

Healthy Eating, Mental Health, and Environmental Awareness: Implications for the Health of Young Generations

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ABSTRACT

Mental health, environmental awareness and diet are becoming increasingly relevant issues among the younger generations. A healthy, plant-based diet has a positive impact on physical health, and improves mental well-being. Growing environmental awareness motivates many young people to switch to a more sustainable diet, which can further reduce their impact on the planet. While this growing awareness, challenges such as cost, access and social habits often prevent them from adopting a healthier and more sustainability diet. This study examines the relationship between diet, mental health and environmental awareness among young people and its impact on their overall well-being. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there is a strong link between the three factors, suggesting that lifestyle changes that support health and sustainability can improve quality of life and mental health. Further efforts in education, access to healthy food, and social support are needed to facilitate better lifestyle changes among young people.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health among the younger generation is an issue that is gaining increasing attention as rates of mental disorders such as anxiety and depression rise. These conditions are often influenced by a variety of factors, including lifestyle, social pressures and diet. Environmental awareness is also growing, especially among young people, with an increased understanding of the impact of the climate crisis and the importance of eco-friendly lifestyles. Many are beginning to realize that dietary choices and food consumption can have a major impact on personal health as well as environmental sustainability, as seen by the increasing popularity of plant-based diets. Understanding the relationship between mental health, environmental awareness and diet is becoming increasingly relevant.

Among the younger generations, diet is a very important aspect in supporting physical and mental health. Various studies have shown that the consumption of certain foods, such as processed and high-sugar foods, can affect one's mental state, exacerbate anxiety and increase feelings of stress. Meanwhile, growing environmental awareness is driving people to choose healthier and sustainable diets,

such as reducing meat consumption and switching to local and organic produce. This dietary shift does not always go smoothly, as many social and cultural factors influence food choices, making it challenging to integrate environmental awareness with a diet that supports mental health.

One of the main issues faced by the younger generation is the misalignment between diets that support mental health and awareness of environmental impacts. Many individuals are trapped in the habit of eating fast food and processed foods that can be risky for mental health, without considering the impact on the environment. While increasing environmental awareness, many still struggle to make choices that support mental health and environmental sustainability, especially when economic and accessibility factors are constraints. A lack of understanding of the importance of the relationship between food and mental health often leads young people to overlook the long-term impact of their dietary choices, potentially worsening psychological health.

Young generations often face challenges in accessing accurate and reliable information about food choices that are environmentally friendly and

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beneficial to mental health. In many places, while efforts to raise awareness about the importance of healthy eating, the lack of adequate education on the relationship between diet and mental state leaves many people unaware of the importance of dietary changes in maintaining their mental health (Baker & Hart, 2021). This further exacerbates the problem, as poor dietary choices can exacerbate mental conditions such as stress and anxiety, further affecting young people's quality of life.

Changes in lifestyle and eating habits made by today's youth have a significant impact on their future physical and mental well-being. Unhealthy diets and a lack of awareness of the relationship between diet and mental health can exacerbate existing psychological problems, while an understanding of how to eat sustainably can improve overall quality of life. Therefore, it is important to understand how the relationship between mental health, environmental awareness and diet can shape the well-being of young generations, in the hope of designing more effective interventions to support positive changes in their lifestyle.

This study aims to examine the relationship between diet, mental health and environmental awareness among young generations, and its impact on their overall well-being. By understanding these interactions, it is hoped that a clearer picture of how healthy and environmentally-aware dietary choices can contribute to improved quality of life and mental health among young generations can be uncovered. By understanding these interactions, it is hoped that a clearer picture can be found of how healthy and environmentally-friendly dietary choices can contribute to improved quality of life and mental health among young generations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a literature review approach to examine the relationship between diet, mental health and environmental awareness among young generations. This approach allowed the researcher to collect, analyze and synthesize findings from previous studies relevant to the topic. This literature study includes journal articles, books, research reports, and other academic sources that discuss the impact of diet on mental health and the role of environmental awareness in shaping diet. By analyzing the literature, this research aims to identify common patterns, influencing factors, and potential relationships between the three variables. This approach also provides insights into how young people respond to issues of mental health and environmental sustainability in their daily lives (Smith & Williams, 2020).

