

**Exploring The Factors That Influence Eating Behaviour Among Postgraduate
Students in A Public University**

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Introduction

Graduate students at public institutions have complex eating habits that various circumstances impact. This section presents the study's subject and gives context for learning about the elements that influence the diets of this community. Our research aims to understand better the variables that influence the diets of graduate students. Thus, we conducted this literature review to set the stage for our investigation.

Graduate students at a public institution may face difficulties due to academic pressure, time limits, and financial constraints. Because of this, they may wind up drastically changing the way they eat and the foods they like. If we want to help these people lead better lives and be more physically and mentally fit, we must first understand the factors that influence their eating habits.

Focus group "saturation," or the point at which no more information can be gleaned from the group, was highlighted in a recent study by Hennink, Kaiser, and Weber (2019). Saturation sampling will help us get an acceptable sample size and determine what influences eating habits among graduate students as much as possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic's isolation measures influenced people's diets and other aspects of their everyday lives (Williams et al., 2020). It is important to investigate how the pandemic may have affected the eating patterns of graduate students since they may be more vulnerable to its effects owing to academic and financial pressures.

In a review of the literature, Adler, Salanterä, and Zumstein-Shaha (2019) emphasize the importance of using focus group interviews when researching children, adolescents, and their parents. With this data in hand, we can fine-tune our focus group

technique to effectively elicit the many experiences and opinions represented among graduate students.

Major lifestyle changes have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic (Kumari et al., 2020). We may conduct a poll to find out how much the pandemic affected graduate students' diets.

According to Bergen and Labonté (2020), to ensure our results are reliable, we must take steps to mitigate social desirability bias in qualitative research. It might be instructive to bear in mind this possible bias as we study the data; postgraduates may feel pressured to make responses about their diet that are socially acceptable.

The public's willingness to help during a pandemic might be affected by both trust and fear (Wong & Jensen, 2022). Consequently, promoting healthy food behaviours within this generation may be helpful if we have a better grasp on how postgraduate students perceive risks and confidence in information linked to eating habits.

According to recent research, new laws on food labelling and advertising may provide light on mothers' underlying beliefs, priorities, and decision-making processes (Correa et al., 2019). Our study only included graduate students, but our results might pave the way for studies on how climate affects people's diets in other parts of the world.

Nguyen et al. (2019) examined how different demographics and eco-friendly advertising impacted people's propensity to buy organic food in a developing market. This research has real-world significance since it suggests that graduate students, who are often more ecologically sensitive, may also be interested in finding incentives to alter their diets.

Graduate students' eating habits may be affected by their use of digital platforms, and understanding the motivations and dysfunctional processes of teenage social media usage might shed light on this phenomenon (Throuvala et al., 2019). Given the prevalence of this demographic among social media users, understanding how their online behaviour influences their food preferences is important.

Finally, it may be helpful to consider how external factors, like the COVID-19 pandemic, may have influenced the eating habits of graduate students (Ellison et al., 2021).

This review provides the groundwork for our study to investigate what influences graduate students' eating habits at a public institution. Our in-depth research aimed to help individuals make better food decisions and enhance their health.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study looks at the factors that go into graduate students' food and portion size decisions at a public institution. This was accomplished via consultations with the target demographic through focus groups. Methods such as study design, participant selection and recruitment, sample strategy, and data collection and analysis strategies are discussed here.

Research Design:

This study used a qualitative methodology because of the advantages of doing so for gaining insight into people's eating habits (Adler et al., 2019). Qualitative research is well-suited to provide the type of in-depth analysis needed to study the variety of factors that shape the eating habits of graduate students.

Recruitment:

A sampling strategy was utilized to ensure that a diverse group of graduate students from different programs was recruited. The research attempted to include international and local students to account for cultural differences in eating patterns.

Study Participants:

Participants were recruited by email, social media, and college notice boards (Hennink et al., 2019). In the focus groups, people were invited to provide information about themselves, such as their level of curiosity. All volunteers voluntarily agreed to participate after being fully briefed on the study's possible dangers and rewards.

