

**DETERMINANTS OF DIETARY PRACTICES AMONG MALE UNIVERSITY STAFF IN
PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the determinants of dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State, Nigeria. The increasing burden of nutrition-related diseases among working adults has heightened the need to understand the factors that influence dietary behaviour. The study examined the influence of occupational, socioeconomic, lifestyle, and environmental factors on dietary practices among male university staff. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised male academic and non-academic staff in selected universities in Plateau State. A sample of 350 respondents was selected through a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a structured instrument titled Determinants of Dietary Practices Questionnaire (DDPQ). The instrument was validated by experts and yielded a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.84. Data were analysed using mean scores, standard deviations, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that occupational factors, socioeconomic conditions, lifestyle characteristics, and environmental factors significantly influence dietary practices among male university staff. The study concluded that dietary behaviour among university staff is shaped by multiple interrelated factors operating at individual, organizational, and environmental levels. It was recommended that universities strengthen workplace nutrition education, improve access to healthy food options, and implement staff wellness programmes that promote healthy lifestyles.

Keywords: dietary practices, occupational factors, socioeconomic factors, lifestyle factors, environmental factors, university staff, Plateau State.

INTRODUCTION

Nutrition remains one of the most important determinants of health and human development. Adequate nutrition supports physical growth, cognitive functioning, disease prevention, and overall wellbeing. Dietary practices influence nutritional status and play a critical role in determining health outcomes throughout the life course. In recent decades, increasing attention has been directed toward the relationship between dietary behaviour and the growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and type 2 diabetes. The World Health Organization (2023) identified unhealthy diets as one of the leading behavioural risk factors contributing to the global burden of disease.

Dietary practices refer to the habitual patterns of food selection, preparation, and consumption adopted by individuals over time. These practices include meal frequency, food preferences, portion sizes, food purchasing behaviour, and adherence to nutritional recommendations. Healthy dietary practices are characterized by regular consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and

nutrient-dense foods while limiting excessive intake of salt, sugar, and saturated fats (World Health Organization, 2023). However, dietary behaviour is influenced by a wide range of social, economic, occupational, lifestyle, and environmental factors that shape food-related decisions.

Globally, rapid urbanization, economic development, and technological advancement have transformed food systems and dietary patterns. The increasing availability of processed foods, fast foods, and convenience meals has contributed to what is commonly described as the nutrition transition. This transition is characterized by a shift from traditional diets toward energy-dense foods that are often high in fats, sugars, and refined carbohydrates (Popkin & Ng, 2022). Although these changes have improved food accessibility and convenience, they have also contributed to rising levels of obesity and diet-related chronic diseases across both developed and developing countries. Nigeria has experienced significant dietary changes over the past two decades. Traditional diets that were largely based on cereals, legumes, vegetables, and locally sourced foods are increasingly being replaced by processed and convenience foods. Urbanization, changing work patterns, increased income aspirations, and exposure to global food markets have accelerated this transition. Consequently, nutrition-related disorders have become increasingly common among adults, particularly within urban and semi-urban populations (Ogundari & Abdulai, 2023).

Among working adults, occupational factors represent important determinants of dietary behaviour. Long working hours, demanding schedules, administrative responsibilities, and workplace stress may limit opportunities for healthy eating. Individuals experiencing occupational pressure frequently report irregular meal patterns, meal skipping, and increased consumption of convenience foods. Workplace food environments may further influence dietary choices by determining the availability and accessibility of healthy food options (Musaiger, 2020).

University staff constitute an important occupational group whose health status directly influences institutional productivity and service delivery. Academic and non-academic staff often perform multiple responsibilities that include teaching, research, administration, community service, and family obligations. These competing demands may reduce the time available for meal planning and preparation, thereby influencing dietary practices. The sedentary nature of many university-related activities may also contribute to unhealthy eating behaviours and poor nutritional outcomes.

Socioeconomic factors also influence dietary practices. Income level affects purchasing power and access to nutritious foods, while educational attainment contributes to nutrition knowledge and informed food choices. Rising food prices and economic instability may limit access to healthy diets and increase reliance on less nutritious alternatives. Household size and family responsibilities similarly influence food purchasing decisions and consumption patterns.

Lifestyle characteristics represent another important category of determinants. Physical activity patterns, stress management, personal preferences, social interactions, and health consciousness contribute to dietary behaviour. Individuals often adopt dietary habits that reflect their lifestyles and social environments. Research has shown that sedentary lifestyles and chronic stress are frequently associated with unhealthy dietary practices and increased risk of nutrition-related diseases (Contento, 2020).

