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FOOD PREFERENCES AND HEALTH RISKS AMONG THE 15-24 AGE YOUTH POPULATION IN OKARA

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ABSTRACT

Background: The youth populations Okara is Undergoing significant changes in dietary habits largely due to increasing availability of fast food and changing cultural practices and these changes rise concern about the potential risk associated with poor Nutrition, these included disease like blood pressure, Obesity and Diabetes which adversely affect health The study focuses on the dietary choices made by the youth of Okara and their health consequences as well as quality of life their food choices may construct if we want to save our young Generations we need to share the Awareness of Dietary knowledge with them.

Methods: This was a Quantitative Survey in which we included various educational institutions in Okara, which included people aged 15-24 and our total sample size was 362 Young Peoples. We collected data from people using a Questionnaire that included data on dietary habits, health Perceptions and physical activity levels, we also conducted statistical analysis to examine the relationship between food preference and health Outcomes.

Results: We Included a total of 362 young people in our Study; we included 190 Male and 172 Female in our Study we data from various School Colleges and University between the ages of 15-24 age young people who were part of the Study. The Result Show that 64.9% of People are eating a lot of fast food, 69.1% Young People are eating those who like home cooked food a lot, 77.1% of People are those who like eat Traditional food and we look at this 57.7 People are those who like Vegetables a lot if we analysis them completely then people are giving preference to fast food a lot, 53.6% who use fast food one to three times a week this is very alarming situation because people are consuming a lot of fast food which increase their chances of getting Disease. 16% were people who had various type of Diseases, 6.6% People were who had blood Pressure problem, 3.6% Percent were people who had diabetes problems and 6.4% were people who had obesity problem. If we analysis the Health Risk there were 18 Female who had blood Pressure and 15 male who had the obesity. People also have a lower tendency to engage in regular physical activity if people do regular physical activity, they won't have a face this common disease Which is a P-value 0.005 Less than 0.05 so we reject the null

Hypothesis (H0) because it is less than 0.05 indicating that dietary choices have a significant effect on risk So we accept the Alternative Hypothesis (H1). The food consumed by the young population of this age has a direct impact on their bodies and causes the diseases in young people. If we want to save them, we need to change their food Preference,

Conclusion: Study Highlight urgent need for targeted interventions to promote healthy eating habits among the Okara Youth People, Public health Initiatives should focus on Nutrition's educations community engagement and policy development changes to reduce the health risk associated with poor dietary practices. By Addressing these issues stakeholder can help improve the overall health and quality of life of youth in Region.

INTRODUCTION:

The youth living in Okara, Pakistan, is currently in a phase in life where food habits and health can impact their future. As society and economy change, the youth are now being offered a wide range of food, be it traditional or fast foods. This trend of changing food habits raises vital questions about the potential impacts and risks on nutritional status and health. Recent studies have indicated increasing concerns about the health status of young people, particularly regarding issues of overweight and obesity, along with micronutrient deficiencies and lifestyle diseases (Jamuna K.V., Dr. Ratna H., 2013)

Cultural practices, economic conditions, and the availability of food options significantly influence dietary preferences and health outcomes among the youth in Okara. Understanding these relationships is crucial for developing targeted interventions that address the specific needs of this demographic. The study highlights the dietary choices made by the youth of Okara and their health consequences, as well as the quality of life shaped by these food choices (Hasan et al., 2024).

With a better understanding of these aspects, stakeholders can design focused campaigns to improve nutrition and health in this critical population. In Okara, there is a unique opportunity to learn about the eating habits of the youth and their nutritional status, which can inform health programs and policy formulation. Given the rising concerns about obesity and other lifestyle diseases, this issue is timely for local policymakers, educators, and the community. While research on youth nutrition in Africa and South Asia is extensive, very few studies have specifically targeted the youth population in Okara. This gap provides an opportunity to investigate local eating behaviors and the associated health risks, thereby enhancing our understanding of the cultural and socio-economic context (Hasan et al., 2024).

