

THE PROBLEMS OF IMPROPER NUTRITION AMONG YOUTH

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Abstract: *Nowadays, one of the pressing public health concerns is the increasing prevalence of improper nutrition among youth. In recent years, this issue has become a focal point not only for health professionals, but also for educators, policymakers, and society as a whole. Youth are at a unique developmental stage where healthy eating habits are critically important, as they lay the foundation for their physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being throughout adulthood. However, diverse socio-economic, cultural, and environmental changes have significantly modified the patterns and quality of nutrition among adolescents and young adults.*

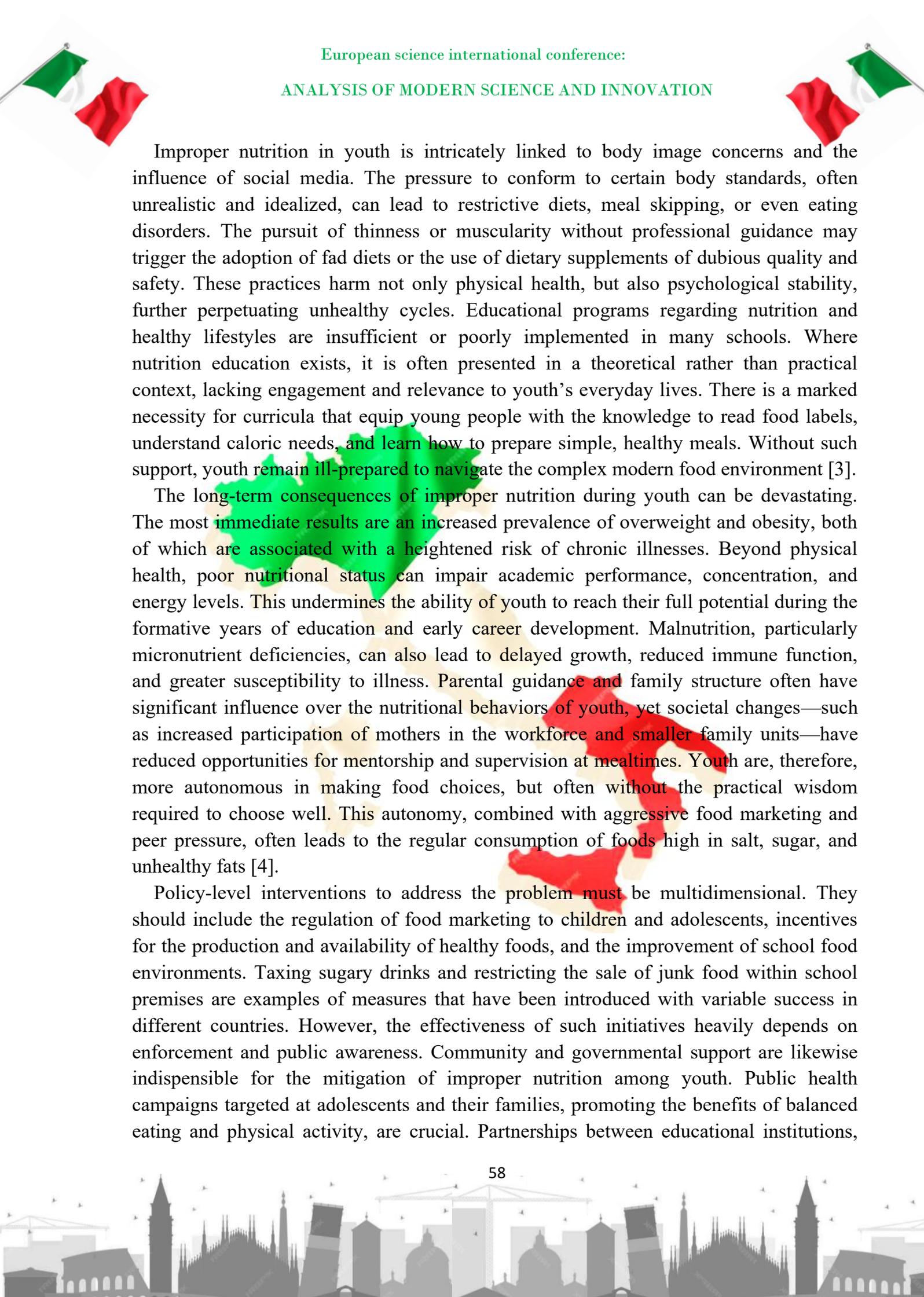
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The rapid urbanization, expansion of fast food chains, and the proliferation of processed food products have contributed to the dramatic shift in dietary behaviors observed in recent decades. Traditional diets, which were once balanced with grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, and proteins, are increasingly being replaced by convenience foods high in calories, saturated fats, sugars, salt, and various additives. The consumption of soft drinks, energy beverages, sweets, and salty snacks dominates the eating habits of many young people, who are often unaware of the long-term health consequences. The environments in which youth live today are saturated with food marketing. Advertisements targeting adolescents are widespread across all forms of media, including television, the internet, social networks, and even mobile applications. The marketing



