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Correlation Between Consistent Healthy Habits and Mental Health



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CURE

Abstract

- Displaying healthy habits, such as adhering to healthy diets or getting adequate sleep, has been linked to positive mental health outcomes in the past.
- We aimed to study the impact that **frequency** of healthy habits (such as exercise, diet, sleep, etc) had on mental health.
- The purpose of our study was to explore the relationship between consistency of healthy habits and mental wellbeing, resilience, and motivation through a self-reported survey.
- We found significant correlations between consistent healthy habits and positive mental health. Conversely, frequent negative habits were correlated to other negative habits (such as fast food consumption and low exercise)
- Based on our findings, we suggest that consistency and frequency of habits is a key factor in having positive mental health outcomes.
- Additionally, we suggest limiting frequency of negative habits, like fast food consumption, due to poor mental health outcomes and influence on development of other negative habits

Introduction

Previous Research

- Poor dietary choices have been related to increased depressive symptoms. (Akbaraly, et al. 2013)
- Lower psychological distress and higher resilience are associated with healthy dietary choices (Whatnall et al. 2019)
- Adherence to the Mediterranean Diet is correlated to better academic performance in university students (Antonopoulou, et al. 2019)
- Healthy diet, regular physical activity, and restful sleep can reduce the risk of anxiety, depressive disorders, cognitive decline, and dementia (Briguglio et al., 2020)

Why is Consistency Important?

- Consistency can lead to the creation of habits, which makes it easier for individuals to continue doing healthy things regularly.
- Metabolic Regulation - with consistent intake of balanced and nutritious foods can help to regulate metabolism.
- Stable Blood Sugar Levels - with balanced meals at regular intervals in order to prevent blood sugar spikes/crashes
- Diverse nutrient absorption, immune function, hormone balancing (adequate sleep, balanced diet), greater cardiovascular health including lowering of cholesterol, blood pressure improvement (heart healthy foods like whole grains, fish), weight management, greater digestive health (fiber in whole grains, leafy greens)

Methods

- Demographics: Male and Female; 18 years and older
- Participants: 234
- Analysis: Pearson Correlation Coefficient, SPSS Version 28
- Deliverance: Word of Mouth, Texting, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, GroupMe, YikYak
- Survey: The MAL Model & Psychological Flexibility Survey
- Categorized specific questions under three psychological qualities to determine their correlation with each healthy habit.

