

Dorms, Dining, and Diets: Exploring the Link Between Housing Status and Eating Habits Among College Students

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BACKGROUND

- Dietary habits significantly impact the **health and long-term wellness** of college students
- Poor nutrition** is linked to **obesity and chronic disease**
- 76%** of university students fail to meet the recommended serving size of daily fruits and vegetables ¹
- Existing findings indicate young adults residing with **parents or living independently** in rented accommodations tend to have **poor dietary intake** ²
- Young adults who live on college or university campuses demonstrated **more nutritious** eating habits and meal patterns ²
- Existing studies assess general dietary habits and food groups, few focus specifically on how **housing status influences meal preparation and grocery behavior**

OBJECTIVE

- Examine associations between **housing status** and different **dietary habits and food purchasing habits** amongst college students

METHODS

- Cross-sectional study**
- Study recruitment strategy
 - Non-probability, availability sampling design
 - Students recruited via social media posts, word of mouth, and outreach to professors/faculty at various universities
 - Recruitment of all **undergraduate students 18+ years old across multiple universities**
- Survey via Google Forms included:
 - Demographics such as age, gender, academic year
 - Financial and housing status
 - Dietary and grocery purchasing habits with pre-determined answer options
- Exposure variable:** housing status
- Outcome variables:** dietary and food purchasing habits
- Data analyses (Chi-square tests) was with SPSS v29

