



# Investigating the Role of Traditional Foods in Promoting Nutritional Well-Being Among Rural Populations

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## Abstract

Traditional foods are crucial in maintaining nutritional well-being, especially among rural homemakers responsible for household food management. This study examines the socio-cultural, economic, policy, and technological factors influencing traditional food consumption in rural Bandung. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys (n=150) and qualitative interviews (n=30) to assess household food consumption patterns, economic accessibility, and awareness of traditional food benefits. Statistical analyses, including Chi-Square tests and ANOVA, were used to evaluate the relationship between income levels and traditional food consumption behaviour. The findings indicate that low-income households rely more on conventional foods due to affordability, while higher-income groups consume them less frequently despite greater nutritional awareness. Additionally, modernization and urbanization have declined traditional food consumption as processed foods become more accessible. Government interventions, such as food subsidies, school nutrition programs, and traditional food certifications, have been identified as key factors in sustaining traditional food systems. Furthermore, digital technology and e-commerce offer new opportunities for small-scale traditional food producers to expand their market reach. However, challenges such as limited digital literacy and market competition require targeted interventions. This study underscores the importance of integrating policy support, education, and digital innovation to preserve traditional foods. Ensuring their sustainability will require collaborative efforts between governments, communities, and the private sector. By doing so, traditional foods can continue contributing to food security, cultural identity, and public health in Indonesia's rural communities.

**Keywords:** *Traditional Foods, Nutritional Well-being, Rural Housewives, Food Security, Economic Accessibility.*

## 1. Introduction

Traditional foods are an integral part of a community's cultural heritage and are crucial in maintaining nutritional well-being, especially in rural areas. In Indonesia, food diversification based on local ingredients has long been a strategy to achieve food security and balanced nutrition. For example, previous studies have shown that utilizing tuber-based foods such as taro to provide sufficient calories and be an alternative in food diversification programs [1]. The nutritional content of traditional foods varies depending on the primary ingredients and processing methods. For instance, traditional foods made from sago contain complex carbohydrates that can serve as a primary energy source for communities [2]. Additionally, traditional foods often use local ingredients rich in essential nutrients such as minerals and vitamins, which are crucial for health. Applying balanced nutrition principles in traditional food consumption can improve the nutritional status of communities. The Balanced Nutrition Guidelines emphasize the importance of dietary diversity, hygiene, physical activity, and maintaining a normal weight to achieve optimal nutritional status [3]. By integrating nutrient-rich traditional foods into daily diets, communities can effectively meet their dietary needs.

Demographic data indicate that there are many homemakers in Bandung Regency, particularly in rural areas such as Kamasan Village and Banjaran District. In 2019, the village had a population of 14,231, with women comprising 48.99% of the total population [4]. This suggests the potential role of homemakers in managing and selecting food for their families. Homemakers can utilize local food ingredients to enhance food diversification and household food security. For example, using sago as a staple in several Indonesian rural



areas has contributed to dietary diversification and improved household nutritional adequacy [5]. This finding highlights how adopting local food resources can enhance rural communities' nutritional well-being. Moreover, educating homemakers on using and processing local food ingredients can improve their knowledge and skills in preparing nutritious meals for their families. Financial literacy and skills development programs involving homemakers, such as those implemented in several villages in West Java, have improved household well-being through better resource management [6].

The importance of traditional foods in preventing nutritional issues, such as stunting, has also been recognized. Traditional foods' superior dietary content can help reduce community stunting rates [7]. Therefore, promoting and preserving traditional foods is a key strategy for improving public nutritional status. Revitalizing the provision of locally sourced supplementary food in schools can also be a practical approach to improving the nutrition of school-aged children. Integrating nutrition education based on local wisdom can increase children's awareness of nutrition and health while preserving local culture [8]. This suggests that traditional foods are essential for physical health, cultural preservation, and regional identity. However, challenges remain in preserving traditional foods. Lifestyle changes and preferences for modern foods threaten the sustainability of traditional food consumption. Thus, promotional and educational efforts on traditional foods' nutritional and cultural benefits must be enhanced to ensure that future generations continue to recognize and consume traditional foods [9]. In this context, homemakers play a strategic role in introducing and maintaining the consumption of traditional foods within families. With adequate knowledge and skills, they can act as change agents in improving family nutritional status by utilizing traditional foods.

