

The Effect of Economic Fluctuations on Students' Nutritional Preferences

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Abstract

The purpose of the research is to ascertain how Türkiye's economic ups and downs affect the dietary habits of 335 Afyonkarahisar Health Sciences University students that participated in the study. To gather information on socio-democratic spending patterns, consumption patterns throughout the 2021–2022 period, and dining habits, a survey form was employed. Participants in the research were 80.6% women and 19.4% males. Of the participants, 8.7% live in a private dorm, 28.7% live in a public dorm, and 51.9% live at home with their friends. The majority of participants believe that their diet is not sufficient nor balanced (84.8%), and the majority of them attribute this to insufficient income (53.8%). When asked to compare the cost of education between the city where they studied and their hometown, 40.6% of participants said it was higher and 30.7% said it was the same. In addition, they assessed that living expenses in the city of study were higher than those in their hometown. It has been shown that in 2022 compared to 2021, a higher percentage of respondents said they always eat cooked meals, bagels, and pastries, lahmacun and pide. In 2022, compared to 2021, there was an increase in the proportion of those who said they always consumed tea, coffee, herbal tea and milk, and a decrease in the proportion of those who always consumed ayran and fruit juice.

Key words: Economy, Nutritional Preferences, University

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1. Introduction

Although hunger is one of the primary factors influencing meal selection, there are many other factors, such as physiological and nutritional requirements, that should be taken into consideration when making a specific food decision. Food choices are influenced by a variety of biological and physiological elements, including hunger, taste, and medical problems, as well as economic aspects including cost, income level, availability, and affordability of food (Ogrban, 2016).

One major component influencing purchasing patterns is income. Based on their financial level, people often make logical selections about what to buy. Changes in income, whether positive or negative, may have a big effect on spending habits. Changes in unit charges, currency rates, fiscal policies, variations in revenue and net income, unanticipated changes in capital values, and shifting projections of future income are some of the variables that are included. Consumption choices are significantly influenced by prices. Price adjustments may have an impact on people's purchase decisions. However, a number of variables, including wealth and personal values, influence whether a product is considered "expensive" or "cheap". Consumption choices are significantly influenced by an individual's financial status (Kıran, 2021).

The monthly income, food prices, and way of living all have a significant impact on the quality of their nutrition. Due to the high cost of nutrient-dense foods, low-income households may find it difficult to purchase a balanced diet. When people go grocery shopping, one of the most important factors affecting their decisions is the price of the product. More reasonably priced goods are typically given priority by consumers. Their capacity to maintain a healthy diet may be hampered by financial difficulties. Fast and simple meals are frequently chosen by students and working adults, yet they may not necessarily be the healthiest options. Time limitations and the requirement for efficiency may be connected to this preference for convenience. Some people with lower socioeconomic position can select unhealthy foods that are heavy in fat and sugar because they taste better and give a cheaper sensation of fullness. Lean meats, whole grains, fresh produce, and fruits are examples of healthier selections, although they are sometimes more expensive (Ogrban, 2016).

The estimated financial cost of poor eating habits and inactivity varies greatly. This discrepancy might be attributed to disagreements about what defines inadequate physical activity or unhealthy diets. For instance, diets heavy in certain nutrients, such as sugars, salts, or fats that are saturated, are frequently referred to be unhealthy diets; however, mounting research indicates that the development of chronic illness is more likely to be related to the consumption of certain foods than to the consumption of macro- or micronutrients (Candari et al., 2017). Meat consumption is comparable in quantity between high- and low-income households, but low-income households tend to prefer cheaper, fattier meats. In general, low-cost, lower-quality foods are more energy dense. These contain refined grains, added sugar and fats, and are cheaper per calorie than nutrient-dense foods (Darmon

& Drewnowski, 2015). Developing countries are experiencing shifts in their food systems because of demographic change, rapid urbanization, supermarket expansion and globalization of agricultural markets and trade. This transition is also associated with malnutrition (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity) and diet-related non-communicable diseases that remain a major impediment to achieving global food security and sustainable development (Karanja et al., 2022). In retail environments such as supermarkets, grocery stores, studies on healthy nutrition based on the knowledge of behavioral economics are being carried out to encourage and enable healthy dietary choices (Anderson et al., 2021).

