



## Psychological And Sociological Solutions in Child Nutrition

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## **Abstract**

This study presents a comprehensive analysis that combines the disciplines of psychology and

sociology to understand child nutrition. The analysis begins with a psychological perspective, examining the emotional factors that shape children's eating habits. The study evaluates elements such as family relationships, emotional bonds, and stress in terms of their impact on children's eating behaviors. The article explores the influence of cultural and societal factors on child nutrition from a sociological perspective. It examines how dietary preferences are shaped by societal norms, advertisements, and cultural values. The article focuses on the social impacts of economic factors on child nutrition. It also highlights the complexity of child nutrition resulting from the combination of psychological and sociological perspectives. To develop more effective intervention and support strategies, it is crucial to

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understand the interaction between children's emotional states and societal and cultural factors. The article presents proposed solutions and implementation strategies aimed at contributing to the development of healthy habits in child nutrition.

**Keywords:** *Child Nutrition, Psychological Factors, Sociological Influences, Emotional Bonds, Social Norms, Cultural Values, Economic Inequality, Advertising Impact, Dietary Habits, Child Health, Psychosocial Development, Family Relationships.*

## INTRODUCTION

Maintaining healthy nutrition is a fundamental habit for individuals to ensure a long and healthy life and improve their quality of life. This crucial issue affects growth and development starting from infancy and childhood and has the potential to prevent chronic diseases that may occur later in life (Smith, 2020; Jones et al., 2018). Dietary habits are influenced by individuals' genetic makeup, gender, family structure, and environmental factors. It is important to consider that nutrition fulfills not only physiological needs but also social and psychological needs (Brown, 2019). Eating attitude refers to an individual's unique behaviors related to eating and nutrition, which develop and are acquired from infancy. Eating disorders are defined as diseases that occur as a result of deviations from normal eating attitudes and behaviors (Ayaz, 2021). Research in the literature indicates that several factors influence eating attitudes and disorders. Genetic studies suggest that 50-83% of these disorders have a hereditary component. Additionally, biological structure plays a role in individuals' susceptibility to eating disorders. Eating habits, psychological disorders, and sociocultural factors are all significant factors that shape eating attitudes and behaviors (Gümüş, 2022). Emotional states can significantly impact eating attitudes and behaviors in individuals. For instance, feelings of anger, anxiety, and stress may lead to abnormal eating behaviors as a way to cope with emotional distress and feel secure (Faraji & Fırat, 2022). Developing healthy eating habits and planning effective interventions for child health requires a holistic approach to psychological and sociological analyses in child nutrition.

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Child nutrition is a critical period in an individual's life, with a determining effect on both physical and cognitive development. The eating habits acquired during the preschool period are crucial for children to adopt healthy eating habits as a lifestyle. Nutrition education plays a vital role in preventing problems caused by inadequate and unbalanced nutrition (Küçükali, 2006). This article presents a comprehensive analysis that combines the disciplines of psychology and sociology to understand child nutrition. The combination of these disciplines provides a crucial framework for comprehending, assessing, and enhancing children's dietary habits.

From a psychological standpoint, a thorough examination of the emotional factors that influence children's eating habits will aid in comprehending the fundamental dynamics in this field. Understanding the determinants of family relationships, emotional bonds, and stress on children's eating behaviors is critical for the acquisition of healthy eating habits (Smith, 2018; Johnson, 2019).

The paper examines child nutrition from a sociological perspective, taking into account cultural and societal factors that impact it. It is crucial to comprehend how societal norms, advertising, and cultural values shape and influence children's dietary choices to address child nutrition from a social perspective (Brown, 2020; Davis, 2021).

The study aims to contribute to the development of healthy eating habits in children through psychological and sociological analysis of child nutrition. The article aims to provide a new perspective on current knowledge and discussions on child nutrition.

Additionally, it integrates the methodology of an original study conducted by Prof. Dr. Kürşat Şahin Yıldırım, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yıldırım Bayezit Deldal and colleagues (2023). This research was conducted in a middle school located in the Bahçelievler district of Istanbul province. Its aim is to support the theoretical framework on child nutrition with concrete data. The integration of this data is expected to provide both theoretical and practical information.

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## PURPOSE

The objective of this article is to examine child nutrition from psychological and sociological perspectives, with a focus on promoting healthy eating habits. The psychological analysis will explore emotional factors that impact children's eating habits, while the sociological analysis will consider the effects of cultural norms, societal expectations, and advertising on child nutrition. The study aims to comprehend the individual and social aspects of child nutrition and provide an integrated perspective with the existing literature.

## METHOD

This paper presents a synthesis of child nutrition analysis from psychological and sociological perspectives. The aim is to integrate two different data sources to identify the main focal points of the research and develop a comprehensive understanding.

The first stage involves a literature review to identify the main emotional factors that influence children's eating habits from a psychological perspective. This review synthesizes scientific articles, books, and studies that focus on child development, family relationships, and emotional bonds to analyze children's eating habits. The aim is to reveal the links between children's emotional states and social and cultural factors.



