



Analysis of physical, mental and social health among young adults

Noorain Fathima¹ and Navyashree B^{*}

¹Department of UG Zoology, JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Ooty road, Mysuru, Karnataka, India

^{*}Corresponding author- Department of PG Zoology, JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Ooty road, Mysuru, Karnataka, India

Email ID of corresponding author- navya.shree72@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyse the overall lifestyle and health status of young adults to understand the causes of increasing health risks among individuals aged 17–22 years. A structured questionnaire comprising 36 questions related to physical, mental, and social health was distributed online to degree students of JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Ooty Road, Mysuru. The collected responses were systematically analysed. The results showed that girls predominated in the underweight and obesity class I categories, whereas boys were more represented in the normal BMI and overweight categories. Obesity class III was reported only among boys. Most students had an average food intake and consumed a variety of snacks, including unhealthy food items. Water intake among the majority was moderate and within the recommended range. Commonly reported health issues included headaches, eyesight problems, and body pain. While some students habitually stayed awake at night, the majority did not. Mental health concerns such as unexplained physical pain, sleep disturbances, loneliness, fear, and limited family interaction were also observed. Walking was the most common form of physical activity, although a small proportion of students reported no daily physical activity. Most students were heavy smartphone users, with Instagram being the most preferred social media platform. However, the majority felt comfortable sharing their problems with friends and family and preferred books for better understanding and quick learning.

Keywords: Physical health, mental health, social health, young adults

Introduction

Young adulthood is a critical stage in framing ones lifelong health status and wellbeing. Choices made during this period have a long-lasting impact on various aspects of their life. Thus, cautious selection of lifestyle elements at this stage becomes very important.

According to WHO youth are people whose age ranges between 15 to 24 years. In any population youth are the most productive and dynamic section of the society that play a crucial role in economic, cultural and political development of the nation contributing as an important human resource (WHO,2018).

Immense physiological, psychological and behavioural changes occur during this period of time that is during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Additionally, this period comes with a lot of social interactions and relationships which often leads to engagement in risky behaviours (Dariotis and Johnson, 2015; Tamura et al.,2012). Developing skills, maintaining independence, self sufficiency, managing new tasks and tolerating various stresses are crucial elements of this age (Arnett, 2004; Meadows et al.,2006; Zirkel,1992; Zirkel and Cantor,1990). The struggle to accomplish everything perfectly and fit into the society often leads to anxiety, depression and stress in young students. To get rid of stress, they look out for solutions that can be very different based on individual choices but some might even land up into bad habits (Mahmoud et al.,2012).

In countries like China and India with the rising population the proportion of youth is also increasing. According to UN, youth comprise about 16% of the world's population (<https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>). According to an estimate by WHO, around 1.2 million young people die each year, though many are presumed to be healthy (WHO,2018; Sunitha and Gururaj, 2014).

Eating practices and behaviours with improving and maintaining health is called healthy eating(Raine,2005). Nutrient intake and diet quality are marked by meal pattern and food

intake (Kerver et al.,2006). Health and incidence of several fatal diseases is influenced by nutrient intake (Anderson,2000; Chapelot,2006; Deutz, 2000).

According to recent studies factors for several diseases such as cancer, coronary heart disease and obesity increased due to improper eating behaviours and dietary factors. However increasing consumption of vegetables and fruits, decreasing total fat, saturated fats and cholesterol intake might reduce the prevalence of various health disorders(Lissner and Heitmann,1995; Tavani and La Vecchia C,1995). Meal pattern is also affected by food availability. In India, rice is used as a staple food in some regions of the country whereas wheat, jawar, bajra and ragi are used as staples in other regions where they are grown as major crops (Omidvar and Begum,2014).

Feeling or condition experienced when a person perceive that demands exceed the personal and social resources an individual is able afford, is referred to as stress (<https://www.stress.org/what-is-stress/>. 2016).

