Original Research Article

**Eating habits and behavior of working university students in the West of Santa Catarina, Brazil**

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ABSTRACT

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| **Background:** University life is marked by a series of challenges, especially for students who have to combine studies, work, domestic responsibilities and, in many cases, distance from their families. This context can generate high levels of stress and make it difficult to maintain healthy lifestyle habits, especially in relation to diet. **Objective:** The aim of this study was to analyze the influences of the university and work routine on the eating habits of university students. **Methodology:** This is a descriptive study with a quantitative approach carried out with working university students from a community university in western Santa Catarina, in southern Brazil. Data was collected by applying a semi-structured online questionnaire using the Google Forms platform. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics. **Results:** The results revealed that university students face difficulties in maintaining a healthy diet due to the overload of academic and professional activities. There was a low consumption of fresh foods and a greater preference for processed foods, influenced by the food options available in the university environment. **Conclusions:** We conclude that it is essential to promote actions in the university environment that encourage healthier eatinghabits, such as implementing nutritional education programs and offering balanced, cost-effective meals that are accessible to students. |

*Keywords:* Students; *Work-Life Balance;* *Public Health;* *Healthy Diet.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The overall context of working university students' lives is shaped by both individual and collective experiences. Several factors may explain the common challenges related to the eating habits of students in higher education. These include separation from family, increased financial responsibilities, housing instability, and stress resulting from academic demands. Additionally, a lack of time to prepare meals, limited cooking skills, and insufficient nutritional knowledge contribute to the difficulty in making healthier food choices (Berbigier & Magalhães, 2021).

A healthy and adequate diet is based on a variety of foods and the adoption of balanced eating habits that take into account individual nutritional needs. It is also essential that such a diet aligns with the individual's cultural and social context. This approach not only promotes health but also respects local food traditions and practices, fostering a more meaningful and enjoyable relationship with food (Souza & Backes, 2020).

Beyond diet, regular physical activity is fundamental to overall health, offering numerous proven benefits such as improved cardiovascular function, reduced cholesterol levels, weight maintenance, psychological well-being, and the strengthening of joints, muscles, and bones (Moiana, Tinga, & Tséu, 2022).

Brazil has experienced a significant rise in overweight and obesity rates across all age groups. Chronic diseases have become the leading cause of mortality among adults. Currently, excess weight affects half of the adult population and one-third of Brazilian children (Brazil, 2014). An increased availability of processed foods has contributed to deficiencies in vitamins and minerals, obesity, and other risk factors for noncommunicable chronic diseases (NCDs). According to the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population (Brazil, 2014), factors such as lack of cooking skills, limited time, and easy access to ultra-processed foods help explain these trends.

The frequent consumption of ready-made meals, processed products, fast food, and snacks—often high in sugar and fat such as sweets, chocolates, and cookies—is driven by limited time, financial constraints, and even personal preferences. Moreover, healthy food options are not always accessible or affordable within the university environment. There is evidence that the heavy academic workload of university students, including curricular and extracurricular activities, negatively impacts the time and motivation available for physical activity and the adoption of other healthy lifestyle habits (Macedo et al., 2019).

According to Oliveira et al. (2021), the persistent pressure to achieve strong academic performance and maintain social and cultural relationships must also be considered. Encouraging a change in unhealthy eating behaviors can be challenging. Some researchers suggest that individuals' perceptions of their own dietary habits often result in resistance to adopting healthier practices. For change to occur, one must first acknowledge the need for it (Souza & Backes, 2020). Therefore, the objective of this study was to analyze the influence of university and work routines on the eating habits of college students.

2. material and methods

This is a descriptive cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach. The study population consisted of working university students from a community university located in western Santa Catarina, southern Brazil. The inclusion criteria comprised students of all genders, aged 18 years or older, enrolled in in-person undergraduate programs in Psychology, Nutrition, Physical Education, Speech Therapy, Nursing, Pharmacy, and Biomedicine.

Data collection was conducted between March and April 2024 using a semi-structured online questionnaire administered via the Google Forms platform. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (approval no. 6,587,047).

The sample was representative and probabilistic, with a calculated sample size of \*n\* = 282. This was based on an estimated population of 800 students, a 5% margin of error, a 95% confidence level, a heterogeneous population distribution, and a 10% increase to account for potential sampling losses. However, due to high participation rates, a total of 492 students responded, resulting in a final sample size larger than originally planned.

