



CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR OF MALAYALIS DURING LOCKDOWN



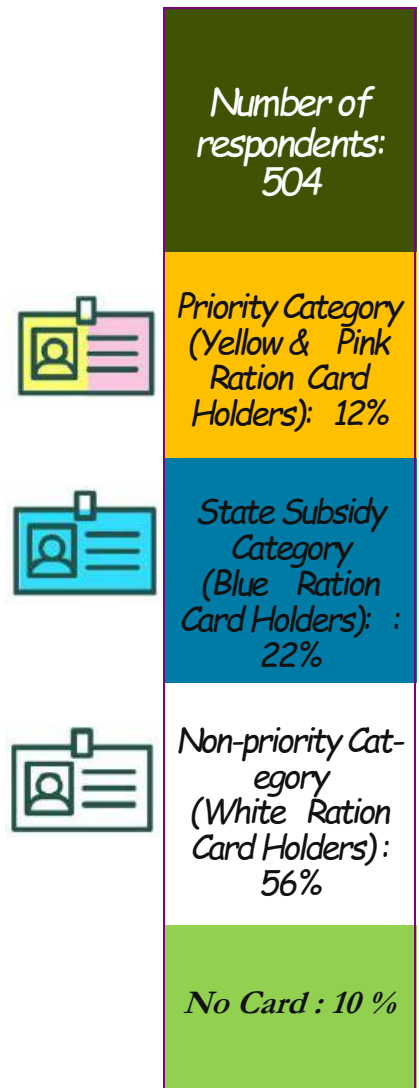
Consumption Behaviour of Malayalis During Lockdown



This study intends to understand changes in the consumption pattern and purchasing behaviour of Malayalis during the lockdown period. The study aimed to answer the following questions; was there any change in the consumption pattern and purchasing behaviour of Malayalis during the COVID-19 lockdown period? Did they experience any shortage of essential products or services? How far did the consumers and the shopkeepers follow the safety measures stipulated by the Government?

An online survey, among Malayalis residing inside and outside Kerala, was conducted to collect data for the study. The survey was conducted between 28th April 2020 and 6th May 2020. However, as the number of respondents from outside Kerala was not sufficient to do a separate analysis, this report is based on the information provided by 504 respondents residing within Kerala. Out of the total respondents, 12 per cent belongs to priority category (households holding yellow and pink ration cards), 22 per cent in the state subsidy category (with blue ration card), and 56 per cent in the non-priority category (having white ration card). Ten per cent of the respondents do not possess a ration card.

As the survey was organised online, it might have reached only those sections with internet access and online literacy. Therefore, the respondents of this study cannot be considered as a representative sample of the Kerala society, which is a major limitation of the current study.



Increased Dependence on Public Distribution System (PDS)

The survey finds that 92 per cent of the households possessing ration card has purchased from ration shops during the lockdown (Figure 1). Among the respondents possessing the ration card, 16 per cent has purchased ration for the first time or after a long period.

Almost all (98 per cent) priority cardholders (yellow and pink ration card holders), 91 per cent of the state subsidy cardholders (blue ration cardholders) and 85 per cent of the non-priority cardholders (white ration card holders) have made purchases from ration shops during lockdown (Figure 2). It is notable that, among the



Most of the households depended on PDS during lockdown.

Kerala is the first state to implement a universalized PDS during the lockdown. At the time of the survey distribution of free kits of essential commodities through ration shops is progressing in the state. The survey outcome proves that such interventions of the Government have been a great relief to all sections of society. This also points to the need for further strengthening of PDS in post COVID-19 Kerala. The increased dependence of non-priority category on PDS may escalate the pressure on the state government. Therefore, the share of food grains allocated to Kerala from the centre requires to be augmented.

