

A Qualitative Study on the Concept of Healthy Lifestyle and Factors Affecting the Dormitory Students' Lifestyle of Shahid Beheshti University

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Abstract

Introduction: Healthy lifestyle can play a significant role in the health and quality of students' life. The purpose of this study was to investigate the concept of healthy lifestyle among students living in dormitories and factors affecting their lifestyle.

Method: This qualitative study was conducted as a semi-structured interview with 18 female students residing in the dormitory of Shahid Beheshti University. These students were selected through purposive sampling. Interviews were analyzed in four contexts: the concept of healthy lifestyles, examining students' lifestyles, evaluating their lifestyles, and factors affecting their lifestyles. Content analysis was used to analyze the data.

Result: The results showed that there are two distinct areas regarding the concept of a healthy lifestyle from the students' perspective; first, the dimensions that the healthy lifestyle contains and second, the principles on which a healthy lifestyle should be based. There were also five groups of factors affecting students' lifestyles: avoidance of family (e.g. independence), internal factors (e.g. individual characteristics), university and dormitory conditions (e.g. time), relationships (e.g. Roommate), macro factors (e.g. social, economic).

Conclusion: Since, university students encompass a significant population of each country, attention to promoting their healthy lifestyle through the process of appropriate understanding the dimensions of healthy lifestyle and planning accordingly, should be considered by researchers and educational institutions.

Declaration of Interest: None

Keywords: Dormitory Students' Lifestyle, Healthy Factors, University Students.

Introduction

A significant part of each country's population are students, who often include the country's young population. In addition to being regarded as valuable human resources, this group includes educated people that can be exemplars for their families and those around them, and a wider community level. Thus their health and lifestyle are important. Transition to higher education has made important changes for many students; many experiences living in a dormitory, and being away from their families for the first time and also found more freedom (1). They are socially and demographically in the age range with the most common stress-related disorders. The common stressors can include training programs, lack of recreation time, adaptation to living in the dormitory with roommates, preparing meals, as well as spending time and financial resources, which there is no guarantee for continuation of these resources (2,3). Additionally, there are various psychological challenges specifically related to this developmental stage and students should face with, including how to follow health-oriented behaviors and avoid high-risk behaviors such as aggression (4) or addiction due to peer pressure which is higher in the age groups of 25 years old and younger than the age groups 41 years and older (5).

One of the most vital concerns for dorm students is their lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle can play an important role in the students' health and quality of life (6,7,8). As the world moves toward modernity and changing diseases from acute to chronic,

health policies and behaviors have gradually focused on the importance of human behaviors, reducing these diseases, and promoting health, which according to William Cockram, is an achievement (9). Choosing better lifestyle and health-related behaviors such as physical activity, nutrition, and sleep which are affected by individuals' hardiness and psychological capital in early adulthood are associated with the health of individuals in later life (10). According to Giddens, lifestyle is a relatively coherent model of a person's daily activities that he/she uses to meet his/her needs and represents a narrative of his/her identity to others (11). As a result, via concentrating on people's lifestyle, we can understand the nature of their behaviors, the reason, and the meaning of those behaviors more appropriately (6).

According to the World Health Organization, a healthy lifestyle is a way of reducing the risk of serious illnesses or premature death, helping to enjoy life by expanding health to its physical, psychological, and social dimensions, and having a positive role in the lives of others and our own families (12). Olfert et al. (13) have stated that nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and stress, as well as lifestyle-related behaviors can affect the lives of young adults throughout the school year and holidays. In other research, sleep, diet, family variables, alcohol, and smoking have been correlated with academic performance (14). Adams et al. (15) considered five behaviors to measure a healthy lifestyle, including smoking, leisure-time exercise, fruit and vegetable consumption during the day, sleep deprivation, and alcohol abuse.

