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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

DIETARY PATTERN ANALYSIS IN RURAL COMMUNITY SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Diet and nutrition are crucial factors contributing to overall health and well-being, with dietary patterns significantly impacting human health. This study aims to identify the dietary habits and preferences of individuals in rural areas of Sri Lanka concerning breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Additionally, it seeks to determine the typical times of day these meals are consumed, investigate the perceived importance of dinner, and examine the factors influencing food costs and spending. The study was conducted in five Grama Niladhari Divisions (GNDs) in the Mahawilachchiya area, one of the Divisional Secretariat (DS) divisions in the Anuradhapura district. A sample size of 342 individuals was surveyed using a questionnaire. The results provide valuable insights into the dietary practices, meal preferences, and perceptions of individuals in rural Sri Lanka. The findings reveal the dominance of rice as a staple food for breakfast and lunch, highlighting its cultural significance and role in the daily routine of the surveyed population. While some alternatives exist, rice remains the preferred choice for the majority. The study also underscores the perceived importance of dinner in maintaining dietary consistency, nutritional adequacy, and overall well-being, with most respondents considering it an essential meal. Furthermore, the analysis of monthly expenditures on food items sheds light on the financial priorities and spending patterns of individuals in rural communities. Rice emerges as the primary expense, followed by vegetables, spices, meat, and fish. This demonstrates the importance placed on staple foods, fresh produce, flavor enhancement, and animal protein sources. These findings offer valuable insights into the allocation of resources for dietary needs and can guide initiatives aimed at promoting affordable and nutritious food options across different income groups.

Keywords: Food and Nutrition, Dietary Patterns, Health and Wellbeing, Rural Community.

INTRODUCTION

Diet and nutrition are crucial factors contributing to overall health and well-being. Dietary patterns significantly impact human health, and researchers have identified a diverse range of dietary habits throughout Sri Lanka. Socio-economic

factors, such as per capita income, food prices, education level of household heads, and rural affiliation, significantly influence individuals' food consumption decisions.

In Sri Lankan households, rice and dhal are generally regarded as essential commodities, while bread and fish are often viewed as luxury items. In rural areas, rice and curry are commonly consumed as the main meal throughout the day. However, studies have highlighted a remarkably low intake of fruits and vegetables, while the consumption of dairy products and plant and animal proteins does not meet the national dietary recommendations for Sri Lankans (Weerahewa et al., 2018).

Individuals who primarily consume rice as their main meal tend to have a higher prevalence of elevated body mass index (BMI) and a higher incidence of underweight individuals. In terms of daily energy and macronutrient intake, no significant differences were observed between men and women, except for carbohydrate intake. Overall, both genders exhibited low energy intake. The mean macronutrient composition, as a percentage of total energy, was 72.18% carbohydrate, 10.62% protein, and 17.2% fat. Notably, the contribution of fat and carbohydrates to daily energy consumption was significantly higher among females compared to males (Weerahewa et al., 2018).

Objectives

To identify the dietary habits and preferences of individuals in rural areas of Sri Lanka concerning breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

To determine the typical times of day at which individuals in rural areas of Sri Lanka consume breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

To investigate the perceived importance of dinner among individuals in rural areas of Sri Lanka.

To examine the factors that influence food costs and spending among individuals in rural areas of Sri Lanka.

METHODOLOGY

The study setting was Anuradhapura district. This district was selected due to its predominantly rural nature and high prevalence of NCDs. Anuradhapura is the largest district in Sri Lanka, covering an area of approximately 7,128 square kilometers and having a population of over 860,000 people. A multi-stage quota sampling technique, one of the sampling methods in non-probability sampling, was employed to select study participants. In the first stage, Mahawilachchiya divisional secretariat division was selected from the Anuradhapura district, and second stage, four Grama Niladhari Divisions were selected from the DS division. These two selections were made using the quota sampling technique. Then, households were selected from each selected Grama Niladhari Division using a convenience sampling method. Based on the sample calculation, a possible sample size for a survey in a population of 2318 was approximately 384. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from study participants.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic information of Respondents

Description Value		N	Percent
	20-30	45	13.2%
	31-40	82	24.0%

Age	41-50	87	25.4%
	51-60	60	17.5%
	61-70	50	14.6%
	Above 71	18	5.3%
Gender	Female	194	56.7%
	Male	148	43.3%
Race	Sinhala	339	99.1%
	Tamil	3	0.9%
	Muslim	0	0.0%
	Other	0	0.0%
Religion	Buddhist	339	99.1%
	Catholic	1	0.3%
	Hindu	2	0.6%
	Islam	0	0.0%
Education Level	Never attended	24	7.0%
	Grade 1 to 5	60	17.5%
	6 to G C E O/L	139	40.6%
	Passed G C E O/L	51	14.9%
	Up to G C E A/L	17	5.0%
	Passed G C E A/L	18	5.3%
	Diploma	0	0.0%
	Graduate	2	0.6%
	Other	31	9.1%
Civil Status	Married	313	91.5%
	Single	2	0.6%
	Living Separately	7	2.0%
	Living together	4	1.2%
	Divorced	1	0.3%
	Widow	15	4.4%

Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

Table 2: Types of Other Income

Type of Other Income	N	Percent
Farming	70	38.9%
Three wheel Driver	3	1.7%
Masonry Work	25	13.9%
Trade	13	7.2%
Government Welfare	9	5.0%

Private Business	6	3.3%
Self-Occupation	6	3.3%
Cow Management	8	4.4%
Garment	2	1.1%
Abroad	2	1.1%
Other	18	10.0%
Total	180	100.0%

Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

Table 3: Monthly Income Distribution

Income Range	N	Percent
Rs. Less than 10,000	23	6.7
Rs. Between 10 001 - 20 000	56	16.4
Rs. Between 20 001 - 30 000	73	21.3
Rs. Between 30 001 - 40 000	65	19.0
Rs. Between 40 001 - 50 000	42	12.3
More than 50 001	80	23.4
Total	339	99.1
No Respond	3	.9
Total	342	100.0

Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

Typical Breakfast Meal and Availability

Table 4: Typical Breakfast Meal

Type of Food	N	Percent
Rice	330	96.5
Bread	1	.3
String hoppers	4	1.2
Hoppers	2	.6
Potato	1	.3
Grains	1	.3
Roti	3	.9
Total	342	100.0

Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Data

The study population consisted of 342 individuals from rural communities in the Mahawilachchiya area of the Anuradhapura district in Sri Lanka.

The analysis of breakfast preferences reveals that a significant majority of respondents (96.5%) reported consuming rice as their typical breakfast meal. Rice seems to be the preferred and most common choice for breakfast among the participants. This finding suggests that rice plays a central role in the breakfast culture of the surveyed population. However, it is worth noting that there were a few alternative breakfast options mentioned by respondents, albeit with lower

frequencies. These options included bread, string hoppers, hoppers, potato, grains, and roti. While these alternatives constitute a smaller portion of the overall breakfast choices, they demonstrate some diversity in breakfast meals within the surveyed population.

In terms of breakfast availability, respondents were asked about the specific time when breakfast is typically available. The majority of respondents mentioned time slots between 6.30 and 9.00 in the morning. The most common breakfast availability time reported was 7.00, followed by 7.30 and 8.00. This indicates a general trend of consuming breakfast during the earlier hours of the day. However, it is important to note that there were respondents who reported breakfast availability before 6.30 or after 9.00, suggesting some variations in breakfast habits and timings among individuals. Additionally, a small portion of respondents mentioned "Nothing Special" when asked about breakfast availability, which could imply a lack of specific timing or routine for breakfast in their daily lives.

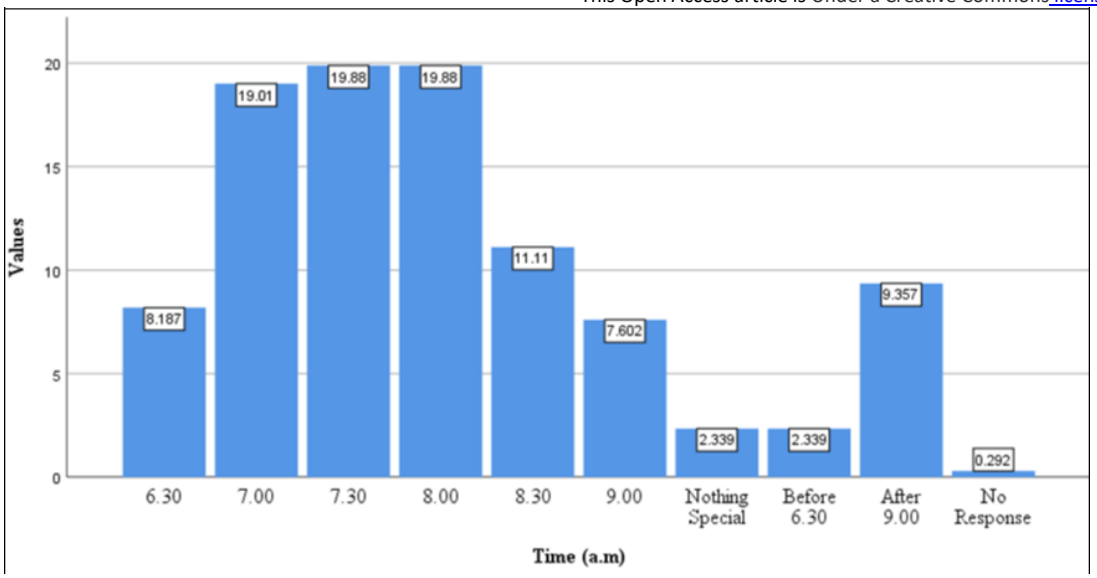
The analysis reveals the predominance of rice as the preferred breakfast meal among the respondents, along with some alternative options. The availability of breakfast generally falls within the time range of 6.30 to 9.00, with the most common availability reported at 7.00. These findings provide insights into the breakfast choices and habits within the surveyed population, shedding light on their dietary preferences and morning routines.

