

Exploring the Role of Food and Nutrition on Mental Health: A Psychological Perspective

Sunanda Pattnaik ¹

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Utkal University

Email id – sunandapattnaik.psy@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the link between nutrition and mental health using a psychological perspective. The study examines various researches that investigate the connection linking diet and mental well-being with a focus on how nutrition impacts psychological aspects such as cognition, mood, and mental disorders. Furthermore this paper explores the various psychological factors that affect food choices as well as eating behaviors, including stress, mood swings, and eating disorders. The results of these research studies indicate that adopting a traditional or Mediterranean diet is beneficial for maintaining optimal mental health. Conversely, avoiding foods that are high in sugar content, saturated fat or processed ingredients is crucial for one's overall mental well-being. These studies also emphasize the significant two way relationship between nutrition and mental health; psychological wellbeing can impact your food preferences while what you eat can affect your cognitive function regulation of emotions. In conclusion this review paper underscores the importance of understanding the psychological perspective behind nutrition's interplay with one's overall mental well-being. It emphasizes why it's crucial to consider related psychological factors when developing interventions or implementing strategies aimed at promoting good health through optimized nutrition. Lastly it highlights the need for further studies in nutritional psychology to deepen our understanding of these complex connections.

Keywords: nutrition, mental health, psychological perspective, diet, food choices, eating habits.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between nutrition and mental health has gained significant recognition in recent years, as research continues to uncover the intricate interplay between what we eat and our psychological well-being. Understanding the impact of nutrition on mental health is not only crucial for individuals seeking to optimize their well-being, but also for healthcare professionals and policymakers in developing effective strategies for mental health promotion and intervention. This research paper aims to explore the dynamic relationship between nutrition and mental health, with a particular focus on the psychological factors that influence food choices, the impact of diet on cognitive function and mood regulation, and the implications for individuals with mental disorders. By delving into the psychological perspective of nutrition and mental health, this paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the field and provide valuable insights for promoting mental well-being through optimized nutrition.

Nutrition and Mental Health:

A research study by Sadhukhan (2020) focused on finding a connection between nutrition and mental health. It revealed that a traditional or Mediterranean diet is beneficial for maintaining mental health. Avoiding foods with a lot of sugar, saturated fat, and processed food is important for mental wellness. Our moods can be improved by food. Food habits and food preferences can be influenced by psychological factors such as stress, mood, and eating disorders. To maintain good mental health, wholesome diet is more vital than tasty food. Research study suggests that incorporating dietary modifications and antioxidant supplementation along with exercise into a comprehensive treatment plans may offer substantial benefits for individuals with mental health concerns and contribute to the promotion of mental well-being.

Nutrients and Brain Function:

A study on “Brain foods: the effects of nutrients on brain function” was conducted by Gomez-Pinilla (2008). It examines the essential nutrients necessary for optimal brain function, such as curcumins (found in turmeric), flavonoids (food sources include- Cocoa, green tea, citrus fruits, and dark chocolate), omega 3 fatty acids. It has been determined that a number of dietary elements have an impact on cognitive functions. By controlling neurotransmitter routes, synaptic

transmission, membrane fluidity, and signal-transduction pathways, dietary variables can have an impact on a variety of brain functions. For instance, Omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids are necessary for optimal brain function and are normal components of cell membranes. The use of excess calories can reduce the synaptic plasticity and increase the vulnerability of cells to damage. Numerous "anti-oxidant diets" have gained popularity due to their reported benefits for neural function. For example, berries have a proven high antioxidant capacity. Since declining serum levels of vitamin E were linked to poor memory function in older people, it has also been linked to cognitive function. Some of the sources of vitamin E include almonds, vegetable oils, and green leafy vegetables.

Diet and Mood Disorder:

A randomized controlled trial study was done to find out the effectiveness of a dietary program used for treating the person suffering from major depressive episodes or the 'SMILES' trial (Jacka et al., 2017). The major aim was to improve diet quality by promoting the consumption of vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes, low-fat and unsweetened dairy products, raw and unsalted nuts, fish, lean red meats, eggs, chicken, and extra virgin olive oil, while lowering intake of "extras" like sweets, refined cereals, fried food, fast food, processed meats, and sugary drinks. The findings advocate that dietary modification may offer an effective and convenient method of treatment for the control of a widely prevalent mental disease, along with potential benefits for the control of widespread co-morbidities. So, we can say that balanced diet is associated with improved mental health outcomes, and an unhealthy dietary pattern has negative effects on mood and emotional disorders of individuals.

Food Choices and Stress:

Human eating habits can be impacted by stress. Under- or overeating may result from stress, and these changes in eating behaviour may depend on the level of the stressor. Chronic life stress is linked to a larger desire for meals that are high in sugar and fat and are also high in nutrients and energy. Evidence from long-term studies indicates that men are more likely to experience the negative effects of chronic life stress than women. One element that may contribute to the development of obesity is stress-induced eating (Torres & Nowson, 2007).

