

# Impact of Life Satisfaction and Dietary Beliefs in Youth

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**Received date:** February 21, 2024, Manuscript No. IPJCND-24-18672; **Editor assigned date:** February 24, 2024, PreQC No. IPJCND-24-18672 (PQ); **Reviewed date:** March 11, 2024, QC No. IPJCND-24-18672; **Revised date:** March 18, 2024, Manuscript No. IPJCND-24-18672 (R); **Published date:** March 25, 2024, DOI: 10.36648/2472-1921.10.2.191

**Citation:** Ahmed S (2024) Impact of Life Satisfaction and Dietary Beliefs in Youth. J Clin Nutr Diet Vol.10 No.2: 191.

## Abstract

The objective of the study is to assess the relationship between dieting beliefs and life satisfaction. For the purpose of the study, a total number of 203 participants were selected from the Karachi, Pakistan with age range of the participants between 18 to 24 years. Two main variables "life satisfaction and the tendency of dieting beliefs" were used in this research. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Dieting Belief Scale (DBS) measure life satisfaction and assess the dieting beliefs respectively among individuals. The correlation analysis was performed to evaluate the link between dieting belief and life satisfaction. The correlation between life satisfaction and dieting beliefs is positive, but it is weakly correlated with the value of R 0.0568 and coefficient of determination  $R^2$  0.0032 as life satisfaction doesn't solely depend upon dieting belief and have other factor affecting it.

**Keywords:** Life satisfaction; Dietary beliefs; College students; Well-being; Health psychology

## Introduction

Life Satisfaction (LS) is defined as the individual's assessment of their life as a whole or in different domains and is considered as cognitive component of Subjective Well-Being (SWB). Subjective well-being is a way of defining a good life and is often referred to as happiness [1]. Considered to be the key indicator of SWB, LS is a subjective evaluation of overall quality of life. People who experience abundant SWB have many pleasures and few pains and they feel satisfied with their lives. The core of this approach revolves around the belief that a person's life satisfaction depends on their contentment in different life domains. Among all, food is the most popular domain that gained attention in literature as it has been found that higher life satisfaction is directly associated with individual healthy eating habits in adults and adolescent [1,2].

Life satisfaction reports are constructed as ongoing findings that indicate the influence of changing life circumstances. As such, changes in satisfaction with life could provoke changes in individuals' coping strategies. For example, someone exhibits declines in life satisfaction and associated emotions due to

health-related risk behaviors (e.g., disordered eating/dieting) to increase their life satisfaction. On the other hand, engaging in health-related risk behaviors may alter a persons' satisfaction with life.

Life satisfaction in different population is influenced by various factors including (weight, alcohol use, personality, culture, stress and physical activity) [3-7]. Moreover, with the emergence of field of "positive psychology" there has been a growing interest in investigating how different behaviors and situations influence life satisfaction and how life satisfaction may be related to outcomes such as academic performance, retention and positive student experiences [8]. The emphasis on satisfaction with life as-a-whole does not eliminate the sufferings and complaints.

As it is well understood that even the happiest are not without complaints. Logically, satisfaction and complaining do not exclude each other. One who is fairly satisfied with life as-a-whole is also aware of the real threats to one's happiness [1].

Different studies indicate the positive correlation between low levels of life satisfaction and variety of maladaptive health-related outcomes among youth, including higher rates of suicidal behavior, lower physical activity levels, substance use and violent behavior [7,9,10]. Moreover, emerging literature also indicates that alcohol misuse is another factor for low life satisfaction among college students. However, fewer studies have explored the relationship among life satisfaction and dietary approaches [11].

Dieting beliefs are also concerned with the view that an individual can lose weight by restricting to eat or by avoiding such eating habits which cause obesity. During the young adulthood period, when the process of identity formation is disturbed, it causes great confusion and instability about life. Young people especially assume that the solution to this problem is to utilize their physical bodies for self-definition [12]. They disregard their other attributes, morals and values and emphasize only on their physical appearance, which they can control or at least tend to control over. The primary solution that many young individuals, particularly girls, choose of improving the self is dieting. By losing weights they assume that they can acquire appreciation from others and a sense of self-worth [13].

A study indicated that people having dieted to lose weight, perceptions of underweight, having vomited or used laxatives to

lose weight and taking diet pills were significantly related to reduced life satisfaction and that results differed by both gender and ethnicity. Furthermore, another study, interviewed of 56 college students for self-regulatory approaches to lose and maintain their weight, reported that students having dietary disorders exhibit more self-regulatory approaches to manage their weight, lower life satisfaction and increased levels of negative affect than individuals of normal weight [14]. Among adults, a Finnish study of twin pairs aged 18–54 at baseline found low levels of life satisfaction were predictors of weight gain in older women [14]. Another study also reported that a lack of perceived eating control and a higher BMI in women were associated with lower life satisfaction and lack of control overeating [15].

