IJRAR.ORG E-ISSN: 2348-1269, P-ISSN: 2349-5138

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND ANALYTICAL REVIEWS (IJRAR) | IJRAR.ORG

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

# AUTONOMIC BEHAVIOR IN DIETARY CHOICES OF THE YOUNG WORKING POPULATION IN GUWAHATI CITY

[1]Shuvjeet Gogoi, [2]Dr. Namita Deka

[1]Student, [2]Dietician

[1]Dietetics and Food Service Management,

[1]Indira Gandhi National Open University, Guwahati, India

***Abstract:*** Dietary choices are brewed under a shell of different attributes of a population such as age, personal preferences, ethnicity, cultural and geographical background, health, financial state, mental state, etc. Due to various reasons, changes in lifestyle occur that brings certain events where one has to make some insightful decisions regarding food choices to play accordingly. In that time, changes in dietary habits are definite that come about consciously or subconsciously. The purpose of this study is to review and understand the autonomy of working individuals in dietary decisions with respect to their lifestyle and awareness of daily nutrition. A survey along with a subjective try-out was conducted through well-structured questionnaires. The responses were recorded and after analyzing the data it was seen that majority of the participants had moderately active lifestyles with an average awareness of nutrition. While attributes like taste, availability and nutritional contents were considered very important, but majority of them did not check the nutritional contents of packed food materials while buying, which showed a lack of implications to practice in terms of nutrition. Attributes like past childhood, choices or religion were considered the least influencing factors. In terms of price, a value for money choice was preferred as they chose healthy options with reasonable cost mostly. These aspects of autonomy in food selection show a trend of food habits and adaptations among the specific age group in Guwahati city and will help in the further relevant study.

***Index Terms*** **– Food Choices, Dietary choices, Autonomic behavior, Food, Nutrition.**

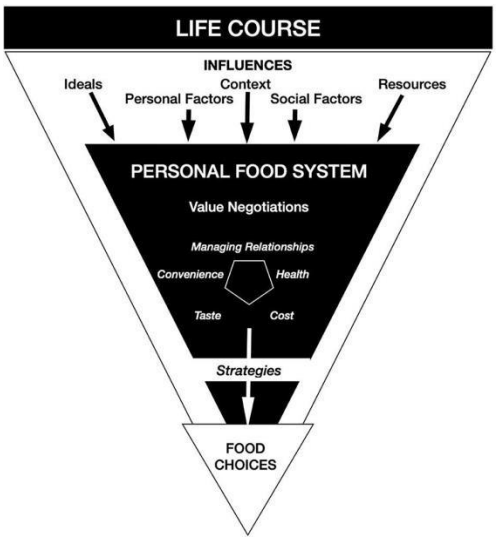
## I. INTRODUCTION

When we eat any specific food item to satisfy our hunger or to fill our stomach for energy, we are making food choices. Making choices regarding food, various factors and grounds- temporary or permanent, come into play. But there are some turning points or stages in life where changes in lifestyle become prevalent which ultimately bring some changes in dietary decisions too. The factors involved in food choices were grouped into three components viz. life course, influences and personal system which leads to a single choice event (Tanis Furst et al., 1996).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship of these components to one another produces the process or pathway leading to the point of choice. Food choices are complex functions of several elements that could change over time (Angels Carallo et. al., 2019). A food choice process model was developed by Jeffery Sobal, M.P.H. & Carole A. Bisogni, (2009) with constructionist social definition perspectives that organized a broad scope of factors and dynamics involved in food behaviors. This food choice process model included life course events, turning points, transitions and experiences with respect to the personal preferences and cultural influences that establish a food choice trajectory. Studies have shown that the food choice behaviors of children and adolescents track into adulthood (Devine 2005). A recent study in heterogeneity in consumers was studied by Jhoanne Ynion et al., (2021) that unraveled five sources (i) socioeconomic characteristics (ii) food environments (iii) eating occasions (iv) consumed dishes and (v) ingredient attributes and consumer attitudes towards food. Based on qualitative research work on food choice process in adults, a model (Figure-1) was adapted which indicated that in the food-choice process there is individual variability in factors are involved (Conners et al., 2001).

