



Diet Preferences and Motivations of Female Adolescents: A Descriptive Study in Gorontalo City

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ABSTRACT

The increasing awareness of the ideal body shape among adolescents, driven by the influence of social media and social pressure, has led many teenage girls to follow specific diet trends despite lacking a thorough understanding of their nutritional needs and the long-term health implications. This study aims to identify the preferred diet trends among teenage girls and to examine their dietary patterns and motivations for dieting, with a focus on female students at SMPN 11 Gorontalo. The research employs a descriptive quantitative approach, with data collected through closed-ended questionnaires distributed to 30 female students in grades VIII and IX who reported having been on or currently being on a diet. The data were analyzed descriptively using percentages and presented in tables and graphs. The results show that the most commonly chosen diet among respondents is the low-carbohydrate diet (36.7%), followed by intermittent fasting (26.7%), portion reduction diets (20%), and vegetarian/vegan diets (10%). Their dietary patterns generally tend to restrict staple food intake and replace it with high-protein foods or fruits. However, this is not always accompanied by an understanding of balanced nutrition. The primary motivations for dieting were the desire to lose weight (43.3%), the influence of social media (30%), and peer encouragement (16.7%). Most respondents obtained their diet-related information from social media, while only a small proportion received information from parents or teachers. These findings suggest that external factors have a greater influence on adolescents' diet preferences than rational health considerations. Therefore, more structured and contextually relevant nutrition education efforts are needed within the school environment to help teenage girls develop healthy, balanced eating habits appropriate to their stage of growth.

Keywords: Diet, Teen Girls, Trends.

ABSTRAK

Meningkatnya kesadaran akan bentuk tubuh ideal di kalangan remaja, yang didorong oleh pengaruh media sosial dan tekanan sosial, sehingga banyak remaja putri memilih untuk mengikuti tren diet tertentu meskipun tanpa pemahaman yang cukup mengenai kebutuhan gizi dan dampak kesehatan jangka panjang. Untuk mengetahui preferensi tren diet yang berkembang di kalangan remaja putri serta mengkaji pola konsumsi dan motivasi mereka dalam menjalani diet, dengan fokus pada siswi di SMPN 11 Gorontalo. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui kuesioner tertutup yang disebarluaskan kepada 30 responden siswi kelas VIII dan IX yang mengaku pernah atau sedang menjalani diet. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif menggunakan persentase dan disajikan dalam bentuk tabel serta grafik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa jenis diet yang paling banyak dipilih oleh responden adalah diet rendah karbohidrat (36,7%), diikuti oleh intermittent fasting (26,7%), diet pengurangan porsi makan (20%), dan diet vegetarian/vegan (10%). Pola konsumsi yang terlihat umumnya cenderung membatasi asupan makanan pokok dan mengganti dengan makanan tinggi protein atau buah, namun tidak selalu disertai dengan pemahaman tentang keseimbangan gizi. Adapun motivasi utama menjalani diet adalah keinginan menurunkan berat badan (43,3%), pengaruh media sosial (30%), dan ajakan teman sebaya (16,7%). Mayoritas responden memperoleh informasi diet dari media sosial, sementara hanya sebagian kecil dari orang tua atau guru. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa preferensi diet remaja lebih didorong oleh faktor eksternal daripada pertimbangan kesehatan yang rasional. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan upaya edukasi gizi yang lebih terstruktur dan kontekstual di lingkungan sekolah agar remaja putri dapat membentuk pola konsumsi yang sehat, seimbang, dan sesuai dengan tahap pertumbuhannya.

Kata Kunci: Diet, Remaja Putri, Tren.