The online questionnaire was structured into three sections. The first section collected sociodemographic data, including gender, age, academic program, and occupation. The second section addressed participants’ work routines, gathering information on working hours and shifts, as well as the frequency of physical activity and sleep habits. The third section explored dietary habits, based on the \*Food Guide for the Brazilian Population\* (Brazil, 2014), and included questions on the frequency of weekly or daily consumption of vegetables, fruits, legumes, sweets, and soft drinks. Response options included: 1–2 times per week/day, 3–4 times per week/day, or 5 or more times per week/day. Additional questions addressed the number of meals consumed per day and the timing of the last meal. Lastly, the questionnaire included open-ended questions regarding the impact of academic routines on diet quality.

After data collection, responses were exported from Google Forms into an Excel® spreadsheet, which served as the basis for the database. The data were initially analyzed using descriptive statistics. To assess associations between the variables, the chi-square test was applied, with a significance level of 5% (p ≤ 0.05). All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 20.

3. results and DISCUSSION

The sample for this study consisted of 492 academics, the majority of whom were female (n = 401; 81.5%) (Table 1). This predominance is supported by recent studies, such as Cruz et al. (2020), who conducted research with 199 health science students, 67.84% of whom were women. In the present study, the program with the highest level of participation was Psychology, accounting for 29.1% of the sample (Table I).

**Table I - Sample Characteristics of Working Students Enrolled in Health Programs — Community College, Chapecó, SC, Brazil, 2024**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Count (n)** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Feminine | 401 | 81.5 |
| Masculine | 88 | 17.9 |
| Others  Total | 3  492 | 0.6  100 |
| **Age** |  |  |
| 18-20 | 293 | 59.6 |
| 21-25 | 139 | 28.3 |
| 26-30 | 34 | 6.9 |
| 31-40 | 18 | 3.7 |
| 41+ | 8 | 1.6 |
| Total | 492 | 100 |
| **Programs** |  |  |
| Psychology | 143 | 29.1 |
| Nutrition | 48 | 9.8 |
| Physical Education | 58 | 11.8 |
| Speech Therapy | 42 | 8.5 |
| Nursing | 73 | 14.8 |
| Pharmacy | 36 |  |
| Biomedicine | 92 | 7.3 |
| Total | 492 | 100 |
| **Academic Period** |  |  |
| 1/2 | 168 | 34.1 |
| 3/4 | 151 | 30.7 |
| 5/6 | 104 | 21.1 |
| 7/8 | 67 | 13.6 |
| 9/10 | 2 | 0.4 |
| Total | 492 | 100 |

**Source:** Authors, 2024.

Regarding the professional profile of university students, most were found to work in administrative and financial services (34.1%), followed by internships (16.7%) and commerce (10.8%). Of all study participants, the majority (75.2%) worked morning and afternoon shifts, with daily working hours ranging from 8 to 9 hours.

When asked about the main obstacles to maintaining a healthy diet and engaging in daily physical activity, the most common responses were lack of time (32%), an intense daily routine (26%), consumption of processed foods (6.3%), and poor personal organization (6%).

These findings align with the existing literature. Baggi and Lopes (2011) report an increasing number of students balancing academic responsibilities with work, driven by the need to fund their education at private institutions. Research also indicates that university students who juggle work and study tend to experience high stress levels due to limited rest. Much of their time is consumed by organizational tasks, often forcing them to sacrifice rest in pursuit of professional obligations. As a result, the time available for academic engagement is often compromised (Macedo & Aguiar, 2023).

Similarly, Oliveira (2020) found that time constraints caused by academic responsibilities significantly influence students’ dietary choices, frequently leading to the replacement of full meals with ready-to-eat or highly processed foods. Such patterns contribute to various health issues, including nutritional deficiencies and obesity.

In the present study, 42.5% of participants reported not engaging in physical activity. Among those who do (57.5%), the most frequently practiced forms were weight training or CrossFit (18.7%), followed by those who engaged in multiple types of physical activities (11.7%). The remaining participants reported practicing aerobic exercises. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), regular physical activity reduces all-cause mortality and the incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs); it also improves well-being, reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, supports cognitive function and sleep quality, and enhances body composition.