To a large extent, self-esteem is also related to satisfaction with appearance. People who are not satisfied with their lives, in addition to other events or circumstances, also remain suspicious about their own self-worth. They may not value their own self and regard themselves as worthless resulting in developing psychiatric and mental issues [12,13]. Researchers in the past decades have also reported a high prevalence of body dissatisfaction and weight loss behaviors among adolescents. Moreover, the boom in the media industry in recent years also made people more conscious about their physical appearance. Thus, the question that “Is body dissatisfaction merely and solely responsible for decreased life satisfaction?” needs to be addressed. Although various studies have suggested a link between dietary habits and lower life satisfaction, but a thorough investigation is essential to explore the association and impact between dietary habits and life satisfaction among youth.

In this study, we aim to find the differences between the dieting concerns of people who are satisfied and possess positive evaluation and those with lower satisfaction and negative approach towards life. Life satisfaction has an impact on their dieting beliefs regarding losing weight and maintaining a well figured-body image. We hypothesized that the more the individuals report satisfaction with their lives, the higher their dieting beliefs are supposed to be. One can simply assume that gaining or losing weight is not to be linked with fate, rather we are responsible for what efforts we put into achieving our task.

## Material and Methods

### Participants

A total number of 203 participants (107 males and 96 females) were randomly approached for the study. All the participants were from Karachi with age ranging from 18 to 24 years. The random sampling method was used in the study. The participants selected belonged to different sociodemographic levels of Karachi to ensure sample heterogeneity. First, a consent form and a demographic sheet were given to the participants. They were informed about the aims of the study designed to evaluate the different behavior patterns and the responses provided would be kept confidential and would not be disclosed to anyone. The participants were also informed about their right

to withdraw at any moment during the study; however, their participation will be appreciated. They were requested to fill out the required form and sign below if they are willing to participate.

After informed consent, the questionnaire was given to them and instructions were given to each participant regarding each statement. Two different measuring scales (satisfaction with life scale and dieting beliefs scale) were used to evaluate the impact of dieting beliefs. For life satisfaction scale, the participants were asked to choose the answer that best describes them on a scale of 0 to 7, where 0 is not like to me at all and 7 is being a lot like to me. They were also requested to be honest in their responses as there were no right or wrong answers. For dieting belief scale, they were told to read the statements and mark the responses from 1 (not at all descriptive of your beliefs) to 6 (very descriptive of your belief) in front of each statement which describes their beliefs. After filling in the questionnaire, the participants were thanked for their participation and their valuable input in this study. The designed study was completed in approximately 2.5 months.

### Instrumentation

**Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS):** The satisfaction with life scale is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. The SWLS was a 7-point Likert scale. The scale usually requires only about one minute of a respondent's time. The scale is in the public domain and free to use without permission or charge by all professionals' researchers and practitioners [16].

**Dieting Belief Scale (DBS):** The 16-item Dieting Beliefs Scale (DBS), a 6-point scale was designed to measure the beliefs and tendencies of dieting. The DBS demonstrated moderate internal consistency and high test-retest reliability. Factor analysis suggested the presence of three readily interpretable factors, an internal factor and two external factors. The DBS correlated highly (0.62) with four-item Weight Locus of Control (WLOC) scale [17].

### Data analysis

All the data was analyzed by using SPSS software version 25.

## Results

### Perceived life satisfaction in youth

Most students reported at least mid-range/slightly satisfied with life or greater (31.3% of females and 39% of males), while approximately 24% of females and 29% of males reported being dissatisfied with life (**Table 1**). Similarly, about 19% female and 14% male were dissatisfied and the number drops down when reaching to the category of extreme dissatisfaction. The results indicated a slighter higher percentage of women being dissatisfied with life in all categories as compared to men. Women as one might expect, there was also a linear increase in the numbers of students in each category when one examines the dissatisfied, mid-range and satisfied categories, respectively.

These results appear to be quite consistent for multiple populations of public youth, providing additional evidence regarding the short-term and long-term stability of life satisfaction judgments.

**Table 1:** Life satisfaction level among youth.

Level of satisfaction	Frequency (female)	Female percentage	Frequency (male)	Male percentage
Extremely satisfied	7	5	5	4.7
Satisfied	23	31	31	29
Slightly satisfied	30	42	42	39.3
Neutral	10	6	6	5.6
Slightly dissatisfied	19	15	15	14
Dissatisfied	5	8	8	7.5
Extremely dissatisfied	2	107	0	0
Total	96	100	107	100

### Evaluation of dieting beliefs

In females, significant associations were established between dissatisfaction with life dieting and behavior. Most of the population showed moderate range of description in dieting belief

(40.2% male and 41.7% females) followed by somewhat description category. Lesser percentage of both male and female were found in upper and lower extreme categories of dieting belief (**Table 2**).

