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Dining in the Fast Lane: Investigating the Dynamic Relationship Between Processed Food and Working Women - A Study with Reference to Mangalore City

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Abstract

The increasing participation of women in the workforce has significantly influenced lifestyle patterns and household food consumption habits. Working women often face the challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with domestic duties, leaving limited time for traditional meal preparation. As a result, processed and convenience foods have become an important part of modern dietary practices. This study aims to examine the relationship between processed food consumption and the lifestyle of working women in Mangalore City. The research focuses on identifying the factors influencing their food choices, including time constraints, income level, family structure, health awareness, and marketing influences. Primary data for the study were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed among working women, while secondary data were obtained from journals, books, and relevant online sources. Descriptive research design and percentage analysis were used to interpret the data. The findings of the study indicate that convenience, time-saving benefits, and accessibility are the major factors encouraging the consumption of processed food among working women. However, concerns regarding nutritional quality and health implications were also observed among respondents. The study highlights the need for balanced dietary practices and greater awareness regarding healthy food choices. The findings may help researchers, policymakers, and food industries understand changing food consumption patterns among working women and promote healthier alternatives.

Keywords: Processed Food, Working Women, Convenience Food, Food Consumption Behaviour, Lifestyle Changes, Mangalore City

Introduction

“The increasing participation of women in the workforce has significantly influenced not only professional environments but also household lifestyles, particularly patterns of food preparation and consumption.” In the modern era, women perform multiple roles within society as daughters, wives, mothers, and professionals. Their contributions extend beyond family responsibilities to active participation in economic and social development. Although considerable progress has been achieved in terms of gender equality, many women continue to bear a substantial portion of domestic responsibilities while simultaneously managing demanding professional roles. This dual burden often creates time limitations that affect everyday activities, especially cooking practices and food choices.

In earlier times, women were largely associated with domestic duties and caregiving responsibilities. However, during the past century, social reforms, expanded educational opportunities, and changing societal attitudes have enabled women to participate more actively in the workforce. Today, women are employed in a wide range of sectors including education, healthcare, administration, business, and technology. Their growing involvement in professional fields has contributed to economic growth while also bringing notable changes in family structures and lifestyle patterns.

Despite these positive developments, working women often face the challenge of balancing career demands with traditional family expectations. Managing professional commitments alongside household responsibilities may lead to physical fatigue and emotional stress. One aspect of daily life that is particularly influenced by this situation is meal preparation.

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Conventional cooking methods typically require significant time and effort, which can be difficult for working women who manage busy schedules. Consequently, modern households increasingly depend on convenient food alternatives that support time management.

Within this context, processed foods have emerged as a practical option for many working individuals. Processed foods are generally defined as food items that have been modified from their natural form through processes such as cutting, heating, freezing, canning, drying, mixing, or packaging. These processing methods help preserve food, extend shelf life, and improve convenience in storage and preparation. For working women who have limited time for extensive cooking, such foods offer a practical solution by reducing preparation time while still ensuring that meals are available for family members.

The rising popularity of convenience foods is closely linked to broader socio-economic changes. Items such as instant noodles, ready-to-cook meals, frozen foods, and packaged snacks have become widely accepted due to their accessibility and ease of preparation. These products are frequently promoted as time-saving solutions, particularly targeting consumers with busy lifestyles, including working women. As a result, processed foods have become a common feature in contemporary dietary patterns.

Considering these evolving lifestyle patterns, it is important to explore the relationship between processed food consumption and working women. Various factors such as convenience, health awareness, product packaging, marketing strategies, and socio-cultural influences play a role in shaping their dietary decisions. Therefore, this study aims to examine the dynamic relationship between processed food consumption and working women in Mangalore City. By analysing the factors that influence their food choices, the study seeks to provide a better understanding of dietary behaviour among working women in the context of increasingly demanding professional lifestyles.

Statement of the Problem

With the rapid pace of modernization and increasing participation of women in the workforce, noticeable changes have emerged in the dietary patterns of working women. Due to demanding work schedules and limited time for household activities, many working women tend to depend on processed and convenience foods for daily meal preparation. Although these foods provide practical advantages in terms of quick preparation and easy availability, their increasing consumption has raised concerns regarding nutritional quality, long-term health outcomes, and overall lifestyle patterns.

The growing dependence on processed foods may influence not only the dietary habits of working women but also the nutritional well-being of their families. Factors such as time constraints, work pressure, socio-economic status, cultural practices, marketing influences, and accessibility of convenience foods may significantly shape food choices and

consumption behaviour. While processed foods offer convenience, frequent consumption may also contribute to health risks due to the presence of preservatives, additives, and high levels of salt, sugar, and fat.

