

Key Challenges Faced by Households for Food Access by Covid-19

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Abstract - Food is essential for life. Maintaining food through the supply chain is important for sustainability. As the coronavirus diseases Covid 19 had affected the life globally, there is a challenge to access food across the world. The study aimed to find out the key challenges faced by households to access food and change of consumer behavior during the Covid 19 pandemic situation in Jaffna district. Data collection was carried out in Jaffna district using interviews, group discussions and questionnaire methods. Fish mongers, vegetable sellers and shop keepers were interviewed regarding the purchasing behavior of consumers. A questionnaire was distributed among the local residents to find the challenges faced by the pandemic situation. The lock down affected the livelihood of wagers who rely on their daily income for nearly three weeks in March- April 2020. As the movement of people was restricted in the first phase, people found it difficult to reach the essential food items. The livelihood of the day-to-day workers was affected by the national curfew implemented throughout the country. Closure of markets due to the spreading of disease, fear of purchasing seafood in the second phase, instability of prices of groceries, unavailability of raw foods and restricted entry into the food corners are the identified key challenges in accessing food. Charity services by the volunteers in the district helped to reduce the hunger of the needy people. However, after the pandemic people showed interest in the short supply chain. Purchasing vegetables from farmers directly from the field is an additional advantage for the farmers.

Key words: Covid 19, Household, Food access, Pandemic

I. INTRODUCTION

The Covid 19 pandemic had disturbed the economy and food system globally and locally [8]. After identifying cases in Sri Lanka, the government implemented national lock down aimed at controlling the pandemic. Quarantine, travel restrictions and isolation of small villages were in practice [3].

Various levels of lock down were initiated in the countries which are affected by the Covid 19 pandemic depending on the infection mortality rates. Countries that implemented their own health regulations and social distancing, as well as people are expected to follow them strictly [10]. In Sri Lanka, the lock down was initiated in the third week of March 2020. The movement of the people was restricted until the third week of April in Jaffna. Thereafter for few weeks curfew was implemented in weekends. Residents of the district were under pressure during the period to find

food to consume. Consumer behavior started to change and home cooking was preferred by the majority.

The study aimed to investigate the key challenges faced by households to access food and change in consumer behavior during the Covid 19 pandemic situation in Jaffna district.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Jaffna district and the data collection was focused based on the pandemic situation from the period of March 2020 December 2020. A questionnaire was distributed among randomly selected 50 residents of households to investigate the challenges faced for food access during the lock down period in Jaffna district from March to April 2020 and thereafter. Local farmers, vegetable sellers, fish mongers and shop keepers were interviewed in order to find out the purchasing behavior of consumers.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The lock down made negative impact on the income and physical assess of food [2]. Food is key factor for consumer sustainability. Covid-19 blocked the normal food supply chain functions. The normal life style of the people was changed and people find it difficult to access food [1].

Closure of markets due to the spreading of disease, fear of purchasing seafood in the second phase, instability of prices of groceries, unavailability of raw foods, restricted entry into the food corners are the identified key challenges to access food from the study.

Home cooking was preferred in the pandemic situation as people were reluctant to purchase cooked food from outside. During the lockdown period work from home and online learning were initiated. As there were fewer options to buy food from outside, frequency and amount of food preparation were increased greater than before with the limited grocery available at houses.

Shop keepers reported that the purchasing behavior of consumers changed. They paid attention in purchasing dry foods such as rice, lentils, soya and laundry soaps before lock down in order to use them during the lockdown period. Panic buying of nonperishable food items was observed worldwide [4]. The goods ran out quickly as consumers buy them in excess amount.

Instability of the price of food raw materials is another problem faced during the lockdown period and thereafter,

the price of paddy, black gram and turmeric went high. As some cereals, lentils and spices are imported from other countries, it was hard to import them during the pandemic situation [11].

Due to the spread of diseases, the markets were closed and the sellers had to shift to mobile vegetable markets where they had to spend extra money to hire vehicles. People show interest towards buying vegetables direct from the local farmers at the field. Local welfare societies arranged facilities to consume fruits and vegetables directly from farmers where both farmers and consumers benefited. Agriculture contributed to the national economy, food security and employment in the country [9]. Social media played a big role in advertising the details of availability of food items [12]. Losses of food items especially fruits and vegetables were observed due to closure of markets and restrictions on transport. Access to milk and eggs was not affected like other food items as they could be obtained from local households.

In the second phase of Covid 19 in Sri Lanka, disease was started to spread from fish market and the demand of fish getting lower thereafter. Grocery shop owners reported that demand for eggs went high. Chicken, eggs, canned fish and dried fish were replaced the seafood.

According to the survey, the families rely on day-to-day work found it difficult to run the family during the lock down period and were at a risk of losing their livelihood [5]. However, during the lock down period funds were raised from local volunteer people and those who migrated to foreign countries in order to distribute dry food items to the needy people throughout the districts. Welfare societies, youth clubs, women organizations, charity organizations and temple trusts played a major role in food distribution. Fund collected from the staff of various organizations was used to donate essential food packages to the deprived families of daily wagers who lost their income during curfew. The alumni of Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna took part in relief activity of Covid-19. Supplementary food packets were given to vulnerable group of people. The nutritional supplements were purchased from the organizations that are run by women-headed families and differently-abled persons. Undernourished children from families of deprived daily wagers were provided with the nutritional supplements.

Home gardening was encouraged by the government during the period with the theme of from garden to table where seeds were distributed to people in order to encourage self-consumption [6].

IV. CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 crisis has raised awareness among people regarding the importance of food access. As the state-imposed curfew was implemented throughout the country with the spread of deadly virus, the situation greatly affected the daily wage earners. Residents of Jaffna faced difficulties

to access food items during the lock down period. Charity services by the volunteers took major role to reduce the hunger of needy people in the district.

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