

# Sugary Drink Consumption, Cognitive Functioning, and Academic Performance: Implications for Social Work Practice among Undergraduates in Babcock University

**VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 2**  
**JUNE, 2026**

**ISSN: 9473-3482 (Online)**  
**ISSN: 3483-2823 (Print)**

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## Abstract

Over the years, sugary drink consumption, which is the intake of drinks such as sodas, sweetened teas, and energy drinks, has significantly increased. In fact, it has been discovered that the frequency of consuming sugary drinks has increased among students, and this pattern follows the dietary pattern of the Western world. This consumption has been characterized by drinks that have high sugar content and calories, without essential nutrients, with various health consequences, even impacting the academic performance of students. The study adopted the Health Belief Model to explain the behaviour of students in terms of sugary beverage consumption. The study adopted a descriptive, correlational research design, and data were collected through administered questionnaire copies. Cluster sampling was used to select 219 respondents from the undergraduate population in Babcock University. The data was descriptively analyzed and the results were presented in tables, charts, frequencies and percentages. The findings revealed that sugary drink consumption positively predicted poor dietary habits ( $\beta=0.742$ ,  $R^2=0.432$ ,  $t=12.851$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), poor cognitive function ( $\beta=0.890$ ,  $R^2=0.486$ ,  $t=14.337$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and poor academic performance ( $\beta=0.914$ ,  $R^2=0.516$ ,  $t=15.223$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), thus all null hypotheses were rejected. Hence, the study concluded that sugary drink consumption reduces cognitive function and academic performance of undergraduates. The study recommends that there is a need for integrated social work interventions to sensitize undergraduates on the impact of high sugar drinks consumption.

**Keywords:** Sugary Drink Consumption, Cognitive Function, Academic

## 1. Introduction

Globally, sugary drink consumption, which is the intake of drinks such as sodas, sweetened teas, and energy drinks, has significantly increased over the years. This rising trend has impacted dietary habits, academic performance, and broader societal shifts. On the one hand, sugary drinks are often defined by high sugar content and calories, without essential nutrients, with various health consequences, even impacting the academic performance of students.

The academic performance of students is largely an important predictor of their future success (Davies et al., 2020). There are various performance metrics and variables of academic achievement, which consist of the knowledge and skill acquisition, gender, heredity, and other factors such as family environment, personal habits, and lifestyle (Ren et al., 2022). Among the various lifestyle factors that impact the academic performance of students is dietary habits, of which the consumption of sugary drinks and drinks has gained increasing attention.

According to Li et al. (2025), it was discovered that the frequency of consuming sugary drinks as increased among students, and this pattern follows the dietary pattern of the Western world. In fact, Elkhatir et al. (2025) also established that there is an increase in the intake of high – energy food, which contains high calorie but low nutritional diet, affecting the cognitive function and physical health of students, which in turn affects the academic performance of students.

Furthermore, sugary drinks have been identified as correlated with cardiovascular illness such as obesity, type 2 diabetes and other metabolic syndrome (Anari et al., 2019). The physical health of students is impacted by their dietary habit/sugary intake, yet it impacts on the academic performance of students. Liu et al. (2022) established that students, who consume sugary drinks, soft drinks and carbonated drinks, are prone to excessive sugar intake which could cause chronic illnesses. However, beyond the association between sugary intakes their association with chronic diseases, poor dietary habit negatively impacts the academic performance of students. The work of Zafar (2025) established that sugar-sweetened drinks are primary sources of sugars in the diet, however, they supply empty calories that contribute poorly to the quality of a person’s diet and increase the risk of health issues. Furthermore, Burrow et al. (2017) opined that the lower intake of sugary drinks is often associated with higher academic performance of students. This informs the supposition that higher consumption of sugary drinks impact negatively on the academic performance of students.

Finally, it was established in the works of Anjum et al. (2018) that the consumption of sugary drinks and drinks have a positive correlation with cognitive disorders, and eventually lead to impaired brain function. Put differently, students who consume high-sugar drinks have low cognitive ability. This agrees with the assertion made by Liu et al. (2022) that antioxidants found in a proper, healthy diet reduce the risk of cognitive disorders in individuals.

### Objectives of the Study

To examine the effect of sugary drink consumption on poor dietary habit of undergraduate students in Babcock University.