Collaboration among the government, academics, and communities is essential to preserving and utilizing traditional foods. Research and development on conventional foods' nutritional content and safety can provide necessary information for public promotion and education [10]. Therefore, investigating the role of traditional foods in improving the nutritional well-being of homemakers in rural areas of Bandung Regency is highly relevant. This study will provide insights into how traditional foods can enhance nutritional status and well-being and what strategies effectively promote traditional food consumption among homemakers. The role of local agricultural products in supporting traditional food consumption also plays a crucial part in rural food security. Many traditional foods are made from locally sourced ingredients, reducing dependence on imported products and enhancing food sovereignty in rural areas [11]. Using indigenous crops, such as cassava, bananas, and various leafy vegetables, ensures that traditional diets remain sustainable and affordable for rural communities.

Economic factors also influence the consumption of traditional foods in rural households. Studies have shown that household income significantly affects food choices, with lower-income families relying more on locally available and cost-effective conventional foods [13]. However, as economic conditions improve, there is often a shift towards processed and convenience foods, which may not always provide the same nutritional benefits. This shift highlights the importance of nutrition education and awareness programs that promote the value of traditional foods regardless of income level [14]. The impact of urbanization and modernization on food consumption patterns is another crucial aspect. Urban expansion has increased access to modern food products, which compete with traditional foods in rural markets. As a result, younger generations may prefer fast food and processed snacks, leading to a decline in conventional dietary practices [15]. This phenomenon has been observed in several regions where traditional food markets struggle to compete with supermarkets offering ready-to-eat meals and imported products. Addressing this challenge requires government intervention through policies that support conventional food vendors, local farmers, and small-scale food businesses.

Another critical issue is the role of traditional knowledge in food preparation. Many conventional foods require specific preparation methods passed down through generations. However, as modernization progresses, this knowledge is at risk of being lost. Studies have highlighted that women, particularly older generations, play a key role in preserving culinary traditions, yet younger homemakers may lack the skills and knowledge to prepare these meals [16]. Community-based initiatives, such as cooking workshops and intergenerational knowledge-sharing programs, can help bridge this gap and ensure the continuity of traditional food preparation skills.

Lastly, addressing public health concerns about food safety and hygiene is crucial when promoting traditional foods. While traditional foods are often nutrient-dense, improper handling, storage, and preparation methods can increase the risk of foodborne illnesses. Research has shown that integrating modern food safety practices with traditional food preparation techniques can enhance both the safety and appeal of traditional foods [17]. Therefore, collaborative efforts between nutritionists, food technologists, and local communities are needed to develop food safety guidelines tailored to conventional food systems, ensuring they remain nutritious and safe for consumption. Overall, traditional foods have significant potential in improving the nutritional well-being of rural communities. With proper utilization and support from effective education and promotion, traditional foods can be key to achieving household-level food security and balanced nutrition.

## 2. Research Methods

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to understand the role of traditional foods in improving the nutritional well-being of rural homemakers in Bandung Regency. The quantitative component focused on evaluating consumption patterns, nutrient intake and awareness of traditional foods, while the qualitative approach explored cultural and socio-economic factors that influence food choices. With these methods, the research is expected to provide a holistic picture of the relationship between traditional food consumption and community nutritional well-being.

The study was conducted in Kamasan Village, Banjaran Sub-district, Bandung Regency, an area with a strong traditional food culture and high dependence on local food resources. The target population was homemakers aged 25-50, who had the leading role in determining the family's consumption patterns and food provision. A stratified random sampling method was used to obtain a representative sample by dividing participants into three socio-economic categories: low, middle and high income. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie & Morgan formula to ensure statistical significance, with at least 150 respondents in the survey and 30 in-depth interviews for qualitative exploration.