In the second stage of the study, we conducted a sociological analysis by reviewing literature to gain insight into cultural norms, social expectations, and the impact of advertising on child nutrition. We analyzed sources that contained current information on social structure, advertising psychology, and cultural interactions. The article integrates sociological information with psychological analysis to provide a comprehensive perspective on the intricate interactions involved in child nutrition. It aims to present the methodology and findings of a study conducted by Prof. Dr. Kürşat Şahin Yıldırım, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yıldırım Bayezit Deldal et al. (2023) that assessed students' nutritional behaviors in a middle school in Bahçelievler district of Istanbul province. The study employed a field study that utilized multiple-choice 3-point Likert-type closed-ended questions. The collected data underwent descriptive statistical analysis using Jamavi data analysis statistical methods. The study results were presented using numerical tables and graphical analysis. To ensure validation and reliability, a brief assessment of the students' dietary consumption habits was conducted to determine the accuracy of the questions. Additionally, the results of the literature review were double-checked. The integration aims to comprehensively address child nutrition by combining a literature-based perspective with concrete data from fieldwork. The aim of this methodology is to contribute both theoretically and practically to the knowledge of child nutrition.

## FINDINGS

This article presents the findings of a study led by Prof. Dr. Kürşat Şahin Yıldırım, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yıldırım Bayezit Deldal et al (2023). The study aimed to understand the nutritional behaviors of secondary school students and assess their impact on child nutrition. The study utilized multiple-choice 3-point Likert-type closed-ended questions to comprehensively understand students' eating habits and identify the psychological and sociological factors that influence these habits. The findings section discusses the success of the study in achieving its

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objectives and how the data contributed to the understanding of child nutrition. The study results provide valuable insights into the dietary habits and preferences of students. The high percentage of students who prefer lunch and use ready-to-eat food significantly influences their daily eating habits. Additionally, 64% of students reported insufficient knowledge about healthy nutrition, highlighting the need to increase awareness among young people. The data shows that 30% of students consume fruit daily, providing insight into the fruit consumption habits of young people. Additionally, the high rate of 76% for daily consumption of home-cooked meals highlights the influence of the family environment on eating habits. The rate of 81% for school canteen and outside food consumption further emphasizes the impact of the school environment on dietary preferences. Eighty-one percent of the students reported complying with hygiene rules, indicating a significant correlation between dietary habits and hygiene factors. The study also found that 67% of students... The prevalence of irregular eating habits among young people is indicated by the 40% non-compliance rate with the rule of three meals a day. Additionally, the high rate of 88% for breakfast consumption highlights the importance of breakfast for young people. The consumption of animal-based protein sources is reflected in the 67% rate. Furthermore, the high rate of 89% for the consumption of sugary and junk foods indicates a tendency among young people to consume such items. The 97% rate of carbonated beverage consumption reflects students' beverage preferences throughout the day, which complements their overall dietary habits. These findings highlight the significance of promoting healthy eating habits among children and young people and provide a valuable foundation for shaping future nutrition policies.

Other studies in the literature have shown that family dynamics play a crucial role in determining children's dietary preferences (Brown, 2015). Economic status can impact families' dietary habits, as low-income families may opt for more affordable but less nutritious foods (Wilson, 2018).

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Children's dietary preferences are heavily influenced by their social environment, including peer groups, school, and media (Jones, 2013). The advertising and marketing strategies employed by the food industry targeting children can have a negative impact on their healthy eating habits. This is achieved by using colorful packaging and special characters to attract children to certain foods (Smith, 2019).

Research conducted globally highlights the significance of a sociological perspective in comprehending dietary habits across various cultures (Aksoy, 2020). Studies evaluating the effects of traditional eating habits on children's growth and development demonstrate how cultural norms influence dietary preferences. Psychosocial interactions strongly influence children's dietary preferences. Family problems, emotional ties, and social interactions can all impact a child's food choices (Johnson, 2018). For instance, a child who only eats potatoes and meatballs may be doing so due to family stress, emotional ties, or social interactions.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: EMOTIONAL FACTORS IN CHILD NUTRITION**

Children's eating habits have a significant impact on long-term health and quality of life (Anderson & Lock, 2007; Austin & Sciarra, 2013). Nutrition is influenced by numerous factors such as genetics, environmental factors, and socioeconomic status (Birch et al., 2003; Chang et al., 2013). This comprehensive impact deeply affects children's psychological and emotional development (Dattilo, 2017).

Nutrition fulfills not only physical needs but also emotional and psychological needs. Healthy communication within the family can influence individuals' emotional responses to food. Food



can serve as a means of creating shared memories, celebrating, and being a part of daily life among family members (Bellows et al., 2013).

Parents' attitudes about eating habits play a crucial role in shaping their children's eating habits. Parents' attitudes can significantly influence their children's food choices and eating behaviors (Goodman et al., 2020). Education and awareness-raising efforts on nutrition are crucial in establishing healthy eating habits within the family (Başkale, 2010).

Open communication within the family is also essential in making informed nutrition decisions. A healthy dialogue between family members enables individuals to express their dietary preferences clearly and find common ground. Family dynamics play a significant role in shaping dietary decisions and facilitating the harmonization of dietary preferences among family members (Balaban et al., 2018).

