

The Influence of Cultural Practices on Adolescent Health Behaviors and Lifestyle Choices

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Abstract

Background: Cultural practices have a profound impact on the development of adolescents' health behaviors and lifestyles through dietary, physical activity and social practices. Dietary, physical activity and lifestyle choices among adolescents are also influenced by cultural practices, which can have either a positive or detrimental impact on health outcomes including the development of chronic diseases such as Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes. **Objective:** This research project will explore the impact of cultural practices on the health choices and lifestyles of adolescents and to understand how these practices impact health. **Methodology:** A quantitative cross-sectional study was conducted on adolescents (13-18 years of age). Information was gathered via questionnaires measuring eating behaviors, physical activity and lifestyles of different cultural groups. Data were statistically analyzed using SPSS. **Findings:** The findings show that cultural practices have a profound impact on adolescents' dietary habits, physical activity and lifestyle. Healthful cultural norms support healthy behaviors, while some traditional practices lead to sedentary behaviors and unhealthy diet and physical activity patterns. **Conclusion:** Health among adolescents is influenced by cultural practices. Supporting culturally appropriate health promotion interventions can strengthen positive lifestyle choices, and optimize health outcomes.

Keywords: Cultural Practices, Adolescents, Health Behaviors, Lifestyle Choices, Nutrition, Physical Activity

1. Introduction

Puberty and junior high school are pivotal times for development, involving physical and cognitive changes, and social transitions. It's a time when people start to develop lifelong health-related behaviors and habits that impact their health later in life. Health-related cultural practices - a collective set of resources such as beliefs, values, norms and behaviors that are shared by a group of people - influence such behaviors. These relate to adolescents' eating, physical activity, sleep and social behaviors [1][2]. Adolescents' healthy or unhealthy practices can lead to good health or predispose them to chronic diseases like Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes [3]. For example, cultural eating practices may promote consumption of healthy foods in one culture, but may increase fat or sugar consumption in another [4]. Likewise, cultural perceptions of physical activity, gender, and recreational activities play a crucial role in adolescents' participation in sports and physical activity [5]. And cultural factors affect psychosocial factors such as peer influence, substance abuse and health-related beliefs and behaviors. Research suggests different populations of adolescents from various cultures have distinct patterns of risk-taking behaviors, including smoking, alcohol use, and sedentary behaviors [6][7]. Parental guidance and family dynamics, at the core of cultural traditions and norms, also play an essential role in shaping adolescents' lifestyle choices and decision-making [8]. The effects of globalization and modernization have added to the cultural influences on health behaviors. The influences of Western culture, new media and social transitions have resulted in a shift in cultural practices, which can lead to unhealthy lifestyles among adolescents [9]. This shift points to the need to holistically consider the role of culture in relation to current environmental influences on health in adolescents [10]. While there is much literature on adolescent health, little attention has been given to the effects of integrated cultural practices on adolescent health and well-being, particularly on positive and negative lifestyle behaviors [13]. Research may focus on one aspect such as physical activity or diet, but ignore the cultural factors [11]. Furthermore, there is a lack of cross-cultural comparisons, especially in developing countries where cultural influences are still strong [12].

1.1 Objectives

- a. To understand the impact of cultural practices on health and health-related behaviors and determinants among adolescents.
- b. To explore the associations between cultural factors and health outcomes of adolescents.

1.2 Research Gap

While past research has focused on several components affecting adolescent health-related behaviors, there are few studies that holistically combine cultural, social and environmental factors. There is also a dearth of empirical research on the effect of changing cultural practices because of globalization on adolescent lifestyle behaviors. This research aims to fill this knowledge gap by presenting a comprehensive review of cultural factors on adolescent health practices.

2 Literature review

Research undertaken in recent years highlights the increasing recognition of the role of cultural practices in shaping health behaviors and choices during adolescence. Diet, exercise and lifestyle is strongly influenced by cultural practices and norms, influencing health outcomes. For example, adolescents in environments that have a cultural focus on healthier diets and living an active lifestyle are more likely to have healthier lifestyles versus adolescents in environments that promote sedentary behaviors and processed food [13][14]. In particular, our dietary patterns are ingrained in cultural practices. Research indicates that traditional eating patterns that include fresh and unprocessed foods are associated with health and well-being, whereas the consumption of Westernized diets have been shown to contribute to Obesity and metabolic diseases [15][16]. Likewise, cultural attitudes towards physical activity, such as gender stereotypes and social norms can influence adolescents' engagement in physical activity and leisure activities [17]. Additionally, cultural factors impact psychosocial behaviors such as smoking, alcohol and substance use, sleep and interactions with others. Families that value cultural identity factors provide greater parental support and encouragement, which support healthy choices [18]. On the other hand, globalization and the rise of the digital media have brought about lifestyle changes that are inconsistent with cultural values, and result in a sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy clusters [19]. Culturally-sensitive health interventions are also a focus of recent research. Interventions that merge cultural values and norms with community norms are more likely to sustain healthy behaviors in adolescents [20]. Yet, cultural differences and lack of a standard framework to assess these factors are important research gaps.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

A quantitative, cross sectional design was used to explore the impact of cultural practices on youth health-related lifestyle choices and behaviors. This allowed for a large sample to be surveyed at one point in time, providing an opportunity to identify associations between cultural factors and health-related factors.

