

Original Article

Trend of fast food consumption among university girls in Karachi, Pakistan

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Abstract

Background The present study is aimed at improving the understanding of fast food trend among university girls. **Objectives** To study the trend of fast food consumption among university girls and to find out the association between university girls' perception regarding the unhealthfulness of fast food and their frequency of eating fast food. **Methods** A sample size of 50 female university students was selected for data collection through purposive sampling. By using questionnaire method, respondents were asked about their trend of fast food consumption by inquiring about their fast food preferences, their consumption pattern, and their monthly fast food expenditure. Correlation was used to analyze the association between the perception regarding the unhealthfulness of fast food and frequency of eating fast food. **Results** We found that the most preferred fast food item among university girls was burger (44.7%). The majority of respondents consume fast food at an average of 2-3 times a month (29.8%) and the main reason for their fast food consumption was convenience (55.3%). Among those who infrequently consume fast food, a majority (90%) agreed to the statement that fast food is unhealthful whereas among those who frequently consume fast food, a comparatively low percent (77.7%) agreed to the statement. Through correlation, we observed no association between all of the asked perceptions regarding fast food and frequency of fast food consumption among university girls ($p > 0.05$). **Conclusion** The overall results showed that university girls' perception regarding the unhealthfulness of fast food does not necessarily affect their frequency of fast food consumption.

Keywords

Fast food consumption, fast food trend, perceptions regarding fast food, unhealthfulness of fast food, frequency of eating fast food

Introduction

Rapid urbanization coupled with busy lifestyle and advancement in technology has greatly changed the lifestyle of many people including people in the developing countries. Eating habits have also undergone changes in parallel with this rapid developing technology. People are now more reliant on ready-to-eat meals offered by businesses for their daily sustenance. (Nondzor and Tawiah, 2015).

Although nutrition is important for all segments of the society, it is of a different importance for university students. (Yardimci, 2012) Individuals, who gain independence in this period, start to decide

on their eating preferences, to eat out more frequently, and to get influenced by their circle of friends more. (Demirezen and Cosansu, 2005) They try to concentrate more on effort saving and time saving than money. In this struggle for time and effort saving, ready-made problem solving techniques are preferred over self-prepared solutions. As a result, they tend to consume those foods more that are deemed unhealthy such as fast foods. (Zafar et. al, 2002).

Fast foods essentially refer to the mass production of speedy food which is of standardized size, shape, color, and taste. (Schlosser, 2001) Such foods may include burgers, pizzas, sandwiches, French fries,

ice creams, doughnuts, and all other food items that are dispensed quickly at restaurants, cafeterias, food courts, or any other locations. In terms of nutrition, fast food includes high amounts of sodium, sugar, cholesterol and fat but low in vitamin A and C and dietary fiber content. (Yardimci, 2012) Despite of its low nutritional value, fast food has become a significant symbol for the modern culture as it satisfies people especially the adolescents and young adults in a relatively short time. (Ritzer, 1992).

Fast food is a new trend of eating in Pakistan and is gaining popularity day by day. Twenty years ago there was no McDonald's, Donuts and no Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in the country. But now major fast food chains have descended on us in a big way and Pakistani consumers have welcomed them with open arms. (Quraishi, 2002).

Keeping in mind the wide variety of fast food available, it is of utmost importance to recognize why and how university students make their consumption decisions as they are one of the most targeted consumers of fast food. Such understanding would enable marketers to predict how youngsters would react to promotional messages as well as other researchers to use the results in future for any health related studies. Though similar other researches have been conducted before in Pakistan but when we speak particularly about Karachi, there had been no research that was specific towards university girls and no research ever had all these components of fast food preference, consumption, and expenditure in it. Therefore there was a need for a study that would analyze these components specifically among university girls and the one that could benefit future researchers to understand the fast food trend among university girls.

Methodology

The targeted population of this study was female university students of Karachi. 50 female university students from 3 different universities were selected as subjects of this study through convenient sampling.

The selection of universities and subjects from those universities was based on convenience.

