

Health Consciousness and Nutritional Habits of Female College Students: A Cross-sectional Study

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Abstract:

Health consciousness (HC) impacts person's awareness and concern for wellness and also impacts motivation to take up activities those advance their health status and enhance life quality. Studies show a shift in the consumption pattern. There is also a growing belief that eating right is the mantra of the youth, yet whether this gets converted in action is to be explored especially for girls and adolescents. There is also the trend of adolescents being overweight or stunting. In this background, the present study is an attempt to find out whether the female college students are HC and whether there is a relationship between HC and the inner state/psychological factors and nutritional habits.

A deductive approach, descriptive research design and Survey research strategy were adopted for the study. The statistical tools used were descriptive statistics, Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Findings suggest a positive relationship between health consciousness and nutritional habits.

1. Introduction:

COVID 19 pandemic has led to people becoming more health consciousness. Health consciousness impacts the consumer's awareness and concern for their wellness and also impacts their motivation to take up activities to improve and/or maintain their health and quality of life. According to a study there are 90 million health conscious individuals in the country and women generally are more conscious about their diet as well as physical fitness. Studies suggest that there is a shift in the consumption pattern and there is a leaning towards "mindful indulgence". As per studies there is also a growing belief that eating right is the mantra today of the youth, yet whether this gets converted in action is to be explored especially for girls and adolescents having a rural background and come from economically weaker sections. This is an area also to be researched upon as the National Family Health Survey (NHFS-5) points out that there is higher level of thinness compared to the results of NHFS-4 and that "stuntness" is a bigger challenge than thinness in adolescents. There is also the trend of adolescents being overweight. Long term nutritional habits result in stunting of the adolescents. It is in this background that the purpose of the paper is to find out whether the female college students in Navsari, a Tier III city are health conscious and to find out whether there is a relationship between health consciousness and the inner state/psychological factors (health alertness and health self-consciousness) and nutritional habits of the respondents

2. Review of literature:

The literature review is divided in two parts. The first part reviews the concept of health consciousness and its dimensions while second section highlighted the findings of leading studies related to health mindfulness.

2.1 Health Consciousness: Main Concept and its Dimensions

Different ways have been performed to define the term “Health Consciousness” over the long period of time by several authors. The very earliest definition was given by Gould (1998), who described the Health Consciousness as a mental/psychological mind set of an individual towards health. As per Gould, health consciousness includes health alertness, self-awareness about health, personal involvement in health-related activities, and regular monitoring on his/her health. Thereafter, Kraft and Goodell (1993) considered health consciousness especially from lifestyle perspective. They considered it as a combination of people’s activities, interests, and opinions regarding their health. The framework prepared by them included concern for environmental hazards, physical fitness, sense of responsibility towards health, diet and stress management.

This concept was again simplified further by defining it as an individual’s tendency to be concerned about maintaining good health. By broadening this idea further, Dutta-Bergman (2004b, 2006) and Dutta (2007) focused on psychological side of HC and concluded that health consciousness can be understood with the help of three dimensions: Health Information Orientation, beliefs about health, and participation in activities that improves health.

Li (2008) had perceived health consciousness as a personal orientation in which health occupies an important place in an individual's life. According to the author, people who are health conscious not only understand the importance of health but also develop positive feelings towards it and make continuous efforts to maintain it. Based on this view, health consciousness comprises three dimensions: knowing, which refers to an individual's understanding and knowledge about health; passion, which reflects the interest, feelings, and emotional attachment towards maintaining good health; and desire, which represents the willingness and determination to adopt and sustain healthy practices over time.

Building on this perspective, Hong (2009) explained health consciousness as a multidimensional concept that is reflected through a person's everyday health-related attitudes and behaviours. It includes actively engaging in healthy practices, paying attention to one's physical and mental well-being, searching for and using health-related information, accepting personal responsibility for maintaining good health, and remaining motivated to follow a healthy lifestyle. In a subsequent study, Hong (2011) refined this concept and suggested that

these aspects can be broadly grouped into three key elements: self-health awareness, personal responsibility, and health motivation.

Jayanti and Burns (1998) also highlighted the practical side of health consciousness. They argued that being health conscious is not limited to having knowledge or concern about health; rather, it is reflected in the extent to which health considerations become a part of an individual's routine decisions, daily activities, and overall way of life. In other words, health-conscious individuals are more likely to incorporate healthy habits into their everyday lifestyle instead of viewing health merely as an occasional concern.