INTRODUCTION

Concerns about physical appearance and the ideal body shape have increasingly drawn attention among adolescent girls, especially with the growing popularity of diet trends widely circulated through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Basile, 2021). Adolescents, particularly females, are at a developmental stage that is heavily influenced by social and media environments, making them highly susceptible to diet-related information that may not align with the principles of balanced nutrition (Bai et al., 2021). As a result, many teenagers follow specific diet patterns not based on medical needs or professional nutritional advice, but rather due to social pressure, the desire to appear ideal, and the influence of public figures. In fact, a healthy diet should consider nutrient adequacy, energy balance, and individual-specific needs, particularly during the growth period (Zhan et al., 2025). Moreover, research shows that most adolescent girls engage in dieting without sufficient understanding of healthy eating patterns, which puts them at risk of metabolic disorders, anemia, or eating disorders (Sadie-Van Gijzen & Kotzé-Hörstmann, 2023).

In the local context, few studies have explored diet preferences among adolescent girls in the Gorontalo region, especially at the junior high school level. Nevertheless, initial observations in several schools in Gorontalo City indicate a tendency among female students to adopt extremely low-calorie diets, such as consuming only fruits and water for several days, or following "viral diets" from social media without supervision from adults or health professionals. Additionally, some students were found to skip meals, particularly breakfast and lunch, in an attempt to lose weight quickly. These practices not only indicate a lack of understanding of balanced nutrition but also reflect the social pressure that adolescents face in shaping their body image (Olstad et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the most commonly chosen types of diets, the dietary patterns followed, and the motivations behind the decision to diet among 30 eighth- and ninth-grade female students at SMPN 11 Gorontalo. This research not only describes general diet trends but also connects actual consumption patterns with the psychological and social motivations underlying diet choices. Based on this background, the research questions posed in this study are: What types of diets are most preferred by female students at SMPN 11 Gorontalo? What consumption patterns are practiced in relation to these diets? Moreover, what motivational factors drive adolescent girls to choose dieting?

The objectives of this study are to identify preferred types of diets, describe consumption patterns during dieting, and determine motivational factors influencing diet choices among adolescent girls. The innovation of this research lies in its contextual approach, which integrates consumption behavior and motivational aspects within a local framework, with a specific focus on early adolescence. This age group has not been extensively studied in Indonesia in relation to dieting. The findings are expected to contribute empirical insights that can serve as a foundation for schools and related institutions to develop more relevant and targeted nutrition education programs. Additionally, this study aims to enhance adolescent girls' understanding of the importance of healthy eating patterns and the risks associated with extreme dieting, thereby enabling them to make more informed and health-conscious lifestyle decisions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to provide an overview of the types of diets chosen, dietary patterns followed during dieting, and the motivations of adolescent girls in engaging with popular diet trends. This design was selected for its ability to present objective data based on structured measurement tools. The research was conducted at SMPN 11 Gorontalo, involving 30 female students from grades VIII and IX who were selected purposively, specifically those who had previously or were currently undergoing a diet. Data collection was conducted using a closed-ended questionnaire comprising three main sections: types and frequency of diets undertaken, eating habits during the diet (dietary pattern), and personal reasons or motivations for choosing a particular diet.

The questionnaire was designed in the form of multiple-choice questions and Likert scales, and was pre-tested to ensure content validity. Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaire was piloted with 20 students from a different junior high school with similar characteristics.

Content validity was assessed by two experts, a lecturer in public nutrition and a school counseling teacher, who evaluated each item for relevance and alignment with the measured indicators in the adolescent context.

Empirical validity was tested using the Pearson product-moment correlation to determine the strength of the relationship between each item and the total score. An item was considered valid if the calculated *r* value was greater than the *r*-table at a 5% significance level (0.05). To assess instrument consistency, reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha formula, where a value ≥ 0.6 indicated reliability. The pilot test results showed a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.78, indicating that the instrument had good reliability and was suitable for the main data collection.

The data used in this study are primary data, obtained directly from respondents through the questionnaire. All data were analyzed using descriptive quantitative methods by calculating the percentage and frequency of each response to identify trends in dietary preferences, consumption patterns, and motivational factors. The results were presented in tables and charts to enhance data visualization.

This study did not involve inferential hypothesis testing, as its primary focus was to describe the phenomenon rather than examine causal relationships between variables. The method was deemed appropriate to capture the behaviors and perspectives of adolescent girls toward dieting within the local context of Gorontalo City, particularly at the junior high school level.