**Table 2:** Score of dieting descriptive beliefs.

Descriptive	Frequency male	Male percent	Frequency female	Female percent
Slightly descriptive of my belief	5	4.7	2.1	2.1
Somewhat descriptive of my belief	34	31.8	11.5	11.5
Moderately descriptive of my belief	43	40.2	41.7	41.7
Very descriptive of my belief	22	20.6	34.4	34.4
Descriptive of my belief	3	2.8	9.4	9.4
Total	107	100	1	1

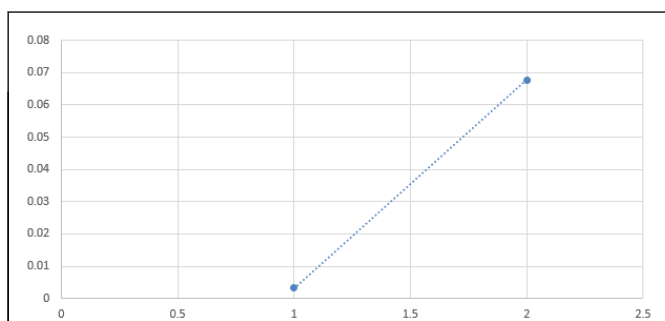
### Correlational analysis

Among the total participants studied (203), the correlational analysis was performed to evaluate the link between dieting belief and life satisfaction among youth. The results supported our

hypothesis as it indicated positive correlation correlated with the dieting beliefs among them as the value of correlation R is 0.0568 which is technically a positive correlation; the coefficient of determination is 0.0032 (**Table 3 and Figure 1**).

**Table 3:** Correlation between life satisfaction and dieting beliefs.

Total number of participants	Correlational value R	Coefficient of determination R <sup>2</sup>
203	0.0678	0.0032



**Figure 1:** Correlation analysis between dieting belief and life satisfaction.

## Discussion

In recent years, the influence of media industry draws attention of millennials and generation Z of society towards dietary approaches to maintain the ideal figure as compared to previous generation (Generation X). The consciousness about their physical appearance and the entire focus on body weight creates both physical and mental health challenges and dissatisfaction. For this, a thorough investigation is required to ascertain the impact of dieting on life satisfaction. Thus, this study is designed with an aim to evaluate and investigate how dietary beliefs circulating in society create an impact on life satisfaction among youth [18].

Life satisfaction is a positive evaluation of the overall life, including life events and circumstances in general. It is not concerned with the current feelings or emotions but rather assuming life as a whole satisfactory. Life satisfaction does not point out that one is completely out of complaints and problems. To measure life satisfaction, two key challenges are associated with it [19]. First, how individuals adapt to personal circumstances can affect the measurement of life satisfaction, even when it is not objective. Secondly, it is difficult to make sure that individuals all over the world perceive life satisfaction in a similar manner. Despite these challenges, it is reported that these are the not the only limiting factor in measuring life satisfaction. Many other factors contribute to the quality of life which can influence life satisfaction. People who are satisfied enjoy the sense of control over life events, whereas dissatisfied people lack internal control and seem to evaluate everything in a pessimistic way [19].

How far life satisfaction goes with the concerns about dieting in young adults, this study has been conducted. The results indicated a slighter higher percentage of women being dissatisfied with life in all categories as compared to men when evaluated *via* SWLS strengthening the idea of females being more concerned about their physical appearance than men. Moreover, correlation analysis between dieting belief and life satisfaction suggested that there is not a very strong correlation with dieting beliefs. Individuals who reported more life satisfaction do not necessarily have higher concerns about dieting. Several factors might be responsible for this slightly correlation. People who are contented and satisfied with their lives might not appreciate what others think about them; rather they are more concerned about their own feelings and

perceptions. It might not be a matter of attention to them whether losing or gaining weight is followed by restricting themselves to eat or not. As they are satisfied they experience a sense of control over the environment.

Another factor that might be involved in the certainty of responses. As there is no objective measurement of life satisfaction, we have to rely on the subjective self-reports of the individuals. People might report a high degree of life satisfaction as they assume it to be socially acceptable or maybe in response to their current pleasant feelings. Similar is the case with dieting beliefs, people might not want to show their weak willpower with regard to weight control and responded in a way which might not reflect their true beliefs.

## Conclusion

Life Satisfaction (LS) is defined as the individual's assessment of their life as a whole or in different domains and is considered as cognitive component of Subjective Well-Being (SWB). The designed study evaluated the linkage between life satisfaction and dieting belief by using dieting belief and satisfaction with life scale. The results suggested a positive but weak correlation between life satisfaction and dieting belief as it doesn't solely depend on dietary behaviors of individuals but also on various other factors that should be studied for better and deeper understanding.

## Limitations

The study has been conducted on the young population with a sample size of 203 individuals. All the participants were students. Thus, for an extensive study, other variables affecting life satisfaction and its impact on dieting concerns must also needed to be studied.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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