2.2 Impact Studies on Health Consciousness

Consumer's awareness and concern for their wellness is impacted and influenced by Health Consciousness and also is impacted by their motivation to take up actions to improve and preserve their health and quality of life to prevent illness by actively being involved in health promoting behaviour and being self-conscious regarding the health (Kraft & Goodell, 1993; Gould, 1988). Gould (1988) found positive relation between a one's health consciousness and disease prevention. McGloin, Richards, and Embacher (2016) concluded that gender categories do not differ with the quality as well as magnitude of health consciousness. Iversen & Kraft (2006) also found a significant relationship between health consciousness and preventive health behaviour. Korn and Noch (2018) revealed that males display riskier health behaviours than females. Clough (2011) concluded that female practice higher hygiene standards than their male counterparts. As revealed by various studies the students of universities are under significant stress. Mai & Hoffmann (2012) found higher health consciousness in female in contrast to male and older respondent in comparison to young. They concluded that health consciousness and self-efficacy have greater predictive power for food decision making than socio-demographics. Pu et al. (2020) reported that during COVID-19, people became more conscious which in turn had positive impact on doing exercise at home. The study also checked the impact of health consciousness on home-based exercise and in turn the positive effect on health behaviours. Jayanti & Burns (1998) found a positive correlation between health consciousness and preventive health measures. They concluded that when individual become more conscious about his/her health, he/she takes more preventive measures to maintain good health. Gould (1990) found that health consciousness people like to discuss more about health related matters and would like to spent time for reading health magazines.

3. Objectives:

The research questions for the study are:

1. Is there a positive correlation between health consciousness and inner state (psychological factors)?
2. Is there a positive correlation between health consciousness and nutritional habits (nutritionally balanced diet etc.)?

4. Methodology:

A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Survey research strategy was used. The respondents were female students in the age group 18–20-years, attending the undergraduate degree courses in colleges in the city of Navsari (Tier-III city). These colleges draw a large number of students from nearby rural areas. Non-probability convenience sampling procedure was adopted for the study and the sample size was 138. The Health consciousness scale as developed by Gould (1988) and the Nutrition and Stress management scale developed by Kraft & Goodell (1993) and a few items developed by the researchers were used for the study.

Some of the statistical tools used were descriptive statistics, Exploratory Factor Analysis, Cronbach Alpha and Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

5. Results/Discussion:

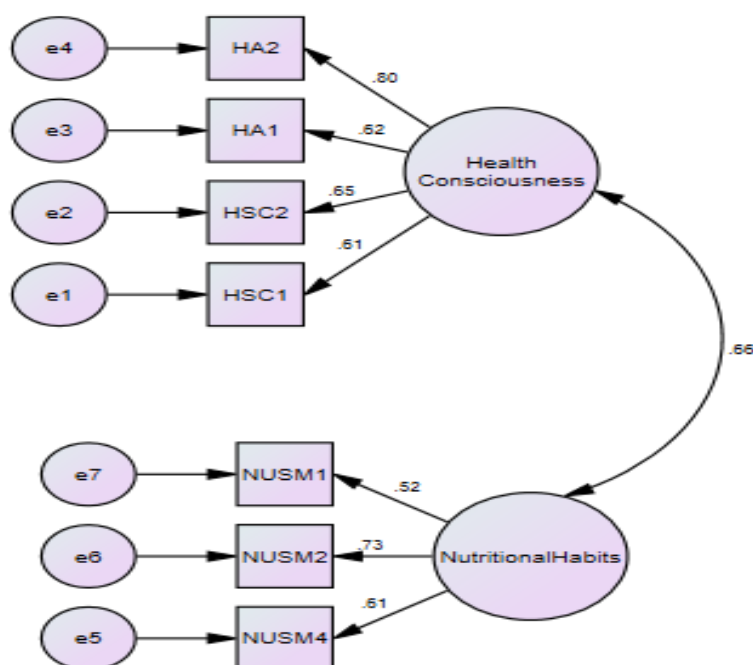


Figure-1: Measurement Model

Three types of Model Fit Indices have been evaluated for the study- Absolute fit indices, Incremental fit indices and Parsimony fit indices (Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen, 2008; Hair et al., 2010; Awang, 2015). These Model Fit Indices help in assessing the Construct Validity.

Table-1: Absolute, Incremental and Parsimony Fit Indices

	Cut off Criterion	Research Output	Remark
Absolute Fit Indices			
RMSEA	<.08 (good fit)	0.067	Meets the criterion
GFI	Value >.90 or >.95	0.958	Meets the criterion
AGFI	>.80	0.927	Meets the criterion
SRMR	<.09	0.0488	Meets the criterion
Incremental/Comparative/Relative Fit Indices			
NFI	>.90	0.914	Meets the criterion
CFI	≥.90	0.964	Meets the criterion
Parsimony Fit Indices			
CMIN/df	(≤2 or 3	1.617	Meets the criterion

Source: Developed by the authors

Model Fit Index Combination -Hu and Bentler (1999) Two Index presentation strategy (1900) CFI and SRMR= CFI of .96 or higher and SRMR of 0.09 or lower- Good model Fit.