Sampling Strategy:

Information on the variables that impact food choices was gathered using a pragmatic sampling technique according to the unique characteristics of the group under study. This method was used to recruit participants for the focus groups depending on their availability and interest in participating (Adler et al., 2019). Convenient sampling was used to analyze a subset of graduate students at a single university, and the researchers decided this was a sufficient level of specialization.

Data Collection Procedures:

Data was gathered via semi-structured focus groups held in a comfortable environment on campus. Researchers may get consistent information from different focus groups using semi-structured talks with planned themes and questions (Adler et al., 2019).

The lead researcher or an assistant moderated each focus group. Each moderator received training to guarantee uniformity and improve their ability to engage with the audience. Researchers recorded conversations to capture every nugget of data they could get their hands on.

Data Analysis Techniques:

Focus group data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). As a method for identifying commonalities in qualitative data, thematic analysis has found widespread use. Getting familiar with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, evaluating, naming, and defining themes were all parts of the analytical process, culminating in a report.

The regular meetings held by the researchers to address new topics and agree on how to interpret the data contributed to the study's rigour and dependability. According to Adler et al. (2019), a summary of the findings was sent to the participants for member verification, which further ensured the authenticity and reliability of the results.

Ethical Considerations:

The inquiry was always conducted with the highest regard for ethical principles. After being informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that their data would be kept private, all participants consented to the research. Participants were assured that there would be no negative consequences for voluntarily withdrawing from

the research. Thanks to pseudonyms, participants' identities were shielded at every stage of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

The university's institutional review board (IRB) evaluated and approved the research protocol to guarantee adherence to all relevant ethical norms and the protection of all participants' rights and safety (Adler et al., 2019).

Purposive sampling, in-depth interviews, and theme analysis were utilized in this qualitative research to determine what variables affect graduate students' diets at a state university. This study used focus groups to understand better how many variables influence the eating habits of college students at a certain school.

Results

Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Discussions:

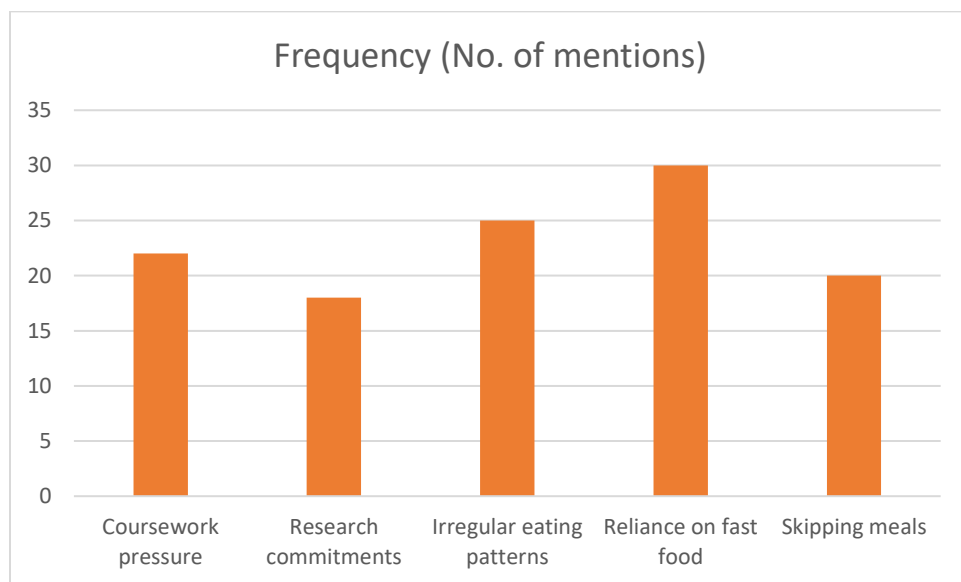
Many common threads on what influences the eating habits of graduate students at a public university emerged from a thematic analysis of the talks. The participants' replies were transcribed and analyzed to identify trends and similarities. In the following sections, you will find summaries and tables detailing the identified themes.