Young adults spend more time on social media and are heavy users of different social media apps platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube etc compared to older adults (Smith and Anderson ,2018; Emarketer,2014) Studies demonstrate social media usage is linked to health related risk factors and behaviours among young adults including anxiety, depression (Primack et al.,2017), sexual behaviours (Gebremeskel R H et al.,2014), use of alcohol and other substances (Moreno et al.,2015; Steers et al.,2015).

It is an undisputed evidence that there is a positive impact of physical activity on the health of adult populations (Physical activity and health: A report of the surgeon general. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1996). Role of physical activity is not limited only to health but it has a great impact on working life, socialization and education according to several evidences (The significance of sport for society: Health. socialisation. economy. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. 1995). However, it was reported that due

to various social changes physical activity declined in adult life (Brooks ,1988; Laakso,1986; Mihalik et al.,1989; Vuolle ,1989). Positive impact of regular physical activity on physical, mental and social health and prevention of coronary risk factors was reported by some researchers (Raitakari et al.,1994; Haskell ,1996; Bouchard et al.,1994; Rimpela et al.,1983; Raitakari et al.,1995; Leino et al.,1996).

Increased risk of coronary heart disease and type 2 diabetes as well as with daytime sleepiness and waking with lack of freshness was found associated with short and long sleep durations (Ayas et al.,2003; Yaggi et al.,2006). A major risk factor for hypertension identified was short sleep duration (Gangwisch et al.,2006). Better sleep quality has been found to be positively related to higher levels of academic performance (Ahrberg et al.,2012; Dewald et al.,2010), better daily functioning and improved mood (Wolfson and Carskadon ,1998), lower risks of morbidity and mortality (Chennaoui et al.,2015) and the amelioration of pain symptoms (Davies et al.,2008).

Thus, assessing all the lifestyle factors of young adults can contribute towards understanding the current status of their overall health and designing preventive strategies wherever necessary.

Methodology

Study site- The study was conducted at JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Ooty road, Mysuru.

General survey- A questionnaire containing 36 questions was prepared. These questions were carefully designed based on the current trends of health and lifestyle in young adults using Google forms under the supervision of a faculty guide. Respondents were given relevant options for every question with kannada translation for to ensure better understanding as the study was being conducted in Mysore . Identity of students was

kept anonymous without collecting their name or e mail id. The questionnaire was then shared through WhatsApp with the degree students of JSS College, Ooty road, Mysuru from all the semesters of various combinations. The aim of the study, the components of the questionnaire and the steps to submit the responses were clearly explained to all the students encouraging them participate. Through convenience sampling and self-administered method, responses from 400 students were collected and the data was analysed using Excel (Nakheeb et al.,2015., Omidvar and Begum,2014)

Results and Discussion

The present study aimed to analyse the physical, mental and social health among young adults.

Out of 400 responses that were received, 57% (228) were female respondents and 43% (172) were male respondents. 18.6% (74) of them were 17 years old, 55.8% (223) of them were 18 years old, 16.6% (66) of them were 19 years old, 5.5% (22) of them were 20 years old, 1.8% (7) of them were 21 years old, 1% (4) of them were 22 years old and 0.7% (4) didn't respond. Thus, it was observed that the gender distribution of the sample was not balanced as it had majority of female respondents and the age distribution was heavily inclined towards 18 year old students followed by 17 year old students. Hence, the study mainly revolves around younger adults or late teens.

Key findings

272 students i.e., 68% of them belonged to rural areas and 128 students i.e., 32% of them belonged to urban areas as shown in fig 1.