To examine the effect of sugary drink consumption on poor cognitive function of undergraduate students in Babcock University.

To examine the effect of sugary drink consumption on poor academic performance of undergraduate students in Babcock University.

## 2. Literature Review

### Relationship between Sugar drinks and Cognitive Function and Academic Performance

Several studies have considered the association between sugar drink consumption and cardiometabolic outcomes and how it relates to cognition. Zafar et al.(2025), in their cross sectional study on sugar-sweetened drinks consumption and associated health risks awareness among university students in Kuwait, it was discovered that regular soda was the most consumed sugar sweetened drinks. The study also established that 42% of students consume the drink between 5 and times weekly while 32% consuming it daily; however, the median daily sugar intake from soda alone was 38g. Although the study identified that males consume sugary drinks than females, however, females

are frequent consumers of sugary drinks; 34% of students were classified as high-sugar consumers (Zafar et al., 2025).

According to Ge et al., (2025), it was revealed comparatively that females exhibited a higher prevalence of high sugary drinks consumption compared to males in the years 1990 and 2021 respectively. The prevalence among females was 6.96% (95% UI, 5.34 to 7.85) in 1990 which increased to 11.72% (95% UI, 9.40 to 12.96) in 2021 while the prevalence for males was 6.20% (95% UI, 4.94 to 6.99) in 1990 and increased to 10.54% (95% UI, 8.65 to 11.65) in 2021.

In the study by Crichton (2016), it was discovered that greater intakes of total sugars, including added sugars and SSB has shown to be correlated with poorer performance of individuals on the Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE), especially among middle aged to elderly adults (Crichton, 2016). Likewise, the work of Ren et al., (2022), it was established from the analysis of 9251 Chinese students who were selected via multistage sampling. that frequent sugary drinks consumers had significantly lower total scores in Chinese (-0.864), math (-2.164), and English (-1.836), compared to those for whom confounders of habits were adjusted.

According to a 2022 meta-analysis of 13 studies (n=242,014) by Liu et al. (2022), it was discovered that SSB intake is related with higher odds of cognitive disorders (OR=1.17, 95% CI: 1.05-1.29), specifically for cohort studies on the consumption of sugar-sweetened soft drinks among middle-aged/elderly adults. The study further revealed that participants confirmed that SSB intake increases cognitive disorder risk, which informs the need to reduce intake. Longitudinal data from the Maine-Syracuse Study revealed that sugar-sweetened soft drinks are associated with poorer executive function and global cognition (Crichton et al., 2016). NHANES analysis (2022) tied specific SSBs like energy drinks to lower cognitive scores across adolescents, independent of demographics (Yan et al., 2022).

In an Australian study, it was discovered that students consuming more SSBs showed reduced test scores in reading, writing, numeracy, and grammar. Higher SSB intake correlated with inferior reading, numeracy, and grammar scores. This agrees with the work of Li et al. (2020) who identified that teens who frequently consume SSB had poorer grades (Li et al., 2020). Finally, Ren et al. (2022) established that student with high SSB frequency lowers total scores ( $\beta=-4.902$ ) in 9,251 juniors, thus, requiring school interventions.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **Health Belief Model**

The Health Belief Model (HBM) was designed in the 1950s by social psychologists like Hochbaum, Rosenstock, and Kegeles. The model explains health-related behaviors through the perception of individuals about threats and benefits of that particular behaviour. The model relies on basic tenets: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues to action and self-efficacy. This implies that that there is low perceived severity, susceptibility and barriers, while perceived benefit is low, thus the rate of consumption is high among undergraduates. Furthermore, Health Belief Model posits that people adopt preventive actions or stop an action when they believe that there is an associated health threat. This is often prompted by cues like education or symptoms.

By applying HBM to the study, students consume sugary drinks because they do not perceive the drinks as harmful to their cognition, brain function, dietary habits and academic performance. Students may underestimate susceptibility to sugar-induced cognitive impairments, however, in order to reduce perceived severity, susceptibility, and benefits of sugary drinks, and increase perceived barriers to high consumption of sugar drinks. Hence, social workers need to be empowered to conduct counseling, group interventions, sensitization and education for undergraduates to reduce the high consumption and reliance on sugary drinks in academic environment. The intervention of social workers can intervene by conducting workshops to heighten perceived severity to further dissuade undergraduate students from high sugary drinks consumption.

