



Investigating Student Perspectives on Unhealthy Snacks: A study based on individual perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the habits of junk food intake among students, emphasizing their knowledge of its detrimental effects and how it relates to particular demographic factors. The study was carried out in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, and employed a quantitative, non-experimental descriptive research approach. It featured semi-structured interviews that were split into two categories: demographic data and the effects of junk food. Results showed that although 98% of students agreed that junk food is unhealthy, there was a substantial knowledge gap, with 38% of students not knowing about the nutritional value and potential health risks. Because of its deliciousness, the majority (70%) ate junk food instead of breakfast. These findings show a worrying trend towards unhealthful food choices driven more by flavor than by nutritional value, highlighting the need for more diet and health education.

Keywords: Junk Food, Nutritional Awareness, Student Health, Dietary Choices

Introduction

Today, children are exposed to significant changes in relationships, lifestyles, and social norms due to the rapid transformations in our society [1]. Significantly, there has been a notable shift in eating habits, as convenient meals have mostly taken the place of traditional, nutritionally rich diets. Today's diet trend heavily relies on junk food, which consists of convenient and appealing choices that are rich in fats, sugars, and salts but lacking in essential elements and vitamins [2,3].

The worldwide inclination towards unhealthy food has attracted the interest of individuals of all age groups, particularly the younger generation. As a result, ready-made, preserved, and antioxidant-rich foods are replacing traditional cuisine [4]. The increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases associated with obesity, such as insulin-resistant diabetes, metabolic

syndrome, and neurodegeneration, is directly linked to the escalating consumption of unhealthy food [5,6].

This can be attributed, to some extent, to the excessively sedentary nature of our everyday routines. In 1951, the term "fast food" was officially added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. It refers to meals that are prepared rapidly and frequently eaten while in motion, enabling time optimization [7,8]. Fast food items such as pizzas, burgers, and sandwiches are known for their high calorie, carbohydrate, and sodium levels. However, they often suffer from deficiencies in essential minerals such as iron, calcium, and vitamins A, B, and C. There has been a significant change in eating habits, shown in the rise of meals consumed away from home, larger portion sizes, meal skipping, and dependence on fast food [9,10].

Study Objective

1. Evaluating the level of awareness among college and school students on the detrimental consequences of consuming unhealthy food.
2. To investigate the correlation between various student demographics and their comprehension of the detrimental consequences of consuming unhealthy food.

Methodology

This study focused on the eating habits of college and high school students in the Uttarakhand region of Dehradun, using a quantitative, non-experimental descriptive research design. The poll was divided into two sections: Part A collected demographic data, while Part B talked about the negative impacts of junk food. 205 students took part in the study, ages ranging from 16 to 50, with 52% of them being male and 48% female. This demographic variety shows that a wide range of ages and populations, including children, consume junk food. After learning about the harmful effects of junk food on one's health, participants answered 14 questions that mixed demographic data with health-related topics.

