

Beyond Tradition: The Influence of Gender and Household Leadership on Food Choices and Alternative Staple Consumption in Claveria, Misamis Oriental

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of gender and household headship on food choice motivations and the consumption patterns of alternative staples in Claveria, Misamis Oriental, Philippines. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys (n=200) and qualitative interviews, the study investigates how socio-demographic factors, gender roles, and household leadership affect food-related decisions. Results reveal that while both male- and female-headed households prioritize rice, significant gender differences emerge in the consumption of other staples, such as corn, with male-headed households consuming more. Motivations for food choices were generally similar across genders, with health and economic availability being key factors, though women exhibited stronger health-related motivations. Statistical analyses showed no significant difference in overall consumption patterns between male- and female-headed households ($p = 0.593$), but a significant relationship was found between gender and food choice motivations in non-GIDA areas ($p = 0.048$). These findings suggest that while gender roles influence food acquisition and preparation, consumption patterns tend to be similar across household types. The study emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive food security interventions that recognize both universal needs and gender-specific motivations, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, it underscores the importance of incorporating cultural, economic, and gendered perspectives into food policy and nutrition programs, especially in rural and semi-urban contexts.

Keywords: *Alternative Staples, Food Choice Motivation, Food Security, Gender Roles, Household Headship, Claveria*

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, an archipelago teeming with biodiversity, is a culinary mosaic shaped by its diverse geography and rich cultural influences. While rice is undeniably the crown jewel of the nation's culinary identity, a deeper exploration reveals a fascinating array of other vital crops that have nourished Filipino communities for generations. This paper ventures into the world of Filipino staple foods, focusing on rice, corn, cassava, sweet potato, and banana, shedding light on their historical significance, regional consumption variations, and evolving roles in the modern Filipino diet.

Each of these five staples, with their unique characteristics and nutritional profiles, has profoundly shaped Filipino cuisine and culture. Rice, the undisputed king, graces the tables of households across the country, symbolizing abundance and tradition. Historically, rice was once considered an elite food, only to become a ubiquitous staple by the late 19th century (Aguilar, 2005). Corn, a vibrant and versatile grain, holds particular importance in the Visayas and Mindanao regions, where it is often ground into flour, cooked into porridge, or enjoyed as a sweet treat. Though secondary to rice, corn plays an indispensable role in the Philippines' agricultural landscape, not only serving as food but also as animal feed and an industrial commodity. In 2023, corn production reached 8.4 million metric tons, cultivated across 2.5 million hectares. Yellow corn dominates production, used primarily for livestock feed and industrial purposes, while white corn remains a staple food in the Visayas and Mindanao

(Philippine Statistics Authority, 2025; Statista, 2024; USDA-FAS Manila, 2025). Cassava and sweet potato, resilient root crops, offer sustenance in resource-poor areas, forming the backbone of a wide range of dishes, from savory stews to sweet desserts. Known for their high fiber and resistant starch content, these root crops hold potential for improving human cholesterol profiles (Trinidad et al., 2013). Bananas, ubiquitous throughout the archipelago, provide a readily available source of energy and nutrients, consumed both ripe and unripe in various forms.

Recognizing the significance of these alternative staple foods, the Philippine government has launched initiatives to promote their production and consumption. These include research and development programs, market promotion efforts, and consumer education initiatives aimed at fostering greater food diversity.

This study seeks to unravel the intricate relationship between gender, household headship, and the motivations behind food choices within Filipino households. It acknowledges that food decisions are not merely driven by personal preferences but are deeply embedded in social structures and cultural norms. In particular, traditional gender roles, which often designate women as the primary food preparers and men as the providers, can significantly influence dietary choices and decision-making power within the household. In rural Malawi, for instance, men have become increasingly involved in food provision, purchasing, and preparation tasks, reflecting a broader shift in gender roles in the household (Mkandawire & Hendriks, 2019). Similarly, the gender of the household head can shape resource allocation, food security, and adherence to cultural food traditions.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of alternative staple foods, there remains limited understanding of how gender and household headship affect their adoption, particularly in specific geographic contexts. Most existing research focuses on general food security and consumption patterns, overlooking the subtle factors that influence food choices at the household level, especially concerning the roles of gender and household leadership.

This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on Claveria, a landlocked municipality in Misamis Oriental, Philippines, which has been the subject of several studies on rural development and agriculture. Previous research has explored issues like accessibility to community services, revealing that higher-income households typically face lower travel costs to essential facilities (Delgado & Canters, 2011). By employing a mixed-methods approach, this research investigates the motivations behind the consumption of alternative staples in Claveria, examining how gender, household headship, and socio-cultural factors influence food choice and consumption patterns in this rural context.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This research utilized a mixed-methods design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of food choice motivations and consumption patterns. By integrating surveys, interviews, and observational data, the study explored the multifaceted nature of food-related issues, including the influence of gender and household headship on dietary behaviors. Mixed methods have proven effective in addressing food security and consumption patterns, particularly in resource-scarce settings (Wertheim-Heck & Raneri, 2019; Limon et al., 2017). However, challenges in integrating qualitative and quantitative data were acknowledged, especially when quantifying qualitative information (Driscoll et al., 2007), which was carefully managed throughout the study.