Regarding eating habits, 33.7% of participants reported consuming four meals per day, 30.1% consumed three meals, and 16.7% consumed two. As for meal frequency, the majority reported eating breakfast (63.8%), lunch (96.1%), an afternoon snack (60.6%), and dinner (78%), while only a minority consumed a morning snack or supper.

According to the \*Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population\* (Brazil, 2014), meals should be distributed throughout the day at regular intervals, in accordance with individual needs and cultural practices. It is recommended to have three main meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), along with small snacks as needed to maintain satiety and energy levels throughout the day.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that daily fatigue and the demands of academic life influence students’ dietary choices, especially during exam periods, when food consumption patterns tend to shift for most participants (Table II). Lara et al. (2019), as cited in Sinigaglia, Silva, and Pereira (2024), observed that an intense schedule filled with responsibilities and deadlines is common among university students, often leading to unhealthy dietary habits, including increased consumption of ultra-processed foods and a reduction in fresh food intake.

In addition, eating behavior is influenced by psychosocial factors, which play a critical role in food choices. Physical and mental stress, as well as the formation of new interpersonal relationships—particularly during young adulthood—can lead to greater consumption of fast food and alcoholic beverages, as well as increased adherence to fad diets (Oliveira et al., 2017, as cited in Sinigaglia, Silva, & Pereira, 2024).

Furthermore, as highlighted by Batista et al. (2023), the university—an institutional environment—is often the setting where many young individuals experience independence from parental supervision for the first time. The availability and easy access to fast-food chains and convenience stores can negatively influence students' food choices, increasing the likelihood of unhealthy dietary habits. While the wide variety of fried or baked snacks and sandwiches offers a quick meal option, these are typically low in nutritional value and high in calories.

According to the results of this study on university students' eating habits (Table II), most participants reported consuming legumes (such as beans, lentils, and chickpeas) only one to two times per week, accounting for 41.7% of responses. Additionally, more than half of the students reported daily fruit consumption, although the most common quantity was just one to two servings per day (45.3%). As for daily vegetable consumption, 51.2% of students reported including vegetables in their diet.

These findings contrast with the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) recommendations, which advise a minimum intake of 400 grams of fruits and vegetables per day—equivalent to five servings—as well as the daily consumption of legumes. The majority of students in this study did not meet these dietary recommendations.

Regarding the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and sweets, most students reported regular intake of these items. Although the exact quantity of ultra-processed foods consumed was not specified, the frequency of consumption was reported (Table II). According to the \*Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population\* (Brazil, 2014), there are numerous reasons to limit the intake of ultra-processed foods, ranging from their poor nutritional composition to their association with excessive calorie intake. The methods used to produce, distribute, market, and consume these products also have cultural, social, and environmental implications. Ultra-processed foods are commonly high in added sugars, fats, and sodium (Brazil, 2014).

