



Preliminary data on Albanian consumers behavior toward food consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Keywords

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Abstract

Albania faced the same challenges as other countries worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study evaluates how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the food security and variety of foods available to Albanian consumers in urban areas. The research was based on a cross-sectional survey conducted between March until September 2021. Regardless of the total lockdown that characterized this period the Albanian consumers used the time of free circulation to go to markets for grocery and were oriented towards buying local products. "Ordering grocery online" 60% of the participants answered "never". This, in our opinion, is caused by a number of variables, including the brief lock down (the first period lasted from the end of March until June 2020) and consumer perceptions that eating healthily will make it easier to pass through Covid. Our findings do not allow us to predict what will happen in the long run, but risk exposure and food uncertainty have changed how consumers spend and eat. Regardless of the data presented in this manuscript, further studies are warranted in the near future to have a full understanding of the Albania consumers behavior toward food consumption especially under stressed period such as the period of COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Consumer's approach to different food patterns affects the mitigation of the impact of some diseases on public health. The Covid-19 pandemic caused a number of events that changed how consumers perceived food during that time, including a shift in consumer attitudes [1]. The total lockdown at both global and regional levels to prevent the spread of infection's was one of the most dramatic occurrences that defined this time period. The result was an increase in customer insecurity toward food. Food-related habits may have been impacted by a number of psychological alterations linked to COVID-19. People were subjected to substantial communication about the COVID-19 life threat which is likely to have stressed them out. According to different publications, during lockdown, people increased their consumption of so called "comfort foods," such as chocolate, chips, and snacks due to anxiety [2].

Albania faced the same challenges as other countries worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the forementioned there are different reports worldwide in the frame of the consumers attitude toward nutrition, and there isn't any publication for the case of Albania consumers. This study evaluates how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the food security and variety of foods available to Albanian consumers in urban areas. The results of this study can aid in a better understanding of the needs of the consumers during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding the requirements of these populations can help in better planning and carrying out preventive interventions in a more effective way.

Material and Method

This cross-sectional research was conducted between March and September 2021 in urban areas in Albania. The design of the questionnaire used in the survey was mainly based on similar research [3] and adopted to the characteristics of Albanian consumers. The questionnaire was delivered through the online platforms, Survey

Monkey and via e-mail. The questionnaire is composed of three parts. The first part contains questions regarding demographics, including educational status. The second part contains questions regarding the consumers' behavior toward food consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. A Liker scale was used to measure this perception, from 'never' (which has a numeric value equivalent to 1) to 'always' (which has a numeric value equivalent to 5). The third part of the questionnaire contains questions if they have experienced changes in the taste of different foods during COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

The first preliminary data of the survey produced an eligible sample of 260 participants, with 65% of respondents (n = 169) residing in Tirana, 30% (n = 78) in Durres, 3% residing in Elbasan and 2% in Fier. "Figure 1" offers the summary statistics for the basic socio-demographic characteristics of the sample where more than 80% of the participants were female.

Furthermore, the participants in the survey were asked if they had experienced negative feelings during the COVID-19 pandemic such as worried, sad, nervous, or depressed. Their perception towards these feelings was assessed based on the Liker scale from "never" to "always". The majority of the participants answered "sometimes" to feeling nervous (33.33%), worried 37.50%, sad 33.33%, scared 30.77% and depressed 20.51%.

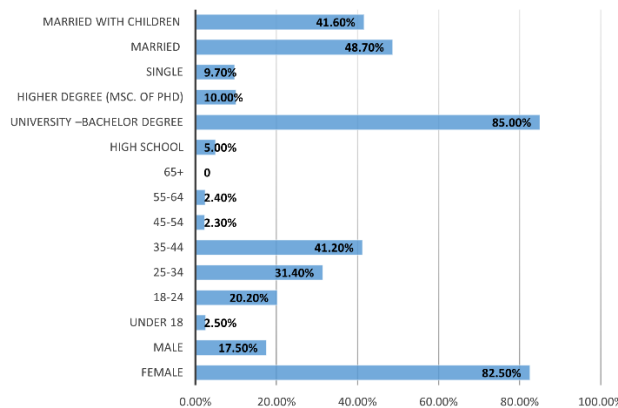


Figure 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants who fulfilled the questionnaire.

The second part of the questionnaire contain questions to assess the Albanian consumers in urban areas toward grocery behavior and nutrition habits during Covid-19 pandemic as shown in "Figure 2".