This research obtained ethical clearance from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Gorontalo Ministry of Health Polytechnic, with approval number: DP.04.03/KEPK/83/2025. All participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's objectives and procedures, and gave their consent to participate via informed consent. Respondents' identities were kept confidential, and the data collected were used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS

This study involved 30 female students from grades VIII and IX at SMPN 11 Gorontalo as respondents. The basic characteristics of the respondents are an important aspect in understanding their social background and habits, which may influence their dietary patterns and motivations for dieting. The following are the results of data collection regarding the characteristics of these adolescent girls.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics.

Characteristics	Categories	Number (People)	Percentage (%)
Age	13 years old	9	30.0%
	14 years old	18	60.0%
	15 years old	3	10.0%
Living With	Parent	21	70.0%
	Family	9	30.0%
Average Duration of Social Media per day	< 2 hours	5	16.7%
	2–3 hours	7	23.3%
	> 3 hours	18	60.0%
Have you ever been on a diet	Yess	30	100%
	No	0	0.0%

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents are 14 years old (60%) and live with their parents (70%), indicating that they are in early adolescence and still under family supervision. Most respondents (60%) spend more than 3 hours per day accessing social media, indicating a high potential for exposure to digital diet content. All respondents (100%) reported having gone on a diet, showing that dieting has become a common phenomenon among female adolescents at SMPN 11 Gorontalo.

Table 2. Types of Diet Chosen by Respondents.

Types of Diets	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Low-Carbohydrate Diet	11	36.7%
Intermittent Fasting	8	26.7%
Reduced Portion Eating	6	20.0%
Vegetarian/Vegan	3	10.0%
Others	2	6.6%
Total	30	100%

Table 2 shows that a low-carbohydrate diet is the most popular choice among respondents (36.7%), followed by intermittent fasting (26.7%) and portion reduction (20%). Other types of diets, such as vegetarian/vegan (10%) and alternative diets (6.6%), are also followed, although in smaller proportions. These results suggest that social media trends have a greater influence on the dietary preferences of adolescent girls than medical recommendations, underscoring the importance of promoting nutritional literacy from an early age.

Table 3. Motivation for Diet.

Motivation	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Losing Weight	13	43.3%
To Look Attractive on Social Media	9	30.0%
Peer Influence	5	16.7%
Health Reasons	3	10.0%
Total	30	100%

Table 3 shows that the primary motivation for adolescent girls to follow a diet is to lose weight (43.3%), followed by the desire to look attractive on social media (30%). Other factors, such as peer encouragement (16.7%) and health reasons (10%), are also noted, although with smaller proportions. This data suggests that aesthetic and social factors have a greater influence on the decision to diet than medical considerations. These findings highlight the importance of education that balances health aspects and self-image, especially amid the strong influence of digital media on teenagers' body perception.

DISCUSSION

Most respondents are 14 years old and live with their parents. As many as 60% of respondents actively access social media for more than three hours per day, potentially making it a primary channel for exposure to diet information. All respondents admitted to having dieted at least once in the last 12 months. Table 1 presents the respondent characteristics in this study, comprising 30 eighth- and ninth-grade female students at SMPN 11 Gorontalo. Based on age categories, the majority of respondents are 14 years old, with 18 individuals (60.0%), followed by 13 years old, with nine individuals (30.0%), and only 3 respondents (10.0%) are 15 years old. This suggests that most respondents are in early adolescence, a crucial developmental stage in shaping body perception and consumption behaviors.