Besides, the Lifestyle Elements Scale contains questions about the number of sleeping hours, the amount of fish and its products consumption, physical activity, rumination, desperate and obsessive thoughts, and social activity (16). Also, Health-promoting lifestyle profile tool has designed to measure the level of health-related behaviors such as nutrition, body activity, responsibility for health, stress management, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual growth (17).

Various studies have addressed the lifestyle as an important subject that has significant implications for dormitory students (1,2,9,18,19) and it has been concluded that there is a meaningful relationship between students' perception of health and healthy lifestyle behaviors (20). The results of a meta-analysis showed that the first year of college was a period of vulnerability for overweight (21). Although some studies report that students' lifestyles have improved (22), a great number of research generally evaluates students' lifestyles as average and below-average, and globally, they are involved in risky behaviors including low levels of physical activity and consumption of fruits and vegetables on the one hand, and high levels of sedentary activity, smoking, drinking alcohol and poor sleep on the other hand. The findings of different studies have demonstrated the effects of lifestyle components such as sleep, diet, and smoking on academic performance (14,23). Not having breakfast and irregular meals are associated with the prevalence of fatigue, and consequently, poor educational outcomes (24). Afrazandeh et al. (25) have

showed that as lifestyle improves, the motivation for progress in academic performance also increases. Sleep problems are associated with academic failure and drowsiness in class, fatigue, mood problems, and quality of life (26,27). According to Keating's review, 40 to 50 percent of students have little physical activity, which can increase the risk of weight gain, heart disease, diabetes, blood fat, and hypertension. In addition, low levels of physical activity are associated with poorer well-being indicators, high risk of depression, and poorer cognitive performance (28). As a result, high levels of psychological distress and inadequate management strategies negatively influence students' physical, mental, social, and academic performance (2,29) and it can be said that there are reciprocal relationships between healthy lifestyle and psychological well-being as well (30).

In keeping with the World Health Organization, a healthy lifestyle is the result of the interaction of individual characteristics, social relationships, and environmental, social, and economic situations; considering this, and confirming to studying the research literature, it would be significant to investigate the concept of a healthy lifestyle and factors affecting students living in a dormitory (31)

Although a wide variety of research has been conducted on university students' lifestyles, most of these studies have been quantitative and have used self-report measures, and no qualitative research has been carried out in this regard. So, it is not obvious exactly what are the components of a healthy lifestyle in terms of students'

perspective how can these components be improved? Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the concept of a healthy lifestyle among students living in dormitories and factors affecting their lifestyle.

Method

This qualitative exploratory study was conducted through semi-structured interview. Study population consisted of female students residing in the Shahid Beheshti Dormitory. The sample consisted of 18 female students residing in the dormitory of Shahid Beheshti University studying various undergraduate courses. The purposive sampling was applied. Inclusion criteria were being at least 18 years old, having at least diploma, and willingness to participate in the research. Exclusion criteria were non-Iranian nationality, history of serious medical diseases and neurobiological disorders.

After studying the research literature, interview questions were designed according to lifestyle dimensions and in some cases adapted from previous research questions. After designing 15 questions and conducting two initial interviews, the questions and

answers were investigated. The interviews were semi-structured; before conducting the interviews, the participants were notified about the recording of the conversation, and it was explained to them that the recording was only for the sake of accuracy, and it was safe by the researcher. The interview began with demographic questions and then a general explanation of the lifestyle followed by questions about describing a healthy lifestyle. During the third to thirteenth questions, dimensions and variables related to a person's lifestyle were explicitly asked. At question 14, we assessed the participant's current lifestyle, and in the last question, we asked about factors affecting the lifestyle. The average duration of each interview was 20 minutes.

To analyze the data, the information contained in the recorded interviews was written as quotes. A code was assigned to each sentence or phrase that had a different meaning to the one before and after. Similar codes were put together as subdivisions of a more general concept, and then the main categories were formed by putting common concepts together. The process was also reviewed by two other researchers to ensure the reliability of coding and interpretation.