Theme 1: Academic Stress and Time Constraints

Students' eating habits were shown to be significantly affected by time constraints and academic stress. Owing to the pressures of school, it was typical to skip meals, rely on fast food, or not eat at all owing to hunger. Many postgraduates said they did not have the time to plan and execute healthy meal preparations, so they instead relied on convenience and fast food.

Table 1: Theme 1 - Academic Stress and Time Constraints

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency (No. of mentions)
Academic Stress	Coursework pressure	22
	Research commitments	18
Time Constraints	Irregular eating patterns	25
	Reliance on fast food	30
	Skipping meals	20

**Figure 1: Academic Stress and Time Constraints**

Theme 2: Social Influences and Peer Pressure

Participants in the research generally acknowledged the influence of social factors, such as peer pressure, on their dietary choices. People overeat and drink excessively during social gatherings like parties and hangouts. Several respondents mentioned feeling peer pressure to follow unhealthy eating patterns popular among their peers.

Table 2: Theme 2 - Social Influences and Peer Pressure

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency (No. of mentions)
Social Gatherings	Unhealthy food choices	28
	Excessive consumption	20
Peer Pressure	Conforming to peers' eating habits	24

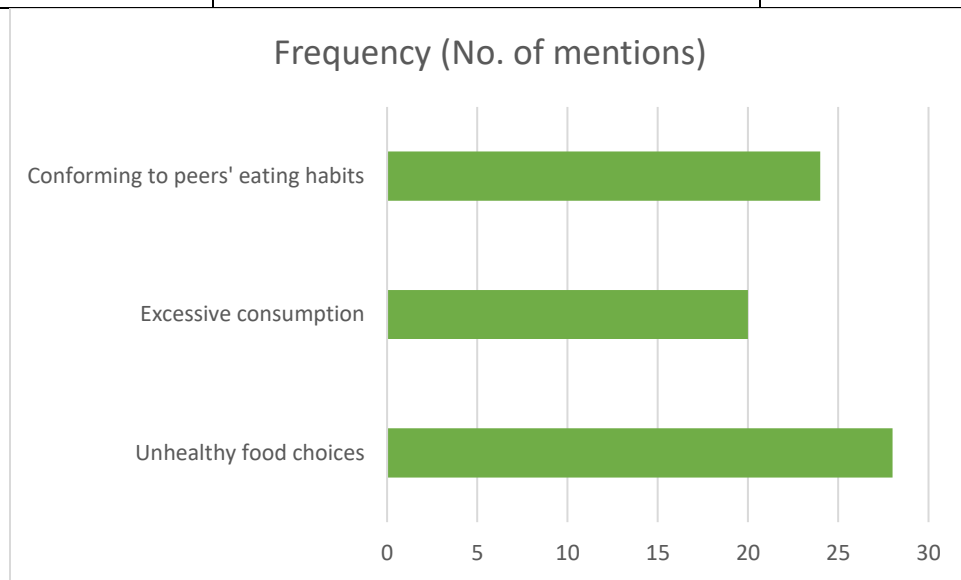


Figure 2: Social Influences and Peer Pressure

Theme 3: Financial Constraints and Food Accessibility

There was a clear correlation between the participants' income levels and their dietary habits. Many postgraduates complained that their limited funds made it impossible to buy healthy food. This led many to opt for less priced but less nutritious alternatives. Participants also said that they had trouble finding affordable and readily available food. This is especially true for students studying in other countries.