Data were collected through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were obtained through a structured questionnaire covering food consumption habits, nutrition awareness, food sources, and food preparation practices. In addition, the 24-hour food recall method was used to assess the quality of nutrient intake and food diversity consumed. Meanwhile, qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews to explore the cultural, social and economic factors that influence the consumption of traditional foods.

Data analysis was conducted using techniques appropriate for each type of data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS software to examine household consumption patterns. Chi-square and ANOVA tests were used to identify the relationship between income level and traditional food consumption behaviour. Meanwhile, food recall data were analyzed using NutriSurvey software to compare nutrient intake with recommended dietary recommendations. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic methods of NVivo software, which helped identify patterns and key themes related to social, economic, and cultural factors in food selection. The entire research process was conducted by considering ethical aspects, including obtaining consent from participants and maintaining data confidentiality, following the guidelines set by the Indonesian Health Research Ethics Committee.

### 3. Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Household Food Consumption

Variable	Count	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	25%	50% (Median)	75%	Max	Frequency
Low-Income Group	6.0	58376.53	142865.74	4.2	56.25	64.0	71.00	350000.0	150
Middle-Income Group	6.0	75045.08	183689.65	5.5	50.00	70.0	78.75	450000.0	150
High-Income Group	6.0	100041.13	244928.82	3.8	35.00	64.0	83.25	600000.0	150

**Table 2.** Chi-Square and ANOVA Test Result

Test	Chi-Square Value	F-Value	p-Value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance (p<0.05)
Chi-Square Test	14.5	-	0.0007	2	Significant
ANOVA Test	-	94.89	0.0000	-	Significant

Chi-Square test results showed a significant relationship between income level and traditional food preferences, with a Chi-Square value 14.5 and  $p = 0.0007$ . This finding indicates that homemakers from different income groups have significantly different preferences for conventional foods. In other words, economic factors play an essential role in determining the extent to which traditional foods remain the leading choice in daily consumption.

Meanwhile, the ANOVA test results showed a highly significant difference in the frequency of traditional food consumption among income groups, with an F value of 94.89 and  $p = 0.0000$ . This implies that income level strongly influences how often traditional foods are consumed, where certain economic groups may have more limited or broader access to conventional foods.

Overall, both statistical tests confirm that income level significantly impacts traditional food consumption behaviour, both in terms of preference and frequency of consumption. These findings highlight the need for more specific and economic group-based interventions to encourage the sustainability of traditional food consumption. With a tailored approach, policies and programs can be designed to ensure that conventional foods remain an essential part of people's diets across different economic strata.

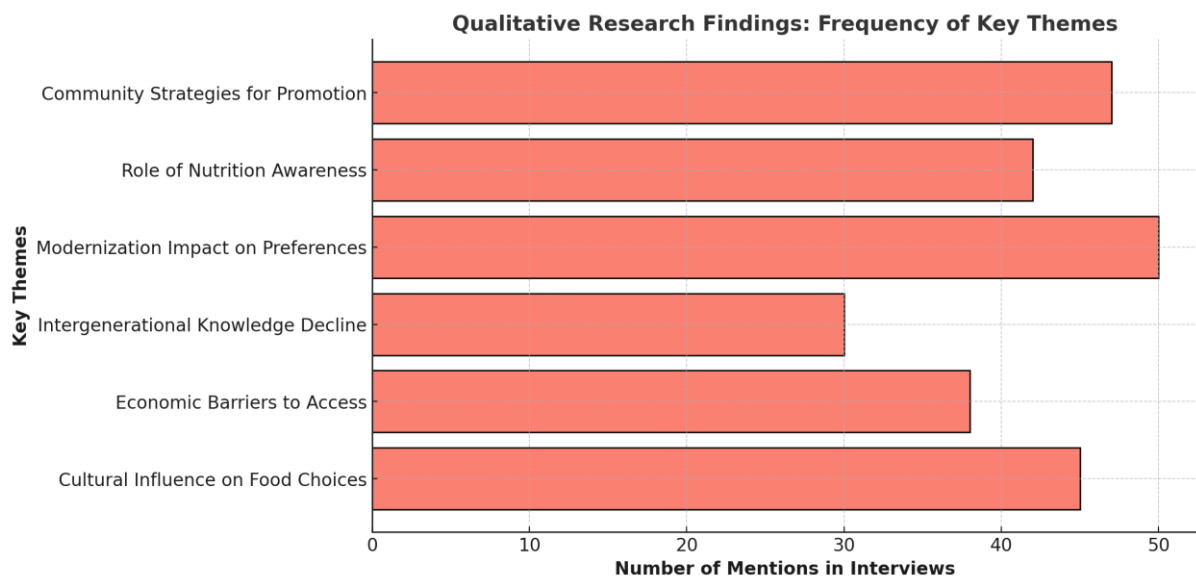
**Table 3.** Nutrient Intake Compared to Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA)

