

Social Capital's Association with Food Security: A Case Study on Phalombe District, Malawi

SC.DTP. South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership



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Introduction

The proportion of food insecure people is increasing in the world (FAO, 2018). This has resulted in a renewed research focus on food security, with a particular focus on food access. One concept that has been associated with food security is social capital and has been coined 'the missing link' to sustainable development (Grootaert, 1998). Social capital can be loosely defined as an individual's family, friends and social networks that can be used drawn upon during a crisis to make a living or used to meet shared objectives. Social capital can be broken down into the following typologies:

Bonding	Relations based on shared identity, backgrounds and culture. Includes family and friends.
Bridging	Between individuals who join for a collective action that will benefit everyone involved.
Linking	Between people who have unequal power and share little in common. Includes sharing of hard to access resources.

Strong social capital has been associated with better household food security (Dzanja et al., 2015; Forrest, 2017; Lamidi, 2019), however, research does not unpack social capital into its different typologies, instead giving one social capital score.

Research objectives

- To understand if the typological components of social capital have different associations with household food security
- To understand whether these associations vary depending on the gender of the household head.

Study Site

Phalombe District in southern Malawi (Figure 1) was used as a case study as it is an area with low food security and strong gender norms.



Figure 1

Methodology

Secondary survey analysis was undertaken of the Fourth Malawian Integrated Household Survey.

Food security- Food Insecurity Experience Scale.

Social capital typologies- factor analysis of numerous variables creating three scores for bonding, bridging and linking.

Three binary logistic regression were constructed for: all households, male headed households (MHH) and female headed households (FHH) with food security as the dependent variable. Socioeconomic variables were included as independent variables alongside the social capital scores.

Results

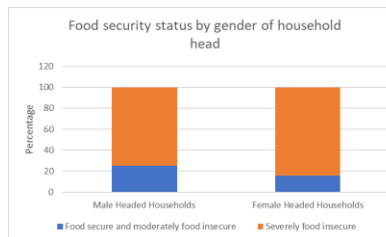


Figure 2

78% of households were deemed severely food insecure. A higher proportion of the FHH were categorised as severely food insecure at 84.4%, while 74.8% of MHH were severely food insecure (Figure 2).

A Chi² test between food security and gender of household head, showed a significant association ($p=0.033$).

Figure 3 shows the social capital beta coefficients from the three regression models.

Findings show higher bonding and bridging social capital are associated with lower food insecurity. Conversely, higher linking social capital is associated with higher food insecurity.

The association between social capital typologies and food security varied by the gender of household head

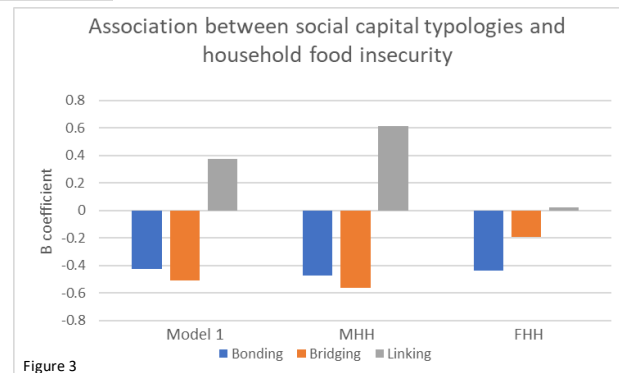


Figure 3

Findings

Bonding social capital had a similar association with household food security for MHH and FHH, while the association with bridging social capital was greater for MHH than FHH.

The social capital typology with the strongest association with food insecurity for FHH was bonding, followed by bridging and linking. Meanwhile for MHH, the strongest social capital predictor for food insecurity was linking, followed by bridging and bonding.

FHH may struggle to form bridging and linking social capital which are often male dominated networks.

FHH are able to build and maintain their bonding social capital, which is likely to be formed with other women, without encountering problems with gender norms or time constraints.

The association between linking social capital and food insecurity can be explained by the proxies used, which considers a developing country context (Harrison et al., 2016; Smith and Frankenberger, 2018)

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