The research was conducted in Claveria, Misamis Oriental, across 12 randomly selected barangays, divided into two groups: Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) and non-GIDA barangays. The study focused on six GIDA barangays (DG Pelaez, Lanise, Malagana, Punong, Santa

Cruz, Tipolohon) and six non-GIDA barangays (Aposkahoy, Gumaod, Mat-i, Patrocenio, Plaridel, Tamboboan), ensuring a diverse representation of the municipality's socio-economic landscape. A total of 200 households participated in the study, with an equal distribution of respondents from GIDA and non-GIDA barangays, selected through a combination of random and stratified sampling to ensure the sample was representative of the broader population.

Data was collected using a structured survey instrument, which was translated into the Visayan dialect for accessibility. The survey consisted of four sections: household profile, socio-economic information, consumption patterns, and food choice motivations. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain qualitative insights, with enumerators guided by a training manual to maintain consistency. Ethical considerations were prioritized, with informed consent obtained from all participants, and data were securely stored and transmitted. Statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses, were performed to identify key trends, and the findings were presented visually through charts and tables for clarity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic results reveal key insights into the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents. Both male and female-headed households in Claveria predominantly consist of adults. However, the higher percentage of widows in female-headed households reflects broader gendered demographic trends, especially in rural contexts (Abdulraheem et al., 2011). Regarding educational attainment, males tend to have lower educational levels, while females display a higher rate of college attendance, which aligns with other studies suggesting that women in rural settings are increasingly seeking education to improve their economic prospects (Nagaraj et al., 2014). The employment status also reflects gender-specific roles in Claveria, with men more likely to be employers or working in the agricultural sector, while women tend to engage in self-employment or government jobs, a pattern consistent with rural gender roles observed in other regions (Pattayat et al., 2023).

Table 1
Socioeconomic and Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Male-Headed Household	Female-Headed Household
Age Distribution	Majority adults (60%)	Majority adults (58%)
Civil Status	64% married, 20% common-law	32% married, 30% widowed
Educational Attainment	51% elementary, 34% high school	37% high school, 28% college
Employment Status	39% employers, 18% private establishments	30% self-employed, 21% government employees
Income	58% earn < ₱9,100	61% earn < ₱9,100
Food Purchasing	32% shop alone	69% shop alone

These results suggest that food security and nutrition policies must consider gender-based differences in education, employment, and income, with particular attention to the economic challenges faced by female-headed households. Programs aimed at improving food security should integrate adult education, vocational training, and women's empowerment initiatives to enhance food access.

Both male and female-headed households show similar staple food consumption patterns, with rice as the dominant staple. However, gender differences emerge in the consumption of corn, with men consuming significantly more corn than women, which could be due to the agricultural activities in which men are more directly involved (Bechoff et al., 2020). The consumption of alternative staples like adlai and sweet potatoes reflects a regional dietary preference, with a slight preference for cassava

in male-headed households, consistent with studies showing the influence of local farming practices on food preferences (Lombardo et al., 2019).

Table 2
Consumption Patterns Between Male-Headed and Female-Headed Households

Staple Food	Male-Headed Household	Female-Headed Household	Total
Rice	92%	97%	94%
Corn	68%	49%	58%
Adlai	3%	2%	2.5%
Sweet Potato	52%	46%	49%
Cassava	53%	43%	48%

These results suggest that while rice is universally consumed, other food choices may vary due to gender-based roles in food acquisition and preparation. These findings suggest that nutrition policies and programs should address regional dietary preferences while considering gender-specific roles in food preparation. Programs focusing on alternative staples should target both genders but emphasize the role of men in agricultural decision-making and women's roles in food preparation.

Table 3
Levels of Motivation for Food Choices Related to Alternative Staples

Motivation Category	Male-Headed Household (Mean)	Female-Headed Household (Mean)
Healthy Motivations	3.91	4.01
Emotional Motivations	3.32	3.35
Economic Availability	3.94	3.92
Social and Cultural Motivations	3.45	3.51

Motivations for food choices are strong across both genders, with women showing slightly higher motivations for healthy eating, which is consistent with findings that women are more health-conscious in their food choices (Wardle et al., 2004). The emotional motivations were also slightly higher among women, a trend observed in other studies indicating women are more likely to use food for emotional comfort and stress relief (Ha & Lim, 2023). Economic motivations were equally important for both genders, emphasizing the role of food affordability and availability in decision-making (Loginova & Mann, 2024). Social and cultural motivations were also significant, reflecting the importance of family traditions and communal eating habits.

