

Relationship between Teenager's Junk Food Obsession and Body Image

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the correlation between adolescents' preoccupation with junk food and their level of satisfaction with body image. Additionally, this research aims to explore the impact of demographic factors, such as gender, education, and income, on both junk food fixation and body image among teenagers. A study was conducted with a sample size of 180 adolescents, consisting of 84 males and 96 females. The age range of the participants ranged from 13 to 19 years. The adolescents in question exhibit diverse socio-economic backgrounds and possess varying levels of education, ranging from completion of 8th grade to attainment of a bachelor's degree in arts or sciences. Data was collected through a survey that consisted of a series of questions. The findings indicate an inverse association between excessive consumption of junk food and body image. Additionally, it has been observed that males exhibit a higher propensity for fixation compared to females. Subsequently, a notable disparity is observed among students enrolled in SSC, HSSC, and BA-BSc programs regarding their responses to the questionnaire assessing their inclination toward junk food consumption. Finally, a notable disparity exists in body image satisfaction across individuals of varying socioeconomic statuses, specifically those in lower, middle, and upper strata. The prevalence of an unhealthy eating fixation is inversely related to the promotion of a positive body image.

Keywords: Junk food, Body image, Obsession, Teens, Education, Significance

INTRODUCTION

Food is anything that is taken by the body in the form of plants and animals synthesized products. Food helps in maintaining healthy growth and development patterns in individuals. Food is either consumed raw (in the form of salads and fruits) or cooked (in the form of meat and poultry). A complete healthy and balanced diet contains all essential minerals required by the human body. Junk food is that which has a high value of calories

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and less nutrition (Andrew, 2006). It has excessive amounts of fats and carbohydrates, but very few proteins and minerals. One of the factors of trigger the use of junk food is that people do not feel satisfied, and this results in practices of overeating. Teenagers are very fond of eating junk food like Pizzas, burgers, fries, rolls, fried items, fizzy drinks, confectionaries, and other related items. These foods contain a very high amount of sugar and sodium content which is harmful for children if used in excess amounts (Michael, Jacobson, Havas, & McCarter, 2013).

Body image is one's perception of oneself. Every individual has their body image and it is perfectly fine to be aware of it. Positive body image produces a sense of optimism about everything whereas negative body image serves as a factor of decreased self-esteem. Junk food conditions the human brain to avoid healthy food and grab more junk. Junk food is designed to satisfy the taste sensation of the human mouth. When a person eats but does not consider the after-effects of that food, they are completely bound by their sensations but later on, they think negatively about their body image. This negative body image leads to low self-esteem, especially in teenagers (Smith & Johnson, 2020).

Jahan et al. (2014) studied 489 individuals and the results showed that people from age 18 – 45 are more prone to junk food intake rather than a vegetable diet. In this study, the weight of individuals was recorded weekly, and it proved that junk food consumers were showing a rapid increase in weight. And they acquire more diseases than vegetable consumers. People do find all types of junk food more fluent and easily available. People find the atmosphere and ambiance of fast-food restaurants more attractive than at home. Junk food is becoming an essential part of a child's diet which should be taken care of by the parents. The restaurants where fast food is available do have a targeted population of young children and busy office people which serves as a great factor in the drift of fast food consumption in Pakistan.

Teenage is an important age of development. In this age, healthy food should be a part of our diet. According to a survey less than 1 % of children are completely taking proper and essential nutrition required by their bodies. The rest of all need proper guidance on food contents as teenagers are a crucial age and all the food and nutrition consumed in this age becomes an essential part of body makeup and helps to execute proper body functioning later in life, (Lee & Chen, 2022). As told by Arya and Mishra (2013) junk food is anything convenient, trendy, and tasty. Junk food is also made more colorful and attractive with its shapes and artificial colors which are harmful to teenagers. Junk food is also serving as the main reason for children becoming obese. As a child becomes fatter, he or she also suffers from more health issues when they grow. Junk food is simply a whole load of trash with lots and lots of calories and a smaller number of good nutrients that are required by the body for healthy growth. Junk food when consumed in the teenage is a major cause of disease and health issues in later adulthood (Brown & Davis, 2018).

