

Food insecurity in the context of conflict: analysis of survey data in the occupied Palestinian territory

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Abstract

Background Conflict impacts food security and decreases household dietary diversity. However, few studies have explored the routes by which prolonged conflict and social stressors affect food insecurity experience and food diversity. This study examines the influence of political, economic, and agricultural stressors on food insecurity and food diversity, and evaluates variations in food insecurity and food diversity with location of residence for households in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Methods A secondary data analysis with structural equation modelling was carried out on data from the Socio-Economic & Food Security Survey 2014 of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The survey was completed by a representative sample of the Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territory at governorate and locality levels, and consisted of 4215 households in the West Bank and 2916 households in the Gaza Strip. The primary outcomes were food diversity (measured with a food consumption score) and food insecurity (assessed with a composite experience-based measure of food security). We used structural equation models to examine the relationships between location of residence (in the West Bank, living in Area C versus not Area C; in the Gaza Strip, proximity of residence to the buffer zone), the number of political stressors, economic stressors, and agricultural stressors (eg, restricted access to land), and the primary outcomes. We controlled for demographic characteristics, including education, governorate, and wealth.

Findings In the West Bank, there was no statistically significant direct association between living in Area C and food insecurity. Living in Area C is associated with a higher number of agricultural stressors than not Area C ($p=0.032$), and a higher number of agricultural stressors is in turn associated with lower food diversity ($p=0.0080$) and higher food insecurity ($p=0.040$). In the Gaza Strip, proximity to the buffer zone is directly associated with higher food insecurity ($p=0.041$) and lower food diversity ($p=0.019$) and a higher number of political stressors ($p=0.057$). A higher number of political stressors is associated with a higher number of economic stressors ($p=0.026$) and higher food insecurity ($p=0.034$).

Interpretation The findings suggest that political, economic, and agricultural factors contribute to food insecurity and food diversity, and that their interactions are complex. Conflict and occupation affect food availability through both direct and indirect channels. In the Gaza Strip, living in close proximity to the buffer zone is associated with lower food diversity and higher food insecurity. In the West Bank, although residing in Area C may not directly increase food insecurity, the hardship generated by the conditions in Area C contributes to higher food insecurity.

Funding The Emirates Foundation.

Contributors

TKL, RK, WH, SM, ZJ, HG, and TL conducted statistical analysis. TKL and RK drafted the manuscript. TKL, RK, WH, SM, RG, and TL designed the research. TL and RG were joint principal investigators on the project. TKL, RK, WH, SM, ZJ, HG, RG, and TL interpreted the results, and reviewed and commented on the manuscript. All authors have seen and approved the final version of the Abstract for publication.

Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

Published Online
July 5, 2021

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