The study can focus on a specific age group (15-24) and can be narrowed down to particular schools, college and University in Okara. Collaborating with local educational institutions and health organizations can provide access to participants and facilitate data collection. A study can be designed to be completed within a semester, allowing for data collection, analysis, and reporting within a manageable period Participants are informed about the study's purpose and provide consent, especially when minors are involved, through parental consent. Data collection methods are designed to ensure the confidentiality and silence of participants. The research aims to contribute positively to the community by informing health programs and interventions, aligning with ethical standards in public health research.

1.1 The research problem

In Okara, young population have significantly changed their eating habits due to the rise of fast food, cultural shifts, and globalization.

These changes Produce various challenges related to nutrition and the health of the youth in the area. There's a clear trend of select prepared and fast foods, often at the cost of traditional diets that are usually healthy. This shift can lead to poor nutrition. As unhealthy eating becomes more common, we are Observe more health issues like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease among young people. It's important to Understand how serious these

risks are for expand effective health solutions. While there is a lot of research on youth nutrition around the world, there are not many studies that focus on the specific cultural and economic situation in Okara. This lack of information makes it harder to create targeted health policies and programs. Factors such as income, education, and access to healthy food can much affect the food choices of young people. Exploring these factors is key to understanding the bigger picture of their eating habits.

Literature Review

In a study Supervise by **A. Malik, M. Khan, and Z. Iqbal** in **2020** on the **Sedentary Lifestyle and Eating Habits in Pakistani Youth**, it was Disclose that **70%** engage in less than 30 minutes of physical activity daily (Malik, Khan, & Iqbal, 2020).

A study by **Khan et al.** in **2021** titled **Food Preferences Among Adolescents in Urban Areas** found that **65% of youth prefer fast food**, and **40% consume sugary drinks daily** (Khan et al., 2021).

The research by **M. Raza, S. Khan, and F. Ahmed** in **2022** on **Cultural Influences on Dietary Choices Among Youth** indicated that **58% of youth report traditional foods as unhealthy** (Raza, Khan, & Ahmed, 2022).

Farooq et al. (2020) conducted a study in **2020** titled **Obesity Trends in Adolescents**, which revealed that **30% of surveyed adolescents are classified as obese** (Farooq et al., 2020).

In **2021**, **Khan et al.** identified in their study on **Chronic Disease Risks in Youth** that **25%** are at risk for diabetes, and **20%** for hypertension due to poor diets (Khan et al., 2021).

A study by **Shah et al.** in **2022** on **Family Influence on Food Choices** found that **70%** of youth report family influence on their food choices (Shah et al., 2022).

Research by **Rehman et al.** in **2023** titled **Peer Pressure and Dietary Choices** indicated that **65% say friends influence their food choices** (Rehman et al., 2023).

In **2022**, a study by **Ahmed et al.** on **Dietary Patterns and Health Outcomes in Pakistan** Disclose that **40% of urban adults consume unhealthy diets** (Ahmed et al., 2022).

A study conducted by **Khan et al.** in **2022** showed that **18% of adolescents are hypertensive**, indicating rising health concerns in the youth population (Khan, A., et al. 2022).

Khan et al. (2020) found in their **2020** study on the **Impact of Urbanization on Dietary Habits** that **urbanization has led to a 50% increase in the consumption of processed foods among youth** (Khan, A., et al. 2020).

In a study by **A. Sharma et al.** in **2022** on the **Prevalence of Hypertension Among Indian Youth**, it was revealed that **15%** of adolescents are hypertensive (Sharma, A., et al. 2022).

Sharma & Kumar (2021) conducted research in **2021** on **Diabetes Risk Factors in Indian Adolescents**, finding that **15%** are at risk for type 2 diabetes and lack of physical activity (Sharma & Kumar, 2021).

A study by **Li et al.** in **2022** on the **Prevalence of Obesity and Its Association with Hypertension and Diabetes in Chinese Youth** found that **25% of adolescents are obese**, significantly Agree with higher rates of hypertension and diabetes (Li et al., 2022).

In **2021**, **Wang et al.** identified multiple cardiovascular risk factors in their study on **Cardiovascular Risk Factors in Chinese Adolescents**, showing that **18% Display these risk factors, including obesity** (Wang et al., 2021).