Nutrition Based Intervention for Mental Health:

Despite the complexity of the factors affecting mental health, there is evidence that nutrition plays a significant role in the prevalence and incidence of mental illnesses. It can be said that diet is just as critical to psychiatry as it is to other fields like gastroenterology, cardiology, and endocrinology. The research evidence supporting the link between food quality and mental health; nutritional deficiency and mental health is rapidly expanding. It also supports the selective use of nutrient-based supplements to correct deficiencies, as monotherapies or augmentation therapies, or as alternative treatments. The researchers share a perspective from a global academic partnership in which they acknowledge nutrition and diet as determinants of physical as well as mental health (Sarris et. al., 2015).

Researchers conducted a systematic review to evaluate the effects of dietary interventions on symptoms of depression and anxiety. The results revealed that dietary interventions significantly reduced the depressive symptoms. However, no significant effect of dietary interventions for anxiety was found. They suggest that dietary interventions hold promise as a novel intervention to reduce the symptoms of depression. They also suggest that future research is needed to determine the specific components of dietary interventions that improve the mental health by exploring underlying mechanisms and establishing effective schemes for delivering the interventions (Firth et. al., 2019).

Food Choice and Nutrition: A Socio-Psychological Perspective

Three major themes have been identified from the review paper done by Hardcastle et. al., (2015). They are as follows: social and environmental factors on food selection; psychological influences on eating behaviour; and eating behaviour profiling. The research studies that considered the environmental and social factors suggested that future research should encourage people to read and understand food labels, as well as encourage healthy eating rather than discourage bad eating. There is a need to figure out how to effectively market healthy eating options through accessibility, availability, and presentation. Intentions, perceived behavioural control, and confidence were identified as predictors of healthy eating in the studies on psychological factors. Healthy eating interventions should lessen barriers to healthy eating and

encourage feelings of confidence to consume a healthy diet, given the significance of psychological elements including perceived behavioural control and self-efficacy.

CONCLUSION

With reference to the research studies cited for the current paper, we can explore number of other areas for further study and directions in the field of nutritional psychology. For example, longitudinal studies are required in order to know about the long-term impact of nutrition on mental health outcomes that use techniques to monitor food intake and psychological health over longer period of times. With the aid of cutting-edge imaging methods and molecular analysis, future study might concentrate on understanding the mechanisms by which particular diets affect mental health. The efficacy of nutrition-based approaches in treating psychological illnesses and enhancing general wellbeing warrants further investigation through intervention trials.

To conclude, this research paper aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the interplay between nutrition and mental health from the psychological perspective by drawing conclusions from various similar research studies. By examining the influence of nutrition on mental health and well-being of the individual, understanding the impact of psychological factors on dietary choices made by any person, and recognizing the potential for nutrition-based interventions, this review paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge in the field of nutritional psychology. It may inspire further exploration of the psychological perspective for understanding the interplay between food choices, diet, nutrition and mental health of individuals.

REFERENCES

- Gomez-Pinilla, F. (2008). Brain foods: the effects of nutrients on brain function. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 9(7), 568-578. doi: 10.1038/nrn2421
- Jacka, F. N., O'Neil, A., Opie, R., Itsiopoulos, C., Cotton, S., Mohebbi, M., Castle, D., Dash, S., Mihalopoulos, C., Chatterton, M. L., Brazionis, L., Dean, O. M., Hodge, A. M., & Berk, M. (2017). A randomised controlled trial of dietary improvement for adults with major depression (the 'SMILES' trial). *BMC medicine*, 15 (1), 23. doi: 10.1186/s12916-017-0791-y

- Firth, J., Marx, W., Dash, S., Carney, R., Teasdale, S. B., Solmi, M., Stubbs, B., Schuch, F. B., Carvalho, A. F., Jacka, F., & Sarris, J. (2019). The Effects of Dietary Improvement on Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. *Psychosomatic medicine*, 81(3), 265–280.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0000000000000673>
- Sadhukhan, M. (2020). Relationship Between Nutrition and Psychology. *International Journal of Research in Engineering, Science and Management*, 3(7), 337–338. Retrieved from <https://journal.ijresm.com/index.php/ijresm/article/view/93>
- Sarris, J., Logan, A. C., Akbaraly, T. N., Amminger, G. P., Balanzá-Martínez, V., Freeman, M. P., Hibbeln, J., Matsuoka, Y., Mischoulon, D., Mizoue, T., Nanri, A., Nishi, D., Ramsey, D., Rucklidge, J. J., Sanchez-Villegas, A., Scholey, A., Su, K. P., Jacka, F. N., & International Society for Nutritional Psychiatry Research (2015). Nutritional medicine as mainstream in psychiatry. *The lancet. Psychiatry*, 2(3), 271–274.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(14\)00051-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(14)00051-0)
- Torres, S. J., & Nowson, C. A. (2007). Relationship between stress, eating behavior, and obesity. *Nutrition (Burbank, Los Angeles County, California.)*, 23(11-12), 887–894.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nut.2007.08.008>