3.2 Participants

The final sample of 300 adolescents (13-18 years) were chosen using a stratified random technique to ensure representation across all age groups, gender and of socio-cultural origins. They were from high schools and consent form was taken (see table 1).

Table.1. Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
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Age Group	13–15 years	150	50%
	16–18 years	150	50%
Gender	Male	155	51.7%
	Female	145	48.3%
Residence	Urban	180	60%
	Rural	120	40%

3.3 Data Collection Tools

We measured cultural practices and health behaviors above in table 2 using standardized questionnaires. These questionnaires were reliable and valid.

Table.2. Measurement Instruments

Variable	Instrument Used	Purpose
Cultural Practices	Cultural Values Scale	Assesses traditions and norms
Dietary Behavior	Food Frequency Questionnaire	Measures eating patterns
Physical Activity	Physical Activity Scale	Assesses activity levels
Lifestyle Choices	Adolescent Lifestyle Questionnaire	Evaluates habits and routines

3.4 Conceptual Framework Diagram

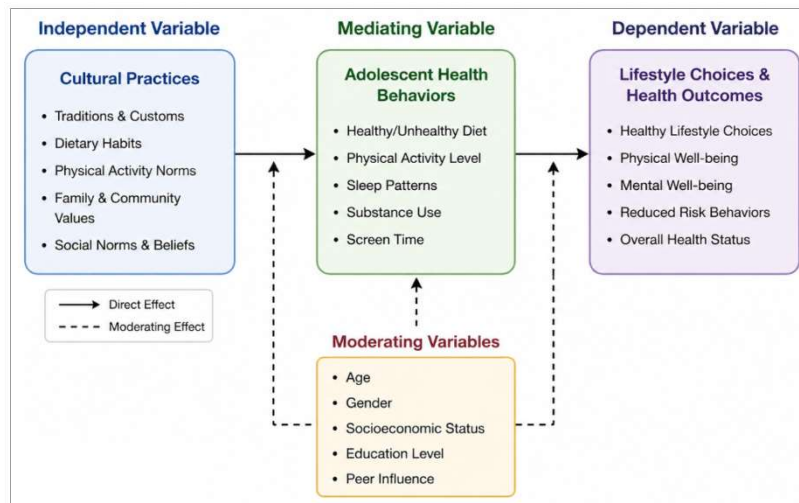


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Cultural Practices Influencing Adolescent Health Behaviors and Lifestyle Outcomes

The diagram above (Figure 1) outlines the conceptual framework of the effects of cultural practices on adolescent health and lifestyle outcomes. The independent variable - cultural practices - encompasses traditions, food preferences, physical activity norms, and social norms and values that dictate people's actions. These in turn affect the mediating variable - adolescent health behaviors - including nutrition, physical activity, sleep, drug use, and media consumption. These then affect the dependent variable - lifestyle factors and health outcomes including physical and mental health. Moreover, moderating variables (such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, educational attainment and peer groups) play a role in regulating these relationships. The model illustrates direct and indirect relationships, showing how youth's health, lifestyle and health related behaviors are influenced by the cultural and social determinants of health.

Figure 1 shows the framework culture and cultural practices as the independent variable, adolescent health behaviors (lifestyle, diet, physical activity) as the mediating variable and health outcomes as the dependent variable. Age, gender,

educational background, socioeconomic status are moderating variables.

3.5 Data Analysis

SPSS was used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics for participants' characteristics and inferential analysis, including regression and correlation, were used to profile the relationship between cultural practices and health-related behaviors. Significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

4 Results & Discussion

This chapter discusses the results from studies that gathered data on adolescents' cultural practices and related health choices and lifestyle. The data includes the main variables of interest including nutrition, physical activity, and lifestyle choices. Correlation and regression analysis were used to assess the relations between cultural factors and health. Data presentation is done through tables and graphs to aid interpretation and comprehension of the influence of cultural practices on adolescent health behavior.

