

The Impact Of Parental Dietary Habits On Shaping Healthy Eating Behaviors In Children

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Abstract

Background: Parental eating patterns are essential factors that influence children eating behaviors and their long time nutritional trends. Children who are exposed to family eating patterns at an early age affect the food preferences, the nutrition attitudes and the risk of adopting unhealthy dietary habits. **Objective:** The aim of the study is to observe how the eating habits of parents influence the emergence of healthy eating habits among children. **Methodology :** The study was a cross-sectional study, involving 120 children of 5-12 years old and their parents. Structured questionnaires that evaluated parental diet patterns, food availability at their homes and eating habits of children were used to collect data. Associations were determined using statistical analyses, such as correlation and regression models. **Findings:** The results indicated a relationship of significant positive correlation between healthy parental eating habits and eating patterns ($r = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$) between children. Children whose parents had a balanced diet were characterized by a high intake of fruits and vegetables and regular meals. On the other hand, negative behavior of parents was linked with high intake of processed foods ($B = -0.41$). **Conclusion:** Eating habits of parents have a great effect on the eating habits of children. The family diet needs to be encouraged towards healthy eating habits in order to promote life-long healthy eating habits.

Keywords: parental nutrition, child nutrition, nutrition, eating habits, healthy eating, the family.

1. Introduction

Physical and emotional well-being of children are critical factors of general development, which affect well-being in life, educational achievement, and social life. Healthy nutrition at an early age helps in boosting physical, brains, and immune system, and also in promoting emotional stability and control [1]. Unhealthy eating habits such as taking too much processed foods and too little fruits and vegetables have been associated with heightened risks of obesity, micronutrient deficiencies and emotional unrestes among children [2]. It is especially crucial that Dietary patterns are formed at an early age and, most likely, those tend to remain throughout the adolescence and adulthood and predetermine the future health risks [3].

Such aspects of parenting, particularly the eating habits of parents, are the crucial determinants of eating behavior among children. Parents are considered primary role models and they affect kids by deciding their food preferences, meal schedules and their beliefs regarding nutrition [4]. Research has identified that when parents eat well by undertaking balanced diets and establishing conducive food environments at home, children tend to lead healthy eating habits (Morey, 2008:9). On the other hand, poor dietary practices among children are linked to unhealthy parental eating habits (high fat and high sugar consumption) [6]. Moreover, parental behaviors including food supply, meal arrangement, and promotion also play a remarkable role in children tastes and control of consumption [7].

Although there are large volumes of evidence that indicate an association between parental influence on child nutrition, there has been an uprising concern of the rising rate of unhealthy nutrition practices among child populations in most parts of the world. The fast urbanization process, the greater access to processed food and the change in lifestyle have also been associated with the changes in the dietary patterns of the family, which tend to

result in the poorer dietary results [8]. This scenario highlights the need to know how feeding habits by parents directly influence the eating habits of children in modern settings.

The issue being pursued in this paper is that the limited knowledge on how the parental diets patterns can be translated into significant behavioural effects on children. Though past studies have made generalised correlations, most studies lack the measurement of the direct effects of parental habits on particular regions of children eating habits, including dietary diversity, regularity and food preferences [9]. This gap restricts the capacity of coming up with effective interventions that can be used to enhance child nutrition.

Additionally, there is a tendency to use cross-sectional designs and self-report in existing literature, which can be biased and not be causally interpreted [10]. The lack of attention to emotional and environmental influences which can be combined with dietary behaviors, including family relationships and socioeconomic statuses is also deficient [11]. Also, there is a dearth of research that considers both physical and behavioral aspects of nutrition, indicating a necessity that research be conducted in comprehensive and multidimensional ways [12]. It is crucial to address these gaps to come up with evidence-based approaches that can be used to facilitate healthy eating among children.

1.1 Objectives

1. To understand the dietary patterns of parents and the dietary behaviors of children such as food preferences, eating habits and dieting.
2. To determine the level to which dietary habits of parents can have an impact on the adoption of healthy eating habits and nutritional preferences in children aged 5-12 years.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (H1):

Children of parents with healthy eating habits will show much higher rates of healthy eating behaviors such as higher rates of intake of fruits and vegetables, as well as, improved regularity of meals as compared to children of parents with unhealthy eating habits.

Hypothesis 2 (H2):

Parents are found to greatly predict the eating habits of the children, with positive parental diets correlating positively and unhealthy parental diets correlating negatively with children food choices.

1.3 Null Hypotheses (H0):

H01: No significant relationship between the eating habits of parents and the eating habits of children.