strategies used often glamorize unhealthy foods, portraying them as essential ingredients of a ‘cool’ and enjoyable lifestyle. This exposure shapes preferences and leads to overconsumption of foods that do not meet nutritional recommendations, contributing to poor eating behaviors. At the same time, the academic workload of students often leaves them with little time or energy to prepare nutritious meals. With busy schedules and multiple responsibilities, young people may choose quick meal solutions that are rarely healthy. School and college canteens frequently offer fast food items, and vending machines loaded with sugary and fatty snacks are easily accessible on most campuses. Moreover, the declining tradition of family meals means that young people are less exposed to home-cooked foods which could otherwise promote healthier dietary patterns [1].

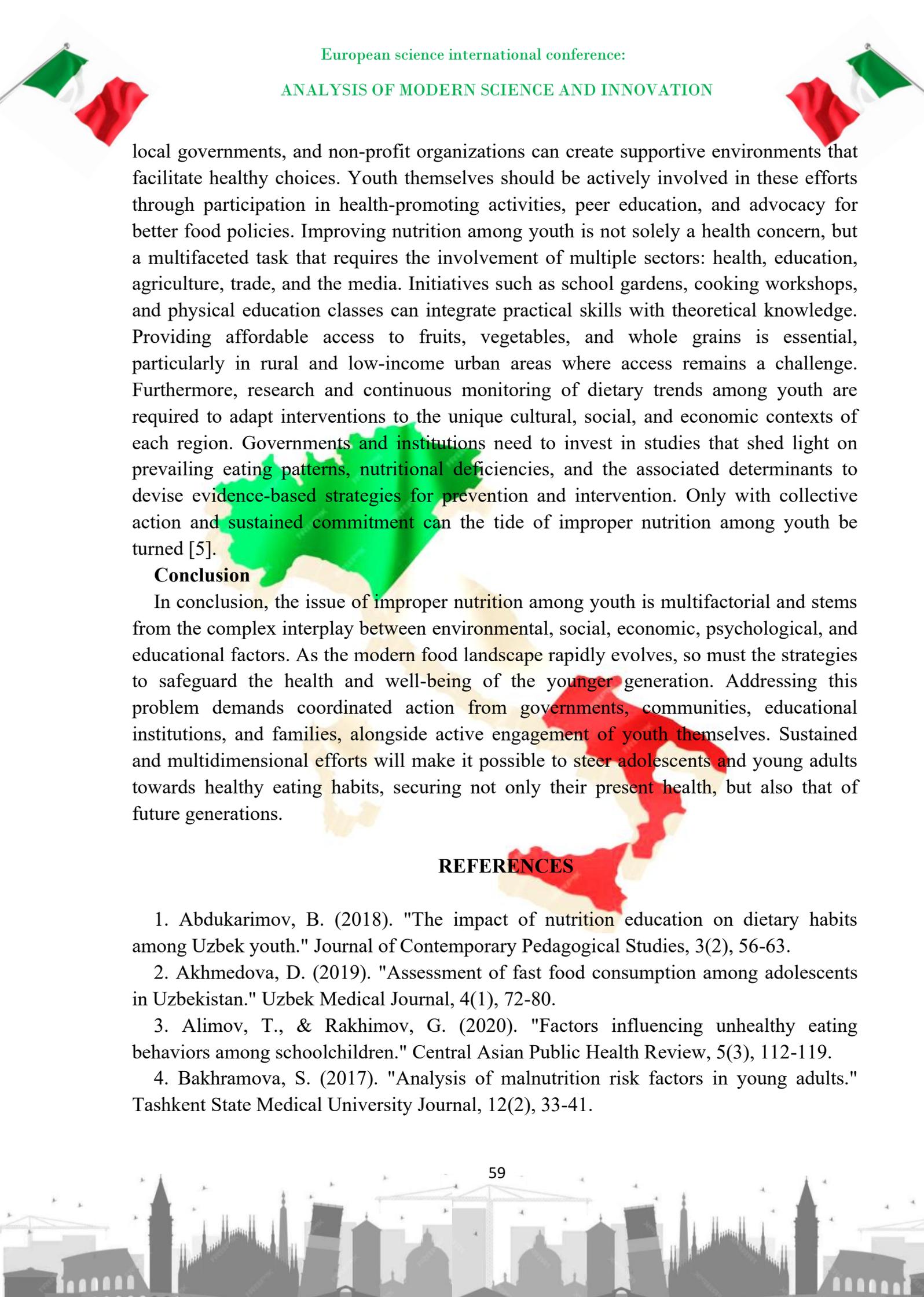
Peer influence is another important factor affecting eating behaviors in youth. The desire to socialize and fit in with peers can lead to eating habits that are not beneficial. For instance, group outings to fast food restaurants and choosing popular snacks together can reinforce unhealthy eating choices. The lack of nutrition education in many educational institutions further aggravates the situation, as the youth may not possess adequate knowledge or skills to make informed food choices that support their health and growth. Additionally, psychological factors play a substantial role in the emergence of improper nutrition. Stress, anxiety, and mood disorders are increasingly prevalent among adolescents and young adults, and many resort to eating as a coping mechanism. Emotional eating often leads to an excessive intake of unhealthy foods, which further negatively impacts both mental and physical health. In the long run, such habits can increase the risk of non-communicable diseases, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain forms of cancer. The growing use of digital devices and sedentary lifestyles associated with modern technology also play a significant part. Increased screen time is typically coupled with mindless snacking and less physical activity, creating a negative energy balance. Youth may be less likely to engage in sports or outdoor activities, further exacerbating the risks associated with poor dietary habits. Furthermore, insufficient sleep due to technology use disrupts hormonal regulation of hunger and satiety, which can stimulate overeating, particularly of calorie-rich foods. Economic disparities are another crucial aspect influencing nutritional habits among youth. Young people from low-income families often face limited access to fresh, healthy food due to affordability and availability. Inexpensive processed foods are often more accessible in such cases, leading to higher consumption of low-nutrient, high-energy products. Food insecurity can also foster unhealthy eating behaviors, as meals may be skipped or replaced with filling but nutrient-poor substitutes, negatively impacting growth and development [2].