Figure 1 : Nature of PDS Purchase by the Households during Lockdown

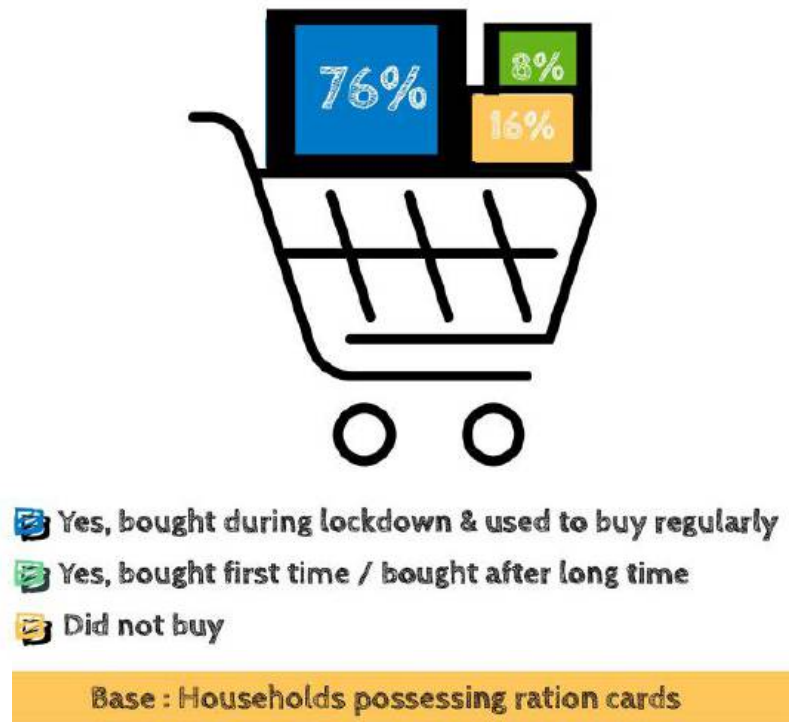
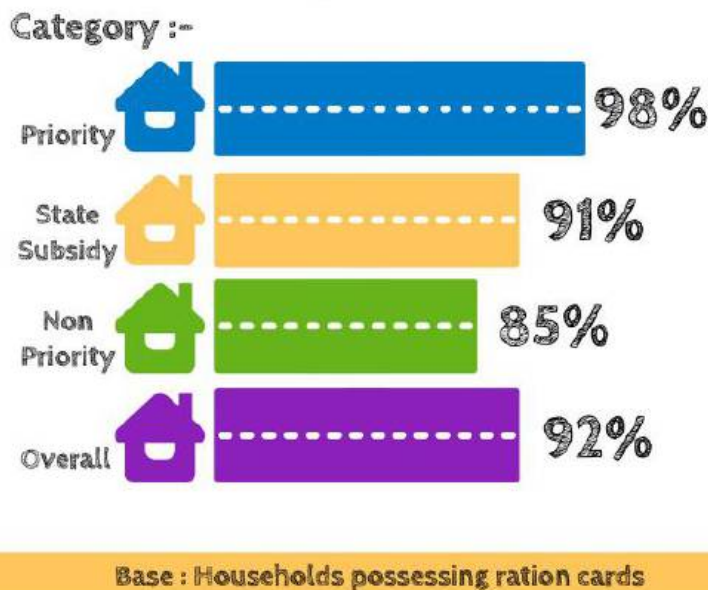


Figure 2 : Households Who Purchased from PDS Shops during Lockdown



The recent report on the People Centric Services published by the fourth Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) of Kerala observes that the efficiency of services delivered by the ration shops in Kerala and the quality of food grains distributed through these shops have improved considerably. The recommendation of the Commission to distribute other essential food items (apart from food grains) through ration shops is also relevant here.

Rise in Reliance on Neighbourhood Grocery Stores

In the pre-lockdown time, 38 per cent of the respondent households used to purchase grocery items from super markets or shopping malls. However, during the lockdown period, this has declined to 20 per cent (Figure 3). Besides, an additional 15 per cent of households started buying from neighbourhood grocery shops during this period. It is also relevant to note that, even amidst the prevailed stringent restrictions on the movement, just 5 per cent of the households depend on online/home delivery facilities.

Among non-priority households, 43 per cent used to buy essential commodities from supermarkets or shopping malls in the pre-lockdown period. However, this got reduced to 24 per cent during the lockdown. The difficulty in going out and the precautions adopted to cut down the physical proximity with others were reported as the major reasons for this change.

