**INTRODUCTION**

- Body mass index (BMI) is a poor indicator of weight status and overall health. Compared to BMI, percentage of body fat over a 3-month period is a better measure of overweight status and obesity, and a better predictor of some health outcomes.
- Girls who frequently buy food from school cafeterias and fast-food restaurants more than twice a week in childhood have a higher BMI as adolescents, compared to those who ate more frequently at home. The presence of a convenience store close to home is associated with increased percentage of body fat in adolescents.
- In one American study, 69% of adolescents helped with meal preparation. Meal preparation was associated with lower soft drink consumption among female adolescents and lower fried food consumption among male adolescents.
- Researching these variables in young adulthood is critical because this life stage is usually the first opportunity that youth have to food shop and prepare meals by themselves. Thus, determining the effects of food shopping and meal preparation on body fat is essential.
- Post-secondary students prefer to buy and cook convenient food rather than nutritious food, with approximately 1/3 being frequent users of fast-food restaurants.
- About 1/2 of post-secondary students enjoy preparing their own meals, but there is no published data on what percentage actually prepares their own meals.
- There has been no published research exploring the effects of the stages of food consumption (i.e., food shopping and meal preparation) on body fat in young adults.
- More research is needed to understand whether living arrangements of young adults (i.e., whom they live with) affects food shopping or meal preparation habits.

**PURPOSES**

1. To examine the longitudinal relationships between food shopping and meal preparation on body fat among a normative sample of young adults, and
2. To determine if whom young adults live with affects their food shopping or meal preparation habits.

**HYPOTHESES**

1. Increased food shopping and decreased meal preparation will longitudinally predict higher levels of body fat, and
2. Young adults living away from their parents will report increased food shopping and decreased meal preparation.

**METHODODOLOGY**

**PARTICIPANTS**

- Participants were recruited from Introduction to Psychology and Research Methods courses at a large urban university.
- N = 146, 68% female, 18 to 21 years (M = 19.17, SD = 1.07).
  - 45.2% Asian, 40.4% Caucasian, and 14.4% other.

**MEASURES**

- Measures were completed at Time 1 and three months later (Time 2).
- Body fat percentage of body mass was measured using bioelectrical impedance analysis.
- SELF-REPORT MEASURES:
  - Food shopping: “What percentage of food shopping do you do yourself during a typical week?”
  - Meal preparation: “What percentage of meal preparation do you do yourself during a typical week?”
  - Living arrangements in the past year (forced choice): alone, roommates/friends, opposite-sex partner, siblings, parents, or other.

**RESULTS**

- Using a Simple Regression and controlling for Time 1 body fat, increased levels of food shopping at Time 1 significantly predicted increased body fat at Time 2 (see Table 2).
- Time 1 meal preparation did not predict Time 2 body fat.

Using ANOVA, there was a significant main effect of whom young adults lived with during the past year on food shopping. Young adults living alone or with roommates/friends reported significantly more food shopping, compared to those living with parents (see Figure 1).

There was no significant main effect for meal preparation.

**DISCUSSION**

- Increased food shopping was a significant predictor of increases in percentage of body fat over a 3-month period. Young adults living alone or with roommates/friends reported significantly more food shopping, compared to those living with parents. Meal preparation habits did not predict or correlate with any variables.
- This study’s findings support past research using samples of adolescents. Although in this study, a more accurate measure of overall health was used.
- This study is the first to explore the effects of food shopping and meal preparation on body fat in young adults, as well as the influence of living arrangements. An additional strength is this study’s longitudinal nature.
- This study suggests that prevention efforts should focus on helping young adults make healthy choices during food shopping, as they transition from living at home to living on their own.
- Prevention programs can focus on increasing eating competence during this transition. Eating competence includes eating a variety of foods from all food groups, as well as meal planning skills.

**LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

- A limitation of this study is the retrospective recall of variables.
- There is a dearth of research on these variables in non-student stages of food consumption (i.e., food shopping and meal preparation) on body fat in young adults. An additional strength is this study’s influence of living arrangements.
- Adolescent females are more likely to buy unhealthy foods in a supermarket when a peer is present. Future research can explore whether whom young adults shop for food with affects their food shopping habits.

**REFERENCES**

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