

EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC CONCEPTS ON CHOICE AND INTAKE OF FOOD

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***Abstract:** Economics has gotten many definitions. The reason is that economists see the subject from different point of view. They are interested in different aspects of economics such as money, industries, business, welfare, international relations etc. However, according to Professor Lionel Robbins whose definition is the most acceptable, Economics can be defined as a social science that studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses. Before now economics is not integrated with the mainstream of nutrition science or practice, other than "home economics" but now, it can enable greater understanding of how socio-economic status may interplay with human nutritional status and health. The important role of economics in food and nutrition is being increasingly recognised. In this paper, secondary sources of data collection like books, government publications and other documents relating to economics and nutrition were utilized. However, like all material sources, the element of subjectivity cannot be absolutely erased but efforts were made to be as objective as possible in the use and application of these documents. It has been confirmed however, that there is a link between economics and nutrition as seen in the influences the economic variables have in the choice and intake of food. Good agricultural food consumption policies, income generation and nutrition education were amongst the recommendations made in this research.*

Keywords: Economics, Concepts, Nutrition.

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INTRODUCTION

Economics has gotten many definitions. It is said sometimes that there are as many definitions as there are many economists. The reason is that economists see the subject from different point of view. They are interested in different aspects of economics such as money, industries, business, welfare, international relations etc. However, according to Professor Lionel Robbins whose definition is the most acceptable, Economics can be defined as a social science that studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses (Anyakoha, 2008). However, according to Professor Lionel Robbins whose definition is the most acceptable, Economics can be defined as a social science that studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses (Carol, *et al*, 1989).

Before now, economics is not integrated with the mainstream of nutrition science or practice, other than “home economics” but now, it can enable greater understanding of how socio-economic status may interplay with human nutritional status and health. The important role of economics in food and nutrition is being increasingly recognised as crucial for its potential impact on Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQL), both at the societal and individual levels. Increasing epidemiological and scientific evidence demonstrates clear links between economics, food, and health maintenance/disease development (WHO, 2003). In developing countries, morbidity and mortality are directly related to protein and energy malnutrition (associated with low income earners) while in many Western countries, health officials have begun to actively promote the consumption of healthy foods while reducing the amount of energy in the diet. Scarcity of foods which falls into the category food insecurity (which informs the theme of today’s conference) cannot be totally eliminated in as much as we continue to have different economic strata in the society. Health spending is presently rising faster than GDP in most of the underdeveloped countries which Nigeria is part of due to wrong choice of foods and ignorance in terms food combination, processing and preparation (Watson, 2006). The question of how to optimise the use of scarce resources, and the linkage between nutrition, health and welfare should be studied in a broader and more scientific way. This should include aspects and methodologies that compare nutrition-related costs and health outcomes, in order to sustain value-based decisions within systems providing health care. A favourable impact of economic variables on nutrition-related disorders and general health status may have a positive impact on health care expenditure, thus contributing to public health and the sustainability of health systems in general. Meanwhile, the joint development of a discipline like nutrition economics may help the policymakers to encourage individual responsibility for a healthy lifestyle.

Finally, people who change their diet plan for economic reasons (prices of foods, demand and supply, ostentatious goods, choice, income level etc) may develop a range of nutritionally, related disorders and diseases ranging from so called over-nutrition to and or under-nutrition even within the same household.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, secondary sources of data collection like books, government publications and other documents relating to economics and nutrition were utilized. However, like all material sources, the element of subjectivity cannot be absolutely erased but efforts were made to be as objective as possible in the use and application of these documents.

DISCUSSIONS

How Do Economic Variables Affect Food and Nutrition?

The relation in a country between the level of nutrition and the level of economic development is obviously very close. Nutrition is, of course, an economic activity which supplies the nutrients to satisfy nutrition necessities. Nutritional balance within a population is a reflection of the prevailing food supply-demand balance, a balance itself

which is conditioned by many economic variables (Olayide, 1974). These variables include; economic status, individual choice, scale of preference and demand supply which invariably determines price and so on.

