

Eating Habits of the To Pekurehua and Javanese Tribes in Central Sulawesi: A Cultural Perspective

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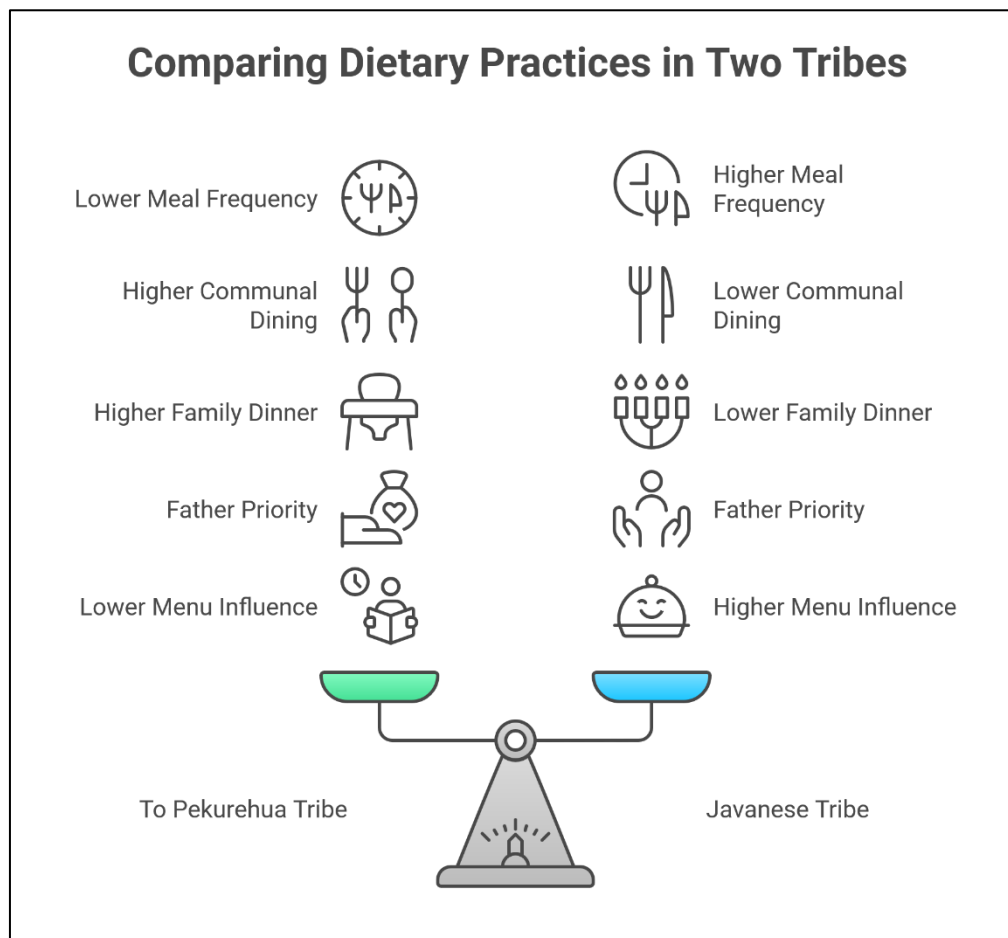
ABSTRACT

Household characteristics are defined by socioeconomic conditions and other factors, including cultural aspects. Culture dictates dietary choices, methods of preparation, locations, and timing of food preparation. This study examined cultural influences on family dietary practices among the To Pekurehua and Javanese tribes. This research was conducted over a ten-month period, from February to November 2023. The application of this equation yielded a sample of 79 respondents from the North Lore District (representing the To Pekurehua tribe) and 41 respondents from the West Pamona District (representing the Javanese tribe). The To Pekurehua and Javanese tribes possessed average meal frequencies of 2.86 and 3.00 times each day, respectively. The practice of communal dining was observed in 91.1% of the To Pekurehua tribe and 87.8% of the Javanese tribe. The To Pekurehua tribe generated a family dinner participation rate of 87.3%, whereas the Javanese tribe's rate was 82.9%. In both tribes, fathers, as the head of the household, received priority in food distribution. In contrast, the wives in the Javanese tribe exerted greater influence over the food menu than those in the To Pekurehua tribe.

