

# Trend of Fast Food Consumption among University Students of Karachi

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** The purpose of this paper is to assess the frequency of fast food consumption, the factors which lead to its consumption and the awareness of its health effects among university students of Karachi.

**Place & Duration:** Descriptive cross sectional study conducted in Karachi, Pakistan. The target population includes university students enrolled in the management programs (BBA & MBA) of Iqra University & Institute of Business Management, Karachi, during May 18, 2013 to August 18, 2013.

**Material & Methods:** A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted using self-administered questionnaire. 100 students were selected through convenient sampling from the management departments of two private universities of Karachi and data was collected after taking informed consent from them.

**Results:** The results of the study have shown that around 97% of the university students consume fast food meal out of which 44% of them consumed it 2-3 times every week. The most appealing factor for the selection of fast food was the taste as reported by 63% of the students and 66% of the students preferred to purchase food from the branded restaurants. Majority of the students were also have some idea about the nutritional values of the food and 54% of them were of the opinion that the fast food is a risk factor for obesity.

**Conclusion:** Although the students are aware of the nutritional information of the fast food and the health hazards related to it to some extent such as obesity, hypertension etc they still prefer to consume it regularly. Therefore there is a strong need to give more detail awareness about the effects of fast foods on their health in order to promote a healthy society.

**Key Word:** Fast Food, University Students, Nutrition

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## INTRODUCTION

Fast foods can be defined as convenience foods obtained in self-service or 'take-away' eateries with minimal waiting and are usually characterized as energy dense, low in micronutrients and fiber, high in simple sugars and salt, generally larger in portion size than conventional home-cooked or restaurant foods<sup>1,2</sup> and highly palatable<sup>3</sup>. The fast food business, initially conceived in Southern California during the 1940s, not only changed the eating habits of Americans, but also those in several other countries around the world, plus Asian countries<sup>4</sup>.

In Pakistan first, Fast food center was opened in 1997 that was KFC<sup>5</sup> and just after one

year in 1998 McDonalds started its first outlet in Pakistan<sup>6</sup>. In parallel with the rapidly developing technology, eating habits also undergo changes. Although nutrition is important for all segments of the society, it is of a different importance for university students<sup>7</sup>. Students eat all the fast food regularly because they do not think about their consumption of nutritionally balanced diet that is important for better health<sup>8</sup>.

### Objectives

The objectives of this study are;

1. To determine the frequency of fast food consumption among university students of Karachi.
2. To find out various factors contributing to fast food consumption by a university student.
3. To assess the awareness level of the effect of fast food consumption on health among university students of Karachi.

### Rationale

Fast food is becoming the food of choice for university students without knowing the serious effects it can have on their health. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research related to the fast food consumption pattern and factors which influences the choice of students. Therefore, it is important to determine the frequency of fast food consumptions among students and to identify those factors which affect their choice to prefer fast food over other food and to assess their awareness on the impact it has on their health.

### Significance

- The study will;
- Identify the factors that are influencing the choice of university students to consume fast food.
  - Contribute valuable knowledge to the existing lack of research on the said topic in Karachi.
  - The information gained in this study will be useful in designing awareness campaigns and promoting healthy eating habits.
  - This information can then be used as a reference and further studies can be conducted in the near future.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Americanization of eating out had tracked a culture of fast food and provided more importance to convenience and eating out behavior due to such certain reasons, dramatic changes occurred in fast food consumption of Asian countries<sup>17</sup>. The impact of this is seen in Pakistan as well as one of the studies support this statement by these words, "Fast food utilization increased radically in Pakistan"<sup>7</sup>. Pakistan is also included in the list of those countries where women are also taking part in an increasing economic scale of a particular family ultimately effecting the country GDP. The large number of women working outside the home had less time to cook food at home<sup>18</sup>, so the women's time was considered to be an important factor in raising the demand for fast food consumption in developing countries<sup>19</sup>.

But is there any link between the fast food and food lacking in nutrients or food leading to obesity, the reflection of the above mention statement is seen in the following studies. There is a potential link between fast food intake and weight gain<sup>20</sup>.

