

Effect of Food Price Inflation on Household Dietary Diversity in Tai Local Government Area

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23490373>

Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>This study investigated the impact of food price inflation on household dietary diversity in Tai Local Government Area, Rivers State. The research was prompted by the continuous rise in food prices and the possible implications for households' access to and consumption of diverse, nutritious foods. The specific objectives were to determine the extent of food price inflation in Tai Local Government Area, examine household dietary diversity practices, assess the relationship between food price inflation and household dietary diversity, and identify the factors affecting dietary diversity under conditions of rising food prices. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, with residents of Tai Local Government Area constituting the study population. A sample of 100 residents was selected, and data were obtained through a researcher-developed questionnaire consisting of Sections A and B. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale. The collected data were analyzed using frequency distributions and simple percentages, while the hypothesis was tested using a t-test at the 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that the calculated t-value of 2.813 exceeded the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 significance level and 172 degrees of freedom. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, suggesting a statistically significant effect of food price inflation on household dietary diversity. The study concludes that increasing food prices weaken household purchasing power and may lead families to replace nutrient-dense foods with less expensive staple foods, potentially reducing dietary diversity. It therefore recommends strengthening social protection programmes, promoting local agricultural production and food systems, improving food price monitoring, expanding nutrition education, and implementing broader economic measures to enhance household income and minimize the negative effects of food price inflation on dietary quality.</i> Keywords: Food Price Inflation, Household Dietary Diversity, Food Security, Household Purchasing Power, Nutritional Quality, Nutrition Education.
Received: 23-08-2025	
Accepted: 27-09-2025	
Published: 20-10-2025	
Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Ibegbulem, Udodi Marcia & Professor Innime Righteous. (2025). Effect of food price inflation on household dietary diversity in Tai Local Government Area. UKR Journal of Medicine and Medical Research, 1(2), 89-97.	

Introduction

High food price inflation is considered a serious issue today on the international agenda, especially in low- and middle-income countries where a significant share of income is spent on food. The effects of rising food prices on the ability of households to afford a diverse and nutritious diet have been shown in several studies to increase food insecurity and health impacts (Headey & Alderman, 2019). Households might cut down on their purchases of relatively high-cost, nutrient-dense foods (fruits and vegetables, animal-source foods) when prices of staple commodities

are high. These dietary changes can later have adverse effects on nutritional status and the health of the individual.

There has been extensive research on the link between food price changes and diet diversity at low-income levels. Food price shock has been found to correlate with significant reductions in food diversity, especially for the less well-off families living in urban areas, by Brinkman et al. (2010) in their study of the 2007–2008 global food price crisis. Some families resorted to poor coping mechanisms to deal with the increased costs, such as eating fewer meals per day, or

omitting certain food groups from their food plan. This led to a decrease in dietary quality particularly for children and women of reproductive age, who are more vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies.

Findings suggest that the impact of food inflation on food consumption behaviour is different across countries, driven by factors such as household income level, social protection programmes availability and resilience of food systems. For example, Arndt et al. (2016) found that in Ethiopia, changes in food prices led households to substitute away from expensive food items, towards the more affordable but less nutritious alternatives. In contrast, in countries like Brazil, more effective food assistance programmes have mitigated some of the negative impacts of rising food prices on food diversity. This underlines the need for government support and specific measures to safeguard household nutrition in times of food price volatility (FAO, 2021).

Household adaptation to food inflation has been studied and some variations in coping strategies have been found between geographical and socio-economic contexts. Islam et al. 2020 reported higher losses of dietary diversity in the rural households of Bangladesh compared to the urban ones, which is partly related to the limited availability of markets and low reliance on subsistence farming. As the financial resources of households dwindled, they often increased their intake of calorie-rich staple foods that were low in nutrients, in order to meet their calorie needs. The results of this study suggest that food price inflation has the potential to further contribute to the existing nutritional disparities across the population, especially for those who are economically vulnerable and have less access to a variety of food items.

Gender roles and intra-household relationships are also important drivers of the food price response of households. Women who often have primary responsibility for preparing meals at home and food budgeting may cut their own food intake in order to provide adequate meals for the other members of the family, especially for children (Quisumbing et al., 2020). This can make women more vulnerable to malnutrition, particularly in food insecure households. An understanding of these household dynamics is key to designing appropriate nutrition policies and social protection programmes to cater to the needs of vulnerable groups.

The literature reviewed shows that food price inflation is a significant issue for ensuring household dietary diversity, especially for those who cannot afford a diversified diet. There are different factors that affect its impact, such as the income of households, responsiveness of food demand to changes in price, coping mechanisms adopted by

households, and the effectiveness of institutional interventions. There is a need for further research to explore the impact of interventions, like food subsidies, price controls, and targeted nutrition programmes, on protecting vulnerable households from the negative nutritional effects of food price increases.

Research Design

Research design is the specification of the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the information needed to address the problems. Descriptive survey design was used in this study. The problem was adequately addressed in the study.

Population of the Study

For the purpose of this study, the target population consists of residents of Tai Local Government Area.