Table 1. Interview questions

Question type	Question Text
Demographic	1. course, semester, main place of residence, marital status, employment status
Preface	2. How would you describe a healthy lifestyle?
Describing the lifestyle	3. Do you have any physical activity? If so, how much?
	4. What is your dietary style? (Consumables, Consumption, Body Image)
	5. How much do you sleep in 24 hours? How do you evaluate the quality of your sleep?
	6. How do you spend your leisure time? What do you do the most?
	7. Do you use alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs? To what extent? For example, how many times a day, or week, or month?
	8. How much do you feel under stress? What makes you stressed the most?
	9. What do you do to cope with this stress?

	10. How important are religious beliefs and spirituality to your life?
	11. Do you feel your life is purposeful? What are your goals?
	12. Do you have a meaning for your life? What does your life mean?
	13. How do you see your future?
Evaluation	14. How do you judge your lifestyle?
Factors investigation	15. What factors do you think have influenced your lifestyle?

Results

The progress of data collection reached a saturation point after sixteen interviews. Two more interviews were conducted to be sure. The mean age of participants were 21.7 (n = 18). Ten were the seniors, two were the juniors, four were the sophomore and two were freshman and they studied different fields such as biology, psychology, geology,

physical education, educational sciences, French literature, consulting, sciences, politics, Chinese language, Persian literature, industrial management, and computer engineering. In terms of employment status, two individuals had part-time jobs, and the rest were not employed.