Another study found that the prevalence of fast food consumption is high in the US across education, income and racial groups and is not only strongly associated with obesity<sup>21</sup>, but also trigger the diabetic and dental problems later in life. Dense sugar content in such food can cause dental cavities and type 2 diabetes mellitus observed by another study<sup>22</sup>. Another question which arises in mind of many researchers is whether the high consumption of fast food is only due to time factor or because of changing in eating pattern which include more fatty food with the less consumption of high fiber and high vitamin food which includes fruits and vegetables. According to Bowman et al, the lack of consumption of fruits and vegetables will eventually increase the obesity and the risk to developed diabetes mellitus and cardio vascular disease<sup>23</sup>. One more provoking fact is that the fast food industry is penetrating in the food industry as fast as nothing else. More recent estimates show that in 2001, there were about 222,000 fast-food locations in the United States, generating sales of more than \$125 billion<sup>24</sup>. According to worldwatch.org, India's fast-food industry<sup>4</sup> is

growing by 40 percent per year<sup>25</sup>. According to the findings of the recent online survey from AC Nielson, India being at the seventh place, is among the top ten markets for weekly fast food consumption among the countries of Asia-Pacific region<sup>26,27</sup>. Although nutrition is important for all segments of the society, it is of a different importance for university students as seen by some studies<sup>28</sup>.

## **MATERIAL & METHODS**

### *Study Setting*

This study had been conducted in Karachi, Pakistan. The target population includes university students enrolled in the management programs (BBA & MBA) of Iqra University & Institute of Business Management, Karachi.

### *Study Duration*

The study had been conducted over a period of three months from May 18, 2013 to August 18, 2013 in two private universities of Karachi.

### *Study Design*

This study is a descriptive cross sectional study.

### *Sampling Technique*

The sample for this study has been selected by using convenient sampling on the basis of availability, accessibility and willingness of the university students of Karachi.

### *Sample Size*

The sample size for the study is 100 students and is determined on the basis of sample size selected in previous studies conducted in Pakistan<sup>7</sup>.

## **Data Collection Procedure**

### *Ethical Considerations*

- To make the study ethical, the rights to self-determination, confidentiality and informed consent would be considered.
- Permission to conduct the research is obtained from the Health Department of the Institute of Business Management.

- Subjects' consent would be obtained and they would be fully informed about the purpose of the study.
- Confidentiality would be maintained by keeping the collected data confidential and not revealing subjects' identity.
- The right of self-determination would also be granted to the subjects by informing them about the study and allowing them to voluntarily choose to participate or not.
- Any form of dishonesty would be avoided by truthfully recording the data without any manipulation.

## **Data Analysis Procedure**

All the information was fed into Microsoft Excel 2007 for statistical analysis in order to generate results as percentages, frequencies, tables and charts.

### *Data Collection Tool:*

The data had been collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 3 broad categories of close ended questions arranged in funnel format. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain the information about the frequency of consumption of fast food, the factors contributing to its choice and the awareness level among the students on its health consequences.

## **RESULTS**

At first the demographic values of the participants were computed that includes age, gender and qualification of the subjects and it showed that 47% of students fall in the age group of 18-22 years followed by those of 23-27 years being about 37%. It also showed that majority of them were males (54%) and about 50% BBA and 50% MBA students as shown in table 1.

The results also showed that out of total sample of 100 students, 99 % students consume fast food while only 1% reported don't eat fast food. Furthermore, 22% of the students who said that they consume fast food just once a week followed by 48% of the subjects reported that they consume fast food about 2-3 times a week while 17 % of the subjects reported that they have fast food for about 4-6 times a week or more as shown in fig 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Demographic factors

Demographic	Range	%
Age	18-22	47%
	23-27	37%
	28-32	10%
	Above 33	6%
Gender	Male	54%
	Female	46%
Qualification	BBA	50%
	MBA	50%

When the students were asked about the reasons which appealed them the most to consume fast food, around 63% of the students said that it is the taste which is the most important factor in selection of fast food while 12% mentioned that it's the time factor due to which they prefer fast food followed by lack of cooking skills which was reported by 10% of the students as shown in figure 2. Secondly when they were inquired whether product brands affect their opinion while selecting a fast food restaurant, 66% of the students were on the opinion that they preferred food from a branded restaurant while 11% disagree and commented that they don't food from branded restaurants and another 23% were not sure about it. Similarly 65% of the students agreed that price is also a main factor while selecting a restaurant while 13% students had no issue with the price where as the remaining 20% were not sure about it.

