

Investigating the Impact of Face-to-Face vs Online Learning on the Eating Habits of Non-Clinical Students Registered at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, St. Augustine



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Introduction

University students lack adequate and balanced meals due to the separation from their families, insufficient funds, or lack of time and information about healthy nutrition. Most university students' diets are not nutritionally adequate or balanced during their school years. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the closure of schools and the implementation of lockdowns, resulting in isolation at home to curb the spread of the virus. The transition to online school disrupted the normal routine of most students making it difficult to maintain a healthy eating habit. However, not all students reported an unhealthy change. Information gathered can be used to promote healthy eating amongst students and make them aware of eating habits that would promote better health and wellbeing.

Objectives

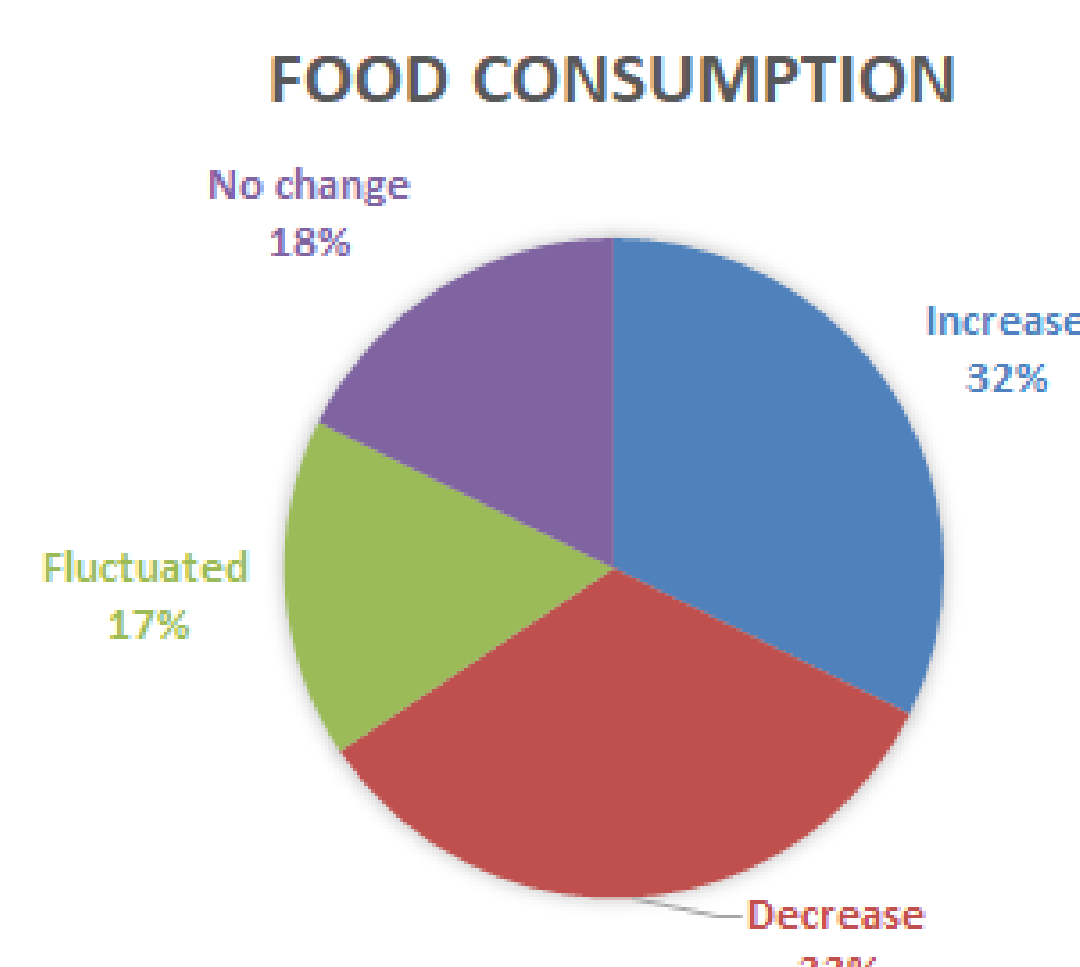
1. To provide information to students and the public alike, on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on eating habits, and to promote healthy eating habits.
2. To determine how the following factors influence the eating habits of second and third year medical sciences students: Alcohol, medication and drug use (b) Non-communicable diseases (c) Physical activity (d) Sleep pattern, stress and anxiety.
3. To investigate the changes in the eating habits of students during online learning vs face to face learning.

