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Determinants of the economic adaptation of refugees: the case of Midyat Camp

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In the context of the bottom-up approach to development and poverty reduction, this is the first study to use the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA), with a slight adjustment, to study the economic adaptation of refugees within camps. The objective of this study was to explore the factors affecting the economic adaptation of refugees in Midyat Refugee Camp in Turkey. The study used a focus group to help design the questionnaire that was subsequently used to collect data from a sample of 393 households in Midyat Camp. The data was used to estimate a Structural Equations Model. The findings indicated that the most important factors in determining refugees' economic adaptation are human capital, social capital and institutions.

Keywords: Syrian refugees, adaptation strategies, Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, Structural Equations Modeling

Introduction

The Syrian-refugee crisis, described as the most dramatic the UN has ever faced (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh *et al.* 2014), has been ongoing since the conflict in the country began in 2011, with no real indications that the plight of refugees will end in the

foreseeable future. Substantial numbers of those fleeing the conflict have sought refuge in neighbouring Turkey. According to the 2018 official statistics of the Turkish government's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), the number of Syrian refugees in the country has reached 3577792, including 174256 refugees distributed across 22 camps (8 now closed) in the south of the country, imposing huge burdens on the Turkish state and international humanitarian organizations (AFAD 2018).

The length of the asylum process increases the economic, social and psychological pressures that refugees face inside or outside the camps, especially vulnerable groups such as children, women and the disabled. However, people do not give up. In the words of Antonio Guterres (2014: viii), the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees: 'I am impressed, again and again, by the resilience we encounter among those who have lost nearly everything.' Such statements posed for the researchers the question of whether Syrian refugees have given up and, if not, how?

The refugee problem has been a subject in studies on humanitarian assistance, economic development and the economics of displacement. Studies published to date have focused on political, social and economic issues. Economic studies have tried to identify the affected groups and beneficiaries of refugee flows in the host country (Whitaker 2002). Researchers have been debating whether refugees constitute an economic burden or an economic opportunity for the host country (Jacobsen 2002). However, few studies have focused on the economic adaptation of refugees in camps and their relationship with the surrounding environment, and none has used a Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) in investigating such issues.

The question that underpins this study is: how have Syrian refugees adapted to the economic conditions of living in a refugee camp? The answer to this question in the context of SLA will help to clarify the different kinds of economic resources that refugees have and deploy in their adaptation to refuge conditions. The same resources can enrich the economic resources of the host community. A major implication of this article is its contribution to the reframing of refugees not merely as consumers, but as contributors to the economy.

Following the introduction, the second section establishes the theoretical background and reviews the literature. Methodology is outlined in the third section and, in the fourth section, the results are presented. Finally, in the fifth section, the key findings are discussed and some recommendations offered.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been a shift in developmental thinking in the literature on tackling poverty. There has been a change in methods used to measure poverty and analyse its causes and perceptions of treatment. Analyses of poverty are no longer based solely on income and consumption standards, but rather on the role of the poor themselves in their perception of being poor and coping with poverty (Rakodi 1999). Among the poor, refugees are the

most vulnerable. Jacobsen (2014) asserts that refugees (forced migrants) differ from the rest of the poor in that they usually start from the point of losing assets, family and community, and face sociopolitical and legal challenges in the host country, which are usually not in their favour. She called on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other refugee agencies to combat the resistance of host countries to refugees' pursuing livelihoods and to help 'refugees make connections (both among other refugees and with the host population), supporting activities that promote integration, or providing business development services, mentoring, and training' (Jacobsen 2014: 110).

Harrell-Bond (1986, cited in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2014) argues that dependency on others is not inherent in refugees; rather, the way humanitarian organizations and states deal with refugees is the cause of dependency. In order to address refugees' dependency, policies and studies should take into account the resourcefulness of refugees themselves. To do that, as De Vriese (2006) notes, we need to understand the livelihood strategies of refugees. The concept of livelihood is defined by Chambers and Conway (1991: 6) as comprising:

> the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain and enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation.

A high percentage of livelihood studies are framed by the SLA, as it can help in designing durable solutions that can be beneficial in avoiding dependency syndrome. This includes refugees inside camps, where studies indicate that, even in closed camps, despite being subject to heavy regulation and an unfriendly surrounding environment, people do not give up and try to develop ways to maximize their access to limited resources and services (Oxford University 2011) and follow short-term and long-term strategies to cope with their new conditions.

The basic intellectual inspiration for the SLA is a general understanding of the lives of the poor (Chambers and Conway 1991; De Haan and Zoomers 2005). The term 'sustainable livelihoods' was used in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development in discussions on resource ownership, basic needs and rural livelihoods security. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development considered sustainability a tool for linking socio-economic and environmental issues. This marked a shift in global attention from a focus on environmental activities to a focus on people and their livelihood activities, placing them within the context of sustainable-development policies.