The data collection was started from June till August 2015. Data was collected from 3 different universities of Karachi:

- Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan Government College of Home Economics.
- Al-Hamd University.
- Hamdard University

A questionnaire method was used as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of (a) **general information**, this part of questionnaire includes questions related to general information of a subject which comprise of institution's name, gender, age and educational status.

(b) **Perceptions regarding fast food**, it also contains few statements of perceptions regarding fast food that the respondents either agreed or disagreed to.

(c) **Components of fast food trend**, most importantly, it inquired the trend of fast food consumption by asking about the following components of fast food trend:

i. Fast Food Preference:

The questionnaire included a Likert scale in which respondents ranked only three out of 8 fast food items on the basis of their preference.

ii. Fast Food Consumption Pattern:

The questionnaire included some questions regarding the fast food consumption pattern of students. These questions were used to inquire the respondent's frequency, time, reasons, and expenditure on eating fast food.

iii. Fast Food Expenditure:

A question was included regarding the average monthly fast food expenditure.

Correlation was conducted to investigate a possible relationship between: Perception regarding the unhealthfulness of fast food and frequency of fast food consumption. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive analysis was used to investigate frequency of fast food preferences, expenditure, consumption pattern, perceptions and general information of subjects.

Results

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Age Groups	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage
19-22	36	72
23-26	11	22
27-30	3	6
Total	50	100
Educational status		
Graduate	14	28
Undergraduate	36	72
Total	50	100
Monthly Pocket Money		
Less than Rs. 1000	14	29.8
Rs. 1000-2000	12	25.5
More than Rs. 2000	13	27.7
Other	8	17
Total	47*	100

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. As depicted in the table, more than half (72%) of the sample falls under the age group of 19-22. Majority of the students were undergraduate (72%) and used to get monthly pocket money of less than Rs. 1000.

*excluding the ones who do not consume fast food

Table 2. Fast food Consumption

Do you consume fast food?	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage
Yes	47	94
No	3	6
Total	50	100

Table 2 shows the responses of whether the sample consumes fast food or not. Almost all respondents (94%) used to consume fast food while only a small percent gave an opposite response.

Table 3. Reasons for Fast Food Consumption

I usually consume fast food because of	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage
Convenience	26	55.3
Price	3	6.4
Hunger & Satiety	12	25.5
Social & Environmental Enjoyment	6	12.8
Total	47*	100

Table 3 indicates respondent's reasons for patronizing fast food. Majority of the respondents who consume fast food consume it due to its convenience (55.3%) while lesser percent consume fast food due to hunger & satiety, and social & environmental enjoyment. The least percent of respondents (6.4%) consume fast food due to its price. The reasons that were merged in the convenience category were quick service, easy accessibility, and lack of other alternatives while hunger & satiety included the reasons that fast food is appetizing and gives a feeling of fullness. The social & environmental factors were other's influence and source of enjoyment whereas price reasonability and no need for self-cooking are merged in the economical factor.

*excluding those who do not consume fast food at all

Table 4. Usual Location of Fast Food Consumption

I usually consume fast food at;	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage
University Cafeteria	16	34
Food courts	12	25
Home	8	17
Restaurants	9	19
Street Vendors	2	4.3
Total	47*	100

Table 4 shows the most frequent locations of fast food consumption by university students. As depicted in the table, majority of the respondents who consume fast food usually have it at university cafeterias (34%) whereas the least percentage consumes fast foods from street vendors (4.3%).

*excluding those who do not consume fast food at all

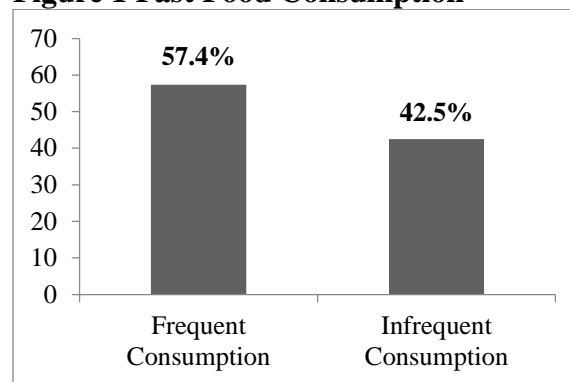
Table 5. Frequency of Fast Food Consumption