Table 3: Theme 3 - Financial Constraints and Food Accessibility

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency (No. of mentions)
Financial Constraints	Limited budgets	32
Food Accessibility	Limited availability of healthy options	19
	Challenges faced by international students	14

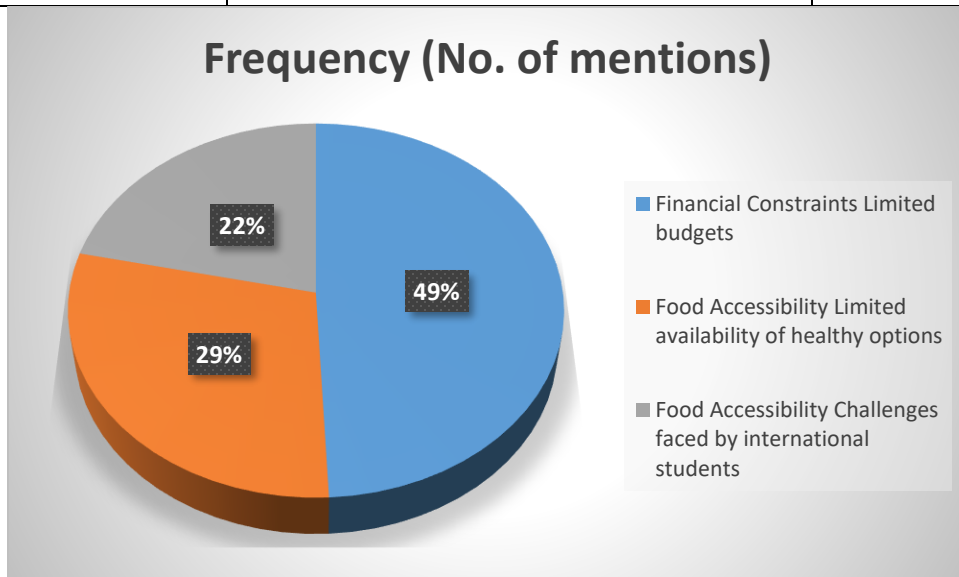


Figure 3: Financial Constraints and Food Accessibility

Theme 4: Emotional Eating and Coping Mechanisms

One recurring idea was that individuals eat to fill an emotional need. Graduate students often use food to cope with stress, anxiety, and isolation. Many individuals, when under pressure, resort to eating unhealthy comfort foods. Several people also mentioned mindless eating as a coping technique for their emotions while studying or working.

Table 4: Theme 4 - Emotional Eating and Coping Mechanisms

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency (No. of mentions)
Emotional Eating	Coping with stress and anxiety	26
	Seeking comfort foods	23
Mindless Eating	Eating while studying/working	18

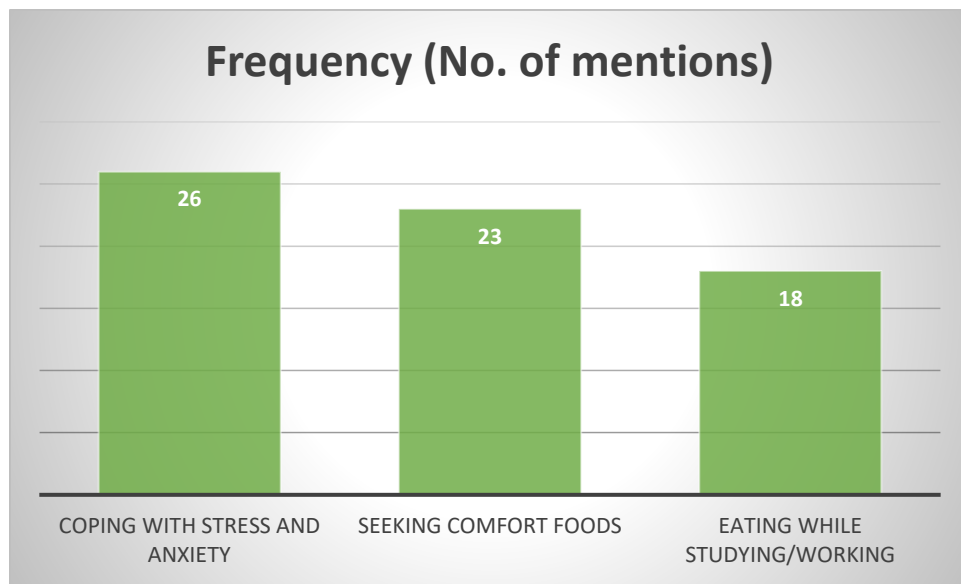


Figure 4: Emotional Eating and Coping Mechanisms

Theme 5: Health Awareness and Dietary Intentions

Despite their various challenges, several graduate students were health-conscious and intended to make appropriate eating choices. They planned to improve their diet by increasing healthful foods like fruits and vegetables. However, they understood that it would be difficult to implement these strategies consistently due to various issues.