Nutrition is one of the most fundamental needs for people, since it is essential to maintaining life and safeguarding health (Özer & Tekinşen, 2021). Nutrition is the process of choosing and consuming meals that, in the most cost-effective way possible, will give you the energy and nutrients you need to grow, develop, and live a long, healthy, and productive life—all without compromising your health or nutritional value (Yılmaz & Özkan, 2007).

University education can be considered as a transition period between adolescence and adulthood, where students become independent from their parents and acquire new health behaviors. Considering the time adolescents and young adults spend in universities and nearby regions, it is thought that this situation may affect students' eating habits in adulthood (Bernardo et al., 2017). Due to changes in lifestyle, including food and physical activity habits, university students often gain weight during their first year of study, and this tendency may persist into later life. Numerous campuses have potentially obesogenic eating environments because of the abundance and marketing of high-energy, low-nutrient meals, according to research (Martinez-Perez et al., 2022). International research also indicates that going to university may lead to a rise in obesity, weight gain, and unhealthy lifestyles, all of which are linked to an increased chance of developing chronic illnesses. Unhealthy eating habits among students are frequently linked to university life and the nutrition situation (Bernardo et al., 2017). A time of more responsibility for eating habits and decisions is university life. University student-specific food consumption habits and the related nutritional concerns are a major concern. Lifestyle characteristics are impacted by changes that some university students experience in their living circumstances, such as changes in dietary choices. Diets of university students can include some unhealthy options, particularly for those who live distant from their family (El Ansari et al., 2012). Information on nutrients is one of the numerous factors that influence meal selection. Adequate understanding of nutrition and the significance of a well-balanced diet may be factors in subpar eating habits. Based on some research, knowing what nutrients are in food may help make better eating and dietary choices. Moreover, current data indicates that development is superior (Husain et al., 2021).

People who are productive and in good health are seen as a society's greatest asset. It is believed that a nation's young population will eventually determine its

economic and social standing. As a result, procedures designed to preserve and enhance health are an essential part of medical care. Ensuring that several health behaviors, including exercise routines, dietary choices, stress management skills, mental well-being, immunizations, and avoidance of dangerous behaviors, are at optimal levels is the goal of protecting and promoting health (Taşçene & Tanyer Koçoğlu, 2021). Significant effects on human health have been discovered as a result of dietary variations. A society with adequate and balanced nutrition has been found to have high living standards and to tend to protect and improve health. Conversely, a society with inadequate and unbalanced nutrition has been found to have many health problems, including dyslipidemia, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, malnutrition, obesity, and hypertension (Özer & Tekinşen, 2021). Illnesses have a detrimental impact on the level of national income because they influence the economic behavior of all economic decision-making units in a micro way and limit investment opportunities through income and savings channels in a macro way. The negative effects of illnesses on the financial behavior of economic decision-making units may be investigated in the framework of the income flow model. In local economies and globally, health expenses have increased due to the aging population and scientific and technological advancements. It is anticipated that health costs will surpass the level of public budget coverage in the 2050s (Koç & Kutlar, 2019).

Understanding how eating habits evolve over time and how they relate to sociodemographic, economic, and health-related factors helps us better understand the origins and effects of eating habits. Without a doubt, this will assist individuals in improving and making the required adjustments for a better nutrition (Yılmaz & Özkan, 2007). People's knowledge of nutrition, diet, and health will determine how much their food choices will impact their long-term health. This paradigm is typically used to assess whether food choices will change in response to economic factors like price or income. Providing diet and health-related information has always been the most popular method of assisting customers in choosing healthier foods. The worth of the time invested in acquiring, preparing, cooking, and cleaning up after the meal is also included in the total "price" of food (Just et al., 2008).

