeling and the family and social environment.

Social Influence, Even at a young age, peers and friends significantly affect a child's diet. When children spend time with peers at home, school or day care, they pay close attention to what their friends eat. In fact, a study published in journal "Health Education Research" in 2000 noted that "Students reported peer influence as a reason for not eating fruit, juice and vegetables and low-fat foods" in addition kids probably spend more time in school that they do at home, eat meals at friend's house and adopt eating habits.^[4] Children clearly value the opinions of their peers and this extends to food choices made within the school environment. Choices are often guided by social opinions while peer group patterns are seen with trends at the school canteen. Children face a conflict between the balance of foods and the type they eat at school in the face of peer judgment and criticism as going against the "the crowd", risks in some case, social isolation because of food choices.^[5]

Media; Marketing plays an important role in nearly every aspect of life, from the cars we drive to the clothes we wear and the foods we eat. In fact, a study published on the focus on the family website reported that "television strongly influences what children less than 12 years old eat." The site adds that "kids who watch more than three hours of TV per day are 50 percent more likely to be obese than kids who watch fewer than two hours." But it's not just television. Magazine, radio commercials, food packaging and store displays also influence children. And since marketers focus on junk foods and fast-food restaurants, these unhealthy foods can look glamorous and tempting youngster.^[6]

One study demonstrated that media advertising does influence children's choices and parents can also affect this but the latter was perhaps less than the researchers were expecting. They have suggested that whilst the media can negatively influence choices that it could also have a positive effect if it was used to promote healthy choices.^[7] Spending time watching TV can take time away from healthy activities like active outside with friend, eating dinner together as a family or reading. TV time also takes away from participating in sports, music, art or other activities that require practice to become skillful. Most of the studies showed how TV affect kids sleep, weight grades, behavior and more suggest that greater time spent watching TV are linked to increase body weight, among both children and adult. This may be a result of replacing more active pursuit with sedentary screen time or eating greater amounts of food due to playing attention to the screen rather that what they are eating.^[8]

Marketing creates desire for many less-than-nutritious foods. Snack foods-marketed not for their nutritional value, but for their fun and taste-often replace the more nutritious foods in our diets. Marketing also caters to a busy lifestyle; grocery store shelves are crowded with frozen and microwaveable meals, instant soup and stews, and pre-packaged lunches. These foods usually contain few fruits and vegetables and are often high in fat and salt. Marketing often targets children by using tie-ins between movie, fast-food restaurants, and toys.^[9]

Children then pressure their parents to visit certain restaurants and buy foods for them based not on their nutritional content but in whether they can obtain a desired toy moreover according to, today, most of the food advertisements focus on kids, why? These companies know exactly what kids want to eat and drink. They are skilled in persuading the kids to eat their food marketing to children in the twenty first century, the products of various brand with favorite character, for example, Shrek is associated with Kellogg's stop selling marshmallows fruit loop cereals and so on.

Significant discrepancy among pupils who are active and are involved in activities and those are laid back are mostly dormant. This is probably due to the advent of electronics in 20th century. Where the abundance of high technology gadgets makes individuals move less and less. This may also be due to the lack of playmates or friends to mingle with; parents do not want their children to leave the house for safety reason and the convenience of technology, moreover according to researcher from Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston study led by Dr. Alison E. Field, found that boys and girls who made a lot of effort to look like media figures were more likely to worry about weight and be prone to chronic dieting.^[8]

Media is one of the factors that has been identified by the researchers and this articles regarding this factor would serve as a basis and evidence that this would be a influential factor, and the researcher would like to determine the extent of this factor especially that technology for today is highly advancing, the researcher include also to determine if it would be beneficiary or not to the part of the child.

