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JUNK FOOD CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR AND ITS IMPACT ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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Abstract

Junk food consumption in adolescents refers to the habit of consuming *fast food* or processed foods that are generally high in calories, saturated fat, sugar, and salt, but low in essential nutrients such as fiber, vitamins, and minerals. *Junk food consumption* harms nutritional status, as well as contributing to physical and mental health problems. In adolescent girls, excessive consumption of junk food can cause menstrual disorders. To analyze factors related to junk food consumption and the relationship between junk food consumption and its impact on nutritional status, physical health, mental health, and menstrual disorders.

This study employed a cross-sectional design with a sample of 107 students from SMK Mutiara, using questionnaires and direct measurements for data collection. The data were analyzed using two approaches: bivariate analysis (Chi-Square test) and multivariate analysis (binary logistic regression). There was a relationship between peer factors, attitude, motivation, self-control, knowledge, taste, and social media exposure with *junk food* consumption, with *a p-value* of < 0.05. There was no significant relationship between *junk food consumption* and nutritional status, with *a p-value* of greater than 0.05. There is a relationship between *junk food* consumption and physical health, mental health, and menstrual disorders, with a p-value of < 0.05. The most significant factor influencing *junk food* consumption is exposure to social media. Young women need to increase awareness of the impact of *excessive junk food* consumption by managing peer influence, building healthy motivation, practicing self-control, and being more selective about food content on social media to maintain health.

Keywords: *junk food,* physical health, mental health

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial transition period marked by significant physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes, particularly in relation to the accelerated growth and development of the reproductive organs. During this phase, nutrient requirements increase to support the process, including protein, iron, calcium, and vitamins (Fatin, 2023; Stuart, 2023; Mastuti, 2023). However, awareness of appearance and body image also affects diet, where adolescents often face challenges such as emotional eating patterns and the tendency to consume *fast food* or *junk food* as a stress management mechanism (Fatin, 2023).

Lifestyle changes, including unbalanced eating habits, have an impact on the risk of malnutrition in the form of malnutrition and overnutrition (overweight and obesity) in adolescents. WHO data for 2021-2022 shows an increase in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among adolescents globally and in Indonesia, with a higher tendency in adolescent boys than girls (WHO, 2021 & 2022). Data from the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey in the 13-18 year old age group in West Java also indicate a significant prevalence of overweight and obesity, which are related to health

disorders such as menstrual disorders and mental health in adolescent girls (Pratama, 2022; Khotimah, 2019).

The consumption of *junk food*, which is high in calories, saturated fat, sugar, and salt but low in essential nutrients such as fiber and vitamins, is increasingly popular among adolescents due to its ease of access and globalization trends, replacing traditional foods (Bohara, 2021). The three theories underlying the understanding of adolescent *junk food* consumption behavior are cognitive social theory, planned behavior theory, and nutritional transition theory, which emphasize the role of personal, social, and environmental factors, including peer influence and social media exposure (Harahap, 2023). Factors such as attitude, motivation, self-control, nutritional knowledge, taste, and social media exposure interact with one another to form *junk food* consumption behaviors that significantly affect the nutritional status and health of adolescents.

Various physical and mental health impacts of excessive *junk food* consumption have been found, including the risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, indigestion, and menstrual disorders in adolescent girls due to hormonal imbalances and inflammation (Hartati, 2021; Hewlings, 2022; Evan, 2024; Y.-J. Park, 2021). In addition, *junk food* consumption is also associated with mental disorders such as depression and anxiety due to biological changes related to a low-nutrition diet (Ejtahed, 2024). Therefore, it is essential to examine the factors that influence *junk food* consumption and their impact on nutritional status, physical health, mental health, and menstrual disorders in adolescent girls to support more targeted health interventions

METHOD

The research method employs a cross-sectional design with a quantitative approach, aiming to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables at a single data collection time (Iskandar, 2023). The research population consists of all students from SMK Mutiara, comprising 107 students from classes X and XI, with all members of the population used as research samples. The research will be carried out at SMK Mutiara, Depok, in April 2025. The operational definitions of the research variables include *junk food* consumption, nutritional status, physical and mental health, menstrual disorders, as well as determinants of *junk food* consumption such as peers, attitude, motivation, self-control, nutritional knowledge, taste, and social media exposure, all measured by questionnaires and direct measurements (Table 3).