**Figure- 1: Food choice model by Conners et al., (2001)**




Unavailability or scarcity of time implicate changes in food consumption patterns which increase the consumption of convenience or ready-prepared foods that leads to an unhealthy diet and may contribute to obesity and chronic health problems such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer (Jennifer Jabs, Carol M.Devine 2006). Food choice coping strategies is seen with long hours and non-standard hours of work and schedules were positively associated among adult males with take-out meals, missed family meals, prepared entrees, and eating while working; and among adult females with restaurant meals, missed breakfast, and prepared entrees (Carol M. Devine et al., 2009). It was seen that people referred to work due to commitments and lack of time which acted as the main barriers to healthy eating at the workplace (João P. M. Lima et al., 2021). People's food choices motivators and driving factors varied as per need and hunger, habits, price, and convenience but also with the time of the day Xuan Uyen and Phan Thuy (2008). There are some predominant factors- schedule and time priorities, hunger level or satiety, healthfulness, convenience, availability, and physical activity that influence the autonomy in food choices among adolescents across different environments such as home, school restaurants, and stores (Amanda M. Ziegler et al., 2021).

One of the important factors which act actively in one food choice is the price of the food items. It has been seen that sometimes this factor has overridden the other attributes of the food items like nutritional value. The extension of financial income does come to play a vital role in making food choices when pricing becomes an important factor, especially when it is low (Simone A. French et al., 2003). Lowincome consumers were significantly more conscious of value and price than higher-income consumers (Steenhuis IH et al., 2011). However, consumers are prepared to pay relatively more for individualspecific information as opposed to generic nutritional information that is typically provided on food labels (Kelvin Balcombe et al., 2016). So it is seen that though the price is one the main factors when it comes to making food choices, sometimes in some special scenarios, people are ready to pay reasonably once in a while.

A study by E.P Koster (2007), had shown past life behaviors, habits and hedonic appreciation are better predictions of food choice behavior than psychological constructs like attitudes and intentions. Daily routines, financial situation and food accessibility have a great impact on people's food choices (Karolina Gombert et al., 2017). Many literally works had showed that parenting styles and food parenting practices may impact the food choices the behaviors in offspring (Savage et al., 2007). A study with young adult women in Delhi by Claire Bailey et al., (2018) showed that they rely mostly on preferences of their families, habit and perspectives established during childhood, convenience and food safety and health when making food choices. Observation of familiar and unfamiliar participants during an open buffet study it was seen that social modeling influences can also be seen in food choices (Armelle Garcia et al., 2021).

If an individual's attitudes towards health are more accessible, they tend to make more health-related food choices (Alison Young, 2012). In a comparison of purchase between a pre and post nutritional campaign where knowledge or awareness on benefits of healthy food choices such as fruits and vegetables are provided to a group of the population, a significant increase in the purchase of those food items is seen among them post-intervention (Diana Kingsfather, 2013).

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An online survey was conducted among 100 working individuals of any gender in Guwahati city, Assam between April and July 2020. The survey was done through a well –structured questionnaire with open, closed, and nominal questions using Likert Scale which aimed to collect data on the demographic characteristics of the participated individuals, their preferences on different attributes of food items, and at the end of the questionnaire, there was a subjective try-out.

### 3.1 Research Objective

- To understand the working individuals' perceptions of food choices.
- To analyze the nutritional awareness among the targeted age group of 25-30 years old working professionals.
- To analyze their preferences on different attributes of food items.

### 3.2 Population and Sample

A random sampling procedure was used. It is because in a random sampling method, each population has an equal chance of selection. Here the Simple Random Sampling method was used. A total of 100 respondents belonging to the age group of 25 to 30 years who work full-time and stay in the Guwahati city area were selected.