Key Messages:

- **Shared Dietary Customs and Hierarchical Allocation** Both the To Pekurehua and Javanese ethnic groups exhibit a strong adherence to communal dining practices and maintain a patriarchal framework in intra-household food distribution, wherein the male head of the household is prioritized.
- **Divergence in Dietary Decision-Making** A distinct contrast exists regarding meal planning authority; Javanese wives exert significantly greater influence and autonomy over menu selection compared to their counterparts in the To Pekurehua tribe.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



INTRODUCTION

The issue of inadequate nutrition among individuals can be addressed by ensuring community food security. In the current context, achieving food security is no longer limited to ensuring food availability at the national level, but must also extend to the micro level the household. Household food security refers to the condition in which a family is able to meet the food needs of all its members in terms of quantity, quality, and diversity, in accordance with their individual requirements(1). Indonesia faces multiple and interrelated challenges in achieving food security, including agricultural land conversion, dependence on imported commodities, and the ongoing transformation of the national food system. Moreover, household income vulnerability to economic shocks—such as pandemics and food inflation—has significant implications for food availability and access at the micro level. The ongoing shift in dietary patterns, characterized by a nutrition transition toward processed and energy-dense foods, has further contributed to changes in the population’s nutritional status(2).

Cultural values and eating habits play a crucial role in shaping food preferences, dietary diversity, and how households allocate their food resources. The preservation of local culinary traditions can positively contribute to nutritional diversity, provided that traditional food sources remain accessible. Conversely, the erosion of traditional food practices and the growing reliance on commercial food products may lead to a decline in dietary quality. Therefore, household food security studies should incorporate cultural dimensions and consumption behaviors within their analytical framework(3). A more diverse food consumption pattern contributes not only to improved food security but also to enhanced nutritional resilience. In the Yogyakarta region, the utilization of locally available food resources plays a vital role in reducing dependency on imported or mainstream commercial food products. Conversely, in East Nusa

Tenggara, households tend to prioritize food sufficiency to meet energy needs rather than focusing on the nutritional quality or balance of their diets. Moreover, dietary diversity may be influenced by various factors, such as socio-economic and demographic. From these factors that play important roles and affect dietary diversity are education, family size, age of the household head, as well as food expenditure (4). Household characteristics are defined by socioeconomic factors such as education, employment, family size, and income. Another crucial factor is the culture of the household.

Indonesia is a country with numerous tribes, with each having its distinct traits (5) and culture(6). Over 1,300 distinct ethnic and cultural diversities exist, including the To Pekurehua tribe, an indigenous group residing in the Napu Valley inside the Lore Lindu National Park area of Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi, and the Javanese tribe, inhabiting many areas due to a transmigration initiative from the island of Java. Both tribes own distinct traditions and reside in rural areas. Poso Regency had an estimated population of 248,345 people and 38,143 households in 2022. The region is currently classified as food and nutrition insecure. This vulnerability is attributed to several interrelated factors, including prolonged droughts, limited agricultural land ownership, high rates of population migration, the absence of substantial non-agricultural economic sectors, and the lack of targeted government interventions aimed at alleviating food and nutrition insecurity.

The Pekurehua people, residing in the highland valleys of Lore in Poso District, Central Sulawesi, represent one of the indigenous ethnic groups that have maintained a close relationship with their natural environment. Their settlements, located in fertile highland ecosystems near Lore Lindu National Park, enable them to practice traditional agriculture that forms the foundation of household food security. The community primarily cultivates rice, maize, vegetables, coffee, chili, and shallots, while also utilizing local biodiversity for food, medicine, and daily needs. Such practices contribute to a form of localized food sovereignty, where the community relies heavily on self-produced and regionally available foods. Cultural traditions among the Pekurehua strongly influence food preferences and dietary patterns. The use of locally sourced ingredients, communal eating traditions such as *mande modulu* (shared eating before marriage), and the preservation of traditional cooking methods reinforce social cohesion and the continuity of local food knowledge. These customs not only support dietary diversity but also embody sustainable food practices adapted to the local ecological context (7).

However, the increasing exposure to commercial food markets and declining agricultural land ownership pose new challenges to household food security. Younger generations are gradually shifting their consumption toward processed and packaged foods, reflecting broader patterns of nutrition transition observed in other parts of Indonesia. Despite this, the Pekurehua's cultural attachment to traditional food systems remains a potential strength for promoting food and nutritional resilience at the community level(7).