Nutrient	Low-Income Intake	Middle-Income Intake	High-Income Intake	RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance)	% RDA Met (Low-Income)	% RDA Met (Middle-Income)	% RDA Met (High-Income)
Calories (kcal)	1800	2000	2200	2100	85.71%	95.24%	104.76%
Protein (g)	45	55	65	60	75.00%	91.67%	108.33%
Carbohydrates (g)	220	250	270	260	84.62%	96.15%	103.85%
Fats (g)	55	65	75	70	78.57%	92.86%	107.14%
Vitamin A (mcg)	450	600	750	700	64.29%	85.71%	107.14%

Analysis of calorie intake shows that low-income households consume only 85.71% of the Nutrient Adequacy Level (NAC), indicating a potential energy deficit. This deficit can increase the risk of malnutrition and impact long-term health. In contrast, high-income households exceeded the recommended calorie requirement with 104.76% of the RDA consumption. This reflects a more varied diet and better access to diverse energy sources.

In terms of protein and macronutrient adequacy, low-income households only met 75% of the protein RDA, while the high-income group exceeded the requirement by reaching 108.33%. This suggests that households with higher economic levels have better access to quality protein sources. A similar pattern is also seen in carbohydrate and fat consumption, where low-income groups tend to fall below the recommendations, indicating dietary imbalances and possibly limited access to more diverse foodstuffs.

In addition, the risk of micronutrient deficiencies, particularly vitamin A, is higher in low-income households, with intake only reaching 64.29% of the RDA. Vitamin A deficiency can increase the risk of health problems such as visual impairment and decreased immunity. In contrast, the middle- and high-income groups had better vitamin A intake, reaching 85.71% and 107.14% of the RDA, respectively. This reflects that they have wider access to foods rich in vitamin A, such as coloured vegetables, animal products, and other nutritious food sources.



**Fig 1.** FGD Results on Qualitative Methods

The bar chart illustrates the frequency of key themes emerging from the qualitative interviews regarding traditional food consumption and nutritional well-being among rural homemakers in Bandung Regency. The most frequently mentioned theme was the impact of modernization on food preferences (50 mentions), highlighting how urbanization and increased access to processed foods have shifted dietary patterns. Many respondents expressed concerns that younger generations are moving away from traditional diets due to the availability of convenient, ready-to-eat meals. Additionally, community strategies for promoting traditional foods (47 mentions) emerged as a critical discussion point, indicating a strong interest in initiatives that could help sustain traditional food practices through education, local policies, and awareness campaigns.

Another significant theme was cultural influence on food choices (45 mentions), underscoring the role of traditions and family heritage in shaping dietary habits. However, economic barriers (38 mentions) were frequently cited, indicating that financial constraints affect the ability of some households to regularly access traditional foods, especially when local food markets are limited or prices fluctuate. Interestingly, the decline in intergenerational knowledge transfer (30 mentions) was one of the least discussed themes, suggesting that while many women recognize the value of traditional food preparation skills, fewer opportunities exist for younger generations to learn these culinary traditions due to modern lifestyle changes.