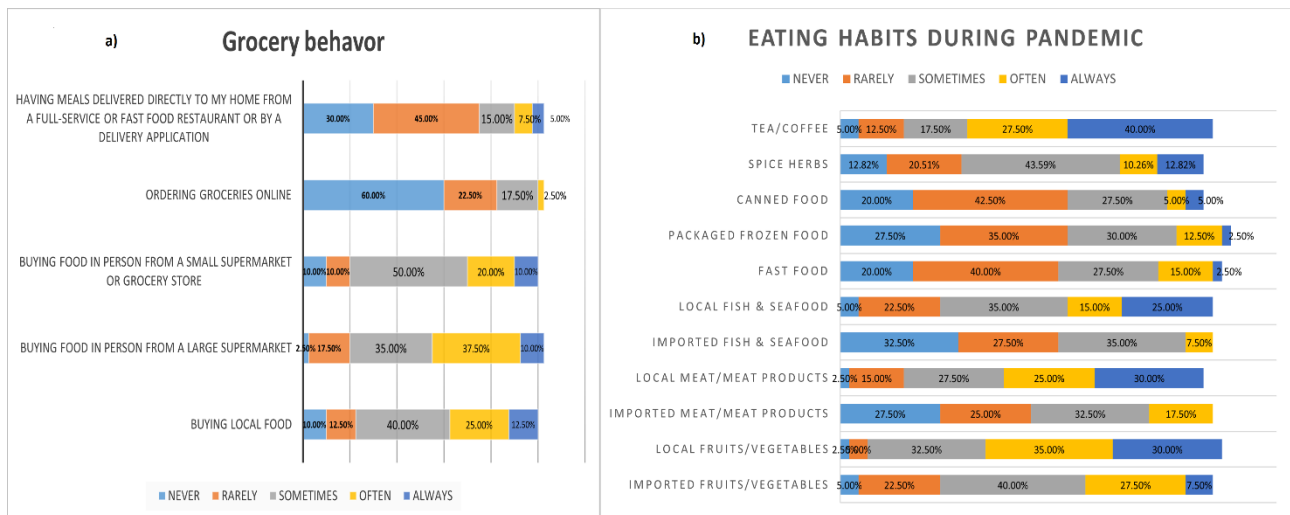


Figure 2. Consumers' behavior toward: a) grocery behavior and b) eating habits during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The preliminary data shows that regardless of the total lockdown that characterized this period the Albanian consumers used the time of free circulation to go to markets for grocery and were oriented towards buying local products. To the statement "Ordering grocery online" 60% of the participants answered "never" as shown in "Figure 2a". "Buying food in person from a small supermarket or grocery store" 20% answered "often" and 10% answered "always". 30 % of the participants choose "always" in consuming local meat/meat products and local fruits and vegetables during pandemic as depicted in "Figure 2b".

To the question “Did your taste on food change during Covid-19 pandemic?” 75 % of the participants answered “yes”. Based on their perception the consumers had experiences changes in food taste mainly towards meat/meat products (30%) as shown in “Figure 3”.

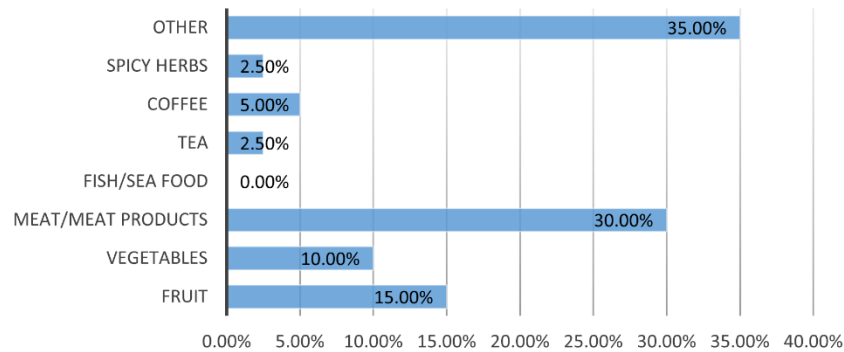


Figure 3. Consumers perception towards changes in taste of different foods during COVID-19 pandemic

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to provide information on consumer food buying habits, means of acquisition, and consumption throughout the pandemic. As with any study done at the time, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's consumption and buying habits [4]. For Albanian customers in the urban areas observed, these shifts weren't as significant. As a result, the majority of survey respondents continued to buy their food in small markets and tended to favor regional foods which is in compliance with some recent publications [5-6]. This, in our opinion, is caused by a number of variables, including the brief lock down (the first period lasted from the end of March until June 2020) and consumer perceptions that eating healthily will make it easier to pass through Covid. For instance, some customers might simply choose to forgo visiting the store during the pandemic in favor of continuing to shop at their favored retailer, so assuring they receive their desired goods. Our findings do not allow us to predict what will happen in the long run, but risk exposure and uncertainty have changed how consumers spend and eat.

Conclusion

The preliminary data of the cross-section survey indicate not a drastic change of Albanian consumers in some urban areas toward food consumption and acquisition during COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of the data presented in this manuscript, further studies are warranted in the near future to have a full understanding of the Albania consumers behavior toward food consumption especially under stressed period such as the period of COVID-19 pandemic.

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