Average Monthly Fast Food Consumption	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage
Everyday	8	17
2-3 times a week	7	14.9
Once a week	12	25.5
2-3 times a month	14	29.8
Once a month	5	10.6
Less than once a month	1	2.1
Total	47*	100

Table 5 shows the frequency of fast food consumption by university girls. According to the results, majority of the respondents who eat fast food consume it 2-3 times a month (29.8%). Only 2.1 percent of the students in the study mentioned that they consume fast food even less than once a month.

*excluding those who do not consume fast food at all

Figure 1 Fast Food Consumption



Based on the results in Table 5 we have categorized our respondents into frequent and infrequent consumers on the basis of their fast food consumption. The respondents are considered frequent if they consume fast food from every day to once a week whereas if the respondents consume fast food from two to three times a month to less than once a month, they are considered as infrequent consumers. The results shown in Figure 1 indicate that out of the respondents who consume fast food majority of the university girls are frequent consumers (57.4%) whereas a lesser percent consume fast food infrequently (42.5%).

*excluding those who do not consume fast food at all

Figure 2 Fast Food Preference

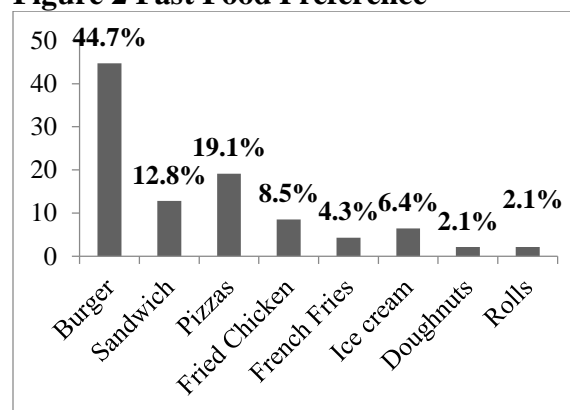


Figure 2 shows the preferred fast food items among university girls of our study. According to the results, the most usually

preferred fast food item is burger (44.7%) followed by pizzas (19.1%) and sandwiches (12.8%). The least preferred fast food items are doughnuts (2.1%) and rolls (2.1%).

*excluding those who do not consume fast food at all

Table 6. Monthly Fast Food Expenditure*

I monthly spend this amount of money on fast food:	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage
Less than Rs. 1000	37	78.7
Rs. 1000-2000	6	12.8

More than Rs. 2000	1	2.1
Other	3	6.4
Total	47*	100

Table 6 shows the monthly fast food expenditure by university girls of our study. According to the results, majority (78.7%) of the respondents who consume fast food spend less than Rs. 1000 a month followed by those who spend Rs. 1000- 2000 (12.8%). Only a small percent (2.1%) spend more than Rs. 2000 per month on fast food.
*excluding those who do not consume fast food at all