To address the nutritional issues faced by young adults pursuing higher education, it is recommended that colleges and dorms enhance their food offerings, provide nutrition instruction to students, and set up loans and scholarships that are suitable for their requirements. In the present economic climate, this study will look at how it impacts university students' regularity, eating habits, and spending power. It will also try to identify how it influences nutrition.

2. Material and Method

2.1 Study design, setting, and sample.

The research is of the descriptive kind. According to Afyonkarahisar Health Sciences University Faculty of Health Sciences, the total population of students is about 2370 (AFSU, 2023). Therefore, the minimum recommended sample size was

331 students, with a confidence level of 95%, a margin of error of 5%, and a response distribution of 50% using an automated Sample size calculator (SSC, 2023). 335 students who volunteered to engage in the research filled out an online survey using "Google Form" between April and May of the 2022–2023 school year.

2.2 Data collection procedure

As a means of gathering data, a 62-question survey questionnaire that resulted from a literature study was employed. The survey is divided into three sections: the first section asks questions about sociodemographic factors (age, height, weight, gender, department studied, and area of residence); the second section asks about the distribution of expenses from the previous year; and the third section asks about consumption records and eating habits (Ermiş et al., 2015; Gürez, 2018).

2.3 Statistical analyses

Standard deviation ($\bar{X} \pm SD$), frequency, and percentage values were employed as descriptive statistical approaches in the data evaluation. The data were assessed, using a significance level of $p < 0.05$ and a confidence range of 95%. The data were statistically analyzed using the SPSS v26 software.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

At its meeting on March 3, 2023, with meeting number 2023/3, the Afyonkarahisar Health Sciences University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee gave its approval. Every student consented to participate in writing and with full knowledge beforehand. An anonymous questionnaire was utilized. It was up to the participants whether they agreed to participate. For this study, researchers of both genders were chosen. The promise was made to participants that all information would remain confidential and would only be used by researchers on their own projects.

3. Results

In Table 1, 335 students participate to take part in the study, 80.6% (n=270) were female and 19.4% (n=65) were male. The average age is 21.00 ± 2.92 (min 18 - max 40), and the average Body Mass Index (BMI) is 21.30 ± 3.72 (min 15.8 - max 38.3). Of the participants, 51.9% (n=174) live at home with their friends, 28.7% (n=96) reside in a public dorm, and 8.7% (n=29) reside in a private dorm. Again, the monthly income of 47.8% of the participants is covered by their families and is approximately 3000 tl and above (72.5%).

Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Categories	n (335)	% (100)
Sex	Male	65	19.4
	Female	270	80.6
Age Mean ($\bar{X} \pm SD$)		21.0 \pm 2.92	
Department	Nutrition and Dietetics	143	42.7
	Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation	45	13.4
	Nursing	86	25.7
	Healthcare Management	61	18.2
Place of residence	At home with family	36	10.7
	At state dormitory	96	28.7
	At private dormitory	29	8.7
	At home with friends	174	51.9
Source of income	From family	160	47.8
	From student scholarship	75	22.4
	From working	34	10.1
	From family + Student scholarship	56	16.7
	From family + working	10	3.0
Monthly income	0-500	16	4.8
	500-1500	25	7.5
	1501-3000	51	15.2
	3000 and above	243	72.5

Table 2. General information of the participants

Variable	Categories	n (335)	% (100)
Smoking status	Yes	82	24.5
	No	253	75.5
Water drinking status (at least 2 L/day)	Yes	216	64.5
	No	119	35.5
Adequate and Balanced nutritional status	Yes	51	15.2
	No	133	39.7
	Partially	151	45.1
Reason of Inadequate and Unbalanced Nutrition	Economic inadequacy	n (284) 153	% (100) 53.8
	Lack of information	50	17.6
	Fast food addiction	2	0.7
	Desire to overeat	3	1.1
	Access to food	52	18.3
	Lack of appetite/ Timelessness	24	8.5
	Food chooses criteria	Price	202
Square meal		56	16.7
Quality		25	7.5
Hygienic		32	9.6
An easy-to-cook meal		16	4.8
Type of material used		4	1.2

