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Investigating the Influential Factors of Household Food Expenditure: Towards Ensuring Food Security of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Food expenditure represents a significant portion of household consumption, and the share of spending on food is a key indicator of food security. This measure directly reflects the accessibility and affordability of nutritious food, which in turn affects people's overall well-being and resilience to economic shocks. Ensuring food security is therefore crucial in global poverty alleviation. This study aims to assess food security levels in Sri Lanka and examine the factors influencing household food expenditure. The data related to monthly food expenditure, monthly income, demographic variables, household size, education level, employment status and the ownership of agricultural lands and livestock were obtained from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2019 conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics. The final sample included 1,192 households, selected through random sampling to ensure representation from all districts in Sri Lanka. The food expenditure share was calculated for all the households. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis, using the STATA software package. Results revealed that the average monthly food expenditure is LKR 5448, ranging from LKR 570 to LKR 18593. The sample is dominated by male household heads (78.61%) and consisted of households from rural (77.10%), estate (6.12%) and urban (16.78%) sectors. Monthly income ($\beta=0.0198$, $p<0.05$), household size ($\beta=550.61$, $p<0.05$), and having own account work ($\beta=375.85$, $p<0.05$) positively influence the food expenditure. The impact of having a secondary level education and above is positive. Living in the rural ($\beta=-709.23$, $p<0.05$) and estate sectors ($\beta=-662.36$, $p<0.05$) reduces food expenditure, compared to urban sectors. This emphasizes the influence of differences in lifestyle on spending on food. The results revealed that the differences in cultures affect food expenditure. Belonging to Sri Lankan Moors ($\beta=905.29$, $p<0.05$) and Malay ($\beta=1285.62$, $p<0.05$) positively affects the spending on food. Moreover, the food expenditure share for the majority of households is less than 15%. The findings emphasize that socioeconomic factors are important in determining household food expenditure. The outcomes of this study are valuable for policymakers and relevant authorities in developing strategies to mitigate food poverty, ensure food security, and enhance overall well-being in the country.

Keywords: *Food expenditure, Regression analysis, Socio-economic determinants, Food security*