Economic status is also a crucial factor that influences dietary habits. Limited budgets can determine families' food choices and eating habits. In economically constrained families, education and support are essential to make informed decisions about nutrition (Baysal, 2003). Parents' attitudes and family dynamics shape children's eating habits (Ek et al., 2016; Goodman et al., 2020).

Children's acquisition of healthy eating habits is influenced by their level of education and knowledge about nutrition (Dilsiz & Dağ, 2018). Emotional factors related to child nutrition can be evaluated by understanding the effects of families on children's eating behaviors (Garro et al., 2005).



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Nutrition plays a significant role in the complexity of family relationships, adding an emotional and psychological dimension. Emotional bonds are formed through the process of feeding, and shared meals, in particular, can strengthen the bonds between family members. This suggests that nutrition is not only related to physical health but also to emotional well-being. It is important to note that parents' eating habits have a decisive influence on their children's dietary choices. Parents' attitudes play a crucial role in shaping their children's future dietary behavior. Additionally, the quality of communication within the family significantly influences individuals' food preferences and eating habits. Healthy communication enables individuals to express their dietary preferences freely and make nutritional decisions in harmony with each other.

It is worth noting that the economic situation within the family is also a factor that affects dietary habits. Limited economic resources can impact families' food choices and eating habits, indicating that nutrition is not only interpersonal but also related to social and economic dynamics. Therefore, providing nutrition education and support can assist families in developing healthy eating habits and making informed choices. In this context, assessing emotional factors in child nutrition is a crucial step towards lifelong healthy eating habits.

## *Emotional Bonds and Eating Behaviors*

The relationship between nutrition and emotional attachments is a significant factor that affects individuals' eating behaviors. Emotional bonds established within the family have a profound impact on eating habits. Parents' nutritional attitudes towards their children play a crucial role in determining children's dietary preferences and eating behaviors (Goodman et al., 2020). Food can serve as a source of shared memories and joy, as well as a daily necessity for family members (Bellows et al., 2013). A healthy communication environment within the family can shape emotional responses to food and influence eating habits.

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Emotional connections within the family are a significant factor that affects individuals' eating behaviors. Eating habits developed in childhood often persist into adulthood, and emotional connections play a significant role in this process (Goodman et al., 2020). Parents' attitudes towards nutrition have a significant impact on their children's dietary preferences. A positive family environment can promote healthy eating habits, while a negative environment can increase the risk of developing eating disorders.

The quality of communication within the family is another crucial factor affecting individuals' dietary preferences. A healthy communication environment allows individuals to freely express their dietary preferences and make nutritional decisions in harmony with each other. Dietary decisions are shaped depending on the dynamics of family relationships and help family members harmonize their dietary preferences with each other (Balaban et al., 2018).

Emotional ties within the family influence the emotional values individuals associate with food, which in turn influence dietary choices. Stress can increase the release of hormones such as cortisol, which often triggers the "fight or flight" response. These hormones can increase hunger and lead to cravings, especially for high-fat or sugary foods. This behavior, called emotional eating, means that individuals under stress turn to food in search of emotional satisfaction. However, stress can also sometimes cause loss of appetite. Elevated levels of cortisol can affect appetite regulation, causing an individual to eat less than usual. In this case, the body may experience a lack of energy and may not get enough of important nutrients. Therefore, understanding this complex relationship between nutrition and emotional attachments is a crucial step for individuals to acquire and maintain healthy eating habits. In this context, studies focusing on parents' nutritional attitudes towards their children allow us to understand how emotional bonds within the family affect eating habits and to make informed interventions in this area.

### *The Effects of Stress on Nutrition*

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Stress is a crucial factor affecting children's emotional, social, and physical development. In particular, stressors such as family conflicts, parental separation, academic difficulties, or social pressures can negatively affect children's quality of life and general health (George, 2011).

Children develop different strategies to cope with stress, and among these strategies, eating habits play a key role. Children under stress may often tend to engage in emotional eating, i.e., frequent overeating or excessive consumption of unhealthy foods (Birch et al., 2003). At the same time, stress can also cause loss of appetite in children, which can lead to malnutrition and weight loss (Chang et al., 2013).

It is important for parents to teach their children stress coping skills and encourage healthy eating habits. Healthy communication and support within the family can strengthen children's ability to cope with stress and encourage healthy eating habits (Goodman et al., 2020).

Furthermore, after assessing children's eating habits, it is important that parents and health professionals guide these habits in a supportive manner. Educational efforts on nutrition can help children develop healthy eating habits and increase their ability to cope with stress (Başkale, 2010).

The relationship between stress and nutrition in children is not only limited to physical health but also has profound effects on their psychosocial development. For example, the eating habits of children under stress are often shaped by emotional context. Children with a tendency towards emotional eating may turn to food as a coping mechanism for stressful situations (Dattilo, 2017). This can have a negative impact on children's mental health and may lead to eating disorders in the future (Anderson & Lock, 2007). At the same time, children's strategies for coping with stress often develop depending on environmental factors. For example, a positive communication environment within the family can provide children with healthier skills to cope with stress and achieve emotional balance (Balaban et al., 2018). Parents' teaching children stress coping skills plays a critical role in this regard. The effects of stress on children

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are not only limited to their eating habits; it can also have a significant impact on their overall lifestyle. For example, children under stress may often tend to avoid physical activities, which may increase the risk of obesity (Büyüköztürk et al., 2017). Therefore, learning stress coping strategies is critical for children's mental and physical health. In this context, promoting family dynamics that support children's stress coping skills and healthy eating habits can contribute to children's development of a lifelong healthy lifestyle. Supporting children to develop healthy eating habits is an important psychological strategy that will positively affect their overall quality of life.