Result

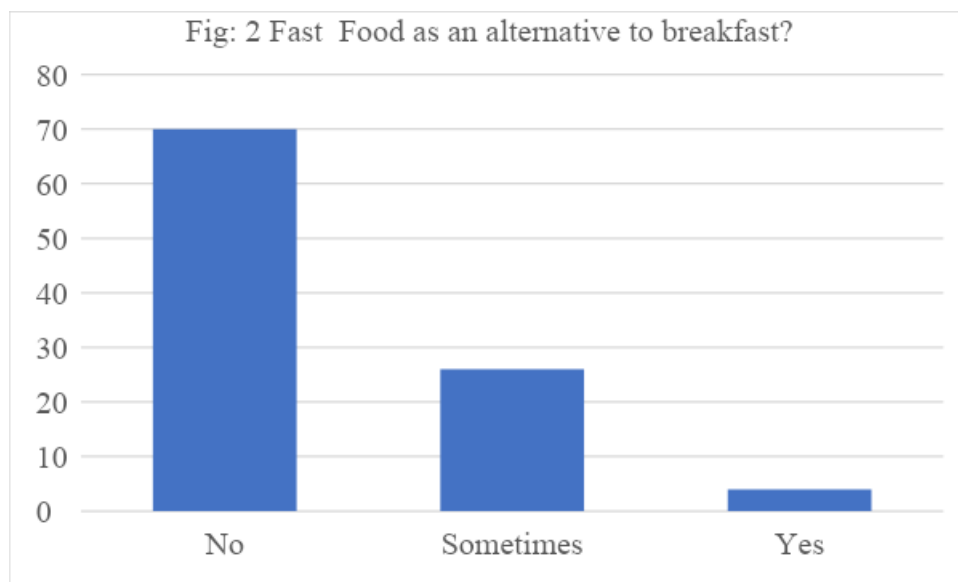
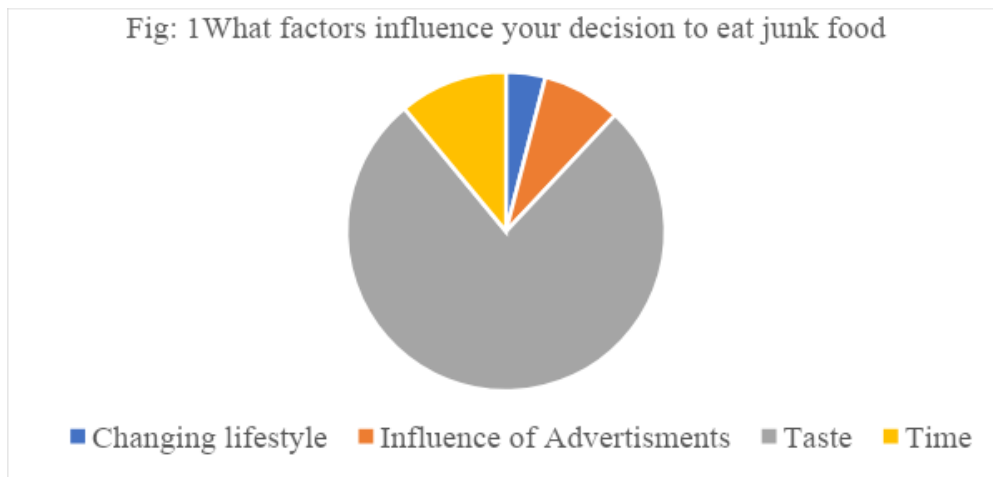
Favorite Fast Food: Preferences for various junk food varieties were noted and compiled for the 205 individuals who completed the survey, as shown in Table 1. About 58% of participants expressed a predilection for fast food, 45% for snacks, 16% for soft drinks regularly, and 5% for candies.

