

THE IMPACT OF HOUSEHOLD HEAD'S GENDER ON FOOD SECURITY IN SYRIA

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INTRODUCTION

Food security and eradicating hunger are gaining more attention from the global community. Together with gender equity, they form a priority on the development agendas of many countries; Syria is no exception. Entering its eighth year, Syrian conflict has severely affected agricultural sector and food production, leaving what was once a "self-sufficient" food-producing nation under the threat of becoming food insecure. Gender relations need even more attention in the lens of current crisis.



MAIN OBJECTIVE

With little evidence on the role of household-head's gender in achieving food security, the question that arises is if female headship can successfully replace that of males? To close this gap, our main objective is to examine the effect of household-head's gender on food security.

METHODOLOGY

- Primary data used in this article were obtained from "Crop Production and Food Security Assessment in Syrian Rural Areas" survey conducted in 2017 by the Syrian National Agricultural Policy Centre.
- 1381 households were interviewed in 12 governorates.

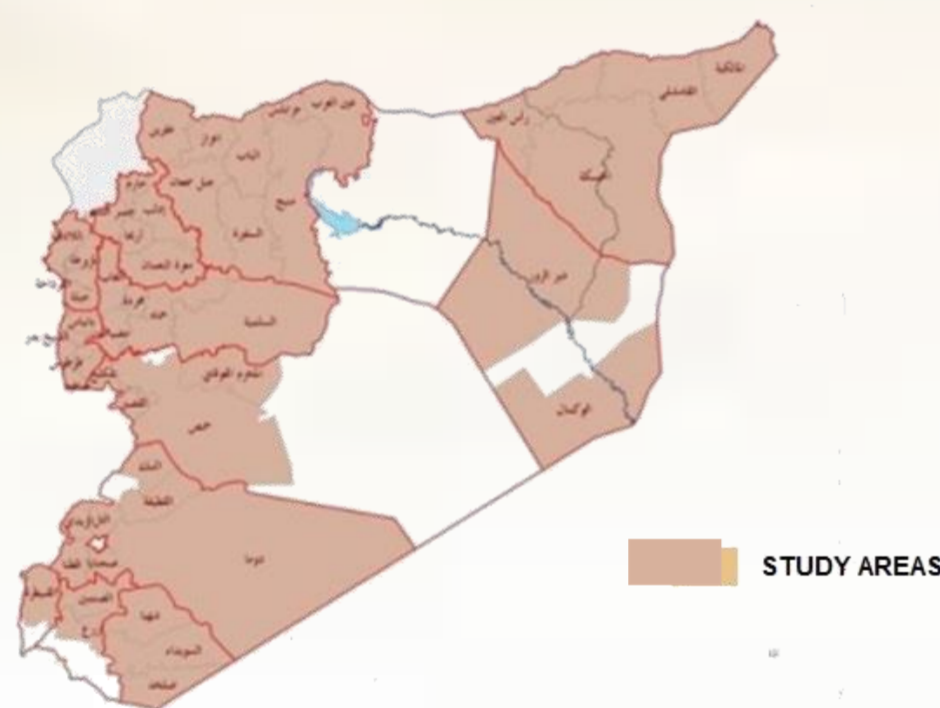


Figure 1. The Syrian Arab Republic with study governorates

Food security is estimated based on the World Food Programme's Food Consumption Score (FCS):

- measures food consumed in the past seven days in a household
- reflects both the quality and the quantity of food by estimating frequency of consumption of each food group x weights associated with each group

