

CONSUMER PREFERENCES AND FISH AVAILABILITY IN RURAL AND URBAN FISH MARKETS IN BATTICALOA DISTRICT, EASTERN SRI LANKA

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The availability of fish in markets and consumption trends are varied among the people in Sri Lanka. There are many factors affecting the distribution and consumption of fish, which are diverse and complex. The objective of this study was to understand the fish distribution and social and cultural parameters associated with purchasing and consumption pattern of rural and urban markets in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. A market survey was conducted to identify the availability of different fish species in the district. Moreover a pre-tested questionnaire was employed to collect information on consumption behaviour and social and cultural factors influencing on fish consumption. Following the purposive sampling technique information were collected from 150 people who came to purchase fish from fish outlets. Results showed that 85% of the respondents consume fish as their major protein food. The decision of purchasing fish for consumption is made based on religious beliefs (10%) and economical (5%) view. However, all respondents mentioned that fish availability was the major constraints for consumption of their preferred type of fish. Among the respondents in urban area, approximately 45% of the respondents preferred seashore fishes (family: Clupidae) and 40% preferred reef fishes (family: Carangidae) and 15% consumed fresh water fishes (family: Cichlidae), but consumption depends on the availability of fish in the respective area. The fish markets in rural areas were mainly having inland fish species and the consumers in these areas showed preference to buy freshwater fish species (family: Cyprinidae and Claridae) since there were no marine reef fish species and seashore fishes in rural areas. It is concluded that availability of fish in rural and urban markets in Batticaloa district and fish consumption trend is determined by many factors including socio-demographics of consumers.

Keywords: Consumer preferences, Fish distribution, Socio-demographics factor