Interventions aimed at improving food choices in Claveria should be designed to appeal to both genders, with a focus on healthy eating and cost-effective food options. Since women show stronger health-related motivations, public health campaigns could emphasize the importance of nutritious food for the entire family, using culturally appropriate messaging.

Table 4
Significant Difference in Consumption Patterns Between Male-Headed and Female-Headed Households

Group Comparison	t-Value	p-Value	Significant Difference?
Male-Headed vs. Female-Headed	0.286	0.593	No

The t-test results suggest that there is no statistically significant difference in the consumption patterns between male-headed and female-headed households (p -value = 0.593). This indicates that while gender roles may influence food acquisition and preparation, both male and female-headed households consume similar types and quantities of food. This could be due to shared economic constraints and food availability, as both groups face similar challenges in accessing affordable and nutritious food. Given the lack of significant gender differences in consumption patterns, food security interventions in Claveria can focus on universal approaches that target the entire household, such as improving access to affordable nutritious food, regardless of the gender of the household head.

Table 5
Significant Relationship Between Gender, Household Headship, and
Motivation for Food Choices

Group Comparison	p-Value (GIDA)	p-Value (Non-GIDA)	Significant Relationship?
Male-Headed vs. Female-Headed	0.890	0.048	Yes (Non-GIDA only)

There is a significant relationship between gender and food choice motivations in non-GIDA areas (p = 0.048), but no significant relationship in GIDA areas (p = 0.890). This suggests that in urban or semi-urban areas, gender plays a more critical role in shaping food choice behaviors, likely due to greater market access and availability of diverse food options. In contrast, in rural GIDA areas, where food choices are often driven by availability and cost, gender differences in motivations are less pronounced.

Policymakers should consider context-specific strategies when designing food security programs. In urbanized areas, gender-sensitive approaches that address health and emotional motivations may be more effective. In rural areas, programs should focus more on improving food availability and affordability.

CONCLUSION

Gender and household headship had minimal influence on the food choice motivations and consumption patterns of alternative staple foods in Claveria, Misamis Oriental. Although there were slight variations in mean scores across different motivational domains—such as health, emotional, economic, social, and political factors—these differences were not statistically significant in most cases. Both male and female respondents, regardless of household headship, demonstrated similar priorities, particularly in health-related and economic motivations. However, significant differences emerged in specific areas such as environmental and political motivations, where female-headed households showed a stronger inclination, and in overall food motivation, where females also scored higher. Despite these exceptions, the general trend suggests that food-related decisions were broadly similar across gender and household headship categories.

Results partially support the Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that behavior is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. It confirms that both male- and female-headed households hold similar attitudes and norms toward food health, economic constraints, and emotional regulation, aligning with the TPB's assumption that behavioral intention is consistent when external variables are controlled. However, significant differences in environmental and political motivations suggest that subjective norms and value-based considerations—especially among female-headed households—may shape food choice behaviors more distinctly in certain contexts. This nuanced outcome indicates that while TPB remains a useful framework, it must consider how gender

roles and socio-cultural dynamics intersect with individual attitudes and perceived control in food-related behaviors. Thus, the theory is confirmed in its core structure but must be contextually adapted to reflect gender-influenced motivational differences in certain domains.

Recommendations

Local Communities. Facilitate shared learning through cooking demonstrations and food literacy campaigns that actively engage both male- and female-headed households to encourage collaboration and mutual knowledge-sharing on healthy eating.

Agricultural and Food Industries. Diversify crop offerings and promote alternative staples that prioritize both health benefits and affordability, encouraging sustainable and nutritious food choices in rural areas.

Government and Policymakers. Implement inclusive food policies that enhance food accessibility, address gender-specific motivations, and ensure that sustainability and food security are prioritized in both rural and urban areas.

Health Professionals. Develop educational materials and outreach programs that highlight the health benefits of alternative staples, particularly for communities with limited access to diverse food options.

Environmental Advocates. Frame alternative staples as eco-friendly food choices, especially targeting female-headed households, which may have stronger environmental concerns, to promote sustainable agricultural practices.

Researchers. Investigate other socio-cultural factors, such as income, traditions, and household size, that influence rural food choices to provide a more holistic understanding of food security and consumption patterns.

NGOs and Development Organizations. Adopt gender-sensitive approaches to food security programs, ensuring that both male- and female-headed households are engaged and promoting shared decision-making within households.

Food Retailers. Improve the visibility and marketing of alternative staples by appealing to health-conscious and environmentally aware consumers, emphasizing the dual benefits of nutrition and sustainability.

Educational Institutions. Integrate food education into school curricula to instill healthy, sustainable eating habits among young people, fostering long-term positive changes in dietary patterns and food choices.

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