In 2023, in a field study conducted by our university (Yıldırım K; Deldal Y. et al.) in Turkey, 82 students (82%) consumed their lunches as ready-to-eat food from outside, especially from the canteen, but the number of students who brought home-cooked food was 18%, which is noteworthy in the context of an analysis to understand the psychological factors determining dietary preferences. This emphasizes the need to understand psychological dynamics such as taste, practicality, emotional state, and social interaction among the factors affecting individuals' dietary preferences. On the other hand, 64% of the students stated that they did not have enough knowledge about healthy nutrition. This indicates a low awareness of eating habits and healthy living in general. Psychologically, individuals' level of knowledge about healthy eating is often related to their family, environment, and school. Lack of knowledge in this regard may prevent individuals from gaining awareness about healthy eating.

Other findings on students' eating habits are as follows: 64% of the students stated that they did not have sufficient knowledge about healthy nutrition. On the other hand, 11% had sufficient knowledge, while 25% stated that they had partial knowledge. Families have an important responsibility for healthy nutrition education at home. It was observed that 62% of the students were inadequate in fruit consumption, which may lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies. There was a 24% increase in the proportion of students who did not consume home-cooked meals, which may reflect the increase in consumption of ready-to-eat meals. Of the students fed



from school canteens, 81% generally preferred ready-to-eat foods and snacked on junk food. The three-meal rule is followed irregularly by 60%, indicating that healthy eating is neglected. Eighty-eight percent of students eat breakfast irregularly or not at all, which can negatively affect their daily performance. Animal product consumption is predominant with 67%, while plant foods are not given enough importance. The majority of students (92%) consume fatty and carbohydrate foods every day and make junk food (89%) and carbonated drinks (97%) a daily habit. The fact that 76% of students consume home-cooked meals in order to form healthy eating habits stands out as a positive finding. In addition, 81% of students pay attention to high hygiene standards while eating, indicating that the measures taken during pandemic periods are effective. However, the fact that 19% of students do not pay attention to hygiene shows that more awareness raising is needed in this area.

## **The Sociological Dimension: Cultural and Social Influences on Childhood**

Childhood is a complex and multidimensional concept that is studied in a wide range of social sciences. Child sociology, a sub-branch of sociology, aims to understand and explain childhood and the social position of children. This discipline examines children's experiences within social, cultural, and societal contexts. The sociology of children is a field that seeks to comprehend the roles, status, relationships, and experiences of children in society. This discipline explores how childhood is not only a biological stage but also how it is shaped and given meaning in cultural, social, and historical contexts. The sociology of children has a broad perspective to understand the roles and relationships of children within social institutions. This involves analyzing how children are situated and impacted within various social institutions, such as family, education, media, and the economy.

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Child nutrition is influenced by the culture, society, and social environment in which children grow up. Social norms, expectations, advertisements, family structure, and economic status are among the factors that affect children's eating habits. Therefore, examining child nutrition from a sociological perspective is crucial for understanding children's nutritional experiences within the social structure. From a sociological perspective, childhood is not only a biological stage but also a social construct shaped by cultural norms, expectations, and values. The status of children in society is a phenomenon that can change over time and across cultures. Sociological research on children includes various issues such as children's rights, education, health, and gender. In Turkey, the sociology of children comprises significant research on how cultural values, family structures, and educational systems impact children's lives. Sociology of children employs sociological theories, research, and various methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of children's positions in society and how these positions are shaped. The sociology of childhood emphasizes childhood as a social construct, focusing on children's roles and interactions within social structures rather than their individual experiences. Child nutrition is a complex process shaped by the social and cultural environment in which children grow up. Applying a sociological perspective to understand this process is important for gaining a deeper understanding of child nutrition.

To comprehend the sociological aspect of child nutrition, it is necessary to integrate resources from various disciplines. Several studies have evaluated child nutrition in conjunction with cultural and social factors. However, despite the increasing diversity and quantity of these studies, they have not yet reached a sufficient level.

### *The Role of Cultural Norms and Values*

Child nutrition is not just a physiological necessity, but it is also influenced by the complex social structure in which it is shaped. Eating habits are shaped by cultural, societal, and familial



dynamics that surround children as they grow up. Sociologically speaking, children's dietary preferences are intricately linked to cultural norms, which guide them in selecting, consuming, and rejecting certain foods. For instance, in some societies, specific foods may be prevalent during holidays and special occasions, while in others, they may be a part of daily life. Each society has its own distinct dietary culture, and these cultural norms have an impact on child nutrition.

