

# Social Dining and Perceived Health Status among UCSD Undergraduates

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## Objective

To determine whether there is an association between social dining and perceived health status among UC San Diego undergraduate students

## Background

- Social dining is the act of eating and/or drinking together with others (Jönsson et al., 2021)
- Health status is a measure of how people perceive their health—rating it as excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor (CDC, 2022)
- Adults who report having less social dining engagement experience more issues with self-care and mental health (Choi et al., 2020)
- Students who have fewer social interactions, including eating alone, are at higher risk of poor mental health and overall lower health status (Jang et al., 2021)
- Undergraduate students have lower mental component scores when it comes to their perceived health status, compared to the general adult population (Snedden et al., 2019)

## Methods

- 22-item cross-sectional anonymous online survey was distributed to UCSD undergraduate students
- Convenience sampling design was used, through school email, word of mouth, and social media platforms (Discord and Reddit)
- Data collection occurred from April 28th-May 11th, 2023
- **Exposure variable:** Social dining engagement
- **Outcome Variable:** Perceived health status
  - 3 items (physical, mental, and overall health)
- Demographics, social dining engagement, and perceived health status were surveyed
- Additional question asked about reasons for participant's preference to engage or not engage in social dining with others.
- SPSS was used for data analyses, including descriptive and inferential statistics such as Fisher's Exact Test

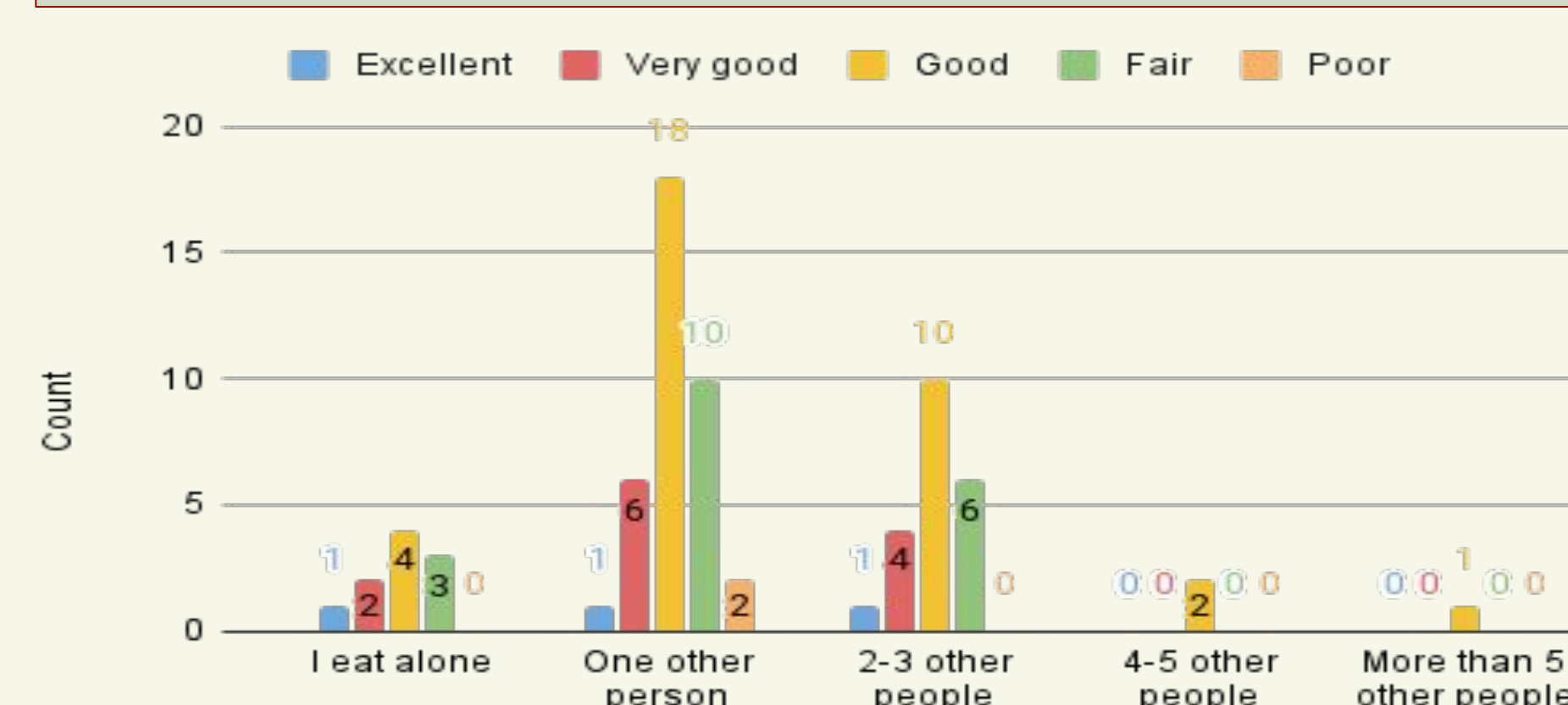
## Results

- **N = 71** total respondents
- 46.5% of participants (n=33) ate more than half of weekly meals alone
- 49.3% of respondents (n=33) reported their overall health was "good", while only 36.6% (n=26) reported their mental health as "good"
- 74.7% of respondents (n=53) reported their physical health as "good" or better
- 40.8% (n=29), 87.4% (n=61), and 94.3% (n=67) of respondents typically eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner with others occasionally or more, respectively
- The frequency of social dining with at least one other person in the past week and participant's rating of overall health showed a non-significant finding (exact sig. 2-sided=0.334)

