



DIETARY PRACTICES AMONG THE MEDICAL STUDENTS OF SHEIKH ZAYED MEDICAL COLLEGE, RAHIM YAR KHAN

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ABSTRACT

Medical students & undergraduates are potentially important targets for promotion of health & dietary lifestyles as this reduces the risks of lifestyle-related and preventable disorders and diseases later in life. This cross-sectional study examined and assessed the knowledge and practice of dietary habits of the medical university students.

Objective: The main objective of our study was to assess the dietary habits of the medical students of Sheikh Zayed Medical College Rahim Yar Khan, regarding junk foods.

Methodology: Study design used was cross-sectional type. Study subject was "Medical students of 4th Year MBBS" of Sheikh Zayed Medical College. A sample size of 50 people from among the medical students was selected using "Convenient sampling method". The study took place in Sheikh Zayed Medical College from March 2022 to April 2022. Questionnaire form was formulated by the students of 4th Year MBBS students of Batch A with the help of their supervisor. Before starting the collection of data, consent was taken from all study subjects. All the data was recorded on the questionnaire forms. It had the variables age, gender, residence, parent's education, parent's occupation, frequency of meals, eating habits regarding frequency of junk food consumption & types of junk food. The data was entered on IBM SPSS Statistics Software Version-26.

Results: Among the different variables studied showed that the mean age of students was 22 years (SD 1.06), male students were 21 (42%) and female students were 29 (58%) corresponding to the actual male to female ratio in this medical school. The majority of students (84%) were hostelites. And majority of students (84%) came from a well-educated background. It was seen that the majority of students (58%) ate two meals per day, breakfast being the most commonly skipped meal. All the students (100%) ate junk foods. And the majority of students (46%) consumed junk foods 1-2 times per week. The most commonly consumed junk foods were fast foods (70%) and fried foods (68%).

Conclusion: Our study showed that all of the students were taking junk foods weekly and more than two-thirds were consuming junk foods up to 4 times a week. Additionally, the most common type of junk food that was consumed by students was fast foods and fried foods. This study highlights the presence of unhealthy eating behaviours in medical students.

Key Words: Dietary habits, medical students, junk food, lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION

The burden of non-communicable diseases is increasing globally and poses a major public health concern, a large part of which is preventable. These diseases have been strongly associated with unhealthy lifestyle habits, including inappropriate nutrition, lack of exercise, smoking, alcohol consumption, caffeine overuse and improper sleeping habits. Inappropriate nutrition and inactivity increase the risk of diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity and cardiovascular diseases (Sajwani et al., 2009)¹. Healthy eating is one of the most substantial means of enhancing health. A healthy diet includes a balance of natural and fresh foods, a lot of fruits and vegetables, and foods containing minerals and vitamins. It also involves behaviors and eating habits that are consistent, which is beneficial for supporting and maintaining both physical and psychological health². Dietary and health habits in any population might be a clue for the general wellbeing and the magnitude of their risks to have the lifestyle disorders like obesity, type 2 diabetes mellitus, dyslipidemia, smoking, related lung problems, hypertension and coronary heart disease, which are collectively are the main cause of death over all the countries. Dietary habits; quality and quantity of the food constitute a major rule in the process of pathogenesis of the above mentioned disorders (Al-Qahtani, 2016)³⁻⁴.

Healthy eating is affected by various individual and collective (social and environmental) factors. In Pakistan, eating patterns have altered considerably during the past few decades because of a fast-rising socioeconomic status at government and population levels. These marked lifestyle changes have affected different age groups, especially the adult students transitioning from schools to universities experience difficulties adhering to healthy eating habits due to lack of time and stressors, and instead, they skip meals, eat unhealthy snacks, dine out, and consume fast food (Alzahrani et al., 2020)⁵⁻⁶. Medical students are expected to possess good eating patterns and have a healthy lifestyle because they have more medical knowledge regarding healthy eating patterns. As such, they are expected to act as role models for their peers in terms of the application of healthy eating patterns. Although behaviors of students are considered a temporary part of college life. however, unhealthy habits picked up at this level generally persist in adult life. College life is an important stage for individuals as at this time their behaviors are conducive to change. University and college arenas, therefore, represent an important opportunity for health and nutritional education (Sajwani et al., 2009)⁷. A study in China showed that medical students had risk factors for chronic diseases due to bad eating patterns (Sakamaki et al., 2005)⁸. Although medical students possess enough knowledge about healthy dietary patterns, they appear incapable of putting this knowledge into practice. The stress of university life and medical studies negatively affects their dietary patterns. Medical education is considered the most academically and emotionally demanding training program. The time and emotional commitments medical students must devote to their training are extensive, and such stress has a negative impact on students' psychological health (Alzahrani et al., 2020)⁹. Many researchers studied the prevalence and impact of the dietary habits and life style of medical university students in Saudi Arabia, almost all of them showed that the dietary habits and life style in those students is not healthy and not following the international guidelines requirement (Al-Qahtani, 2016)¹⁰⁻¹¹. Healthy dietary habits among medical students are important because they are the future physicians, and students who personally ignore adopting a healthy lifestyle are more likely to fail to establish health-promoting opportunities for their patients. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the baseline nutritional and life style habits of medical students and to assess eating patterns with a focus on frequency & types of junk food consumption by the medical students.