Another interesting finding was the fact that around 65% of the students prefer to have a carbonated drink along with their meal which is an additional draw back in terms of health effects as shown in figure 3.

Figure 4 shows that although 10 % of the students are positively aware of the nutritional value of the fast food and majority of the students' i.e 60% had limited information about it only they still they prefer fast food because of its taste. The study also showed that all of the students were aware that fast food consumption may lead to certain health disorders and majority of them stated that obesity is one of the major outcome of consuming fast food regularly as shown in figure 5.

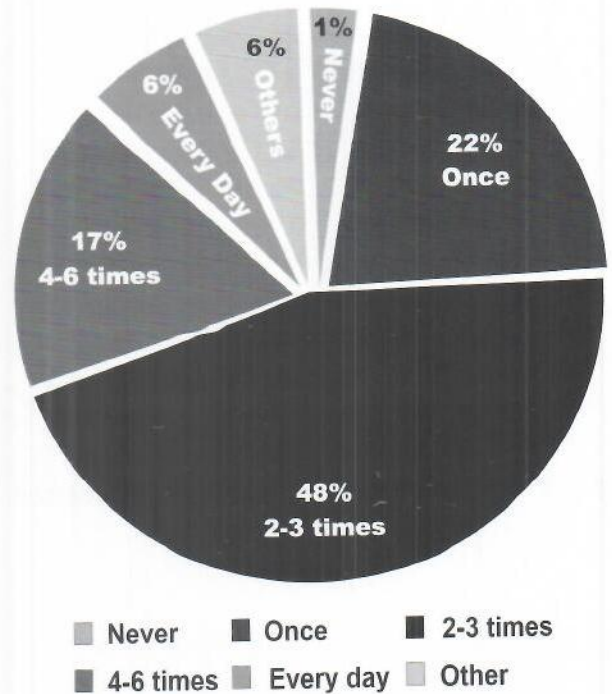


Fig 1. Frequency of Consumption of Fast Food

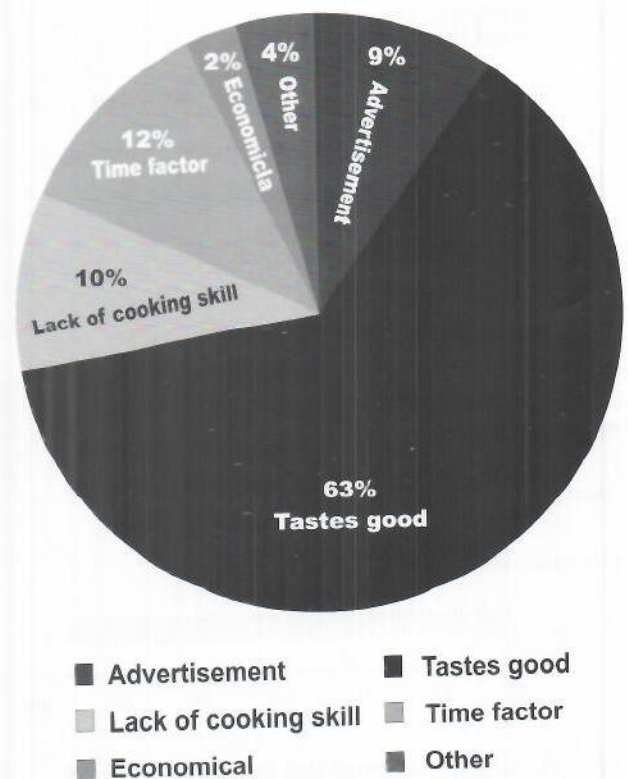


Figure 2: Reason for choosing to eat fast food.