Typical Lunch Meal and Availability

Table 5: Typical Lunch Meal

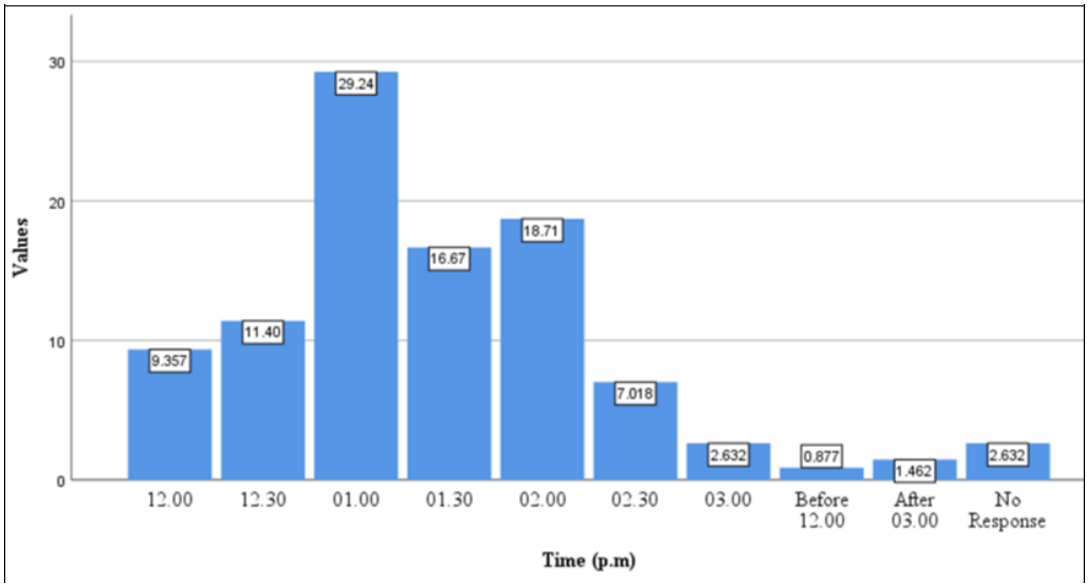
Type of Food	N	Percent
Rice	322	94.2
Fried rice	2	.6
Potato	1	.3
Other	3	.9
Nothing	14	4.1
Total	342	100.0

Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data



Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

Fig 1: Time of Availability of Breakfast



Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

Fig 2: Time of Availability of Lunch

The analysis of lunch preferences reveals interesting insights into the typical meals consumed by the respondents. The majority of respondents (94.2%) reported consuming rice as their usual lunch meal. Rice is a staple food in many cultures and is known for its versatility and widespread consumption. It is not surprising to see it emerge as the most common choice for lunch among the surveyed population. In addition to rice, a small proportion of respondents mentioned having fried rice, potato, or other unspecified options for their lunch. These alternative choices represent a minor portion of the overall lunch preferences. Fried rice is a variation of rice that is typically prepared by stir-frying with vegetables, meat, and spices. The

inclusion of fried rice in the responses indicates that some individuals prefer this flavorful and often convenient option for their midday meal. The mention of potatoes and other unspecified options suggests that some respondents may opt for different dishes or ingredients based on their personal preferences or dietary restrictions.

Regarding the availability of lunch, respondents were asked to indicate the time when their typical lunch meal is available. The responses demonstrate variations in lunchtime preferences among the participants. The most frequently reported lunchtime was 01.00, accounting for 29.2% of the responses. This indicates a preference for consuming lunch during the early afternoon hours. The next most common lunchtime reported was 02.00, representing 18.7% of the responses, followed by 01.30 at 16.7%. These findings suggest a clustering of lunchtime preferences around the early to mid-afternoon timeframe. However, it is important to note that respondents reported a range of lunchtime options, starting from 12.00 and extending until 03.00. This variability indicates that there is no fixed or universally agreed-upon lunchtime among the surveyed population.

