Consumer Preferences for Marine and Inland fish: A Case Study in the Anuradhapura District

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A poor understanding of the supply and demand for fish has been a major constraint in developing fisheries in Sri Lanka. Anuradhapura district receives daily a significant quantity of marine fish and inland fish. It is thus an ideal location to study consumer preferences and gain an understanding of the supply and demand for marine and inland fish.

This research was carried out over a six month period within three different geographic areas (urban, semi-urban, and rural) in the Anuradhapura district by interviewing 300 consumers using a semi-structured pre-tested questionnaire. The objective of this study was to understand consumer preferences for marine and inland fish by identifying the factors which affect consumer demand.

A two-way ANOVA ($F = 98.17$; $df = 299$; $p = 0.00$) showed that there were significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in demand for fish in the three geographic areas. Comparison of consumer preference in rural and urban areas using a t-test indicated ($t = 11.27$; $df = 199$; $p=0.00$) a significant difference ($p < 0.05$). In rural areas up to 90 % of the mean per capita protein intake consists of inland fish products whereas in urban areas 92% of the consumers depend on marine fish. A Chi square (χ^2) test for age and consumer preference ($\chi^2 = 87.87$; $df = 22$; $p = 0.00$) and for sex and consumer preference (($\chi^2 = 12.07$; $df = 4$; $p=0.02$) also showed significant differences ($p<0.05$). There was no significant difference between the education level and consumer preference for fish ($p > 0.05$). Majority of the consumers were Buddhist. A Chi square test ($\chi^2 = 40.71$; $df = 300$; $p = 0.00$) indicated that wealth level and consumer preference for fish in the three geographic areas varied significantly. Consumer preference for freshwater fish gradually decreased with increase in income level. High consumption of freshwater fish was shown by consumers with a monthly income of Rs. 5,000 -10,000 whereas high consumption of marine fish was shown by people with an income range of Rs. 10,000-20,000.

These results show that geographic location, demographic and psychographic factors significantly affect consumer preference for marine and inland fish in the Anuradhapura district. Based on these findings, suitable recommendations for better fish marketing and production policies which will enable to target the market for the rich and the poor in the Anuradhapura district are proposed.