**Table II - Eating Habits of Working Students Enrolled in Health Programs at a Community College, Chapecó, SC, Brazil, 2024**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** |  |  |  |  | **Count (n)** |  | **Percentage (%)** |
| **Influences on nutrition during exam time** | | | | | | | |
| Yes |  |  |  |  | 199 |  | 40,4 |
| No |  |  |  |  | 293 |  | 59,6 |
| **Influences of routine fatigue on eating habits** | | | | | | | |
| Yes |  |  |  |  | 316 |  | 64,2 |
| No |  |  |  |  | 176 |  | 35,8 |
| **University influences on food choices** | | | | | | | |
| Yes |  |  |  |  | 298 |  | 60,6 |
| No |  |  |  |  | 194 |  | 39,4 |
| **Habit of consuming legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas, etc.)** | | | | | | | |
| Yes |  |  |  |  | 445 |  | 90,4 |
| No |  |  |  |  | 47 |  | 9,6 |
| **Weekly frequency of legume consumption** | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 2 times a week  3 to 4 times a week  5 to 6 times a week  every day | |  |  |  | 205 |  | 41,7 |
|  |  |  | 131 |  | 26,6 |
|  |  |  | 59 |  | 12 |
|  |  |  | 50 |  | 10,2 |
| **Habit of consuming fruit daily** | | | | | | | |
| Yes |  |  |  |  | 320 |  | 65 |
| No |  |  |  |  | 172 |  | 35 |
| **Amount of fruit consumed per day** | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 2 units  3 to 4 units  5 units or more | |  |  |  | 223 |  | 45,3 |
|  |  |  | 60 |  | 12,2 |
|  |  |  | 37 |  | 7,5 |
| **Habit of consuming vegetables daily** | | | | | | | |
| Yes |  |  |  |  | 252 |  | 51,2 |
| No |  |  |  |  | 240 |  | 48,8 |
| **Habit of consuming sweetened beverages (soft drinks/artificial juices)** | | | | | | | |
| Yes |  |  |  |  | 354 |  | 72 |
| No |  |  |  |  | 138 |  | 28 |
| **Weekly frequency of consumption of sweetened beverages** | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 2 days a week  3 to 4 days a week | |  |  |  | 249 |  | 50,6 |
|  |  |  | 71 |  | 14,4 |
| 5 days or more | |  |  |  | 34 |  | 6,9 |
| **Habit of consuming sweets, candies and stuffed cookies** | | | | | | | |
| Yes |  |  |  |  | 338 |  | 68,7 |
| No |  |  |  |  | 154 |  | 31.3 |
| **Weekly frequency of sweet consumption** | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 2 days a week |  |  |  |  | 232 |  | 47.2 |
| 3 to 4 days a week |  |  |  |  | 69 |  | 14 |
| 5 days or more |  |  |  |  | 37 |  | 7.5 |

**Source:** Authors, 2024

Following the 2020 pandemic, the general population experienced changes in routines, eating habits, and emotional states. Soares et al. (2022) found that 52.6% of university students reported cravings to eat during episodes of anxiety, worry, and tension. This pattern was particularly evident when examining the exam period variable, where dietary changes were significantly more pronounced among female students and during the intermediate semesters (5th/6th and 7th/8th). Additionally, sweet consumption was more frequent between the 3rd and 6th semesters, but decreased during the 7th and 8th semesters (Table III).

When analyzing meal patterns by age group, afternoon snacks were consumed less frequently than expected among individuals aged 21 to 25, whereas those aged 18 to 20 and 31 to 40 reported higher-than-expected frequencies of afternoon snacking. According to the Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population (Brazil, 2014), it is recommended to have three main meals and two snacks daily, as this helps maintain stable energy levels throughout the day, prevents hunger and fatigue, and reduces the likelihood of overeating during the final meal before bedtime.

**Table III – Associations Regarding Food Consumption of Working Students Enrolled in Health Programs at a Community College, Chapecó, SC, Brazil, 2024**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Changes in food consumption during exams periods** | | |
| **Gender** | **Yes** | **No** | **Significance** |
| Masculine | 16 (18,2%) | 72 (81,8%) | x²= 24,6 |
| Feminine | 183 (45,6%) | 218 (54,4%) | p= 0,000 |
| **Academic Period** | **Yes** | **No** | **Significance** |
| 1/2 | 47 (28%) | 121 (72%) | x²= 22,88 |
| 3/4 | 61 (40,4%) | 90 (59,6%) | p= 0,000 |
| 5/6 | 51 (49%) | 53 (51%) |  |
| 7/8 | 39 (58,2%) | 28 (41,8%) |  |
| 9/10 | 1 (50%) | 1 (50%) |  |
| **Variable** | **Cookies/Cracker** | | |
| **Academic Period** | **Yes** | **No** | **Significance** |
| 1/2 | 113 (67,3%) | 55 (32,7%) | x²= 10,73 |
| 3/4 | 113 (74,8%) | 38 (25,2%) | p = 0,030 |
| 5/6 | 73 (70,2%) | 31 (29,8%) |  |
| 7/8 | 39 (58,2%) | 28 (41,8%) |  |
| 9/10 | 0 | 2 (100%) |  |
| **Variable** | **Afternoon Snack** | | |
| **Age** | **Yes** | **No** | **Significance** |
| 18-20 | 188 (64,2%) | 105 (35,8%) | x²= 11,76 |
| 21-25 | 79 (56,8%) | 60 (43,2%) | p = 0,010 |
| 26-30 | 14 (41,2%) | 20 (58,8%) |  |
| 31-40 | 14 (77,8%) | 4 (22,2%) |  |
| mais 41 | 3 (37,5%) | 5 (62,5%) |  |
| **Variable** | **Lunch** | | |
| **Gender** | **Yes** | **No** | **Significance** |
| Feminine | 385 (96%) | 16 (4%) | x²= 7,635 |
| Masculine | 86 (97,7%) | 2 (2,3%) | p = 0,020 |
| **Variable** | **Last meal** | | |
| **Gender** | **Yes** | **No** | **Significance** |
| Feminine | 35 (8,7%) | 366 (91,3%) | x²= 17,53 |
| Masculine | 21 (23,9%) | 67 (76,1%) | p = 0,00 |