The data collection process was conducted by searching for relevant publications from various academic databases, such as Google Scholar, PubMed and JSTOR. The analysis was conducted thematically by categorizing findings based on relevant topics, such as the influence of plant-based diets on mental health, the role of environmental awareness in dietary change, and the impact of unhealthy diets on psychological well-being. This literature review relied on sources that have proven to be credible and recognized within the academic community to ensure the validity and reliability of the information used. In some cases, articles and books that were published many years ago are still highly relevant as the themes discussed regarding diet and mental health remain important topics in public health studies (Johnson & Lee, 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Diet, mental health and environmental awareness are closely interconnected, especially among the younger generations. Many factors influence young people's food choices, including socio-economic status, social media trends, as well as increased awareness about the importance of maintaining their mental health and the environmental impact of their diet. One aspect that is often discussed in the literature is the link between unhealthy diets and mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. Diets high in sugar, saturated fat and preservatives have been linked to an increased risk of mental disorders (Jacka et al., 2017). This suggests that a poor diet can affect an individual's psychological well-being, risking a reduced quality of life.

Plant-based diets, which are increasingly popular among younger generations, have been shown to bring benefits to mental health. Consumption of plant-based foods rich in fiber, vitamins and antioxidants can increase the production of neurotransmitters important for brain function, such as serotonin (Micha et al., 2017). Some studies have also shown that plant-based diets can reduce inflammation, which is associated with various mental disorders (Dimitriou et al., 2019). Therefore, choosing an environmentally friendly and healthy diet can help manage or even prevent mental disorders among the younger generations.

Establishing a healthy diet starts with understanding the importance of nutritional balance in every meal we consume. A healthy diet involves proper intake of all food groups, including carbohydrates, proteins, healthy fats, and vitamins and minerals that the body needs. Eating foods rich in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains,

is important to support digestion and prevent chronic diseases. Decreasing consumption of processed and fast foods that are high in sugar, salt and saturated fat is an important step in shaping a healthy diet (Pérez-Escamilla et al., 2017). The main focus is on diversity and balance in every food intake.

The second step in establishing a healthy diet is to plan and prepare meals wisely. Planning a weekly menu can help control the type and amount of food consumed, as well as ensure that the foods chosen are rich in nutrients. Avoiding fast food and over-processed options can reduce the risk of diseases associated with unhealthy diets, such as obesity and type 2 diabetes. This is in line with recommendations from various health authorities that encourage the consumption of fresh, local and seasonal foods as part of a healthy diet (Micha et al., 2017).

Awareness of the importance of hydration is also part of a healthy diet. Water is an important component needed to support various bodily functions, including metabolism and digestion. Replacing sugary or high-calorie drinks with water or sugarless herbal tea can help maintain daily calorie balance and support overall health. Reducing consumption of sugary drinks, such as soda, may also lower the risk of health problems such as obesity and heart disease (Ng et al., 2014). It is important to educate individuals on the importance of choosing beverages that support a healthy diet.

It is important to pay attention to food portions. Eating food in portions that match individual calorie needs helps prevent overeating, which risks leading to obesity and other health problems. Using methods such as the “balanced plate”, which divides the plate into three sections with the right proportions of carbohydrates, proteins and vegetables, can be a practical guide in choosing the right portions. According to Bauer et al. (2018), learning about healthy portions can also prevent overeating tendencies, which often occur due to eating habits or social environmental influences.

Finally, establishing a healthy diet requires more appropriate lifestyle changes, including regular eating habits and awareness of the importance of adequate rest and sleep. Regular eating habits, such as not skipping breakfast and avoiding eating late at night, can help regulate the body's metabolism. In addition, adequate sleep supports the body's recovery process and appetite regulation. The link between a good diet and quality sleep has been shown to support overall mental and physical health (Walker, 2017). Thus, establishing a healthy diet is about choosing the right foods, and about creating a balance that supports an overall healthy lifestyle.

Environmental awareness is becoming an increasingly important factor in dietary choices among young people. Many of them are increasingly aware of the adverse effects of food consumption on the sustainability of the planet, including greenhouse gas emissions generated by industrial farming and processing of processed foods. In response to this, many are turning to plant-based diets, which are better for personal health, and considered more environmentally friendly (Springmann et al., 2018). For example, excessive consumption of red meat and animal products has a negative impact on the environment, while a plant-based diet can help reduce an individual's carbon.