Area

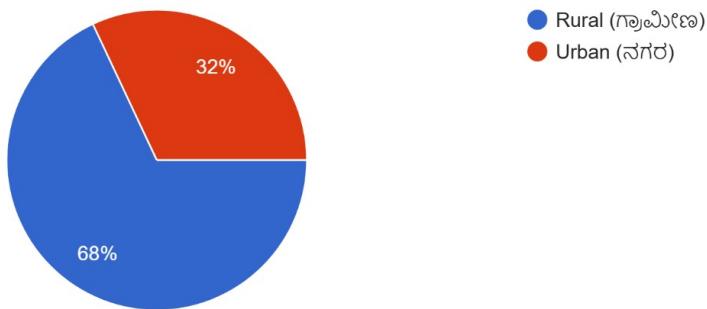


Fig 1: Area distribution among students

Results revealed that girls dominated the underweight and obesity class 1 category, where as boys dominated both normal BMI range category as well as overweight category and only boys were reported under Obesity class 3 category

(as depicted in fig 2). In agreement with a number of studies (Banwell et al., 2009; Boo et al., 2010; Gunes et al., 2012; Kahan, 2007; Yahia et al., 2008), the present study found that male sex was associated with overweight/obesity.

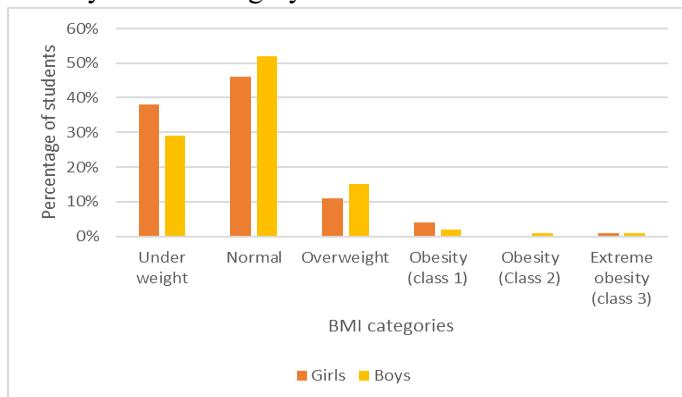


Fig 2: BMI of girls and boys

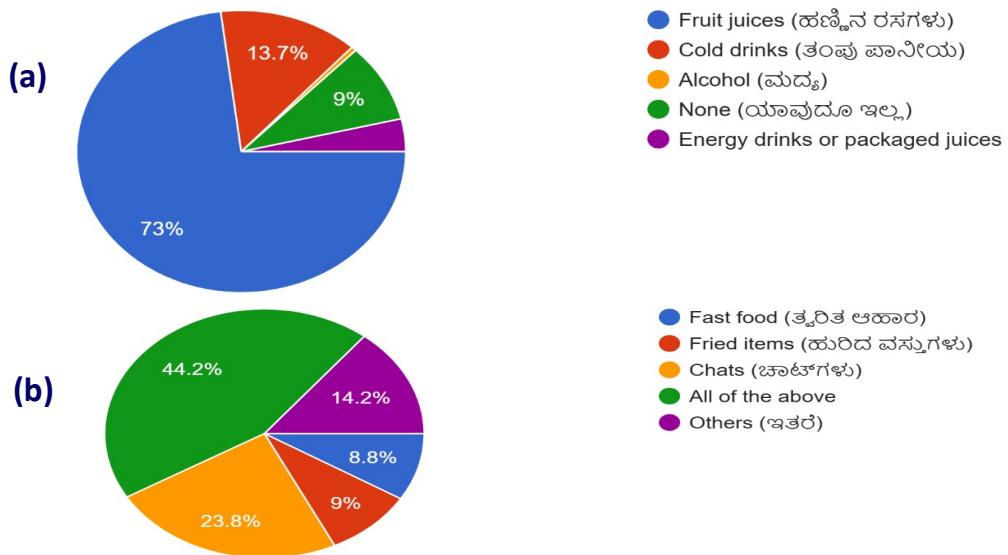


Fig 3: a-Choice of snacks, b- Type of drink preferred

Snacks preference indicated that majority of the students (44.2%) had wide preference for snacks with mixed choices followed by chats (23.8%) whereas some of them completely relied on fried items (8.8%) and fast food (9%) that indicates their unhealthy food choices. While fruit juice was the choice of majority of the students (73%), there were smaller proportion of them that chose cold drinks (13.7%), energy drinks or packaged juices(3.7%) which are known to be unhealthy options (as shown in fig 3). A study conducted in Nigeria on adolescents and young adults reported different results where drink and snack options

that are high in calories such as sugary carbonated drinks, cookies, cakes and pastries preferred over fruits and fruit juices (Olawuyi et al.,2020).

