

THE ECONOMIC ASPECTS

Household expenditure among the Malay fishermen in Beserah is influenced not only by the income and structure of the household but also by the seasonal influence of the Monsoon. The various aspects of these factors will be discussed in this chapter.

A. Household Structure.

Since different members of the household make slightly different personal expenditure the household structure will, therefore determine to a certain extent the pattern of household expenditure. A household in this study is defined as a group of persons, very often closely related, living together and sharing a common house-keeping expenditure.

i. Size of Household.

The average household in Beserah had 4.4 persons. The smallest household was the one-person household while the biggest was the nine-person household.

Table IIA on page 6 shows the distribution of households, in terms of size, according to numbers and percentages of household and of persons surveyed. It shows that nearly 70 per cent of the households surveyed were of the size ranging from 3-6 persons to a

household, and about 70 per cent of the members live in such houses. The one-person households which represent about 5.3 per cent of the total households surveyed were, in all cases, made up of a man who is either a widower or a divorcee.

TABLE IIA

DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY SIZE

No. of persons in household	Households		Persons	
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
1	3	5.3	3	1.2
2	6	10.5	12	4.8
3	10	17.5	30	12.2
4	14	24.6	56	22.8
5	8	14.0	40	16.3
6	12	21.0	72	29.3
7	1	1.8	7	2.8
8	1	1.8	8	3.3
9	2	3.5	18	7.3
Total	57	100.0	246	100.0

11. Members of Household.

Dependents in a household other than the wife fall into two categories. One group consists of children under 12 years old, the grown-up unmarried daughters and in a few cases old-aged parents who are wholly dependant on the household income, while another group is made up of the subsidiary income earners who are partly dependent on the household income. These subsidiary income earners are the grown-up sons or other such dependents who are earning and contribute a small portion of their income to the household expenditure.

Generally, the different household expenditure incurred by different members of the household can be classified into personal expenditure and common household expenditure. Common household expenditure, such as expenditure on rice, flour and sugar, is consumed by all members of the household as a group, whereas personal expenditure on snacks and cigarettes is consumed by a household member as an individual.

The husband, who is the head of the household and the main income earner, spends quite a high proportion of his earnings on personal expenditure. It was estimated that, on the average, he spent about 21 per cent of his total earning on personal expenditure which consisted mainly of cigarettes and snacks taken at coffee shop. However, the higher his income and the smaller his household the bigger would be the husband's personal expenditure. This will have

the effect of reducing his share in the common household expenditure, as the more he eats outside the less food he will take at home.

The wife, who normally does the house-keeping, makes only a small personal expenditure on sweetmeats.¹ It was also learned that almost all wives were non-smokers.

Among the wholly-dependant household members, those who are schooling spend on the average of about 20 cents per day as pocket money to buy sweetmeats and drinks, but, of course, the amount varies with the size of the household income. Similar dependants who are not schooling make the same personal expenditure but to a lesser amount and less regular.

The partly-dependant members of the household spend a large proportion of their income on personal expenditure, mainly on cigarettes and snacks taken at coffee-shops. It was estimated that personal expenditure per subsidiary income earner was very much higher than that of the main income earner. This is because the main income earner has to support his family while the subsidiary income earners have no family to support. Although the personal expenditure by the subsidiary income earners do not directly affect the total household income, it affects the total household expenditure, as the more they eat outside the less food they will take at home.

1. It was estimated that about 25 per cent of the wives interviewed are working and in such a situation the house-keeping is done by the grown-up daughters.

B. Household Income.

The influence of income on household expenditure is obvious. Its influence is felt in any community, but among the fishermen in Beersah, where earning from fishing is very irregular and fluctuates violently from month to month and season to season, its effect is easily noticed in the frequent changes that take place among the household expenditure items.

Household income, in this study, refers to the pooled income available for the household expenditure. This, in Beersah, is derived from the earning of head of household, wife's earning, financial contribution from subsidiary income earners and the imputed value of home-produced food items.

1. Average Household Income.

It was estimated that the average household income per month was about \$93.00. This is made up of \$68.00 as the average earning of the head of household, \$12.00 as the average contribution from subsidiary income earners,¹ and \$13.00 as the average imputed value of home-produced food items. It was also estimated that one out of every four households surveyed had a working wife and one out of every three households surveyed had a working grown-up son. Of the \$13.00 imputed value of home-produced food items, \$12.00 was made up of the imputed value of fresh fish.

1. This amount includes the average earnings of the wives.

ii. Household Income Groups.

Table IIB below shows the distribution of household income groups, according to the number and percentage of households.

TABLE IIB

DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME GROUPS

Household Income Groups.(In dollars)	No. of Households	% of Total	Av. Household size	Av. Income per capita/month
Under 40.00	2	3.5	1.5	21.00
40.00 - 70.00	10	17.5	2.8	21.00
70.00 -100.00	27	47.4	4.5	20.00
100.00 -130.00	12	21.1	4.7	26.00
Over 130.00	6	10.5	5.5	26.20
Total / Average	57	100.0	4.4	21.10

The above table shows that nearly half of the households surveyed have a household income of about \$70.00 to \$100.00 per month and about a third has a household income of more than \$100.00 per month. Households with less than \$40.00 per month represent only a very small proportion of the total households surveyed. In all cases it was found that they were either a one-person or

two-person households of an old man or old couple respectively, whose income earner was too old to be a full-time fisherman.