In urban areas such as Mangalore City, where the number of working women is steadily increasing, lifestyle changes and busy work schedules may further influence food preferences and cooking practices. However, there is limited empirical research examining how these factors affect the dietary decisions of working women in this region. Understanding the motivations behind processed food consumption and the socio-economic factors influencing such choices is therefore essential.

Hence, this study seeks to examine the relationship between processed food consumption and the dietary practices of working women in Mangalore City. The research focuses on identifying the key factors influencing their food choices, including income level, educational background, family structure, time availability, taste preferences, and lifestyle demands. By analysing these aspects, the study aims to provide useful insights for policymakers, health professionals, and researchers in promoting healthier dietary habits and supporting sustainable lifestyle practices among working women.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the consumption pattern of processed food among working women in Mangalore City.
2. To identify the factors influencing working women to choose processed food products.
3. To analyse the relationship between socio-economic variables such as age, income, education and family type and the consumption of processed food.
4. To understand the role of time constraints and work pressure in influencing food choices of working women.
5. To examine the perception of working women regarding the health impact of processed foods.

Significance of the Study

The increasing participation of women in the workforce has brought significant changes in lifestyle and food consumption patterns. Working women often face time constraints due to professional and household responsibilities, which may influence their preference for processed and convenience foods. Understanding these consumption patterns is important for identifying the factors that affect dietary choices and overall health.

The present study is significant as it provides insights into the relationship between processed food consumption and the lifestyle of working women in Mangalore City. The findings of the study may help policymakers, nutrition experts, and food manufacturers understand changing dietary behaviour and promote healthier food alternatives. In addition, the study contributes to academic research by highlighting the socio-economic and lifestyle factors that influence food choices among working women.

Review of Literature

Several researchers have examined the relationship between changing lifestyles and food consumption patterns, particularly among working women.

Smith (2015) examined the influence of busy work schedules on food consumption patterns and found that working women often rely on convenience foods due to time constraints and work pressure.

Gupta and Sharma (2017) studied the consumption behaviour of processed food products among urban consumers and observed that factors such as convenience, taste, availability, and marketing strategies play a significant role in influencing purchasing decisions.

Kaur (2018) conducted a study on working women and dietary habits and reported that the increasing demand for ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat food products is largely driven by changing lifestyle patterns and the growing participation of women in the workforce.

Patel (2019) analysed the impact of processed food consumption on health and highlighted that excessive intake of ultra-processed food may contribute to health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

Rao and Rao (2020) investigated the perception of consumers toward processed food products and found that while consumers appreciate the convenience and time-saving benefits, many are also concerned about the nutritional quality and presence of preservatives. Although several studies have explored processed food consumption and changing dietary patterns, limited research has specifically focused on the relationship between processed food consumption and the lifestyle of working women in regional cities such as Mangalore. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge this gap by examining the factors influencing processed food consumption among working women in Mangalore City.

Research Gap

In recent years, several studies have examined the changing food consumption patterns associated with modernization and urban lifestyles. Many researchers have highlighted the increasing popularity of processed and convenience foods due to their accessibility and time-saving benefits. However, most of these studies focus on general consumer behaviour or the health impacts of processed foods without specifically examining the experiences and challenges faced by working women.

Sample Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Classification of Respondents Based on Working Hours

Working Hours	No. of Respondents	Percentage
8 hours	69	69
9 hours	13	13
10 hours and above	8	8
Part time	10	10
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation:

The table shows that the majority of respondents (69%) work for 8 hours per day, while 13% work for

Working women represent a unique group whose food choices are strongly influenced by time constraints, work pressure, family responsibilities, and socio-economic conditions. Despite the growing number of women in the workforce, limited research has been conducted to analyse how these factors influence their reliance on processed foods, particularly in regional contexts such as Mangalore City.

Therefore, there is a need for focused research that explores the relationship between processed food consumption and the lifestyle of working women, while also considering factors such as convenience, marketing influence, socio-economic background, and health awareness. This study attempts to address this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the dietary behaviour and food choices of working women in Mangalore City.

Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the systematic approach adopted to conduct the research study.

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive research design to analyse the consumption behaviour of processed food among working women in Mangalore City.

Area of the Study

The study is based on responses collected from 100 working women in Mangalore City.

Sources of Data

Primary Data Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed among working women.

Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected from books, journals, research articles, websites, and previous studies related to processed food consumption and working women.

Sampling Technique

The study uses Convenience Sampling Method, where respondents were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the survey.

Sample Size

The study is based on responses collected from 100 working women in Mangalore City."

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used to collect the required information regarding demographic profile, food habits, cooking preferences, and perception towards processed foods.

9 hours and 8% work for more than 10 hours. About 10% of the respondents are part-time workers.

