
Exploring the Eating Habits and their Perceived Effects on Health Among Nurses: A Qualitative Study

Ma. Daryl Kaye Lim Baltazar¹/ Dr. Joel John A. Dela Merced²

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9341-9467>¹/ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1459-5274>²

St. Bernadette of Lourdes College^{1,2}

Mbaltazar@sbhc.edu.ph¹ / jdelamerced@sbhc.edu.ph²

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored nurses' eating habits and their perceived effects on health and work performance. Findings showed that irregular meal patterns, skipped meals, and reliance on convenient food choices were common due to long shifts, workload demands, and workplace stress. Although participants understood the importance of proper nutrition, many struggled to maintain healthy eating behaviors. Poor dietary practices were associated with fatigue, reduced concentration, low energy levels, and increased stress, whereas healthier habits were associated with better focus and stamina. The study highlights the gap between nutritional knowledge and practice and emphasizes the need for workplace support to promote nurses' well-being and quality patient care.

Keywords: *Eating habits, nurses, Workplace factors, Health and well-being, Work performance, Qualitative study*

INTRODUCTION

Nurses play a vital role in patient care, yet often struggle to maintain healthy eating habits despite their nutritional knowledge. Long shifts, rotating schedules, high stress, and limited access to nutritious food within healthcare facilities contribute to poor dietary practices, leading to fatigue, weight fluctuations, and nutrient deficiencies. In Qatar, these challenges are compounded by a fast-paced multicultural healthcare environment, extreme heat, and heavy workloads. While some nurses attempt strategies like meal prepping, consistency remains difficult. Understanding these barriers highlights the need for institution-based interventions, including supportive workplace policies, accessible nutrition resources, and targeted educational programs to improve nurses' overall well-being and performance.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore nurses' perspectives on their eating habits and the perceived effects of these habits on their health. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do nurses describe their typical eating habits during work and non-work hours?
2. How do workplace factors, such as shift schedules, workload, and food availability, influence nurses' eating behaviors?
3. What personal, social, and environmental factors do nurses identify as facilitators or barriers to maintaining healthy eating habits?
4. How do nurses perceive the relationship between their eating habits and their ability to perform professional duties and manage work-related stress?

5. What perceptions do nurses hold regarding the effects of their dietary practices on their physical and mental health?

Scope and Limitations

The study explored the eating habits of nurses and their perceived effects on health in selected hospital settings. It specifically examined nurses' personal experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to dietary practices, including the influence of work schedules, stress, and workplace food environments. The research was conducted with multinational nurses who were willing to participate and provide detailed accounts of their eating behaviors, which may not represent the experiences of all nurses across different regions or specialties. The study relied on self-reported perceptions of health outcomes rather than clinical measurements, and the findings were confined to the context and conditions of the participating hospitals at the time of data collection.

Review of Related Literatures

Research across multiple countries consistently highlights the significant challenges nurses face in maintaining healthy dietary habits due to demanding occupational conditions. A Polish study of 460 nurses linked shift work and multiple employment to poor eating patterns, excess body fat, and obesity, emphasizing the need for workplace interventions. Similarly, Australian new graduate nurses encountered workplace cultural barriers that hindered the formation of healthy lifestyles during their critical first professional year. In Norway, public health nurses recognized the importance of personalized nutritional counseling for families but faced difficulties keeping up to date due to inadequate training opportunities. An Iranian study demonstrated that nutritional literacy accounted for 44% of the variance in nursing students' eating behaviors, underscoring education's pivotal role. A global systematic review further confirmed that organizational factors, including shift work and extended hours, alongside personal and environmental influences, collectively impede healthy eating. These findings collectively advocate for comprehensive, multilevel institutional interventions to address nutritional well-being across the nursing profession.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