Figure 3 Perceptions of Fast Food

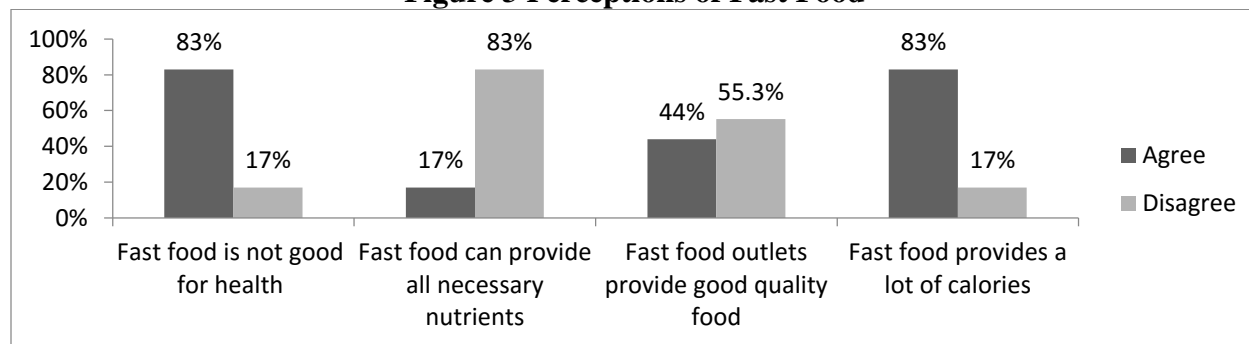


Figure 3 shows that more than half respondents who consume fast food agreed that fast food is not good for health (83%) and that fast food provides a lot of calories (83%). Similar majority of respondents disagreed to the statement that fast food can provide all necessary nutrients whereas 55.3% disagreed that fast food outlets provide good quality food.

*excluding those who do not consume fast food at all

Table 7 Association between university girls' perception regarding the unhealthfulness of fast food and their frequency of eating fast food

Perception: fast food is not good for health	Frequency of fast food consumption		Total	P-Value
	Frequent Consumption	Infrequent Consumption		
Agree	N = 21 77.7%	N = 18 90.0%	N = 39 83.0%	0.280
Disagree	N = 6 22.8%	N = 2 10.0%	N = 8 17.0%	
Total	N = 27 (100%)	N = 20 (100%)	N = 47* 100%	

According to the results in Table 7, among those who infrequently consume fast food, a majority (90%) agreed to the statement that fast food is unhealthful whereas among those who frequently consume fast food, a comparatively low percent (77.7%) agreed to the statement. When we used correlation, we observed no association between the perception regarding unhealthiness of fast food and frequency of fast food consumption.

*excluding those who do not consume fast food at all

Discussion

The results of this study showed the actual trend of fast food among university girls. Burger was found to be the most preferred fast food item among university girls. This correlates well with the results of a study conducted in Saudi Arabia among young adults in which burger was the most frequently preferred fast food item. (Al Faris, et al, 2015).

The main reason for fast food consumption among university girls in our study was found to be convenience. This result is similar to the findings of a US study exploring the reasons for fast food consumption among students aged 19-25 years, where most students rated convenience and cost as factors influencing their consumption. (Mu, 2015).

Majority of university girls were found to consume fast food 2-3 times a month. This finding is similar to the study conducted on Pakistani female university students in which out of 51 participants, 30 students visited fast food restaurants less than 3 times per month. (Shaikh Rehman, 2010).

As far as the monthly expenditure is concerned, majority of the fast food consumers in our study spend less than Rs. 1000 per month. This finding correlates well with the results of a study conducted in Faisalabad in which most of the respondents spend in the same way. (Zafar, 2002)

In our study, it was observed that majority of the infrequent consumers of fast food had the right perceptions regarding fast food and fast food outlets and they were applying their knowledge practically whereas it was also seen that majority of the frequent

consumers also had the right perceptions but in lesser percent than infrequent consumers. This is similar to a study conducted on female university students in Saudi Arabia where 85% were aware that fast food is unhealthy and still were having a frequent consumption of it. (Alfawaz, 2012). Thus the study showed that university girls' perceptions regarding fast food and fast food outlets do not necessarily affect the frequency of their fast food consumption.

Keeping in mind this frequent consumption of fast food among university girls, preventive measures should be taken to avoid the occurrence of unhealthy outcomes associated with excessive fast food consumption. Nutrition education programs should be organized in universities to educate students on the consequences of fast food consumption habits and to encourage them to go for some healthier options. Not only nutritional education but nutritional counseling can also greatly improve the dietary practices of university girls. This is also indicated in a study conducted in India that showed that nutritional counseling regarding the importance of balanced diet and harmful effects of fast foods helped to curb the fast food addiction and improved the dietary pattern among adolescent girls. (Singla, 2012) Only by this way, the fast food trend can successfully be controlled among university girls.

Conclusion

The overall results showed that university girls' perceptions regarding fast food do not necessarily affect their frequency of fast food consumption.

Competing Interests

The author has completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form and declare: no support from any organization for the submitted work; no financial relationships with any organizations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous three years; no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.

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