Cultural characteristics and rural areas are intimately tied to food security. Culture specifies what should or should not be eaten and how food should be cooked, where, when, and with whom it is consumed (8,9) . Environmental variables also impact the selection of food consumed, food habits, socio-cultural aspects, demography, and lifestyle factors(10,11). There are 25.9% of households in rural areas experiencing food insecurity (12). Patterns of food intake within communities are closely linked to the conditions of food security(13) (14). The study aim analyzed cultural factors influencing household food habits, including food consumption frequency, preferences, allocation, and menu decisions within the To Pekurehua and Javanese tribes, as food security can be assessed through food diversity and meal frequency.

METHODS

This research was performed for ten months, starting from February to November 2023 utilizing a cross-sectional study design. Sampling was conducted using the Slovin formula with a confidence interval (CI) of 95% and a significance level of 0.05. The application of this equation yielded a sample of 79 respondents from the North Lore District (representing the To Pekurehua tribe) and 41 respondents from the West Pamona District (representing the Javanese tribe), The samples were selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure that every individual in the population had an equal chance of being included in the study. This study incorporated primary data. Direct interviews were conducted with a

questionnaire and a Semi-Quantitative Food Frequency Questionnaire (SQ-FFQ). The data collection questionnaire aimed to compare the dietary patterns of the To Pekurehua and Javanese tribes and also data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 key respondents, namely traditional leaders, village heads, and mothers of toddlers. Data were analyzed descriptively to present the frequency distribution and percentage of each variable. This research has received ethical approval from Universitas Tadulako, No. 1322/UN28.1.30/KL2024.

Secondary data refers to information acquired from literature and several other sources. In this study, secondary data were acquired from relevant agencies. Table 1 lists the types and data collection techniques employed.

Table 1. Types and Research Data Collection Techniques

Variable	Method of Data Collection
Eating habits (food habits)	Structured interview using SQ-FFQ questionnaire
Food Consumption Feeding frequency (FFQ)	Structured interview using the SQ-FFQ questionnaire Respondent: wives
Traditional Food Eating Habits How to obtain food Processing and preparation of food	Structured interview using the SQ-FFQ questionnaire Respondents: husbands and wives, village heads, religious leaders, and traditional leaders

RESULTS

The respondents comprised 120 households, including 79 from the To Pekurehua tribe and 41 from the Javanese tribe. Table 2 on household eating habits in Central Sulawesi Province indicates an average eating frequency of 2.91, with 85.8% of individuals consuming meals three times daily. Additionally, 90% of families engaged in communal dining, predominantly during dinner, as reported by 85.8% of respondents, signifying the common habit of family meals.

Table 2. Household Food Habits in Central Sulawesi

Household Food Habits	To Pekurehua Tribe n= 79	Javanese Tribe n= 41	Total n = 120
Eating frequency (times/day), mean $\pm$ SD	2.86 $\pm$ 0.416	3.00 $\pm$ 0.224	2.91 $\pm$ 0.367
Category of eating frequency, n (%)			
- 1 time	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- 2 times	13 (16.5)	1 (2.4)	14 (11.7)
- 3 times	64 (81.0)	39 (95.1)	103 (85.8)
- >3 times	2 (2.5)	1 (2.4)	3 (2.5)
Habit of communal dining with family, n (%)	72 (91.1)	36 (87.8)	108 (90)
Common meal time of communal dining with family, n (%)			
- Breakfast	45 (57.0)	17 (41.5)	62 (51.7)
- Lunch	25 (31.6)	13 (31.7)	38 (31.7)
- Dinner	69 (87.3)	34 (82.9)	103 (85.8)
Meaning of communal dining with family, n (%)			
- Togetherness	61 (77.2)	28 (68.3)	89 (74.2)
- Convenience	58 (73.4)	23 (56.1)	81 (67.5)
- Sharing happiness	56 (70.9)	25 (61)	81 (67.5)
- The food is more delicious	55 (69.6)	24 (58.5)	79 (65.8)
- It is already a habit	71 (89.9)	32 (78)	103 (85.8)