Building environmental awareness in young people requires a creative and holistic approach that combines education, hands-on experience, and habit formation in favor of sustainability. Education on the importance of environmental conservation should start early, both at school and in the family. One effective way is through a curriculum that integrates environmental issues in relevant subjects, such as biology, geography or social sciences. By utilizing visual and digital media often used by young people, information about climate change, pollution, and sustainability can be conveyed in a more interesting and understandable way (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000).

In addition to formal education, hands-on experience is also very important in shaping environmental awareness. Young generation who are directly involved in activities such as beach cleanups, tree planting, or waste management projects will better understand the impact of their behavior on the environment. These activities provide practical experience, and evoke a sense of responsibility towards the surrounding environment. By participating in community activities or organizations that focus on environmental issues, young people can see first-hand how collective action can bring positive change to nature (Louv, 2008). This involvement can increase their awareness of environmental issues and encourage them to make more environmentally friendly choices in their daily lives.

The use of technology can also be a very effective tool to build environmental awareness among young people. Social media, which is popular among young people, can be utilized to spread information about sustainability and climate change. Young activists like Greta Thunberg prove that social media is effective for mobilizing young people and raising global awareness of environmental issues (Parker et al., 2019). Educational apps and games on nature conservation and sustainability can increase young people's interest in reducing their carbon footprint and practicing sustainable living.

It is important to build awareness that individual consumption choices have a major impact on environmental conditions. Young generations should be taught about the impact of their consumption habits, such as the use of single-use plastics, food waste and inefficient energy consumption (Sogari et al., 2018). Campaigns that educate them to choose environmentally friendly products, use renewable energy, or reduce waste can shape more sustainability habits. Realizing that their every action-whether it is choosing local products or reducing personal vehicle use-can make a big difference to the condition of the earth will increase their awareness of the important role they play in environmental sustainability.

Finally, to ensure that environmental awareness becomes part of young people's daily lives, governments and educational institutions need to work together to create policies that support sustainability. Policies that facilitate access to green transportation, efficient waste management, and support environmentally-based education and activities are important to creating a society that is more aware of environmental issues. Giving young people the tools and opportunities to engage in sustainability efforts, we can create a generation that is more concerned about the environment and able to contribute to the preservation of the earth (Stern et al., 1999).

The younger generations are also increasingly exposed to information that educates them on the importance of healthy eating and environmental awareness. Social media is becoming a key platform in the dissemination of this information, with many health and environmental influencers promoting healthy and eco-friendly diets. This allows them to more easily access information that can shape their food choices, further influencing the mental health and environmental impact of their diets (Le et al., 2020). While many are inspired to make changes, challenges related to cost, access, and social habits still act as barriers to adopting healthy and sustainable diets consistently.

While environmental awareness among the younger generations is increasing, not all of them have a deep understanding of how their diet can contribute to their mental and environmental well-being simultaneously. Many do not realize that processed foods high in sugar and fat can increase stress and anxiety. This is a concern, as mental disorders among adolescents and young adults are on the rise, while their knowledge of the relationship between diet and mental health is limited (Micha et al., 2017). It is important to increase education on the impact of diet on mental health and the environment from an early age.

Poor diets, which are often chosen by younger generations, have a direct impact on their well-being. The consumption of fast and processed foods, which are rich in sugar and trans fats, has been found to correlate with mood, stress and anxiety disorders (Sanchez-Villegas et al., 2015). Consumption of these unbalanced diets may increase the risk of mental disorders in the long run, which may impair their quality of life and well-being. At the same time, the lack of awareness regarding the relationship between food and mental health adds to the psychological burden they feel.

Based on environmental awareness, many do not fully understand the benefits of choosing a more sustainability-friendly diet in improving their mental health. Some studies show that food choices that support sustainability, such as plant-based diets, have a positive impact on feelings of happiness and well-being (Micha et al., 2017). This can be explained by the understanding that individuals feel more connected to a larger mission to protect the earth, which brings a sense of accomplishment and psychological satisfaction.

The influence of social and cultural factors also plays a major role in dietary choices among the younger generations. In many cultures, a diet high in meat and animal products is often seen as a symbol of social status or happiness. With increasing awareness of environmental issues, many are seeking to change their diets to support personal health while contributing to environmental sustainability (Le et al., 2020). This awareness encompasses aspects of bodily health, and includes feelings of psychological well-being arising from contributing to the global good.

