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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Investigation of University Students Attitudes Towards Healthy Eating in Terms of Some Variables

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the attitudes of university students towards healthy eating in terms of some variables. 322 students (170 male, 152 female) from Bartın University Faculty of Sports Sciences and Health Services Vocational School participated in the study. "Attitude Scale Towards Healthy Eating" developed by Tekkurşun Demir and Cicioğlu (2019) and a personal data form were used as data collection tools in the research. SPSS 20 package program was used in the analysis of the data. In the analysis of normally distributed data, the Independent Samples T test was used in pairwise comparison, and the significance level was taken as $p<0.05$. When the gender and attitude scores and sub-dimensions of the groups participating in the study were examined, it was found that men's attitudes towards healthy eating, feelings about nutrition and positive nutrition scores were higher than women, but there was no statistically significant difference between the groups ($p>.05$). When the variable of taking the nutrition lesson of the groups and the scores and sub-dimensions of the attitudes towards healthy nutrition were examined, it was determined that the students who took the nutrition lesson had higher attitude levels towards healthy nutrition, but there was no statistically significant difference ($p>.05$). There was no statistical difference between the department variable and the scores of attitudes towards healthy eating, and between the sub-dimensions of knowledge about nutrition, feeling towards nutrition and malnutrition ($p>.05$), but a statistical difference was found between the groups in the sub-dimension of positive nutrition ($p<.05$). As a result, the gender of the participants and the variable of taking a nutrition course do not affect the attitude towards healthy eating, while the section variable causes a difference in the positive nutrition sub-dimension.

Keywords: Healthy diet, University students, Gender

INTRODUCTION

Nutrition, the intake and use of nutrients are essential for the individual to continue his vital functions from the moment he is born, grows and develops, and lives a long time healthily and productively (1).

The concept of healthy nutrition, on the other hand, is the consumption of all the nutrients needed in sufficient quantities, in a balanced, rich variety, and at the appropriate time, taking into account the age, gender, and physiological condition of the individual (2,3). Proper nutrition reduces side effects and inflammation in the body, allowing individuals to get sick less, and shortens the recovery period in case of illness (4). Individuals who do not have a healthy nutritional profile are more prone to obesity, diabetes, cancer, psychological and cardiovascular disorders (5).

In today's conditions, individuals' proper nutrition and habits are affected by many factors such as agricultural structure, geographical location, socio-economic status, biological, psychological, technology, media, and globalization. These multifactor sometimes trigger unhealthy eating habits and disease occurrence in individuals (6).

Making healthy nutrition, a lifestyle can be achieved by increasing individual and social consciousness. Individuals' healthy eating behaviors should be provided with the stages of accessing the correct information, evaluating, and making the right decision (7).

When the nutritional profiles of university students, who make up an essential part of the society, are examined, it has been determined that the habit of skipping a single meal or main meal, snacks, the pattern of consuming high-calorie food with low nutritional value due to financial impossibilities, and the consumption of food only for satiety instead of a high-quality, healthy and balanced diet. These irregular eating habits can negatively affect both the school success and general health of students (8,9,10,11).

In this context, the study aims to examine university students' attitudes towards healthy eating in terms of some variables.

MATERIAL & METHODS

To examine university students' attitudes towards healthy nutrition in terms of some variables, the survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, was used, and the data were collected by conducting a survey.

The study group of the research consisted of 152 female and 170 male students selected by random sampling method, studying in Faculty of Sports Sciences and Health Services Vocational School at Bartin University in the 2020-2021 academic year.

Sociodemographic Information Form

In the sociodemographic information form section, there are questions about the participants' age, gender, body weight (kg), height (cm), the department they studied, and whether they had taken a nutrition course before.

Attitudes Towards Healthy Eating Scale

It is a Likert-type scale consisting of 21 items and four sub-dimensions (Knowledge About Nutrition (NDI), Emotions About Nutrition (FDI), Positive Nutrition (OB), and Malnutrition (BP) by Tekkurşun Demir and Cicioğlu in 2019. "Attitude Scale Towards Healthy Eating" was used (12). The lowest score obtained from the scale is 21, and the highest score is 105. In the scale scoring, 21 points are meager, 23-42 points are low, 43-63 points are medium,

64-84 points are high, 85-105 points are ideally high, and they have an attitude towards healthy eating.

SPSS 20 package program was used in the analysis of the data. In the analysis of normally distributed data, the Independent Samples T-test was used in pairwise comparison, and the level of significance was taken as ($p<0.05$).

RESULTS

The distribution of the participants according to their demographic characteristics is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.D
Age	322	18	33	21,8	2,7
Height	322	153	210	171,8	9,2
Weight	322	43	115	66,3	13,1

When Table 2 is examined, although men's attitudes towards healthy eating scores are higher than women's, there is no statistical difference between gender variable and attitude scores towards healthy eating and its sub-dimensions ($p>.05$). When the scores of the sub-dimensions of the scale were examined, it was determined that the scores of feelings about nutrition and positive nutrition were higher in men and that the scores of the knowledge about nutrition and malnutrition sub-dimension were equal in women and men.

According to Table 1, the mean age of the participants was 21.08 ±2.7 years, the mean height was 171.8 ±9.2 cm, and the mean body weight was 66.3 ±13.1 kg.