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents Who Answered “Yes” to the Statements about Food Allocation in Central Sulawesi

Food Allocation, n (%)	To Pekurehua Tribe n= 79	Javanese Tribe n= 41	Total n = 120
Father eats before mother and children	11 (13.9)	7 (17.1)	18 (15)
Mother or daughter eats last	14 (17.7)	4 (9.8)	18 (15)
Food for the father is set aside first	20 (25.3)	15 (36.6)	35 (29.2)
Food for the father is larger in portion	18 (22.8)	12 (29.3)	30 (25)
Menu differences between the father and other family members	3 (3.8)	2 (4.9)	5 (4.2)
Menu differences among family members	1 (1.3)	1 (2.4)	2 (1.7)

Food allocation systems, referred to as food distribution within households, represent an aspect of socio-cultural life within family dynamics.

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents Based on Household Food Culture in Central Sulawesi

Household Food Culture, n (%)	To Pekurehua Tribe n= 79	Javanese Tribe n= 41	Total n = 120
Father eats first	11 (13.9)	6 (14.6)	17 (14.2)
Mother eats first	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Male child eats first	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Female child eats first	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Reasons for prioritizing father during mealtime			
- Father as head of the family	10 (12.7)	3 (7.3)	13 (10.8)
- Father as breadwinner	10 (12.7)	5 (12.2)	15 (12.5)
- It is already a culture	10 (12.7)	2 (4.9)	12 (10)
The habit of buying processed food			
- Every day	1 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.8)
- Only for breakfast	1 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.8)
- Once a week	16 (20.3)	6 (14.6)	22 (18.3)
- Only for family member’s birthday or events	14 (17.7)	3 (7.3)	17 (14.2)
- Others	3 (3.8)	1 (2.4)	4 (3.3)

According to Table 4 regarding food culture in households in Central Sulawesi, the To Pekurehua Tribe in North Lore District and the Javanese Tribe in West Pamona District showcased similar patterns, with fathers eating first at proportions of 13.9% and 14.6%, respectively; neither tribe has mothers, sons, or daughters eating first. The analysis results revealed that the rationale for prioritizing the father during meals was uniformly distributed across all categories, as the father is regarded as the head of the family and the primary provider, and it has become a familial tradition to prioritize him at mealtimes, each accounting for 12.7%.

Table 5 presents indicators for food consumption decision-making based on the distribution of respondents from the To Pekurehua and Javanese tribes regarding daily meal menus, portion sizes, and nutritionally balanced food.

Table 5. Distribution of Respondents Based on Decision-Making Indicators

Decision-Making Indicators	To Pekurehua Tribe n= 79	Javanese n= 41	Total n = 120
Determining daily food menu, n (%)			
- Husband dominant	1 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.8)
- Husband only	0 (0.0)	1 (2.4)	1 (0.8)
- Wife dominant	22 (27.8)	13 (31.7)	35 (29.2)
- Wife only	37 (46.8)	26 (63.4)	63 (52.5)