The positive impacts of a plant-based diet focus on physical health, and significantly affect mental health. Studies show that a plant-based diet can help reduce anxiety, stress and depression, which are common problems among younger generations (Dimitriou et al., 2019). This suggests that environmental awareness that motivates a person to choose a healthy diet can also improve their overall mental well-being. There is a direct link between a healthier diet and improved quality of life and psychological well-being.

While many young generations are interested in healthy lifestyles, they often face barriers in implementing such changes, such as budget constraints and access to healthy food. In many countries, healthy and environmentally-friendly foods are often more expensive than cheaper and more convenient processed foods. This factor creates a gap in the adoption of healthy diets among individuals with lower economic backgrounds (Le et al., 2020).

The challenge of creating better access to healthy food options is important to improve the physical and mental well-being of young generations.

Self-being is characterized by mental health. Maintaining effective mental health requires the right approach, covering physical, emotional and social aspects. One of the most effective ways to support mental health is to maintain healthy living habits, including eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising regularly. Physical activity, such as walking, running or yoga, has been shown to reduce stress, boost mood and improve sleep. In addition, exercise increases the production of endorphins, which serve as “natural stress relievers” and help prevent mental disorders such as anxiety and depression (Brosse et al., 2002). Having a healthy and regular routine can also improve emotional stability and psychological well-being.

Having a strong social support system is important for maintaining mental health. Interacting with family, friends and colleagues can help one feel more connected and supported (Arango et al., 2018). Studies show that positive social support can reduce the risk of mental disorders and increase an individual's ability to cope with stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). This is especially important in the face of life challenges that can cause emotional distress. Therefore, it is important to build and maintain healthy relationships, and not hesitate to seek support from others when needed.

It is also important to have effective stress management strategies. Poorly managed stress can contribute to the development of mental disorders such as anxiety and depression. Relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, or mindfulness can help calm the mind and body, and increase self-awareness. Mindfulness practices, for example, teach one to focus on the present moment, which can reduce anxiety related to the future or the past (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Engaging in enjoyable activities and giving time to oneself can also help reduce mental burden and increase a sense of well-being.

It is important to manage time well. One of the main factors that can increase stress is an imbalance between work, social activities and personal time. Creating a realistic schedule and allowing time to rest and relax can help prevent physical and mental exhaustion. Engaging in enjoyable activities, such as vacationing, gardening, or engaging in hobbies, can provide opportunities to release stress and improve overall quality of life (Schulz et al., 2002). Effective time management helps individuals to maintain life balance and ensure they have time to care for themselves.

Maintaining mental health also involves seeking professional help if needed. While efforts to maintain mental health, one can still feel overwhelmed or struggle to cope with negative emotions. It is important to seek help from a psychologist, therapist or counselor for support and appropriate mental health treatment strategies. Professional interventions have been shown to be effective in treating a wide range of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression and trauma (Cuijpers et al., 2016). Maintaining mental health is therefore associated with self-effort, and with a willingness to seek support when needed.

Overall, the relationship between diet, mental health and environmental awareness among young people suggests great potential for improving their quality of life. A better understanding of the impact of diet on mental health and the environment can encourage young people to make wiser choices. This creates an opportunity to create a world that is physically and mentally healthier, and more sustainability. It is important to engage more parties in promoting healthy and environmentally-friendly lifestyles as part of efforts to improve overall well-being.

CONCLUSION

Diet, mental health and environmental awareness among the younger generations are closely linked. Healthy and environmentally-friendly food choices can contribute to improved mental health, while poor diet can worsen psychological conditions and impair individual well-being. Growing awareness about the importance of environmental sustainability is encouraging many young people to switch to a plant-based diet, which is good for their bodies, and more environmentally friendly. While higher awareness, challenges such as limited access, cost, and social customs are still barriers to adopting a healthier and more sustainability diet.

Based on these findings, it is recommended to increase education on the relationship between diet, mental health, and environmental awareness, especially among the younger generations. Clearer and more accessible information can help them make more informed decisions regarding diet and its impact on mental health and the environment. Efforts to create better access to healthy and environmentally-friendly foods, such as providing more affordable and accessible options, are needed to encourage positive changes in their lifestyles.

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