Research report

Psychological distress may affect nutrition indicators in Australian adults ☆

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 27 March 2014
Received in revised form 22 January 2015
Accepted 2 February 2015
Available online 26 February 2015

Keywords:
Psychological distress
Fruit
Vegetable
Milk
Takeaway
Moderator

ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this research was to explore which demographic and health status variables moderated the relationship between psychological distress and three nutrition indicators: the consumption of fruits, vegetables and takeaway. Method: We analysed data from the 2009 Self-Reported Health Status Survey Report collected in the state of Queensland, Australia. Adults (N = 6881) reported several demographic and health status variables. Moderated logistic regression models were estimated separately for the three nutrition indicators, testing as moderators demographic (age, gender, educational attainment, household income, remoteness, and area-level socioeconomic status) and health status indicators (body mass index, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes status). Results: Several significant interactions emerged between psychological distress, demographic (age, area-level socioeconomic status, and income level), and health status variables (body mass index, diabetes status) in predicting the nutrition indicators. Relationships between distress and the nutrition indicators were not significantly different by gender, remoteness, educational attainment, high cholesterol status, and high blood pressure status. Conclusions: The associations between psychological distress and several nutrition indicators differ amongst population subgroups. These findings suggest that in distressed adults, age, area-level socio-economic status, income level, body mass index, and diabetes status may serve as protective or risk factors through increasing or decreasing the likelihood of meeting nutritional guidelines. Public health interventions for improving dietary behaviours and nutrition may be more effective if they take into account the moderators identified in this study rather than using global interventions.

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Introduction

Increasing fruit and vegetable (FV) consumption appears to be important to reduce mortality arising from cardiovascular diseases and cancer (Scarborough, Nnoaham, Clarke, Capewell, & Rayner, 2010). FV consumption is also associated with modest weight reduction and the avoidance of weight gain (Conceição de Oliveira, Sichieri, & Sanchez Moura, 2003; Drapeau et al., 2004; He et al., 2004; Sartorelli, Franco, & Cardoso, 2008; te Velde, Twisk, & Brug, 2007; Vioque, Weinbrenner, Castello, Asensio, & de la Hera, 2008), and FV consumption may be important in sustaining a low calorie density eating pattern (U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Conversely, studies suggest that takeaway food consumption is associated not only with higher intakes of energy, total fat, saturated fat, and sodium, but also increased body mass index (BMI) and weight gain across the lifespan (Bisset, Gauvin, Potvin, & Paradis, 2007; Schmidt et al., 2005; Tavera et al., 2005; Viner & Cole, 2006).

Given that the consumption of fruits, vegetables and takeaway all make important contributions towards diet quality, weight management and reducing the risk of chronic disease, it is important to understand which factors influence these nutrition indicators. Psychological distress is one such variable previously associated with lower fruit and vegetable intake (Kiviniemi, Orom, & Giovino, 2011; Konttinen, Mannisto, Sarlio-Lahteenenkorva, Silventoinen, & Haukkala, 2010). Furthermore, psychological distress in terms of depressive symptoms, as measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, is positively associated with the consumption of...
takeaway and non-sweet energy dense foods (Bradshaw, 2011; Konttinen et al., 2010). Significant correlations have also been observed between psychological distress and fast food cravings (Lim, Norman, Clifton, & Noakes, 2009).

The relationship between distress and diet may be explained through several pathways. Emotions can control food choice, suppress food intake, impair cognitive eating controls, be regulated by food intake, and modulate eating in congruence with emotion features (see Macht, 2008). Sweet and high energy density foods may improve mood and reduce stress through brain opioidergic and dopaminergic neurotransmission (Gibson, 2006). It is plausible that, as distress increases, preferences for sweet and high energy density foods increase, while the desire for and consumption of foods lower in energy density (e.g., fruit and vegetables) decreases.

In the United States, 3.5% of adults aged 18 and over experienced psychological distress during the past 30 days in the first half of 2013 (Schiller, Ward, & Freeman, 2013). The 2012 Health Survey of England reported that 18% of women and 12% of men scored 4 or more on the General Health Questionnaire, indicating probably of England reported that 18% of women and 12% of men scored 4 or more on the General Health Questionnaire, indicating probably distress.

Hispanic respondents, it disappeared in African American respon-
dents depending on race/ethnicity. While the inverse relationship between psychological distress and FV consumption differed depending on race/ethnicity. While the inverse relationship between psychological distress and FV consumption will only exist for adults with lower levels of education. This is due to those with higher education levels having greater awareness of healthy levels of nutrition indicators (Powell, Zhao, & Wang, 2009). We hypothesise that an inverse relationship between distress and the nutrition indicators (fruit and vegetable) will only exist at lower income levels. Since adults from higher income brackets find fruits and vegetables more affordable (Drewnowski & Darmon, 2005; Drewnowski & Specter, 2004; French, 2003; Glanz, B. Maibach, Goldberg, & Snyder, 1998; Powell et al., 2009; Putnam & Allshouse, 1999). We hypothesise a positive relationship between distress and FV consumption for those with lower income levels, since takeaway is more commonly consumed at fast food outlets by individuals with lower incomes (e.g., Fleischhacker, E. Evenson, Rodríguez, & Ammerman, 2011; Thornton, Bentley, & Kavanagh, 2011; Thornton, Crawford, & Ball, 2010).

(2) a negative relationship between fruit consumption and distress and positive relationship between distress and takeaway consumption is more likely to exist in younger age groups than older age groups. This hypothesis is proposed on the basis that previous research finds higher fruit consumption amongst older age groups (e.g., Casagrande et al., 2007; Guenther et al., 2006; Johansson & Andersen, 1998; Kant et al., 2007; McClelland et al., 1998; O'Connor et al., 2010; Quadir & Akhtar-Danes, 2010; Stewart et al., 2004; Wolf et al., 2008).

(3) the inverse relationship between distress and FV consump-
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(4) the inverse relationship between distress and FV consump-
tion will remain for adults from rural and regional areas, but not for adults living in urban areas. This is hypothesised because we expect that fruit and vegetable consumption will be more accessible to those residing in major cities (Backman et al., 2011; Bodor et al., 2008; Leather, 1995; Morland, Wing, & Roux, 2002; Pearson et al., 2005; Zenk et al., 2005). We hypothesise a positive relationship between distress and takeaway consumption frequency only for adults living in major cities, also because of increased access to takeaway food (e.g., Thornton et al., 2011).

(5) In terms of moderation, we hypothesised that an inverse relationship between distress and FV consumption and a positive relationship between distress and takeaway consumption will persist for adults from lower SES quintiles but not for adults from higher SES quintiles. This is based on research which highlights that adults from higher SES areas have higher levels of fruit and vegetable consumption, possibly because of the greater ability to afford these foods (Anderson et al., 1994; Casagrande et al., 2007; Dubowitz et al., 2008; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Guenther et al., 2006; Johansson & Andersen, 1998; Kamphuis et al., 2006; Kant et al., 2007; Lindström et al., 2001; Litt et al., 2011; McClelland et al., 1998; O'Connor et al., 2010; Quadir & Akhtar-Danes, 2010; Sorensen et al., 2007; Stewart et al., 2004; Wolf et al., 2008).

(6) Inverse relationships between distress and FV consumption and positive relationships between distress and takeaway consumption will be observed for adults without high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol, but not for those who do have these conditions. This hypothesis is based on previous findings that people with higher awareness of hypertension consume more fruits and vegetables (Dickson, Blackledge, & Hajjar, 2006).
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