Lunchtime preferences may be influenced by various factors such as work schedules, cultural practices, personal routines, and individual preferences. The flexibility in lunchtime routines highlights the diverse nature of mealtime habits within the surveyed population. In conclusion, the analysis provides valuable insights into the typical lunch meals and availability patterns among the respondents. Rice emerges as the dominant lunch choice, while alternative options such as fried rice, potato, and other unspecified dishes are also mentioned to a lesser extent. Lunchtime preferences show a preference for early to mid-afternoon hours, although a range of lunchtime options are reported. These findings deepen our understanding of the respondents' lunch preferences and shed light on their dietary habits and mealtime practices.

Typical Dinner Meal and Availability

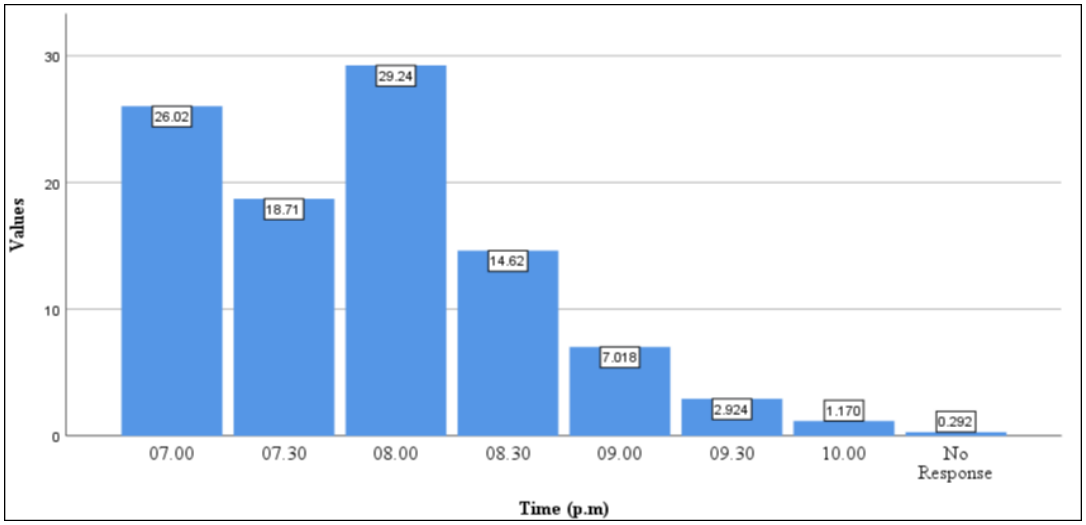
The following analysis focuses on examining the typical dinner meals and their availability among the respondents. Understanding individuals' dinner preferences and the timing at which dinner is usually consumed is essential for gaining insights into their dietary habits and lifestyle practices. By exploring the choices and availability of dinner options, aim to uncover patterns in meal preferences and shed light on the cultural and individual factors that influence dinner routines.

Table 6: Typical Dinner Meal

Type of Food	N	Percent
Rice	319	93.3
Bread	6	1.8
String hoppers	4	1.2
Hoppers	2	.6
Pittu	2	.6
Noodles	1	.3
Short eat	1	.3
Roti	6	1.8

Nothing	1	.3
Total	342	100.0

Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data



Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

Fig 3: Time of Availability of Dinner

The analysis focuses on understanding the typical dinner meals and their availability among the respondents, shedding light on their dinner preferences and the timing at which dinner is usually consumed. The findings reveal interesting insights into the dinner habits of the surveyed population. In terms of dinner meals, the results indicate that the majority of respondents (93.3%) reported consuming rice as their typical dinner meal. Rice stands out as a popular and widely preferred option for dinner among the respondents, reflecting its importance as a staple food in their dietary choices. However, it is worth noting that a small percentage of respondents also mentioned other dinner options. These include bread (1.8%), string hoppers (1.2%), hoppers (0.6%), pittu (0.6%), noodles (0.3%), short eats (0.3%), and roti (1.8%). Additionally, a few respondents (0.3%) reported having nothing for dinner, which could be attributed to various factors such as dietary preferences or occasional fasting practices.