Methodology

The study is a descriptive study. A 64-item questionnaire was delivered online via Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed to the study sample which comprised year 2 and year 3 medical sciences students registered in the Faculty of Medical Sciences, St. Augustine. For this study (n = 700), the minimum sample population was calculated to be 249 students at a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS software. The project was conducted between January 2021 to July 2021.

Results

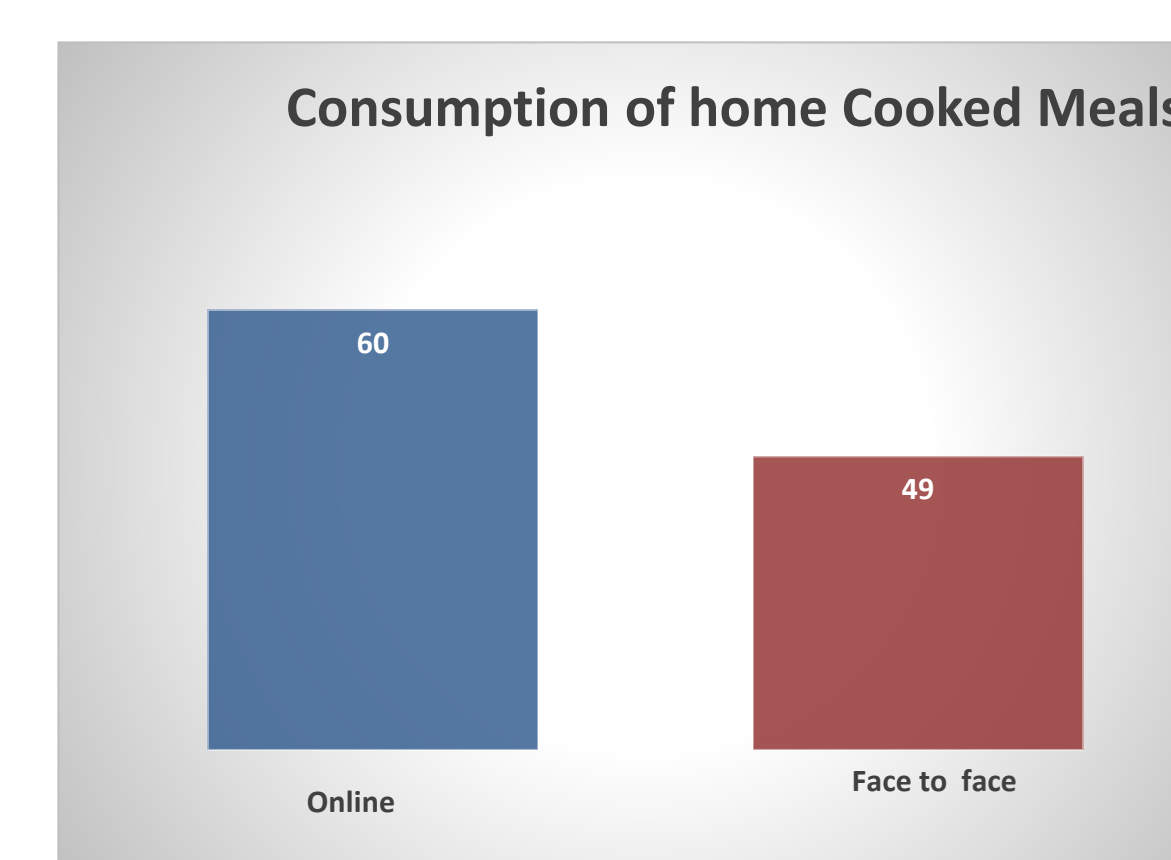
PIE CHART SHOWING THE OVERALL CHANGE IN FOOD CONSUMPTION DURING ONLINE CLASSES COMPARED TO FACE TO FACE