H02: The dietary practices followed by parents are not a significant predictor of the dietary choice made by children.

2. Literature review

The recent studies indicate a significant role of the parental dietary patterns in the formation of children nutritional habits and the future implications of these habits. Research has consistently provided evidence on how children can imitate their parents in regard to their food preferences and healthy parental food diets are strongly linked to increased intake of fruits, vegetables and balanced meals among children [13]. On the other hand, unhealthy eating habits and high risks of obesity among children on the other hand have been associated with frequent consumption of processed and high-sugar diets by parents [14].

The home food environment and parental modeling are another emerging research that highlights the importance of these factors in determining the dietary habits of children. By keeping a well-organized meal schedule and feeding their children a variety of meal types rich in nutrients, parents can support children to have improved appetite regulation and healthier food choices [15]. Moreover, recent studies indicate that the attitudes of parents to food, mindful eating and nutrition awareness play a significant role in the self-regulation of children and their eating habits [16].

According to the research carried out after the pandemic, modifications in family routines and an increased consumption of convenience food negatively affected the quality of the children eating, which supports the

significance of parental education in keeping family habits healthy [17]. Longitudinal studies also show that enduring patterns of keeping healthy parental diets result in both long-term positive eating habits and low morbidity and mortality rates due to diet-related illnesses [18].

Nevertheless, there are gaps in these developments to incorporate the understanding of behavioral, emotional, and environmental issues that can impact eating habits of children. The existing literature proposes to have even more in depth and a culturally diverse study to gain a more insightful view of the complexities between parent diet and child nutrition [19].

3. Methodology

a. Research Design

It is a research study which takes a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive method is applied to analyse the trends in parent diets, dietary habits of children and the analytical aspect measures the intensity and version of relationships between these variables. This design will enable you to systematically examine behavioral and nutritional variables.

b. Study Population

The population of the study will be composed of children between ages 5 and 12 years old and parents or certain primary caregivers. The rationale behind using this age group is that it is a critical age as far as development of dietary and nutritional habits. Parents will be incorporated to offer dependable details of domestic meal intake.

c. Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling method is used so that there is representation of various social economic and education and family set ups. Participants will be divided into groups and further random sampling will occur in groups in order to minimize bias and enhance generalizability.

d. Data Collection Methods

Data gathering is done as a mixed method approach:

Recording/ Questionnaires: Stratified questionnaires on the foods eaten by parents and their food supplies determine the eating habits of children.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be used to give more profound data about the attitudes of parents and their making decisions about food.

Observation: Direct observation appraises eating habits of children and parent-child relationships at the meal times.

e. Tools/Measures

The analysis is based on standardized indicators and instruments:

Health Markers: Body Mass Index (BMI), morbidity and overall nutritional conditions.

Mental Health Scales: Assessed instruments that measure emotional well-being, eating behavior and self-regulation as a measure of mental health.

f. Data Analysis

The methods of data analysis consist of both quantitative and qualitative methods:

Statistical Analysis: The SPSS software will be used to analyze the data. They analyse the relationships among parental eating ways and children eating habits with descriptive statistics, correlation as well as regression analysis.

Analysis: Interpretation of qualitative data obtained through interviews: Thematic Analysis: This method is used to identify repeated patterns and themes within the data.

Conceptual frame work

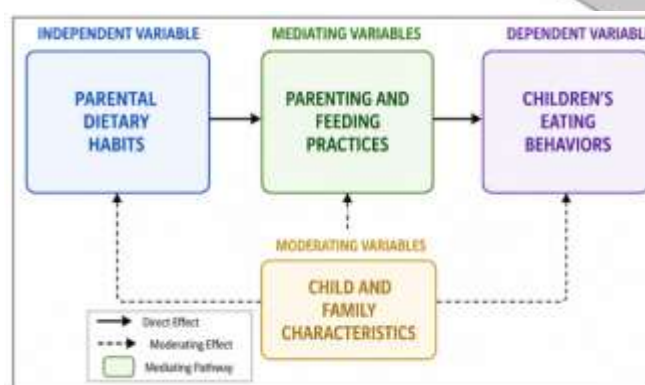


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Model of Parental Dietary Habits and Children's Eating Behaviors

The parental examples of dietary habits (dominant variable) and children eating countries (dependent variable) relate as shown in figure 1. It demonstrates that children dietary behavior is directly determined by their food preferences, frequency of eating, and nutrition knowledge of parents. The model also emphasizes parenting and feeding practice as mediating variables such as food supply, routine feeding, and a promotion of nutritious food intake which influence food preferences and self-control among children. Moreover, other moderating factors like socioeconomic status, the level of education, and culture weaken these relationships. Altogether, the framework illustrates direct and indirect routes, in which parental practices influence the eating habits of children in the long-term.