One of the effective strategies to improve health status of children is developing collaboration between schools and homes. Bonhauseret, described schools in general as an effective avenue for promoting health Schools are significant primary points of contact for children and their families. Health promoting school's initiative recognizes that parent's awareness could be improved through school systems, as schools can be avenue for accessing parents and communities as whole. Health promoting schools should strive to improve the health of school personnel, families, and community members as well as students and work with community leaders to help them understand how the community contributes to or undermines, health and education.^[10]

Al-Hazaa et al, found out that obese Saudi children were less active than non-obese Saudi children.^[11] This was seconded by another study in another region wherein they argued that environment might be a factor as they found significant difference between children living in rural desert. Extent was defined on the research as degree to which the factors that were identified extends. The capacity or power of persons or things to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behavior, opinions, etc., of others while factors were defined as one of the elements contributing to a particular result or situation. Eating habits refers to why and how people eat, which foods they eat, and with whom they eat, as well as the ways people obtain, store, use, and discard food.

A comprehensive approach must be undertaken by concerned personnel who involve a multi-level strategy starting from home including raising the awareness of parents regarding obesity issues.^[12] Therefore, in the present study, we measure the extent of influence of the factors affecting the eating habits of elementary students in Al-Quwayiyah, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Participants

This was a descriptive study carried out in Al-Quwayiyah, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. With an estimated

population of 100,067 children. Almost all have the access of being enrolled in different schools situated in the city. Schools were assigned randomly using accessible schools nearby the center of the city. A total of 284 students from chosen schools participated in the study taken from grades 1-4 of each school.

Procedures

A self-made questionnaire was used for data collection with inquiries regarding the extent of influence of the factors that were enumerated as per factor stated. The Arabic version which was translated by lecturers and professors of the College of Applied Medical Sciences of Shaqra University was utilized in order to fit the language of students. To determine the extent of influence of the factors affecting the eating habits of students, the researcher applied the weighted mean formula. The four-point Likert scale indicated the extent of influential factors such as family/parents; social/peer group and media affecting the eating habits of the four (4) Elementary Schools of Al-Quwayiyah, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Using the descriptive equivalents and symbols to categorize the 4-3-2-1 numerical values.

The statistical limits served as the equivalent range of scores to describe results of the computed mean values.

Table 1: Statistical Limits.

Extent of influential factors affecting the eating habits of the pupils		
Numerical Values	Statistical Limits	Descriptive Equivalent
4	3.25 – 4.00	Always
3	2.50 - 3.24	Sometimes
2	1.75 - 2.49	Seldom
1	1.00 - 1.74	Never

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2. Extent of Influence of Family Factor (n=284).

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I eat together with my parents.	3.62	Always
2. My parents prepare food for me.	3.46	Always
3. I am satisfied with the food that my parents prepare.	3.22	Sometimes
4. My parents influence my food choice.	2.88	Sometimes
5. I enjoy eating together with my family.	3.62	Always
Average Weighted Mean	3.36	Always

Table 2, shows the extent of family as factor affecting the eating habits of the respondents. Generally, results show that respondents claimed family has the greatest influence in their eating habits. This was disclosed by the general weighted mean of 3.36. Among the identified indicators, respondents claimed always in eating together with parents, enjoying eating together with family and parents are the ones preparing their food. This was shown by the weighted mean of 3.62, 3.62 and 3.46, respectively. On the other hand, respondents claimed sometimes in terms of satisfaction with the food their

parents prepare and parents influencing their food choice, as shown by weighted mean of 3.22 and 2.88, respectively.

Table 3: Extent of influence of Social/Peer Group factor n=284.

