

## Original Research

# Exploring the Relationship Between Eating Behavior and Perceived Stress Among Healthcare Professionals in Kashmir

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### Abstract:

Healthcare professionals often experience high levels of stress, which can impact their eating behaviors and overall well-being. This study investigates the association between eating behavior and perceived stress among healthcare professionals in Kashmir. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 300 healthcare professionals, using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Eating Habits Questionnaire (EHQ). Results showed a significant positive correlation between perceived stress and unhealthy eating behaviors. Multivariate regression analysis revealed that perceived stress, age, and occupation were significant predictors of unhealthy eating behaviors. The study highlights the need for stress management and healthy eating interventions tailored to healthcare professionals in Kashmir.

### Introduction:

Healthcare professionals are exposed to high levels of stress due to the demanding nature of their work, long hours, and high stakes decision-making. Chronic stress can lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms, including unhealthy eating behaviors. Unhealthy eating can have severe consequences on physical and mental health, compromising the well-being of healthcare professionals.

Kashmir, a region with a history of conflict and political instability, presents a unique context for studying stress and eating behaviors among healthcare professionals. This study aims to:

1. Examine the relationship between perceived stress and eating behavior among healthcare professionals in Kashmir.
2. Identify demographic and occupational factors associated with unhealthy eating behaviors.

### Methodology:

**Study Design:** It was a cross-sectional survey

Sample: 300 healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals) from various healthcare institutions in Kashmir were allotted using google forms

### Inclusion Criteria:

- Healthcare professionals working in Kashmir
- Age 20-60 years
- Ability to read and understand English or Urdu

### Exclusion Criteria:

- Healthcare professionals on leave or vacation
- Those with severe medical conditions or disabilities

**Tools used:**

1. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS): 10-item scale assessing perceived stress levels.
2. Eating Habits Questionnaire (EHQ): 20-item scale evaluating eating behaviors.
3. Demographic and Occupational Questionnaire: assessing age, sex, occupation, work hours, and experience.

**Statistical Analysis:**

Data was analysed using spss 20. Descriptive statistics and correlations were used.

**Results:**

**Demographics:**

- Mean age: 35.4 years
- Male: 55.3%, Female: 44.7%
- Doctors: 40%, Nurses: 30%, Allied health professionals: 30%

**Perceived Stress:**

- Mean PSS score: 23.5 (moderate to high stress)

**Eating Behavior:**

- Unhealthy eating behaviors: 67.3% (consuming high-sugar/fat foods, skipping meals)
- Healthy eating behaviors: 32.7% (consuming fruits/vegetables, regular meals)

**Correlation Analysis:**

- Significant positive correlation between PSS and EHQ scores ( $r = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )

**Regression Analysis:**

- Perceived stress ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ )
- Age ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )
- Occupation ( $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )

**Discussion:**

The present study revealed a significant positive correlation between perceived stress and unhealthy eating behaviors among healthcare professionals in Kashmir. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that stress can lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms, including unhealthy eating behaviors [1, 2]. The relationship between stress and eating behavior is complex and bidirectional, with stress influencing food choices and eating habits, and conversely, food choices and eating habits impacting stress levels [3, 4].

The study's results highlight several key implications:

1. **Stress Management:** Healthcare professionals experiencing high levels of stress may benefit from stress management interventions, such as mindfulness, yoga, or cognitive-behavioral therapy [5, 6].
2. **Healthy Eating Initiatives:** Promoting healthy eating habits through workshops, nutrition education, and accessible healthy food options in healthcare settings may help mitigate the negative effects of stress on eating behaviors [7, 8].
3. **Work-Life Balance:** Encouraging work-life balance through flexible scheduling, regular breaks, and employee wellness programs can help reduce stress and promote healthy behaviors [9, 10].
4. **Organizational Support:** Healthcare organizations should prioritize employee well-being by providing resources and support for stress management and healthy eating [11, 12].
5. **Cultural Considerations:** Future research should explore culturally specific stressors and coping mechanisms among healthcare professionals in Kashmir, considering the region's unique sociocultural context [13, 14].
6. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Collaboration between healthcare professionals, nutritionists, and mental health experts is crucial for developing effective interventions addressing stress and unhealthy eating behaviors [15].

The study's limitations, including its cross-sectional design and self-reported measures, underscore the need for longitudinal studies and objective assessments to confirm these findings [16].

**Conclusion:**

This study underscores the critical need to address stress and unhealthy eating behaviors among healthcare professionals in Kashmir. By providing stress management and healthy eating initiatives, healthcare organizations can promote employee well-being, improve job satisfaction, and enhance patient care.

**Recommendations:**

1. Regular stress management workshops and training programs.
2. Nutrition education and healthy eating initiatives.
3. Policy changes promoting work-life balance and employee well-being.
4. Collaboration between healthcare professionals, nutritionists, and mental health experts.

By prioritizing healthcare professionals' well-being, we can ensure a healthier, more resilient workforce better equipped to provide quality patient care.

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