Dataset and Parameters

In table 1 and table 2 in appendix Parental Diet Child Eating Behavior Dataset, it has data on 120 parent-child pairs. The independent variables will include the dietary practices of the parents including: quality of diet, consumption of healthy meals and consumption of processed foodstuffs. Demographic factors are the age of the child, their sex, social and economic status and education level of their parents. The dependent variables are indices of eating habits of the children such as diversity in their diet, consumption of fruits and vegetables, the frequency of her meals, and preference to unhealthy foods. Other measures are Body Mass Index (BMI) and frequency of illnesses. Structured questionnaires and dietary assessments were used to gather data which allowed the statistical testing of correlations between parental diet and child eating behaviors [1][2].

Sample Data Table

Table 1: Parental_Diet_Child_Eating_Behavior_Dataset (Sample Extract)

I D	Parent Diet Qualit y	Healthy Meal Frequen cy	Process ed Food Intake	Chil d Age	Gend er	SES	Parental Educatio n	Dietary Diversi ty	Fruit & Veg Inta ke	Meal Regulari ty	Unhealt hy Food Score	BM I	Illness Frequen cy
1	High	5	Low	8	Male	Midd le	Graduate	7	5	4	2	16. 5	2
2	Low	2	High	10	Femal e	Low	High School	3	2	2	4	18. 9	4
3	Moderate	3	Moderate	7	Male	Midd le	Secondary	5	3	3	3	17. 8	3
4	High	5	Low	9	Femal e	High	Postgradu ate	8	5	4	1	16. 2	1
5	Low	2	High	11	Male	Low	Secondary	3	2	2	5	19. 5	5
6	Moderate	3	Moderate	6	Femal e	Midd le	Graduate	5					

Table 2: SPSS Coding (Variable View Guide)

Variable Name	Label	Type	Values
diet_quality	Parent Diet Quality	Numeric	1=Low, 2=Moderate, 3=High
meal_freq	Healthy Meal Frequency	Scale	Number per day
processed_food	Processed Food Intake	Numeric	1=Low, 2=Moderate, 3=High
age	Child Age	Scale	Years
gender	Gender	Numeric	1=Male, 2=Female
ses	Socioeconomic Status	Numeric	1=Low, 2=Middle, 3=High
parent_edu	Parental Education	Numeric	1=Secondary, 2=High School, 3=Graduate, 4=Postgraduate
diet_div	Dietary Diversity	Scale	1–8
fruit_veg	Fruit & Vegetable Intake	Scale	Servings/day
meal_reg	Meal Regularity	Scale	1–4
unhealthy_score	Unhealthy Food Score	Scale	1–5
bmi	BMI	Scale	kg/m ²
illness	Illness Frequency	Scale	per year

3.Results & Discussion

In this section, the results of the correlation between dietary practices of parents and the eating habits of children are given. Descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analyses were used to analyze data. All the findings are reported using tables and figures, which emphasize trends in dietary diversity, frequency of meals, and intakes of unhealthy food. The analysis is based on the identification of the differences in terms of parental diet quality and the research of strength of the relationships between parental habits and healthy eating habits of children.

Table 3: Children's Eating Behaviors by Parental Diet Quality

Parent Diet Quality	Dietary Diversity	Fruit & Veg Intake	Meal Regularity	Unhealthy Food Score	BMI
High	7.5	5.0	4.2	1.8	16.3
Moderate	5.2	3.2	3.1	3.0	17.5
Low	3.4	2.1	2.3	4.5	19.0

Children in table 3 where parents have a high diet quality have better eating habits, such as increased dietary diversity and the consumption of fruits and vegetables. Conversely, poor parental diet quality is linked to bad eating habits and increased intake on unhealthy foods which implies poor dietary consequences.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

Variable Pair	Correlation (r)
Parental Diet & Dietary Diversity	0.69
Parental Diet & Fruit & Veg Intake	0.72
Parental Diet & Unhealthy Food Consumption	-0.64

Table 4 correlation analyses indicate that there is positive strong relationship between parental diet quality and healthy eating behavior. The fact that correlating with unhealthy food intake is negative shows that parental healthier diets minimize child eating unhealthy diets.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Predictor (Parental Diet Quality)	Beta (β)	Significance (p-value)
Dietary Diversity	0.61	<0.01
Fruit & Vegetable Intake	0.65	<0.01
Unhealthy Food Score	-0.52	<0.01

The regression outcomes in table 5 will affirm that parent eating behaviors are strong predictors of eating habits among children. The best association is fruit and vegetable intake, indicating the significant influence of parental modeling in determining healthy eating habits.