The research instrument consisted of a questionnaire containing closed-ended questions with a Likert scale for psychosocial variables, as well as an anthropometric measurement observation sheet for assessing nutritional status. The validity and reliability of the instruments were evaluated using correlation tests and Cronbach's Alpha, with all variables yielding reliable results ($\alpha \geq 0.9$) and valid findings (r-count > r-table, 0.339). The data collection procedure includes theory preparation, preliminary studies, supervisor consultation, licensing, validity and reliability tests, assistant briefings, respondent selection, data collection, and data processing, which includes editing, coding, entry,

cleaning, tabulation, and data analysis. Data analysis was conducted using univariate, bivariate (Chi-Square test), and multivariate (logistic regression) analyses to examine the relationship between variables and identify the dominant factors influencing *junk food* consumption. The research also adheres to ethical principles, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining data confidentiality, and ensuring sample representation as approved by the KEPK.

RESULTS

Table 1 Univariate

Variabel	Category	Sum	Percentage	Frequent Consumption of Junk Food	% Frequent	Consumption of Junk Food is rare	% Rare
Peer Factor	Strong	58	54%	32	55%	26	45%
	Weak	49	46%	13	27%	36	73%
Attitude	Positive	64	60%	35	55%	29	45%
	Negative	43	40%	10	23%	33	77%
Motivation	Strong	48	45%	26	54%	22	46%
	Weak	59	55%	19	32%	40	68%
Self-Control	Strong	60	56%	17	28%	43	72%
	Weak	47	44%	28	60%	19	40%
Nutritional Knowledge	Tall	49	46%	13	27%	36	73%
	Low	58	54%	32	55%	26	45%
Taste	Good	49	46%	27	55%	22	45%
	Bad	58	54%	18	31%	40	69%
Social Media Exposure	Tall	57	53%	33	58%	24	42%
	Low	50	47%	12	24%	38	76%

The table above illustrates the distribution of categories for each variable and their relationship with the frequency of *junk food* consumption among adolescent girls. Adolescents with strong peer influences, positive attitudes, high motivation, weak self-control, limited nutritional knowledge, a preference for junk food, and high social media exposure tend to exhibit a higher frequency of *junk food* consumption.

Table 2 Bivariate

Independent Variables	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)	Interpretation of Relationships
Peer Factor	0.003	3.408	Adolescents with strong peer influence tend to consume *junk food* 3.4 times more often than those with weak peer influence.
Attitude	0.001	3.983	A positive attitude increases the likelihood of consuming *junk food* by almost four times compared to a negative attitude.
Motivation	0.022	2.488	Adolescents with strong motivation were 2.5 times more likely to consume *junk food* than those with weak motivation.
Self-Control	0.001	0.168	Strong self-control lowers the likelihood of *junk food* consumption, with an OR well below 1 indicating a protective effect.
Nutritional Knowledge	0.003	0.293	High nutritional knowledge plays a protective role, reducing the consumption of junk food (OR < 1).
Taste	0.012	2.727	A good perception of junk food tastes increases *junk food* consumption by about 2.7 times.
Social Media Exposure	0.000	4.354	High social media exposure increases *junk food* consumption the most, with an OR of 4.35 times.

In all variables of peer factors, attitude, motivation, self-control, nutritional knowledge, taste, and social media exposure showed a significant relationship with *junk food* consumption in adolescent girls, characterized by a p-value of < 0.05. Peer factors, positive attitudes towards *junk food*, high motivation, good taste towards *junk food*, and high exposure to social media are all associated with an increase in the frequency of *junk food* consumption in adolescent girls. It illustrates the social, psychological, and environmental factors that influence consumption behavior. On the contrary, strong self-control and high nutritional knowledge have a significant protective effect, lowering the likelihood of *junk food* consumption, signaling the importance of self-control abilities and nutritional information in forming a healthy diet. Social media exposure was the variable with the most decisive influence on *junk food* consumption, followed by attitudes and peer factors, confirming the role of media and social networks as dominant factors in adolescent eating behavior.

