



Brief Research

## Age- and Situation-wise Eating Behavior: An Extensive Qualitative Review of Psychological and Socio-cultural Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

Age- and situation-wise eating behavior is very progressive and dynamic, and to measure it using a single parameter is very difficult. Hence, this paper aims to take a broader perspective, such as psychological and socio-cultural aspects, to analyze the eating behavior within different age groups. This analysis with existing literature reveals cohesion between age-related changes and originating eating behaviors, highlighting the importance of psychological factors, such as emotions and people's thoughts along the life span. In addition, the review fascinates how socio-cultural perspectives, including family kinetics, peer influences, and societal norms and depiction of food, contribute to the embodiment of dietary preferences in various situations? By assimilating various findings from several disciplines, this review not only ameliorates our understanding of age- and situation-wise eating behavior but also determines the necessity for multifaceted interference and the deliberate degree of psychological and socio-cultural aspects for promoting healthy and salubrious dietary habits across the human lifespan.

**Keywords:** Eating behavior, Choice, Age-wise eating, Habits, Cultural eating, Obesity, Psychological eating

### INTRODUCTION

Age- and situation-wise eating behavior is very dynamic in modern contexts all over the world. As various food options are being open to all, people have the option to choose freely.<sup>1</sup> Robinson *et al.* highlighted eating behavior using laboratory studies.<sup>1</sup> Some findings suggest, using predictions and strategies influence to change eating behavior outside the laboratory.<sup>2</sup> Psychological and social cues also influence eating behavior; for example, empty or inflating food packaging has also influenced food consumption.<sup>3</sup> The work is based on a modern behavior perspective, such as how people are mainly thinking about situational cues that define the eating outlay.<sup>4,5</sup> People use different natures of food at different times, for example, on the sofa, with friends, at party time, and morning, noon, and evening time.<sup>4</sup> The situation of food consumption's probability of desire imposing and fecund food ensues from the "grounded cognition theory of desire."<sup>6,7</sup> The main theme of this principle is that for something conferred, perceptions, circumstances intimation are integrated into perplexing, companionable multi-model presentations, also known as "situated conceptualization." The circumstances intimation limn into situated conceptualization that includes emotions and actions, along with different other sources such

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as cognitions, information about time and place, and limn of the objects and population impending.<sup>6,8-10</sup> One study noticed that people tend to consume more popcorn during movies at the theater. However, one individual who rarely eats popcorn, during movies, end up consuming more popcorn when they are with their friends, due to the excitement, and social or environmental influence.<sup>11</sup> This observation indicates that people generally consume more popcorn during movies, while in an office setting, popcorn consumption is much lower. This suggests that the situation conspicuously influences eating behavior. Behavioral science is one of the humanistic contexts that also define people's choices of food consumption. We know that for people who live in the mountainous region of the world, their food choices are different from the plain region or coastal regions of the world. The majority of coastal people consume a lot of fish, whereas people living inland in a country do not eat much fish and instead consume other types of food. Hence, by changing the geographical place, culture, or environment, the eating behavior is also changed. The eating demeanor of obese children is very intricate. With penury of hunger, individual obese children have different eating demeanors, such as eating their favorite food when unhappy, snacking after meals, eating at midnight, skipping meals and eating junk, consuming too much food, and resulting in vomiting. Nowadays, another aspect is binge eating in the child age group.<sup>12</sup> Engorge intake is addressed among 9.3% of "salubrious" kids until 36.5% of them, are overweight.<sup>13</sup> Stress is another aspect of eating behavior. One study noticed that in the adult group, especially under mild stress, the eating tendency is more than 30 to -43% and that ensures unhealthy and unbalanced food choices.<sup>14</sup> Aged people tend to maintain more fresh vegetables and fruits for consumption rather than oily fatty foods.<sup>15</sup> Age- and situation-wise consumption or eating behavior always changes. Our main goal is to discuss some parameters such as people's thoughts, situations, and societal norms that influence eating behavior. Due to the massive amount of research that has been wielded, this inspection does not cover the entire aspects but craves to explain that eating behavior is definitive by the number of dominating factors that are discussed.

## SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

With this meta-analysis, we got a very vast knowledge about age- and situation-wise eating behavior or environmental impact on food culture and also about several thoughts of people on various foods, emotional attachment to the foods, and eating time among different aged people. Furthermore, we know about adolescent eating behavior in modern times, societal norms, and cultural sight. Hence, this paper is an overall package to know about eating conditions and eating behaviors among people very elaborately. We have

adopted a qualitative approach to examine from the previous research how different elderly people like and dislike consuming different kinds of foods and discuss how different parameters, such as psychological and socio-cultural aspects, affect eating behavior. Mainly, Google Scholar and PubMed were used to search the following databases for academic literature, which facilitated trace of related articles tailored to the aim of our research. Moreover, questionnaire surveys and a long interactive sessions were conducted. Extensive interactive sessions were conducted with people of various ages to understand their daily food preferences, which made our findings even more interesting.