### **4. Methods**

The study employed a descriptive research design through a quantitative approach. The data was primarily collected from undergraduates in the Department of Mass Communication, Babcock

University, Ilishan-Remo in Ogun state, Nigeria. The respondents were selected for the study using a multi-stage cluster sampling technique. The first stage of the sampling technique consists of the Ten (10) schools at Babcock University from which the Adeleke School of Social Sciences and College of Postgraduate Studies. At the end of the first stage, the Veronica Adeleke School of Social Sciences was selected at random. The Veronica Adeleke School of Social Sciences consists of Four (4) departments which are departments of Economics, Political Science and Public Administration, Sociology and Social Work, and Mass Communication. In the second stage, the department of Mass communication was randomly selected from the Veronica Adeleke School of Social Sciences. The quantitative data was obtained through the questionnaires administered. The number of respondents from the department is 219 students, from whom data was collected. The data collected were subjected to descriptive and inferential analysis. Data was checked for missing variables to ensure the validity of the generated data. Consent was obtained from participants before data collection.

## 5. Results

Socio-demographic information of the respondents

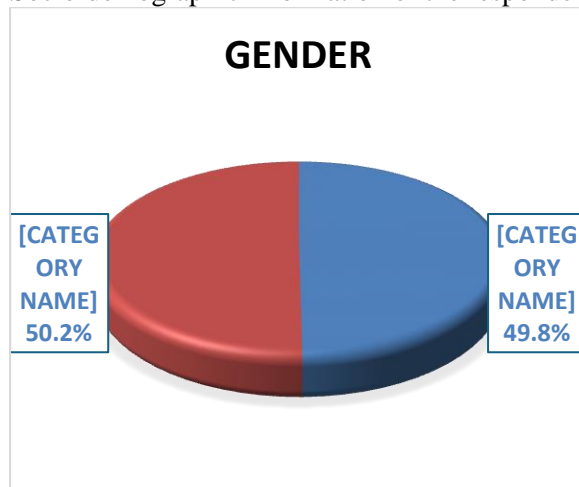


Fig 1. Gender of the respondents

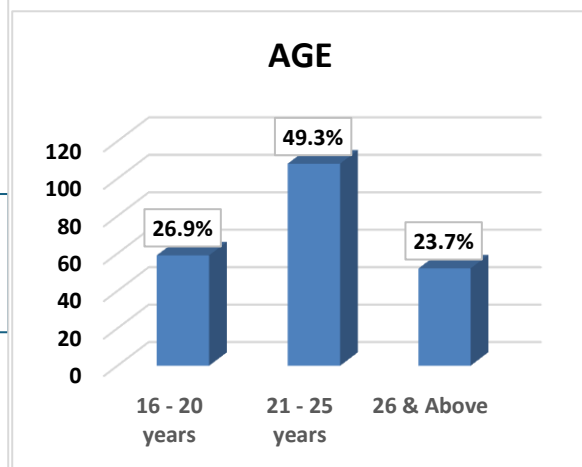


Fig 2. Age of the respondents

Fig 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents: 50.2% of the respondents are females, while 49.8% are males. With regards to the age distribution of the respondents, the higher proportion (49.3%) of the respondents are aged between 21 and 25 years, 26.9% are within the age 16 – 20 years while 23.7% are 26 years and above.