Results

Figure 1: Age

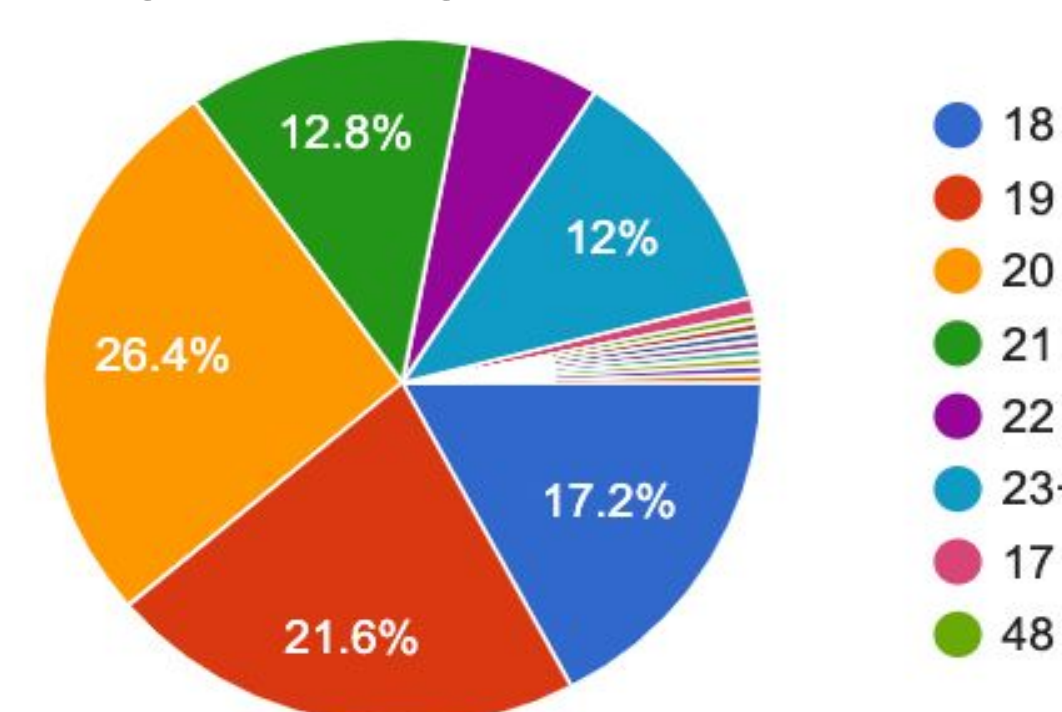


Figure 2: Gender Identity of participants

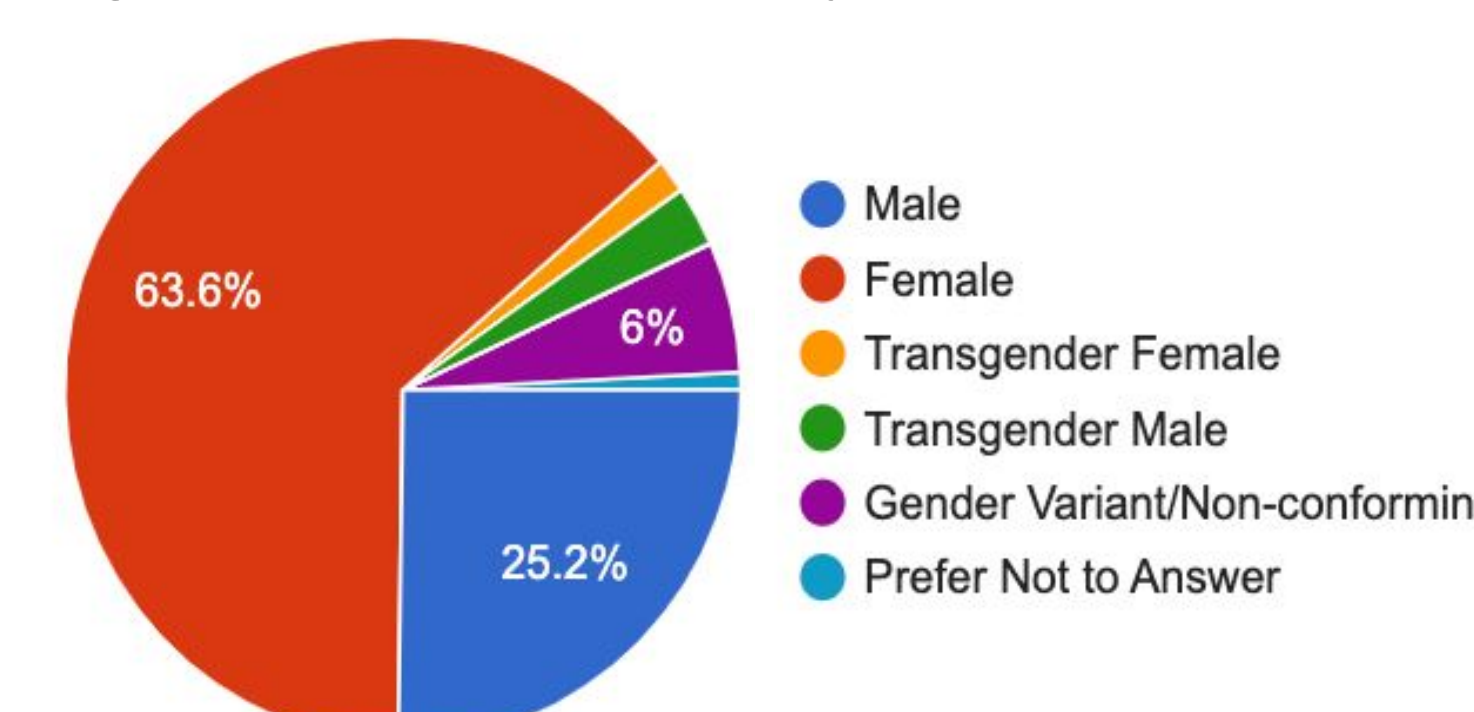


Table 2-Relationship between eating healthy and the motivation, resilience, and well being of the individual