## Psychological paradigm mastery to eating behavior

The psychological paradigm is another factor in eating behavior. Different people and their approaches to eating behavior are different. Some people are trying to lose weight, while some people are trying to gain weight. Also, there is another approach for people who are obese. Eating behavior is also related to some cognitive components that may differ from a set of eating-related conditions and are also dependent on stress and emotions.<sup>16</sup> In this section, we will observe people's weight and height and their thoughts about food. According to the World Health Organization, 25–29.99 is an overweight category in body mass index (BMI) index. Table 1 helps to understand the tendency of people about their food consumption and their weight. We observed three weight categories: normal, overweight, and underweight. Among the participants, three are at risk due to being overweight, one is underweight, and ten are in the normal weight category. Here, we have tried to discuss participants' thoughts on food cognitions. We picked some questions for this section, like (1) what are people thinking about food consumption? As per age, the efficiency of our

**Table 1:** Weight, age, and BMI category of interviewees.

Pseudonym	Weight category	Age	BMI
MALINA	Normal	44	21.51954
SOURAV	Normal	20	24.71306
MALAY	Normal	18	23.0381
TANDRA	Overweight	46	25.87478
AVOY	Normal	55	23.4849
SANKHADEEEP	Underweight	22	16.09413
PUSPITA	Normal	25	21.52782
JAMUNA	Overweight	48	28.96862
ANUVAB	Overweight	61	25.83929
SUMONA	Normal	22	19.90368
PALLABI	Normal	26	18.62268
SOVA	Normal	54	21.51954
SOHOM	Normal	20	19.57075
SUDIP	Normal	60	21.28069

BMI: Body mass index

gastrointestinal system may decrease,<sup>17</sup> leading to changes in the quality or quantity of food consumed. Malina, who is 44 years old, says, “When I see sweet food on an empty stomach, I think it might cause acidity, so I avoid it. However, when I see foods like rice or puffed rice, I prefer them on an empty stomach.” The issue is not only that older individuals change the amount of food and nutrients they consume but also their thoughts about food.<sup>18</sup> Another participant, Tandra, who is 46 years old, says, “When I see any type of food, I’m ready to eat it without considering what is healthy or unhealthy.” Another interviewee, Snakhadeep, who is 22 years old, said, “Stress is one factor that controls the eating behavior of adult people. He also said that when he was under too much stress, his potential to eat decreased.” According to Harris *et al.*, 1984,<sup>19</sup> depression impacts weight loss and decreased appetite. Other research says that people consume sweet, fatty foods rather than protein foods during stress period.<sup>20</sup> Some findings indicate that food choices basically in the adult age group are not sustainable and also affect climate change.<sup>21,22</sup> “Jamuna,” another interviewee, was in the overweight category after calculating the BMI index. She said, “For me, food is an emotion; when I see food, I am very excited, and my eyes are always open to the food, and I feel very happy.” That indicates obese people consume food without appetite; they like to consume it. Various experiments in the time of 1960s exhibit that obese humans up-wield their intake when consecration more dainty food but also plucked to down-wield after a pre-load (additional food given before the test meal).<sup>23</sup> “Malay,” who is 18 years old said, “I like eating non-veg and sweet foods. Most of the time, I have no problem eating such kind of food. Moreover, in a week, for 4–5 days, I consume non-veg and street food.” In the adolescent period, people have higher social involvement with their mates, so that’s why they need higher food energy, and the tendency to unhealthy food consumption is high.<sup>24</sup> Public education is most important that ensures the healthy eating disposition and food consumption behavior and that may reduce the problem of obesity and reduce the risk to different kind of diseases.<sup>25</sup> (2) How emotions are attached with consuming foods? Emotional attachment to the food is also a different

approach to eating disposition. Greater level of emotional intake is noticed in obese people, especially when they are in negative mental situation.<sup>26</sup> So here, we took different approaches toward our interviewees on the emotional connection to food as given in Table 2.