Decision-Making Indicators	To Pekurehua Tribe n= 79	Javanese n= 41	Total n = 120
- Fully shared	19 (24.1)	1 (2.4)	20 (16.7)
Determining the amount of food, n (%)			
- Husband dominant	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- Husband only	0 (0.0)	1 (2.4)	1 (0.8)
- Wife dominant	28 (35.4)	13 (31.7)	41 (34.2)
- Wife only	44 (55.7)	27 (65.9)	71 (59.2)
- Fully shared	7 (8.9)	0 (0.0)	7 (5.8)
Determining nutrition-balanced food menu, n (%)			
- Husband dominant	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- Husband only	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- Wife dominant	31 (39.2)	13 (31.7)	44 (36.7)
- Wife only	41 (51.9)	28 (68.3)	69 (57.5)
- Fully shared	7 (8.9)	0 (0.0)	7 (5.8)
Determining eating frequency, n (%)			
- Husband dominant	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- Husband only	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- Wife dominant	24 (30.4)	11 (26.8)	35 (29.2)
- Wife only	19 (24.1)	21 (51.2)	57 (47.5)
- Fully shared	19 (24.1)	9 (22)	28 (23.3)
Determining the amount of expenditure for daily meals, n (%)			
- Husband dominant	3 (3.8)	1 (2.4)	4 (3.3)
- Husband only	1 (1.3)	1 (2.4)	2 (1.7)
- Wife dominant	25 (31.6)	13 (31.7)	38 (31.7)
- Wife only	42 (53.2)	24 (58.5)	66 (55)
- Fully shared	8 (10.1)	2 (4.9)	10 (8.3)
Determining the proportion of food expenditure from household income, n (%)			
- Husband dominant	2 (2.5)	1 (2.4)	3 (2.5)
- Husband only	1 (1.3)	1 (2.4)	2 (1.7)
- Wife dominant	25 (31.6)	14 (34.1)	39 (32.5)
- Wife only	42 (53.2)	25 (61)	67 (55.8)
- Fully shared	9 (11.4)	0 (0.0)	9 (7.5)
Determining the method of food processing, n (%)			
- Husband dominant	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- Husband only	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- Wife dominant	31 (39.2)	12 (29.3)	43 (35.8)
- Wife only	42 (53.2)	28 (68.3)	70 (58.3)
- Fully shared	6 (7.6)	1 (2.4)	7 (5.8)
Determining cooking or buying outside, n (%)			
- Husband dominant	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- Husband only	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
- Wife dominant	28 (35.4)	14 (34.1)	42 (35)
- Wife only	45 (57.0)	26 (63.4)	71 (59.2)
- Fully shared	6 (7.6)	1 (2.4)	7 (5.8)

DISCUSSION

The To Pekurehua and Javanese tribes generated average eating frequencies of 2.86 and 3.00 times per day, respectively. The Javanese tribe's frequency of consuming meals three times daily (95.1%) surpassed that of the To Pekurehua tribe (81%). This gap stems from the Javanese habit of preparing breakfast before leaving for work or farming, believing that consistent meal frequency will provide extra energy for work or farming. This is supported by ethnographic/food education studies and documents that state that the traditional Javanese eating pattern is three meals a day (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), with breakfast being part of the traditional daily pattern(15).

The practice of communal dining was observed in 91.1% of the To Pekurehua tribe and 87.8% of the Javanese tribe. The To Pekurehua tribe had a family dinner participation rate of 87.3%, whereas the

Javanese tribe's rate reached only 82.9%. Research by Diana (2022) (16) demonstrated that cultural influences affect eating behaviors and mealtimes in the Madurese tribe, whereas, in the Alune tribe, communal dining is perceived as a symbol of fraternity (17). Additionally, Ramadhan G (2022) (18), suggested that the practice of dining together as a family is a phenomenon that might significantly enhance communication among family members. Culture governs the distribution of household food among several tribes in Indonesia, including the To Pekurehua and Javanese tribes in Central Sulawesi Province.

Table 3 indicates that the food distribution within households where the fathers consumed their meal prior to the mothers and children was lower in the To Pekurehua tribe (13.9%) compared to the Javanese tribe (17.1%). Additionally, the proportion of food reserved for the fathers first was 25.3% in the To Pekurehua tribe, whereas it was 36.6% in the Javanese tribe. Meals for fathers with higher amounts were reported at 22.8% for the To Pekurehua tribe and 29.3% for the Javanese tribe. The disparity in menu selections among fathers and other family members in the To Pekurehua tribe was 3.8%, while in the Javanese tribe, it was 4.9%. Conversely, the variances in menu selections among family members were 1.3% for the To Pekurehua tribe and 2.4% for the Javanese tribe. The data suggest that among both tribes, the fathers, as the head of the household, have been given precedence in food distribution. The Javanese tribe exhibited superior family food distribution criteria compared to the To Pekurehua tribe, except for the criterion regarding the condition of the mothers or children eating last (17.7% for the To Pekurehua tribe and 9.8% for the Javanese tribe). A quantitative study in Indonesia reported significant intra-household disparities in food distribution, revealing that access to food among family members is not always equitable. Such inequalities were shown to have a measurable impact on nutritional outcomes, particularly increasing the risk of malnutrition among women and children. These findings highlight that household food security is not merely determined by overall food availability, but also by the fairness of food allocation within the family unit(19). Based on existing studies, men often hold dominant roles within the family, reflecting a gender-based power imbalance. Consequently, this family dynamic can contribute to unhealthy eating behaviors and a lack of parental attention to children's dietary habits. Such conditions highlight the intersection between gender dynamics and child nutrition issues, which may have long-term implications for children's nutritional well-being(20).

