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Introduction:

Healthy diet and eating patterns are crucial for children because habits developed during childhood stay for a lifetime. Especially for preschoolers, who have transitioned from being playful at home to more responsible beings during preschool activities, building healthy eating habits can go a long way. Healthy diet promotes good health which everyone knows. What people don't focus much on is how a nutritional diet impacts mental health outcomes among preschool children. Parents, being unaware of how diets can contribute to a happy mood in children, often don't work on gathering specific information about food elements that might boost up a child's psychological health. However, they try to their best ability to organize meal plans to build up children's bodies because human history has witnessed severe threats to children's survival due to food scarcity and malnutrition (Birch, 2007). Nutritional diets not only boost their body but also impact their mood. Kids who eat healthy tend to have lower mood disorders and depressive symptoms (O'Neil, 2019). Mental health conditions in childhood persist throughout life in most cases or influence the mental health in adulthood. Therefore, it is important to research the impact of diet plans on children's psychological health.

Initial inconsistency in research outcomes:

For this paper, I am considering several research studies and their results to dive into the different ways diet influences mood. Researcher Preeti Khanna, in "Nutritional Aspects of

Depression in Adolescents - A Systematic Review,” as a finding of her systematic reviews and meta-analyses, has confirmed that adults with healthy eating patterns have experienced less depression than those who were eating unhealthy and had irregular eating habits (Khanna, 2019). The evidence of positive correlation between healthy eating and better mental health outcomes in adults have sparked interest in researchers to carry on their investigation in younger participants. When researchers started studying younger participants like children and adolescents, the results were inconsistent initially. Some studies have shown positive associations between diet quality and high spirits among them while some didn't show significant correlation between the two. In Adrienne O'Neil's paper, “Relationship Between Diet and Mental Health in Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review,” he reviewed 12 studies in which the participants were children or adolescents aged 19 or below. In these studies, researchers assessed children's medical records and self or informant reports to analyze how dietary intake influenced internalizing disorders like depression, low mood, and the likes. For these studies, the set standards of healthy diet was higher intake of nutrient rich food. They assigned a higher intake of a fat saturated diet and processed food as an unhealthy diet. In these studies, there was evidence of correlation between unhealthy dietary intake and depressive mood. However, the positive correlation between healthy eating patterns and good mood was inconsistent (O'Neil, 2019). Despite the inconsistency, the evidence of unhealthy diet promoting depression sets a foundation for further inquiry into the positive correlation between healthy diet and sound psychological health in children. Adrienne, while analysing some other studies, mentioned that the participants might have subconsciously emphasized a healthy diet more than the unhealthy ones because of

social desirability bias which leads people to say things that are desirable to hear from them (O'Neil, 2019).

Studies supporting positive correlation between healthy diet and sound mental health outcomes:

Other studies had similar implications. Researcher Preeti Khanna also reviewed a set of 56 studies in her article, “Nutritional Aspects of Depression in Adolescents - A Systematic Review,” involving adolescents as participants and have found out that the nutritional status of diet right from the prenatal period of a mother is influential on sound mental health outcomes in children. Analyzing the results, we can conclude that the intake of saturated fats, sugary beverages, and snack-like food in childhood increases the likeliness of mental disorders in adulthood (Khanna, 2019). Roger A.H. Adan, in his article, “Nutritional psychiatry: Towards improving mental health by what you eat,” found evidence from his meta-analyses of studies that deficiencies of nutrients, mainly vitamins, resulted in lower cognitive abilities (Adan, 2019). Research has further approved that early life habits set the base for later life development and influences adults’ vulnerability to diseases. Therefore, brain development, impaired due to nutritional constraints, can lead to permanent impairment in later life. Taking care of nutritional supply to the body in early life can ensure sound cognitive and mental health capacities. Roger A.H. Adan, in his paper, also found from his meta-analyses that there is a strong correlation between increased consumption of fresh vegetables with higher levels of mental wellbeing (Adan, 2019). Farhangi Abbasalizad, along with her fellow researchers, conducted a study with 107 Iranian female adolescents and reported the results in her paper, “Mental health problems in relation to eating behavior patterns, nutrient intakes and health related quality of life among

Iranian female adolescents.” They found that unhealthy eating behaviours like snacking and meal skipping to be positive predictors of depressive disorders and low fat saturated diet to be negative predictors of hyperactivity disorders (Abbasalizad, 2018). Therefore, we see that several systematic reviews and meta-analyses have shown a strong association of healthy diet with mental wellbeing which should encourage parents to modify their meal plans based on the mental needs of children.

Results and limitations:

All of these studies imply that there is a potential relation between dietary intake and mental health outcomes. This paper doesn't discuss the specific elements of food and how food plans should be made for preschoolers; rather, it sets the foundation to inspire further research into the biological basis of mental health through diets people can control by creating healthy consumption habits among children. This paper encourages further research into what type of food and nutritional components benefit what aspect of mental health. If further research can be done on the nutritional impact of each type of food on different behaviour patterns, it will be convenient for parents to organize for kids meal plans rich with the nutrients they need more than other alternatives based on their behavioral patterns. Preschoolers become more active physically and mentally as they engage in different activities. To energize them, parents should plan a diet having a proportionate quantity of all essential nutrients. Therefore, it is important to have adequate knowledge about the nutritional contents and make the right choice of food intake right from a younger age so that such habits carry on to later age.

Conclusion:

Parents should take interest in this topic in order for their kids to grow not only a healthy

body but also a sound mind. They should reinforce their kids positively for healthy diets and negatively for processed food. Parents should oversee that kids follow their diet rules as they grow up and don't get externally influenced to eat junk food. Supervision of parents on a child's eating patterns will help children maintain sound mental health throughout their life and pass on the lessons to the future generations. Promoting spread of knowledge regarding this topic across generations can give rise to happier generations of people. Preschool teachers and educators at all levels can make a difference by informing kids and their parents of the beneficial mental outcomes of nutritional diet. With the motive to build a healthy nation, educators can play a big role in taking care of kids' diets while they stay at school. Since educators interact with kids on a daily basis and are able to say about the strengths and weaknesses of students, they can make informed decisions for children about what to eat based on their behaviours if they have adequate knowledge regarding this topic. Children are more likely to apply in their lives the suggestions of teachers as they rely on teachers to learn new pieces of information. What the educators suggest is likely to create a huge impact on the young minds and hence educators, especially at the preschool level, should educate themselves on this topic and create a healthy atmosphere for kids by instilling in them the idea of the right choice of food to build a happy mind.

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