Regarding place of residence, 21 respondents (70.0%) live with their parents, while the remaining nine respondents (30.0%) live with relatives or guardians. This environmental factor has the potential to influence daily consumption patterns, including supervision of eating habits and dieting activities. Furthermore, in terms of daily social media usage, 18 respondents (60.0%) reported accessing social media for more than 3 hours per day, seven individuals (23.3%) use social media between 2 and 3 hours, and only five respondents (16.7%) access social media for less than 2 hours. The high intensity of social media use strongly indicates that the majority of adolescents have high exposure to information and diet trends widely spread on digital platforms. Lastly, all respondents in this study (100%) reported having dieted, whether for a short term or on an ongoing basis. This confirms that dieting trends have become part of the lifestyle among female adolescents at this school, highlighting the need for further research on consumption patterns and the motivations underlying such behaviors.

Regarding diet preferences, 11 respondents (36.7%) chose a low-carbohydrate diet, eight individuals (26.7%) followed an intermittent fasting regimen, six respondents (20%) reduced their

portion sizes, three respondents (10%) opted for vegetarian or vegan diets, and two respondents (6.6%) followed other diets. Table 2 presents data on diet types followed by the 30 respondents in this study. The results show that low-carbohydrate diets are the most popular among female adolescents at SMPN 11 Gorontalo, with 11 individuals or 36.7%. This diet type typically involves reducing or avoiding the consumption of rice, white bread, and sweet foods, which are considered primary contributors to weight gain.

The second most chosen diet is intermittent fasting, practiced by eight respondents (26.7%). This method typically involves regulating meal times, such as eating only within a 6– to 8-hour window and fasting outside that period. This pattern is quite popular among adolescents because it is often promoted on social media as a quick way to lose weight without strict food type restrictions (He & Gong, 2024). A total of 6 respondents (20.0%) opted to reduce portion sizes without adhering to specific dietary rules. This pattern typically involves eating smaller amounts than usual to reduce calorie intake (Zhang et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2023). Meanwhile, three respondents (10.0%) followed vegetarian or vegan diets, which avoid meat and animal products, substituting them with plant-based sources. Although less common among adolescents, this pattern is gaining attention due to many public figures promoting it as a healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyle (Neto et al., 2025). The "other" category, such as detox diets or eating only certain fruits, was followed by two respondents (6.6%) and represents diet patterns that are not medically standardized. Overall, this data indicates that diet preferences among female adolescents are strongly influenced by the popularity of these methods on social media and their ease of implementation rather than by nutritionist recommendations (Saul et al., 2025; Olstad et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of promoting accurate and contextual nutrition education within schools.

Consumption patterns during dieting revealed that 66.7% of respondents skipped breakfast, particularly those practicing intermittent fasting, and 53.3% replaced rice with other foods, such as fruits or high-protein options. However, only 13.3% of respondents maintained a balanced nutritional diet. The primary motivations for dieting are to lose weight (43.3%), social media influence (30%), peer encouragement (16.7%), and health reasons (10%). Table 3 shows various motivations that drive female adolescents at SMPN 11 Gorontalo to diet. The results reveal that the dominant motivation is the desire to lose weight, expressed by 13 respondents (43.3%). This indicates that perceptions of an ideal body shape greatly influence adolescents' decisions to regulate their eating patterns and follow dieting programs (Beers et al., 2025). The second-largest motivation is the desire to appear attractive on social media, expressed by nine respondents (30.0%). This phenomenon reflects significant social pressure and the influence of digital content on body image, primarily through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where beauty standards often depict a slim or idealized body (Berthy et al., 2025). Five respondents (16.7%) stated that they were motivated to diet due to peer encouragement. This suggests that the social environment plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' decisions about consumption patterns, particularly among students in the phase of identity formation who are easily influenced by social groups (Gisbert et al., 2025). Meanwhile, only three respondents (10.0%) stated that health reasons motivated their decision to go on a diet. This suggests that awareness of the importance of health is not yet a primary consideration for most adolescents when choosing to diet, compared to aesthetic or social motivations (Huang et al., 2025). Overall, the data show that dieting motivations among female adolescents are more driven by psychosocial factors and body image pressure influenced by digital media than by medical or health reasons (Tang et al., 2025). This highlights the importance of educational interventions in schools that not only teach balanced nutrition principles but also foster critical thinking regarding the influence of media and unrealistic beauty standards (Chen et al., 2025; van de Locht et al., 2024).