RESULTS

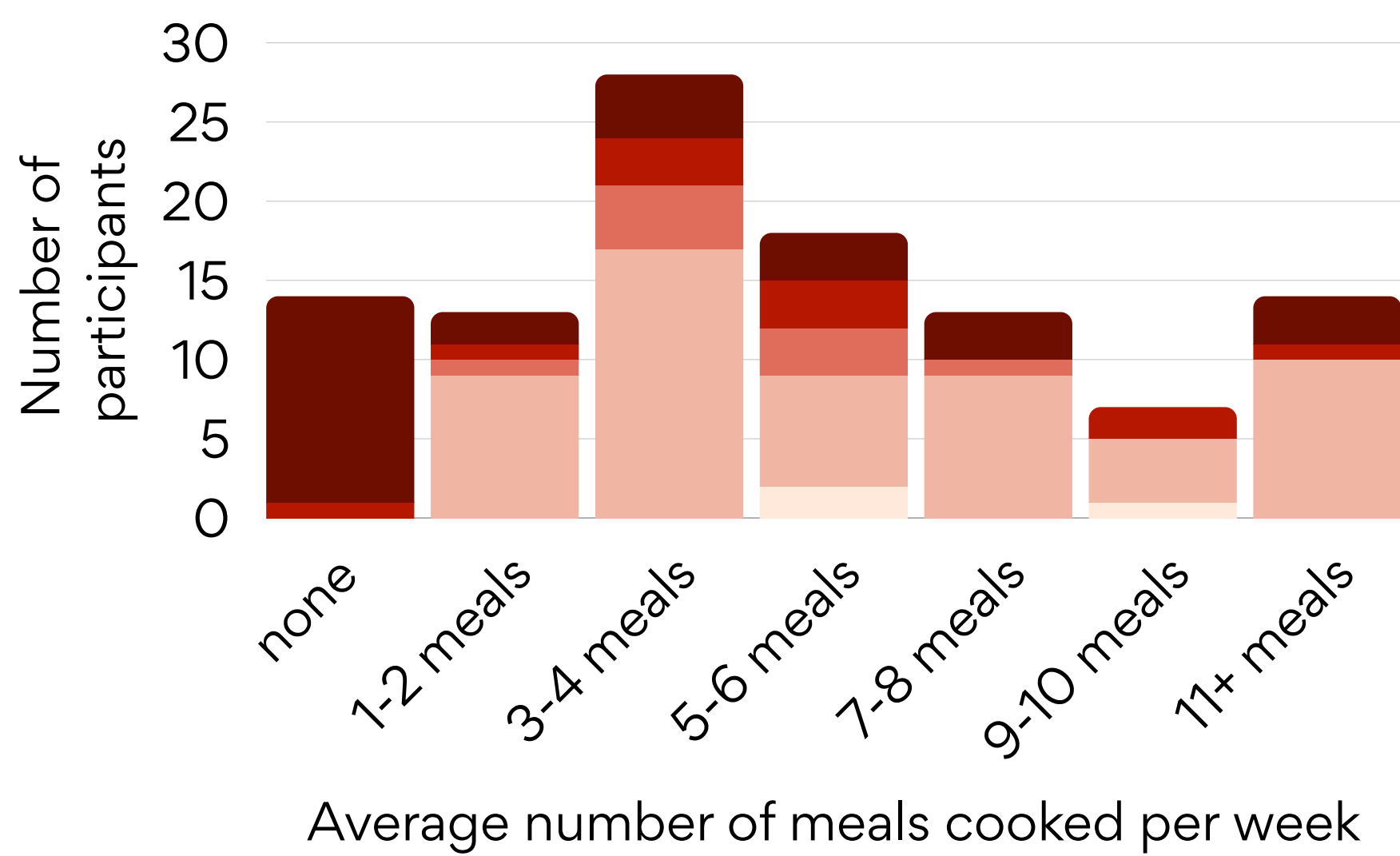
Table 1. *Demographics (N = 107)*

| Characteristic | Category | n (%) |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------|
| School | UCSD | 80 (74.8) |
| | Other | 27 (25.2) |
| Age | 18-21 | 83 (77.6) |
| | 22-25 | 21 (19.6) |
| | 30+ | 3 (2.8) |
| Gender Identity | Female | 75 (70.1) |
| | Male | 27 (25.2) |
| | Non-binary | 4 (3.7) |
| | Genderqueer | 1 (0.9) |

Table 2. *Housing Status*

| Living arrangements | n (%) |
|--|-----------|
| Off-campus alone | 3 (2.8) |
| Off-campus with others (non-relatives) | 56 (52.3) |
| Off-campus with relatives | 9 (8.4) |
| On-campus alone | 11 (10.3) |
| On-campus with others | 28 (26.2) |

Figure 1. *Relationship Between Housing Status and Average Number of Home Cooked Meals Per Week*



Reported average number of home cooked meals per week broken down by housing status of participants. (Figure 1)

Figure key:



Table 3. *Association Between Housing Status Versus Number of Home Cooked Meals Per Week*

| Factor | Pearson chi-square | p-value |
|----------------|--------------------|---------|
| Housing status | 59.562 | < 0.001 |

*Chi-square test found a **statistically significant relationship** between housing status and average number of home cooked meals per week

Table 4. *Associations Between Housing Status Versus Reported Reasons to Dine-out*

| Factor | Pearson chi-square | p-value |
|----------------|--------------------|---------|
| Housing status | 99.678 | 0.791 |

*Chi-square test found relationship between housing status and reported reason to dine out **was not statistically significant**

Table 5. *Reported Reasons to Dine-out over Grocery Shopping*

| Reasons | n (%) |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| "It is more convenient" | 78 (72.9) |
| "It saves me time spent cooking" | 67 (62.6) |
| "It is more fun" | 28 (26.2) |
| "I just enjoy dining out more" | 24 (22.4) |
| "I prefer grocery shopping" | 10 (9.3) |
| "It saves me money" | 9 (8.4) |
| Other | 5 (4.7) |

- Students reported they prefer dining out over grocery shopping due to **increased convenience and decreased time spent cooking**
- Participants living off-campus alone (100%), off-campus with others (71.4%), and on-campus with others (85.7%) preferred dining out due to **convenience**
- Students living off-campus with relatives (66.7%) and on campus alone (63.6%) preferred dining out because it was more **time efficient**

CONCLUSIONS

- Although there is no significant association between housing and food purchasing habits, **kitchen access and shared responsibilities** between living arrangements shape students' meal habits
- Off-campus students are more likely to follow USDA MyPlate guidelines likely due to **access to greater variety of eateries and groceries** off campus
 - On-campus students primarily purchase **dining hall meals**, limiting access to certain food groups (ex. vegetables and fruits)
- Students purchasing habits may be influenced by the habits of those who they live with (ex. sharing groceries, dining out together, or other preferences)
 - Students in **independent or shared peer housing** tend to cook more frequently, likely due to greater **financial constraints**
 - Students living with relatives typically prepared 3–4 meals per week, likely influenced by **convenience, access to shared meals, and time constraints**

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Universities should tailor **nutrition education** and **support services** based on students' living arrangements ⁴
 - University services (ex. HDH) could provide cooking workshops, grocery budgeting guides, and shared kitchen resources for students
- Campus wellness initiatives could partner with housing services to promote **communal cooking spaces** and **peer-led programs**, particularly for students living off-campus

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