Economic Status As It Affects Amount of Nutrient Intake

The ultimate goal of nutritional plans in national development is to raise the standard of living of the citizenry. However, "standard of living" is related to many other factors, and its measurement involves attention to a considerable number of variables. One of the more important yardsticks for measuring standard of living is the average nutritional intake of the population. The importance of this yardstick as an index of quality of life which is derived from the valid assumption that a given level of nutritional intake is influenced by many economic and other variables such as economic status. With all of their implications, a population's level of nutritional intake can be used to draw certain broad inferences about the economic well-being of the people and vice versa (Olayide *et al*, 1985).

People who assumed to be wealthy eat more than the households that are poor. This most of the times result to nutritional disorders like overweight, obesity, diabetes, coronary heart diseases and hosts of others. Meanwhile, the members of the poor households are majorly the people suffering from low intake disorders such as protein energy malnutrition, deficiency diseases and the likes (Lo *et al*, 2009).

Food Prices and Food Choices

WHO (2003) asserts that the global food price crisis threatens public health and jeopardises the health of the vulnerable (disadvantaged or low income earners) groups such as women, children, and the elderly and low income families. Economic decision factors such as food price and income do influence peoples' food choice and invariably affects their nutritional status. Economic decision factors such as food price and income do influence peoples' food choices (Lo *et al*, 2009).

Moreover, food costs are a barrier for low income families to healthier food choices. Several studies indicate that diet costs are associated with dietary quality and also food safety. Food prices have surged over the past couple of years and have raised serious concerns about food security around the world. Rising food prices are having severe impacts on the population including their social, psychological, health and nutritional status.

Scale of Preference, Food Purchases and Intake

According to Anyakoha (2008), scale of preference refers to the consumers' preferences for diverse goods and services over others. In other words, a consumer may prefer unhealthy food items in preference for the healthy ones. He or she may even decide to use the available income for food items to purchase non food items in preference to food

items. It should be noted here that, you are responsible for your actions nutritionally. You are what you eat.

How Does Law of Demand and Supply Affects Food Purchases

Consumer behaviour largely operating through the economic principle known as law of demand states that all other factors held constant, as the price of a good increases (or decreases) the quantity demanded of that good will decrease (or increase). This principle has worked perfectly well in either encouraging or discouraging the purchase and intake of certain food items. For instance, there are certain food items that are healthy but are expensive for the poor masses. The only way to reduce the food price and increase food intake is by increasing food availability. This can be achieved through food importation as a short-term means or by increasing the food production locally as a long term means there by reducing the price. Price increase in food items can also deter or reduce the intake of a particular food item. In this case, it is for the well being of the members of the society.

According to Olayide *et al* (1985), this idea is the driving force behind large increase in the tobacco taxes in order to increase the price and reduce the intake by smokers. One of the benefits is that when the price of the unhealthy food items increase, there is tendency for consumers to switch over to healthier food substitutes with positive nutritional health value.

Poverty and Attitude of Accepting Change (Innovation)

Olayemi (1974) postulated that economic constraints to adoption of new nutritional behaviour may be as a result of long experience of poverty and deprivation which can condition people psychologically. A chronic lack of resources and opportunities may lead to almost total acceptance of their condition as the act of God. This kind of attitude can lead to perpetual acute malnutrition.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is inter-disciplinary relationship between nutrition and economics. And the better understanding of this relationship will go a long way in curbing the negative influences of one on the other thereby preventing diseases and improving the health and the nutritional status of individuals and the general public. However, it can be argued that the level of economic status of individuals does not really matters, but what matters is the nutritional knowledge of the individuals, nutritional lifestyle and their ability to make better food choices for nutrition. It is based on these assertions that these recommendations were made;

- Designed nutrition education which should focus on better understanding of food combination, preparation, processing and preservation should be embarked on to reduce ignorance on the consumers.

- There should be increased food production through better Government Agricultural production policies such as mechanised agriculture, subsidised farm inputs and access to agricultural loans without collaterals.
- Employment opportunities and better poverty eradication programs will increase the economic status of individuals thereby allowing them access to foods.

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