

## Awareness and Perception of Food Safety, Nutrition and Food Security among Omani Women

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**Abstract :** Oman is a sub-tropical country with limited water resources, harsh weather and limited soil fertility, constraining food production. Therefore, it largely depends on international markets to assure supply of food. In the light of these circumstances, food security in Oman is defined as the ability of the country to grant the staple food needs of people (e.g. rice, wheat, lentil, sugar, dates, dairy products, fish and plant or vegetable oils). It also involves exporting local goods with high production rates to exchange them with required food products. This concept of food security includes the availability of food through production and/or importing, stability of the market prices during all circumstances, and the ability of people to meet their needs within their income capabilities. As a result, most of the food security work is focused on availability and access dimensions of the issue. Not much research is focused on the utilization aspect of food security in Oman. Although women play a vital role in food security, there is limited research on women's role in food security neither in Oman nor in neighboring Gulf countries. Women play an important role not only by carrying the responsibility of feeding their families but also by setting the consumption model for the household. Therefore, the research aims to contribute to the work done on food security in Oman and similar regions of the world by studying the role women play at the utilization level. Methods used in this research include Qualitative unstructured interviews, focus groups, survey questionnaire and an experimental study. Based on the FAO definition of food security, it consists of availability, access, utilization and sustainability. Results from a pilot study conducted for this research on two groups of women in Oman; urban and rural women, showed that women in Oman are responsible for achieving these four pillars at the household level. Moreover, awareness of women increased as their educational level increased. Urban women showed more awareness and openness to adopt healthier and proper food related choices than rural women. Urban women seem also more open than rural women to new ideas and concepts and ways to healthier food. However, both urban and rural women claim that no training and educational programs are available for them and awareness of food security in general remains relatively low in both groups. In the light of these findings, this research attempts to further investigate the social beliefs, practices and attitudes women adopt in relation to food purchase, storage, preparation and consumption as considered as important parts of the food system. It also seeks to examine the effect of educational training programs and media on the level of women awareness on the issue.

**Keywords :** food security, household food security, utilization, role of women

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