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Comfort Foods and its Impact on Individual Psychology- A Review Article

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Introduction- Stress can be considered as feeling when a person believes that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize and it affects its homeostasis. Stress on a rise in covid-19 pandemic due to socioeconomic conditions, loss of family members, uncertainty, decreased human interaction, etc [1]. People are increasingly spending more time at home because the educational institutes have turned towards online modes of teaching and many employees have been made to work from home.

Comfort foods can be defined as food to which a person has emotional and nostalgic attachment and have a component of unhealthiness, tastiness and are easy to prepare. It is not necessary that all these characteristics are found in all comfort foods but one of these is usually present.[3]

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Comfort Foods and its Impact on Individual Psychology- A Review Article

Usmaan Topiwala

I. Introduction

Stress can be considered as feeling when a person believes that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize and it affects its homeostasis. Stress on a rise in covid-19 pandemic due to socioeconomic conditions, loss of family members, uncertainty, decreased human interaction, etc [1]. People are increasingly spending more time at home because the educational institutes have turned towards online modes of teaching and many employees have been made to work from home.

Comfort foods can be defined as food to which a person has emotional and nostalgic attachment and have a component of unhealthiness, tastiness and are easy to prepare. It is not necessary that all these characteristics are found in all comfort foods but one of these is usually present.[3]

This narrative review is meant to review the existing literature on relation between stress and eating of comfort foods. This will help us to arrive at a conclusion whether stress can increase consumption of comfort foods and vice-versa.

Changes in nutritional quality of meals and calorie intake have lead to a dramatic increase obesity over the past 30-40 years in developed and increasingly, in developing countries.[2]

Cognitive functions have been reported to be impaired due to obesity in both people and rodents .It has been observed in rats that exposure to a high fat and high sugar diet for as little as 1 week selectively impaired place recognition [2]. According to American Psychological association, nearly one -third of adults self- report overeating (hyperphagia) when stressed[4]. Eating more comfort foods after stress can be considered self medication for decreasing stress. This would dampen the response of body towards stress and leads to decrease in secretion of cortisol in long terms. This can lead to problems in handling stress in future and addiction to comfort foods.[5] Comfort eating is more likely to occur in women and obese. These groups can also become deficient in certain nutrients due to high consumption of only a certain type of nutrient[6] Also large amount of time is spend at home during the pandemic which would increase accesibility and need for comfort foods.[1] This study will be a great medium to create awareness among the vulnerable section ie women and obese thus decreasing their dependence on comfort foods

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II. Methods

For the purpose of reviewing the literature, search was made on pubmed using keywords “comfort foods” and “stress” during May 2021. 208 results were reported. Studies included were providing a relation between comfort foods and stress on humans. Studies which were performed on animals i.e. rats and those related to heat or cold stress were excluded. 31 studies were identified to be useful for the review.

III. Discussion

Comfort foods are highly idiosyncratic across individuals. The very first taxonomic approach to comfort foods was proposed by Wansink, Cheney, and Chan (2003), and it was based on the physical characteristics of those foods.1 Wansink and colleagues conducted a two-part experiment. In the first study, they mailed a questionnaire to some randomly selected households to collect data on what kinds of foods people find more comforting. in the second study that was conducted over the phone; participants were asked to rate each comfort food identified in the initial study. They were asked if they considered it a comfort food, how guilty they felt after consuming it and how healthy they felt after consuming this food. Although the results suggested potential age and sex differences in comfort foods, this work also indicated the idiosyncratic nature of comfort foodsie comfort foods differ from person to person an would be based on that persons life experiences .

Certain research suggests that they are particularly likely to turn to such foods in times of high emotional arousal, regardless of which foods people choose as comfort foods. (e.g., DubLeBel, & Lu, 2005; Evers, Adriaanse, de Ridder, & de Witt Huberts, 2013). It has been reported that humans use consumption of comfort foods to attempt to distract themselves from, or alleviate, Negative emotions, or on the contrary, heighten the sensation of positive emotions (Dubé et al., 2005; O’Conner, Jones, Conner, McMillan, & Ferguson, 2008).

