

# Less healthy foods for the poor! - Russia-Ukraine War and its aftermath on vulnerable households groups in Germany

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**Abstract** - The Russia-Ukraine war has dominated the daily lives of people in Germany since February 2022. Different age groups are affected to a very different extent. Against this background, this article examines the extent to which changes in dietary and food shopping behaviour and stress perception can be observed in different (age) cohorts. Based on an online survey 1.473 subjects were interviewed about their dietary and health behaviour, anxiety and everyday stress. It is hypothesized that lower-income households and vulnerable populations (e.g. families with children) are significantly more impacted by the effects of the war regarding dietary and purchasing behaviour.

## INTRODUCTION

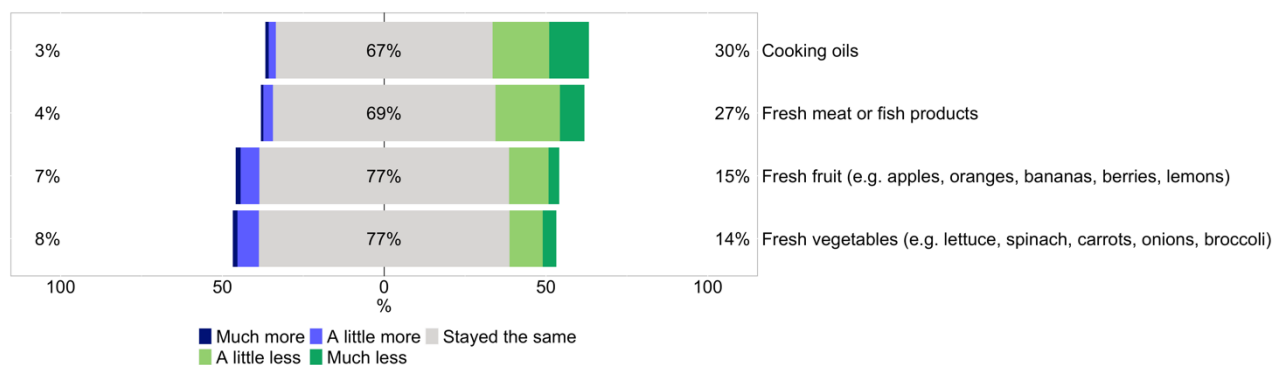
Since the end of February 2022, news about the war between Russia and Ukraine has dominated the daily lives of people in Germany. Many people are concerned not only by the shock of an actual armed conflict in Europe but also by the associated economic and social consequences. Now that the consequences of the Corona pandemic have not yet been overcome, the war is again presenting people with major challenges in many respects. During the Corona pandemic, for example, it was noticed that the perception of "feeling alone" and the sense of stress increased for many people. Younger people, in particular, felt very stressed and additionally also significantly more stressed than in the first lockdown at the beginning of 2020 (Busch et al., 2021). At the same time, it was observed that people's dietary behaviour has also changed.

On the one hand, more fruit and vegetables were consumed, but at the same time, the proportion of people consuming more snacks and junk food also increased (Busch et al., 2021). Against the background of the war and the resulting price increases for energy and food products, it is questionable to what extent these developments will continue or perhaps even develop in the opposite direction. Therefore, this article examines the current war's impact on the emotional state and the purchasing and dietary behaviour of German consumers. Since it became apparent during the Corona pandemic that young people felt burdened and stressed (Busch et al., 2021), we would like to focus in particular on the extent to which possible changes in food and eating behaviour are becoming visible depending on age group.

## METHODS

The study was conducted in April 2022, 8 weeks after the start of the war. 1.473 people were interviewed. The subjects were recruited via an online access panel provider (gapfish). The sample is representative of the German population in terms of age, gender, education, income and regional distribution. In the questionnaire, the respondent was asked about the change in food consumption that is due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The concrete question was: "To what extent has your \_\_consumption\_\_ of food changed compared to before the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict? Which of the following foods do you currently consume more or less of than before the war began?". In this contribution, we present the descriptive results for different consumer segments that were categorized according to income, age, and the number of kids in the household. The change in consumption was measured on a five-point-scale from much less, a little less, stayed the same, a little more, to much more.