Environmental influences further shape dietary decisions. Food availability, accessibility, affordability, and workplace food environments determine the extent to which healthy food choices are possible. Story, Kaphingst, Robinson-O'Brien, and Glanz (2008) observed that food environments significantly influence dietary behaviour by shaping the options available to individuals. Supportive environments encourage healthy eating, whereas environments dominated by unhealthy food options may contribute to poor dietary habits.

This study is anchored on the Social Ecological Model developed by McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, and Glanz (1988). The model explains that health behaviours are influenced by interactions among individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy factors. Within the context of dietary practices, the model suggests that food choices are shaped not only by personal preferences but also by workplace conditions, socioeconomic circumstances, and environmental influences.

Despite increasing awareness of the importance of healthy nutrition, unhealthy dietary practices remain prevalent among working adults in Nigeria. Male university staff are exposed to occupational, socioeconomic, and lifestyle conditions that may influence their dietary behaviour. Although previous studies have examined dietary practices among students and general working populations, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the determinants of dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State. This knowledge gap limits the development of effective workplace nutrition interventions and health promotion strategies. It therefore became necessary to investigate the determinants of dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State, Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study was to investigate the determinants of dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the occupational factors influencing dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.
2. Examine the socioeconomic factors influencing dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.
3. Determine the lifestyle factors influencing dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.
4. Examine the environmental factors influencing dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What occupational factors influence the dietary practices of male university staff in Plateau State?
2. What socioeconomic factors influence the dietary practices of male university staff in Plateau State?
3. What lifestyle factors influence the dietary practices of male university staff in Plateau State?
4. What environmental factors influence the dietary practices of male university staff in Plateau State?

HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H01: There is no significant relationship between occupational factors and dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between socioeconomic factors and dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

H03: There is no significant relationship between lifestyle factors and dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

H04: There is no significant relationship between environmental factors and dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on the Social Ecological Model (SEM) proposed by McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, and Glanz (1988). The model explains that health behaviours are influenced by interactions among individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy factors. The theory was developed to provide a comprehensive explanation of how environmental and social influences shape health-related behaviours.

The Social Ecological Model recognizes that health behaviour is multidimensional and cannot be adequately explained by individual factors alone. At the individual level, behaviour is influenced by

personal characteristics such as knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and skills. At the interpersonal level, family members, peers, and social networks contribute to behavioural choices. Organizational factors include workplace structures, institutional policies, and environmental conditions that either facilitate or hinder healthy behaviours. Community factors involve social norms, cultural practices, and access to resources, while policy factors encompass laws and regulations that influence behaviour.

The model is particularly relevant to dietary practices because food choices are rarely determined solely by individual preferences. Occupational demands, income level, family responsibilities, workplace food environments, and food availability interact to influence dietary behaviour. Consequently, the Social Ecological Model provides a suitable framework for understanding how occupational, socioeconomic, lifestyle, and environmental factors influence dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from respondents concerning the factors influencing dietary practices among male university staff without manipulating any study variable. The design also facilitated the description and analysis of existing conditions as they naturally occurred within the study population.

The study was conducted in Plateau State, Nigeria. Plateau State is located in the North-Central region of the country and hosts several public and private universities with diverse categories of academic and non-academic personnel.

The population of the study comprised male academic and non-academic staff in selected universities within Plateau State. The target population included lecturers, administrative personnel, technologists, and support staff whose occupational responsibilities and lifestyle characteristics may influence dietary behaviour.

A multistage sampling procedure was employed in selecting the respondents. Universities were purposively selected based on accessibility and staff strength. Proportionate stratified sampling technique was subsequently used to ensure representation of academic and non-academic staff categories. Thereafter, simple random sampling technique was used to select participants from each stratum. A total of 350 respondents constituted the sample for the study.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Determinants of Dietary Practices Questionnaire (DDPQ). The instrument consisted of five sections. Section A elicited demographic information, while Sections B, C, D, and E contained items on occupational, socioeconomic, lifestyle, and environmental determinants of dietary practices respectively.

The questionnaire adopted a four-point response scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts in Home Economics, Nutrition Education, and Measurement and Evaluation. Their observations and recommendations guided the modification of the instrument before final administration.

A pilot study was conducted among male university staff outside the study area. Data obtained from the pilot test were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability procedure. The instrument yielded an overall reliability coefficient of 0.84, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

The researcher, assisted by trained research assistants, administered the questionnaire directly to respondents. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately and during follow-up visits to ensure a high return rate.