A Kendall's tau-b correlation was run to determine the relationship between Health consciousness and Nutritional habits. There was positive correlation between Health consciousness and Nutritional habits, which was statistically significant, as shown in the table-2 below:

Table-2: Health consciousness vs. Nutrition habits (Kendall's Tau b Correlation)

			HSC1 I reflect about my health a lot	HSC2 I am very self-conscious about my health.	HA1 I am alert to changes in my health.	HA2 I am usually aware of my health
Kendall's tau_b	NUSM1 My daily meals are nutritionally balanced.	Correlation Coefficient	.302**	.177*	.351**	.178*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.020	.000	.021
		N	138	138	138	138
	NUSM2 I try to avoid high levels of cholesterol in my diet.	Correlation Coefficient	.219**	.334**	.246**	.353**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.001	.000
		N	138	138	138	138
	NUSM4 I purchase and eat foods considering my health	Correlation Coefficient	.199**	.215**	.324**	.221**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.005	.000	.004
		N	138	138	138	138

***Kendall's tau-B values: + or -0.10 to 0.19: weak; + or - 0.20 to 0.29: + or - 0.30 or above: strong**

*Source: Mastrothanas, Konstantinos. (2020). Re: How can I make interpretation of Kendall's Tau-b correlation magnitude? Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/post/How-can-I-make-interpretation-of-kendalls-Tau-b-correlation-magnitude/5fea3c6fb5d53e21916e64e8/citation/download>.

Table-3 Measuring constructs Nutritional habits and Health Consciousness

Construct -Nutritional habits: Items	Mean Value	Remark
NUSM-1 “My daily meals are nutritionally balanced”.	3.69	The respondents are unsure-leaning towards agreement that they have healthy (nutritional) habits.
NUSM-2 “I try to avoid high levels of cholesterol in my diet”.	3.71	
NUSM-4 “I purchase and eat food considering my health”.	3.96	
Average Mean	3.79	
Construct - Health Consciousness: Items		
HA-1 “I am alert to changes in my health”.	4.22	The respondents are agreeable to the statements, hence are health conscious.
HA-2 “I am usually aware of my health”.	4.25	
HSC-1 “I reflect about my health a lot”.	4.01	
HSC-2 “I am very self-conscious about my health”.	4.12	
Average Mean	4.15	

If we look to the profile of the respondents they largely have a rural background and belong to the economically weaker sections (family income up to Rs. 700,000 yearly). Two components were identified after running the Exploratory Factor Analysis to measure health consciousness. These were Inner state/psychological factors and Nutritional habits. Through Confirmatory factor analysis it was found that a positive correlation exists between health consciousness and inner state /psychological factors (health alertness and health self-consciousness as per Gould's, 1988 classification); and health consciousness and nutritional habits. The internal reliability of the scales was measured through Cronbach Alpha test, the convergent validity was tested by finding out the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Construct Reliability (CR) was found. The values were in the acceptable range. The discriminant validity was also found to be acceptable hence it was concluded that the reliability and validity of the instrument was good. Nearly all the respondents said they were health

conscious and believed in leading a lifestyle of health and sustainability. The respondents are in agreement to the items related to their Inner state /psychological factors and were neutral to 'in agreement' with regards to their nutritional habits. This shows that the female youth have a positive inner state but they need to put into action their mind-set related to health alertness and health self-consciousness. Majority of the respondents included fruits and vegetables (at least 2.5 cups in a day) in their diet daily or at least three times in a week.

6. Conclusion:

Based on findings of the study, it can be concluded that the female college students are health conscious with reference to their inner state is concerned, still much efforts are needed to encourage not just the youth but also their family with regards to nutritional habits. Social marketing campaigns may help in this direction. Sustained efforts are required in this direction as it is the long-term nutritional habits that lead to better health, thereby helping the youth to mitigate health-related risk behaviours and becoming contributing members of the society.

- The youth (female college students) are health conscious as far as their inner state is concerned, but nutritional habits are yet to be cultivated and maintained.
- Efforts need to be made to motivate not just the youth but also their family with regards to nutritional habits.
- Social marketing campaigns may help in this direction. Sustained efforts are required in this direction as - it is the long-term nutritional habits that lead to better health, thereby helping the youth to mitigate health-related risk behaviours that increase risk of disease and becoming contributing members of the society.