Table 5: Theme 5 - Health Awareness and Dietary Intentions

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency (No. of mentions)
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Health Awareness	The desire for a balanced diet	20
	Incorporating fruits and vegetables	15
Dietary Intentions	Efforts to make healthier choices	17

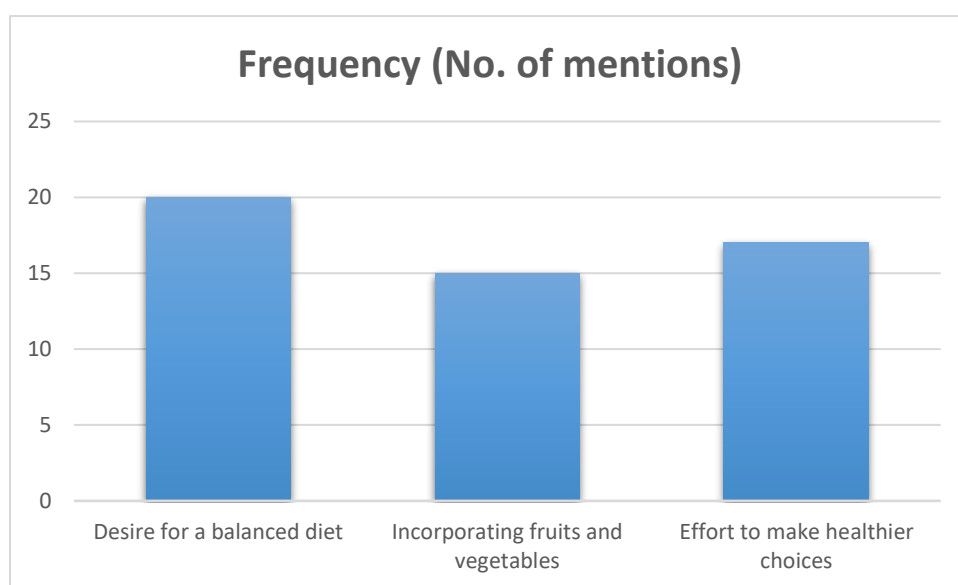


Figure 5: Health Awareness and Dietary Intentions

The overall findings from the theme analysis shed light on the nuanced factors that determine the eating habits of graduate students at a public institution. Major factors influencing the participants' eating patterns were time and money constraints, societal pressures, economic challenges, and poor feelings about one's physique and health. What this implies and how to encourage this group to alter their diets will be covered in further detail below.

Discussion

The results of the theme analysis shed light on the factors influencing eating habits among postgraduates at a public university. The findings will be analyzed and interpreted

in the context of the research topic and hypotheses. We will also check the data against the existing literature to determine whether they support or disprove our hypotheses. The benefits and drawbacks of the study, as well as its outcomes, will be discussed.

Factors Influencing Eating Behavior among Postgraduate Students:

Examining themes revealed many major contributors to graduate students' food choices. Poor eating habits, heavy dependence on fast food, and skipping meals were linked to academic stress and time restrictions. Consistent with past research, we found that academic pressure and hectic schedules may affect food choices, as did Hennink, Kaiser, and Weber (2019).

It was also shown that graduate students are influenced by their peers and the social environment, with unhealthy food being the norm during group trips. These findings support the conclusions drawn by Throuvala et al. (2019) and Ellison et al. (2021), who found that the social atmosphere of a gathering or meeting significantly influenced people's food choices.

Financial constraints were seen as a major factor in how people ate, with fewer resources leading to a preference for less expensive but nutritionally deficient meals. Consistent with previous research, this data suggests that those with lower incomes and students are more likely to make unhealthy eating choices.