Table.3. Cultural Practices and Health Behavior Scores

Variable	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Dietary Habits	3.9	0.8
Physical Activity	3.5	0.9
Lifestyle Choices	3.7	0.7

On the table 3, the mean for dietary scores is the highest, reflecting a positive cultural influence on dietary choices. Exercise is slightly lower, suggesting there is less support for exercise. Lifestyle choices also provide reasonable consistency, as a blend of cultural and contemporary factors.

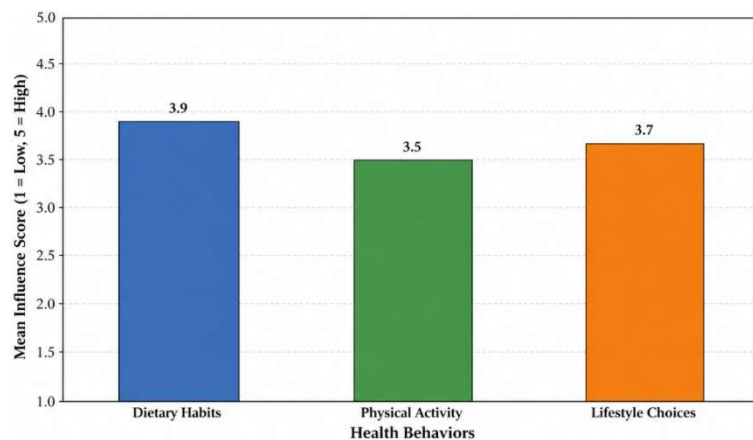


Figure.2. Cultural Influence on Health Behaviors

Figure 2 shows the relative impact of cultural factors on various health factors. This illustration demonstrates a greater cultural influence on dietary behaviors than on physical activity, identifying opportunities to promote and constrain healthy behaviors in adolescents.

Table.4. Regression Analysis of Cultural Influence

Predictor Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	Significance (p)
Cultural Practices	0.52	7.10	<0.001
Family Influence	0.44	6.35	<0.001

The multiple regression analysis shows that cultural practices strongly predict health behaviors in adolescents, with a high beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.52$) in table 4. The impact of family influence is significant, highlighting the influence of cultural and social factors in health choices.

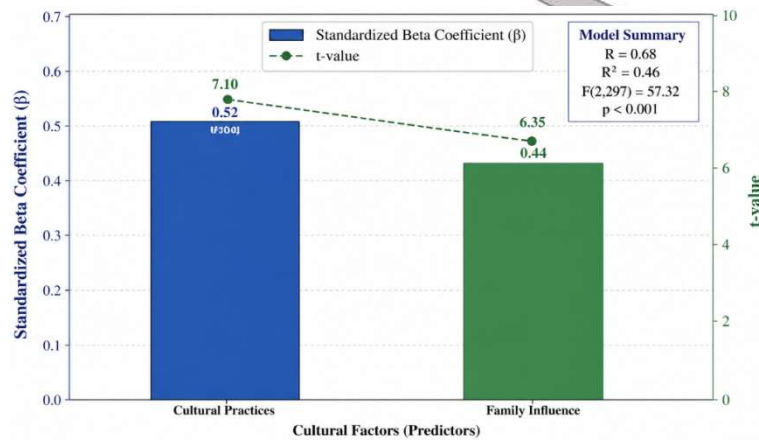


Figure 3. Regression Impact of Cultural Factors

The impact of cultural and family variables is presented in Figure 3 below. The impact of cultural factors is greater than family factors, stressing the prominent role of culture in lifestyle choices.

5 Discussion

This study's results show the considerable influence of cultural practices on young people's health practices and lifestyle. The high impact on dietary behaviors indicates that culture still influences food preferences, which can have a positive effect on health behaviors or result in diet-related illnesses such as Obesity. The smaller effect on physical activity suggests that cultural practices may restrict or promote exercise-based activity. Also, family regulates cultural values, contributing to lifestyle and behaviors. These findings suggest the need for cultural-climate sensitive and adolescent appropriate health promotion strategies to encourage healthy lifestyle scales and avoid risks associated with unhealthy behaviors.

6 Conclusion and future scope

Cultural factors are critical to understand the health and lifestyle choices of adolescents - this study suggests. Our research has revealed that cultural factors play a major role in shaping eating patterns, physical activity, and lifestyle choices, all of which can contribute to maintaining health or facing health challenges, such as Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes. The influence of family and community values on adolescent health further emphasizes the role of culture in shaping their health practices and lifestyle choices. These insights have implications for public health practice, showing a need for culturally tailored health promotion interventions that honor cultural values and promote positive lifestyle changes. Policies, schools and families need to work together to develop programs that blend cultural understanding with contemporary health promotion. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand the long-term impact of cultural factors on adolescents' health. Further, incorporating qualitative methods can inform adolescents' views, facilitating development of culturally relevant health promotion programs.

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