This study integrated three theoretical frameworks to comprehensively examine nurses' eating behaviors. The Health Belief Model explained how nurses' perceptions of health risks, barriers, and self-efficacy shaped their dietary decisions amid workplace challenges like shift work and stress. Complementing this, Pender's Health Promotion Model emphasized proactive motivation, perceived benefits, and situational influences driving healthier food choices. Leininger's Transcultural Nursing Theory further acknowledged that cultural values, traditional diets, and diverse beliefs significantly influenced nurses' nutritional practices. Together, these frameworks captured the work-related, personal, and cultural dimensions that affect nurses' health outcomes. This integrated approach supported the development of holistic, culturally sensitive interventions that promote healthier eating habits and improve nurses' overall well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore nurses' eating habits and their perceived effects on health. The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and perceptions regarding their dietary practices. Data were collected through answering Google Forms, enabling participants to share detailed accounts of their daily eating behaviors, challenges, and the influence of workplace and personal factors on their health. This design was appropriate for capturing the complexity and context-specific nature of nurses' experiences, providing rich, descriptive data that quantitative methods could not fully address.

Research Site

The study was conducted in a tertiary hospital, where nurses were employed, providing a suitable environment to explore their eating habits within the context of their daily work routines. The site is in a government institution. The operating theatre was chosen based on accessibility, the willingness of nursing staff to participate, and the presence of varied work conditions, such as shift work and extended hours, that were relevant to the study. Conducting the research in these settings allowed the researchers to capture authentic experiences and perspectives of nurses regarding the effects of their eating habits on health.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants could provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights related to the research topic. The sample included multinational respondents from the Operating Theatre of a tertiary hospital, representing diverse cultural backgrounds and varying years of experience to capture variations in dietary behaviors and perceived health effects. This diversity allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural influences and workplace conditions shaped eating habits. The final number of participants was determined based on data saturation, ensuring that interviews continued until no new themes or significant information emerged.

Data Analysis Method

First, the interview transcripts and field notes were read repeatedly to become familiar with the content. Significant statements related to eating habits, perceived health effects, and influencing factors were then identified and coded. These codes were grouped into categories that reflected common patterns, which were further refined into themes capturing the core aspects of the participants' experiences. The analysis was conducted systematically and iteratively, with continuous comparison of data to ensure consistency, accuracy, and a clear representation of the nurses' perspectives.

Research Hypotheses and Validation

The semi-structured interview guide was validated through expert review to ensure its content accuracy, clarity, and alignment with the study's objectives. Nursing and qualitative research experts assessed the relevance of each question, suggested modifications for clarity, and confirmed that the instrument could effectively elicit in-depth insights into nurses' eating

habits and perceived health effects. Adjustments were made based on their feedback to enhance the comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the questions.

The study's trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved by conducting member checks, allowing participants to verify the accuracy of their responses. Dependability was maintained by keeping a detailed audit trail of data collection and analysis processes, while confirmability was ensured through careful documentation of field notes and reflective observations. These measures strengthened the reliability and rigor of the findings, ensuring that the results genuinely represented participants' experiences and perceptions.

Study Limitations and ethical considerations

The researcher ensured that the study complied with ethical standards in conducting research with human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the study's purpose, objectives, procedures, and potential benefits and risks. Participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Confidentiality and privacy were strictly maintained throughout the study. Personal identifiers were removed from transcripts, and data were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access.

The study adhered to principles of integrity and honesty, ensuring that findings were reported accurately and without fabrication or misrepresentation. The researcher maintained transparency in data collection, analysis, and reporting, and any potential conflicts of interest were disclosed, safeguarding the ethical credibility of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SOP 5. What perceptions do nurses hold regarding the effects of their dietary practices on their physical and mental health?

Nurses' eating habits have a direct and powerful impact on overall health and well-being, influencing both physical and mental aspects of life. Healthy eating habits, such as consuming balanced and nutritious foods, contribute to higher energy levels, improved focus and memory, stronger immunity, better mood, and the ability to maintain a healthy weight, all of which support a more active and fulfilling lifestyle. Poor eating habits such as frequent consumption of processed foods, skipping meals, or excessive sugar intake can lead to fatigue, difficulty concentrating, weakened immune function, mood swings, and increased risk of obesity and chronic diseases like diabetes and heart conditions. These negative effects not only impact daily functioning but also long-term health outcomes. The infographic emphasizes that making consistent, mindful food choices, staying hydrated, eating at regular intervals, and maintaining an active lifestyle are essential steps toward achieving better health and overall well-being.