Similar to previous studies(Nguyen Ngoc LanAnh , 2021), it was found that majority of the students (47%) consume between 1-2L of water per day. However unlike the previous studies , the present study found that a good proportion of students (38%) consumed 3-4L of water where as rest drank more than 5L of water per day. Around 2% students with less than 1L of water consumption were also reported (as depicted in fig 4).

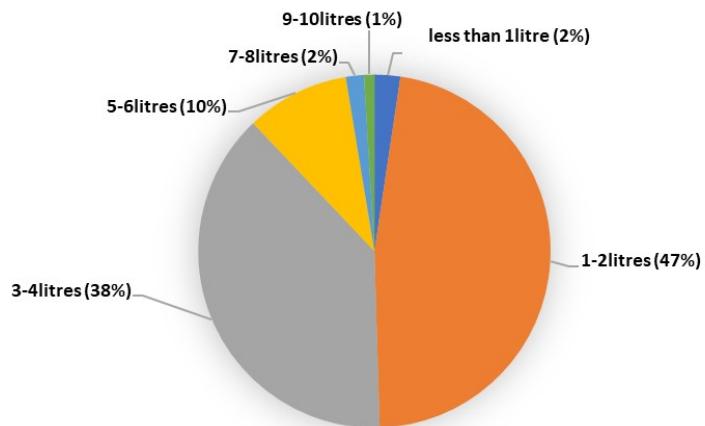


Fig 4 : Water intake per day (in litres)

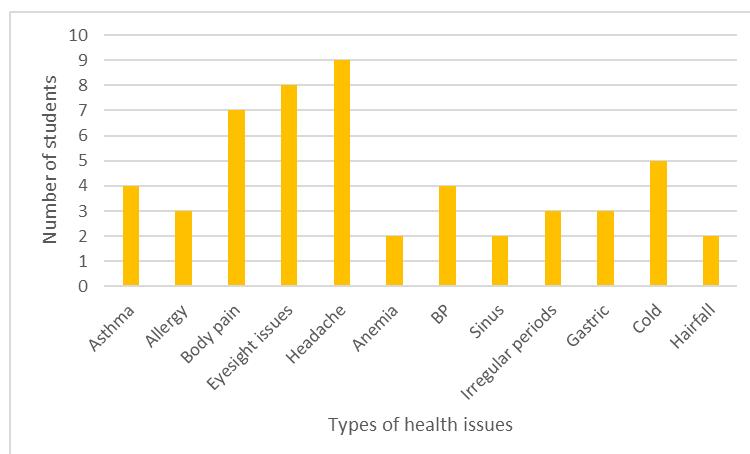


Fig 5: Health issues

Another key finding in this study was that health issues like headache, eyesight problems and body pain were prevalent (as shown in fig 5). These findings aligned with the previous studies. The prevalence of pain in any part of the body was reported to be 73.5% according to a study conducted among the university students of South

Korea (Kim et al.,2021) and headache was found to be a prevalent disorder among majority of the participants with 60.9% of participants experiencing headaches in the past year, and 54.6% having headaches within the last 30 days in a study conducted from various institutions in Chennai (Mahendran et al.,2024).