Table 3 Multivariate

Independent Variables	Forest	Sig. (p-value)	Odds Ratio / Exp(B)
Peer Factor	7,343	0,007	4,631
Attitude	5,249	0,022	3,773
Motivation	6,920	0,009	4,554

Self-Control	2,036	0,154	0,463
Nutritional Knowledge	7,170	0,007	0,229
Taste	1,575	0,210	1,997
Social Media Exposure	10,348	0,001	6,362

In the table above, the variables with significant influence ($p < 0.05$) are peer factors, attitude, motivation, nutritional knowledge, and social media exposure. Social media exposure has the most dominant influence on *junk food* consumption, with the highest odds ratio of 6,362. Self-control and taste showed no significant impact in this multivariate analysis, although they were important in the bivariate analysis.

DISCUSSION

Peer Factors and *Junk Food* Consumption

The results showed that peer influence was significantly related to the frequency of *junk food* consumption in adolescent girls. Adolescents who are influenced by a strong peer factor tend to consume *junk food* more frequently than those with a weak influence. It illustrates the significant impact of peer pressure on the development of unhealthy eating habits during adolescence. This phenomenon can be explained by the theory of peer pressure, which posits that individuals, especially adolescents, modify their behavior to be accepted within their social group.

These findings align with research by Zhou (2023), who revealed that peer factors increase preferences for unhealthy foods. Bohara (2021) also emphasized that adolescents who gather with friends who often consume *junk food* have a 2.01 times higher chance of consuming *junk food*. This condition confirms that the friendship environment is highly influential in shaping adolescent eating habits, particularly *in terms of junk food* consumption.

Other researchers, such as Ha (2022) and Suiraoka (2022), also supported these findings by stating that social activities with friends involving the consumption of *junk food* reinforce the habit. Therefore, interventions to reduce *junk food* consumption need to involve managing pressure from peer groups to be more effective in changing adolescent eating behaviors.

Attitude and Consumption of *Junk Food*

Adolescents' attitudes towards *junk food* are a significant factor influencing their tendency to consume it. Adolescents with a positive attitude towards *fast food* tend to consume *junk food* more frequently, while those with a negative attitude consume it less often. A positive attitude can lead teenagers to perceive *junk food* as a delicious and practical food choice, thereby encouraging high consumption. On the other hand, negative attitudes that highlight health hazards and obesity risks can lower consumption intention.

These findings support the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that attitude is the primary predictor of behavior. Research by Panggabean (2025) and Mohammed (2024) also showed a positive relationship between attitudes and *junk food* consumption in adolescents. Positive attitudes tend to reinforce adolescents' preferences for delicacies and social trends, thereby increasing the frequency of consumption.

These results are also consistent with the research of Liu (2021) and Rogers (2022), which affirms the importance of attitude in determining intention and eating behavior. Thus, the formation of negative attitudes through education and counseling is crucial in suppressing *junk food* consumption and promoting healthy eating among adolescent girls.

Motivation and Consumption of *Junk Food*

Motivation in adolescents plays a role as the primary driver of *junk food* consumption behavior. Adolescents with strong motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, consume *junk food* more often than those who are weakly motivated. Motivation for taste, practicality, social influence, and emotional comfort are the main reasons why *junk food* is chosen as a source of *fast food*.

Research by Sanjeevi (2022) and Pathak (2024) supports these findings, stating that motivation is a significant driving force in dietary formation, including the consumption of junk food. The stronger the motivation, the higher the probability of regular *junk food* consumption. The concepts of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) also demonstrate how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influence adolescent eating behavior intentions.

These findings suggest the need to strengthen the healthy motivation that comes from within adolescents, such as awareness of the adverse effects of *junk food* and a desire to lead a healthy life, to reduce *junk food* consumption. This approach is crucial as part of behavioral interventions designed to foster better eating habits.

Self-Control and *Junk Food* Consumption

The level of adolescent self-control is significantly related to the frequency of *junk food* consumption. Adolescents with strong self-control tend to be able to resist the temptation to consume *junk food* and do so less frequently. In contrast, adolescents with weak self-control are more prone to consuming *junk food* often, because they are less able to control momentary urges that provide instant gratification.

The research of Sinaga and Undarwati (2024) and Nusantara (2024) supports this finding, stating that self-control plays a crucial role in regulating eating behavior. Herdova (2022) also noted that individuals with low self-control struggle to delay gratification, making them more susceptible to developing unhealthy patterns of *junk food* consumption.

It emphasizes that training and development of self-control are essential strategies in an effort to reduce excessive *junk food* consumption in adolescents. Education that strengthens self-regulation and coping mechanisms in a social context is key to the success of behavioral interventions.