It is further interesting to note from Table IIB on page 10 that the average size of household increases with a rise in household income. This indicates that as the need of the household increases, the total household income also increases either because, the main income earner goes to fish more regularly, or that the wife or grown-up sons go to work as fishermen to supplement the household income.

Since the number of members in a household increases with increase in income, it is not necessarily accurate to say that households with higher income are better off. Average income per capita among the different income groups, as shown on Table IIB on page 10, indicates that the income per capita among households with income of less than \$100.00 per month is almost the same, but increases to about \$26.00 per month per capita among those with income of more than \$100.00 per month. But among these income groups the income per capita is again the same. However, the average income per capita is about \$252.00. This is very low when compared to the income per capita for the whole country which is estimated at about \$800.00.

iii. Sources of Income.

a. The Main Income Earner.

The main income earner contributes all his earning to the household income. As mentioned earlier, his earning was estimated

at about \$68.00 per month but this varies with the type of fishing he does. If he is an 'asek-asek'¹ in the 'pukat tarek'² he may earn an average of about \$50.00 to \$60.00 per month. A handline fisherman may earn an average of about \$70.00 to \$80.00 per month, and a 'jaragan'³ in a 'pukat tarek' may easily earn an average of more than \$100.00 per month. The few rubber tappers who live among the fishermen have an income of about \$60.00 per month.

The distribution of the main income earners, by occupations, according to number, percentage and the estimated income is shown in Table IIC on page 13. It shows that the handline fishing is the most popular occupation among the main income earners and only about 21 per cent of them work as an 'asek-asek' in the 'pukat tarek'. To the main income earner who has to support his family the work of an 'asek-asek' is unpopular because of the low and irregular income that one gets from being an 'asek-asek'.

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1. 'Asek-asek' is the local name for ^{the} ordinary crew in the 'pukat tarek'.
 2. 'Pukat tarek' is the local name for group fishing close to the shore using a sampan and a seine net.
 3. 'Jaragan' is the local name for the leader of the 'pukat tarek'.

TABLE IIC

DISTRIBUTION OF THE MAIN INCOME EARNERS
ACCORDING TO OCCUPATION

Types of Occupation	No. of Main Income Earners	% of Total	Estimated Income per month (\$)
Handliner	31	54.4	70.00 - 80.00
'Asak-asak' in 'pint tarak'	15	26.3	50.00 - 60.00
'Jeragan'	5	8.8	Over 100.00
Birds Tapper	2	3.5	About 60.00
Miscellaneous ¹	4	7.0	-
Total	57	100.0	-

b. The Subsidiary Income Earners.

The subsidiary income earners are either the wives or the grown-up dependents. The working wife who either works as an 'asak-asak' or makes sweetmeats for sale contributes all her earning to the household expenditure. Other subsidiary income earners are the grown-up dependents, who normally work as 'asak-asak' and contribute only a small proportion of their earning to the household expenditure. Their contribution is very irregular depending on

1. Miscellaneous includes shop assistant, carpenter and village medicine men (bomoh).

the needs of the household and at the most they seldom contribute more than one-third of their total earnings. The popularity of work as an 'muck-muck' among the subsidiary income earners is because an 'muck-muck' needs neither capital nor skill.

c. Home-produced Food Items.

Home-produced food items is the other source of household income. Of the total average imputed value of \$13.00 per month about \$12.00 is the imputed value of fresh fish. Fresh fish, which are taken daily during the fishing season, are obtained free of 'cost'. Other food items which are home-produced are dry salted fish and vegetables.

However, the household income is dependent more on the earning of the head of household than on other source.

C. Seasonal Factor.

The effect of the Monsoon on the household expenditure is twofold. Firstly, it affects the expenditure through income and secondly, through the supply of fresh fish.

1. Irregularity of Income.

Owing to the strong north-east monsoon, which blows from November to February, fishing in the east coast is seasonal. The fishing season is from mid-January to mid-November and off-fishing season is from mid-November to mid-January. It was estimated that during the off-fishing season nearly 75 per cent of the fishermen could not go fishing and they are, thus, cut off from their daily means of earning.

It was also learned that total monthly income during the fishing season varies from month to month. This is because the type of fish caught and the number of fishing days changes from month to month, causing the total monthly income to fluctuate.

ii. Supply of Fish.

Because nearly 75 per cent of them do not go to fish during the off-fishing season, the fishermen could no longer get their free supply of fresh fish. The sudden fall in the quantity of fresh fish causes the price to rise making it beyond the reach of the fishermen to buy.

However, because of the significant influence of the Monsoon on the household expenditure, the writer has specially devoted a chapter on this important subject.