Table 2: T-Test Table of the Groups Participating in the Study by Gender Variable

Scale and Sub-Dimensions	Gender	N	Mean	Std.Dev	T	P
Attitude Towards Healthy Eating	Male	170	71,7	10,4	1,82	,19
	Female	152	69,7	8,9		
Nutrition Information	Male	170	17,5	2,7	-0,27	,07
	Female	152	17,5	2,3		
Emotion to Nutrition	Male	170	19,1	4,1	3,89	,11
	Female	152	17,4	3,6		
Positive Nutrition	Male	170	16,9	3,8	,90	,59
	Female	152	16,5	3,5		
Malnutrition	Male	170	18,1	3,8	-,17	,29
	Female	152	18,1	3,3		

*p<.05

Table 3: T-Test Table of the Groups Participating in the Study by Department Variable

Scale and Sub-Dimensions	Department	N	Mean	Std.Dev	T	P
Attitude Towards Healthy Eating	SSF	144	76,1	8,9	4,45	,17
	Other	178	71,2	10,6		
Nutrition Information	SSF	144	20,9	3,2	3,88	,32
	Other	178	19,6	3,1		
Emotion to Nutrition	SSF	144	19,1	3,8	3,58	,67
	Other	178	17,6	3,9		
Positive Nutrition	SSF	144	17,4	3,2	3,10	,04
	Other	178	16,2	3,9		
Malnutrition	SSF	144	18,5	3,3	1,84	,23
	Other	178	17,8	3,7		

*p<.05

When Table 3 is examined, no statistically significant difference was found between the groups regarding the department they studied and its sub-dimensions ($p>.05$). However, a statistically significant difference was found between the groups in the positive nutrition sub-dimension ($p<.05$). When the average scores are examined individually, it has been determined that the Faculty of Sport Sciences students have higher values in the total scores of all sub-dimensions of the scale, but there is no statistically significant difference.

Table 4: T-Test Table According to the Variable of Nutrition Lessons of the Groups Participating in the Study

Scale and Sub-Dimensions	Nutrition Lessons	N	Mean	Std.Dev	T	P
Attitude Towards Healthy Eating	Yes	154	75,5	9,8	3,59	,21
	No	168	71,5	10,1		
Nutrition Information	Yes	154	20,7	3,1	3,12	,13
	No	168	19,6	3,2		
Emotion to Nutrition	Yes	154	18,8	3,9	2,22	,06
	No	168	17,8	3,9		
Positive Nutrition	Yes	154	17,2	3,4	2,21	2,24
	No	168	16,3	3,8		
Malnutrition	Yes	154	18,6	3,4	2,55	,44
	No	168	17,8	3,6		

When Table 4 is examined, no statistically significant difference was found between the variables of whether or not to take a nutrition course and attitudes and sub-dimensions towards healthy eating ($p>.05$). When the average scores of the university students who took the nutrition course were examined, it was determined that the total scores of the healthy eating attitude scores and all the sub-dimensions of the scale were higher than the students who did not take the nutrition course, but there was no significant difference between the groups.

DISCUSSION

No significant difference was found between the genders in the scores and sub-dimensions of the participants' attitudes towards nutrition.

In the study in which the nutritional attitudes of taekwondo athletes were examined in terms of various variables, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between the groups according to gender, nationality, and BMI variable (p>0.05) (8). Özenoğlu et al. (2021), in their study, it was determined that there was a statistically significant difference in favor of women in the "knowledge about nutrition" sub-dimension (13) While there was a statistically significant difference in favor of men in the "feeling towards nutrition" sub-dimension, there was no significant difference in the other sub-dimensions according to the gender variable.

In another study examining the nutritional knowledge attitude and quality of life of university students who do and do not do sports, it was found that the average scores of women were higher than men, but there was no significant difference between the groups (14). Zaborowicz et al. (2016), It was determined that the nutritional knowledge level of the students according to gender was sufficient; 34.7% of the female students and 25.1% of the boys had good nutrition knowledge (15) In another study, it was determined that there was no significant difference between the sub-dimensions of the social media and healthy eating scale and the gender variable (16).

The findings of our study show parallelism with the results in the literature. It can be thought that this situation arises because the groups have similar profiles (education level, social condition, etc.).

There was a statistical difference between the groups participating in the study, only in the positive nutrition sub-dimension, between the department they studied and their attitudes towards healthy eating. There was no significant difference in the other sub-dimensions.

In the study examining the Social Media Addiction and Healthy Eating Attitudes of Sports Science Students, no significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions of the healthy eating attitude scale in terms of the department variable (p>0.05) (16). Ermiş et al. (2015) determined that the majority of university students (64%) had insufficient nutritional knowledge (17). It has been determined that there is a significant difference in the attitudes of amateur and professional athletes towards healthy eating (18).

It can be thought that the high nutritional awareness of the faculty of sports sciences and the departments of Health Vocational School is a factor in the absence of any difference between the departments.

No significant difference was found between the status of taking/not taking nutrition lessons and their attitude scores and sub-dimensions towards nutrition.

Yılmaz and Karaca (2019), It has been determined that the nutritional knowledge and nutritional attitudes of the people who take nutrition lessons and do sports are statistically significantly higher than those who have not taken nutrition lessons and those who are sedentary (p<0.05) Jones et al. (2015), nutritional knowledge levels of the students who took nutrition course were significantly higher than the others(19).

Although the sub and total scores of the participants who took the nutrition course were higher than those who did not, no significant difference was detected. It can be thought that this situation is due to the close relationship between the departments that the participants read and the level of nutrition knowledge.

As a result, it can be said that the gender of the participants and the variable of taking a nutrition course do not affect the attitude towards healthy eating, but only in the positive nutrition sub-dimension in the section variable.

It can be said that the high and similar attitudes of the participants towards healthy eating are related to the department, body image, education, and high level of awareness.

In future studies, quantitative-qualitative studies with enriched sample groups can be included.

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