Improper nutrition in youth is intricately linked to body image concerns and the influence of social media. The pressure to conform to certain body standards, often unrealistic and idealized, can lead to restrictive diets, meal skipping, or even eating disorders. The pursuit of thinness or muscularity without professional guidance may trigger the adoption of fad diets or the use of dietary supplements of dubious quality and safety. These practices harm not only physical health, but also psychological stability, further perpetuating unhealthy cycles. Educational programs regarding nutrition and healthy lifestyles are insufficient or poorly implemented in many schools. Where nutrition education exists, it is often presented in a theoretical rather than practical context, lacking engagement and relevance to youth's everyday lives. There is a marked necessity for curricula that equip young people with the knowledge to read food labels, understand caloric needs, and learn how to prepare simple, healthy meals. Without such support, youth remain ill-prepared to navigate the complex modern food environment [3].

The long-term consequences of improper nutrition during youth can be devastating. The most immediate results are an increased prevalence of overweight and obesity, both of which are associated with a heightened risk of chronic illnesses. Beyond physical health, poor nutritional status can impair academic performance, concentration, and energy levels. This undermines the ability of youth to reach their full potential during the formative years of education and early career development. Malnutrition, particularly micronutrient deficiencies, can also lead to delayed growth, reduced immune function, and greater susceptibility to illness. Parental guidance and family structure often have significant influence over the nutritional behaviors of youth, yet societal changes—such as increased participation of mothers in the workforce and smaller family units—have reduced opportunities for mentorship and supervision at mealtimes. Youth are, therefore, more autonomous in making food choices, but often without the practical wisdom required to choose well. This autonomy, combined with aggressive food marketing and peer pressure, often leads to the regular consumption of foods high in salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats [4].

Policy-level interventions to address the problem must be multidimensional. They should include the regulation of food marketing to children and adolescents, incentives for the production and availability of healthy foods, and the improvement of school food environments. Taxing sugary drinks and restricting the sale of junk food within school premises are examples of measures that have been introduced with variable success in different countries. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives heavily depends on enforcement and public awareness. Community and governmental support are likewise indispensable for the mitigation of improper nutrition among youth. Public health campaigns targeted at adolescents and their families, promoting the benefits of balanced eating and physical activity, are crucial. Partnerships between educational institutions,



local governments, and non-profit organizations can create supportive environments that facilitate healthy choices. Youth themselves should be actively involved in these efforts through participation in health-promoting activities, peer education, and advocacy for better food policies. Improving nutrition among youth is not solely a health concern, but a multifaceted task that requires the involvement of multiple sectors: health, education, agriculture, trade, and the media. Initiatives such as school gardens, cooking workshops, and physical education classes can integrate practical skills with theoretical knowledge. Providing affordable access to fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is essential, particularly in rural and low-income urban areas where access remains a challenge. Furthermore, research and continuous monitoring of dietary trends among youth are required to adapt interventions to the unique cultural, social, and economic contexts of each region. Governments and institutions need to invest in studies that shed light on prevailing eating patterns, nutritional deficiencies, and the associated determinants to devise evidence-based strategies for prevention and intervention. Only with collective action and sustained commitment can the tide of improper nutrition among youth be turned [5].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of improper nutrition among youth is multifactorial and stems from the complex interplay between environmental, social, economic, psychological, and educational factors. As the modern food landscape rapidly evolves, so must the strategies to safeguard the health and well-being of the younger generation. Addressing this problem demands coordinated action from governments, communities, educational institutions, and families, alongside active engagement of youth themselves. Sustained and multidimensional efforts will make it possible to steer adolescents and young adults towards healthy eating habits, securing not only their present health, but also that of future generations.

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