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Eating behaviours and its association with BMI among undergraduates in a tertiary education institute

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Eating behaviour and lack of physical activity contribute to poor health and academic performance. The present study investigated eating behaviour and its association with Body Mass Index (BMI) among undergraduate students in a tertiary educational institute. A descriptive study was conducted among 354 undergraduates using stratified random sampling. The pre-tested self-administered questionnaire was used to collect information on fast food, sugar added beverage, fruits and vegetable consumption and physical activity. BMI was measured according to the NAHANES guidelines. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. The majority of the students were female (76.6%), and the mean age of the sample was 22.41 ± 2.39 years. Among the students, 19.5% were underweight, 13.6% were overweight and 24.6% were obese. The majority of the undergraduates consumed fast food less than 3 times per week (54.2%), beverages with sugar less than 3 times per week (77.7%) and 89.2% of the undergraduates consumed fruits and vegetables more than 3 times per week. The majority exercised less than 3 times per week (63.0%) for at least a 30-minute duration. There was a significant gender difference in the frequency of consumption of sugar added beverages per week ($P < 0.001$), with females having a higher frequency of consumption more than 3 times per week. The frequency of beverages with sugar consumption in the obese category (33%) was higher than the normal BMI (19.7%) and overweight (8.3%) categories. In conclusion, the frequencies of consumption of fast food and beverages with sugar among undergraduates were less than 3 times per week. Fruits and vegetable consumption was more than 3 times per week. Consumption of beverages with sugar was significantly associated with high BMI among the study group. Our findings emphasize the need for interventional strategies to discourage the consumption of beverages with added sugar among the undergraduate population.

Keywords: Food habits, physical activity, undergraduates, BMI

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