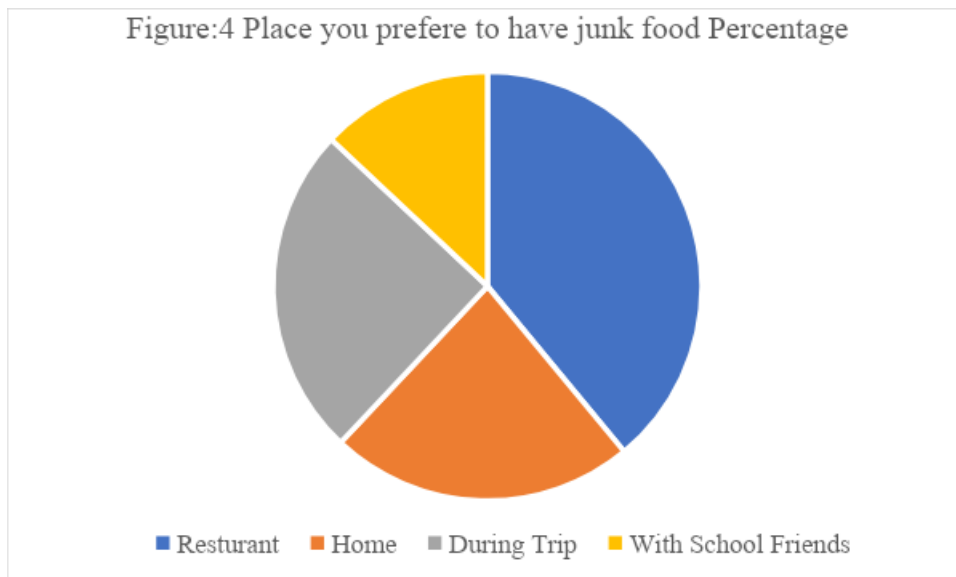
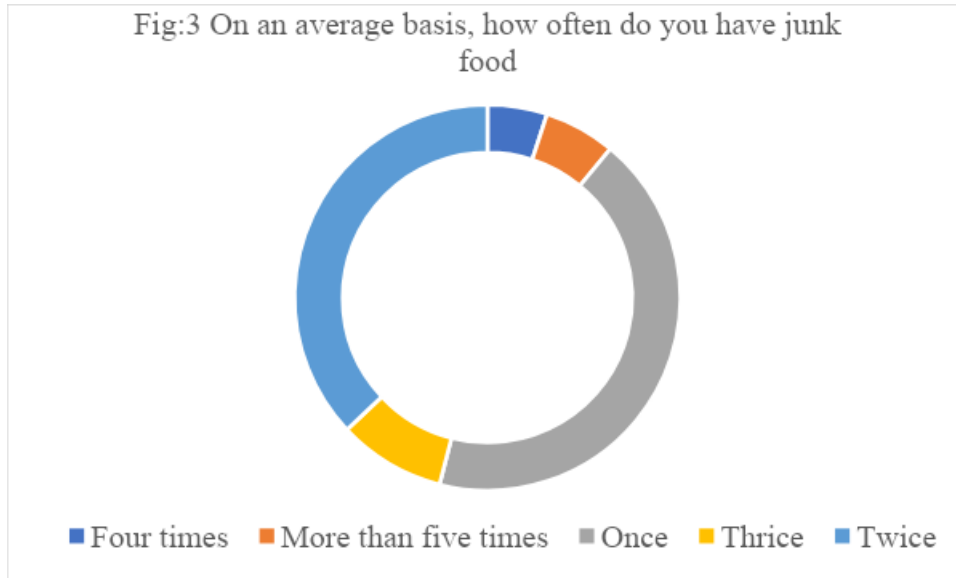
Eating habits related to junk food: The survey investigated the dietary choices and practices of students, with a special emphasis on their eating habits about the consumption of junk food. Different breakfast substitute patterns were found. Just 3% of students never had junk food for breakfast, 26% thought about it occasionally, and 70% usually chose fast food. 77% of respondents stated that taste was the main factor affecting their choice of junk food, 11% said that time restrictions played a role, and 9% said that lifestyle changes were the reason. Merely 8% stated that advertisements had an impact on them. Figure 1 shows the decision-making criteria for selecting junk food.

Figure 2 asks whether students substitute junk food for traditional breakfast, and Figure 3 shows how frequently students consume junk food each week: 6% eat it five times a week, 6% more frequently, 9% more frequently, 37% more frequently, and 43% less frequently.