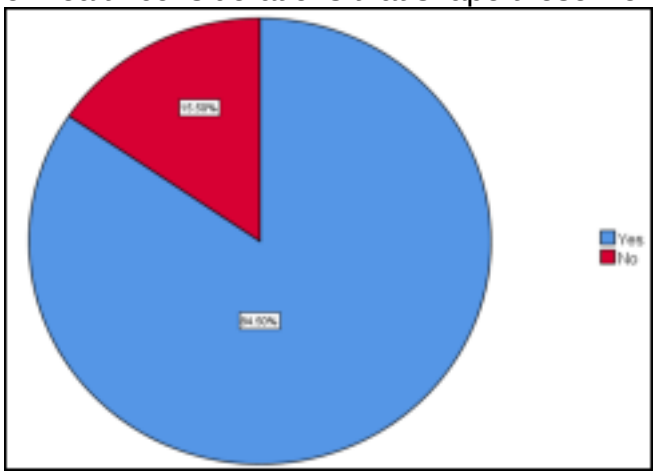
Turning to the availability of dinner, the findings highlight variations in the timing at which dinner is typically consumed among the respondents. The most commonly reported dinner time was 07.00, selected by 26.0% of the respondents. This suggests that a considerable portion of the population prefers to have dinner early in the evening. Following closely, 18.7% of the respondents indicated 07.30 as their preferred dinner time. The data also revealed that a significant number of individuals have dinner between 08.00 and 08.30, with 29.2% and 14.6% of the respondents, respectively, opting for these time slots. Further down the timeline, 7.0% of the respondents reported having dinner at 09.00, while smaller proportions of individuals selected 09.30 (2.9%) and 10.00 (1.2%) as their preferred dinner times. It is important to acknowledge that a small fraction of respondents (0.3%) chose the option labeled as "99," which likely represents an alternative or unspecified dinner time.

These findings provide valuable insights into the dinner preferences and habits of the surveyed population. The overwhelming preference for rice as the main dinner meal showcases its significance in the daily dietary routines of the respondents. The availability of dinner at different times throughout the evening indicates variations in mealtime practices, with a considerable number of individuals having dinner between 07.00 and 08.30. It is essential to consider cultural influences, personal preferences, and dietary habits when interpreting these results, as they can contribute to understanding the dinner routines and food choices of the population under study. It is worth noting that the analysis is based on self-reported data provided by the respondents. Further exploration of factors that influence dinner choices, such as cultural norms, regional cuisine, and personal dietary preferences, could offer deeper insights into the dinner patterns and mealtime practices within the surveyed population. Such insights can aid in designing targeted interventions, promoting healthier dinner options, and facilitating better meal-planning strategies for improved nutrition and well-being.

Perception of Dinner's Essentiality

The analysis focuses on the perception of the essentiality of dinner among the respondents. Dinner, as one of the primary meals of the day, holds varying degrees of importance across individuals and cultures. The understanding of how dinner's essentiality is perceived can provide insights into dietary habits, lifestyle choices, and overall well-being. By examining the responses, valuable insights can be uncovered regarding the significance attributed to dinner as a meal. This enables the assessment of whether individuals consider dinner to be a crucial component of their daily routine or perceive it as optional or less essential compared to other meals. The perception of dinner's essentiality can be influenced by various factors, such as cultural norms, personal preferences, work schedules, and lifestyle demands.

The analysis of the perception of dinner's essentiality provides a comprehensive understanding of individuals' attitudes toward this mealtime. It assists in gauging whether dinner is prioritized as a time for nourishment, social interaction, or relaxation after a long day. Additionally, exploring the reasons underlying such perceptions, whether positive or negative, helps uncover beliefs, cultural practices, or health considerations that shape these views.



Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

Fig 4: Requirement of Dinner

The analysis focuses on the respondents' opinions regarding the requirement of dinner as a meal. The data reveals that the majority of respondents, comprising 84.5%, expressed the opinion that dinner is indeed necessary. On the other hand, a smaller proportion of respondents, accounting for 15.5%, indicated that they do not consider dinner to be a requirement.

Reasons for Considering Dinner Essential or Not

Table 7: Reasons for Considering Dinner Essential

Factors Influencing the Perception of Dinner's Essentiality	N	Percent
Dietary Consistency	10	2.9
Nutritional Adequacy	20	5.8
Miscellaneous Factors	29	8.5
Physical Exertion	85	24.9
Medication Influence	21	6.1
Sleep Disturbance	39	11.4
Skipped Lunch	8	2.3
Infant Feeding	14	4.1
Habitual Practice	57	16.7
Medical Recommendation	6	1.8
Total	289	84.5
No Response	53	15.5
Total	342	100.0

Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

Table 8: Reasons for Considering Dinner Not Essential

Factors Influencing the Perception of Dinner's Not Essentiality	N	Percent
Health Maintenance	4	1.2
Prevention of Obesity	8	2.3
Financial Constraints	8	2.3
Miscellaneous Factors	25	7.3
Medical Recommendation	7	2.0
Other	1	.3
Total	53	15.5
No Response	289	84.5
Total	342	100.0

Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data

The analysis examined the factors influencing the perception of dinner's essentiality among the respondents. Table 8 presents the findings on factors that

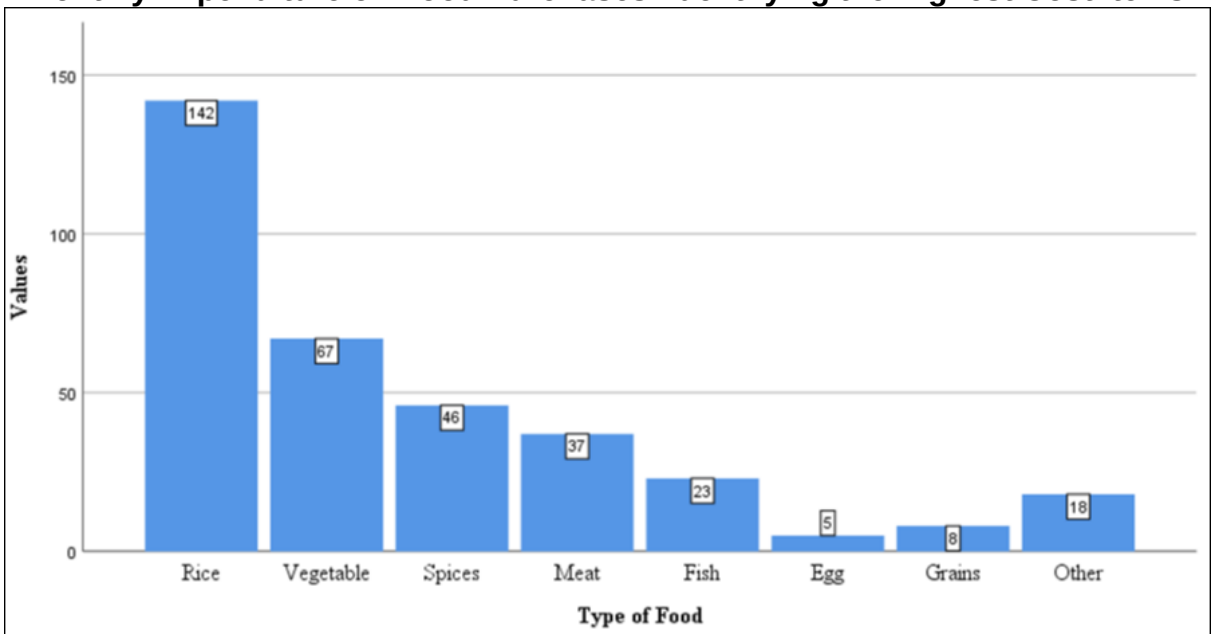
contribute to considering dinner essential, while Table 8 focuses on reasons for perceiving dinner as not essential.

In Table 39, dietary consistency emerged as a notable factor, with 20 respondents (5.8%) considering dinner essential to maintain regularity in their meal intake. This finding suggests that individuals place importance on establishing a consistent eating pattern throughout the day. Additionally, 29 respondents (8.5%) highlighted the need for nutritional adequacy, emphasizing the role of dinner in meeting their dietary requirements and ensuring the intake of essential nutrients. The significance of maintaining adequate nutrition throughout the day aligns with the understanding that dinner serves as a crucial meal to support overall health and well-being. The analysis also revealed miscellaneous factors influencing the perception of dinner's essentiality, as reported by 39 respondents (11.4%). These factors may vary individually and include cultural, social, or personal reasons that contribute to considering dinner essential. Moreover, physical exertion was identified as a determinant, with 85 respondents (24.9%) emphasizing the importance of dinner to replenish energy and meet the demands of physically demanding activities or occupations. The influence of medication on dinner's essentiality was mentioned by 21 respondents (6.1%). This indicates that certain individuals may require dinner as part of their medication regimen or treatment plan, highlighting the connection between dinner and health management. Sleep disturbance, reported by 39 respondents (11.4%), also emerged as a factor contributing to considering dinner essential. These individuals may experience hunger or discomfort during sleep, motivating them to have dinner to alleviate these concerns. Moreover, a small number of respondents (2.3%) cited skipping lunch as a reason for perceiving dinner as essential, suggesting that dinner compensates for the skipped midday meal. Additionally, 14 respondents (4.1%) mentioned that having breastfeeding infants influenced their perception of dinner's essentiality, as they need to ensure regular and adequate nutrition for both themselves and their infants.