In 75.5% of instances (n = 253), participants reported not smoking, and in 64.5% of cases (n = 216), they reported consuming at least 2 liters of water daily. Compared to those who believe they have a sufficient and balanced diet, which make up 15.2% (n=51) of the population, 84.8% (n=284) of the population believe they do not (no 39.7%, partly 45.1% respectively). Most participants (53.8%) stated that they were unable to consume a sufficient and balanced diet due to financial insufficiency. It has been shown that most participants consider food price to be a significant factor when choosing what to eat (Table 2).

Table 3. Meal habits of participants

Variable	Categories	n (335)	% (100)
Main Meal	1	8	2.4
	2	91	27.2
	3	113	33.7
	4	70	20.9
	More than 5	53	15.8
Skip a Meal	Yes	206	61.5
	No	129	38.5
		n (206)	% (100)
Skipping Meals	Breakfast	121	58.7
	Lunch	20	9.7
	Dinner	8	3.9
	Snack	57	27.7
		n (206)	% (100)
Reason for Skipping Meals	Economic inadequacy	146	70.9
	Lack of appetite	5	2.4
	To lose weight	3	1.5
	Timelessness	52	25.2
Eating out habits	Yes	292	87.2
	No	43	12.8
		n (292)	% (100)
Which meal do you typically eat at outside?	Breakfast	42	14.4
	Lunch	134	45.9
	Dinner	72	24.7
	Lunch + Dinner	44	15.0
		n (292)	% (100)
Where do you typically dine out?	Cafe/restaurant	22	7.5
	Canteen	2	0.7
	Fast food	90	30.8
	Dining-hall	178	61.0
		n (292)	% (100)
Reason for choosing to dine here	Economic/cheap	108	37.0
	Practical	102	34.9
	Because of the class schedule	4	1.4
	Eating with friends	78	26.7

Table 3 shows that 33.7% of participants reported eating three meals a day, consisting of a main meal and a snack. Once more, it was discovered that 61.5% (n=206) of the participants skipped meals. Out of the 206 individuals who reported missing meals, 58.7% (n=121) said they missed breakfast, and the majority (70.9%) said they missed meals due to not having enough money. The majority of participants (87.2%) stated that they had lunch outside of their school (45.9%).

When asked to compare the cost of education between the city where they studied and their hometown, 40.6% of participants said it was higher and 30.7% said it was same. Additionally, they assessed that the cost of housing and food and beverage in the city where they studied was higher than that of their hometown (46.3%, 63.6% respectively) (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of their hometown and the city they studied in

Variable	Categories	n (335)	% (100)
Students' expenses	Very low	2	0.6
	Low	23	6.9
	Same	103	30.7
	High	136	40.6
	Very high	71	21.2
Food-Beverage	Very cheap	0	0.0
	Cheap	5	1.5
	Normal	81	24.2
	Expensive	155	46.3
	Very expensive	94	28.1
Housing	Yes	36	10.7
	No	213	63.6
	Partially	86	25.7

Table 5. General expenditure distribution of participants by years

Expenses		<50 t1		50-100 t1		100-200 t1		>200 t1	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Communicatio n	2021	61	18.2	167	49.9	72	21.5	35	10.4
	2022	20	6.0	73	21.8	179	53.4	63	18.8
Transport	2021	116	34.6	98	29.3	62	18.5	59	17.6
	2022	25	7.5	131	39.1	81	24.2	98	29.3
Heating	2021	152	45.4	71	21.2	71	21.2	41	12.2
	2022	121	36.1	51	15.2	77	23.0	86	25.7
Energy	2021	146	43.6	64	19.1	61	18.2	64	19.1
	2022	123	36.7	53	15.8	53	15.8	106	31.6
Stationery	2021	183	54.6	90	26.9	47	14.0	15	4.5
	2022	126	37.6	110	32.8	72	21.5	27	8.1
Food- Beverage	2021	76	22.7	91	27.2	86	25.7	82	24.5
	2022	22	6.6	63	18.8	111	33.1	139	41.5
Social activity	2021	134	40.0	111	33.1	49	14.6	41	12.2
	2022	93	27.8	95	28.4	84	25.1	63	18.8