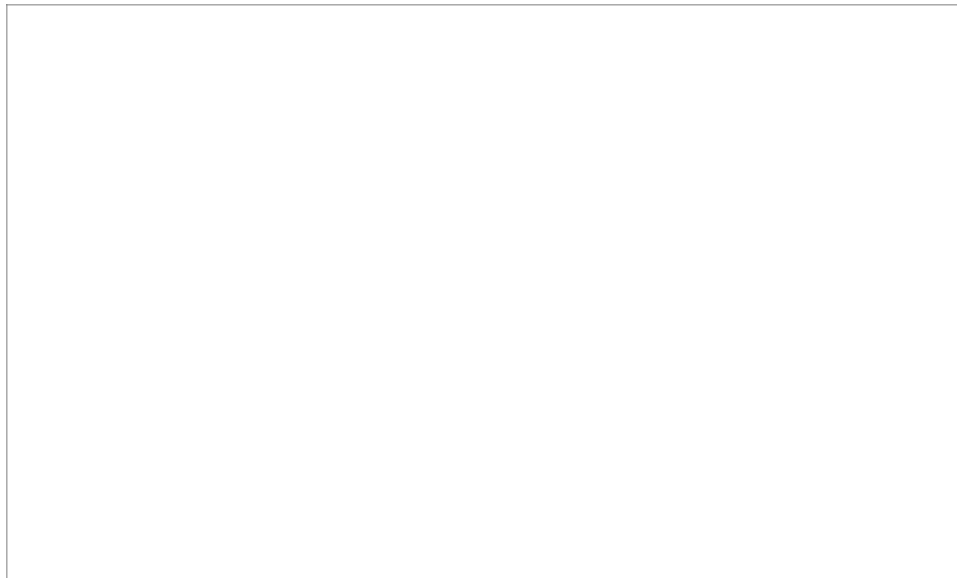
Table: 1 Favourite Fast-Food Items

Favorite Fast-Food Items	Respondents Count (n=205)
Fast Food	118
Snacks	45
Soft Drinks	32
Candies	10