Nutrition Knowledge and *Junk Food* Consumption

Low nutritional knowledge in adolescent girls is correlated with a high frequency of *junk food* consumption. Adolescents with good nutritional understanding tend to be more selective in their food choices and consume *junk food* less frequently. This knowledge encompasses an understanding of the nutritional content and health impact of junk food, which is crucial for informed, healthy eating decisions.

The research of Azman (2020) and Setiawan (2019) provides similar support that increased knowledge is significantly related to healthier eating behaviors. A lack of understanding regarding the risks associated with *junk food* consumption can result in limited awareness of how to reduce fast food consumption.

Therefore, nutrition education must be the primary focus in adolescent health programs. Increasing nutritional literacy has the potential to change adolescents' attitudes and motivation to choose healthy foods, while reducing the tendency to consume *junk food*.

Taste and Consumption of *Junk Food*

The perception of *junk food* as delicious is the primary driving factor behind its consumption in adolescent girls. Adolescents who judge *junk food* to have good taste are more likely to consume it often than those who judge it bad or do not like it. The sensation of savory, salty, sweet, and crunchy flavors typical of *junk food* stimulates the brain's reward system, encouraging repetitive eating behavior.

Research by Gudadinni (2023), Naik (2024), and Pathak (2024) states that taste is the main reason consumers choose *junk food*. The Sensory Appeal theory, as described by Suryani (2023) and Dinc (2025), also corroborates that the hedonic factor of taste influences food choices more than health considerations, especially in adolescents who are not yet fully nutritionally conscious.

These findings suggest that interventions to reduce *junk food* consumption should be accompanied by the development of healthy food alternatives that adolescents also find appealing in terms of taste and flavor. Adjusting the taste of healthy foods can be an effective strategy to change eating preferences and behaviors.

Social Media Exposure and *Junk Food* Consumption

Social media exposure to *junk food* content has a significant influence on increasing the frequency of *junk food* consumption among adolescent girls. Adolescents who are often exposed to

junk food advertisements, reviews, and promotions on social media show a tendency to consume *junk food* more than those who are exposed to low. Social media serves as a powerful platform in shaping social norms and influencing food consumption behaviors.

The research of Joo (2024) and Alanazi (2023) supports these findings, stating that exposure to eating content on social media correlates with *increased fast food* consumption. The Social Cognitive Theory, as presented by Sebastian (2021), emphasizes that eating behavior is studied through the observation of examples of behavior seen in the media, particularly from influencers and celebrities.

This phenomenon underscores the importance of regulating advertising content and promoting healthy foods on social media, while also providing educational content and encouraging the consumption of healthy options, thereby enabling adolescents to make more informed choices. Intervention in the realm of digital media is a strategic part of preventing excessive *junk food* consumption among adolescents.

CONCLUSION

Peer factors have a significant influence on *junk food* consumption in adolescent girls. Adolescents with strong peer influence tend to consume *more junk food* than those with weak peer influence. Pressures and habits from the peer environment encourage adolescents to follow unhealthy diets, making social influence a significant determinant of *junk food* consumption behavior among adolescents.

A positive attitude towards *junk food* is also associated with a higher frequency of consumption. Teenagers who view *junk food* as delicious, practical, and fun food are more encouraged to consume it regularly. On the other hand, adolescents with negative attitudes towards *junk food* tend to avoid excessive consumption. Strong motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, also increases the tendency to consume *junk food*, while strong self-control acts as a protector by reducing the frequency of consumption.

Low nutritional knowledge contributes to increased consumption of junk food, while good knowledge helps adolescents make healthier food choices and control *their intake of fast food*. The perception of *junk food* as delicious and evocative also encourages more frequent consumption, while poor taste judgment can reduce the tendency to consume it. These factors suggest that cognitive aspects and sensory preferences have a strong influence on adolescent eating behavior.

Social media exposure is the variable with the most dominant influence on *junk food* consumption in adolescent girls. The high exposure to *junk food* content on social media significantly increases the desire and frequency of *junk food* consumption. Social media, as a source of behavioral models and information, encourages the internalization of unhealthy eating habits involving junk food. Therefore, managing social media exposure is a crucial key in intervention strategies to reduce *junk food* consumption among adolescent girls.

All of these variables significantly contribute to *junk food* consumption behavior in adolescent girls, with social media exposure as a dominant and essential factor to consider in efforts to control excessive *fast food* consumption to improve teenage girls' health.

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