Yahya, Zafar, and Shafiq (2013) discussed junk food and concluded that junk food is a fast and trending practice in Pakistani society. Junk food manufacturers do have a targeted population of children and they attract children with advertisements and

associations of junk food with toys and games which are of greater interest. The main agent of increased fast food consumption other than taste is globalization, urbanization, and above all modernization. Fast food is a status symbol considered by people and a way of showing other people that they are more modernized than others. Even though all people do not like fast food and it is also not very common in the joint family system in Pakistan to eat a lot of fast food but still people living in nuclear systems do have a daily habit of consuming fast food. It is people's choice, especially youngsters to spend more money on fast food.

Junk food has created a very obsessed environment that leads to obesity and the rising level of obesity is creating an 'obesogenic' environment that is not good for the health of the public. People who belong to urban or they belong to rural areas have a great practice of consuming fast food either in locally available markets or internationally (Gupta & Patel, 2017). People consider junk food more of a trend than food. The most important factor that has triggered the use of fast food is availability. Fast food restaurants are available everywhere on corners of the streets, roads, airports, bus stands, shopping malls, schools, gas stations, hospitals, and everywhere. Baig and Saeed (2012) found that not very early people used to consider junk food or eating out as a special treat but nowadays it is a very common practice in every family.

This evolution in eating habits also has changed and developed a taste in people for fast food and their likeness of eating out has increased. The first outlet of Kentucky Fried Chicken was opened in Pakistan in 1997 and one year later McDonalds opened their first outlet in 1998. Since then fast food has started to root itself in Pakistani society but now within 10 – 15 years, we have a long chain of fast food available in every big and small city of Pakistan. Just not this, we also have another side of the coin which gives us local fast food brands and replicas of international brands. Jalees and Run (2014) discussed the dual policy of media and showed us how media has greatly influenced the body image of especially females and is now distorting our traditions and norms in Pakistani society. First, we see a lot of junk food advertisements that have changed our perception of food and have forced us to move towards the Western concepts of food and then later show us pencil-thin models and make us suffer from an inferiority complex to become like them. This cycle of temptation and inferiority complex creates a rift of conflicts in the real self and the ideal self.

Khan, Khalid, Khan, and Jabeen (2011) introduced the idea of body image dissatisfaction in female teenagers and found that whether females are very thin or very fat they are not satisfied with their body image. This is because of the increasing impact of media which have provided females with a perfect numerical figure of their body to look beautiful. Today females also want to fit in that numerical value and strive hard for perfection and in the case of not being perfect they suffer from negative body image and if continued for a very long time it also changes into some acute personality or mental disorders. Junk food has become a staple food of the generation.

They are in one way obsessed with junk food and this has resulted in a practice of eating fast food daily even acknowledging the fact that junk food is not healthy. Teenagers are more specified towards Westernized food and are getting detached from their root origin and their traditional and healthy food. On the other hand, media is greatly influencing the factor of body image in teenagers. There is an emerging novel trend of becoming size zero in females and having a perfectly fit and muscular body in males. When they are consuming junk food in such a big amount how can they stay healthy and fit and maintain a proper body figure? So, these two opposite phenomena result in a conflict of self-esteem (Nguyen & Williams, 2019).

Regarding the pervasive preoccupation with junk food, a substantial number of individuals experience the adverse consequences of obesity and various health ailments. As they mature, these individuals are likely to encounter challenges such as changing cholesterol levels and a multitude of other health-related concerns. Extensive research has been conducted about junk food and its detrimental impact on human health. However, the present study diverges from this prevailing focus on health implications, instead directing its attention towards the domain of body image. Extensive research has been conducted about junk food at a worldwide level; however, comparatively limited attention has been given to this topic within the context of Pakistan. This study establishes a correlation between an excessive preoccupation with unhealthy eating and the perception of body image among adolescents.

Objectives

Objectives of the present research are:

- To study the relationship between junk food obsession and body image among teenagers.
- To explore the effects of demographic variables like gender, education and income on junk food obsession and body image among teenagers.

Hypotheses

H 1: There is a relationship between junk food obsession and body image of teenagers.

H 2: Female teenagers have more junk food obsession and negative body image than male teenagers.

H 3: There is a difference among teenagers of SSC, HSSC and B.A/BSc on junk food obsession and body image.

H 4: There is a difference among teenagers of lower, middle and upper socio-economic class on Junk food Obsession and Body image.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Instruments

Junk Food Obsession Questionnaire. It was developed by Yahya, Zafar and Shafiq (2013) to measure the junk food obsession. The scale consists of 30 items. 6 questions are based on demographic information (no options). 24 Questions are based on amount of Obsession of junk food. It is five point likert scale, 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Neutral, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly Disagree. If the scores are high the level of obsession is more.

Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ). Modified version of Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) was used to measure the body image. It was developed by Dowson and Henderson (2001). It consists of 14 items and is a six point rating scale, answer ranging from never to always, where Never= 1, Rarely= 2, Sometimes= 3, Often= 4, Very Often= 5, Always= 6. If the scores obtain on the scale are higher than the dissatisfaction with the body image is higher.

Sample

The sample consist of 180 teenagers (male= 84, females= 19) taken from different schools and colleges of Islamabad. Their age ranges from 13 years to 19 years. Their education or qualification varies from 8th grade to BA-BSc.

Procedure

After getting permission from authorities of schools and colleges, boys and girls were approached. They were asked to fill both questionnaires. Basic purpose and content of questionnaire were explained to them. They were also assured that the information will be kept confidential and used only for research purpose. After getting data, it was analyzed.

RESULTS

Table 1 *Frequency and Percentages of Demographic Variables of the study (N=180)*

Demographic Variables		f	%age
Gender	Male	84	47.00
	Female	95	53.00
Education	SSC	77	43.00
	HSSC	54	30.00
	B.A/BSc	49	27.00

Socioeconomic Class	Lower class	19	11.00
	Middle class	88	49.80
	Upper class	70	39.20

Table 1 indicates the frequency and percentages of demographic variables among gender, academic domains, and three socio-economic classes.

Table 2: Chronbach Alpha Reliability of Junk Food Obsession Questionnaire and Body Shape Questionnaire (N=180)

Scale	No. of items	Alpha Reliability
Junk Food Obsession Questionnaire	24	.65
Body Shape Questionnaire	14	.73

Table 2 shows the reliability of Junk Food Obsession Questionnaire and Body Shape Questionnaire. The reliability of both scales are satisfactory.

Table 3: Correlation between junk food obsession and body image of teenagers (N=180)

	Body image
Junk food obsession	.76***

*** $p < .001$

Table 3 shows the correlation between junk food obsession and body image of teenagers. There is a positive relationship between junk food obsession and body image. As the junk food obsession increases there is also an increase in negative body image among teenagers.

Table 4 Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of male and female teenagers on junk food obsession and body image (N=180)

	Male	Female			95% CI		Cohen's d
	(n=84)	(n=95)	t	P	LL	UL	
	M(SD)	M(SD)					
Junk food obsession	61.21(9.59)	57.87(7.36)	2.63	.009	0.83	5.83	0.39

Body image	34.20(11.72)	33.12(12.46)	0.59	0.55	-2.49	4.65	--
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Table 4 shows the difference between male and female teenagers on junk food obsession and body image. Male teenagers have more junk food obsession (M=61.21, SD=9.59) than female teenagers (M=57.87, SD=7.36). But there is non-significant difference between male and female teenagers on body image.

Table 5 Mean, Standard Deviation and F-value of SSC, HSSC and B.A/BSc students on junk food obsession and body Image (N=180)

	<u>SSC</u>	<u>HSSC</u>	<u>B.A/BSc</u>	95% CI			
	(n=77)	(n=54)	(n=49)	F	p	L.L	U.L
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)				
Junk food obsession	61.66(9.74)	58.87(8.14)	56.55(6.04)	5.71	.004	58.16	60.70
Body image	33.29(11.40)	33.37(12.55)	34.42(12.85)	0.14	.86	31.84	35.40

Table 5 shows the significant difference between students of SSC, HSSC and BA/BSc on Junk Food Obsession Questionnaire. SSC students (M= 61.66, S.D= 9.74) have more obsession than HSSC (M= 58.87, S.D= 8.14) and BA/BSc students (M= 56.55, S.D= 6.04). There is non-significant difference between SSC, HSSC and BA/BSc students on Body Image Questionnaire.

Table 6 Mean, Standard Deviation and F-value of teenagers belonging to lower, middle and upper socio-economic class on junk food obsession and body image (N=180)

	<u>Lower</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Upper</u>	95% CI			
	(n=19)	(n=88)	(n=70)	F	p	L.L	U.L
	M(S.D)	M(S.D)	M(S.D)				
Junk food obsession	56.73(8.23)	59.60(8.09)	59.93(9.28)	1.07	0.34	58.16	60.70
Body image	39.63(14.53)	31.55(11.35)	34.56(11.82)	3.97	0.02	31.84	35.40

Table 6 shows significant difference between teenagers belonging to lower, middle and upper socio-economic class on Body Image Questionnaire. Teenagers of lower socio-economic class ($M=39.63$, $S.D= 14.53$) have more negative body image than teenagers of middle ($M= 31.55$, $S.D= 11.35$) and upper socio-economic class ($M= 34.56$, $S.D= 11.82$). There is a non-significant difference between teenagers on junk food obsession.