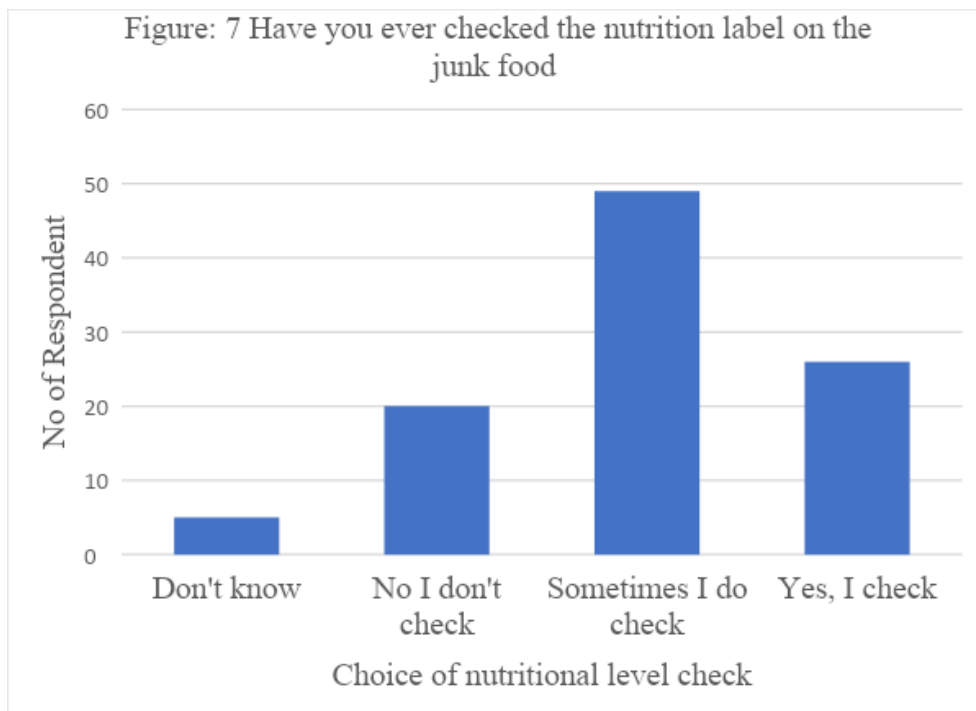


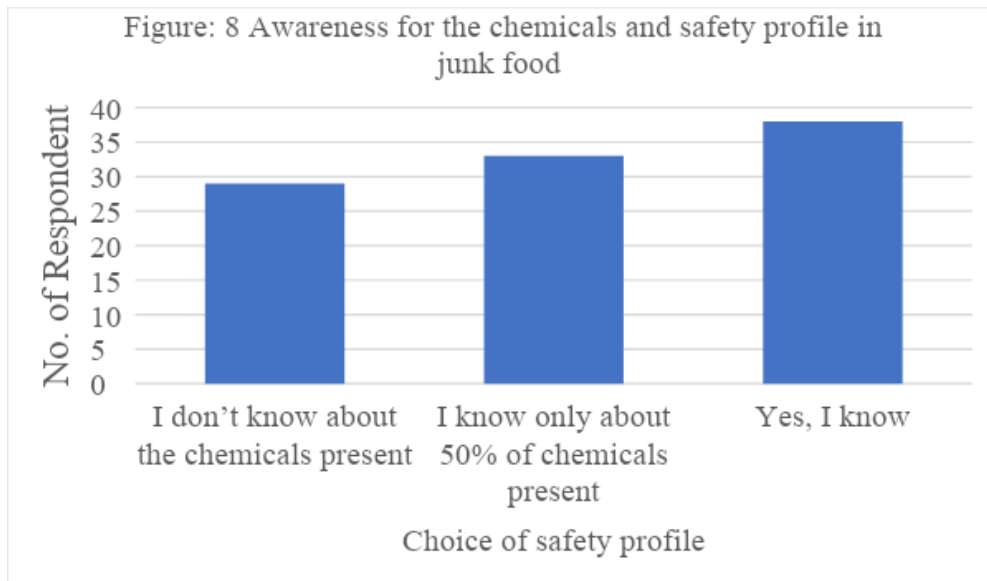


Students were also asked where they would prefer to eat junk food in the survey. According to the students' responses, 39% of them liked to eat junk food at restaurants, 25% when on trips, 23% at home, and 13% among classmates. Figure 4. When asked which times they preferred, 37% replied there was no set time, 41% with friends, 10% while travelling, 5% on special occasions, 4% alone, and 3% with their parents. Figure 5