Ogden et al. (2022) conducted a study in **2022** on the **Prevalence of Obesity and Its Impact on Cardiovascular Health in Adolescents**, disclose that **22% of adolescents in the U.S. are obese**, significantly increasing their risk for hypertension and diabetes (Ogden et al., 2022).

A study by **Lowry et al.** in **2021** on **The Role of Diet and Physical Activity in Youth Obesity** Specify that poor dietary choices and low physical activity levels are major contributors to obesity and related health risks among adolescents (Lowry et al., 2020).

Aims

Improve the Nutritional Status on the 15-24 Age youth population in Okara

Objectives/Hypotheses:

- Evaluate food preferences of youth in Okara by comparing traditional and modern dietary choices.
- Assess health risks linked to these preferences, including obesity, and chronic diseases.
- Provide evidence-based recommendations for community health programs to promote healthy eating habits among young people.

Hypotheses:

Null:

- **H0** suggests that dietary choices do not impact health risks, indirect that other factors may be Stronger.

Alternative:

- **H1** Submit that food preferences directly affect health outcomes, Focus on the need for dietary interventions in this age group.

METHODOLOGY

Investigate food preferences and health risks among the youth in Okara, we will adopt a quantitative survey method. The study will start with a structured questionnaire distributed to youth aged 15 to 24 in schools, College, and universities, focusing on dietary habits and health perceptions. This will be followed by interviews with selected participants to explore the underlying factors influencing their food choices. Data analysis will include statistical methods for survey responses and thematic analysis for interview transcripts. This approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between food preferences and health risks, leading to actionable recommendations for community health initiatives and educational programs. This research will use a Cross-Sectional Study design. The cross-sectional survey data will be gathered using self-administered questionnaires distributed to 15-24 male and female Youth Population The proposed study on food preferences and health risks among youth in Okara will be conducted over a period of **three months**.

y. We aim to gather data from approximately 362 participants through surveys for Quantitative analysis. For the quantitative component, we aim for a sample size of approximately 362 participants. This number is based on Advance estimates of the youth population in Okara and the need for Enough statistical power to detect meaningful differences in dietary habits and health perceptions.

Using a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, this sample size will allow us to generalize findings with a Sensible degree of Confidence.

Estimated Proportion (P): (0.382) 38.2% of the **15-24** youth population in Okara

Margin of Error (E): Typically set at 0.05 (5%).

Confidence Level (Z): 95% confidence level,

Z = 1.96.

Cochran's Formula: $n = (Z^2 \times P \times (1-P)) / E^2$

$n = (Z^2 \times P \times (1-P)) / E^2$

$n = (1.96^2 \times 0.382 \times (1-0.382)) / (0.05^2)$

$n = 3.8416 \times 0.382 \times (0.618) / (0.0025)$

$n = 0.907 / 0.0025$

n= 362

Data collection tools will include a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire will be adapted from existing validated tools like the Food Frequency Questionnaire tailored to the local context of Okara.

RESULTS:

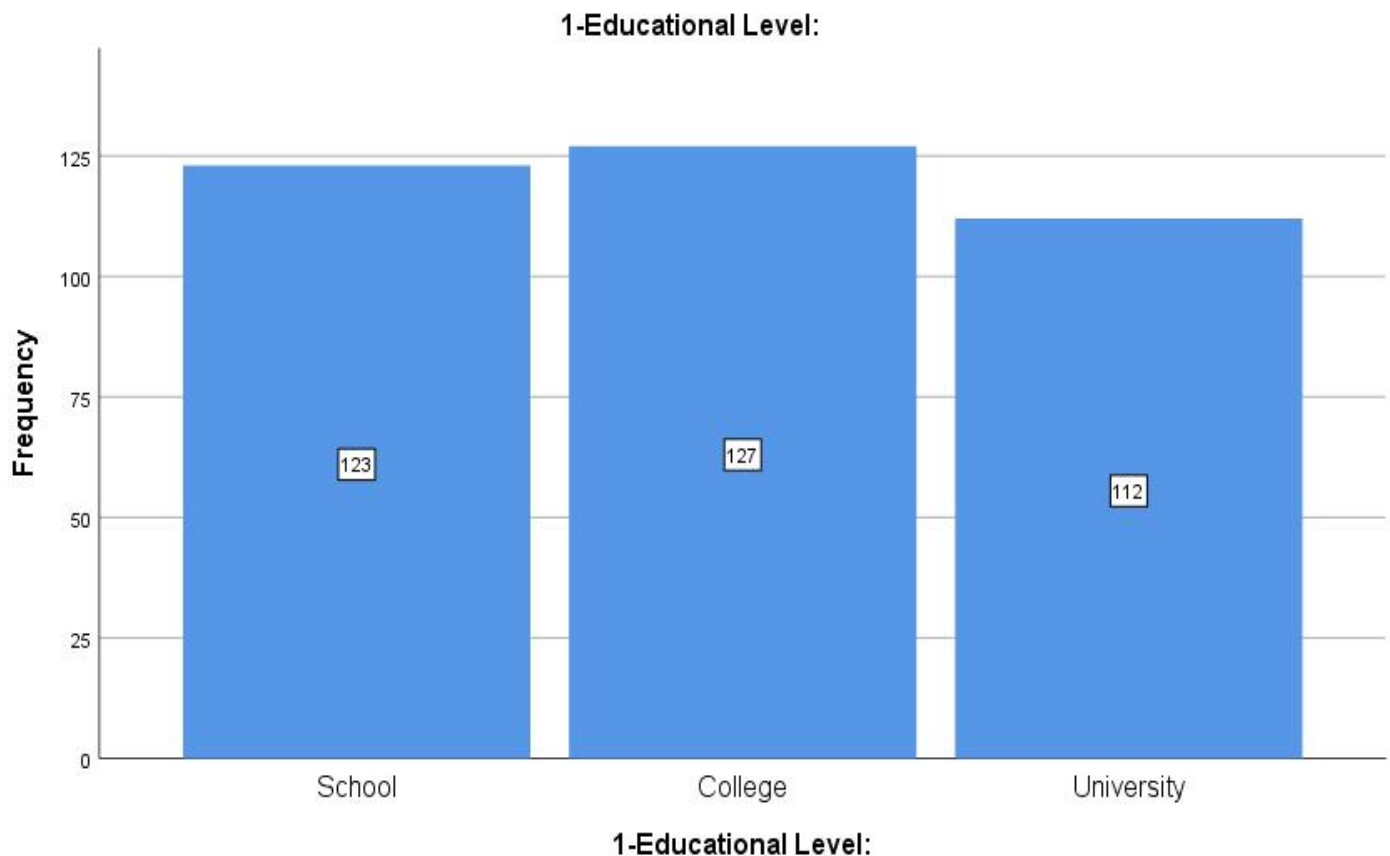
This Study was conducted in Okara City we ere included Youth Population aged 15-24 in this Study we included youth from school college and University.

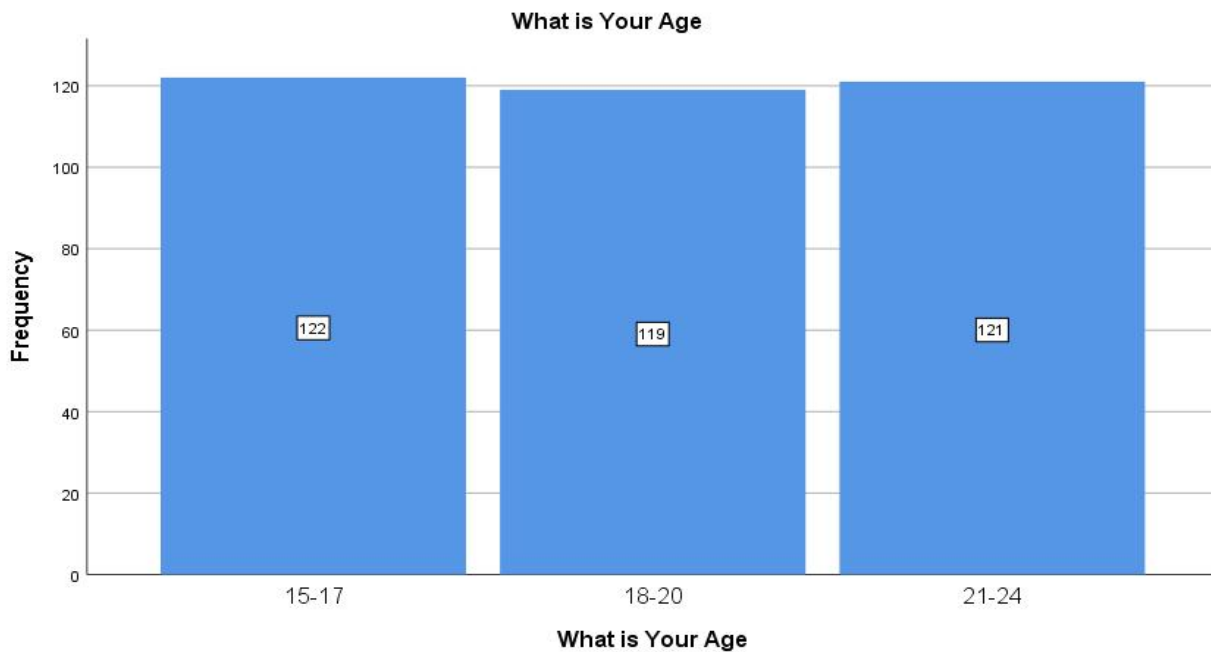
Table no 1:

What is your Gender				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	190	52.5	52.5	52.5
Female	172	47.5	47.5	100.0
Total	362	100.0	100.0	

- The sample has a slightly higher proportion of males compared to females, with males constituting just over half (52.5%) of the total respondents.
- Females make up a smaller yet significant portion of the sample at 47.5%.

1-Educational Level:				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
School	123	34.0	34.0	34.0
College	127	35.1	35.1	69.1
University	112	30.9	30.9	100.0
Total	362	100.0	100.0	



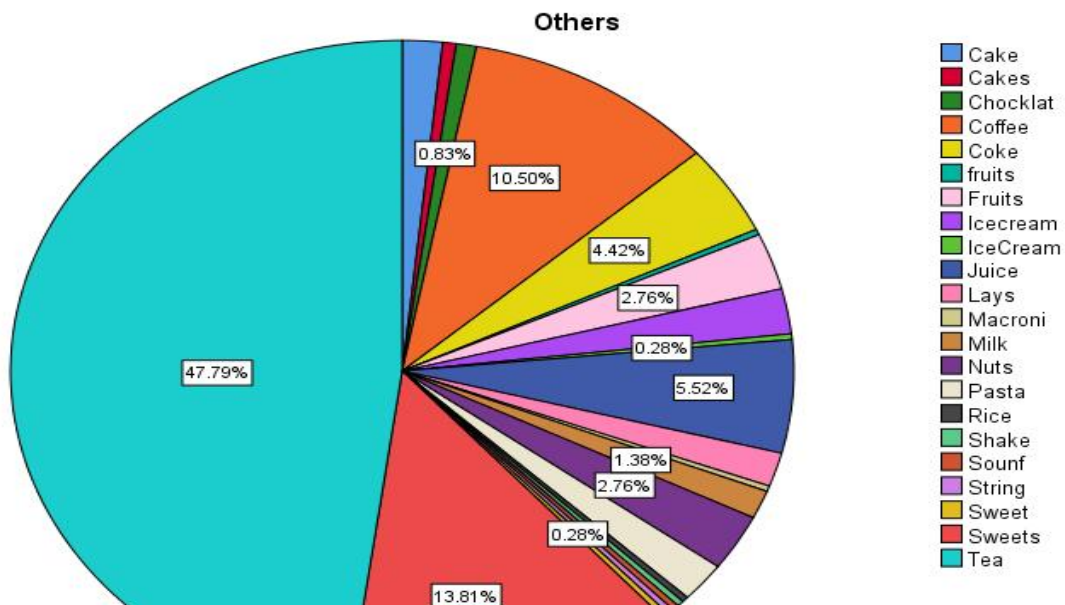


- **23.5% (85)** of respondents **strongly like** fast food, while **41.4% (150)** simply **like** it. Together, a significant **64.9%** express a positive attitude towards fast food.
- **25.1% (91)** are neutral, indicating ambivalence, while a small percentage, **10% (36)**, express dislike (7.5% dislike and 2.5% strongly dislike).
- This suggests that fast food is widely accepted among the youth in Okara, which raises concerns about potential health risks associated with high consumption.
- There were 114 (**31.5%**) Young People who like home-cooked food a lot. There were 136 (**37.6%**) people who like home-cooked. If we at the total 69.1% of People preferred home-cooked food.
- There were 21 (**5.8%**) young people who did not like home-cooked food and there were 4 (**1.1%**) who expressed a strong dislike for home cooked food. Only **6.9%** expressed any form of dislike, suggesting that while fast food is popular, home-cooked meals maintain a strong presence.
- I aksed 362 Youth people how much they liked tradional cusine then out of which 85 people they strongly liked a lot, 194 people liked it all, 67 people are responded in the neutral way, 12 people are said they didn't like it and 4 people are said they strongly didn't like it
- A total of 77.1% indicated they like (combined strongly like and like) traditional/local cuisine, with only **4.4% (16)** expressing dislike.
- This reflects a cultural appreciation for traditional foods, which could be leveraged in health promotion strategies.

- Preferences are mixed **57.7%** (209) like or strongly like vegetarian/vegan options a lot in their meal, there were **28.5%** (103) people responded naturally and while **13.9%** (50) people who expressed Dislike and Strongly Dislike regarding vegetables.

Others:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Cake	6	1.7	1.7	1.7
	Cakes	2	.6	.6	2.2