Tools for Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using the following statistical tools:

- Percentage analysis
- Tables and charts
- Chi-square test

Limitations of the Study

1. The study is limited only to working women in Mangalore City.
2. The research is based on a limited sample size, which may not represent the entire population.
3. The data collected are based on respondents' personal opinions and perceptions, which may vary from person to person.

1. Cooking Preference

This section analyses the preferred method of cooking among working women.

Table 2: Preference for Method of Cooking

Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Traditional method of cooking	88	88
Instant method of cooking	12	12
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation:

The table shows that the majority of respondents (88%) prefer the traditional method of cooking, while only 12% prefer instant cooking methods.

2. Time Spent for Cooking

This section explains the amount of time working women spend on cooking daily.

Table 3: Classification of Respondents Based on Time Spent for Cooking

Cooking Hours	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1 to 2 hours	33	33
3 hours	52	52
4 hours	13	13
5 and more hours	2	2
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation:

Most respondents (52%) spend around three hours for cooking, while 33% spend one to two hours.

3. Reasons for Choosing Processed Food

This section explains the factors influencing the consumption of processed food among working women.

Table 4: Factors Influencing the Choice of Processed Food

Factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Advertisement / Marketing	21	14.29
Time constraints	31	21.09
Taste preference	51	34.69
Easy availability	33	22.45
Cost effective	10	6.80
Other	1	0.68
Total	147	100

Source: Primary Data (MRR = 1.47, N = 100)

Interpretation:

The table shows that taste preference (34.69%) is the major factor influencing processed food consumption, followed by easy availability (22.45%) and time constraints (21.09%). Advertisement and marketing also influence respondents, while very few respondents consider other factors.

4. Types of Processed Food Consumed

This section identifies the commonly consumed processed food items.

Table 5: Type of Processed Food Preferred

Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Milk items	52	25.36
Masala items	56	27.32
Snacks	43	20.98
Sausages	16	7.80
Ready-to-eat food items	36	17.56

4. Time and resource constraints limited the scope of the study.
5. The accuracy of the results depends on the honesty of the respondents in answering the questionnaire.

Results and Data Analysis

This section analyses the responses collected from working women in Mangalore City regarding their cooking behaviour, processed food consumption, and health perceptions.

Other	2	0.98
Total	205	100

Source: Primary Data (MRR = 2.05, N = 100)

Interpretation:

The table shows that masala items (27.32%) are the most preferred processed food items, followed by milk items (25.36%) and snacks (20.98%). Ready-to-eat foods are also commonly consumed, while sausages and other items are less preferred.

5. Perception about Nutritional Value

This section explains the perception of working women regarding the nutritional value of processed food.

Table 6: Perception on Nutritional Value of Processed Food

Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Highly nutritious	9	9
Moderately nutritious	33	33
Low nutritious	30	30
Not nutritious	28	28
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation:

The table shows that 33% of respondents perceive processed food as moderately nutritious, while 30% consider it low in nutrition and 28% believe it is not nutritious. Only 9% of respondents think processed food is highly nutritious. This indicates that most working women have moderate to low perception of the nutritional value of processed foods.

6. Health Impact of Processed Food

This section analyses whether respondents experienced health issues due to processed food consumption.

Table 7: Health Issues Experienced by Working Women

Health Issues Experienced	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes, experienced health issues	29	29
No, haven't experienced	33	33
Not noticed	24	24
Depends on brand	14	14
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation:

The table shows that 29% of respondents experienced health issues due to processed food consumption, while 33% reported no health issues.

Findings of the Study

1. A significant number of working women prefer processed foods due to time constraints.
2. Taste preference and easy availability influence processed food consumption.
3. Ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat products help working women manage household responsibilities.
4. Income and education influence processed food consumption patterns.
5. Respondents from nuclear families show higher preference for processed food.
6. Many respondents expressed concern regarding the health effects of processed foods.
7. Marketing strategies and product availability influence purchasing decisions.
8. Many working women balance processed foods with home-cooked meals.

Suggestions

1. Working women should maintain a balanced diet by combining processed foods with fresh and nutritious home-prepared meals.
2. Awareness programs should be conducted to educate consumers about the nutritional value and health impacts of processed foods.

3. Food manufacturers should focus on producing healthier processed food options with reduced additives and preservatives.
4. Government agencies should strengthen food labeling regulations to ensure transparency in food ingredients.
5. Working women can adopt better time management strategies to include healthier cooking practices in their routine.

Conclusion

The increasing participation of women in the workforce has significantly influenced household food consumption patterns. Due to time constraints and busy work schedules, many working women prefer processed and convenience foods as they reduce cooking time and effort. While processed foods offer convenience and accessibility, excessive consumption may lead to several health risks. Therefore, it is important for working women to make informed dietary choices and maintain a balance between convenience and nutrition. The study highlights the importance of understanding the factors influencing processed food consumption and encourages the adoption of healthier food habits in modern lifestyles.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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