EMPIRICAL MODEL

OLS MODEL

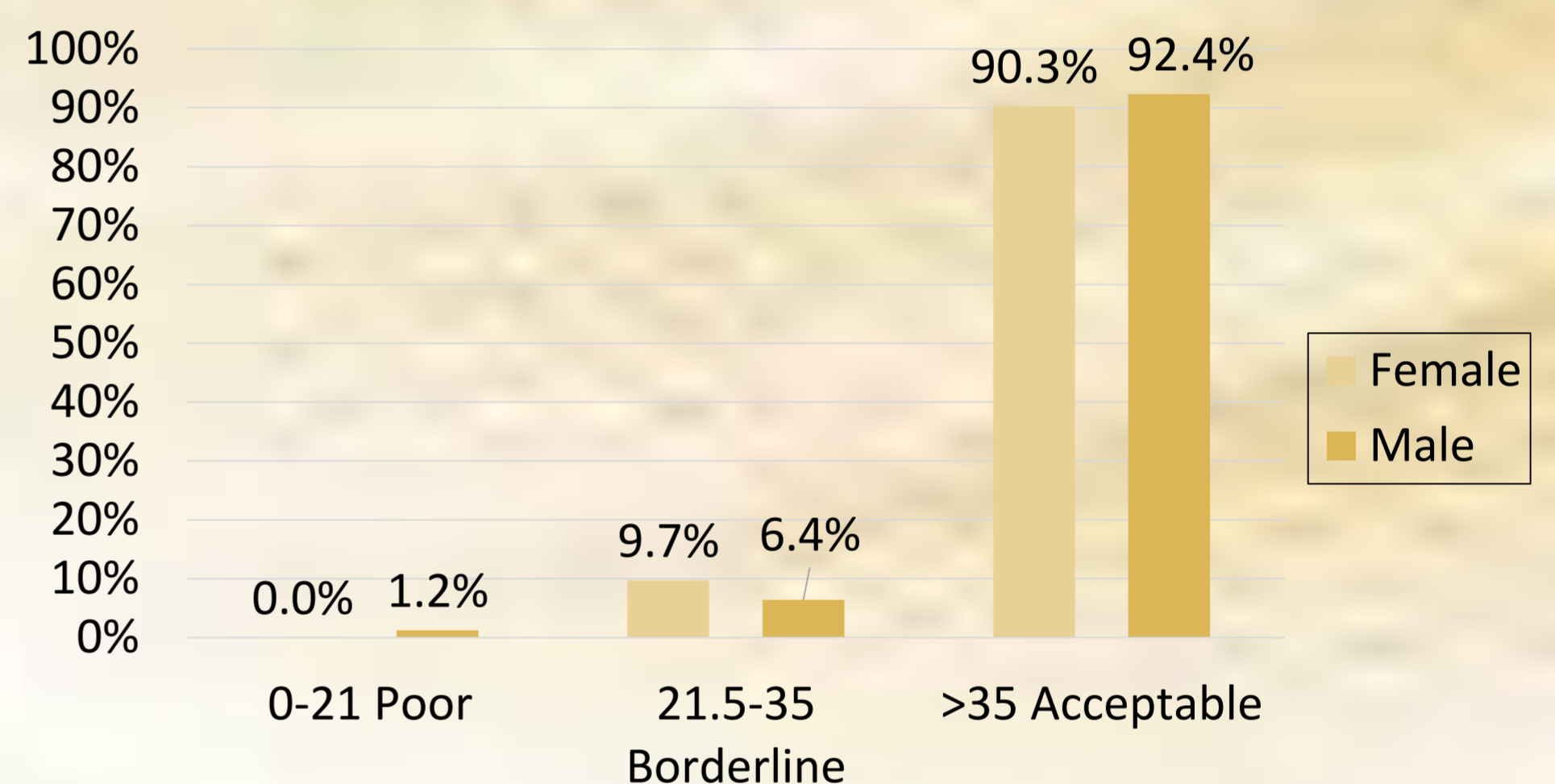
Study relied on an ordinary least squares (OLS) model which includes the following dependent and independent variables:

Table 1. Variables used in the OLS model

Dependent variable	
Food consumption score	continuous
Independent variables	
Household head (HH) Gender	Dummy (1=male, 0=female)
Ln of HH head age	Logarithm of HH head's age
Family Size	No. of people in the HH, Cont.
Land holding size	Continuous (Dunum= 1/10 ha)
No. of sheep	Continuous
No. of income sources	Continuous
No. of coping strategies	Continuous
HH received aids	Dummy (1=yes, 2=no)

RESULTS

In our sample, only 72 households were female-headed. Taking the FCS threshold, only 1.2% of households were "food insecure", 6.6% were on "borderline" and 92.3% "had acceptable" food security level.



Graph 1. Food Consumption Score threshold

Table 2. Results of OLS model

Variables	Coefficient	Standard error
HH head gender	8.223**	3.774
Ln of HH head age	-2.824	0.573
Family size	-0.024	0.213
Land holding size (dunum)	-0.30***	0.011
No. of sheep	0.051***	0.018
No. of income sources	-3.217***	0.834
No. of coping strategies	-2.934***	0.573
HH received aids	6.420***	1.938
Constant	77.748	16.095

Note: *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1; R² = 0.256

CONCLUSION

The analysis provides interesting results regarding the effect of gender on food security:

- only limited number of households are female-headed, and generally female-headed households are more food secure.
- Low levels of food insecurity exist among Syrian households, where more investigation is needed to evaluate the nutritional dimension of consumed food. Especially that in some hot warzones the source of food is mainly from aids and it usually lacks the diversity needed for a healthy diet.
- The results provide first evidence, that there is a potential, not yet fully used, of female as farms-heads for increasing food security in Syria. In future research, reasons for low share of women as households' head should be further investigated to understand the problem more in-depth.

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