For instance, in Japan, fish consumption is a cultural norm, whereas in the United States, fast food consumption is widespread. These norms influence children's eating habits, and compliance with them develops as an attempt to gain social acceptance (Smith, 2010; Johnson, 2012). According to a study conducted by Prof. Dr. Kürşat Şahin Yıldırım, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yıldırım Bayezit Deldal et al. (2023), the majority of surveyed students (82%) consumed ready-to-eat food for lunch, which they purchased from the canteen. Only 18% of students brought home-cooked meals. The data indicates that a considerable proportion of students rely on pre-packaged or frozen meals, which are often considered to be less nutritious, as a substitute for home-cooked meals. The high percentage (82%) of students who consume ready-to-eat meals for lunch can be attributed to the fast-paced lifestyle and urbanization of modern society. The fast pace of modern life has led to a preference for ready-to-eat and fast-consumable foods, which is driven by time management and practicality considerations. This trend has affected the eating habits of individuals and may lead to the acceptance of outsourcing lunches as a social norm. Such behavior may spread and become accepted among individuals, and the preference for ready-to-eat foods from canteens may be perceived as a social norm among students.



This preference may create a sense of harmony and similarity within the group. The low proportion of students who bring home-cooked food suggests that food consumed outside the home may be a determining factor in social acceptance and relationships within student groups.

### *Impact of Economic Factors*

Based on the same result, it can be said that buying ready-to-eat foods from the canteen may also be related to economic factors. Ready-to-eat foods are generally considered to be more economically accessible and more practical. Social class differences may also affect these preferences; students with better economic status may be more likely to prefer ready-to-eat foods from the canteen.

The financial situation of families is a determining factor in children's dietary habits and can often trigger nutritional inequalities. Low-income families, in particular, often tend to turn to more affordable but non-nutritious foods due to economic constraints. This highlights the challenges children face in accessing healthy and balanced diets (Brown, 2015; Wilson, 2018).

The social sciences literature has explored in detail the effects of economic disadvantage on dietary habits. Brown's (2015) study reveals that low-income families are generally more likely to eat foods with low nutritional value. It also shows that the risk of nutritional inequality and unhealthy diets is higher among the children of these families. Wilson (2018) is another important source that examines the impact of economic status on child nutrition. Wilson's research emphasizes that families with low-income levels often turn to low-cost but non-nutritious foods, which can negatively affect children's potential for healthy growth and development. In this context, the impact of economic factors on child nutrition highlights an important social issue of nutrition inequality and access to healthy diets.



Similar situations can be observed in Turkey. In particular, low-income families may turn to foods with low nutritional value due to limited financial resources. This may reflect potential inequalities in children's access to healthy and balanced diets across Turkey. The Turkish sociological literature is an important source for understanding the effects of economic factors on child nutrition in this context.

Understanding the effects of economic status on child nutrition and developing solutions is important not only at the individual level but also at the societal level.

Social policy initiatives and education programs can play an effective role in promoting healthier eating habits among children from low-income families.

### *Family Structure and the Role of Social Environment*

The eating habits of children are significantly influenced by their family's dietary choices, which can be better understood through a sociological perspective. Factors such as family food culture, relationships between family members, shared food experiences, and regular mealtimes directly impact children's eating habits.

According to research, healthy eating habits within the family have a positive effect on children (Jones, 2013). For instance, the practice of families eating together can serve as a positive model for children to develop healthy eating habits. These positive eating norms within the family can influence children's interest in and preferences for various food groups. Furthermore, children can also acquire eating habits from their social surroundings, including their friends and school environments.



Social interactions can significantly influence children's dietary preferences. Eating habits that are popular or adopted in a child's circle of friends can be effective in shaping their own preferences (Miller, 2016). As Jones (2013) emphasizes, social interactions play a crucial role in shaping children's nutrition. Interactions among norms, values, and expectations play a crucial role in shaping children's dietary preferences. In particular, school-based nutrition education programs and social activities can help children develop healthy eating habits.

Similarly, in Turkey, children's eating habits are influenced by their family and social environment, which can impact their overall health and development. Therefore, it is essential for families and schools to collaborate in promoting healthy eating habits among children. Turkish sociological literature is an important source for understanding the effects of family and social environments on child nutrition.

### *Impact of Media, Advertising and Marketing*

The advertising and marketing strategies of the food industry targeting children have a strong influence on children's dietary preferences. This situation, when analyzed from a sociological perspective, reveals a key area for understanding how the food industry affects children.

Elements such as colorful packaging, child-specific characters, gifts, and games are used to attract children to certain foods and build loyalty between brands. As Brown (2017) notes, products designed with these strategies are particularly effective in attracting children and influencing them to purchase through their parents.

Such marketing strategies targeted at children can shape their dietary preferences and often lead them towards unhealthy foods. For example, sugary snacks or fast-food products for children can be encouraged to be consumed by making them attractive through advertisements. This can make it difficult for children to adopt healthy eating habits and can lead to problems such as obesity (Smith, 2019). Given the influence of social media today, the food industry's strategies



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to influence children have become even more complex. Children may interact with various food products through online advertisements, which may further influence their dietary choices.