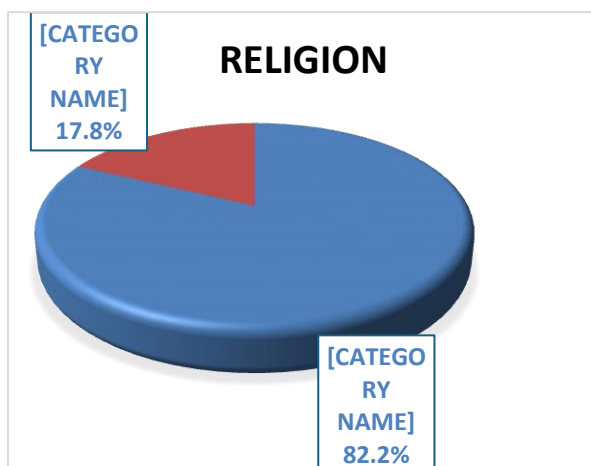


Fig 3. Religion of the respondents

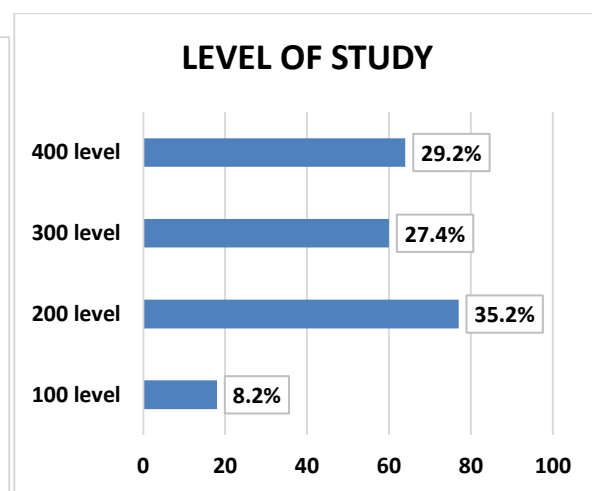


Fig 4. Level of study of respondents

A vast majority (82.2%) of respondents are Christians while 17.8% practice the Islam religion. A higher proportion of the respondents are in 200 level (35.2%) while a significant proportion (29.2%) of the respondents are 400 level. 27.4% of the respondents are in 300 level while the remaining 8.2% of the proportion are in 100 level. The ethnic distribution of the respondents

shows that 42.5% are Yoruba, 31.1% are Igbos, 16.4% are Igbos while those who are of other ethnicities are 10.0%.

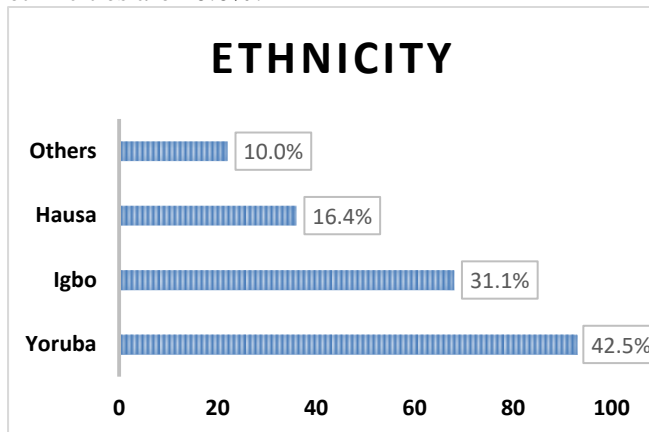


Fig 5. Ethnicity of the respondents

### Hypothesis One

Sugary drink consumption does not significantly affect the poor dietary habits of undergraduate students.

Table 1: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on the Sugary Drink Consumption on Poor Dietary Habits of Undergraduates.

Model Two $Y_1 = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \mu_1$		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.616	.677		5.338	<.001
	Sugary Drink Consumption	.742	.058	.657	12.851	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Poor Dietary Habit (DH)  
 b. R= 0.657a      R<sup>2</sup>= 0.432      T(219) = 12.851      P=0.000<0.05

The table above shows the simple linear regression analysis on the effect of sugary drink consumption on poor dietary habits of undergraduates in Babcock University. From the table above, the findings of the analysis revealed that sugary drink consumption with  $\beta = 0.742$ ,  $t = 12.851$ ,  $p < 0.05$  has a positive and significant effect on poor dietary habits of undergraduates in Babcock University. The R value of 0.657 indicates that sugary drink consumption has a moderate but positive relationship with poor dietary habits of undergraduates in Babcock University. An R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.432 shows that 43.2% of the differences observed in the poor dietary habits of undergraduates in Babcock University was caused by sugary drink consumption while the remaining 56.8% was because of other variables that were not captured in the model. From this, the simple regression model is expressed as:

$$DH = 3.616 + 0.742 SC + \mu_i \dots\dots \text{Eq 1 (Predictive Model)}$$

Where:

DH = Poor Dietary Habits

SC = Sugary Drink Consumption

From the equation above, the regression model shows that when sugary drink consumption is held at zero, poor dietary habit will still be 3.616. This implies that even without sugary drink consumption, poor dietary habits will still be noticed. Hence, since the model is significant, both the predictive and prescriptive models are the same. This result further shows a high level of statistical significance with P value less than 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ). This means that sugary drink consumption has a significant effect on poor dietary habits of undergraduates in Babcock University. Hence, the null hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>) which states that sugary drink consumption does not have significant effect on poor dietary habits of undergraduates in Babcock University is rejected.