	Chocolate	3	.8	.8	3.0
	Coffee	38	10.5	10.5	13.5
	Coke	16	4.4	4.4	18.0
	fruits	1	.3	.3	18.2
	Fruits	10	2.8	2.8	21.0
	Ice-cream	8	2.2	2.2	23.2
	Ice-cream	1	.3	.3	23.5
	Juice	20	5.5	5.5	29.0
	Lays	6	1.7	1.7	30.7
	Macaroni	1	.3	.3	30.9
	Milk	5	1.4	1.4	32.3
	Nuts	10	2.8	2.8	35.1
	Pasta	7	1.9	1.9	37.0
	Rice	1	.3	.3	37.3
	Shake	1	.3	.3	37.6
	Sounf	1	.3	.3	37.8
	String	1	.3	.3	38.1
	Sweet	1	.3	.3	38.4
Sweets	50	13.8	13.8	52.2	
Tea	173	47.8	47.8	100.0	
Total		362	100.0	100.0	



- There were 122 People Between the **Aged 15-17** out of which **31** people Strongly Like a lot, **61** people are responded liked it, **25** people responded naturally, 3 people expressed dislike and 2 people are expressed strongly dislike
- There were 119 People **Aged 18-20** Aged out of which 26 people Strongly Like a lot, **47** people are responded liked it, **30** people responded naturally, 12 people expressed dislike and 4 people are expressed strongly dislike. There were 121 People **Aged 21-24** aged out of which 28 people Strongly Like a lot, **42** people are responded liked it, **36** people responded neutral, 12 people expressed dislike and 3 people are expressed strongly dislike.
- We had data from 362 people and if we look at it in full Population than 64.9% were those who liked ad Strongly Liked Fast food very much, 25% People were those who like neutral fast Food and 9% were those who did not like and strongly dislike of fast food.
- 69.2% majority of respondents still favor home-cooked meals, showcasing enduring popularity. 24.0% considerable portion feels indifferent, indicating potential for promoting the benefits of home cooking. 6.0% Very few respondents express dislike for home-cooked meals, suggesting general acceptance.
- **77.07%** majority of respondents favor traditional/local cuisine, showcasing its enduring relevance. **18.5%** significant portion feels indifferent, indicating an opportunity for promoting local dishes and culinary heritage.**4.4%** Very few respondents express dislike for traditional cuisine, suggesting general acceptance and appreciation.
- **57.73%** little over half of respondents favor vegetarian/vegan options, indicating a growing interest in plant-based diets. **42.26%** significant portion feels indifferent, highlighting potential for education and promotion of vegetarian/vegan benefits.**13.7%** notable minority expresses dislike for vegetarian/vegan options, suggesting that there are barriers to acceptance.

