

EFFECTS OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN SRI LANKA ON THE FOOD PURCHASING BEHAVIOURS OF CONSUMERS IN MORATUWA MUNICIPAL AREA

L.W.D.T. Nethmini¹, S.A.S. Jayawardana² and H.R.M.G.C. Thilakarathna¹

¹*Department of Animal and Food Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Puliyankulama, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.*

²*Food Technology Section, Industrial Technology Institute, Halbarawa Gardens, Thaladena, Malabe, Sri Lanka.*

In 2022, Sri Lanka has undergone its worst economic crisis since its independence. Hence, this study was conducted to evaluate the effects of economic crisis on food purchasing and consuming behaviours. Due to the highly diversified population, Moratuwa municipal area was selected for the study. Printed and online versions of pre-tested, self-administrated questionnaires were disseminated, and data were collected from 220 respondents from July to October 2022. Among the respondents, 48.18% declared a decrease in the family's monthly income. Due to the changes in prices (37.97%), transport difficulties (16.81%), and changes in monthly income (16.23%), 66.82% of the respondents have changed the places they used to purchase food items. Most respondents (70.91%) have declared that fulfilling food and grocery needs is difficult, and 80.91% have reduced the quantities of food they purchase. Regarding cooking, most of them have started using the wood stove and cooking two or three main meals together. Shortage and unavailability of imported foods have affected 73.18% of the respondents. Most respondents (82.12%) have declared a decrease in consuming soft drinks, biscuits, and bread. In addition, the respondents have limited the consumption of eggs, fish, canned fish, chicken, and other meat varieties, processed meat products, milk powder, fresh milk, and other dairy products. For the food items they cannot find or purchase, 74.09% of the respondents have started using substitutes. Except for the age group and income level, no significant correlation ($p>0.05$) was reported among sociodemographic factors such as education, employability, and gender with food purchasing behaviour. These findings are important for food manufacturers to identify current trends and for decision-makers to make the necessary decisions to avoid socio-economic and health-related issues. Furthermore, extensive studies must be carried out across the country and essential remedies must be implemented in the future.

Keywords: Consumption, Economic crisis, Income, Purchasing, Survey