Table 2 depicts some thoughts about emotional behavior toward the food of our interviewees, and we believe that this helps a lot to understand the emotional connection to eating behavior. Obesity and overeating are due to psychological and emotional eating, including the nature of various food intake amalgamation dispositions.<sup>27</sup> In an intriguing study by Macht (2008),<sup>28</sup> it was found that negative mood states improved quickly after consuming chocolate. The experiment showed that feelings of hostility disappeared within two minutes of eating chocolate. Macht concluded that it is unlikely that this rapid mood improvement was due to physical effects alone. Emotional eating behavior is more dominant in young adult groups. One study suggests that before the examination, most of the students are in a negative mood (stress, anxiety, and depression), which is why intake desire is less. On the other hand, after the examination, they feel free and without any stress, with a positive mood and a higher propensity to eat, which indicates how positive and negative emotions demonstrate eating behavior.<sup>29</sup> Appetite significantly mediates the connection between amalgamation-perturbation and emotional intake.<sup>30</sup> With this context of emotion, our interviewee, Sankhadeep, said that “when he came back to his home after a long period, he felt the nostalgic connection to homemade food, which means the situation influenced the emotional connection to the food, and his appetite also increased to see that kind of food.” Rise of eating in repercussion to emotion might be individual interest when we envisage its potential to lessen weight loss and weight maintenance endeavors.<sup>31</sup> Understanding the tangled relationship between emotions and eating behavior is ultimate for promoting healthy practice and overall well-being. Manifesting mindfulness, flourishing positive coping mechanisms, and nurturing a balanced approach to emotional well-being can be congruent with establishing a benign relationship with food. (3) How does time play an important role in our perception of food? From time to time,

**Table 2:** Overview of emotional connections of interviewees to the food.

Superlative theme	Subthemes	Example quote
Emotional connection to the food	Food give me pleasure	“When I see food in stress situation then I feel very pleasure”
	Expression of love	“Always I want to share food with my friends and family members”
	Personal preferences	“I mostly like non-veg items, with that, I have a strong emotional connection”
	Sense of home	“When I ate some food then that food remembered me about my home”
	Social bonding	“When I make some special food then I share to our neighbors”
	Food memories	“Different food items in different situations create my food memories”
	Comfort and nostalgia	“When I remember some food I easily connect with my emotions, and I feel nostalgic”
	Food is fuel	“Our body is like a machine so food is a driven force for our body”

our eating behavior is also very different. All people prefer different food at different times of the day. Optimal time of eating helps auspicious dietetics, metabolic health, and loss of weight in a fruitful manner, and that will expedite intervention at the community of people and clinical levels.<sup>32</sup> In a day, people consume various foods, and in this context, “timing” is very important. From our interviewees, we got some findings such as (i) people consume heavy food in the daytime but consume very light food at night time. (ii) Food consumption at midnight is more prominent in the younger age group of people. According to Grummon *et al.* (2021),<sup>33</sup> bedtime is crucial for sleep quality. They found that going to bed later is linked to less sleep and a higher tendency to eat unhealthy foods like pizza, burgers, chips, and soft drinks due to late-night cravings. Additionally, they noted that staying up late is more common among younger people. (iii) Most of the elders consume food on time and with proper healthy diets. With increasing age, people are more aware about their body function because most of the elder people face digestive problems. Therefore, their eating behavior is different.<sup>34</sup>

However, in the modern context, people are more concerned about their health and obeseness, but also they wish to have neoteric food such as fast food, spicy food, and soft drinks because they enjoy eating and that creates a major confusion among people. This is called “Goal Conflict Model” of eating behavior.<sup>35</sup>

### Socio-cultural spectacle to eating behavior

Socio-cultural mastery is also an important parameter to measure the eating behavior of people. Societal norms and cultural practices play a major determinant in eating behavior. When they are with some people, such as friends, family, close persons, and neighbour's so, all the different situations make different eating behaviors. Our dietary choices also overlap with our close persons because we are adapting someone's eating behaviors; moreover, societal norms are responsible for obesity as well as healthier diets.<sup>36</sup> A place always has a unique societal practice that creates differences from another society. Societal and cultural genres make a difference between men's and women's eating behavior. One finding about breakfast and dinner routines of married people those are working in the office within modern society so the majority of people say (“my wife is working ... so I come to the office and eat breakfast here” and “My wife usually prepares meals because she does not work outside the home,” page no 470, Park *et al.*, 2017).<sup>37</sup> Male workers, especially those who work for a long time at the office, mainly consume a pre-packaged meal or instead eat outside (Park *et al.*, 2017).<sup>37</sup> Also, one context we got from our interviewees is that those couples are both engaged in outside work most days of the week. They consume outside food or online food for dinner due to scarcity of time and tiredness to make food at night. Another finding I got

