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Socioeconomic dimension of wild food plants use during the conflict in Syria

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Abstract

Wild plants have served as a food source for humans since ancient times; the use of such food particularly increases when the availability or accessibility of conventional food is limited due to emergency situations, such as conflicts. Eleven years of the war in Syria have left a catastrophic impact on all life aspects, and it has caused the largest war-related crisis since the Second World War. Soaring food and fuel prices, stagnant salaries, loss of livelihoods and reduced food production have led to widespread food insecurity across the country. Nearly 60% of the Syrian population (12.4 million people) are food-insecure. Our study aims to understand how people’s socioeconomic status influences the use of wild food plants during the conflict. We hypothesise that with the decrease in household income, the use of wild food plants increases. We also hypothesise that the war-involved households (where a household member is a soldier, injured, or a victim) tend to have a higher reliance on wild food plants. The study was conducted in the coastal region of Syria between March 2020 and March 2021. Fifty informants (26 women and 24 men), representing 50 households, were interviewed in-depth on their use of wild plants during the current economic conditions resulting from the conflict. In addition to the qualitative analysis, a quantitative statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS programme version 27. Linear regression showed that the number of used species holds a strong positive correlation with informants’ age, and a significant negative correlation with the annual household income. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between war-involved households and reliance level. Future analysis of a larger set of informants and further socioeconomic indicators is required to understand better how socioeconomic conditions influence the use of wild plants in crisis times.

Keywords: Economic crisis, Middle East, socioeconomic factors, war-time food