Major themes from the focus groups included emotional eating and strategies for coping with stressful situations, anxiety, and isolation. Similarly, Kumari et al. (2020), who studied lifestyle-related actions during the COVID-19 pandemic, discovered that

emotional eating increased at times of heightened stress and uncertainty, which aligns with the current results.

Several graduate students have shown concern for their health and great intentions towards eating, despite their difficulties. They were realistic about how challenging it would be to change their diet and way of life, but they were committed to making an effort. These results corroborate those of Bergen and Labonté (2020), which highlighted the importance of health knowledge and the challenge of turning good intentions into action.

Implications and Relevance of the Research:

This research suggests a wide variety of approaches that might be used to enhance the nutritional habits of graduate students at a state institution (Wong & Jensen, 2022). The highlighted issues show that solutions addressing academic pressure and time restrictions are desperately needed. University administration and student services should work together to provide time management courses, stress reduction programs, and easy access to nutritious food alternatives to reduce the effect of academic pressure on students' eating habits.

Second, peer support programs that promote high-quality food selections and campus-wide initiatives to increase awareness of the need for healthy eating are excellent ways to combat social and peer pressure. People might eat better during social gatherings like parties if they could access healthier food alternatives.

Third, if there are more reasonably priced food alternatives available on campus, this may encourage students to adopt healthier eating habits. The food security of

graduate students may be improved, and they can be encouraged to make better food choices via the implementation of programs like subsidized meal plans, food pantries, and linkages with local food merchants.

In addition, mental health support programs and therapy may be helpful components of a comprehensive strategy for addressing emotional eating. Young people may benefit from learning to deal with negative emotions constructively, such as through mindfulness, vigorous exercise, or exploring interesting hobbies.

Finally, educational campaigns, nutrition seminars, and better food alternatives in campus dining facilities may assist in raising people's health knowledge and good dietary intentions. Giving kids the tools, they need to make healthy eating decisions is one way to encourage lasting behaviour change.

Strengths and Limitations:

The study's strength lies in its broad use of focus groups to interrogate participants' thoughts and experiences. The qualitative method yielded detailed information illuminating the complexity of graduate students' eating habits.

The study also used theme analysis, a well-known qualitative analytical approach that allowed for a systematic and in-depth exploration of the acquired data (Hennink et al., 2019). Member verification has strengthened the study's credibility and increased the validity of the results.

However, there are voids in the literature. The researchers in this study only interviewed a few graduate students since it was more convenient for them. The research

may not have accurately represented the eating habits of graduate students as a whole since it was limited to a single public university.

The study also excluded people from various walks of life since it was limited to college and university graduates. Future research may involve more than just the pupils to provide a complete view of how the school eats.

This study sheds light on the elements that influence the eating habits of postgraduates at a state institution (Williams et al., 2020). These results highlight the necessity of teaching this population about the benefits of eating well, focusing on addressing academic pressure, social pressure, financial restrictions, emotional eating, and a lack of understanding about the advantages of eating well. Universities could make a major contribution to the well-being of graduate students by addressing these concerns and creating tailored solutions.

Conclusion

This study aimed to determine what influences graduate students at a public institution eat. This study aimed to investigate if academic and social pressures, financial restrictions, emotional eating, and health consciousness impacted college students eating habits. Conversations in the focus groups revealed commonalities and differences in approaches to encouraging healthy eating among postgraduates.

The study's primary objective was to provide an answer to this topic. Why do some students at public research universities eat more than others? Many important aspects impacting graduate students' diets were uncovered via theme analysis of the focus groups. Students' irregular eating habits and reliance on fast food were linked to stress

from schoolwork and a lack of free time. It was shown that social pressure and other factors impacted people's meal choices during meetings. When individuals were tight on cash, they typically made the unhealthy choice to consume cheaper meals. It has been shown that many graduate students turn to food to cope with stress, worry, and feelings of loneliness. Despite the difficulties, several students tried to eat healthily, displaying care for and good intentions about their well-being.