about eating behavior among children's groups is different. In India, their main caste system is very abuzz in society. I noticed that parents of the higher caste groups are very concerned about food choices for their children, but in the lower caste group, we observe the inverse things. “Pallabi,” our interviewee, belongs to upper caste society and said (“I am always very responsible or concerned about food choices for my daughter and always I prefer homemade light meals and healthy food for my child”). Children occasionally eat outside. Their parents monitor most of the children's eating behavior; when children remain at home, their eating habits are very healthy, but when they are outside of the home with their friends or someone, most of the unhealthy foods are on their choice list.<sup>38</sup> Societal norms also define eating behavior; predominantly, males are less engaged with cooking, so the propensity of males is to consume outsider food rather than homemade. Eating behavior depends on some factors such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, and environmental aspects. Most of the young age students are away from their homes, so there are two contexts: if they are staying (in a mess or hostels) with someone, they tend toward making a variety of homemade dishes, but when some people stay alone, they must do everything singly, such as shopping and cooking. So, people are looking for easy-to-prepare dishes, and that indicate situations and environmental practices or culture impact their eating behavior.<sup>39</sup> In our society, those people are alone, they are suffering from loneliness with negative moods, and they mainly want to consume unhealthy and palatable foods.<sup>40</sup> Most of the aged people's eating behavior is formed by social interaction surrounding networks. Also, they are very careful about the doctor's recommendations for food.<sup>41</sup> In Greek rural society girls, adolescent people are more concerned about healthier diets. They consume more fruits and vegetables rather than boys; on the other hand, girls are skipping meals more than boys.<sup>42</sup> Another aspect observed in the rural area of Matlab, Bangladesh, according to Islam *et al.* (2019),<sup>43</sup> is that most rural adolescents primarily choose street foods, energy drinks, and snacks. Their food culture tends to be limited and not conducive to a healthy diet. In the world over context, country-wise eating behavior and food habits are different. It is important to observe each country's culture. There could be regional variations in eating habits and traditional dishes. Hence, from Table 3,<sup>44</sup> we observe large portion of Indian people, around 40%, follow a vegetarian diet. However, there is significant variation in food habits and culture within India. Notably, about 15% of Indians, approximately 180 million people, consume beef (Natrajan and Suraj Jacob, 2018).<sup>45</sup> In contrast, most European countries and China have predominantly non-vegetarian food cultures. Due to globalization, all countries' food-consuming behavior and food culture have changed. Furthermore, due to rapid urbanization all over the world that has changed society, people are changing their eating behavior from traditional to



**Table 3:** Rank of countries related to veg food consumption.

Rank	Country	Percentage
1	India	up to 39
2	Mexico	19
3	Brazil	14
4	Taiwan	13
5	Finland	12
6	Sweden	12
7	Australia	12
8	Austria	11
9	UK	10
10	New Zealand	10
11	China	5

Source: Wikipedia<sup>44</sup>

non-traditional foods. Moreover, most of the obesogenic food-consuming cultures and habits are increasing, and the dietary culture is shifting to the overweight and obesity category.<sup>46</sup> Watching television or advertisements in modern society is very responsible for lower intake of fruits and vegetables and increased consumption of artificial foods. Also, there is a greater probability of more body weight in children and adolescents.<sup>47</sup> Developing and developing societies also have some sociocultural traits about food culture. As an example, India, Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, and Srilanka consume more spicy food, but most of the developed countries (USA and UK) are very concerned about healthier diets and consume less spicy foods. Changing places and cultures is really affecting eating behavior. Most Asian students are settled in the United States for their studies, which purposes that their style of eating routine has drastically changed from their traditional diet. Most people skip breakfast, consume sweet and salty snacks, less consume healthier food items, and that lead to mischievous health effects in the long term.<sup>48</sup> The slum area's culture is very different than the normal environment. We know that those areas are very congested, lack sanitation, and have poor infrastructure, and therefore, their eating habits are very poor. Most urban slum children are getting inadequate micro and macronutrients and that lead to a malign risk for their health; the main sake is impoverishment and lack of proper education of their parents.<sup>49</sup> Tribals have different food cultures or eating behaviors, "Bhil" tribal people in India chiefly consume chapattis in the daytime, and in the evening, they intake gruel or porridge, also boiled pulses and vegetables. One interesting thing about their eating culture is that the couple never share food items on the same plate; most of the time, that happens, but in a few cases, that does not work properly. So, typically, it depends on their economic conditions.<sup>50</sup> Around 40% of the South African people only had between one and three different food variations in their daily dietary chart. The most disregarded food groups were Vitamin A exuberant fruits and