DISCUSSION

Today's generation is Junk food obsessed; especially teenagers show more Junk food obsession than any other age group. The age range for teenagers is 13 to 19 years. Body image is your perception about their self. Positive body image creates a sense of optimism whereas negative body image creates a stir of low self-esteem. Junk food also serves as a bad agent for health. People suffer from a lot of health issues after consumption of fast food. There is a difference of levels of obsessions and concerns of body image in males and females. The negative body image is a result of media influence on teenagers. There is also a marked difference in the relationship of socio economic status and educational values with obsession and body image. This research uses a close ended questionnaire for the measurement of obsession and level of satisfaction of body image. This is a cross-sectional study, and it provides us with results that prove the association between junk food obsession and level of satisfaction with body image.

According to the first hypothesis, there is a relationship between junk food obsession and body image. The result shows that there is a negative relationship between junk food obsession and body image. As the junk food obsession increases there is also an increase in the negative body image among teenagers. It is consistent with previous literature as junk food makes one obese and shapeless. And then these people are not satisfied and happy about how they look so they develop a negative body image (Goswami, Sachdeva, & Sachdeva, 2012).

According to the second hypothesis, female teenagers have more junk food obsession and negative body image than male teenagers. Nevertheless, results showed that Male teenagers have more junk food obsession than female teenagers. However, there is non-significant difference between male and female teenagers on body image. It can be due to the reasons of small sample size and culture differences. The earlier studies were conducted in a different demographic area and we have the results of Pakistani society. The cause of this difference can be the male dominant Pakistani society. As males are more outgoing so they have more chances of eating fast food either they go for school, colleges, offices or they travel they have more chances of consumption of fast food. They have an availability of finding junk food restaurants in every nook and corner of streets. They are more prone to junk food (Baig & Saeed, 2012).

According to third hypothesis there will be a difference on junk food obsession and body image among students of SSC, HSSC and B.A- BSc. Result shows that SSC students have more obsession than HSSC and BA- BSc. It is consistent with previous literature as according to a survey only less than 1 % of children exist who are completely

taking proper and essential nutrition required by their body (Akman et al., 2010). As the students of SSC are mostly fresh teenagers (Age 13, 14, 15) so they are more inclined to junk food. They have less restrictions than children below teenage.

According to forth hypothesis there will be a difference of Junk food Obsession and Body image among students belonging to different socio-economic status. The results shows that lower socio-economic status teenagers have more negative body image than middle socio-economic status and upper socio-economic status. It is consistent with the previous literature as the main agent of increase fast food consumption other than taste is globalization, urbanization and above all modernization. Fast food is a status symbol considers by people and a way of showing other people that they are more modernized than others. Mostly people belonging from lower socio-economic status believe that eating fast food very often makes them more of modernized and shows them rich (Yahya et al., 2013).

Limitations and Suggestions

- Sample size is small. A large number of population should have been used.
- Sample collected only from teenagers of Islamabad. Samples should also be collected from other cities.
- The extraneous variables were uncontrollable. If the study would have been taken place in a proper setting so the diet could have been properly controlled.

Implication

This study can be proved beneficial for schools, colleges and universities which could teach teenagers to be less obsessed about junk food and help them to achieve a satisfaction level of their body image. The teenagers should be taught to be happy and satisfied about what they are and help them improve in near future. The results could also acknowledge people about the changing trend of junk food in Pakistani society. This study can motivate teenagers to decrease their obsession of junk food and maintain a healthy diet.

CONCLUSION

Junk food has been proven bad for the health of people belonging to any age group. Junk food has very bad effects on the physical and psychological health of people. Junk food obsession has created a drastic change in eating habits of teenagers and these habits also lead to a negative psychological outcome. People are more than concerned about their body image and this concern leads to negative or positive attitude of body image. If people are more positive they feel confident and optimistic about if they are negative about their body image so they have a low self-esteem and lack confidence. As the junk food obsession increases there is also an increase in negative attitude of body image.

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