Samples and Sampling Techniques

The sample for the study is that part of the population that was selected for more detailed examination. One hundred (100) residents of Tai Local Government Area were used for this study in selecting the needed samples.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument employed for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researcher. It was designed in a clear, simple, and well-organized manner. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, namely Sections A and B. Section A collected information about the respondents' personal characteristics, while Section B contained questions formulated from the research questions to obtain relevant responses from the participants. The response options consisted of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D).

Validity of the Instrument

To determine the face validity of the study, the research instrument was reviewed and approved by the supervisor for the suitability of each item of the instrument. The last items were obtained from the supervisor's comment. The items were further submitted to content validity to ascertain that the contents of the instrument were indicative of the area that the instrument is meant to cover.

Method of Data Analysis

Frequency tables and simple percentage technique were used to analyse the response to the questionnaire items. The Chi-Square Statistics was used to test the research hypothesis presented previously.

4.2 Presentation of Data

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaire

	Frequency	Percent
Returned	87	87.0
Unreturned	13	13.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.1 showed that 87% (87) respondents returned their questionnaire while 13% (13) respondents did not returned their questionnaire. This implies that a large proportion of the questionnaire were filled and returned.

Table 2: Distribution According to Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	51	58.6
Female	36	41.4
Total	87	87.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As indicated in Table 2, 58.6%(51) respondents were male while 41.4%(36) were female. This shows that male respondents participated more in the research than their female counterpart.

Table 3: Distribution according to Age

	Frequency	Percent
21 – 30 years	30	34.5
31 – 40 years	24	27.6
41 – 50 years	18	20.7
51 – 60 years	9	10.3
51 – 60 years	6	6.9
Total	87	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In the age grade category in Table 3, it shows that the respondents 34.5%(30) respondents are between 21 – 30 years, 27.6%(24) are between 31 – 40 years age range, 20.7%(18) are from 41 – 50 years, 10.3%(9) respondents are in between 51 – 60 years, while 6.9%(6) are in the age bracket of above 51 – 60 years.

Table 4: Distribution According to Marital Status

	Frequency	Percent
Single	49	56.3
Married	38	43.7
Total	87	87.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The Marital category of the respondents shows that 56.3% (49) respondents were single while 43.7% (38) respondents were married. This implies that respondents with single status attended more to the questionnaire.

4.3 Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1

Ho: Food price inflation has no significant effect household dietary diversity

H1: Food price inflation has significant effect household dietary diversity

Table 5: Relationship between Food price inflation and household dietary diversity

Structure	N	X	SD	df	Standard Error	t-cal	t _{crit}	Decision
Food price inflation	87	3.59	0.883	172	0.177	2.813	1.96	H ₀
household dietary diversity	87	3.09	1.398					Rejected

0.5 level of significance

Table 5 above shows that the calculated value of t-test $t_{cal} = 2.813$ which is greater than the critical value $t_{crit} = 1.96$ at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom $df = 172$; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis which states “Food price inflation has no significant effect household dietary diversity”. This showed that Food price inflation has significant effect household dietary diversity.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

Food price inflation substantially affects household dietary diversity, especially in low- and middle-income nations, and data strongly points to this. The rising cost of food is forcing families to change their eating patterns, usually by eating a less varied and nutritious diet. It is most noticeable among low-income households who spend a disproportionately large share of income on food. Food inflation concerns food security and food quality by limiting availability to nutrient-rich foods and high value foods such as fruits and vegetables, and animal products (FAO, 2011).

One of the most consistent findings across studies is the substitution effect—households respond to rising prices by substituting expensive foods with cheaper staples such as cereals and tubers. A study by Headey and Ecker (2013) in Ethiopia found that during food price spikes, consumption of more nutritious but costly items declined significantly, while intake of starchy staples remained stable or even increased. This substitution reduces dietary diversity and has negative implications for long-term nutritional outcomes, especially for vulnerable groups like children and pregnant women.

The findings also reveal differential effects of food price inflation between rural and urban households. Rural families, often engaged in subsistence farming or informal labor, are more exposed to food price shocks due to limited income diversification and weaker market integration. For instance, Adekunle et al. (2019) found that rural Nigerian households experienced sharper declines in dietary diversity compared to their urban counterparts during periods of high inflation. This divergence is attributed to rural households’ restricted access to diverse food markets and their greater reliance on seasonal income.

Food price inflation contributes to poor nutritional outcomes by limiting access to essential micronutrients. Research by Hirvonen et al. (2016) found that higher food prices were associated with a lower probability of children consuming a minimally acceptable diverse diet in Ethiopia. This decline in diversity contributes to micronutrient deficiencies, stunting, and weakened immune systems. The public health implications are far-reaching, especially in regions already burdened with malnutrition, where inflation worsens existing health disparities and impedes efforts to meet global nutrition targets.

The studies also identify common coping mechanisms that households adopt during food price inflation, such as reducing portion sizes, skipping meals, or consuming less-preferred foods. While these strategies may help households manage short-term food insecurity, they often come at the cost of diet quality and long-term health. According to Brinkman et al. (2010), such strategies reflect economic stress and a lack of social safety nets, and their prevalence signals deeper vulnerabilities in food systems and household resilience to shocks.