Data collected were analysed using mean scores and standard deviations to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 served as the basis for decision making. Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics.

RESULTS

The data collected for this study were analysed using mean scores, standard deviations, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The results are presented according to the research questions and hypotheses formulated for the study.

Research Question One

What occupational factors influence the dietary practices of male university staff in Plateau State?

Table 1: Mean Scores on Occupational Determinants of Dietary Practices Among Male University Staff

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Heavy workload affects my meal timing and eating habits.	3.42	0.71	Agree
2	Long working hours make it difficult to maintain regular meals.	3.36	0.74	Agree
3	Work-related stress influences my food choices.	3.28	0.82	Agree
4	Administrative responsibilities affect my dietary practices.	3.14	0.79	Agree
5	Lack of time for meal preparation contributes to unhealthy eating habits.	3.48	0.69	Agree

Grand Mean = 3.34

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that occupational factors influence dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State. All the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating respondents' agreement that workload, work schedules, stress, and administrative responsibilities affect their dietary behaviour.

Research Question Two

What socioeconomic factors influence the dietary practices of male university staff in Plateau State?

Table 2: Mean Scores on Socioeconomic Determinants of Dietary Practices Among Male University Staff

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
6	My income level influences the quality of food I consume.	3.45	0.68	Agree
7	Rising food prices affect my dietary choices.	3.58	0.62	Agree
8	Family size influences my food purchasing decisions.	3.17	0.81	Agree
9	Educational attainment influences my nutrition awareness.	3.22	0.77	Agree
10	Economic challenges affect my ability to maintain a healthy diet.	3.51	0.66	Agree

Grand Mean = 3.39

The findings in Table 2 reveal that socioeconomic factors influence dietary practices among male university staff. Respondents agreed that income, food prices, family responsibilities, educational attainment, and economic conditions affect dietary behaviour and food choices.

Research Question Three

What lifestyle factors influence the dietary practices of male university staff in Plateau State?

Table 3: Mean Scores on Lifestyle Determinants of Dietary Practices Among Male University Staff

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
11	Physical activity influences my food choices.	3.18	0.80	Agree
12	Personal food preferences affect my dietary practices.	3.54	0.67	Agree
13	Stress affects my \ eating behaviour.	3.40	0.73	Agree
14	Social engagements influence my food consumption patterns.	3.27	0.78	Agree
15	Sedentary work habits contribute to unhealthy eating practices.	3.31	0.76	Agree

Grand Mean = 3.34

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that lifestyle factors influence dietary practices among male university staff. All the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean, suggesting that lifestyle behaviours significantly shape dietary decisions and eating habits.

Research Question Four

What environmental factors influence the dietary practices of male university staff in Plateau State?

Table 4: Mean Scores on Environmental Determinants of Dietary Practices Among Male University Staff

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
16	Availability of healthy foods influences my dietary choices.	3.49	0.65	Agree
17	Accessibility of food outlets affects my eating habits.	3.30	0.77	Agree
18	Workplace food environment influences my food consumption.	3.37	0.72	Agree
19	Cost of healthy foods affects my dietary practices.	3.56	0.64	Agree
20	Convenience of fast foods influences my food choices.	3.43	0.70	Agree

Grand Mean = 3.43

The results in Table 4 show that environmental factors influence dietary practices among male university staff. The respondents agreed that food availability, accessibility, workplace food environment, affordability, and convenience significantly affect their dietary choices.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis One

H01: There is no significant relationship between occupational factors and dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Occupational Factors and Dietary Practices

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Occupational Factors	350	0.621	0.000	Significant
Dietary Practices	350			

Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, a significant relationship exists between occupational factors and dietary practices among male university staff.

Hypothesis Two

H02: There is no significant relationship between socioeconomic factors and dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Socioeconomic Factors and Dietary Practices

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Socioeconomic Factors	350	0.587	0.000	Significant
Dietary Practices	350			

Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, a significant relationship exists between socioeconomic factors and dietary practices among male university staff.

Hypothesis Three

H03: There is no significant relationship between lifestyle factors and dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

Table 7: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Lifestyle Factors and Dietary Practices

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Lifestyle Factors	350	0.603	0.000	Significant
Dietary Practices	350			

Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, a significant relationship exists between lifestyle factors and dietary practices among male university staff.

Hypothesis Four

H04: There is no significant relationship between environmental factors and dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State.