2-How often do you consume fast food?

Together, **53.6%** of respondents consume fast food "very frequently" or "frequently," indicating significant dependence on fast food across age groups. **46.4%** of respondents consuming fast food occasionally and never, there is an opportunity to educate this demographic about the benefits of cooking at home or choosing healthier options when dining out. Engaging marketing strategies could help shift perceptions about fast food and encourage healthier choices. high percentage of frequent consumers raises concerns about potential health risks associated with a diet high in fast food, such as obesity, heart disease, and other chronic conditions

Health Risks Have you been diagnosed with any of the following health conditions? Obesity, Diabetes, High blood pressure, High cholesterol

We Had a Sample Size of 362 in Which asked About their Health 29 Male said they had a chronic disease while 161 Male said they did not have the disease then we assessed women had 143 did not have the disease, among then 5 Male Were patients with High Blood Pressure, 9 males were diabetic, 15 were obese and 161 Male were free of the Disease. The we came to the Women 19 of them had High Blood Pressure 3 Female had diabetes and 8 Female had the obese and 143 people had no disease.

When we asked the youth about health risk than 58 Youth People gave us a Positive answer and 304 people did not give us a positive answer, out of which 23 People had a high blood pressure 12 People had diabetes and 23 People were obesity patient and 304 Young youth people did not have the Disease.

Which is a P-value 0.005 Less than 0.05 so we reject the null Hypothesis (H0) because it is less than 0.05 indicating that dietary choices have a significant effect on risk So we accept the Alternative Hypothesis (H1). The food consumed by the young population of this age has a direct impact on their bodies and causes the diseases in young people. If we want to save them, we need to change their food Preference, Both measures Phi and Cramer's indicate a perfect association between the two nominal variables being analyzed. This suggests that the dietary choices and health risks are perfectly correlated in your dataset, and the relationship is statistically significant.

DISCUSSION:

This research provides critical insights into the dietary preferences and associated health risks among youth in Okara, Pakistan. The findings reveal a concerning trend of increased consumption of fast food, which correlates with rising rates of obesity, diabetes, and other lifestyle-related health issues. A significant portion of respondents (64.9%) exhibited positive attitudes towards fast food, suggesting a shift in eating habits influenced by globalization, aggressive marketing strategies, and the growing availability of fast-food outlets.

The data indicates that 13.5% of participants consume fast food very frequently (four or more times a week), highlighting a dependency on convenience foods that are often high in calories, sugars, and unhealthy fats. This trend raises serious public health concerns, particularly as dietary habits established in adolescence can have lasting implications for long-term health (**Khan et al., 2021; Lowry et al., 2021**).

Moreover, 16% of the youth reported being diagnosed with health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, with high blood pressure being the most prevalent. These findings align with national and international trends indicating an escalating prevalence of lifestyle diseases among young populations (**Farooq et al., 2020; Raza et al., 2022**).

The introduction of unhealthy eating patterns, coupled with sedentary lifestyles, necessitates urgent attention from public health officials.

Cultural factors significantly influence dietary choices. While traditional foods are still valued by many, the increasing popularity of fast food suggests a potential erosion of these cultural practices. Family dynamics and peer influences are crucial in shaping food preferences, as indicated by 70% of youth citing family influence in their dietary choices (**Shah et al., 2022; Rehman et al., 2023**).

This finding underscores the importance of involving families in dietary interventions.

Physical activity levels among participants were also evaluated, revealing that while many engage in some form of exercise, a noteworthy 12.2% reported rarely or never participating in physical activities. This sedentary behavior, combined with poor dietary choices, increases the risk of chronic health conditions (**Malik et al., 2020**).

CONCLUSIONS:

This Study has shown that young people are consuming a lot of fast food as a dietary supplement. Which is causing a lot of health problems. If fast food is available for the price of bread, people will eat more and will also face more health problem. Therefore, we need to take immediate steps to educate and inform our young generation so that they do not face this problem and can live a good and healthy life. It is better if we involve stakeholder and government in educating them about the disease of fast food, I am sure they will cooperate with us.

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