		<500 tl		500-1000 tl		1000-2000 tl		>2000 tl	
Clothing	2021	137	40.9	105	31.3	48	14.3	45	13.4
	2022	70	20.9	96	28.7	93	27.8	76	22.7
Housing	2021	140	41.8	55	16.4	79	23.6	61	18.2
	2022	117	34.9	54	16.1	48	14.3	116	34.6

Table 5 displays the participants' expenditure allocation by year. In 2022, 18.8% of people reported spending 200 TL or more on communication, compared to 10.4% in 2021. The rate of those who spent 1000 TL or more on transportation, heating, energy, stationery, food-beverage, and social activity in 2021 (17.6%, 12.2%, 19.1%, 4.5%, 24.5%, 18.8%, respectively), increased in 2022 (29.3%, 25.7%, 31.6%, 8.1%, 41.5%, 18.8%, respectively). While the rate of those who spent 2000 TL or more on clothing in 2021 was 18.2%, it increased to 22.7% in 2022. Likewise, the rate of those who spent 2000 TL or more for housing increased from 18.2% in 2021 to 34.6% in 2022.

Table 6. Food-Beverage expenditure distribution of participants by years

Expenses		n		%		n		%	
		None	Sometimes	Frequent	Always				
Bagel/pastry	2021	13	3.9	204	60.1	81	24.2	37	11.0
	2022	21	6.3	207	61.8	63	18.8	44	13.1
Lahmacun/ pide	2021	10	3.0	272	81.2	43	12.8	10	3.0
	2022	20	6.0	268	80.0	35	10.4	12	3.6
Pizza	2021	36	10.7	236	70.4	48	14.3	15	4.5
	2022	52	15.5	230	68.7	39	11.6	14	4.2
Döner kebab	2021	20	6.0	202	60.3	81	24.2	32	9.6
	2022	18	5.4	212	63.3	73	21.8	32	9.6
Hamburger	2021	39	11.6	215	64.1	60	17.9	21	6.3
	2022	47	14.0	212	63.3	55	16.4	21	6.3
Çiğ köfte	2021	24	7.2	177	52.8	86	25.7	48	14.3
	2022	28	8.4	191	57.0	68	20.3	48	14.3
Homemade meals	2021	8	2.4	108	32.2	81	24.2	138	41.2
	2022	6	1.8	103	30.8	69	20.6	157	46.9
Tea	2021	16	4.8	119	35.5	112	33.4	88	26.3
	2022	17	5.1	108	32.2	114	34.0	96	28.7
Coffee	2021	8	2.4	101	30.2	133	39.7	93	27.8
	2022	7	2.1	114	34.0	117	34.9	97	29.0
Ayran	2021	20	6.0	171	51.0	99	29.6	45	13.4
	2022	29	8.7	165	49.2	102	30.4	39	11.6
Ready juice	2021	63	18.8	216	64.4	50	14.9	6	1.8
	2022	61	18.2	222	66.2	48	14.3	4	1.2
Carbonated beverage	2021	51	15.2	194	58.0	59	17.6	31	9.3
	2022	55	16.4	205	61.1	44	13.1	31	9.3
Milk	2021	39	11.6	192	58.2	84	25.1	20	6.0
	2022	49	14.6	195	58.2	69	20.6	22	6.6
Fresh juice	2021	62	18.5	234	69.8	27	8.1	12	3.6
	2022	87	26.0	226	67.4	20	6.0	2	0.6

Herbal teas	2021	29	8.7	185	55.2	68	20.3	53	15.8
	2022	31	9.3	187	55.9	62	18.5	55	16.4