Similarly in Turkey, sociological studies on the marketing strategies of the food industry towards children are important to understand local dynamics. The impact of the food industry on children should be evaluated together with cultural factors and policy recommendations should be developed to prevent negative effects on children's health. In this context, the marketing strategies of the food industry towards children should be analyzed in an in-depth social and cultural context. These strategies, which are effective in the formation of nutritional preferences, should be addressed with a multidisciplinary approach as they may affect the healthy growth and development of children. The field research conducted in this context supports the theories in the literature.

For example, a study conducted on middle school students in Bahçelievler, Istanbul in 2023 revealed that a substantial proportion of students (81%) were fed from school canteens and preferred unhealthy options such as toast, instant pasta, crackers, pastries, candies, wafers, and fruit juice (Yıldırım, Deldal 2023). The fact that the media and advertisements define ready-to-eat foods as an attractive and fast nutrition alternative may contribute to directing students towards such foods. Media messages that affect the eating habits of the society can shape individuals' preferences and this situation can spread through social norms. Other findings of the research are as follows; The findings obtained regarding the nutritional habits of the students are as follows: 64% of the students stated that they did not have enough information about healthy nutrition. On the other hand, 11% had sufficient knowledge, while 25% stated that they were partially informed. Families have an important responsibility for healthy nutrition education at home. It was observed that 62% of the students were inadequate in fruit consumption, which may lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies. There was a 24% increase in the proportion of students who did not consume home-cooked meals, which may reflect the increase in consumption of ready-to-eat meals. Of the students fed from school canteens, 81%

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generally preferred ready-to-eat foods and snacked on junk food. The three-meal rule is followed irregularly by 60%, indicating that healthy eating is neglected. Eighty-eight percent of students eat breakfast irregularly or not at all, which can negatively affect their daily performance. Animal product consumption is predominant with 67%, while plant foods are not given enough importance. The majority of students (92%) consume fatty and carbohydrate foods every day and make junk food (89%) and carbonated drinks (97%) a daily habit. The fact that 76% of the students consume home-cooked meals to form healthy eating habits stands out as a positive finding.

In addition, 81% of students pay attention to high hygiene standards while eating, which shows that the measures taken during pandemic periods are effective. However, 19% of students do not pay attention to hygiene, indicating that more awareness-raising is needed in this area. When these findings are considered from a sociological perspective, these trends in students' eating habits reflect a complex structure shaped by social and cultural factors. Nutritional habits interact with individuals' social environment, economic status, and cultural norms. The general education level and health awareness of the society affect the level of knowledge of students about healthy nutrition. This can be attributed to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "social capital". Knowledge about healthy eating differs among families and social groups, which in turn affects individuals' eating habits. To understand the interaction of dietary habits with social and economic factors, we can refer to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "social capital". Bourdieu argues that social capital accumulates based on the position of individuals within the social structure and that this capital affects individuals' behaviors, preferences, and lifestyles. Dietary habits can also be considered as a part of social capital. For example, individuals with higher levels of general education generally have higher levels of health knowledge. This can be explained by the impact of their social capital related to their capacity to access and understand information on health. Bourdieu's theory also emphasizes differences between social groups. Eating habits are often shaped around norms and values learned and shared within the family. Therefore, the eating habits of individuals in a family or social group can be a reflection of the social capital

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in that group. In this context, we can conclude that dietary habits are shaped not only by individual preferences but also by factors such as social capital, educational level, and cultural norms. This information can be utilized to develop more effective strategies to formulate nutrition policies and reduce health inequalities.

Emphasizing healthy nutrition education at home as a family responsibility is a crucial factor affecting role distribution and communication within the family. In this context, feminist sociologists' work on gender roles within the family contributes to understanding the issue in a broader social context. By examining how gender roles are shaped, distributed, and maintained within the family, feminist sociologists draw attention to gender norms and inequalities. Issues within the family, such as nutrition education, can also be influenced by gender roles and may be a reflection of traditional gender norms, where women are often directed to take on domestic responsibilities.

Based on the work of feminist sociologists, we can conclude that healthy eating education is often the responsibility of women and therefore the distribution of roles within the family is unequal. This may increase the burden on women to cope with additional obligations and affect communication within the family. Furthermore, from this perspective, it can be emphasized that healthy eating education should not only fall equally on women, but also on men, and that gender roles should be distributed more fairly. This may require a more comprehensive effort to balance power relations within the family and reduce gender inequalities.

Changes in dietary habits are also linked to modern social dynamics such as the fast pace of life, workload, and economic conditions. At this point, Anthony Giddens' "modernization theory" and Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" can help explain how dietary habits are associated with social change. Anthony Giddens' modernization theory addresses the fundamental dynamics of social change and examines the effects of modernization on



individuals' lifestyles. Giddens argues that modernization changes traditional social structures, creating more choice and freedom in the daily lives of individuals. Changes in dietary habits can be associated with the fast pace of life and various dietary options brought about by modernization.

Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" emphasizes that today's societies have an ever-changing, uncertain, and fluid structure. Rapid changes in eating habits can be explained by this understanding of liquid modernity. In an environment where social norms, values and relations are constantly being reshaped, eating habits can also rapidly transform and diversify.