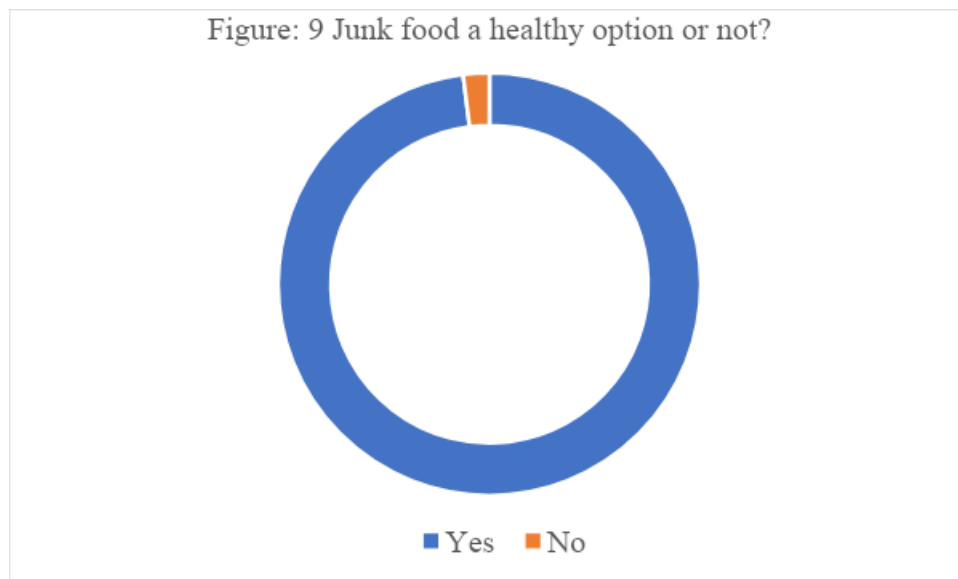


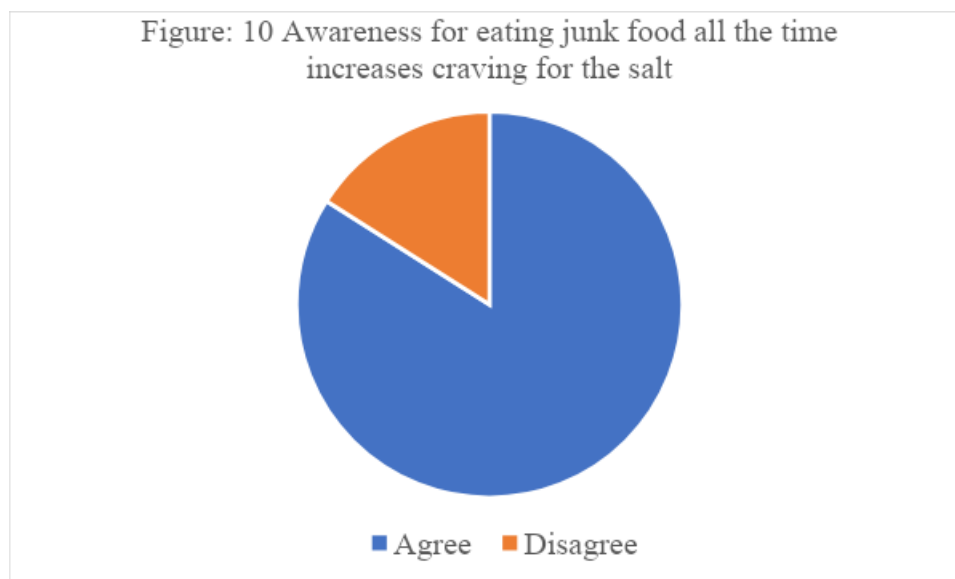
Information regarding junk food: Questions were asked to determine the pupils' level of knowledge regarding junk food. Of those surveyed, 17% said they never check the quality of junk food, 40% said they check it frequently, and 51% said they check it occasionally. Regarding nutrition facts labels, 21% disregarded them, 26% regularly checked them, 49% hardly glanced at them, and 5% were ignorant that they even existed. 38% of students knew a lot about chemicals and the safety levels of such substances in food, 29% knew nothing at all, and 33% knew something only partially. Figures 6-8 provide a full overview of responses to many factors including contaminants, nutrient labelling, and overall quality, including their safety and negative impacts.





Thoughts on Junk Food: Figure 9 shows that while 2% of respondents think it's appropriate, 98% of respondents think it's unhealthy. Figure 10 shows that 84% of respondents agreed that eating junk food contributed to overeating, whereas 16% disagreed.





Discussion

Junk food intake in youth is linked to significant health hazards, and recent research provides further insights into these concerns. Processed food, characterized by its high caloric density but low nutritional value, is readily accessible and can establish long-lasting dietary habits that become challenging to modify with age [11]. Regular consumption of unhealthy food is associated with substantial health risks, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, Type II diabetes, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and various cancers [12]. Studies reveal that more than 50% of students consume three or more fast food meals per week, and 16% of them habitually consume junk food [13]. Furthermore, it is clear that junk food companies intentionally focus their advertising efforts on younger demographics, as teenagers aged 12 to 17 are exposed to more than 14.4 million food advertisements each year on popular websites. Studies on behavior, such as those conducted using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), indicate that students' intentions to consume fast food are strongly influenced by their level of knowledge and societal standards. These findings underscore the crucial necessity for programs aimed at enhancing students' understanding of nutrition and promoting healthier eating habits [14].

Conclusion

Our study examines adolescents' junk food preferences, consumption rates, and health concerns. This population consumes more junk food due to many variables, according to our research. First, TV advertising influences college students' bad eating habits. Second, many participants admitted to junk food addiction. Finally, young teens must realize that fast food nutritional information is sometimes inaccurate. These corporations often add flavor enhancers and other ingredients to make their products more appealing, which can mislead consumers about their nutritional content. To ensure adolescents have a better informed, safe, and balanced diet, these habits must be promoted.

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