**Table 1.** Sample population demographics

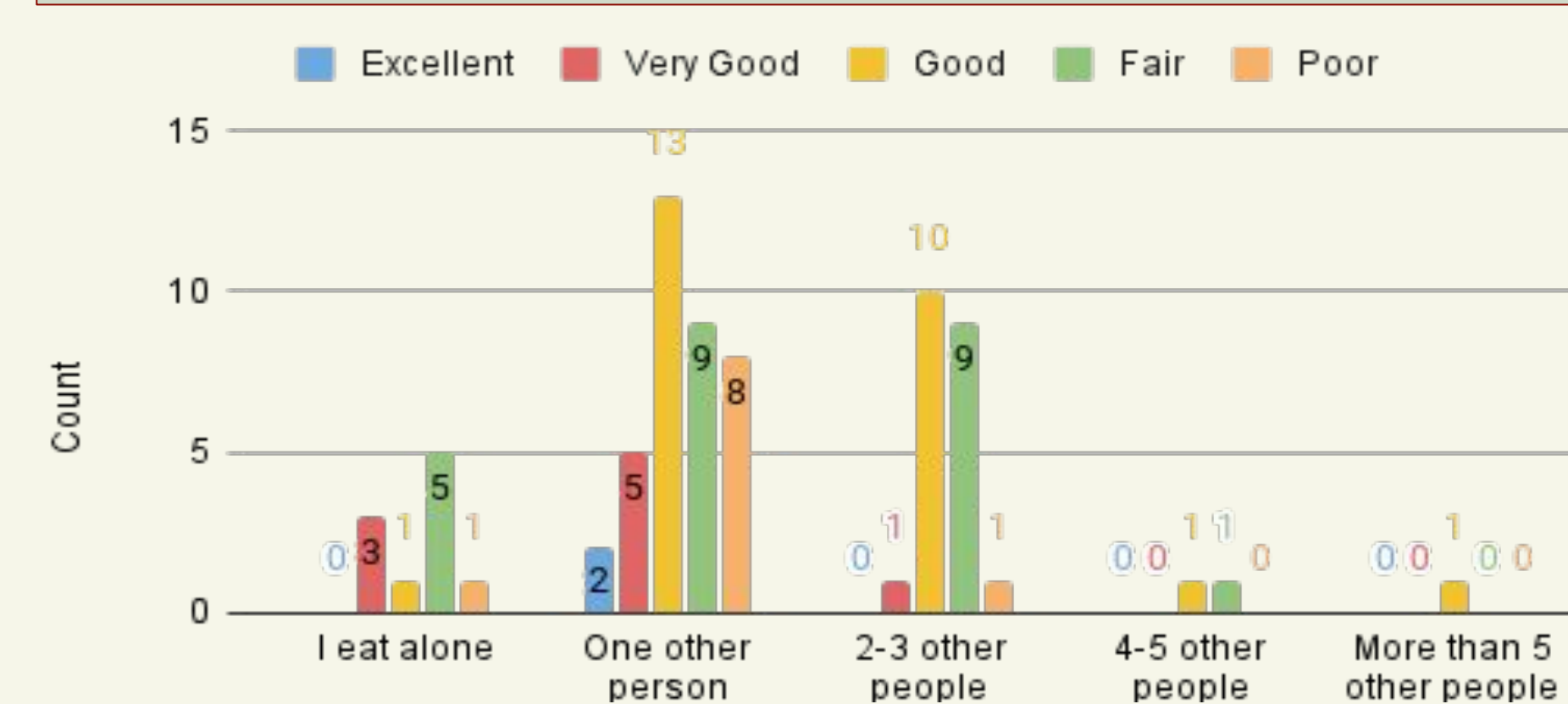
Age	Count and percentage
18-19 years old	22 (31.0%)
20-21 years old	35 (49.3%)
22-23 years old	11 (15.5%)
24-25 years old	1 (1.4%)
26+ years old	2 (2.8%)
Gender Identity	
Female	50 (70.4%)
Male	18 (25.4%)
Non-Binary	3 (4.2%)
Race/Ethnicity	
Asian	31 (43.7%)
Black or African American	1 (1.4%)
Hispanic or Latinx	16 (22.5%)
White	16 (22.5%)
Mixed	7 (9.9%)
Housing	
On-Campus	34 (47.9%)
Off-Campus	37 (52.1%)