The percentage of people who say they always eat döner kebab, hamburgers, and çığ köfte has not changed from 2021 to 2022, while the percentage of people who say they always eat bagel/pastry, Lahmacun/pide, and home-cooked meals has grown. Once more, the percentage of respondents who said they always drink tea, coffee, herbal tea, and milk increased in 2022 compared to 2021, while the percentage of respondents who said they always drink ayran, ready juice, and fresh fruit juice decreased. Participants who frequently had tea and ayran on a basis in 2022 consumed fewer other items than they did in 2021. Except for pizza and home-cooked meals, the percentage of people who claim they never eat items like bagel/pastry, lahmacun/pide, döner kebab, hamburgers, and çığ köfte has increased in 2022 compared to 2021 (Table 6).

4. Discussion

Numerous studies have looked at how much of an impact students have on the metropolitan economy. In contrast to earlier studies, Kaşlı and Serel's (2008) study in Balıkesir found that students spent a larger portion of their money on social activities. Similar findings were made by Yazar and Demir (2013) in Tokat and Çalışkan (2010) in Uşak regarding the amount of money students spend on housing, transportation, and food and beverage. Furthermore, Çalışkan's research revealed that students had a greater level of contentment with the city than many other studies. More money was set aside for housing and transportation in Bitlis, according to research done there by Binici and Koyuncu (2015). Comparing the food-beverage expenses of students in Kastamonu with those of Güllü et al. (2018) in Eskişehir, Gümüş and Ekiz (2017) found that students considered housing costs to be excessive. It was discovered that the students who took part in our research thought that living expenses and the cost of food and beverage were higher in the city where they studied than in their hometown.

There are common food consumption inadequacies among college students, according to a systematic evaluation of 37 research on students from 30 different nations. One prevalent issue was low consumption of fruits, vegetables, dietary fiber, and seafood. Research has shown that many college students usually forgo breakfast in favor of lunch or dinner. Once more, a lot of students snacked in between meals and ate low-nutrient items that were often served in university cafeterias. Living with one's parents has been linked to more consistent eating patterns, which include consuming more fruits, vegetables, and other healthful meals. When students move away from their parents' houses, their diets frequently alter significantly; they eat at less home-cooked meals and healthful foods and more fast food. It has also been shown that the food environment on campus influences eating decisions, sometimes restricting the availability of healthful meals. To put it briefly, governmental measures to support healthier food choices on campus have been proposed, and the university setting has been assessed as a viable setting to promote healthy eating (Bernardo et al., 2017).

Examining the research group's eating patterns, it was discovered that 61.5% of the students had missed meals. When the "sometimes" option was included in the analysis, the percentage of participants who skipped meals increased from 43.4% to 76.1%. It might be argued that many students miss meals overall. It should not be overlooked that consuming less than three meals a day or that the meals are not spaced equally can disturb the metabolism, making it impossible to have an appropriate and balanced diet. According to a 2014 research, lunch was the meal that students skipped the most (52.6%), followed by breakfast (39.7%). The reason why the most skipped meal is lunch may be that students skip lunch due to the intensity of classes at school during the day (Ermiş et al., 2015). In the study, it was determined that the meal most skipped by university students in 2022 was breakfast (58.7%), and they cited economic inadequacies as the reason for skipping meals (70.9%).

Martinez-Perez et al. (2022) conducted a study on the food purchasing behavior, choice determinants, and food availability on campus of the university community, including students, employees, and administrative and support staff within the university environment. Like the study, most participants found that they purchased food on campus for lunch and snacks when they were away from home. The most frequently preferred foods are hot drinks (tea, coffee etc.), bottled water and hot foods (such as small serving and sandwiches/burgers). Providing generous portions at reduced costs has been demonstrated to affect many students' dietary preferences. The participants made demands for expanded availability of healthy options in vending machines, reduced costs for healthier selections, and sustainability as well as high nutritional quality items. In conclusion, pricing plays a significant role for different groups when it comes to food choices made by students, even though flavor is still a major issue. Food consumption patterns can be positively impacted by making improvements to the campus dining facilities and offering discounts on healthier options. These findings might add to long-term health benefits by informing initiatives that encourage healthier eating choices in academic environments.