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I eat with my classmates in school during break time.	3.34	Always
2. I'm tempted to buy the same kind of food that my friends purchase.	2.31	Seldom
3. I eat healthy foods such as bread and fruits like my classmates or friends.	3.39	Always
4. I eat foods given or offered by my classmates or friends.	3.33	Always
5. I convince my parents to buy the same food I see from my classmates or friends.	2.38	Seldom
Average weighted mean	2.95	Sometimes

In accordance to Table 3, the highest overall is item no.3 with a weighted mean of 3.39 which implies "I eat healthy food such as bread and fruits like my classmates or friends" and interpreted as always influential. Hence, this only proves that most of the respondents from Al-Quwayiyah elementary are tend to be influenced when it comes to food preferences; it is because of belongingness and acceptance in the group. Peers are people that a child, adolescent or adult identifies with. A peer can influence, persuade and coerce you to do certain things or act a certain way in order to be accepted. Even though often perceived as negative, peer pressure can also affect a person in a positive manner.^[13]

Meanwhile item no. 5 has the lowest weighted mean of 2.38 which denotes that "I convince my parents to buy the same food I see from my classmates or friends" with an interpretation of seldom. From what was shown, the respondents are not that interested to ask their parents to buy the same product like what their friends have, due to

the reason that they don't have much of the time with their friends, but rather staying in touch more with their families, who can influence more on their lifestyle and belief in choosing food preference, although friends affect kids quite a bit, and kids spend few hours with their families as they grow older, I'm sure that good family relationship, good role modeling from parents and have high self-esteem are really important in enabling kids to stick to what they know is better for their health. Thus, the finding corroborates with the study on how peers influence the eating habits of children. When children spend time with friends at home, school, they pay close attention to what their friends eat. In fact, a study published in journal Health Education Research in 2000 "Child-reported family and peer influences on fruit, juice and vegetable consumption: reliability and validity of measures" noted that students reported peer influence as a reason for eating or not eating meals.^[14] As a result of the study, peers are only sometimes influential which negates the researcher's hypothesis.

Table 4: Extent of influence of media factor n=284.

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I convince my parents to buy the food I see on TV commercials.	2.33	Seldom
2. Popular artist endorsing certain kind of food are effective in influencing my food choice.	2.55	Sometimes
3. I suggest food/ beverages I see in the magazines to my parents.	2.51	Sometimes
4. I enjoy eating while watching the television/ listening to the music	2.86	Sometimes
5. Food commercials from television, radio and magazines catch my attention.	2.59	Sometimes
Average weighted mean	2.57	Sometimes

In Table 4, shows the extent of influence of media as influential factor on affecting the eating habits of respondents. Generally, respondents considered media as second most influential factor affecting their eating habits, as manifested by average weighted mean of 2.57. In regard to the identified indicators for media factor, respondents considered sometimes the popular artist

endorsing certain kind of food are effective in influencing their food choice, suggesting food/ beverages they see in the magazines to their parents and enjoying eating while watching the television/ listening to the music. However, it is noted that that respondents perceived seldom in convincing their parents to buy the food they see on TV commercials.^[14]

Table 5: Summary of extent of influence of influential factors on the eating habits of the respondents.

Factors	Weighted Mean	Description
Family	3.36	Always
Social / Peer group	2.95	Sometimes
Media	2.57	Sometimes

Table 5, summarizes the extent of influence of influential factors on the eating habits of the respondents. As could be gleaned, family factor emerged to have the greatest

influence in the eating habits of the respondents, as supported by mean of 3.36. On the other hand, social and media factor seconded the influence in the eating habits

of the respondents. As such the hypothesis that the extent of the influential factors is always influential since these are highly prevalent factors that affects a child's eating habit is only true to family factor.

CONCLUSION

Family factor was claimed by the respondents to have the greatest influence in affecting their eating habits. While, social and media factor were considered the second most influential in affecting the eating habits of the respondents. Family factor was claimed by the respondents from grades 1 and 4 to have the greatest influence in affecting their eating habits. While, grades 2 and 3 respondents considered family as second most influential factor affecting their eating habits. For social factor, regardless of grade level, respondents considered it as second most influence affecting their eating habits. For media factor respondents from grades 1, 2 and 3 considered it as second most influence affecting their eating habits. While, Grade 4 respondents perceived it as often influential in affecting their eating habits.

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