

**Do the Poor Pay More?**  
**A Study of the Price of Food Consumed by Households with**  
**Different Incomes in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Sweden**

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Diet and lifestyle create disease and premature mortality. Dietary patterns are changing fast in both high- and low- and middle-income countries. One part of the change is improved food security and improving nutrition. But in many countries diets are becoming less healthy. Rising incomes and the global food industry both contribute to changing diets and unfortunately the influence is oftentimes negative. Suboptimal diets risk creating huge future public health problems all over the World. To secure good health for future generations we therefore need to become much better at influencing what people eat. To do this we need to know what determines dietary patterns.

The present study tries to contribute to this by analyzing household level consumption data from cost of living surveys carried out by the Social Board in Sweden in the early 20th century. All of the households included in the surveys were low- or middle-income households that spent a sizeable part of their incomes on food and all had to try to find ways to reduce this spending.

The study investigates how the prices paid for the food varied with the household income. There are two counteracting hypothesis of what the association could be. The poorer households might have reduced the quality of the consumed foods to increase the quantity, leading to them paying lower prices. But literature on present day populations have, on the other hand, shown that poorer households pay higher prices for their food.

Possible explanations for this is that the households become less flexible regarding, for example, the size and timing of the purchase leading to an on average higher price. The paper will investigate the association between household income and the price paid for foods to see which mechanism dominated among low income households in early 20 th century Sweden.