

## **Factors Influencing Eating Behaviours Among University Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Many university students reported changes in the foods they ate, how much they ate, and how often they snacked because most students have returned to their families, with many taking on passive roles in activities that shape their eating behaviours during COVID-19. Therefore, this study empirically measures how parental influences, food prices, and academic stress influence eating behaviour among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data for the study was collected through a survey with 384 respondents, all of which were recognized, university students. Data were analysed by frequency analysis, descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, and Pearson correlation analysis through SPSS version 26.0. The results of the Pearson correlation demonstrate a link between parental influence, food prices, academic stress, and eating behaviour. The findings indicated that the food price factor influenced university students' eating behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. These findings have implications for future policies and approaches for assessing nutrition in crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords: Eating Behaviour, Parental Influence, Food Price, Academic Stress,**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The emergence of COVID-19 has led to severe changes worldwide from the end of 2019 to the present day. The Malaysian government has taken precautionary measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by creating a Movement Control Order [MCO] on 18 March 2020. It has affected the lives of university students throughout Malaysia. All educational institutions in Malaysia have also been closed by the government (Shah et al., 2020), and it is forcing university students in Malaysia to adjust their daily lives and eating behaviours. The closure of the university campus coincided with the introduction of the stay at the home limit. Also, it caused the Malaysian education system to shift from face-to-face teaching to online learning. In this regard, the routines of university students in terms of daily activities and eating behaviour have changed or will change (A. Radwan & E. Radwan, 2020). According to Owens et al. (2020), this situation is further compounded by the pandemic implications of COVID-19, which found that 34.5% of university students claimed that their eating behaviours had changed.

Parental food choice motives were associated with variations and alterations in nutritional quality during closure (Marty et al., 2021). According to Pung et al., (2021) many university students are obliged to eat all of their food at home. As a result, parents are in charge of their children's eating behaviours throughout the day (A. Radwan et al., 2021). Philippe et al. (2021) suggest that parents encourage healthy eating by offering advice on food selection and consumption of home-cooked foods to avoid contamination.

Meanwhile, according to A. Radwan et al. (2021), their parents are impoverished and have lost their source of income since the present lockdown, so they have no option but to supply for their needs, which they do by purchasing the cheapest food products. University students from medium or low-income socioeconomic families with less money and poor living conditions are more likely to experience changes in eating behaviours and have higher levels of nutrition-related disease (French et al., 2015). Apart from that, the university may be a source of substantial stress for many students during this pandemic. Since the university's closure, it