### Hypothesis Two

Sugary drink consumption does not significantly affect poor cognitive function of undergraduate

students.

Table 2: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on the Sugary Drink Consumption on Poor Cognitive Function of Undergraduates.

Model Two $Y_2 = \alpha_0 + \beta_2x_2 + \mu_2$		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.436	.729		-.599	.550
	Sugary Drink Consumption	.890	.062	.697	14.337	<.001
a. Dependent Variable: Poor Cognitive Function (CF)						
b. R= 0.697a      R <sup>2</sup> = 0.486      T(219) = 14.337      P=0.000<0.05						

The table above shows the simple linear regression analysis on the effect of sugary drink consumption on poor cognitive function of undergraduates in Babcock University. From the table above, the findings of the analysis revealed that sugary drink consumption with  $\beta = 0.890$ ,  $t = 14.337$ ,  $p < 0.05$  has a positive and significant effect on poor cognitive function of undergraduates in Babcock University. The R value of 0.697 indicates that sugary drink consumption has a moderate but positive relationship with poor cognitive function of undergraduates in Babcock University. An R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.486 shows that 48.6% of the differences observed in the poor cognitive function of undergraduates in Babcock University was caused by sugary drink consumption while the remaining 51.4% was because of other variables that were not captured in the model. From this, the simple regression model is expressed as:

$$CF = -0.436 + 0.890 SC + \mu_i \dots\dots \text{Eq 2 (Predictive Model)}$$

Where:

CF = Poor Cognitive Function

SC = Sugary Drink Consumption

From the equation above, the regression model shows that when sugary drink consumption is held at zero, poor cognitive function will still be -0.436. This implies that even without sugary drink consumption, poor cognitive function will still be noticed. Hence, since the model is significant, both the predictive and prescriptive models are the same. This result further shows a high level of statistical significance with P value less than 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ). This means that sugary drink consumption has a significant effect on poor cognitive function of undergraduates in Babcock University. Hence, the null hypothesis (H<sub>02</sub>) which states that sugary drink consumption does not have significant effect on poor cognitive function of undergraduates in Babcock University is rejected.

**Hypothesis Three**

Sugary drink consumption does not significantly affect poor academic performance of undergraduate students.

Table 3: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on the Sugary Drink Consumption on Poor Academic Performance of Undergraduates.

Model Two $Y_3 = \alpha_0 + \beta_3x_3 + \mu_3$		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.353	.705		3.339	<.001
	Sugary Drink Consumption	.914	.060	.719	15.223	<.001
a. Dependent Variable: Poor Academic Performance (AP)						
b. R= 0.719a      R <sup>2</sup> = 0.516      T(219) = 15.223      P=0.000<0.05						

The table above shows the simple linear regression analysis on the effect of sugary drink consumption on poor academic performance of undergraduates in Babcock University. From the table above, the findings of the analysis revealed that sugary drink consumption with  $\beta = 0.914$ ,  $t = 15.223$ ,  $p < 0.05$  has a positive and significant effect on the poor academic performance of undergraduates in Babcock University. The R value of 0.719 indicates that sugary drink consumption has a high and positive relationship with poor academic performance of undergraduates in Babcock University. An

R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.516 shows that 51.6% of the differences observed in the poor academic performance of undergraduates in Babcock University was caused by sugary drink consumption while the remaining 48.4% was because of other variables that were not captured in the model. From this, the simple regression model is expressed as:

$$AP = 2.353 + 0.914 SC + \mu_i \dots\dots \text{Eq 3 (Predictive Model)}$$

Where:

AP = Poor Academic Performance

SC = Sugary Drink Consumption

From the equation above, the regression model shows that when sugary drink consumption is held at zero, poor academic performance will still be 2.353. This implies that even without sugary drink consumption, poor academic performance will still be noticed. Hence, since the model is significant, both the predictive and prescriptive models are the same. This result further shows a high level of statistical significance with P value less than 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ). This means that sugary drink consumption has a significant effect on poor academic performance of undergraduates in Babcock University. Hence, the null hypothesis (H<sub>03</sub>) which states that sugary drink consumption does not have significant effect on the academic performance of undergraduates in Babcock University is rejected.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of the study showed that there are significant associations between sugary drink consumption (SC) and key outcomes such as poor dietary habits, poor cognitive function and poor academic performance of undergraduates at Babcock University. Existing literature typically links sugary drinks consumption to cognitive deficits and poorer academic performance (Ren et al., 2022; Crichton, 2016). Simple linear regressions demonstrated strong effects: SC positively predicted poor dietary habits ( $\beta = 0.742$ ,  $R^2 = 0.432$ ,  $t = 12.851$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), poor cognitive function ( $\beta = 0.890$ ,  $R^2 = 0.486$ ,  $t = 14.337$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and poor academic performance ( $\beta = 0.914$ ,  $R^2 = 0.516$ ,  $t = 15.223$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), rejecting all null hypotheses. These results suggest that sugary drink consumption moderately influence poor dietary patterns and cognitive functions and impact academic performance.

The regression models account for 43.2-51.6% of variance in the 3 key outcomes which leaves 48.4-56.8% as other unmeasured factors, hence, the positive  $\beta$  coefficients challenge meta-analytic evidence (e.g., OR=1.17 for cognitive risks) and studies like Ren et al. (2022;  $\beta = -4.902$  for academic scores).

### Implication for Social Work Practice

The findings of the study reflect the implications for the need to educate and sensitize students and the general public on the effect of consuming sugary drinks and drinks on cognition; and for students how it impacts academic performance. These programs can be better conducted with scientific results and reports that establish the impact of sugary drinks consumption. Social workers in educational and community settings should also focus on interventions that seeks to reduce the consumption of sugary drink consumption among students (by providing empirical evidence), given its established negative links to cognitive function and academic performance. Likewise, social workers need to initiate programs that integrate nutrition education into school-based programs, such as group counseling sessions or family workshops, which can help students and the general public to reduce sugary drink intake by promoting healthier drink alternatives.

Furthermore, social workers can advocate and address broader social determinants of sugary drink consumption, especially among students, including peer influences and socioeconomic barriers. Also, social workers can conduct needs assessments and more research in high-risk communities and partner with public health agencies for targeted interventions and campaigns, and engage health practitioners to mitigate sugary drink consumption-related conditions. This would allow social workers to enhance student well-being and also monitor longitudinal impacts, while advocating for policy.

## 7. Conclusion

This study examined the effect of sugary drink consumption on poor dietary habits, poor cognitive functioning, and poor academic performance among undergraduate students in Babcock

University. The study found that there is a significant influence of sugary drinks consumption on poor dietary habits, poor cognitive functioning, and poor academic performance of students. The regression analyses revealed that the consumption of sugary drinks accounted for a substantial proportion of the variation observed in these outcomes, with a moderate-positive relationship with poor dietary habits and poor cognitive function while high-positive relationship with poor academic performance. This implies that students who consume more sugary drinks are more likely to experience unhealthy dietary patterns, reduced cognitive functioning, and poorer academic performance.

The application of the Health Belief Model explained the motivation behind the high consumption of sugary drink, especially as it pertains to relation to their perception of risk, benefits, and barriers associated with reducing sugary drink intake. However, addressing this issue requires coordinated efforts involving social workers, educational institutions, health professionals, and policymakers to promote healthier dietary behaviors and improve student well-being and academic success.

## **8. Recommendation**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Universities should plan and organize regular health education and awareness campaigns to educate students on the health and academic consequences of excessive sugary drink consumption and promote sessions on the relationship between nutrition, cognitive functioning, and academic performance.

Nutrition education and behavioral change strategies should be incorporated into counseling services, orientation programs, and student development initiatives that are handled by social workers and student support in order to encourage healthier beverage choices among undergraduates.

The management should promote the availability and accessibility of naturally produced drink that are healthier for student population within campus cafeterias, vending machines, and recreational centers. Educational institutions should design and implement policies that regulate the sale and advertisement of high-sugar drinks within the university environment, and seek partnerships with health agencies to support healthy dietary and lifestyle initiatives.

Social workers should engage parents, guardians, and community stakeholders through workshops and outreach programs to reinforce healthy dietary practices and reduce the normalization of frequent sugary drink consumption among young adults.

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