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LIFESTYLE DETERMINANTS OF IRON-DEFICIENCY ANEMIA IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Relevance. Iron-deficiency anemia is an important public health concern that affects cognitive performance, physical health and mainly the overall well-being. It is highly prevalent among students which is majorly driven by their lifestyle habits and factors like poor dietary habits, high stress and in female menstruation. The key risk factors would include inadequate iron intake, skipping breakfast and frequent tea and coffee consumption. Although the students may know the materiality behind it, the pushing force of stress, academic pressures, limited self-care time and fluctuating schedule timing doesn't allow them to maintain a stable lifestyle.

Aim: to assess the lifestyle habits and factors of students in university students as a risk factor to development of iron-deficiency anemia.

Materials and methods. A cross-sectional study conducted among university students through the administration of a questionnaire via Google forms. The questionnaire contained questions about anthropometric data, dietary patterns and lifestyle habits.

Results and their discussion. A questionnaire conducted via Google Forms with a total of 40 participants revealed several important insights into the lifestyle determinants of iron-deficiency anemia among university students. Many respondents were female (77.5%), while males accounted for 22.5%. Although 72.5% of participants reported being aware of the symptoms of iron-deficiency anemia and dietary sources of iron, only 50% indicated that they regularly consume iron-rich foods, while the remaining half reported inconsistent or no intake. In terms of lifestyle factors, 42.5% of students frequently consumed tea or coffee during or immediately after meals, a habit known to inhibit iron absorption. Additionally, 52.5% of respondents did not engage in regular physical activity, and many reported sleeping less than 5–6 hours per night, which may contribute to fatigue and poor health maintenance. Among female participants, 14.3% reported menstruation, with 63.6% experiencing heavy menstrual bleeding, a significant risk factor for iron deficiency. 70% of students had previously been diagnosed with anemia or iron deficiency, indicating a high prevalence within this population. Despite 62.5% of respondents taking iron supplements or multivitamins containing iron, many continued to experience symptoms such as fatigue and weakness, suggesting possible issues with adherence, absorption, or overall management. Furthermore, while some students had undergone anemia testing within the past six months, others had not been tested recently, highlighting a gap in regular health monitoring.

Conclusions. The findings of this study indicate that iron-deficiency anemia is highly prevalent among university students and is strongly influenced by modifiable lifestyle factors. Despite a relatively good knowledge of the symptoms and dietary sources of iron, they fail to adopt consistent healthy practices. Unhealthy habits such as frequent tea or coffee intake with meals, low physical activity, and poor sleep contribute to reduced iron absorption and overall health. Heavy menstrual bleeding in female students further increases anemia risk. Continued symptoms despite supplement use may indicate poor adherence, absorption issues, or inadequate management. These findings highlight the need for better health education, regular screening, and targeted interventions to improve lifestyle habits and reduce iron-deficiency anemia among university students.