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**EXPLORING THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EATING
BEHAVIOUR AMONG MASTERS STUDENTS IN A
UNIVERSITY OF WALES TRINITY SAINT DAVID: A FOCUS
GROUP DISCUSSION**

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Background to the study	3
Research Aim and Objectives	4
Research Questions	4
Research Rationale	4
Research Methodology	5
Research Design	5
Recruitment, sampling, and study participants	6
Data Collection Methods	6
Data Analysis Technique	7
Ethical Considerations	7
Results	7
Interview Results	7
Discussion	11
Conclusion	12
Reference List	13

Introduction

Background to the study

Eating behaviour is an important aspect as they developed overall human health and it is characterised as human well-being. Eating behaviour is influenced by a variety of factors, including personal, social, environmental, and cultural factors (Chen and Antonelli, 2020). In the opinion of Yun *et al.*, (2018), it can be identified that majority of the university students, be it undergraduate students or post graduate students, regularly eats the daily meals provided at the university; where half tends to skip the breakfast. Frequent eating of snacks, fried items, reduced intake of regular fruits and different vegetables are quite among these students. The strain to perform can likewise bring about pressure eating or depending on unfortunate comfort food sources. Monetary limitations are one of the main elements of effect eating ways of behaving among postgraduate students (Di Renzo *et al.* 2020). Most postgraduate understudies have restricted monetary assets which drive them to pick less expensive quality and less nutritious food choices. This can prompt higher handled food varieties that are high in calories, fat, and sugar, which can adversely affect their general wellbeing.

Cultural factors are also another leading factor impacting the eating behaviours of postgraduate students. They come from different backgrounds and they have different dietary traditions as well as preferences. In this aspect, they continue to want foods which are familiar to them and also available in their home countries or cultural communities. In addition, personal factors such as individual preferences, beliefs, as well as knowledge about nutrition can influence eating behaviour. A few postgraduate students might have explicit dietary inclinations, for example, vegetarianism or allergen limitations, which can influence their food decisions and accessibility. Students who have a decent comprehension of sustenance might focus on better decisions, while others might miss the mark on information or inspiration to settle on informed decisions. Healthy eating behaviour is most important for ensuring well bring thus postgraduate students need to know the effects of consuming unhealthy foods which harm their well-being and push them towards facing different kinds of diseases (Gonçalves *et al.* 2021). Due to their busy schedules many students skipped their breakfast and were attracted to the snacks which are highly rich

with calories, and fat. Due to all these reasons or factors, the frequency of visits to fast food restaurants is increasing day by day.

Research Aim and Objectives

Aims

The research aims to explore the potential aspects, which can influence the eating behaviours of postgraduate students in university of wales trinity saint david, in the United Kingdom.

Objectives

- To explore the eating behaviour among postgraduate students in UWTSD
- To identify the factors responsible for the eating behaviours among the university post graduate students at UWTSD

Research Questions

The significant research questions, which help in fostering the exploration of the chosen phenomenon, are as per the following:

RQ1. What is the existing situation related to eating behaviour among postgraduate pupils studying in UWTSD?

RQ2. What the most influencing factors responsible for the eating behaviours among the university post graduate students in UWTSD?

Research Rationale

In the opinion of Grimm and Steinle (2011), eating behaviour is perceived as the complicated interplay related to psychological, societal, genetic, and surrounding environmental factors that impact the timings of taking meals, quantity of consumed food, preferences of food items, and choices of foods. Hence, research regarding the involvement of taste genetics, preferences, pathological consumption attitude, size of meal, and choices of meal have been quickly exploring the comprehension of the way humans eat and the reason behind it. The eating habits of students can be influenced by several factors as students work under strict deadlines in terms of their academics, while certain characteristics factors can also impact their eating attitude.

Hence, studying the alteration in dietary habits and different practices within the lifestyle of the university post graduate students can assist in educating those students on the significance of preventing premature obesity through the adoption of a healthy life style (Contreras-Mendez and Cruse, 2021). This research information can help in delivering a detailed context of different factors which include stress, anxiety and time constraints. Eating behaviour is a complicated aspect as it is associated with the psychological, social, physiologic and genetic factors which influence students' meal timing food preferences and quantity of food intake as well as food selection (Zwierczyk *et al.* 2022). Understanding these factors can help universities develop strategies to promote healthy eating among postgraduate students, such as providing affordable nutritious options on campus, promoting nutrition education and creating a supportive social environment that encourages healthy eating habits.

