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The Relationship Between Lifestyle and Eating Behaviors in College Students

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INTRODUCTION

- College students moving away from home have been found to consume more alcohol, high sugar and fast food, and have a significant reduction in intake of healthier options (Papadaki et al., 2007).
- According to a study conducted in Canada, university students’ eating behaviors are highly influenced by several lifestyle factors (Jackson et al., 2009).

Hypotheses:

- Individuals that drive to campus, have higher stress levels, or spend more time per day on campus and/or studying will have poorer eating habits.
- Those who walk or bike to campus and rate themselves as having higher levels of physical activity will have healthier eating habits.
- Students living on campus or off-campus with other students will have poorer eating habits than those living at home.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

- 49 college students recruited through psychology subject pool
- Mean Age = 18.43 ($SD = 0.79$)
- Predominantly female (82%)
- Predominantly Caucasian (71%)

Procedure

- Participants completed an online survey that contained questions on demographics, lifestyle questions, eating habits, stress level and physical activity.
- Conducted on Qualtrics in a computer lab on campus.

Measures

- Lifestyle questions**
 - Place of residency
 - If they live with roommates
 - Transportation to campus
 - Time spent on campus
 - Time spent studying
- Eating Behavior Questions**
- Perceived Stress Scale** (Cohen et al., 1983)
- Physical activity questionnaire** (Godin, 2011)

TABLE 1

Pearson’s Correlation: Testing relationship between hours spent per day on campus and eating habits.

Hours on campus per day	Fast food per week	Alcohol per week	Lunches from campus per week	Breakfasts from campus per week	Dinners from campus per week
	.23	.03	.05	.10	.31*
Hours on campus per day	Home cooked meals per week	Snacks per day	Cups of water per day	Caffeine per day	“Sugary” drinks per day
	-.24	.33*	-.17	.19	.24

TABLE 2

One-way Analysis of Covariance: Measuring the differences between participants’ eating habits based on whether they live on campus, off campus, or at home.

	On Campus <i>M (SD)</i>	Off Campus <i>M (SD)</i>	At Home <i>M (SD)</i>
Fast food	2.06 (1.74)	2.50 (2.12)	2.00 (1.25)
Alcohol	.81 (1.84)	.00 (.00)	1.00 (3.16)
Lunches	5.64 (3.74)	.00 (.00)	1.20 (1.99)
Breakfasts	2.97 (2.62)	.50 (.71)	.00 (.00)
Dinners	5.14 (2.28)	.50 (.71)	.50 (1.08)
Home cooked meals	1.84 (3.35)	4.50 (3.54)	7.33 (6.33)
Snacks per day	2.40 (1.54)	1.50 (.71)	2.44 (2.01)
Cups of water	3.95 (2.26)	5.00 (.00)	4.60 (3.09)
Servings of caffeine	1.30 (1.93)	1.00 (1.41)	.40 (.69)
“Sugary” drinks	1.69 (2.34)	2.00 (1.41)	.90 (.99)

RESULTS

- There was a significant difference in lunches ($p = .048$) and dinners ($p = .009$) obtained per week on campus based on commute types. Those who walked to campus obtained more on-campus lunches ($M = 5.52, SD = 4.37$) and dinners ($M = 4.81, SD = 2.35$) than those who drove ($M = 2.47, SD = 3.00; M = 2.20, SD = 3.12$, respectively).
- A significant difference was also found between groups for home-cooked meals per week ($p = .049$). Those who drove consumed more home-cooked meals per week ($M = 5.36, SD = 5.91$) than those who walked ($M = 2.19, SD = 3.75$).
- Stress levels and time spent studying had no significant impact on eating behaviors.
- There was a significant positive correlation between hours spent on campus per day and dinners obtained on campus per week and snacks consumed per day, as shown in Table 1.
- Levels of physical activity had no significant impact on eating behaviors.
- Those who lived on-campus obtained significantly more breakfasts, lunches, and dinners on campus than those who lived off-campus and at home.
- Those who lived at-home consumed significantly more home-cooked meals a week than those who lived on-campus.

DISCUSSION

- Home-cooked meals are considered healthy eating habits (Mills et. al, 2017), and snacking and on-campus meals are considered poor eating habits (Levitsky et. al, 2004).
- The hypotheses related to living on campus and spending more time on campus per day were supported. No other hypotheses were supported.
- These results provide insight for further research on what aspects of the daily lives of college students affect their eating behaviors in order to improve upon the health levels of their diets.
- Limitations included a small sample size, restricted range in age, race, and gender, and open-ended style questions resulting in answers from some participants being removed.

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