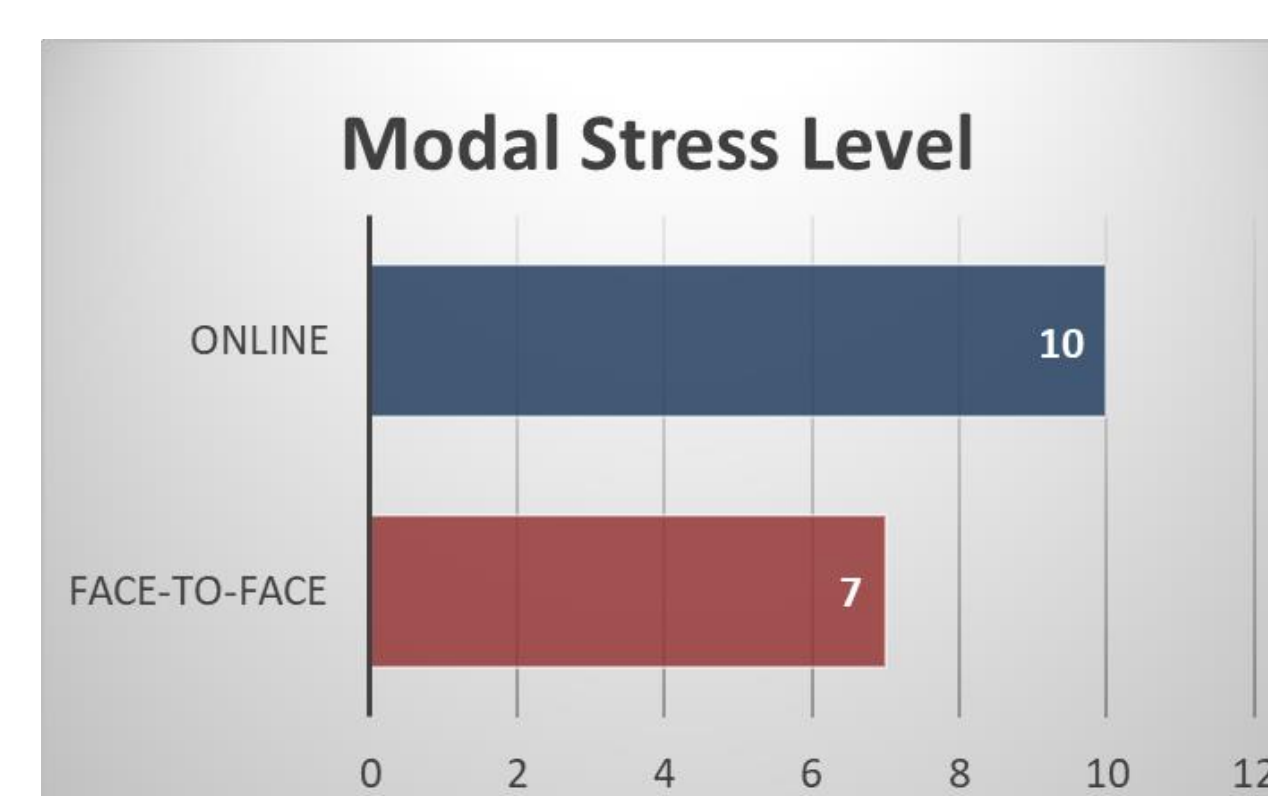
32% of students reported increased food consumption; 33% decreased their food consumption; 17% fluctuated and 18% reported no change.

BAR CHART SHOWING THE FREQUENCY OF HOME COOKED MEALS CONSUMED DURING FACE TO FACE AND ONLINE CLASSES.

60 respondents consumed home-cooked meals during online classes compared to 49 respondents for face to face classes.