Research Methodology

The research methodology refers to the techniques which have been used by the researcher to collect data based on the research topic in this paper (Newman and Gough, 2020). By collecting data from the participants the researcher has added effective information in this research work. The philosophical concepts in this research work say about the collection as well as analysis of data based on this research phenomena (Groenland and Dana, 2020). The interpretivism philosophy has been assistive in terms of comprehending the unique attributes of humans and their behaviour irrespective of the social structures, contributing to thoroughly understand the exclusive features of the postgraduate students in the context of the eating behaviours and the factors behind such attitude. Besides, the philosophical approach has also been helpful in manufacturing information related to eating behaviour of the students high in validity as it has aided in identifying the individuals motivations for their eating behaviour.

Research Design

Research Design is another important aspect of the research substructure, since it describes the research methods and techniques which have been used. It helps researchers develop success factors for their studies (Dada *et al.* 2021). Besides, by

utilizing the descriptive research design approach the researcher has effectively conducted this research outline which allows readers to find out the key objectives of this research phenomena. The main application of the descriptive research design in the current study is that it has allowed the learner to ideally analyse the aspects influencing the eating behaviours to assist in establishing an in-depth comprehension of the issue to effectively determine the eating attitude of the postgraduate students in a given setting (Cerqueira Sousa *et al.* 2023). Sufficient information is possible to be gathered with this process in use, and the researcher is able to gain gradual advantages. Thus, they are able to conduct significant research and implement the research results for their significance.

Recruitment, sampling, and study participants

The research is based on important factors which influence eating aspects of postgraduate students in the UWTSD. Sampling is a process which estimates a group of people representing an entire population, and provides significant insights on the selected topic (Sadia *et al.* 2021). Hence, in the present case the purposive sampling approach has been applied. It has a technique through which the research procedure relies on the decision of the researcher to opt for the participants who would take part in the study. As the main focus of this study is postgraduate students to know their eating behaviour and the influencing factors behind them, the purposive sampling has helped in opting for 6 postgraduate students from the UWTSD.

Data Collection Methods

A data collection method represents the process by which information on a selected topic is collected. It is primarily of two types, primary and secondary data collection methods. While the primary process is done through first-hand sources like conducting interview or survey, the secondary data collection method is carried out from the existing information sources via articles, websites, and other incidental sources (MSOGA and Anasel, 2020). In this instance, a primary data collection method has been used by the researcher, where interviews are conducted with six female postgraduate students. The interviews have been conducted face-to-face, while also recording the responses for the purpose of the research. The main focus

of collecting data in this research is to gather insights about the eating behaviours of the postgraduate students and the factors that impact those eating habits.

Data Analysis Technique

Since the chosen and gathered data type of this research is interview, it is evident that the qualitative primary data has been collected in the form of interview. Hence, the analysis technique to be utilised in case of a qualitative study should be a qualitative analysis technique (Vishwakarma *et al.* 2022). In the present scenario, the thematic analysis technique has been applied to identify patterns in the data and relevant factors to address the objectives in this paper.

Ethical Considerations

Upholding the ethical parameters is essential to morally conduct any study (Garrido-Fernández *et al.* 2020). And this research has been no exception in that aspect. The researcher has ensured that all ethical traits are maintained to ensure the reliability of the information coming out of the successful incorporation of methods with regards to the specific objectives in this research. Since, this research has employed qualitative primary data, it is crucial to ensure that consents have been taken from all the six participants or students pursuing post graduation at UWTSD (Razak and Vanoh, 2022). Consent forms have been sent to the six participants to take part in the interview process, where it has been ensured that no private information would be shared and the responses would only be used in obtaining the expected outcome of this study.