**Source:** Authors, 2024. Significance level p < 0.05

According to Tabares et al. (2022), excessive use of audiovisual devices (such as televisions) during meals disrupts the perception of satiety and encourages increased food intake through exposure to food advertisements. When examining the relationship between screen use and dietary habits, it was observed that participants who watch screens tend to consume more sugary foods, while their intake of beans (legumes) is lower. Additionally, the majority of university students reported using screens during meals, representing 41.5% of responses. Among these, males were more likely to use televisions, while 20.5% of participants indicated they do not have this habit, and 38% reported using screens “sometimes.” The results are shown below (Table IV).

**Table IV – Associations Between Food Consumption, Gender, and Screen Use Among Working Students Enrolled in Health Programs at a Community College, Chapecó, SC, Brazil, 2024**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Use of screens during meals** | | |  |
| **Gender** | **Yes** | **No** | **Sometimes** | **Significance** |
| Masculine | 45 (51,2%) | 9 (10,2%) | 34 (38,6%) | x²= 12,55 |
| Feminine | 156 (38,9%) | 92 (22,9%) | 153 (38,2%) | p= 0,014 |
| **Consumption of sweets** | | | | |
| Yes | 151 (44,7%) | 60 (17,7%) | 127 (37,6%) | x²= 6,79 |
| No | 53 (34,4%) | 41 (26,6%) | 60 (39,0%) | p= 0,033 |
| **Bean consumption** |  |  |  |  |
| Yes | 173 (38,9%) | 95 (21,3%) | 177 (39,8%) | x²= 12,87 |
| No | 31 (66,0%) | 6 (12,8%) | 10 (21,2%) | p= 0,002 |

Source: Authors, 2024. Significance level p < 0.05

When analyzing the results on college students' daily sleep duration, an important finding emerged: 41.8% of participants reported sleeping 5 to 6 hours per night, which is below the recommended amount. The Sleep Primer (ABSono, 2023), based on the National Sleep Foundation’s guidelines, states that adults should sleep 7 to 9 hours per night, with an average of 8 hours. Additionally, 35% of participants reported sleeping 6 to 7 hours, which is also below the recommended range, and only 12% of students met the daily sleep recommendation.

Both the quality and quantity of sleep influence eating habits and physical activity, contributing to increased rates of overweight and obesity in adolescents. A study conducted in Pernambuco found a higher prevalence of overweight and obesity among young people who experienced poor sleep quality, were physically inactive, watched TV for more than three hours per day, and consumed sweets four or more times per week (Petribú et al., 2011).

Regarding the timing of students' last meal, most reported eating after class, between 10 p.m. and 1 a.m. (49.9%), followed by 42.9% who ate their last meal between 6:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., with the remainder eating before 6 p.m. Recent studies indicate that eating close to bedtime can have negative effects due to its impact on metabolism and sleep. At night, melatonin—which regulates the circadian rhythm—can interfere with glucose metabolism, increasing the risk of insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes. Additionally, consuming heavy meals late at night can cause reflux and disrupt restful sleep. Experts recommend that the last meal be eaten at least two hours before bedtime to minimize these adverse effects (Garaulet et al., 2022).

When relating dietary variables to the hours of sleep reported by participants, statistically significant findings emerged, showing that fewer hours of sleep are associated with higher consumption of sweets and a later time for the last meal, closer to bedtime. In the study by Schäfer et al. (2019) on the consumption and eating behaviors of university workers, it was reported that approximately 15.4% to 22.9% of the sample consumed foods considered markers of unhealthy eating—namely soft drinks/artificial juices and sweets—which negatively impacted participants’ sleep quality. The data from the present study are shown below (Table V).