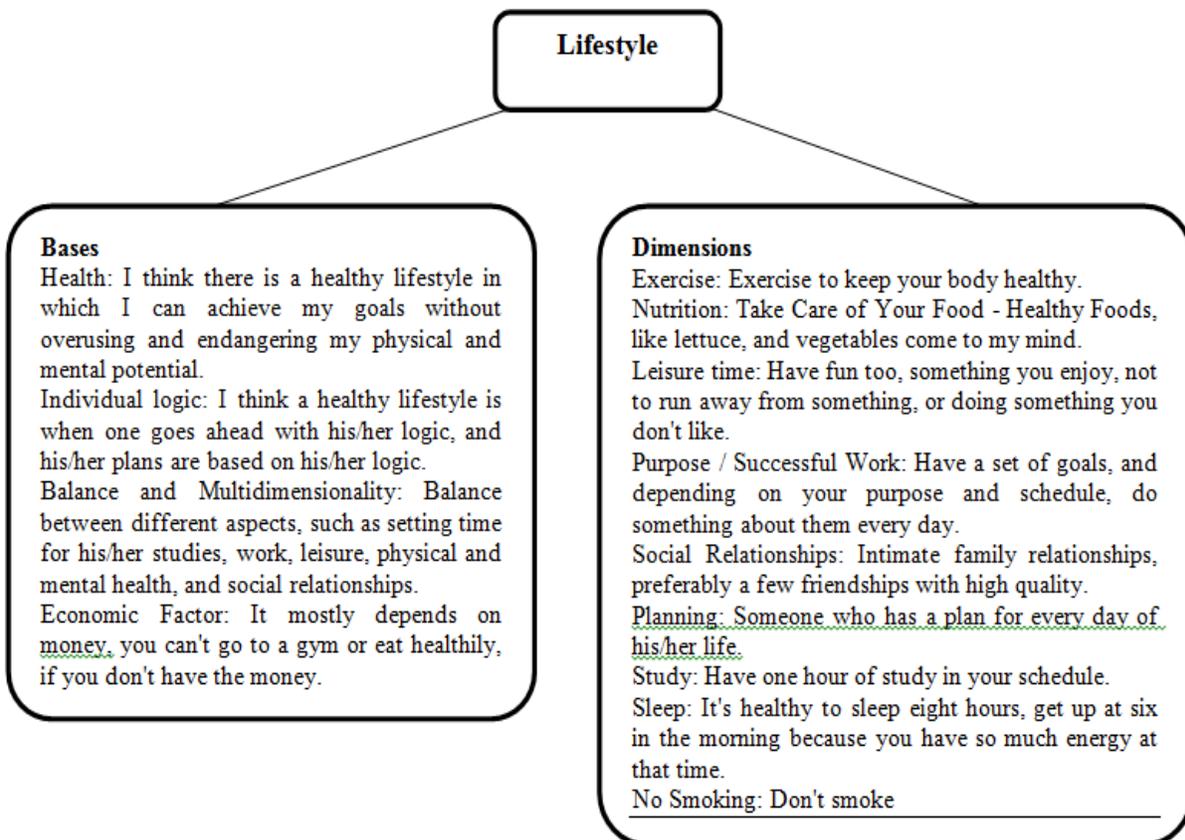


Figure 1. Concept of healthy lifestyle

There were two distinct areas regarding the concept of a healthy lifestyle for students

after content analysis; First, the dimensions of a healthy lifestyle include exercise,

nutrition, leisure time, purposeful and productive work, social relationships, planning, sleeping, not smoking, and studying; and second, the principles on

which a healthy lifestyle should be based, including balance and being multifaceted, health, individual logic, and economic factor.

