

## Emotional Stress and Eating Habits on the Academic Performance of Mexican University Students

**Evangelina Cruz Barba \***

PhD in Education and Master's in Business and Economic Studies, University of Guadalajara, University Center for Economic and Administrative Sciences (CUCEA). Los Belenes, Zapopan, México

**Blanca Noemí Silva Guitiérrez**

PhD in Education and Master's in Business and Economic Studies, University of Guadalajara, University Center for Economic and Administrative Sciences (CUCEA). Los Belenes, Zapopan, México

### Abstract

Food-related decisions and behaviours are strongly influenced by social, historical, and emotional factors, which directly impact physical and mental health, as well as academic performance. The objective of this study is to analyse the emotional aspects of university students in Mexico. Emotional eating is rooted in genetics and family upbringing, and is influenced by emotional intelligence and stress. In Mexico, where obesity is a major public health problem, poor eating habits contribute to less physical activity, poor sleep, lower academic performance, and a higher risk of diseases such as diabetes and depression. External stressors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbated these problems, particularly among higher education students. Stress and low self-esteem were found to alter eating habits, leading to emotional eating and cognitive distractions that hinder academic success. Scientific literature, including that of Lange, James, Craig, Cannon, and Damasio, supports the idea that gut sensations influence emotions and decision-making. A previous study of 926 Mexican university students revealed that women were more affected during the COVID-19 pandemic, presenting higher levels of stress, emotional eating, and depression. This study, based on a random survey of more than 350 students and using chi-square tests of independence, seeks to analyse whether emotional and behavioural responses to stress continue in a cycle of anxiety and avoidance of academic responsibilities, considering previous work in Mexico. Because there have currently been cases of suicide attempts, the COVID-19 pandemic has presumably left emotional scars, as a high percentage of students currently suffer from some type of depression. Overall, the findings suggest a strong relationship between emotional well-being, eating behaviours, and educational outcomes, emphasizing the need to raise awareness and provide support for mental health, especially among vulnerable students.

### Keywords

Emotional eating, stress, university students, México, academic performance.