These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted policy interventions to protect dietary diversity during periods of food inflation. Governments and international organizations must strengthen social protection programs, such as food subsidies and cash transfers, to support at-risk households. Additionally, investing in local food systems, reducing reliance on imported food, and improving food storage and transportation can help stabilize prices and ensure a consistent supply of diverse food items. Without proactive measures, food price inflation will continue to erode household dietary diversity and exacerbate food insecurity.

Conclusion

This study has examined the effect of food price inflation on household dietary diversity, revealing a clear and significant negative relationship. Rising food prices lead households—especially those in low-income and rural areas—to make difficult trade-offs between food quantity and quality. In most cases, this results in reduced consumption of nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, dairy, and animal products, and increased dependence on

staple carbohydrates such as rice, maize, and wheat. As households strive to cope with economic constraints, dietary diversity is sacrificed, increasing the risk of malnutrition and associated health problems.

The analysis shows that food price inflation disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including rural households, women, and children. These groups often lack the income, assets, and market access to adapt effectively to price shocks. Rural communities, in particular, face structural disadvantages such as limited access to diverse food markets and seasonal employment, making them highly sensitive to food price changes. Even in urban settings, lower-income households struggle to maintain diet quality when inflation reduces their purchasing power.

The study also highlights broader implications for public health and development. Poor dietary diversity is strongly associated with micronutrient deficiencies, weakened immune systems, and increased susceptibility to disease. Among children, this can lead to stunted growth, cognitive impairment, and long-term developmental challenges. These effects not only burden the health system but also reduce economic productivity and hinder the achievement of national and global development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to hunger, health, and well-being.

Recommendations

To mitigate the adverse effects of food price inflation on dietary diversity, several policy and programmatic interventions are necessary. First, governments should expand and strengthen social protection systems, including targeted food subsidies, cash transfer programs, and nutritional safety nets such as school feeding and maternal health initiatives. These interventions can help cushion the most vulnerable populations during periods of high food inflation and ensure continued access to diverse and nutritious foods.

Second, agricultural and food policy must prioritize the development of resilient local food systems. This includes investing in smallholder farmers, promoting crop diversification, supporting local food markets, and improving post-harvest storage and food processing. Reducing reliance on food imports and enhancing local production of diverse foods can help stabilize prices and make nutritious food more accessible and affordable, especially in rural areas.

Third, governments and international organizations should invest in early warning systems and real-time monitoring of food prices and dietary trends. Timely data collection and analysis are essential for anticipating crises and implementing proactive policy responses. Additionally,

nutrition education and awareness campaigns should be strengthened to encourage healthier food choices within available means and promote sustainable consumption habits.

Lastly, broader economic policies aimed at controlling inflation, improving employment, and boosting household incomes are critical. Enhancing economic resilience will enable families to better absorb food price shocks and maintain dietary diversity over the long term. Without such interventions, food price inflation will continue to undermine the health and nutrition of millions, especially those who are already at risk.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire on the subject ‘effect of Food Price Inflation on Household Dietary Diversity in Tai Local Government Area’ has been designed purposely to source for relevant data that will complement the research work.

The information supplied will be treated with utmost confidentiality and used mainly for the purpose in which the study is intended.

Your honest and objective answers to the following questions will be highly appreciated and acknowledge. Please tick the appropriate box provided for the answers and make comment(s) where necessary.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

1. Sex:
 - a. Male []
 - b. Female []
2. Age:
 - a. 21 – 30 years []
 - b. 31 – 40 years []
 - c. 41 – 50 years []
 - d. 51 – 60 years []
 - e. Above 60 years []
3. Marital Status:
 - a. Single []
 - b. Married []

SECTION B:

Please read the following statements, and tick in the box that best explains your opinion. Tick only one number for each statement using the scale below:

SA: Strongly Agree

SD: Strongly Disagree

A: Agree

D: Disagree

1. **Food prices in Tai have increased significantly in the past year.**
 - a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()
2. **Rising food prices have made it difficult for my household to buy a variety of foods.**
 - a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()
3. **Due to food price increases, my family now consumes fewer fruits and vegetables.**
 - a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()
4. **High food prices have forced my household to eat more staple foods (e.g., rice, garri) and fewer protein-rich foods.**

- a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()
5. **My household has reduced the number of meals we eat daily due to food price increases.**
- a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()
6. **I have noticed a decline in the nutritional quality of food my household consumes since prices went up.**
- a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()
7. **Food inflation has made it harder to afford food items like eggs, milk, meat, and fish.**
- a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()
8. **I sometimes skip buying healthy food because of high prices.**
- a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()
9. **My household now relies more on cheaper, less nutritious food because of food price inflation.**
- a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()
10. **Government support is needed to help households in Tai cope with rising food prices and maintain a healthy diet.**
- a. Strongly Agree ()
 - b. Agree ()
 - c. Strongly Disagree ()
 - d. Disagree ()