Figure 1: Changes in food consumption due to war



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Figure 2: Change in consumption according to income

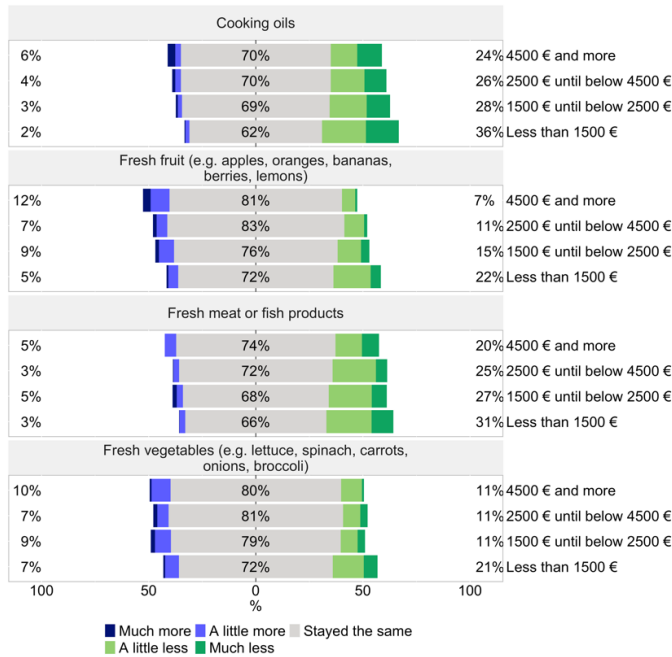
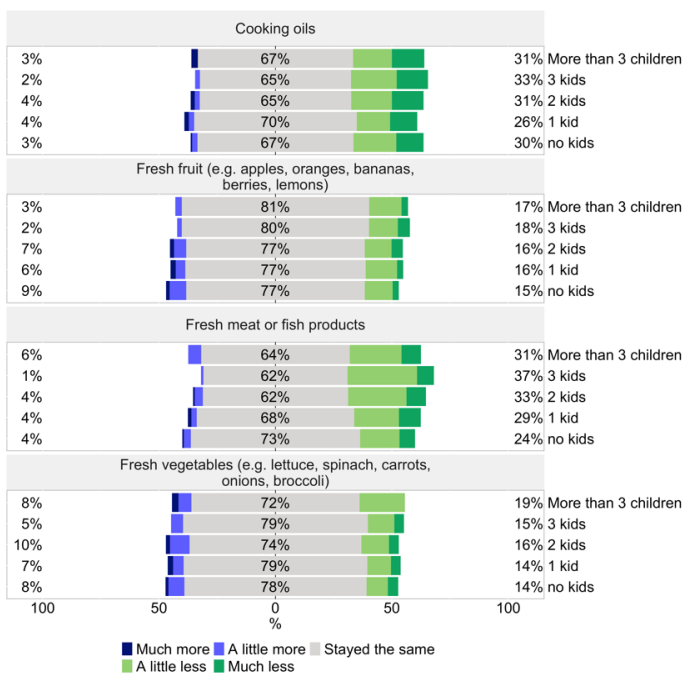


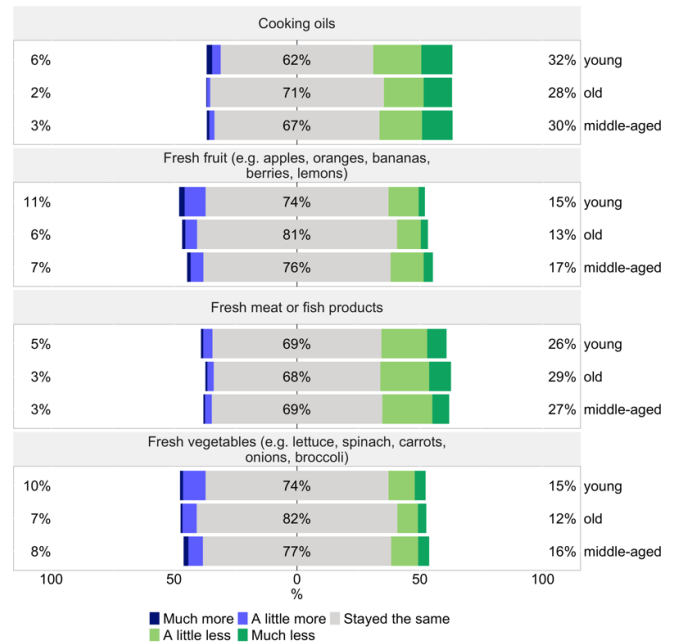
Figure 3: Change in consumption according to the number of kids in the household



## RESULTS

The findings clearly show that there is, in particular, reduced consumption of edible oils, fresh meat, fresh fruits and vegetables (see Figure 1). Concerning consumer segments, it can be found that lower incomes and a higher number of children in the household lead to lower consumption of healthy product categories, such as fresh fruits and vegetables (see Figures 2 and 3). Similarly, it can be found in meat consumption. Interestingly, only minor differences across age groups can be identified for age.

Figure 4: Change in consumption according to age



The reasons for the changes can be found in increasing prices respectively. Thus, the war caused shock waves that even influenced the diet health in industrialized countries like Germany with all its consequences.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In consumer research, it is known that key moments or drastic experiences can be triggers for long-term behavioural changes. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has led to an economic crisis that affects, in particular, the diet in poor households and households with children. The reduced consumption of healthy product categories can be considered severe and political measures must be taken (e.g. reduced taxes on fresh fruits or vegetables) to counteract this negative effect.

## REFERENCES

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