The food distribution among households of the To Pekurehua and Javanese tribes aligns with a prior study(10), revealing disparities in the sequence of meals consumed by fathers compared to mothers and children, variations in menu selections between fathers and other family members, and variances in menu selections across family members. Moreover, research by Morisson (2018)(21) discovered that due to their economic ability, fathers have been prioritized in food distribution and consumption, receiving larger amounts and superior quality of food before mothers and other family members. Similarly, another study also disclosed that fathers receive a greater allocation of food due to their economic stability in supplying food for their families(22). Men possess a greater capacity to access food sources than women (23). Due to the high level of gender disparity within households, where husbands (men) hold greater decision-making power over food choices and consumption access, the distribution of food resources tends to favor men and children over women (24).

In the same category of the study performed by Tanziha (2023)(25), fathers play a more significant role as a driver of menu selection. Additionally, research by Fatchiya (2024) (10) indicates that fathers enjoy privileges, such as eating first before the mothers and children and having food prepared for them prior to sharing with other family members. As highlighted in Nurbaiti L et al (2014)(26), the eating habits of the Sasak tribe dictate that the mothers refrain from eating until the fathers and other family members have completed their meals; however, it does not pertain to breastfeeding mothers, who may eat immediately if they experience hunger, without waiting for the fathers.

Table 5 reveals that wives imposed greater influence on the daily household food composition menu, with proportions of 46.8% in the To Pekurehua tribe and 63.4% in the Javanese tribe. The quantities of food were 55.7% and 65.9%, respectively. A nutritionally balanced meal plan was recorded at 51.9% and 68.3%, while the frequency of consumption proportions was 30.4% and 51.2%. The wives determined the daily food spending, accounting for 53.2% and 58.5% respectively. The percentage of food spending relative to household income was 53.2% and 61% for the wives. The wives dominated

the food processing method in the To Pekurehua tribe, recorded at 53.2% and 68.3% in the Javanese tribe. The decision-making indicator for whether to cook or purchase food externally was also the wives, with proportions of 57% in the To Pekurehua tribe and 63.4% in the Javanese tribe. As has been asserted, wives possess more decisive influence in three domains: food provision, financial management, and agricultural oversight (27,28). Additionally, they have an awareness of household food preferences and eating patterns (29).

The indicators for daily food decision-making in families of both tribes revealed that the distribution value of the percentage indicator was greater in the Javanese tribe than in the To Pekurehua tribe, including everything from daily food determination to the selection of cooking or purchasing food externally. Interviews with key respondents from each tribe unveiled that the Javanese tribe maintained a cultural norm wherein the husbands, as the head of the household, were tasked solely with earning a livelihood without influencing the menu prepared by the wives. Conversely, in the To Pekurehua tribe (Napu Valley), the husbands not only earned a living but also participated in decision-making regarding the food provided by the wives. This function exists due to the impact of the cultural values and customs prevalent among the To Pekurehua tribe. In the To Pekurehua tribe of Napu Valley, men are perceived as holding a greater status than women, reflecting a patriarchal social structure. A study by Jaiyeola (2020) (23), mentions that in a patriarchal society, males possess more access to food resources than women, with cultural elements reflecting a more pronounced patriarchal value in rural areas compared to metropolitan ones (30).

CONCLUSION

The analysis results led to the following conclusions. The average eating frequency of the Javanese tribe exceeded that of the To Pekurehua tribe. The disparity stemmed from the Javanese work ethic in agricultural settings with greater intensity and the Javanese belief that consistent meal frequency maintains bodily resilience. The To Pekurehua tribe exhibited a higher preference for communal dining and shared meal times at dinner compared to the Javanese tribe. The To Pekurehua and Javanese tribes showcased a similar practice wherein the fathers consumed food first, with both tribes prioritizing the fathers (head of the household) in food distribution. The indicators of daily food decision-making in families from both tribes revealed that the distribution value of the percentage indicator was greater in the Javanese tribe than in the To Pekurehua tribe, including everything from daily food determination to the option between preparing or purchasing food externally.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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