

Social differences in red meat consumption during the meat crisis and COVID-19 pandemic in Iran

Afsaneh Ehsani, Tinoush Jamali Jaghdani and Linde Götz

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Introduction

Red meat plays an essential role in Iranian cuisine, both as a source of protein and as an integral component of religious and cultural eating behaviors.

In early 2019, the sharp jump in red meat prices led to fundamental changes in the Iranians' dietary intakes, such as drastically reducing or even eliminating red meat. This price crisis was directly followed by the COVID-19 pandemic that exacerbated social inequalities.

Objectives

- Investigating the changes in red meat consumption among Iranian consumers by income (low, middle, high income).
- Distinguishing between pre-crises (2019), rising meat price crisis (2019-2020) and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Case Study

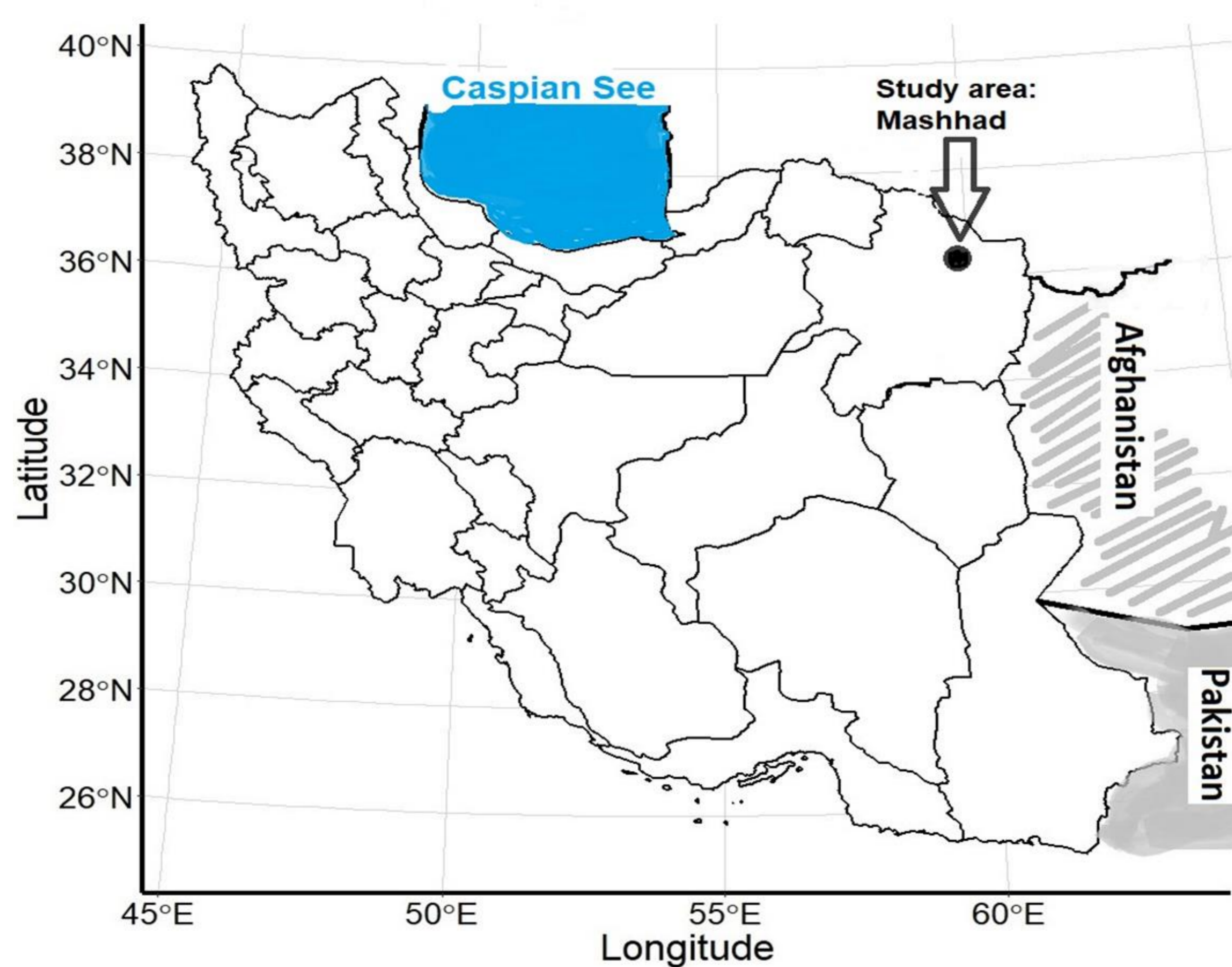


Figure 1. Study area

Mashhad, the second-most-populous city in Iran and the capital of Razavi Khorasan province:

An essential supplier of red meat with the highest production over the period 2016-2018

A high rate of distribution of subsidized imported frozen red meat since the beginning of 2019

450 km border with Afghanistan, facing food insecurity

Methodology

- Repeated (three times) survey of 296 participants, randomly selected in three different city quarters: quarter one (low-income), quarter two (middle-income) and quarter three (high-income)
- Stratified random sampling
- Repeated-measures ANOVA to compare means across variables that are based on repeated observations

Results

- Red meat consumption mean differs significantly between the inhabitants of quarter one (low income) and two (medium income), quarter one and three (upper income) and also between quarter two and three, and also between three periods of pre-crisis, price crisis and COVID-19 pandemic.
- Per capita consumption of red meat had decreased for all participants during the rising meat price crisis compared to the pre-crisis period
- Due to lower per capita consumption in the low-income group during pre-crises era, the changes in their consumption had a more severe impact on this group with regards to the elimination of red meat from their diet.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the per capita consumption among the low- and middle-income groups decreased, while it increased in the high-income group.

Social class	Period	Mean	Standard Error
Low income	Pre-crisis	5.85	3.196
	Price crisis	2.07	1.525
	COVID-19 pandemic	1.49	1.616
Middle income	Pre-crisis	21.85	3.085
	Price crisis	10.85	1.471
	COVID-19 pandemic	9.25	1.560
High income	Pre-crisis	42.53	3.131
	Price crisis	19.89	1.494
	COVID-19 pandemic	22.49	1.584

Table 1: Resident's red meat consumption (per capita), by city quarter

Suggestions

- Developing targeted strategies that enable lower-income and vulnerable consumers to cope with crisis periods
- Subsidize some essential commodities, including meat
- Alternative sources of protein

Contact

Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO)

Theodor-Lieser-Str. 2 | 06120 Halle (Saale) | Germany

Afsaneh Ehsani | Ehsani@iamo.de | Tel.: +49 345 2928-340

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