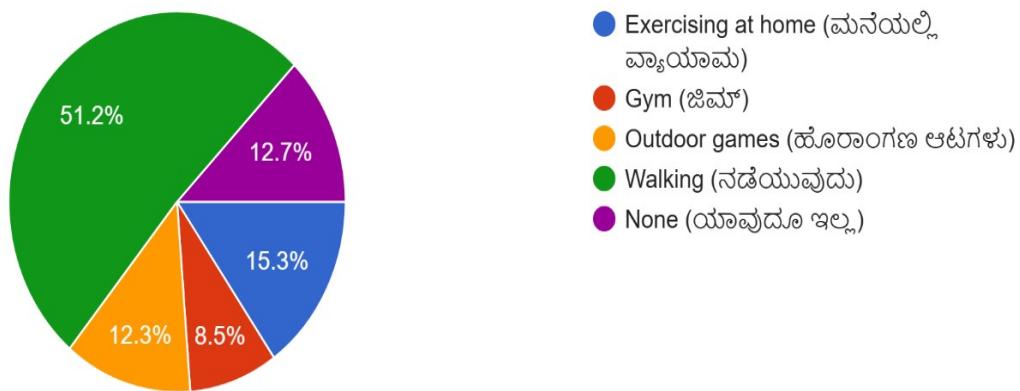
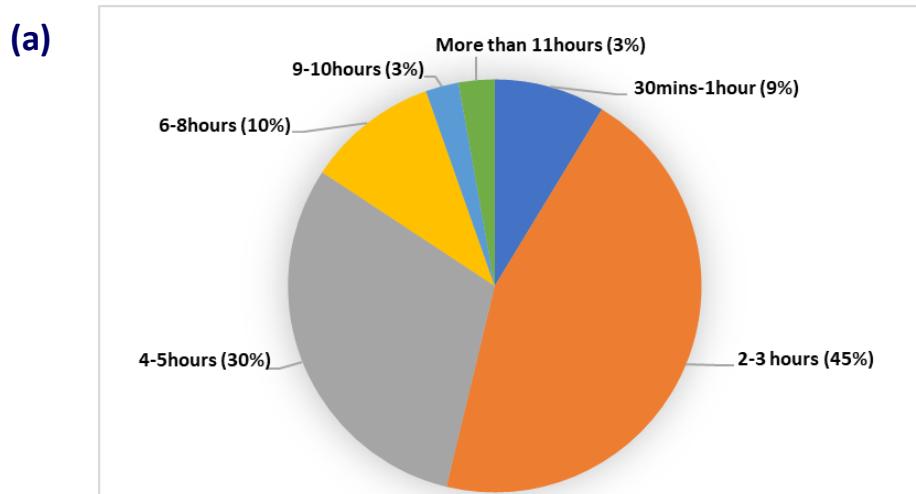


Fig 6 :Type of physical activity practiced on daily basis

As depicted in fig 6 majority of the students (51.2%) practiced walking whereas a small proportion(15.3%) of them engaged in no physical activity on daily basis others engaged in activities like outdoor games(12.3%) and gym(8.5%). Contrary to the results obtained in this study, a study conducted in an university of Nigeria reported poor physical activity practices among respondents where a large proportion of

respondents did not engage in any form of physical exercise (Olawuyi et al.,2020). This may be due to the rising awareness about fitness, that is pushing many young adults to engage in physical activities that contribute to their good health. But a few of them with completely sedentary lifestyle, face obesity, concentration issues and lack of socializing skills.



(b)