Results

Interview Results

Theme 1: The health conditions of individuals influences their health choices

Interviewee 1 has described that health consciousness is the aspect which has been efficient for their food choices, and the health factor is a nurturing aspect for them. The person is trying to maintain a healthy life throughout, and it has been influential for healthy food choices.

Participant 2 considers veg healthy food, but more often consumes junk food according to their choice.

Interviewee 3 has given importance to health consciousness, since they have a heart disease, and prefers healthy and organic food, also preparing them by estimating the carbohydrate levels, and more often indulges in junk food also.

Participant 4 is a vegetarian, consuming eggs at times. They are helpful for balancing their weight, and they sometimes eat unhealthy food when bored, lazy, and hungry.

Following the responses that have been collected from the participants in this interview, it is evident that the health conditions of an individual has a significant impact and influence on the health choices that are made by them and also how they select the food items that are considered to be healthy as well. The advantages of the veg and non-veg items are also considered to be another aspect that influences their health choices as well.

Theme2: Getting to know about the different kinds of food available is an essential part of healthy consuming

Participant 3 should take part to know about the types of food provided by the University of Wales.

Following the responses that have been collected while conducting this interview, a majority of the participants have stated that getting to know about the different kinds of food options and how they could incorporate these items into their diet and make their diet even more healthy.

Theme 3: The kind of food that is available for the students influences their choices

Participant 5 prioritises organic and fat-free foods.

The majority of the participants to whom this question has been asked to have stated that the frequency of the healthy choices that are made by them are directly influenced by the kind of food that is available for them to consume which determines how many times they make healthy choices.

Theme 4: Unhealthy choices are more prevalent in the University because of the kind of food that is available for them to consume

Participant 1 has emphasised on frequent unhealthy food choices.

Participant 2 described making unhealthy food choices more often.

Interviewee 3 makes unhealthy food choices depending on availability.

Interviewee 4 makes rare unhealthy food choices, with eggs as potential choices.

Participant 5 has stated about making general unhealthy food choices.

Interviewee 6 states about making unhealthy choices always.

Theme 5: The availability of food in their University is a key player in how well they are able to make healthy choices

Participant 1 pointed out foods containing sugar.

Participant 2 has regarded non-fresh foods which have been prepared earlier.

In an analytical perspective of the responses that have been collected from the interview, it is evident that the kind of food that is available for the students to consume are mostly junk foods and those kinds of food that is available for them to consume. This is highly influential in relation to the kind of the healthy choices that are made.

Theme 6: The University has not made many changes in the kind of food that is available for the students to maintain their healthy diet.

Participant 1 has stated about similarities from the past.

Interviewee 2 has demonstrated making less changes.

Participant 3 prefers healthy food choices.

Interviewee 4 has stated about remaining static to old food habits.

Participant 5 described bringing no changes in food habits.

Interviewee 6 has stated encouraging healthy food items.

Theme 7: There has been a change in the eating habits of the students after they have started living in the premises of the University

Participant 1 has ceased purchasing from the automated machine.

Participant 2 has started buying food from the vending machine.

Through analysing the responses that have been collected from the students in this interview, it is evident that the students have faced major changes in their eating habits and behavioural patterns, such as an increase in the consumption of junk foods in the students of the University.

Theme 8: Most of the students get their nutritional information from online resources

Participant 1 acquires information from online healthcare sources.

Through the responses that the interviewee has collected from the students of the University, it is evident that a majority of the students have collected the required

nutritional information from online sources rather than checking the packaging of the food materials that they are eating.

Theme 9: The nutritional information of the food that they consume influences the healthy choices that are made by the students in the University

Based on the information that is available for the students, regarding the food that they consume, the information that is available for them influences the healthy choices that are made by them when it comes to the kind of food that they consume. This information includes the calories level of the food that they are consuming and the concentration of other aspects of the components such as sugar. It is these information that is influential for the students when it comes to them consuming a particular food in the University.

Theme 10: The information available in the cafeteria or kitchen is also influential in the food choices that are made by the students.

Participant 1 should not prefer this option.

Following the analysis that has been conducted in related to the responses that have been collected for this particular question, it is evident that the kind of information that is available for the students to access in the University is not that trusted by the students and would rather collect information on their own of the respective food that they are consuming in the process.