Furthermore, habitual practice was highlighted by 57 respondents (16.7%), indicating that dinner is considered an ingrained part of their daily routine. This finding suggests that individuals may prioritize dinner as a habitual behavior, emphasizing its perceived importance. Lastly, medical recommendation influenced the perception of dinner's essentiality for 6 respondents (1.8%), underscoring the impact of professional advice on dietary choices.

In Table 8 reasons for perceiving dinner as not essential were also explored. While the number of respondents citing these reasons was relatively small, they provide insights into alternative viewpoints. Factors such as health maintenance, prevention of obesity, financial constraints, miscellaneous factors, medical recommendations, and other reasons were mentioned. These reasons may be influenced by individual preferences, circumstances, or specific health conditions. Overall, the analysis highlights the multidimensional nature of individuals' perceptions regarding dinner's essentiality. Factors such as dietary consistency, nutritional adequacy, physical exertion, medication influence, sleep disturbance, infant feeding, habitual practice, and medical recommendations all contribute to the perceived importance of dinner. Understanding these factors can inform discussions on dietary patterns, health promotion, and individual preferences related to dinner consumption.

Monthly Expenditure on Food Purchases: Identifying the Highest Cost Items



Source: Created by authors based on analyzed data
Fig 5: Identifying the Highest Cost Items

The analysis focuses on examining the distribution of monthly expenditures for various food items among the respondents. Understanding the financial allocations made towards different food categories provides insights into the prioritization and spending patterns related to dietary needs.

The findings indicate that rice emerges as the food item incurring the highest monthly expenditure, with 41.0% of respondents reporting it as their costliest purchase. Rice holds a significant position as a staple food in many cultures, and its prominent presence in monthly expenses reflects its essential role in daily meals. Vegetables follow as the second-highest expenditure category, accounting for 19.4% of respondents' monthly food budget. This highlights the importance placed on including fresh produce in the respondents' diets and signifies the emphasis on a balanced and nutritious meal plan.

Spices rank third in terms of expenditure, with 13.3% of respondents allocating a significant portion of their monthly budget towards these flavor-enhancing ingredients. This suggests that respondents value the culinary aspect of their meals and prioritize incorporating a variety of spices to enhance the taste and diversity of their dishes. The analysis further reveals that meat and fish contribute significantly to monthly food expenses. Approximately 10.7% of respondents reported that meat represents a considerable portion of their food budget, while 6.6% identified fish as a notable expense. This underscores the significance of animal protein sources in their dietary choices and signifies a willingness to invest in these nutrient-rich options. On the other hand, eggs, grains, and other food items have comparatively lower expenditure percentages. Eggs accounted for 1.4% of respondents' expenses, indicating a lesser financial impact compared to other food items. Grains, which include cereals and other grain-based products, represented

2.3% of the respondents' monthly expenditure. Additionally, miscellaneous food items, categorized as "other," accounted for 5.2% of expenses, suggesting a range of individual preferences and specific dietary choices.

Understanding the distribution of monthly expenditures on food items provides valuable insights into the financial priorities and decision-making processes related to dietary needs. The data highlights the significance of staple foods like rice, the inclusion of fresh vegetables, the importance of spices for flavor enhancement, and the allocation of resources towards meat and fish. This information can be utilized for budgeting purposes, meal planning, and policy development to ensure access to affordable and nutritious food options for individuals and communities.

DISCUSSION

The primary objectives of this study were to identify the dietary habits and preferences of individuals in rural areas, determine typical meal times, investigate the perceived importance of dinner, examine factors influencing food costs and spending, and provide recommendations for improving nutrition and food security. This discussion aims to shed light on the current state of nutrition in rural communities and pinpoint areas where interventions and improvements can enhance overall well-being. By delving into dietary habits and preferences, the study seeks to understand the types of foods commonly consumed during breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as the typical meal consumption patterns in rural areas. Additionally, it explores the importance of dinner in the overall dietary habits of individuals, providing a comprehensive understanding of their dietary practices to inform targeted nutritional interventions.

Another crucial aspect investigated is the influence of food costs and spending on dietary choices. Understanding the economic constraints faced by individuals in rural areas offers valuable insights into the challenges they encounter in accessing nutritious food. This understanding helps formulate recommendations to improve food affordability, availability, and access, ultimately promoting better nutrition and food security in rural Sri Lanka.