METHODOLOGY

This Cross-sectional study was conducted among 4 Year MBBS students of SZMC, Rahim yar Khan from March 2022 to April 2022. A total of 50 were selected by convenient sampling technique.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Medical students from 4th Year MBBS in SZMC who consented to take part in the research project and opted to fill the questionnaire.
2. Both male and female students.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Those who didn't want to participate.

Data was collected on a predesigned questionnaire that was formulated by the students of Batch A with the help of their supervisor. The Questionnaire was distributed among the 4th Year MBBS medical students of SZMC RYK. The questionnaire collected variables such as age, gender, residence, parent's education, parent's occupation, frequency of meals, eating habits regarding frequency of junk food consumption & types of junk food. Ethical approval was sought from ethical review board of Sheikh Zayed Medical College, Rahim Yar Khan.

The data was entered and analyzed by using IBM SPSS Statistics Software Version-26. Numerical variables like age were presented as mean, median, mode and range.

RESULTS

Table-I shows that the mean age of the students (50) under study was 22 years, with a standard deviation of 1.06 years. Standard error of mean was recorded as 0.15. And median and mode was found to be 22 years. Table-I summarizes the descriptive statistics of students' age.

Table-1: Descriptive Statistics of Age of Students

Age	Number
Mean	22
Std. Error of Mean	0.15
Median	22
Mode	22
Std. Deviation	1.06

Figure-1: Sex Distribution of the Students

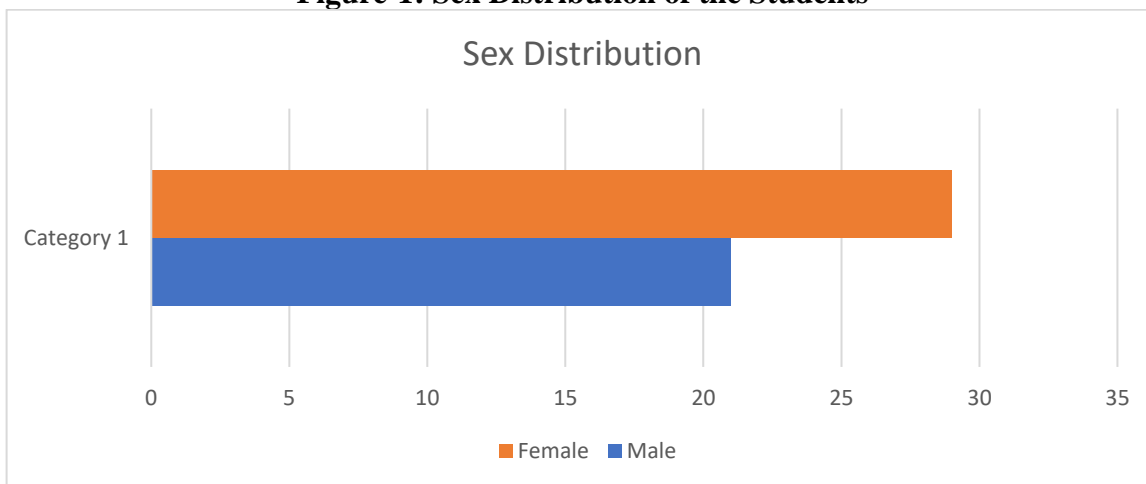


Figure-I shows that the majority of the students were female. Out of the population size (50) under study, 21 students were male (42%) while 29 students were female (58%). Figure-I summarizes the sex distribution of the students.

Table-II: Residence of Students

Residence	Frequency	Percent
Host elite	42	84
Day Scholar	8	16
Total	50	100

Table-II shows that the majority of students (84%) were host elites whereas only a few students (16%) were day scholars. Table-II summarizes the residence of the students under study.

Table-III shows that the majority of students (84%) came from a well-educated background. Whereas 4% had a parent that only held primary education and 12% had a parent that passed matriculation.

Table-III: Students' Fathers Education and Occupation Level

Father's Education	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	0	0
Primary	2	4
Matric	6	12
Fsc & above	42	84
Total	50	100
Father's Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Laborer	8	16
Government Servent	22	44
Private Job	14	28
Businessman	5	10
Landlord	1	2
Total	50	100

Table-III shows that 44% of the students came from a family of government servants which was the most common of the students under study. 28% had parents in the private sector. 16% of students came from a laboring family. 10% of students came from a businessmen family. And 2% were from a landlord family.