But people will usually seek Comfort food when they are in a negative affect state of stress. O’Conner Et

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al. (2008) reported that increased consumption of high-fat and high-sugar Foods between meals are Correlated with interpersonal and work related stressors. A recent study also determined that more chocolate was consumed by people with High stress and lower cortisol levels as compared to those with low stress and high cortisol levels in a laboratory Study (Tryon, DeCant, & Laugero, 2013). Further, van Strien, Roelofs, And de Weerth (2013) found that people who scored high on an emotional eating scale combined with a lower (blunted) cortisol response Consumed more food after a stressful task than did those who scored High on an emotional eating scale combined with higher cortisol levels; Participants who scored low on the emotional eating scale did not show These differences.

Similarly, it was found that participants consumed The most of sweet, fat-rich foods when they were stressed when given an option to consume sweet, Salty, or bland foods of varying amounts of fat, (Oliver, Wardle, & Gibson, 2000). One study on contrary found that those who consume Comfort foods when stressed perceived these situations as less stressful When compared to those who did not consume comfort food (Finch & Tomiyama, 2015). This might lead to sense of euphoria about something that does not exist and this might lead to not facing problems.

Additionally, Labroo and Mukhopadhyay (2009) concluded that if people believe their positive mood is short-term, they would consume unhealthy food that will preserve their existing positive mood just the way people abuse drugs. This is the reason that there is a risk of addiction. In contrast, if people Believe their negative mood is short-term, they will consume healthier Food allowing them to focus on long-term needs because the negative Mood will alleviate itself. Similarly, if an emotion is thought to be long-Term, people will consume unhealthy food if they are in a negative mood in order to improve it, whereas they would consume healthy food In a positive mood because they are able to focus on their long-term needs.

Some investigations have focused on comfort food's Nostalgic components. It was found that along with comfort food providing psychological relief, people found it to be Comforting due to the consumption context and experience. (LeBel, Lu, & Dubé, 2008). It has been Suggested that social contexts and childhood experiences are important in The formation of life-long comfort food consumption. Spence (2017) Argues that strongest influence on whether a food will later become a Comfort food is based on past associations (e.g., memories and relationships) with Food. One of investigations in this nostalgia domain has Focused on social surrogacy (e.g., Troisi & Gabriel, 2011).The social surrogacy approach is a blend of Aspects of the emotional and nostalgic approach (Troisi & Gabriel, 2011; Troisi, Gabriel, Derrick, & Geisler, 2015; Troisi & Wright, 2017). Troisi and colleagues claim that the consumption of comfort Food can act as an emotional substitute to counteract loneliness. Each time the Food is consumed, memories of the emotions and inter Personal relationships associated with this food are activated (Ong, IJzerman, & Leung, 2015; Troisi & Gabriel, 2011; Troisi & Wright, 2017).It should be pointed out that one of the major ways of eradicating stress is focusing on building better interpersonal relationships. This need is being replaced by comfort foods thus making people dependent on comfort foods and infesting them with a lack of interest in developing interpersonal relationships.

1. PLS and cognitive restraint enhance the salience of NA as a trigger for stress-eating. Individuals with high chronic and perceived life stress have greater baseline and stress-induced NA [31,54], and show a relationship between stress-induced NA and consuming a larger percentage of portioned snack food [30l
2. Also Van Oudenhove et al. has observed that food intake without awareness (i.e., without visual, taste, and olfactory inputs) can modify emotions (2)
3. Approaches to treating obesity should certainly take the link between stress and food into account; the origin of stress should be identified and dealt with.

For young adult college students who are learning important self-management skills, intake of high-fat, non-nutritious "comfort foods" (e.g. heavy meals, sweets, salty snacks) in response to stress may be especially problematic. This would pave way for lifelong bad habits and obesity. Indeed, diet and other behavioral risk factors for obesity have been shown to remain similar from early life into adulthood (Craigie et al., 2011).

Limitations

Conclusion

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