### 3.3 Data and Sources of Data

Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources is collected with the help of well-structured questionnaire whereas data from secondary sources have been collected with the help of journal, websites and research papers.

### 3.4 Research Setting

The researcher's objective was to understand the working individuals' perceptions of food choices and their awareness. The study was conducted in the entire Guwahati city.

### 3.5 Statistical Tool

The population of the city is very large in size. So random sampling was used for the sample collection because in a random sampling each unit of the population has an equal chance of selection. After random sampling, an online survey was conducted through a questionnaire. The online survey was conducted with 100 working individuals between the age group of 25-30 years who are employed in private or government sectors. The criteria for sample selection were: Individuals' ages should be between 25- 30 years, working full-time, and should be staying in or relocated to Guwahati city.

### 3.6 Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were classified in light of the objective of the study. The data collected were tabulated and analyzed statistically with the help of approved statistical techniques (Imran and Coover, 1983). Frequency and percentage were applied. **I.** Frequency value: It was calculated to find out the number of respondents in the particular cell according to their age groups. **II.** Percentage value: Percentage was used for simple comparison and calculated by dividing the frequency of a particular cell by a total number of respondents and multiplying by 100.

$$\text{Percentage} = f/N \times 100$$

Where, f = frequency of respondents

N = total number of respondents (total frequency)

## IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

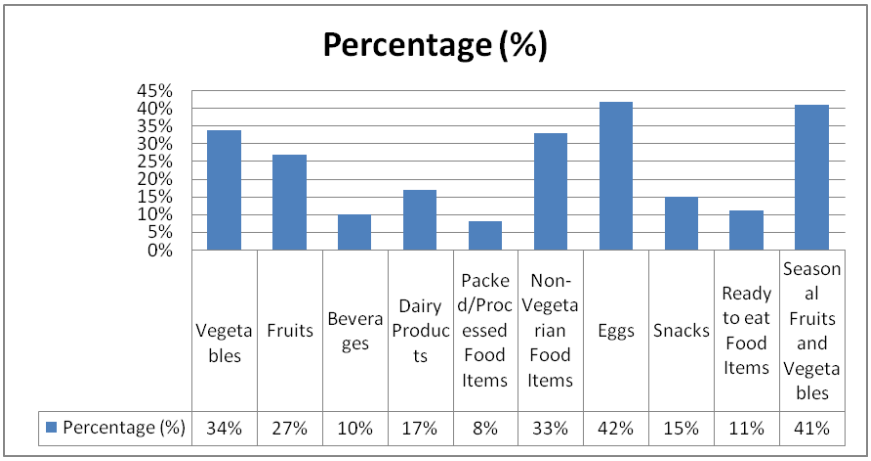



**Figure 2.A: Distribution of food items that were chosen "Mostly" by the individuals.**

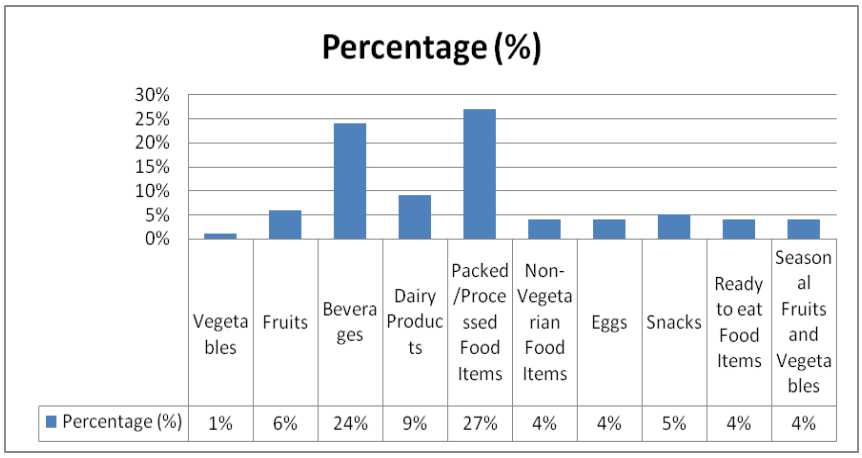



**Figure 2.B: Distribution of food items that were chosen "None" by the individuals.**

The questionnaire assessed the demographics and a subjective overview of the participants. They were given a scenario- "If a 500 rupee is given to them to buy food items/groceries for the next two working days, what kind of food materials/groceries and in what quantity they will choose to buy according totheir preferences and conveniences as per their lifestyle". They have to rate the quantity as "Mostly", "Moderately", "Not much" or "None" as their responses. It will reflect a comparative idea between having a theoretical approach and practical application.

The responses of the participants were as follows:

**Vegetables**: The collected data had shown that 34% of individuals will choose to buy vegetables mostly, 46% will choose moderately, 19% individuals will not choose vegetables that much and only 1% individuals will not choose any vegetables.

**Fruits**: The collected data had shown that among the 100 participating individuals 27% of individualswill choose fruits mostly, 47% of individuals will choose moderately, 20% individuals will choose fruits that much and 6% of individuals will not choose any kind of fruits in their purchase.

**Beverages**: The survey showed that 10% will choose beverages mostly, 23% of individuals will choose moderately, 43% individuals will not choose beverages that much and 24% individuals will not choose any beverages during their purchase. This 24% of individuals also include non-consumers of soft or hard drinks

**Dairy products**: Among the 100 participating individuals, 17% of individuals will choose dairy products mostly, 38% of individuals will choose moderately, 36% of individuals will not choose that much and 9%of individuals will not choose chose any dairy products. The individuals who will not choose any dairy products is due to their preferences or have an intolerance to dairy products.

**Processed food items**: The collected data had shown that among the participated individuals, 8% will choose Packed/Processed food items mostly, 28% individuals will choose moderately, 42% individuals will not choose packed/processed foods that much and 27% individuals will not choose any Packed/processed food items during their purchase. 8% of the individuals who will choose packed/processed food items were mostly due to their working schedule, time management or their capability to cook food. Most of the packed/Processed foods are easy and take less time to prepare which helps in their time management during their working days. 27% of individuals who will not choose any ofit, are aware of the ingredients like artificial food coloring, flavors, preservatives etc. and do not want to add these substances into their diet.

**Non-vegetarian food items**: The collected data had shown that among the participated individuals, 33% will choose non-Vegetarian food items mostly, 17% will choose moderately, 46% individuals will not choose that much and only 4% individuals will not choose any non-vegetarian food items during their purchase. This 4% of individuals will not choose any non-vegetarian food items due to their preferences, culture, food habits or any kind of health issue. The majority of the individuals will choose to have non- vegetarian food items in their diet.

**Eggs**: The survey showed that among the participating individuals, 42% will choose Eggs mostly, 41% will choose moderately, 13% will not choose that much and 4% will not choose eggs during their purchase. Purchase of eggs was asked separately and not with non-vegetarian food items because some people eat eggs despite vegetarian preferences. However, it seems that the percentages of individuals whowill not choose any non-vegetarian food items including eggs are the same in the study. Hence, the individuals who will choose eggs during their purchase are pure non-vegetarians.

**Snacks**: The collected data had shown that among the participated individuals, 15% of individuals will choose snacks mostly, 44% individuals will choose moderately, 36% will not choose that much and 5% individuals will not choose any snacks during their purchase.

**Ready to eat food items**: The collected data had shown that among the participated individuals, 11% willchoose ready to eat food items mostly, 32% will choose moderately, 34% will not choose that much and 23% individuals will not choose any ready to eat food items during their purchase. Ready to eat food is quite convenient and a time saver when there is a tight working schedule. These types of food items comein packages and are all ready to eat with little cooking time or sometimes just have to heat them before eating. These food items come with a variety of preservatives and additives for longer shelf life. 23% of individuals to will not choose

these types of foods in their diet are certainly health-conscious and prefer freshly prepared or cooked food items.