**Figure 1.** Typical amount of people respondents ate with and rating of overall health



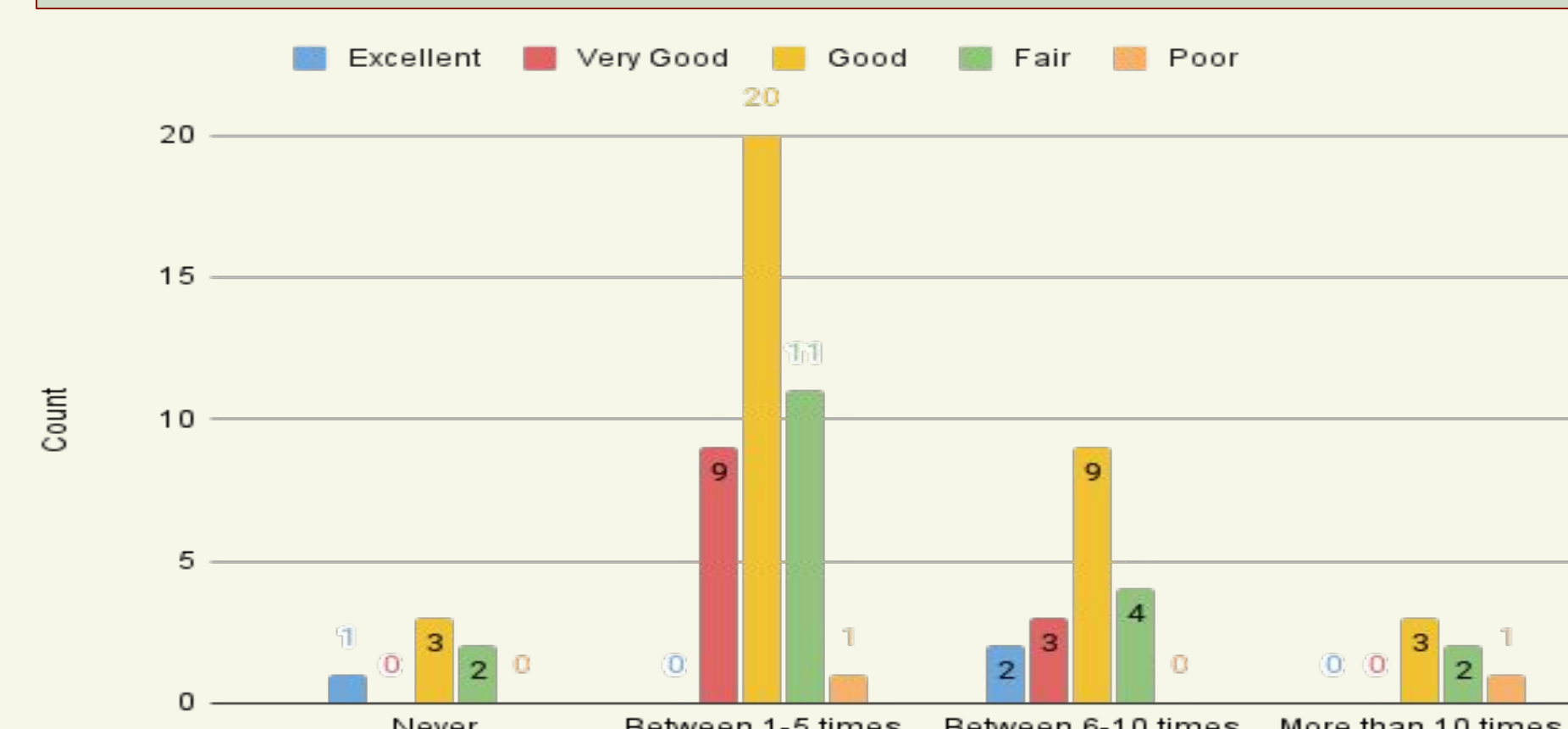
- Of people who ate alone, 70% reported their overall health as "good" or better, as compared to 70.49% for those who ate with one or more people.

**Figure 2.** Typical amount of people respondents ate with and rating of mental health



- Only 40% of those who are alone had "good" or better mental health, but people who ate with up to three people reported this 53% of the time.

**Figure 3.** Frequency of social dining with at least one other person and rating of overall health



- Only 66.67% who did not engage in social dining had "good" or better overall health, compared to 70.77% of people who engaged at least once within the past week

## Conclusions

- Social dining is not associated with a significant difference in perceived health status among UCSD undergraduates, which contradicts what is concluded in the literature
- Many respondents report below average or subpar perceived mental health, an issue which could be helped by social dining
- Various barriers exist to engaging in social dining at UCSD, such as schedule conflicts, finances, lack of social support and introversion
- There is no significant difference in social dining patterns on-campus and off-campus
- Limitations in sample size, study could be expanded to non-UCSD environments

## Policy Implications

- Universities should offer additional events with free food to reduce financial barriers and potentially increase socializing among students
- The university should consider promoting more events aimed at decreasing academic stress, since it is a major factor impeding social dining

## Acknowledgements

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## References

