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A soft pillow for hard times?

Economic insecurity, food intake and body weight in Russia

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Highlights

- **This study investigates effects of economic insecurity on individual anxiety, food intake, and weight outcomes in Russia.**
- **The empirical analysis is based on RLMS data for the years 1994-2005.**
- **Results support a causal chain from economic insecurity to weight outcomes for some population groups.**
- **There is strong evidence of a decreasing effect of economic insecurity on weight among Russian women.**

Abstract

This study investigates causal effects of economic insecurity on subjective anxiety, food intake, and weight outcomes. A review of psychological and nutrition studies highlights the complexity of processes at work on each stage of this causal chain. Econometric analyses trace the effects along the hypothesized pathway using detailed household panel data from the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey from 1994 to 2005.

Economic insecurity measures serve as key explanatory variables in regressions and are instrumented by exogenous regional indicators. Results support a causal chain from economic insecurity to weight outcomes for some population subgroups. In contrast to the leading hypothesis that economic insecurity increases body weight, I find strong evidence of a decreasing effect among women. Results suggest further that consumption of foods rich in sugar responds strongly to higher levels of economic insecurity. Heterogeneous impacts of economic insecurity on body weight call for individual-level interventions rather than large-scale action.

Keywords: Economic insecurity, food intake, body weight, instrumental variables, RLMS.

JEL codes: D01, C26, I14

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