The role of nutrition awareness (42 mentions) in food choices also highlights an important insight—homemakers with higher awareness levels were more likely to actively incorporate traditional foods into their diets, recognizing their health benefits. However, some participants admitted that despite understanding the nutritional value of conventional foods, they still preferred modern dietary options for convenience. This finding suggests the need for community-based interventions, such as cooking workshops, educational campaigns, and policy support, to ensure that traditional foods remain accessible and relevant in modern dietary practices. Overall, these findings emphasize the complex interaction between cultural, economic, and social factors influencing the consumption of traditional foods in rural communities.

### 3.1. The Influence of Socio-Cultural Factors on Traditional Food Consumption

Socio-cultural factors are crucial in shaping food consumption patterns in rural communities. Traditions, beliefs, and customs passed down through generations influence the food families consume. Research has shown that in Gunung Sereng Village, geographical factors, culture, and the knowledge of homemakers significantly influence food consumption patterns [18]. Additionally, food taboos within a culture can impact individual nutritional status. For instance, dietary restrictions during pregnancy or postpartum periods may affect the nutritional intake of both mothers and children. A study in Mataram found that food taboos among pregnant women could potentially affect child nutrition and increase the risk of stunting [19].

Homemakers' nutritional knowledge is also a key factor in determining the quality of family food consumption. Mothers with good nutritional knowledge tend to provide more balanced and nutritious meals. A study in Biang Village revealed that 79% of homemakers had good dietary knowledge, even though most were unemployed [3]. However, lifestyle changes and modernization have shifted food preferences from traditional foods to processed or fast foods. Urbanization has increased the demand for processed foods due to their convenience in preparation and distribution [20]. This shift may reduce the consumption of traditional foods rich in essential nutrients.

Therefore, it is essential to maintain and promote traditional food consumption culture through nutrition education and community programs. By doing so, positive cultural values can continue to support the community's nutritional well-being.

### 3.2. The Role of Economic and Accessibility Factors in Traditional Food Consumption

Household income and food accessibility influence a family's ability to select and consume nutritious food. Families with higher incomes tend to have better access to various types of food, including traditional foods. Research has shown that household spending on food and non-food consumption is influenced by household income and additional earnings from side jobs [5]. However, despite low income in some regions, people still consume traditional foods due to their abundant availability and affordable prices. For example, in Gunung Sereng Village, the community utilizes locally grown corn to prepare traditional dishes like corn porridge and lepet jagung [21].

Food accessibility is also affected by geographical factors. Remote or hard-to-reach areas may face limitations in obtaining certain food ingredients, influencing dietary patterns. Studies show that geographical location affects food availability and variety in rural areas [22]. Moreover, the nutritional knowledge of homemakers plays a role in budget management for food consumption. Homemakers with better nutritional knowledge can manage food budgets effectively to ensure that their families receive adequate nutrition, even with limited financial resources [23].

Therefore, interventions to improve household income, food accessibility, and nutrition education for homemakers can significantly enhance traditional food consumption and overall family nutritional status.

### 3.3. The Impact of Traditional Food Consumption on Nutritional Status and Health

Traditional foods rich in nutrients can positively contribute to a community's nutritional status and overall health. Traditional foods often contain natural ingredients high in vitamins and essential minerals. For instance, the daily intake of local conventional foods has been found to play a role in preventing stunting in toddlers [24]. However, food quality alone does not always correlate directly with nutritional status. Research indicates no significant relationship exists between dietary quality and nutritional status, suggesting that other factors, such as infectious diseases, also play a role [25].

Socio-cultural factors, such as traditions, beliefs, and dietary habits, influence children's food consumption patterns. Studies have shown that these factors affect dietary diversity in toddlers, which can impact their long-term growth and development [8]. Thus, promoting the consumption of nutrient-rich traditional foods must be accompanied by appropriate nutrition education and improved access to healthcare services. A holistic approach considering cultural, economic, and health factors is necessary to improve the community's nutritional status.