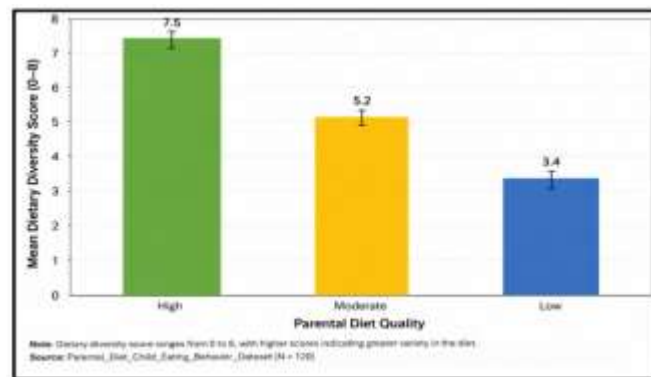


Figure 2: Dietary Diversity by Parental Diet Quality

This can be observed in figure 2 that indicates children whose parents are on healthy diets have much higher scores on dietary diversity. There is evident degradation of dietary quality of parents, implying the importance of parents in formulating food variety.

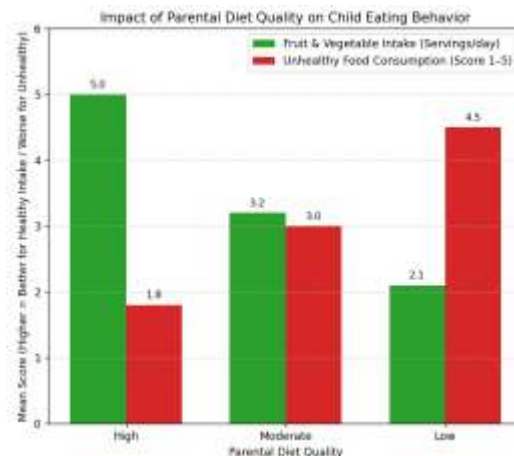


Figure 3: Healthy vs Unhealthy Eating Patterns

Figure 3 is a comparison between the intake of healthy (fruit and vegetables) and unhealthy foods according to parental levels of food diet. Children whose parents have a good quality diet have better health patterns with those whose parents have low quality diet consuming more unhealthy goods.

4. Discussion

The results back up the conceptual framework evidence that indicates that parental eating patterns have a major impact on children eating patterns either directly or indirectly through feeding patterns. Good-quality parental diets will ensure healthier food options, meal frequency, and decreased unhealthy eating in children. The findings affirm that parental modeling is one of the driving forces in the development of dietary practices. Moreover, the high statistical correlation confirms the relevance of the model suggested as the results show that the behavior of the parental diet can be effectively used to improve the nutritional outcomes and health-related behaviors in children in the future.

5. Discussion

The results of this report underscore the considerable impact of parental food habits in the development of children eating habits. In line with the current research, children whose parents had healthier diets had better dietary diversity, greater intake of fruit and vegetable diets and improved meal regularity. The outcomes give credence to the idea that parental modeling is key to the development of children food preferences and self-regulation. On the other hand, children with parents who had the unhealthy eating patterns had an increased consumption of processed and unhealthy food. The high correlations and regression results also substantiate the fact that the nutritional habits of children are largely predicted by their parental diet. Generally, the research paper has identified the significance of healthy family eating environment in promoting healthy and sustainable goal of eating in children.

6. Conclusion and future scope

This paper shows that eating habits by parents are very important in maintaining eating habits in children and their nutritional outcome. These findings demonstrate that children who are subjected to healthy parental diets have greater dietary diversity, improved meal regularity, and higher intake of fruits and vegetables. Conversely, poor dietary habits have been linked with unhealthy parental eating habits such as increased consumption of energy-rich and processed foods. These findings validate that parent modeling and home food environment are critical factors determining the diet and health patterns of children in the long term.

The research adds to the literature by establishing a connection between a parental diet and behavioral measurement in children. Nevertheless, the design used in the study, being cross-sectional, and the use of self-reported data imply that future studies should be conducted. Longitudinal methods should be used in future research to investigate causal links in the long run. Also, the impact of cultures, socioeconomic, and digital factors on family diets can be examined to gain more information. Research interventions such as education and nutrition awareness interventions to parents can also be useful in coming up with effective parental education interventions that can result in healthy feeding patterns and child health conditions in the world.

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