Table-IV: Students Eating Habits (frequency of meals) and Students Eating Habits (if they eat junk food)

Number of meals per Day	Frequency	Percent
One	1	2
Two	29	58
Three	17	34
Four or above	3	6
Total	50	100
Eating Junk food	Frequency	Percent
Yes	50	100
No	0	0
Total	50	100

Table-IV shows that the majority of students (58%) were recorded to be eating only two meals per day. 34% of students ate three meals a day, 6% ate 4 or more meals per day, and 2% of the students under study ate only one meal per day. Table-V summarizes the eating of habits of the students in regards to frequency of meals per day.

Table-V: Students Eating Habits (eating frequency of junk foods) per week and Students Eating Habits (types of junk food)

Eating frequency of Junk Food per week	Frequency	percent
1-2	23	46
3-4	12	24
5 & above	15	30
Total	50	100
Types of Junk Food	Frequency	Percent
Fried Food	34	68
Soft Drink	28	56
Fast Food	35	70
Bakery items	30	60
Other Junk Food Item	29	58

Table-V shows that the majority of students (46%) were recorded to be eating junk food 1-2 times per week. 24% of students ate junk food 3-4 times a week, whereas 30% ate junk food on a daily basis i.e., 5 or more times a week. Table-VII summarizes the eating of habits of the students in regards to eating frequency of junk food per week.

Table-V shows that 70% of the medical students under study consumed fast foods. Whereas 68% were reported to consume fried foods. 60% of the students ate bakery items. 58% ate other junk foods (like, dhai bhalla, chaat etc.). And 56% of the students drank soft drinks. Table-VIII summarizes the eating habits of the students in regards to types of junk food consumption.

DISCUSSION

The results of our study showed that even though medical students had a superior knowledge of healthy lifestyle and nutrition, there is a lack of health consciousness amongst the medical student population. This has also been observed in other studies where students were practicing unhealthy dietary habits and made inappropriate choices in hypothetical scenarios (Sajwani et al., 2009)¹⁰⁻¹¹.

In our study, most students (84%) were hostilities. And the majority of students (84%) came from a well-educated background. Yet, all of the students ate junk foods. This was found to be consistent with Al- Qahtani, 2016. According to it, majority (90%) of the medical students came from well-educated backgrounds and yet had unhealthy dietary habits regardless of their parental education level. In a study conducted in Saudi medical students of the University of Dammam, it was found out that both male and female medical students are having unhealthy dietary habits and both sexes consumed junk foods. with no differentiation in frequency (Al-Qahtani, 2016). This was parallel to the results of our study, in which both sexes also consumed junk foods regularly.

Our study showed that the majority of students (58%) were recorded to be eating only two meals per day. This was found to be similar to studies conducted in Malaysian University medical students (Gan et al., 2011) and King Abdulaziz University (Alzahrani et al., 2020). These studies, showed that majority of the students (62% & 59.5%) ate only two meals per day, respectively.

Our study showed that all of the students were taking junk foods weekly and more than two-thirds (70%) were consuming junk foods up to 4 times a week. This was parallel to the findings in Bede et al., 2020. According to it, all students took junk foods weekly and 73% of the university students were consuming junk foods up to 4 times per week¹².

In our study, the most commonly consumed junk foods were fast foods (70%) and fried foods (68%) out of the different types of junk foods consumed. This was similar to the results found in Alzahrani et al., 2020. Which showed that the majority of the medical students (74.8%) consumed fried and fast foods, also being the most commonly consumed type of junk food among the students¹³.

Although this study revealed a significant outcome, it was not without its limitations. This study targeted a specified target group i.e. students of MBBS so the findings of this study cannot be generalized in all contexts¹⁴⁻¹⁵. Further research can be conducted utilizing multiple groups from

various medical and non-medical universities. A longitudinal study following these students through their university years could be conducted to investigate the changes in their eating behaviors. This would provide insight for the development of effective intervention trials to help improve their eating behaviors¹⁶.

CONCLUSION

Our study showed that all of the students were taking junk foods weekly and more than two-thirds were consuming junk foods up to 4 times a week. Additionally, the most common type of junk food that was consumed by students was fast foods and fried foods. This study highlights the presence of unhealthy eating behaviours among medical students. And shows that the knowledge, attitudes and dietary practices of medical students in SZMC Rahim Yar Khan suggest that a superior knowledge about healthy life style does not necessarily result into better practices.

SUGGESTIONS

It is suggested that health education and dietary health campaigns should be started to control such unhealthy behaviours among the medical students and in general. Medical students need to have strategic intensive university and college- based dietary lifestyle plans and counselling for their nutrition and physical activity which will be reflected on better community health and wellbeing.

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