

Surveying Student Attitudes and Behaviors Regarding Diet and Exercise

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Patients, Physicians & Populations 1 (P3-1) • Spring 2022

Study Question and Background

Our goal was to understand how often students within the Honors College at Texas Tech exercised and ate commercially prepared meals. We also wanted to analyze these parameters to note how these behaviors compared to the general population. Finally, collecting this data allowed us to gauge how interested students are in improving their proficiency in cooking and frequency of exercise.

Study Population

Undergraduate students enrolled in Texas Tech's Honors College were the intended study population for our survey. The 45 respondents are primarily young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 (n=43) enrolled in various majors across the 13 schools at Texas Tech University. These students also differ in their housing situations. The respondents reside either with their parents (n=2), in on-campus dorms (n=14), or in an apartment/house (n=29). Surveying this population allows us to identify real and perceived barriers to exercise and dieting for young adults pursuing higher education. In the following year, we will attempt to minimize these barriers and increase student wellness through improved nutrition and exercise practices.

Data Collection Methods

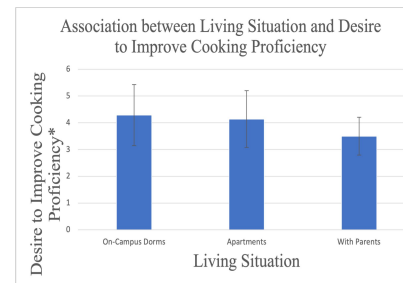
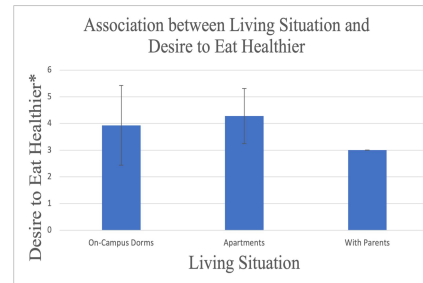
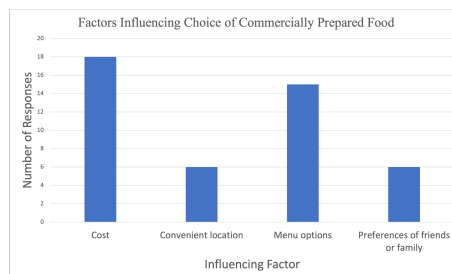
This project used the TTUHSC School of Medicine P3-1 TTU Honors College/WNR =Survey, an online survey instrument shared with students in the Texas Tech Honors College. The survey, which included 9 question sets, received a total of 63 responses. The questions that our group submitted received 45 responses. This project was approved for exempt review by the TTUHSC Institutional Review Board.

Results

On average, students residing in on-campus dorms tended to eat commercially prepared meals more often per week than those who lived in apartments or houses or with their parents (5.21 vs. 3.50 vs. 4.00, respectively). However, regardless of their living situation, most students expressed a desire to improve their cooking proficiency and eat a more nutritious diet. Additionally, weight gained or lost during COVID-19 did not have a significant association with students' reported desires to become more proficient in cooking.

Surveyed students believed that the average American eats 6.27 meals out per week, while a broader study has shown an actual value of 2.8 in 1999-2000, which has been expected to grow to around 4.00 in recent years. Participants, on average, eat about 4.06 commercially prepared meals per week. Students reported that their decision on where to eat commercially prepared food mostly depended on cost and menu options.

Most students believed that the average American engages in less than 60 or between 60 and 100 minutes of exercise per week, while a study has shown an actual value of 120 minutes per week. On average, the honors students in the study reported engaging in at least 30 minutes of exercise 3.64 times per week.



* 1 = Low Desire, 5 = High Desire

Conclusions

Across all living situations, students on average tended to show a desire to improve their dietary and exercise habits. Survey participants, on average, gained 4.7 pounds throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, however, their attitudes towards healthier habits did not correlate with their personal weight gain/loss. Students eat on average 4.06 commercially prepared meals per week, which is very close to the average American's intake. Their perceptions on the national average are overestimated and may lead to the belief that they are eating a healthier diet. This information sheds much light on the current behaviors and attitudes of undergraduate students and guides further research and action to improve student health in the future.

Next Steps

1. Reach out to Co-Directors for the Culinary Medicine elective and request TTU kitchen access to host cooking workshops
2. Organize cooking workshops for undergraduate students and create invitations to be distributed across campus
3. Create a student-friendly cookbook with recipes and nutritional guidelines supported by the USDA and AHA

References

1. Kant, Ashima K., and Barry I. Graubard. "Eating out in America, 1987–2000: trends and nutritional correlates." *Preventive medicine* 38.2 (2004): 243-249.
2. Godbey, Geoffrey. *ATUS Analysis/NIH*. Penn State University (2012).