

# Undergraduate Students Are Not Wooed by Fad Diets

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## Objectives

1. Identify factors linked to health and nutrition in Oakland University Undergraduate students
2. Characterize student's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding fad diets
3. Assess the association between fad diets and health in this young adult sample

## Introduction

### Why target undergraduate students?

- They are at a major transition period marked by increased dietary independence
- Behaviors established during this period can influence lifelong health

### Known health impactors of undergraduate students:

- Time constraints, financial constraints, food knowledge, social pressure<sup>1</sup>

### What is a fad diet?

- A diet that is popular for a short time
- Not aligned with standard dietary recommendations
- Typically makes empty promises including rapid weight loss or health improvements

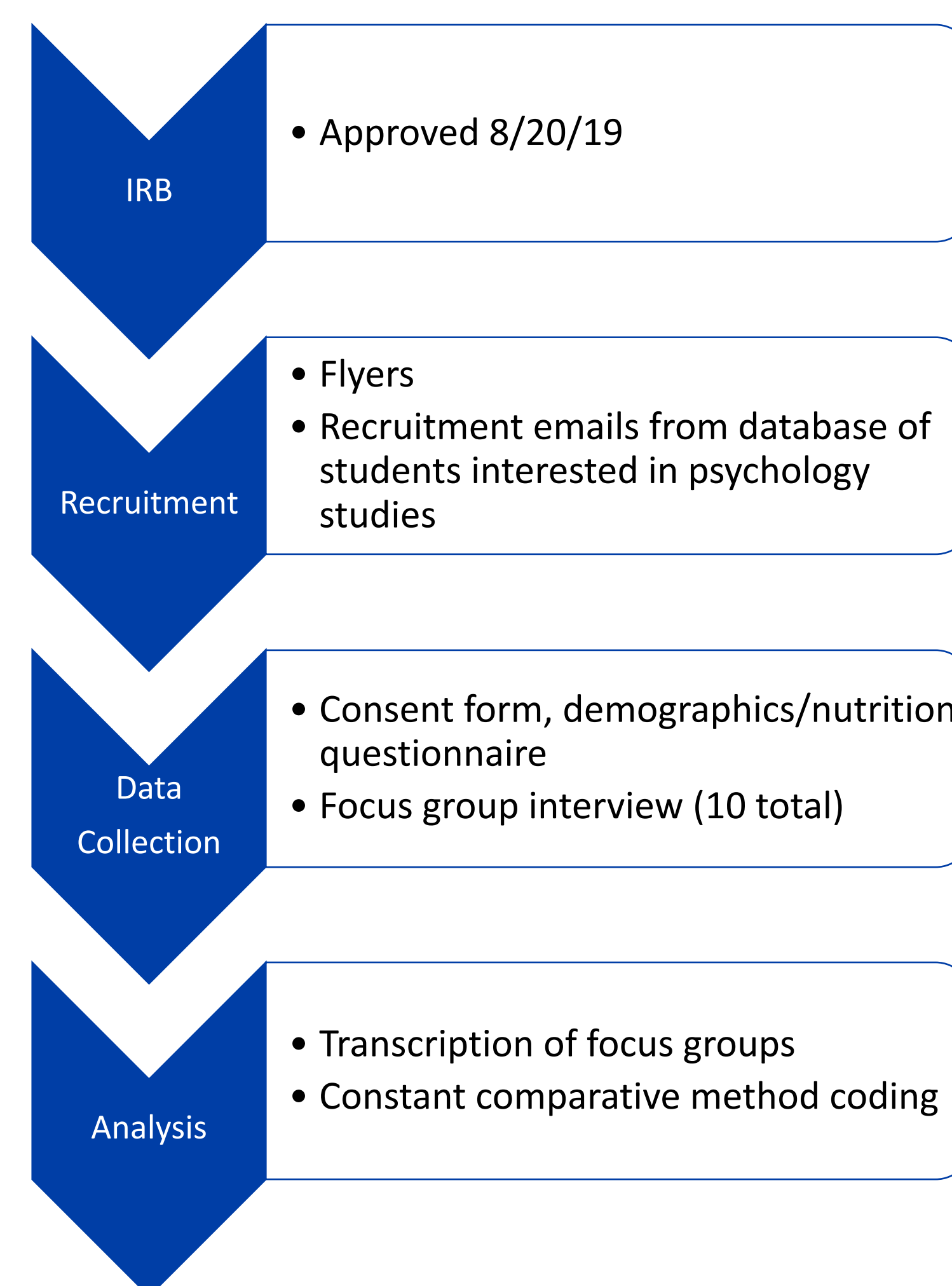
### What is the literature showing?

- Literature contains many studies looking for associations between fad diets and health parameters such as weight loss, cancer progression, and diabetes <sup>2,3</sup>
- Information regarding who is using fad diets, why they are using them, and their perceptions about them are not well characterized

### Why do a qualitative study?

- This type of study allows for a more detailed assessment of participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding fad diets

## Materials and Methods



## Participants

Demographic	N (%)
Male	5 (21.7%)
Female	16 (69.6%)
Prefers not to report sex	2 (8.7%)
White only	11 (47.8%)
Black only	7 (30.4%)
Asian	3 (13%)
Middle Eastern	1 (4.3%)
More than one race	1 (4.3%)
Freshman	11 (47.8%)
Sophomore	5 (21.7%)
Junior	5 (21.7%)
Senior	1 (4.3%)
Post-baccalaureate	1 (4.3%)
Age	Mean (SD)
BMI	19.2 (2.1) 27.3 (6.3)

## Results

Fad Diet	N
Keto diet	8
Paleo diet, Intermittent fasting	4
Slim tea, Juice cleanse	3
Atkins diet, Pescatarian	2
Beach diet, Mediterranean diet, Military diet, Dark chocolate diet, Cabbage soup diet, Grapefruit diet, Cotton ball diet, Watermelon diet, Slim Fast, Apple cider vinegar diet	1 N= number of focus groups diet was mentioned

### Students believe fad diets are ineffective.

- “Yeah, I just don’t think they’re very effective. I think, even if you lose weight, it won’t stay off.” [Participant 5]

### Students could define how a “healthy diet” differs from a fad diet, even though most have not tried the latter.

- “It’s realistic, where they have 3 course meals and its fitting to how much they want to lose and its hitting all areas of protein, nutrition, and vitamins, where a lot of fad diets are like “don’t eat bread, don’t eat a lot of meat, you have to eat fruit or this one vegetable because it’s good for you and you have to eat this portion” [Participant 3]

### Social media is a frequent source of fad diet information that allows influencers and celebrities to make money.

- “I’d say any social media platform where you can see it. Because on Twitter, it’s mostly text, but I agree, like Snapchat, YouTube and Instagram are where I’ve seen them a lot” [Participant 6]
- “..they have celebrities promote them but like, it’s very obvious the celebrity doesn’t use them, so it’s like so ridiculous” [Participant 9]

### Healthy eating on campus can be a challenge.

- “Well, when they serve food and stuff like that in the dining halls cafeteria, there aren’t really diverse much when it comes to healthy..” [Participant 18]

## Discussion

### Conclusions

1. Students are generally well-versed in distinguishing “fad diets” from “healthy diets”
2. Social media is where most students learn about fad diets but it is unlikely to influence them to try one
3. There is a general consensus that there are limited healthy food options available on campus

### Implications

- Efforts by universities to improve students’ health should not be directed at fad diet education
- Social media can be used to support and promote healthy eating

## References

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