Giddens' modernization theory and Bauman's concepts of liquid modernity can be used to understand how dietary habits evolve in a social context. Fast pace of life, industrialization, cultural globalization, and economic factors can influence individuals' dietary preferences and contribute to the constant change of these habits. These theoretical approaches help us understand how dietary habits are shaped not only by individual preferences but also by societal dynamics.

The fact that students do not follow the three-meal rule and have irregular diets can be considered as a result of the rapid change in the social structure. This may be a reflection of the way today's lifestyles, working conditions and social expectations affect eating habits.

### *The Role of Level of Education and Awareness*

Families' level of education plays a critical role in children's nutritional awareness. This emphasizes the importance of having a sociological perspective to understand and improve child nutrition. Educated families are generally more nutritionally conscious. This awareness is a crucial factor in teaching children healthy eating habits. For example, families with higher



levels of education have better access to up-to-date information on nutrition and may be better equipped to pass this information on to their children (Wilson, 2014).

The level of education within the family can increase children's awareness of nutrition. An aware family guides their children to learn healthy eating habits. At this point, the effect of education level on children's nutritional awareness should be evaluated together with social environment and cultural factors (Jones, 2016).

While educational attainment shapes families' attitudes towards nutrition, social norms and societal expectations also play a key role. For example, educated families are generally more likely to adhere to healthy eating norms. However, the culture in which the child grows up and the general nutritional norms of the society also influence this process. Social interactions on nutrition are among the factors that influence a child's level of awareness.

Therefore, the role of education level in child nutrition becomes more meaningful when considered together with social factors. A sociological perspective reveals the need to evaluate child nutrition not only in terms of individual preferences, but also in terms of social environment, culture, and social norms. In this context, it is a necessary approach to consider child nutrition not only as an individual issue but also as a social phenomenon.

### *Research on Child Nutrition Worldwide and in Turkey*

Worldwide, research on child nutrition offers a variety of perspectives to understand dietary habits in diverse cultures and to improve child health. These studies aim to assess the nutritional status of children in various countries by considering child nutrition in cultural, social, and economic contexts. This type of research offers a comprehensive assessment, taking into account not only the physical health of children, but also cultural and social contexts.

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By 2023, it is difficult to make an overall assessment of the adequacy of sociological research on child nutrition. This is because it depends on many factors such as the number, scope, and quality of research. However, in general, research on child nutrition from sociological perspectives has increased in recent years. Nevertheless, it can be argued that research on child nutrition from a sociological perspective should be more extensive and in-depth. In this way, it may be possible to better understand the social, cultural, and economic factors affecting children's eating habits.

On the other hand, sociological research on child nutrition has diverse perspectives due to the unique socio-cultural contexts on different continents. In North America, especially in countries such as the US and Canada, sociological research on child nutrition focuses on issues such as the proliferation of fast-food culture, consumption of sugary drinks and obesity.

Across Europe, dietary habits vary greatly from country to country. For example, in the UK, sociological research on child nutrition often addresses issues such as nutritional inequalities, social class differences and factors influencing children's dietary choices. In Italy, research evaluates the positive effects of traditional Mediterranean cuisine on obesity and metabolic health in children.

In Asia, dietary habits vary widely. For example, research in Japan examines the effects of traditional Japanese dietary habits on child growth and development, whereas in India, the effects of economic factors on child nutrition and the differences between the nutritional status of children in urban and rural areas on child nutrition have been investigated.

In South America, research on child nutrition often focuses on local food cultures and nutritional inequality. Australia stands out as a continent and a country with a special focus on child nutrition. Research in Australia often focuses on child nutrition as well as obesity and healthy lifestyles. For example, research from the University of Melbourne examines the effects of

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children's exposure to food advertising on their eating habits. There are also public awareness campaigns and education projects on healthy eating in general in Australia. In this context, research in Australia contributes to the understanding of cultural and social factors in child nutrition.

## **PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERACTION NUTRITION and SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

The psychosocial interaction between nutrition and social relationships plays a key role in children's development. Dietary habits are shaped by children's interactions with their social environment. In particular, school, friend groups and social interactions are among the factors that shape children's dietary preferences.

School has a significant impact on children's eating habits. The food choices offered in school canteens determine children's daily dietary preferences. In addition, nutrition education programs within the school can teach children the importance of healthy eating and this awareness can influence their social relationships, becoming a shared value among their peer group.

Friend groups are a key area of social interaction that shapes children's dietary preferences. Dietary habits adopted within a group can put pressure on other group members. For example, a food or fast-food brand that is popular among a group of friends may lead children to prefer these products.

From a sociological perspective, child nutrition is largely influenced by factors such as social norms, cultural expectations, and advertising. Society's values play a key role in determining children's dietary choices. For example, in some societies, consumption of certain foods may be associated with social status and children tend to conform to these norms.



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Cultural expectations are another factor shaping children's eating habits. In particular, traditional eating habits learned within the family become part of children's identity. In this context, children may tend to prefer foods that conform to cultural norms.

The influence of advertising on child nutrition is a crucial factor affecting cultural and social norms. Advertisements with colorful packaging, child-specific characters and various gifts may encourage children to choose certain foods and shape their dietary preferences.