**Table V – Sleep Duration Among Working Students Enrolled in Health Programs at a Community College, Chapecó, SC, Brazil, 2024**

**Source: Authors, 2024. Significance level p < 0.05**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Daily hours of sleep** | | |  |  |  |
| **Time of last meal** | **Less than 5 hours** | **5 to 6 hours** | **6 to 7 hours** | **7 to 8 hours** | **More than 8 hours** | **Significance** |
| 12 p.m. to 6 p.m. | 10 (28,57%) | 15 (42,85%) | 7 (20%) | 3 (8,58%) | 0 (0%) | p= 0,008 |
| 6:30p.m. to 9:30p.m. | 17 (8,05%) | 83 (39,37%) | 88 (41,7%) | 21 (9,94%) | 2 (0,94%) | x²= 113,87 |
| 10p.m. to 1 a.m. | 28 (11,38%) | 108 (43,9%) | 77 (31,3%) | 30 (12,2%) | 3 (1,22%) |  |
| **Consumption of sweets** | |  |  |  |  |  |
| Yes | 37 (11%) | 158 (47%) | 107 (31,5%) | 32 (9,5%) | 4 (1%) | p= 0,017 |
| No | 18 (12%) | 48 (31%) | 65 (42,5%) | 22 (14%) | 1 (0,5%) | x²= 12,087 |

When asked about suggestions for changes that students would like to see in order for the university to better support the promotion of healthier eating, the most requested change was the establishment of a university cafeteria, similar to those found at federal universities and/or offering more affordable prices, cited by 13.2% of respondents. This was followed by requests for establishments with healthier options that sell more natural products (12.8%), buffets located closer to campus buildings (3.25%), and daily availability of fruit-selling venues (3%).

Bortolot, Perez, and Silva Franco (2019) evaluated the availability of fruits and vegetables at a university in Rio de Janeiro. Although fruit options were present in nearly all food establishments, their availability was not proportional to the supply of foods considered markers of unhealthy eating (MANS). A study analyzing five food outlets on campus found that four primarily sold ultra-processed foods, fried and baked snacks, and convenience items such as candies and chocolates. Moreover, none of the locations provided nutritional information about the dishes served, and only one offered a buffet option for both lunch and dinner. Additionally, three establishments offered fruit juices and fresh fruit options. However, healthier products tended to be more expensive than snacks, sweets, and soft drinks. Consequently, several barriers hinder the promotion of healthier eating practices within these environments, which is concerning given the extended amount of time students and staff spend exposed to a wide variety of low-nutritional-value foods and beverages. Although fruits and vegetables are available, their average price is higher compared to products of lower nutritional quality, such as snacks, cookies, and soft drinks. Therefore, the characteristics of campus food outlets underscore the importance of continuously improving the nutritional quality of products sold at universities (Batista et al., 2023).

4. Conclusion

It is clear that intense routines and lack of time—whether due to work or academic demands—make it difficult for university students to maintain a healthy lifestyle that includes quality sleep, regular physical exercise, and adequate nutrition based on fresh food consumption.

The research highlights that the absence of affordable alternatives and the scarcity of healthy options on campus remain persistent challenges for those striving to maintain a proper diet in the university environment. Furthermore, even if the food supply improves, processed foods will continue to be available. Therefore, it is essential to implement initiatives that promote healthier habits, including nutrition education, so that students can make more informed food choices. This can be achieved through teaching, research, and outreach projects focused on this issue.

In this regard, the study raises important considerations for universities, as decisions regarding campus food environments can be made within their administrative and academic bodies. These include providing healthy, affordable options, establishing partnerships with food vendors, and seeking support from local government authorities.

By improving the quality of food available to university students, not only is personal health promoted, but academic and professional performance is also enhanced, contributing to a more productive and healthier future. Therefore, we reaffirm our commitment to social transformation through education, emphasizing the importance of a university better equipped to address contemporary challenges.

**DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)**

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

**CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL**

The research was carried out in accordance with CNS Resolution 466/2012 (Brasil, 2012) and Resolution 510/2016 (Brasil, 2016) and approved under Opinion: 6,587,047. It was also carried out in accordance with the General Personal Data Protection Law (LGPD), Law No. 13,709/2018 (Brasil, 2018).

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