SUMMARY

The results revealed five major themes on nurses' eating habits and their perceived health effects. Nurses' eating patterns were largely shaped by work demands, with irregular meals, skipped meals, and reliance on convenient foods during busy shifts. Workplace factors

such as workload, limited breaks, food restrictions, and limited access to healthy options strongly influence dietary choices. Personal strategies like meal preparation and hydration, as well as family, peer, and environmental influences, also affect eating behaviors. These habits impacted energy, concentration, stress management, and work performance. Overall, unhealthy eating practices negatively affected nurses' physical health, emotional well-being, and professional functioning.

CONCLUSIONS

The qualitative research highlighted the significant implications of these eating habits on nurses' work performance, stress levels, and overall health. Poor dietary practices were found to contribute to fatigue, reduced concentration, emotional instability, and decreased productivity, potentially affecting the quality of patient care. Maintaining balanced and regular meals supports better energy levels, improved focus, and effective stress management. Long-term health outcomes such as increased risk of chronic diseases, weakened immunity, and poor mental well-being were associated with unhealthy eating behaviors. These findings emphasize that proper nutrition is not only essential for individual health but also for professional effectiveness and safety in healthcare settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are suggested: Nurses should practice effective self-management strategies for healthy eating, while hospital administrators, nursing leaders, educators, policymakers, and researchers collaborate to create supportive workplace environments, implement nutrition-focused policies and programs, protect meal breaks, promote nutrition education, and advance research that enhances nurses' well-being, work performance, and overall occupational health.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Almighty God, our dean and adviser, Dr. Joel John dela Merced, faculty members, institution staff, research respondents, colleagues, and classmates for their guidance, support, encouragement, and invaluable contributions that made this study possible. I am especially grateful to my loving husband, Jerome, and our three children for their unwavering love, patience, sacrifices, and constant inspiration, which gave me the strength and determination to complete this research journey.

AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

REFERENCES

- Alyafei, A., & Carr, R. E. (2024). The Health Belief Model of Behavior Change. National Library of Medicine; StatPearls Publishing. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK606120/>

-
- Arsheen Imran Sajwani, Hashi, F., Eman Abdelghany, Alomari, A., & Ibrahim Alananzeh. (2024). Workplace barriers and facilitators to nurses' healthy eating behaviours: a qualitative systematic review. *Contemporary Nurse*, 60(3), 270–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10376178.2024.2354336>
- Bartosiewicz, A., Dereń, K., Łuszczki, E., Zielińska, M., Nowak, J., Lewandowska, A., & Sulikowski, P. (2025). Exploring Body Composition and Eating Habits Among Nurses in Poland. *Nutrients*, 17(16), 2686. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu17162686>
- Brogan, E., Rossiter, C., Duffield, C., & Denney-Wilson, E. (2021). Healthy eating and physical activity among new graduate nurses: a qualitative study of barriers and enablers during their first year of clinical practice. *Collegian*, 28(5), 489–497. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.colegn.2020.12.008>
- Chen, P.-J., & Antonelli, M. (2020). Conceptual Models of Food Choice: Influential Factors Related to Foods, Individual Differences, and Society. *Foods*, 9(12). <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods9121898>
- Flaubert, J. L., Menestrel, S. L., Williams, D. R., & Wakefield, M. K. (2021). Supporting the health and professional well-being of nurses. In www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. National Academies Press. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK573902/>
- Helle, C., Elisabet Rudjord Hillesund, & Nina Cecilie Øverby. (2023). A qualitative study of public health nurses' perspectives and experiences on nutritional guidance for parents of infants and toddlers. *Maternal and Child Nutrition*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.13546>