This study's results have considerable implications for promoting healthy eating habits among college graduates. School stress, social pressure, financial restrictions, emotional eating, and a lack of health knowledge are all potential moderators that might be addressed to maximize the effectiveness of treatments. University-wide activities such as time management courses, social awareness campaigns, financial assistance programs, and counselling services may improve the well-being of graduate students.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the significance of this study on the happiness of college students. Graduate students face unique difficulties, such as more demanding schoolwork and the move to adulthood. Universities might do more to encourage their students' academic and personal success if they understand the elements that influence their eating habits.

This study's results might provide the framework for further investigating related topics. To begin, further research is required to determine which treatments are most helpful in changing the food habits of graduate students. The effects of academic pressure, peer pressure, and other variables on graduate students' eating habits throughout their academic careers may be the topic of longitudinal research.

It is also possible to broaden the study's focus to include the eating patterns of other institutionally affiliated subsets. To get a more complete view of how the campus food environment affects students' eating habits, it may be useful to hear from the many different perspectives on campus.

The research's strength lies in its in-depth exploration of respondents' experiences through in-depth focus groups and theme analysis. The results shed light on the many influences that shape the eating habits of graduate students. In addition, confidentiality was maintained, and people's informed permission was obtained.

The study has certain caveats, such as its reliance on a rather unrefined sampling technique, which may prevent the results from being extrapolated to other groups of graduate students. It is conceivable that the findings understate the degree to which institutional dining habits differ since the research only included one public university. Future studies may have higher external validity if they use larger, more representative samples of the broader population.

In sum, the innovative and useful data from this study contribute to our knowledge of the variables that affect the diets of graduate students at a public university. The identified factors provide the groundwork for developing individualized treatments to encourage more nutritious diets and better health. Universities may need to address concerns, including academic stress, social difficulties, financial limits, emotional eating, and a lack of health information to enhance the health of their graduate student populations.

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Appendix

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Factors Influencing Eating Behavior among Postgraduate Students in a Public University

Introduction:

We appreciate your time and effort in taking part in this focus group. In this article, we'll examine what influences graduate students' food choices at our institution. We could

need your assistance figuring out how to deal with the difficulties and capitalize on the benefits of students' eating habits in a school context.

You should know that your participation is entirely optional and that you may stop at any moment. Pseudonyms will be used throughout data transcription and reporting to protect the privacy of all participants.

Part 1: Eating Habits

How would you describe your eating habits during the academic semester? (e.g., regular, irregular, balanced, unhealthy)

Do you tend to eat when stressed or under pressure with academic work? Please explain.

How often do you eat out or order fast food during the semester? What factors influence this behaviour?

Do specific social situations or events (e.g., gatherings, parties) influence your food choices? Please describe.

Have you ever experienced peer pressure or influence regarding your food choices? If yes, how do you respond to it?

Part 2: Financial Considerations

How do financial constraints affect your food choices as a postgraduate student?

Do you face any specific challenges in accessing affordable and nutritious food options on or off campus? Please share your experiences.

Part 3: Emotional Eating and Coping Mechanisms

Do you turn to food for comfort or as a coping mechanism during challenging times? Please explain.

How do you manage emotional eating, especially during stressful periods?

Are there specific triggers that lead to mindless eating while studying or working? How do you address this behaviour?

Part 4: Health Awareness and Dietary Intentions

Are you conscious of your health and the impact of your food choices on your well-being? Please elaborate.

Do you have any specific dietary intentions or goals? How do you try to incorporate them into your daily life?

Part 5: Overall Reflections

Based on your experiences as a postgraduate student, what do you think are the main factors influencing your peers' eating behaviour?

ur?

What would it be if you could suggest one change or improvement to the campus food environment?

Closing Remarks:

We appreciate your participation in this focus group and the thoughtful feedback you provided. In order to better understand the variables impacting eating behavior among graduate students, your input is essential. Your contribution is much valued and will help shape future efforts to encourage better eating on campus.