vegetables. The tribal areas and informal urban or slum areas, people are harshly affected, mainly eggs, vitamin-rich foods, or vegetables, and legumes are less consumed.<sup>51</sup> The consumption of raw food is more common in east Asia. For example, in Japan, a significant portion of the population frequently consumes raw seafood. However, over 70% of food-borne diseases in Japan are linked to raw seafood consumption.<sup>52</sup> Despite all those things, the economic conditions of society are also a major facilitation to eating behavior and obesity risk. Lower socioeconomic status people are more obese due to large plate sizes and uncontrolled eating, but, on the other hand, the richest people are more concerned about their health.<sup>53</sup> Adolescent learners are outside of the home and get more money to spend, so predominantly female students are more consume protein aliment such as milk and fruits rather than males. Furthermore, consumption of rice decreased with increasing monthly spending for both males and females.<sup>54</sup> The culture of parents has a more positive influence on introducing new food to family diets among children and that is a positive sign for the reduction of the dominance of advertisements and media in eating habits. In modern times, adolescents and children are not influenced by their dietary volition by their peers or surrounding people. Moreover, there is no dissimilation in eating behavior in urban and rural children at present.<sup>55</sup> Food festivals or cultural programs also make positive emotions over the negative emotions of people; most of the people feel very happy (positive) about their food preferences because they are getting locally produced foods such as cheese, chutneys, cider, meat, fish, sweet, and cakes eggs rather than the harmful (negative) globalized foods.<sup>56</sup> Encampment good posters alludes to the popularity of the product and the purchasing rate also arises of people when recipients are involved in a task designed to deplete moderation resources.<sup>57</sup> Another observation in restaurants is women intake less with the presence of their likable partner because they try to impress, and men might eat more portions to exert their manliness.<sup>58</sup> During COVID-19, most of the areas were under lockdown. Therefore, the eating behavior was also less healthy. This pandemic increased uncertainty and uneasiness and had a particularly negative effect on the eating behaviors of vulnerable people in society.<sup>59</sup> However, some contexts had an inverse trend minutely in richer countries, food-assured households, etc., they consumed more fresh foods because of the abrupt boom of home food procurement practices.<sup>60</sup> In other contexts, when people visit their relatives' houses, people become shy, and so they eat less rather than when they stay in their own houses. Because in the denounced society, people are always thinking about what other people are thinking about their food consumption behavior. Aggregately, the sociocultural aspect of eating behavior provides a ground for feeding a more extensive and nuanced approach to promoting different cultural aspects and

thoughts or the diversity of eating behavior that facilitates enhance our knowledge about eating sight in different age groups and also fascinating knowledge about healthy diet and policy-making process in future.

## CONCLUSION

So overall, age- and situation-wise eating behavior plays a central role in the embodiment of eating behaviors. As we go through different stages of life, the nutritional needs of people and their significant changes in eating behavior can be seen. Psychological and sociocultural perspectives play an important role in describing the intricate interplay between human behavior or thoughts and food consumption. For example, children are very sensitive to external variables, such as advertisements, for eating behavior, while older people may face some problems with changing metabolism and dietary requirements. Young children require earmarked nutrients for development and growth, and their eating patterns are influenced by their parental choices on societal trends. Individual lifestyle, work responsibility, and social environment have more impact on eating behavior. Busy schedules and scarcity of time may lead to more intake of fast foods. From a psychological viewpoint, there are various factors, such as emotions, stress, and individual thought processes, that play a crucial role in shaping eating behavior among different age groups and situations. Thinking about how individuals behave with stress through eating, their emotions can wield tangible food preferences to serve a nuanced understanding of the complicated relationship between the mind and food habits. In addition, sociocultural spectacle shows societal norms, traditions, and situational factors on eating behavior. Cultural mastery indicates mealtime rituals and dietary preferences about food consumption. These indicate very important things about cultural context when accosting issues related to health and nutrition. Overall, age and situational factors influence eating behavior, highlighting the necessity for a holistic approach to promote healthy dietary habits. Interference of educational programs is not sufficient for addressing nutritional aspects but also deliberated the socio-cultural and psychological factors that impact eating behavior. By considering this complex interplay between these ingredients, policymakers, health professionals, and educators can amplify more effective strategies to exacerbate well-rounded, sustainable, and culturally subtle approaches to nutrition among mosaic age groups with circumstances.

## Data

For this study, no major volume of data was used. The work was carried out by using empirical observations and by conducting interviews.

## Ethical approval

The research/study is complied with the Helsinki Declaration of 1964.

## Declaration of patient consent

The authors certify that they have obtained all appropriate patient consent.

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Nil.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

## Use of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technology for manuscript preparation

The authors confirm that there was no use of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technology for assisting in the writing or editing of the manuscript and no images were manipulated using AI.

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