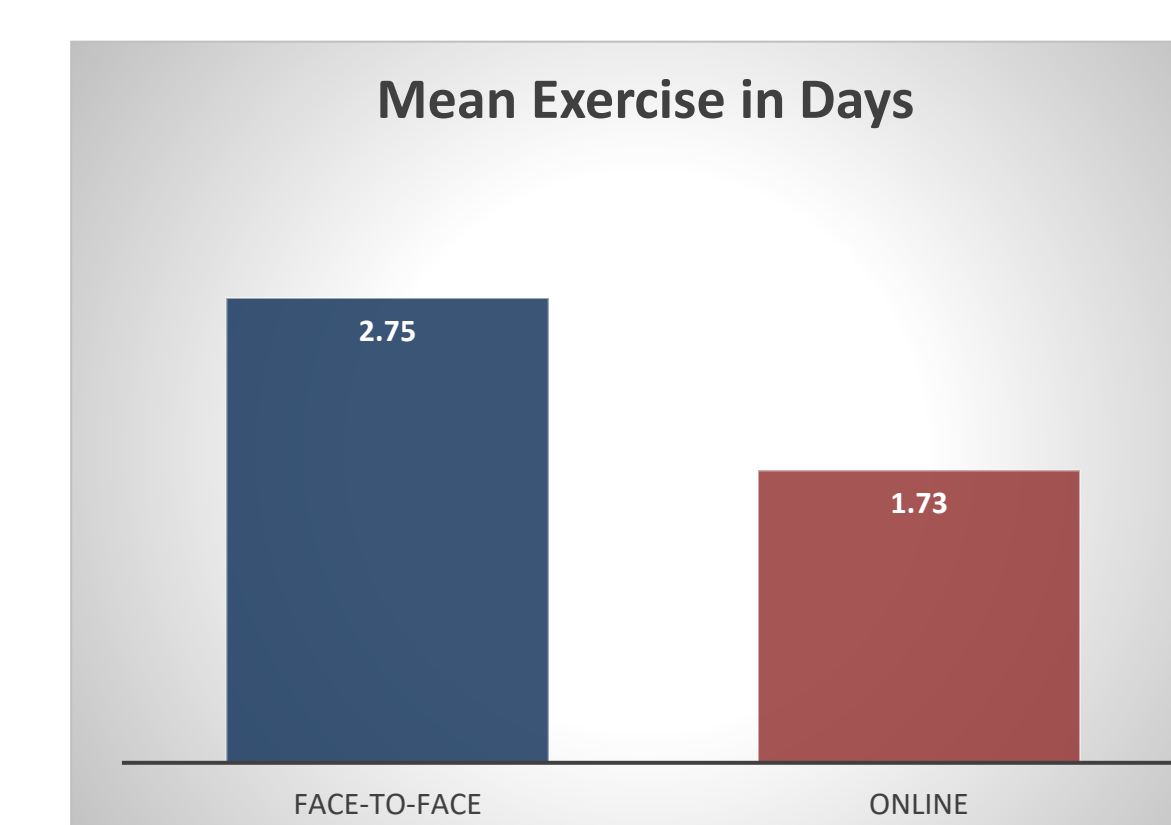
BAR GRAPH ILLUSTRATING THE MODAL STRESS LEVEL OF STUDENTS DURING FACE TO FACE AND ONLINE CLASSES.



•The modal stress level during face to face was 7 (17%) compared to that of 10 (26%) for online.

BAR GRAPH SHOWING MEAN NUMBER OF DAYS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DURING FACE TO FACE AND ONLINE CLASSES

Mean number of days spent exercising decreased from 2.75 during face to face classes to 1.73 during online classes.



Discussion

- The research showed that students increased their food consumption which consisted of more unhealthy food items. 65% of respondents showed an increase in their weight, which was mirrored in an increase in carbohydrate, fat, savory snack consumption and a lack of physical activity were found to be two main contributors to their unhealthy lifestyle and wellness.
- During face to face class, it can be noted that there was an increase in physical activity and a decrease in stress amongst the students in the faculty. In comparison, during the virtual period, students experienced higher levels of stress and decreased physical activity. This decrease in physical activity led to fewer calories being burned, combined with a rise in the consumption of high-calorie and low nutritional value meals contributes to an unhealthy lifestyle. Stress eating, can account for the results yielded in this study.
- Data on alcohol, medication, illicit drugs, NCDs, eating disorders and sleep patterns were inconclusive due to low responses.

Conclusion

This study showed that:

- The covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on the lifestyle of students' influencing their eating habits.
- There was an increase in weight across 65% of the sample group, which was reflected in an increase in carbohydrate, fat, and savory snack consumption during online classes.
- In face-to-face classes, students bought more fast food and ate less home cooked meals whereas during online classes, they ate more home cooked meals and bought less fast food.
- There was a significant increase in modal stress levels during online classes as opposed to face to face classes.
- Students' average number of days spent exercising decreased as they transitioned from face-to-face classes to online classes.

References

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