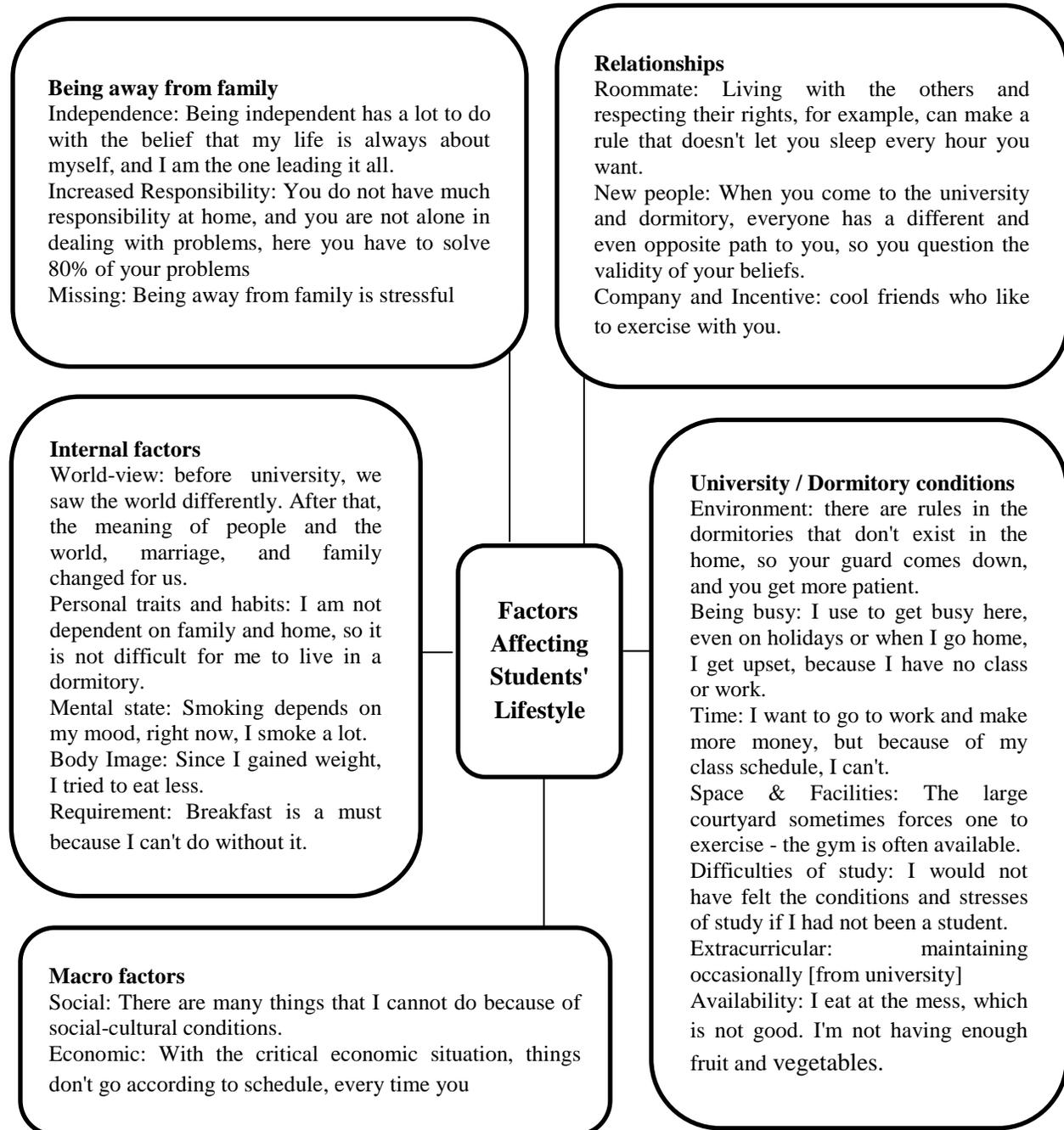


Figure 2. Factors affecting students' lifestyle

In the next step, the participants' lifestyles in different dimensions were examined, and the concepts underlying each dimension were extracted; Physical activity (activity level, athletic activity, other activities, perseverance, laziness, and sitting), Nutrition (breakfast, food, fast food, number and time of meals, university food, body image / diet, personal importance, enjoyment, homemade food), Sleep (sleeping hours, sleep quality, sleep time), Leisure time (social relations, going out, studying, physical activity, art / literature, film, smartphone / internet, music, learning and volunteering), Alcohol and drug use, Stress (stress, distance from family, roommate incompatibility, being worry about the future, macro factors, lessons, relationships, personality traits), Coping with stress (joking, rewarding yourself, solitude, physical activity, art, planning, avoid thinking, emotional drain, talking to someone, writing, going out, working, risky behaviors), Religion / Spirituality (having religious beliefs, religious behavior, spirituality, relationship with God, death and self-role), Purposefulness (having goals, being on track, overall purpose, education, work and material well-being, interest / hobbies, ethics, marriage), Meaning (the nature of meaning, intellectual activity, public individual), and Future perspective (positive / negative / ambiguous, effort, planning). In the third step, the participants assessed their current lifestyle, which was carried out by assigning a score overall or in different dimensions.

The final question of content analysis, identifying five groups of factors affecting the lifestyle of students residing in the

dormitory, including being away from family (independence, increased responsibility, nostalgia), internal factors (worldview, personality traits and habits, mental state, body image, need), university and dormitory conditions (time, space and facilities, difficulties of study, access, university extracurricular, others), relationships (roommates, new people, companions and incentives), and macro factors (social, economic).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the concept of a healthy lifestyle for students residing in dormitories and identify the factors affecting their lifestyle. For students, healthy lifestyles included exercise, nutrition, leisure time, purpose / successful work, social relationships, planning, study, sleep, and no smoking, all of which matched with the WHO standard of healthy lifestyle encompasses no smoking, healthy eating, physical activity, and no alcohol abuse.

On the other hand, it was found that a healthy lifestyle is based on health, personal logic, balance, and multi-dimensionality. One of the interviews also listed the economic factor of the necessities of a healthy lifestyle, because it is essential for the benefit of higher levels of a healthy lifestyle such as access to healthy and varied food, education, and sports. In the study by Deliens et al. (28), the component related to cost (expense) has been mentioned as an obstacle to physical activity. In this study, physical activity- both as a hobby for leisure time and as a coping strategy, was identified as one of the dimensions of a healthy

lifestyle. Since students' life is associated with sitting behaviors, such as studying, working with computers, and sitting in class, it would be more important to reduce costs, and improve sports facilities to enhance these healthy behaviors and their positive impacts. In addition, planning as a self-regulation strategy can balance a limited time perspective, and individuals who intend to do physical activity and have a diet will be more likely to succeed if they plan appropriately. Also, sleep is extremely important as another dimension mentioned here. In one study, students' estimates of insomnia according to the DSM-5 were about 10 percent. Individuals with insomnia significantly report fatigue, depression, anxiety, stress, poor quality of life, and drug use (16,28).