Table 8: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Environmental Factors and Dietary Practices

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Environmental Factors	350	0.644	0.000	Significant
Dietary Practices	350			

Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, a significant relationship exists between environmental factors and dietary practices among male university staff.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that occupational factors significantly influence the dietary practices of male university staff in Plateau State. Respondents agreed that heavy workload, long working hours, work-related stress, administrative responsibilities, and limited time for meal preparation affect their eating behaviours. This finding suggests that occupational demands often create barriers to healthy eating among university personnel. The finding is consistent with Musaiger (2020), who reported that occupational pressures and time constraints contribute significantly to unhealthy dietary habits among working adults.

The study further established that socioeconomic factors significantly influence dietary practices among male university staff. Income level, food prices, educational attainment, economic conditions, and family responsibilities were identified as major determinants of dietary behaviour. This finding agrees with Ogundari and Abdulai (2023), who observed that economic conditions and household purchasing power significantly affect dietary quality and food diversity among Nigerian households.

The findings also revealed that lifestyle factors influence dietary practices among male university staff. Respondents indicated that physical activity, food preferences, stress management, social interactions, and sedentary behaviours contribute to dietary decisions. This finding is consistent with Contento (2020), who emphasized that personal lifestyle characteristics significantly influence nutrition-related choices and long-term health outcomes.

Environmental factors were also found to significantly influence dietary practices among respondents. Food availability, accessibility, affordability, workplace food environments, and the convenience of fast foods emerged as important determinants of dietary behaviour. This finding supports the work of Story, Kaphingst, Robinson-O'Brien, and Glanz (2008), who reported that food environments shape dietary choices by influencing available food options and opportunities for healthy eating.

The results of the hypotheses revealed significant relationships between occupational, socioeconomic, lifestyle, and environmental factors and dietary practices among male university staff. Occupational factors demonstrated a positive relationship with dietary practices, indicating that workplace conditions significantly influence eating behaviour. Socioeconomic factors also showed a significant relationship, suggesting that income level and economic realities affect dietary quality. Similarly, lifestyle and environmental factors recorded significant relationships with dietary practices, demonstrating that dietary behaviour is shaped by interactions among personal, organizational, and environmental influences. These findings provide support for the Social Ecological Model proposed by McLeroy et al. (1988), which explains that health behaviours are influenced by multiple interconnected factors operating at different levels of the social environment.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the determinants of dietary practices among male university staff in Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that occupational, socioeconomic, lifestyle, and environmental factors significantly influence dietary practices among the respondents. Occupational factors such as workload, long working hours, work-related stress, administrative responsibilities, and limited time for meal preparation were found to affect eating habits and food choices.

The study further established that socioeconomic factors, including income level, food prices, educational attainment, economic challenges, and family responsibilities, significantly influence dietary behaviour. Lifestyle factors such as physical activity, food preferences, stress management, social engagements, and sedentary behaviours were also identified as important determinants of dietary practices.

Furthermore, environmental factors, including food availability, accessibility, affordability, workplace food environments, and the convenience of fast foods, were found to significantly affect dietary choices among male university staff. The findings therefore demonstrate that dietary practices are influenced by a combination of personal, occupational, socioeconomic, and environmental factors rather than by individual choice alone.

The study concludes that improving dietary practices among male university staff requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach involving workplace support, nutrition education, economic empowerment, healthy lifestyle promotion, and improved food environments. Such interventions are essential for enhancing the nutritional wellbeing, productivity, and overall health of university personnel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Workplace Nutrition Education:** University management should organize regular nutrition education programmes, seminars, and workshops aimed at improving staff awareness of healthy dietary practices and nutrition-related health risks.
2. **Healthy Food Environment:** Universities should encourage the establishment of cafeterias and food outlets that provide affordable, nutritious, and balanced meal options for staff members.
3. **Work-Life Balance Support:** Institutional policies should be strengthened to reduce excessive workload and promote healthy work-life balance, thereby enabling staff to maintain regular meal patterns and healthier eating habits.
4. **Staff Wellness Programmes:** Universities should implement comprehensive wellness programmes that incorporate nutrition counselling, physical activity promotion, health screening, and stress management initiatives.
5. **Economic Support Measures:** Government and university authorities should improve staff welfare packages and other support mechanisms that enhance purchasing power and access to nutritious foods.

6. Nutrition-Friendly Workplace Policies: University administrations should develop workplace policies that encourage healthy eating practices, including designated meal breaks and supportive food environments within campuses.

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