Maschio et al. (2023) in their study on the use of unprocessed foods and consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards this practice, participants associated the use of whole foods with health promotion and sustainability. Sustainability-conscious consumers have identified the synergy between the healthiness of food and its sustainable features. But some participants linked whole food use to economic factors, such as saving money. While participants with low monthly income generally associated all food consumption with food and nutrition, those with high monthly income associated this with positive attitudes to a lesser extent.

The study looks at how meal selections and nutritional value are affected in a cafeteria environment by payment methods and food item pre-selection. Making your meal selections in advance from the menu board hasn't always resulted in healthier options. It has been shown that the payment method selection has a big

influence on meal selections. It was shown that those who use limitless debit cards are less likely to buy skim milk but more likely to buy less healthful products like cakes and soda. However, restricting the use of debit cards has resulted in a marked rise in the consumption of nutritious foods and a decrease in the consumption of harmful ones. Debit card users with limited cards used less calories and healthier meals, whereas those with unrestricted cards used more calories and less nutrient-dense foods. The findings imply that precommitment and payment mechanisms might affect food preferences, which may have consequences for enhancing the nutritional value of meal options in school cafeterias (Just et al., 2008).

Ogrban (2016) in his study, a significant number of participants evaluated inexpensive foods as very important (38.57%), important (30%) and moderately important (23.8%). This highlights the importance of cost in food choices. Many students are on a tight budget and need to find affordable food options. It was found that most students (54.11%) attach great importance to food that provides value for money. Only a small percentage (0.48%) were found not to be concerned about the cost of food. Most respondents believe that it matters how much food really costs. This emphasizes how pricing affects what people choose to eat. When choosing what to eat, participants seem to typically follow sensible, healthful guidelines, taking things like cost and simplicity of preparation into account. When selecting food, people look for a balance between price and nutritional content, and affordability frequently influences their decisions.

The quality of nutrition and family economic accessibility were assessed in research including 24,753 homes in Pakistan. It has been shown that, on average, grains make up a large number of calories consumed, whereas foods high in protein, such as meat, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and legumes, make up a smaller fraction of the diet. As a result, a large section of the populace experiences malnutrition and stunting due to a lack of appropriate nutrition, which is one of the main reasons in Pakistan. Once more, it is evident how Pakistan's socioeconomic disparities, food shortages, and pricey food items contribute to both economic instability and food insecurity. It has been found that low-income households in Pakistan spend a significant portion of their income on food. He highlights those nutritious foods like fruit, dairy and meat tend to be more expensive across the country. As a result, nutritional quality and economic accessibility are challenging in Pakistan, especially for low-income households. These issues must be addressed to improve food security and nutrition in the country (Hameed et al., 2023).

5. Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how students were affected by the economic ups and downs that our nation experienced in 2021–2022. Since the nation has not yet attained economic stability, the research was unable to proceed. Since the global and national food crises have increased the strain on the current economic crisis. It is anticipated that the study's target group would see noticeably harsher effects on their eating patterns as a result.

6. Conclusions

Individuals these days lead increasingly consumer-focused lives. People in the high-income group view consumption in terms of fashion, ostentation, status, and prestige, whereas people in the low-income group view consumption in terms of providing for their fundamental necessities. The global economic instability that followed the epidemic and impacted every nation has also had an impact on our nation's economy. Because it impacts their family economies, the effects of these economic swings on students place a heavy psychological and social load on them.

The survey found that monthly expenses for university students are largely comparable, with food and beverage and housing being the two most common categories of expenditure. According to several studies, students' living expenses in cities are expensive for housing, food, and beverage, as well as transportation. We have concluded from this circumstance that the expenses of housing, food, and beverage, as well as transportation, are more affected by economic fluctuations than they are by savings opportunities. These are necessities for survival.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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