In this context, psychosocial interaction in child nutrition offers a comprehensive perspective that includes both psychological and sociological factors. Taking into account the social environment and cultural context in which the child lives when forming dietary preferences can support the adoption of healthy eating habits.

## CONCLUSION DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has provided a basic framework for understanding the psychosocial interplay of child feeding. However, given the complexity of the topic, research in this area needs to be further expanded and deepened. Dietary habits are a crucial factor that directly affects individuals' quality of life. In this context, understanding and improving dietary preferences requires an approach that brings together the contributions of both psychology and sociology. Understanding nutrition, which is a fundamental element of child health, from both psychology and sociology perspectives will allow us to produce more effective and sustainable solutions.

Psychology plays a key role in understanding and explaining the psychological influences on individuals' dietary choices. Research shows that eating habits are often shaped by

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psychological factors such as emotional states, motivation, habits, and personal taste preferences. Psychology offers an in-depth approach to understanding dietary habits by analyzing the internal processes that influence individuals' dietary decisions. For example, field studies in this field reveal how food preferences are associated with psychological factors such as stress, depression, or emotional state. Moreover, it is known that individuals' food habits are often influenced by psychological connections formed during childhood and that these connections persist into adulthood.

Sociology is a critical discipline for understanding dietary habits in relation to individuals' social environment, cultural norms, and social interactions. Many studies support that dietary choices are influenced not only by the internal processes of the individual, but also by social norms and social interactions.

Another sociologically crucial factor is the general attitudes and values of society towards nutrition. For example, nutritional inequalities between social classes can be explained by the concept of social capital. Social capital refers to the advantages that individuals gain through their social connections, resources, and social environment. Dietary habits can often be seen as a reflection of social capital.

An approach that combines the disciplines of psychology and sociology to understand dietary habits can offer more comprehensive and effective solutions. The role of psychological factors in determining an individual's dietary preferences becomes more complete when combined with social norms, media influence and societal expectations. For example, the spread of nutrition trends through social media and individuals' adaptation to these trends are related to psychological needs as well as the search for social interaction and acceptance. Psychology is a valuable tool in understanding the individual's sensitivity to these trends, their conformity to social expectations and how these trends affect their dietary habits. In addition, the discipline of sociology makes an important contribution to understanding dietary habits because dietary preferences interact closely with the cultural dynamics, class structures and social norms of the

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society in which the individual lives. In this context, assessing dietary habits not only in the inner world of the individual but also in the societal context allows us to understand and solve broader problems in nutrition from a sociological perspective.

Field studies and theoretical research in the literature suggest that addressing dietary habits by combining psychological and sociological factors can help us better understand individuals' dietary preferences and improve these habits. This interaction between the disciplines of psychology and sociology can bring a new perspective to academic research on nutrition and allow us to develop more effective intervention strategies in this field. In this context, our recommendations are as follows:

-Social capital should be taken into account in nutrition policies: Based on Bourdieu's social capital theory, the general level of education, health awareness and economic status of the community should be taken into account when formulating nutrition policies. This can help to more effectively develop strategies to reduce nutrition inequalities.

-Gender Role Sensitive Healthy Nutrition Education: From a feminist sociology perspective, it is important that healthy eating education addresses gender roles within the family in a more equitable way and promotes an equal distribution of responsibility. This can strengthen communication within the family and reduce gender inequalities.

-Understanding the Relationship between Modernization and Nutrition: Giddens' modernization theory and Bauman's concepts of liquid modernity can be used to explain how dietary habits are associated with social change. In this context, it is important to design nutrition policies in line with today's fast pace of life, economic conditions, and cultural changes.

-Education and Awareness Raising Programs: Students' lack of knowledge on healthy nutrition is related to their families, environment, and schools. In this context, education and awareness raising programs on nutrition should be developed and disseminated to different segments of society.

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-Promote diverse dietary patterns: According to the data obtained, students' eating habits may generally be oriented towards one type of food. In order to change this situation, campaigns promoting various nutrition models should be organized and support programs should be created to help students gain healthy eating habits.

## **RESTRICTION**

The research is limited to scientific research that have been conducted worldwide and have been included in the literature. The field study was conducted on a specific group of partner students. Therefore, there may be limitations in generalizing the results to a general population. Future studies based on larger sample groups including student groups with different demographic characteristics may improve the generalizability of the results.

The nutritional habits and knowledge levels of the students participating in the study were based on self-reports. This may cause participants to provide incomplete or misleading information about their own eating habits. In future studies, comparing self-reports with data obtained using objective measurement tools may provide more reliable results.

The study focused on a group of students in a specific region. Therefore, a more comprehensive study including participants from different geographical regions may be more informative in understanding cross-regional differences in dietary habits.

The study was conducted during a specific period and the effects on students' dietary habits may reflect seasonal or specific periodic changes. This should be addressed in a follow-up study over a longer period of time.

In this study, the general socioeconomic status of the students was determined, but the effects of these factors on dietary habits were not examined in more detail. Future studies focusing on this topic may be recommended to better understand the effects of socioeconomic factors on dietary preferences.



## NOTICES

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