Quality	Greater consumption of these foods is correlated with higher levels of each quality:
Resilience	Dairy (.166**) and Fruits (.207**)
Psychological Well-being	Fruits (.199**), Nuts/Flaxseed (.235**), Leafy Greens (.240**), Beans (.137*), Whole Grains (.219**)
Motivation	Dairy (.221**), Fruit(.153**), Whole Grains (.173**), Nuts/Flaxseed (.171**), Leafy Greens (.201**)

Table 1- Relationship between other habits and the motivation, resilience, and wellbeing of the individual

Habit	Correlation
Substance Use	More substance usage → lower levels of: ○ motivation (-.149*)
Sleep	More sleep → higher levels of: ○ psychological wellbeing (-.136*)
Fast Food	More fast food → lower levels of: ○ motivation (-.137*),
Breakfast	More breakfast → higher levels of: ○ motivation (-.127*), psychological wellbeing (.164**)
Exercise	More exercise → higher levels of : ○ resilience (.164**), psychological wellbeing (.182**)

p<.05 = * p<.01 = **

Discussion

Our findings are generally in line with previous research suggesting a correlation between healthy habits and psychological well-being. Additionally, our findings supported our hypothesis.

- Foods like leafy greens, dairy, fruits, nuts, flaxseed, and whole grains have vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that have many positive physical health implications as well as positive mental health implications.
- The presence of vitamins, especially E, B9, D, antioxidants, minerals, calcium, protein, fiber, complex carbohydrates, and omega-3 fatty acids in the foods observed may contribute to our findings due to the connection of these ingredients to brain and cognitive function. Positive mental health outcomes with exercise, adequate sleep, and eating breakfast could be due to greater hormonal regulation, and greater cognitive benefits that they have been associated with.

Our findings include...

- Higher motivation was positively correlated to consistent longer sleep, higher healthy food consumption, and negatively correlated to substance use and fast food consumption.
- Higher psychological resilience was positively correlated to consistent healthy food consumption, more exercise, and negatively correlated to substance usage and fast food consumption.
- Greater psychological well-being was positively correlated with eating breakfast consistently, exercising more, and eating healthier food consistently.
- Displaying a certain healthy habit was correlated to an increased likelihood of displaying another healthy habit. The same is true for negative habits.

These findings led us to the conclusion that consistency is an important factor in positive outcomes of healthy habits such that the more consistent you are with your habits, the higher the mental health benefits. We suggest increasing frequency of healthy food intake, exercise, breakfast, and adequate sleep, while decreasing frequency of fast food intake and substance use.

Implications

- Mental health problems are exceedingly prevalent in college-aged populations, and more accessible solutions are necessary.
- Fad diets and inconsistency in other habits like sleep and exercise are extremely common, with many people not aware of the importance of consistency
- Greater education and resources on the importance of healthy habits and the consistency of them as well as the correlations with mental health should be prioritized in college-aged groups.

Limitations and Future Research

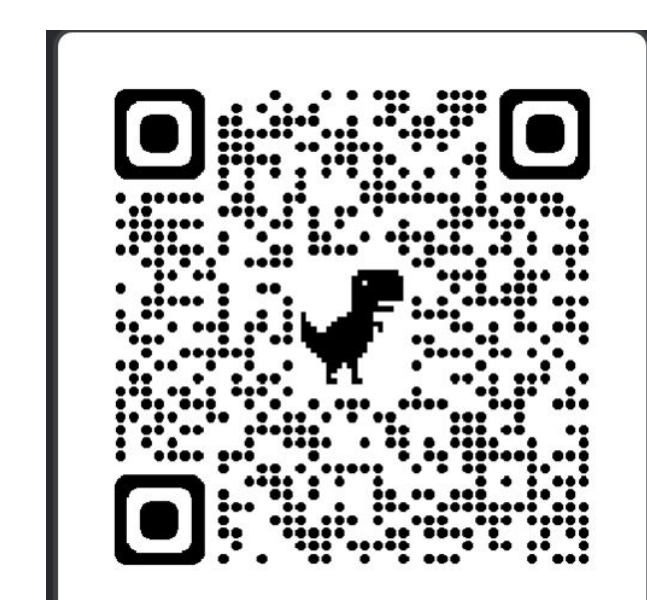
Limitations

- Large age range
- Bias and limitations of self-reported data

Future Research

- Focusing on college-aged students alone during periods of high vs. low stress
- Studying the habits of individuals over time → understand how much consistency is necessary to impact mental health (times per day, week, etc.)
- Impacts of a college student living on campus vs. off campus

References



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