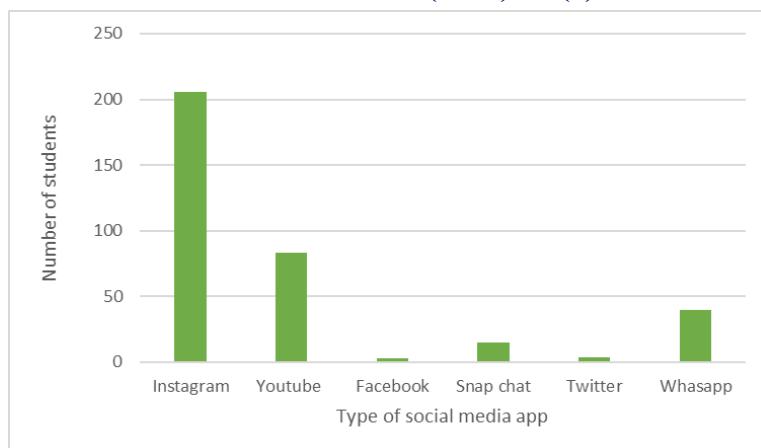


Fig 7 : a-Mobile usage per day, b-Social media app preferred

Results obtained for the duration of smartphone were similar to the previous results obtained in a study conducted in Tamil Nadu. Both the studies depicted that majority of the students were moderate users with 2-3hours of screen time, while a small proportion of students were heavy users spending at least 6 hours on their smartphone. However, the current study also reported students using smartphone for more than 9 hours per day (as shown in fig 7-a). There were very less students who used smartphone for only 30min-1hour (9%) unlike 13% students reported in the other study (Babu et al.,2024).

Instagram was the most preferred social media app, followed by you tube and WhatsApp (as shown in fig 7-b). Slightly different results were observed in a study conducted among university

students in Cyprus where the most preferred app was WhatsApp, followed by Instagram and YouTube (Tuncay and Bulut ,2020). But in both the studies among all the social media apps Instagram, YouTube and WhatsApp were the most popular ones.

Sleep duration analysis indicated that majority of the students (67%) slept for 7-8hours that is the recommended range, whereas next larger group of students slept for 5-6hours rest of them had shorter and longer durations (as shown in fig 8). These results indicated that majority of them were moderate sleepers. However in the previous studies, prevalence of short sleepers was reported where 58% of the participants slept for less than 7 hours (Sharifnezhad et al.,2023).

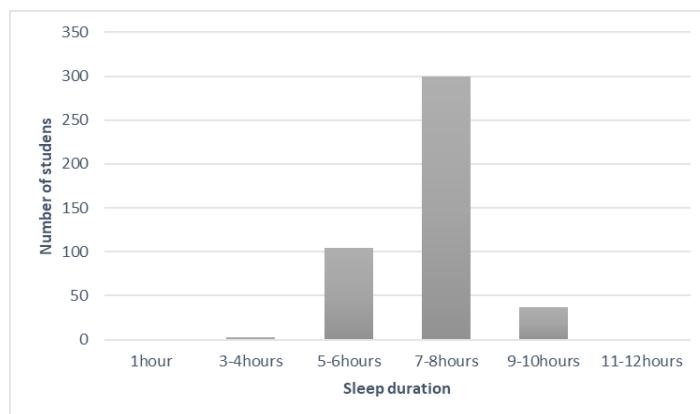


Fig 8 : Sleep duration

In the present study health issues related to mental health like unexplained physical pain or difficulty in sleeping (17.5%), loneliness and fear (26.3%), no interaction with family (5.2%) were reported in a few students while majority of them did not experience any of these issues (as shown in fig 9-a). However, in a previous study sleep disorders were observed in 46% of the participants at moderate levels, fear of being scared was observed in 35.6% of the participants and other issues like abdominal discomfort (35.6%), nervousness (39.2%) at mild levels were reported (Fernandes, et al., 2018). This comparison indicates that the mental health of young adults in the current study is better but students facing such

issues need to work on their mental health and environment.

Other findings include, most of the students bring comfortable sharing the problems with their friends and family (41.5%) but a small proportion of students(6.5%) preferred AI (as shown in fig 9-b), contrary to the results obtained in a study conducted in western Mumbai, where majority of the young adults felt comfortable talking to an AI chatbot for emotional needs compared to humans (Pandey ,2025). In the present study it was also observed that majority of the young adults preferred friends over parents to share their problems.