Hypothesis testing using Spearman's correlation test revealed a significant relationship between social media exposure and the choice of diet type, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.572$ and a p -value of 0.001. This means that the higher the frequency of social media use, the greater the tendency for adolescents to follow specific popular diet trends. Based on these results, it can be concluded that adolescent characteristics, especially age, living environment, and social media usage intensity, contribute to their mindset and behavior in choosing and

following diets. Diet trends among female adolescents are more influenced by appearance and social factors than health considerations, indicating the need for contextual and social media-based nutrition education in schools.

This study aims to identify diet trend preferences and understand consumption patterns and motivations among female adolescents at SMPN 11 Gorontalo. Based on the findings, most adolescents' diets primarily aim to lose weight (43.3%), followed by the desire to look attractive on social media (30%), peer encouragement (16.7%), and health reasons (10%). These findings clearly indicate that psychosocial factors, especially self-perception and social pressure from the environment and digital media, are strong drivers of dieting behavior in adolescents.

The motivation to lose weight as the primary driver aligns with previous studies, which indicate that adolescents, especially females, are often driven by the desire to achieve an ideal body according to societal beauty standards (Gan et al., 2025; Xuan et al., 2023). These standards are often influenced by social media, which presents a slim body as a symbol of success and attractiveness, supported by data showing that 60% of respondents use social media for more than 3 hours per day. This reinforces the concept that digital media exposure is a powerful social agent in shaping diet preferences and consumption patterns during adolescence (Van Mullem et al., 2025; Vernarelli & Poirier, 2020). Additionally, peer encouragement as a motivation confirms social cognitive theory regarding the influence of the social environment and behavior modeling. Adolescents within groups with specific dietary patterns tend to imitate and adopt these habits to achieve social acceptance (Solch-Ottaiano et al., 2025). However, the low percentage of health motivations suggests that nutrition education and awareness of the importance of health still need improvement, so that dieting is more oriented toward long-term well-being, rather than just appearance (Holmberg et al., 2025).

Supporting factors for dieting include high access and exposure to social media, which provides various information and motivation, as well as a social environment that supports or even encourages diet trends among peers (Ting et al., 2025). However, there are also inhibiting factors, such as a lack of proper understanding of balanced nutrition, limited professional health support, and the potential negative influence of social media spreading inaccurate or extreme diet information (Bakhshi et al., 2025).

The implications of this study underscore the need for integrated nutrition education interventions that effectively utilize social media to educate adolescents about healthy eating habits and proper consumption patterns (Yin et al., 2022). Moreover, it is crucial to develop programs that enhance awareness and provide psychological support to help adolescents cultivate a positive body image and resist harmful social pressures (Hassoun et al., 2022).

The limitations of this study include a relatively small sample size (30 respondents) and a limited scope, focusing on only one school in Gorontalo City, which means the results cannot yet be generalized to a broader population. Additionally, data collected using self-report methods are subject to social desirability bias and respondent subjectivity. Future research is recommended to expand the sample size to include greater age variation and to incorporate more in-depth quantitative and qualitative approaches, such as interviews and observations. Further studies could also investigate the specific impact of social media and the role of parents and teachers in promoting healthy dieting behaviors among adolescents.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that diet trends among female adolescents at SMPN 11 Gorontalo are predominantly driven by psychosocial motivations, such as the desire to lose weight and appear attractive on social media. The most commonly chosen diets are low-carbohydrate diets and intermittent fasting, while health reasons remain a minimal motivation, potentially posing long-term risks. It is recommended that the school strengthen nutrition education by emphasizing the importance of healthy eating patterns and positive body image, and involve parents in monitoring their children's consumption habits and limiting the influence of social media. For further recommendations, the Health Department and related organizations are advised to utilize social media to disseminate credible and engaging nutrition information targeted at adolescents. Further research with a broader scope and more in-depth approaches is also recommended to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of dieting on adolescent health.

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