Figure 3 : Places of Purchasing Essential Commodities by the Households

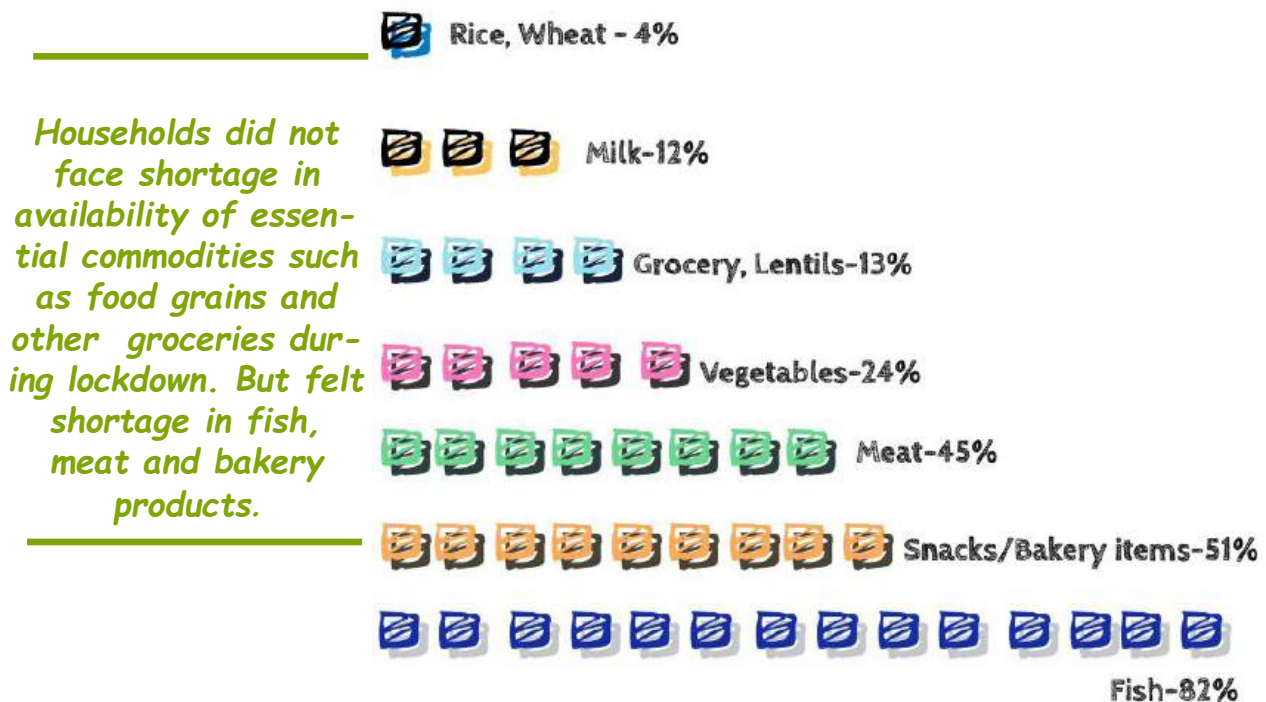


Availability of Essential Commodities

Only less than 5 per cent of the households reported that they experienced a shortage of food grains during the lockdown. Less than 15 per cent reported shortage of other grocery items such as milk or lentils during the time. However, 82 per cent and 45 per cent reportedly faced a shortage of fish and meat, respectively. Half of the households reported a reduced availability of bakery products too. Although fishing and its marketing were brought under essential services, the restrictions imposed on big and mechanized boats and non-availability of transportation facilities adversely affected the marketing and distribution of fish. Therefore, the availability of fish was more or less limited to the costal and nearby areas. These could be the major factors that contributed to the reduced availability of fish during the period.

Some of the respondents reported difficulty in accessing hospital services, mobile services and repair of electrical and home appliances during the lockdown period.

Figure 4 : Households Reported Shortage of Essential Commodities



Changes in Income

Nearly two-thirds (63%) reported that their income got reduced during the lockdown period (Figure 5). As revealed by the survey results, poor households have majorly borne the brunt of the situation. While among the priority card holding households, 97 per cent suffered an income reduction, among the non-priority card holders it was only 49 per cent. It underscores the need to provide thrust to income generation among economically weaker sections in government relief

Income of economically vulnerable households has reduced during lockdown.