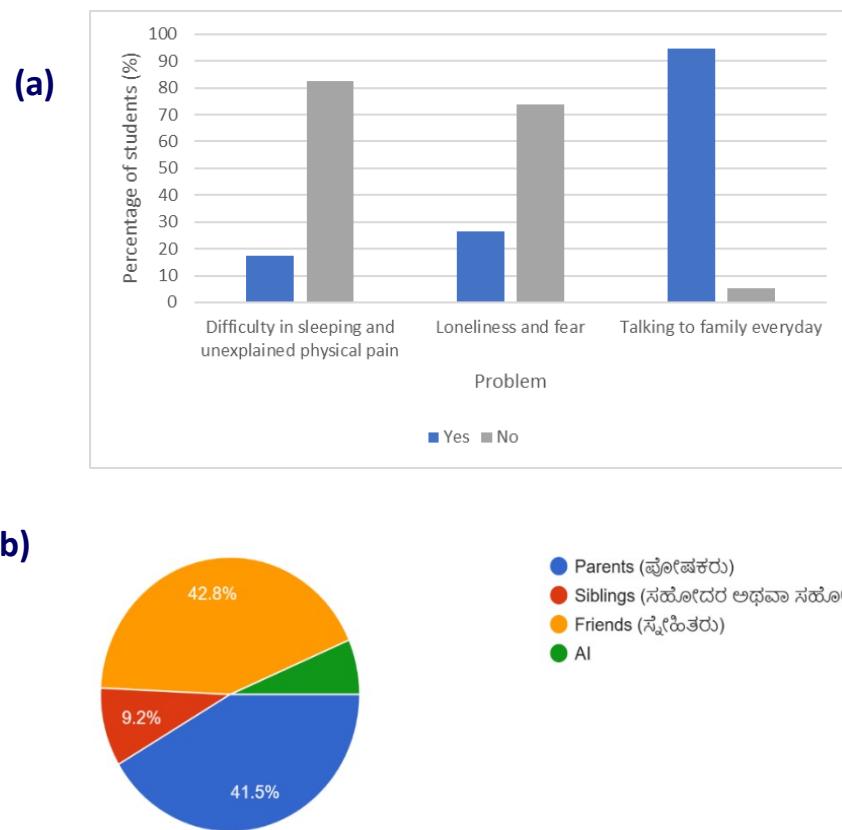


Fig 9: a-Type of issues contributing to mental health, b-Preference to share problems

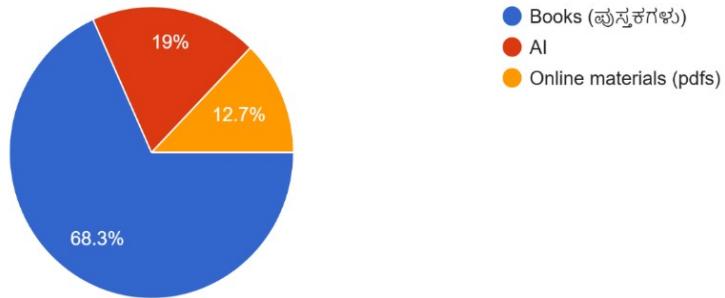


Fig 10: Choice of source for studying and better understanding

For better understanding and quick learning majority of them preferred printed books (68.3%) over online materials or AI (as shown in fig 10) whereas a study conducted among university students in a middle eastern country showed that majority, 74.6% students preferred e books whereas 66.7% preferred printed books (Amirtharaj et al.,2023). The present study also found that around 19% of students preferred AI compared to 12.7% students who chose online materials.

Thus, lifestyle of young adults is changing but due to the pressure to fit in perfectly in the society and inability to deal with stresses that come by their way, they land up making wrong choices.

Conclusion

The current study found both positive and negative aspects in the lifestyle of young adults. The positive aspects included habits related to water intake, physical activity, food preferences, sleep etc while the negative aspects reported were improper BMI, health issues, mental health, smartphone usage etc. These findings highlight the fact that today's young adults are aware of the current situation and thus many are shifting towards healthy lifestyle. But still there are many students who are neglecting their health retaining their unhealthy lifestyle. This increases the risk of many health issues for them in the future. Therefore, prioritizing healthy lifestyle choices among young adults for a healthy body and sound mind remains crucial.

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