According to the description of students' lifestyle, one of the components for leisure time was the use of mobile phones and the Internet which can lead to isolation, sleep disturbance, and reduced academic performance (27). Besides, stressors such as being away from family, roommate incompatibility, and the course mentioned in this study had points in common with the study by Robinson et al. (3). The findings showed that more than half of the students in the present study reported high level of stress, which is justified given that the sample gender was restricted to women; in other studies, women reported higher levels of stress as well which could be due to lower levels of using effective stress management techniques and physical activity among woman. Mehri et al. (32) also found that stress control and responsibility had a strong

association with physical activity and healthy nutrition.

On the other hand, half of the students had a positive perspective on their future. It can be said that those who are positive about future possibilities may be more motivated to make healthy choices. Despite the gap between students' lifestyles and healthy lifestyles, the evaluation of some of them was positive, which could be due to attributing some of the responsibility to environmental factors, or the importance of some aspects of their lifestyle to them.

As mentioned, five operating categories were identified for the current students' lifestyle; being away from family, internal factors, university/dormitory conditions, relationships, and macro factors. This is in line with the findings of Delines et al. (28) which found five categories of personal factors, social environment, university characteristics, the physical environment, and macro environment. These concepts can be effective on physical activity and sedentary behaviors of dormitory students (as one of the important aspects of their lifestyle).

One of the components of being away from the family was independence; by living in a dormitory and moving away from the family, the family's control over one's behavior greatly reduces, and the person's authority increases: (Being independent is very effective. It has a lot to do with the belief that my life is always about myself, and I am the one leading it all). Two other components were increased responsibility: (you don't have much responsibility at home, and you're not alone in dealing with problems) and missing (here, sometimes I

need more intimacy than what I have with my friends and roommates). One of the internal factors was the worldview (Before the university, we saw the world in another way; after we come to university the meaning of people, the world, marriage, and family changed for us). Being busy was a component of university and dormitory conditions (I use to get busy here, even on holidays or when I go home, I get upset, because I have no class or work), which indicates the conditions and environment of the university and dormitory can develop new behavioral habits in the person. Depending on its facilities, the university and dormitory can both act as a stressor (the population of the room is more than its facilities), and also a facilitator of health behaviors (the large courtyard of the dormitory forces one to walk, the gym is often available). Lack of time (I don't have time to exercise) is a component that can be reminiscent of the importance of planning and being multidimensional. Macro-socioeconomic factors also affect almost everyone in the community, including students. It may be argued that decreasing security and socio-economic stability via negating or obscuring the prospects of individuals influence their motivation to choose healthy behaviors and lifestyles.

There were some limitations in this study that should be considered when interpreting these findings. Firstly, the study was single-sex, which did not allow simultaneous comparison of findings between the two sexes. In future studies on this topic, it is suggested that both sexes will be studied for better and more accurate conclusions. Additionally, in the present research, the

role of various social and cultural factors was not studied, which should be considered in future related research. Despite these limitations, the results from this study indicated that students' lifestyle is a particular pattern of life that has its own set of components, conditions, and stressors. Given the significance of the impact of a healthy lifestyle on different aspects of students' lives that make up a major population of each country, understanding the components of a health-oriented lifestyle is mainly important. In fact, it is imperative to investigate students' perceptions of health first while attempting to determine their healthy lifestyle behaviors. Subsequently, educational institutions, universities and responsible organizations should apply the collected information to design appropriate educational programs for students to modify, improve and enhance their lifestyles via increasing health-oriented factors and reducing negative risk factors in order to prevent future mental or physical challenges and health issues, and treat potential disorders at the proper time.

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