Theme 11: University can implement different approach to promote healthy choices being made by students.

Participant 1 has stated that the educational institution can promote healthy and organic food.

Interviewee 2 has suggested that the university can host an awareness programme.

Participant 3 has agreed on educational ventures.

Interviewee 4 has stated about vegetables and veg food items.

Participant 5 has stated on bringing academic balance besides introducing healthy food initiatives.

Interviewee 6 has stated that pictures of healthy food should be distributed throughout the university.

Discussion

From the above-mentioned interview questions, the primary factors influencing the eating habits of the postgraduate students of the University of Wales are health consciousness, mood, eating disorder, and the type of foods which they consume. Moreover, the availability of foods available at the vending machine of the educational institution has also played an important role, along with the awareness program concerning healthy foods. Health consciousness has been a primary factor, and it is dependent on the food choices which they make to live a healthy life. These aspects influence their daily choices, and most of the students prefer consuming unhealthy food items presently. Moreover, a few of the participants have stated about introducing significant changes in their food habits, which can be possible through efficient research and analysis. Thus, the students ensure that the changes are sufficient to provide nutritional information on the healthcare strategies which are adopted by consuming healthy food items efficiently.

The postgraduate students have managed to know about the importance of consuming unhealthy foods, and they are trying to introduce changes in their food habits also. They have taken initiatives to take part in health awareness campaign programs, which should be significant for them in the long run. Considering the types of food which should be essential for them, a few of the students are listing down the items which should be efficient to introduce changes in their food habits. It should be impactful on their decision-making process of consuming healthy foods, and ensure that they are living a healthy and active life in the long run. Moreover, they should be able to address the issues which are caused by consuming unhealthy foods, and replace them with healthy habits. These aspects should reflect on their food behaviour and ensure that they are having no health concerns in the future efficiently.

Many of the students have preferred staying to their traditional way of consuming unhealthy and junk food. It can create a major impact on their health, and they should try to switch to organic and healthy food, which should be significant for them in the future. Moreover, it can ensure that the postgraduate students are able to demonstrate the health factors which play a major role in their food categorization. Thus, they can identify the issues, and look for solutions to address them. The students making healthy choices prefer eggs as unhealthy food, which they consume

at times, and it generally does not reflect on their actions. Moreover, the students are able to acquire information on consuming healthy foods from different health websites, which ensure that there is much significance of consuming healthy foods. Moreover, it is ensured that the students are able to make significant changes in the consumption of healthy food items, which can ensure that they can take care of their body in the long run. Thus, the issues are addressed, and the students look to improve their lives.

Conclusion

This research paper has described the importance of eating habits of postgraduate students, and the ways by which these habits influence their lives efficiently. Research aims and objectives have been addressed about this subject, along with research questions have been addressed. It is important to know that ways by which the actions reflect physical health, and they can stay healthy in this tough environment. Moreover, the issues are addressed, and they look for health factors which influence their health. An interview outcome has been addressed, stating the significance of consuming healthy foods and retaining their old habits of consuming unhealthy food. It is possible that they are able to adopt healthy habits to determine the healthcare factors which influence their food habits. Thus, they should address the issues, and try to introduce changes in their healthcare strategies. Thus, the possibilities of having a healthy life can be ensured, and they are able to address the issues which are raised while consuming unhealthy food in the long run.

In terms of the limitation of this study, it is required to be mentioned that more students could have been involved in the interview process to gather more comprehensive information with regards to the phenomenon under consideration. Besides, conducting a survey procedure among a larger number of participants would have also provided enhanced understanding of the factors behind the eating behaviours of postgraduate students at UWTSD.

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Appendix

Q1: What influences your food choices?

Q2: Would you prefer participating in the University Meal Programme?

Q3. How often do you make healthy choices in the University?

Q4. How often do you make unhealthy food choices?

Q5. What is really considered unhealthy?

Q6. What are the past food habits?

Q7. How has your eating habit changed?

Q8. Where do you get your nutrition information from?

Q9. What kind of information do you need to make healthy food choices?

Q10. Would the information available on the cafeteria influence your food choices?

Q11. What can your university do to promote healthy eating?