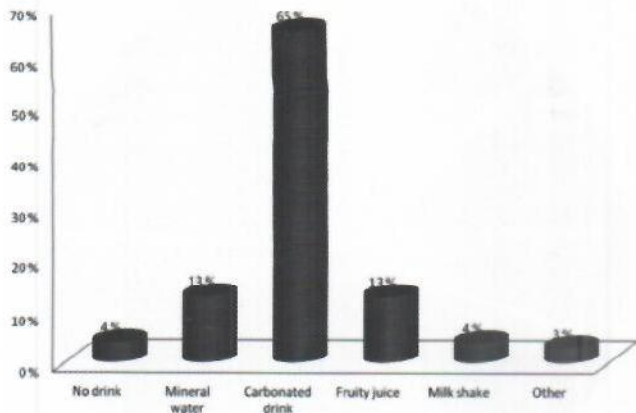


Figure 3: Beverage preference while ordering fast food

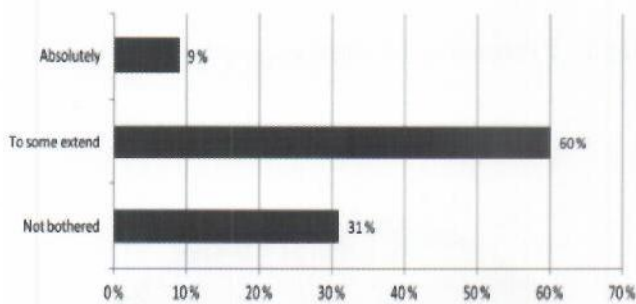


Figure 4: Awareness about the nutritional facts & ingredients of the fast food

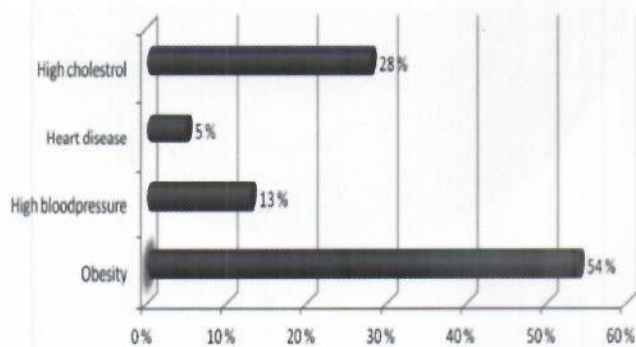


Fig 5: Awareness about the possible hazards of regularly eating fast food

## DISCUSSION

The results of the study have shown that the most important factor which influences the selection of fast food in university students is its taste. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted on students and youngsters. According to Hulya Y et al, the university students in Turkey classified taste as the most important factor in their preference for fast food<sup>29</sup>. The results of an Indian study conducted by Anita G et al, also inferred that taste and quality has the highest importance in the mind of fast food consumers in its selection<sup>30</sup>. Another study conducted in Pakistan by Baig AK et al has also demonstrated that people prefer fast food over fine dining due to its taste<sup>7</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have shown that fast food is highly popular among university students of Karachi and its consumption is increasing day by day. It is becoming an integral part of their life and most of the students consume fast food 2-3 times a week. The results also demonstrated that although the students are somewhat aware of the fact that fast foods lack in nutritional elements but this does not affect their selection and still they prefer fast food because of its taste followed by time factor.

## LIMITATIONS

This study is still ongoing. There are some limitations with respect to the data collection that may affect the accuracy of the results. The data was collected through online survey tool which could have created a chance of bias. Nevertheless, this is the first study of its kind conducted in Karachi to find the prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders using a customized standardized questionnaire.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Fast food has become a food of choice among university students. Despite the fact that fast food lack in nutritional elements and causes obesity, students still prefer it. The widespread use of fast food among students is of great concern and therefore there is strong need that the nutritional food should be included in the menu of fast food

restaurants and nutritional facts should be clearly stated in the menu. The government can ensure this by making it compulsory for fast food restaurants to introduce healthy menus and by performing regular inspections. Furthermore, media should also spread awareness about ill consequences of prolonged use of fast food.

There is a need for future studies in this area. Analytical studies should be carried out based on the results of this study to demonstrate the relationship between fast food consumption and its adverse effect on health to promote a healthy society since development is not about the growth of fast food outlets and altering eating behavior at the cost of consumer's health.

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