Traditional food consumption can enhance homemakers' nutritional well-being in Bandung's rural areas. However, collaborative efforts across multiple sectors are required to overcome barriers and maximize its benefits.

### 3.4. The Role of Government and Policy Interventions in Promoting Traditional Foods

Government support is crucial in ensuring the sustainability of traditional food consumption in rural communities. Policies that promote local food production, market accessibility, and food education are vital to maintaining traditional food security [26].

One of the most effective interventions is subsidizing local farmers and food producers. Research shows that governments providing subsidies for small-scale farmers contribute to increased food availability and affordability for rural populations [27]. Traditional food production may decline due to competition with mass-produced processed foods without such support. Education and awareness campaigns about the health benefits of conventional foods also play an essential role. Studies suggest governments implementing school-based nutrition programs integrating local and traditional foods have successfully improved children's dietary habits and nutritional status [28].

Furthermore, food labelling regulations and certifications for organic and traditional food products can enhance consumer confidence and market demand. Countries that have implemented certification systems for traditional foods have seen a rise in domestic and international consumption [29]. Therefore, government intervention is crucial to support the sustainability, accessibility, and promotion of traditional foods in rural communities. This includes financial aid, policy development, and public health programs.

### 3.5. The Future of Traditional Food Consumption in a Digitalized Economy

The rise of digital technology and e-commerce has significantly impacted food consumption behaviour, including traditional foods. Digital platforms provide new opportunities for marketing and selling conventional foods beyond local markets [12]. Online food delivery services and social media campaigns have helped small-scale traditional food businesses reach a broader audience. Studies show that homemakers utilizing digital marketing tools experience increased sales and greater demand for traditional food products [29].

However, the lack of digital literacy and technology access remains challenging, especially for older generations who produce traditional foods. Research suggests that providing digital training programs for rural food producers can enhance their ability to compete in modern markets [6]. Moreover, blockchain and traceability technology are now being explored to certify the authenticity and quality of traditional foods, ensuring consumer trust and product sustainability [29]. Integrating technology with conventional food industries offers a promising future for preserving local food culture while expanding market access. Policymakers, educators, and local entrepreneurs must work together to ensure traditional food remains relevant in the digital economy.

## 4. Conclusion

The consumption of traditional foods is vital in enhancing nutritional well-being among rural homemakers in Bandung. Socio-cultural factors, including traditions, beliefs, and local knowledge, significantly influence food choices. However, modernization and lifestyle changes have shifted toward processed and convenience foods, which may impact dietary quality. Meanwhile, economic conditions and food accessibility also determine whether families can consistently consume nutritious traditional foods. Findings from this study indicate that household income, geographic location, and nutritional awareness play a crucial role in shaping traditional food consumption patterns. Therefore, strengthening nutrition education, food accessibility, and economic support is essential to preserving traditional food consumption.

In addition to individual and household factors, government policies and digital technology are becoming increasingly important in promoting and sustaining traditional food systems. Policies that support local food production, subsidies for farmers, school nutrition programs, and conventional food certifications have proven effective in enhancing food security and consumer trust. Furthermore, digitalization and e-commerce platforms provide new opportunities for rural food producers to expand their markets, ensuring that traditional foods remain relevant in a modernized economy. However, challenges such as digital illiteracy and market competition require strategic interventions to ensure small-scale producers can thrive in a changing food landscape.

This study highlights the importance of preserving and promoting traditional foods to improve nutritional well-being, sustain cultural heritage, and support rural economies. Future efforts should focus on integrating education, policy interventions, and digital innovation to ensure that traditional foods remain a sustainable and viable option for rural households. Collaborative efforts involving governments, communities, and private sectors are necessary to maximize traditional food consumption's benefits and address economic, social, and technological barriers. By doing so, traditional foods can continue contributing to food security, cultural identity, and public health in Indonesia's rural communities.

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