Typical Meals and Availability

Breakfast

The analysis of breakfast preferences reveals that rice is the predominant choice, with 96.5% of respondents reporting it as their typical breakfast meal. This highlights the cultural significance of rice in rural Sri Lanka. While rice is integral to the morning routine, a smaller proportion of respondents mentioned alternative breakfast options such as bread, string hoppers, hoppers, potato, grains, and roti, indicating some diversity in breakfast meals. Most respondents reported having breakfast between 6:30 and 9:00 AM, with peak times at 7:00, 7:30, and 8:00 AM, reflecting cultural practices and the importance of starting the day with a substantial meal.

Lunch

Rice is also the dominant choice for lunch, with 94.2% of respondents indicating it as their typical meal. This reaffirms the importance of rice in the dietary habits of the respondents. Minor choices like fried rice and potato suggest some

diversity in lunch preferences. Lunchtime typically ranges from 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM, with the most common times being 1:00, 2:00, and 1:30 PM. The variability in lunch timing indicates flexibility influenced by factors such as work schedules, cultural practices, and personal routines.

Perception of Dinner's Essentiality

The analysis focused on the perception of dinner's essentiality among respondents. A significant majority (84.5%) considered dinner necessary, emphasizing its importance in their daily routine. Factors influencing this perception included dietary consistency, nutritional adequacy, physical exertion, medication, sleep disturbance, habitual practice, and medical recommendations. A smaller proportion (15.5%) did not view dinner as essential, citing reasons such as health maintenance, obesity prevention, financial constraints, and personal preferences. Understanding these factors can inform strategies to promote healthy eating habits and overall well-being.

Monthly Expenditure on Food Purchases

The analysis of monthly expenditures on food items provides insights into financial priorities and spending patterns. Rice emerged as the highest monthly expense for 41.0% of respondents, underscoring its significance as a staple food. Vegetables followed, with 19.4% of respondents allocating a significant portion of their budget to fresh produce. Spices ranked third, with 13.3% of respondents prioritizing flavor-enhancing ingredients. Meat and fish also represented substantial expenses, with 10.7% and 6.6% of respondents, respectively, highlighting the importance of animal protein sources. Other food items such as eggs and grains had lower expenditure percentages, reflecting lesser financial impact compared to staple foods and fresh produce.

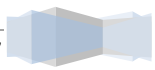
Understanding these expenditure patterns provides valuable insights into dietary decision-making processes and can inform budgeting, meal planning, and policy development. These findings can guide initiatives to promote affordable and nutritious food options, ensuring better access for individuals and communities across different income groups.

CONCLUSION

This study offers valuable insights into the dietary practices, meal preferences, and perceptions of individuals in rural Sri Lanka. The dominance of rice as a staple food for breakfast and lunch emphasizes its cultural significance and role in daily routines. While alternative options exist, rice remains the preferred choice for the majority. The perceived importance of dinner highlights its role in maintaining dietary consistency, nutritional adequacy, and overall well-being.

The analysis of monthly food expenditures sheds light on financial priorities and spending patterns, with rice, vegetables, spices, meat, and fish being significant expenses. These insights can guide initiatives to promote affordable and nutritious food options, enhancing food security and nutritional outcomes for different income groups in rural Sri Lanka.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Based on these insights, several proposals can be made to improve nutrition and food security in rural Sri Lanka.

Targeted educational campaigns should be developed to raise awareness about alternative breakfast and lunch options, promoting diversity and nutritional balance. This can be achieved through collaborations with community organizations, healthcare providers, and educational institutions. Additionally, initiatives should focus on promoting the importance of dinner and its role in maintaining a healthy diet, dispelling misconceptions, and addressing concerns related to health maintenance and obesity prevention.

To address financial constraints and ensure access to nutritious food, efforts should be made to enhance food affordability and availability. This can be achieved through the implementation of policies that support agricultural development, local food production, and market interventions to stabilize prices. Government subsidies and incentives can also be provided to encourage the consumption of vegetables, ensuring their affordability for individuals in rural areas.

Community-based initiatives such as community gardens, cooperatives, and farmer's markets can be established to promote the production and distribution of fresh, locally sourced food. These initiatives can provide opportunities for individuals to grow their own food, exchange produce within the community, and access nutritious options at affordable prices. Collaboration with local farmers, agricultural experts, and community leaders will be crucial in the implementation and sustainability of these initiatives.

In conclusion, by understanding the dietary practices, meal preferences, and perceptions of individuals in rural areas of Sri Lanka, targeted interventions can be developed to improve nutrition and food security. The promotion of alternative breakfast and lunch options, the emphasis on the importance of dinner, and initiatives to enhance food affordability and availability can collectively contribute to better dietary outcomes and overall well-being within rural communities. These proposals, combined with community-based initiatives and collaborations with relevant stakeholders, can pave the way for sustainable improvements in nutrition and food security in rural Sri Lanka.

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