**Seasonal fruits and vegetables**: The collected data had shown that among the participated individuals, 41% individuals will choose Seasonal fruits and vegetables mostly, 39% individuals will choose moderately, 16% individuals will not choose that much, and 4% individuals will not choose any seasonal fruits and vegetables during their purchase. Seasonal fruits and vegetables are highly nutritional and should be consumed during their availability in their respective seasons. It is seen that majority of the individuals will choose to buy these as they are aware of the health benefits they will get. The 4% of individuals lack this awareness hence they will not prefer to choose any seasonal fruits or vegetables during their purchase. However, there is also a chance that they might choose the other non-seasonalfruits and vegetable items.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the study, the majority of the participants have rated their awareness of nutrition as average. During thesubjective try-out among the participated individuals, it is seen that the food items that they will choose mostly during their purchase were vegetables (seasonal or unseasonal), fruits, and non-vegetarian food items and eggs (Figure 2.A). The food items that they will choose the least during their purchase will be Beverages and Packed/processed food items (Figure 2.B). Therefore, considering the figure at which the food items were selected, it can be concluded with an overview that the majority of the population tendsto make healthier food choices to some extent.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The factors related to the food choices of the young working population are an important subject of study because a substandard autonomy on food choice may lead to many diseases in the early stage of life. Thisstudy identified the elements of autonomy in dietary choices of young working individuals who have undergone changes such as living places, financial status, etc. With an average grab on awareness on nutrition and becoming financially independent has allowed the population of young workers to explore new and extended food choices.

## REFERENCES

**[1]** FURST, T., CONNORS, M., BISOGNI, C., SOBAL, J. and FALK, L., 1996. Food Choice: A Conceptual Model of the Process. Appetite, 26(3), pp.247-266.

**[2]** Devine, C., T. J. Farrell, C. Blake, M. Jastran, E. Wethington and C. Bisogni. “Work conditions and the food choice coping strategies of employed parents.” Journal of nutrition education and behavior 41 5 (2009): 365-70.

**[3]** Jabs, J. and Devine, C., 2006. Time scarcity and food choices: An overview. Appetite, 47(2), pp.196-204.

**[4]** Lima, J., S. Costa, T. Brandão and A. Rocha. “Food Consumption Determinants and Barriers for Healthy Eating at the Workplace—A University Setting †.” Foods 10 (2021): n. pag.

**[5]** Garcia, A., Hammami, A., Mazellier, L., Lagneau, J., Darcel, N., Higgs, S. and Davidenko, O., 2021. Social modeling of food choices in real life conditions concerns specific food categories. Appetite, 157, p.104950.

**[6]** French, S., 2003. Pricing Effects on Food Choices. The Journal of Nutrition, 133(3), pp.841S-843S.

**[7]** Balcombe, K., I. Fraser, Ben Lowe and Diogo M. Souza Monteiro. “Information Customization and Food Choice.” Agricultural & Natural Resource Economics eJournal (2016): n. pag.

**[8]** Gombert, K., Douglas, F., Carlisle, S. and McArdle, K., 2017. A Capabilities Approach to Food Choices. Food Ethics, 1(2), pp.143-155.

**[9]** Bailey, C., Garg, V., Kapoor, D., Wasser, H., Prabhakaran, D. and Jaacks, L., 2018. Food Choice Drivers in the Context of the Nutrition Transition in Delhi, India. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 50(7), pp.675-686.

**[10]** Garcia, A., Hammami, A., Mazellier, L., Lagneau, J., Darcel, N., Higgs, S. and Davidenko, O., 2021. Social modeling of food choices in real life conditions concerns specific food categories. Appetite, 157, p.104950.

**[11]** Kinsfather, Diana Llelven. "Food Purchasing Behavior: Choice, Change, Challenge." (2013)