Figure 5: Share of Households Reporting Reduction in Income during Lockdown

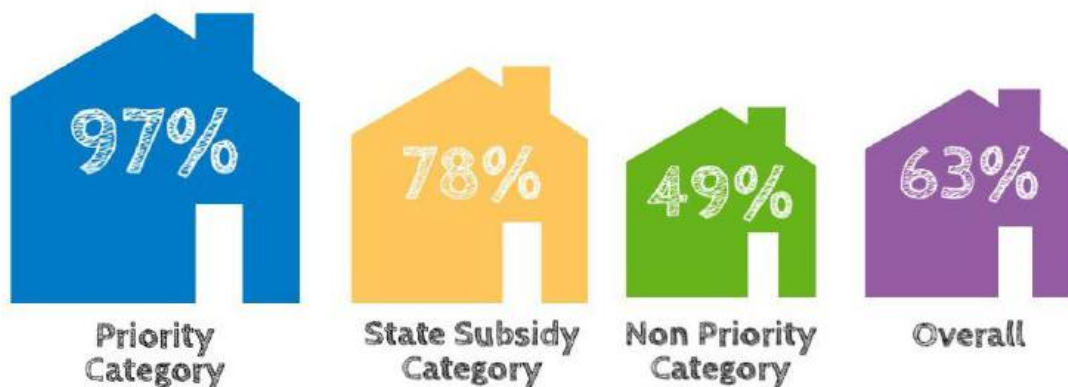
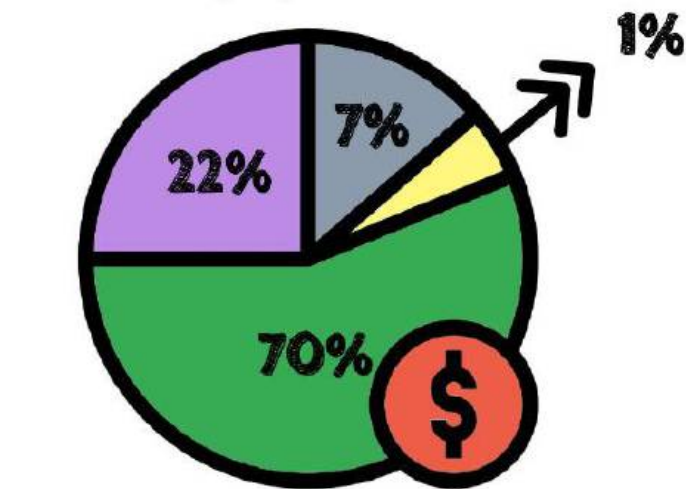






Figure 6: Is there any Need to Reduce Day to day Expenditure?



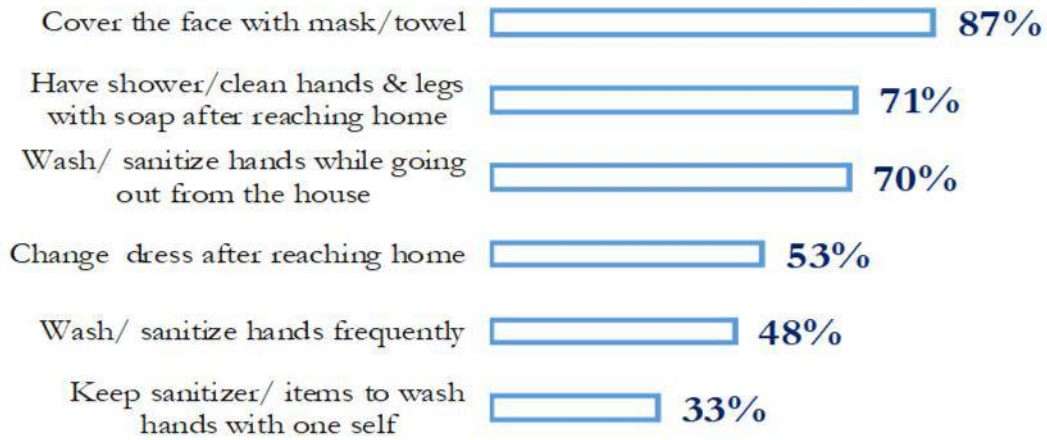
A large majority of respondents (92%) feels they will have to reduce the day to day expenses because of the continuing lockdown.

-  **Yes will need to reduce**
-  **May need to reduce**
-  **No need to reduce**
-  **No response**



The survey also explored how far the safety measures mandated by the Government to contain the spread of the virus (such as personal cleanliness, physical distancing, restrictions in going out, etc. were followed by the consumers and sellers. It is noted that in 12 per cent of the respondent households, elderly (those above 60 years) usually goes out to purchase things during the lockdown. It is a matter of concern that the elderly are still required to go out for purchasing despite the concerted efforts taken by the state Government to facilitate them to remain at home. It calls for special attention from the authorities as scientific studies reveal more complications due to COVID-19 among the elderly.

Figure 7: Safety Measures Adopted by Public While Going Out for Shopping

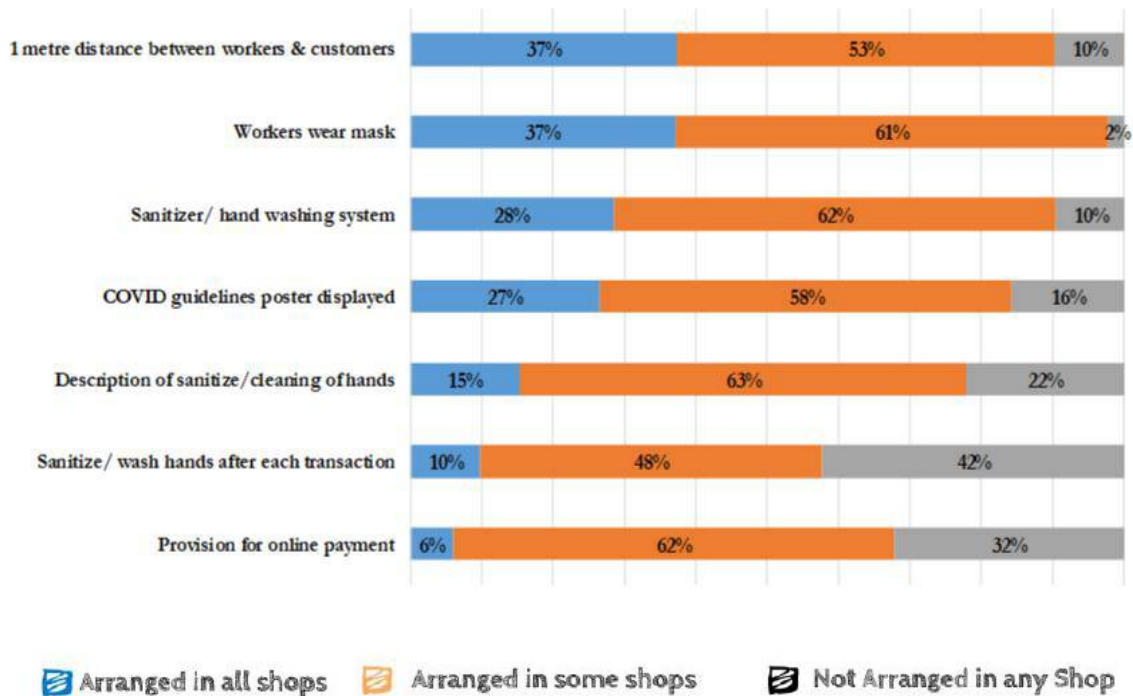


Malayalis developed a practice of wearing masks and sanitizing hands while going out.

The study also finds that 87 per cent of respondents cover the face with a mask or towel, and 70 per cent sanitise hands regularly while going out for shopping (Figure 7).

The State government have published safety guidelines that need to be implemented in shops. However, the survey results show that many of the shops are not following these instructions.

Figure 8: Safety Measures in Shops



The COVID-19 and lockdown scenario has impacted the consumption pattern and behavior of Malayalis. Two notable changes observed during the period are higher dependence on PDS and higher reliance on neighbourhood grocery shops for essential commodities by all sections of the society irrespective of economic class differences.

Although the public is more or less following the safety measures instructed by the Government, many of the shops are not observing them.

Given the stagnation of economic activities, including the primary sector and the resulting job and income losses, the COVID-19 situation has an impact on the future consumption pattern of Malayalis. Especially, as pointed out in the study, if the people reduce their consumption, the economy will be pushed into deeper crisis.



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