In the 1990s, several sustainable-livelihood approaches were formulated and implemented by many donors, non-governmental organizations, the UN and research organizations (Brocklesby and Fisher 2003). The approach towards sustainable development formulated by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) in a series of guidance sheets was highlighted in this context. There are five types of capital (social, human, financial, physical and natural) that households own or utilize through transforming structures (hereafter referred to

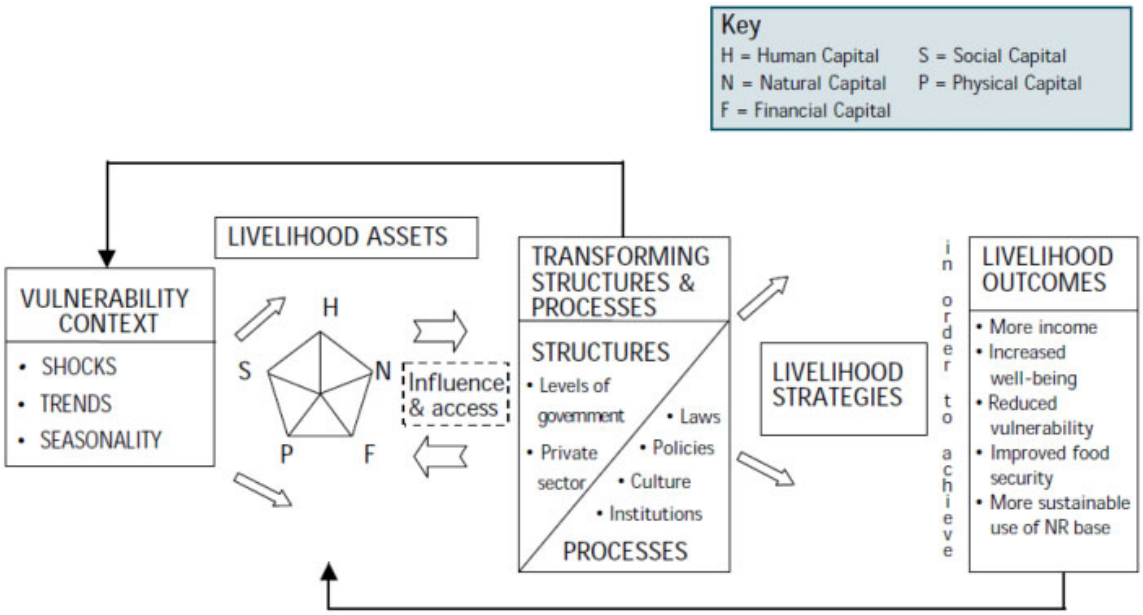

Figure 1.
Sustainable-Livelihoods Framework

Source: DFID (1999), Sustainable livelihoods guidance sheets, p. 13.

as 'institutions', i.e. levels of government, the private sector and civil society) and processes (i.e. laws, policies, culture, institutions and power relations), using specific livelihoods strategies to achieve results that contribute to reducing the vulnerability of households or communities to risk (Bennett 2010; Sakdapolrak 2014). Figure 1 shows this framework.

Most empirical studies about the economics of displacement have dealt with the effects of refugees on the host country. Jacobsen (2002) shows that, despite the economic, security and environmental burdens imposed by refugees on host countries, they represent a huge resource of economic and human assets and flows of international aid, so that the opportunities they offer to the host country are much more than their burden. She also affirmed that 'restricting refugees to camps inhibits their utilisation as productive economic actors, and their individual resources and skills will be less available to the host community' (Jacobsen 2002: 593). Whitaker (2002), too, emphasizes the idea that the presence of refugees is a resource for the host country. However, she states that the positive influence on the host country is not distributed to all in the same way. She believes that the distribution of benefit depends on factors such as sex, age and class resulting in the fact that weaker groups do not benefit and may even be negatively affected. Several subsequent studies have confirmed the notion of the benefits of the presence of refugees and their uneven distribution among the local population (Alix-Garcia and Saah 2009; Maystadt and Verwimp 2009; Kreibaum 2016; Alix-Garcia et al. 2018). However, these studies have not attempted to study the economic dynamics within the camp and its relationship with the surrounding environment. One study that has done so is Alloush et al.'s (2017), which studied

camp economics, trying to test the effectiveness of two kinds of aid: in-kind aid and cash aid. It found that there is an economy within each camp that reflects the structure of the economic context around it, and that the effectiveness of that interaction with the surrounding area and its impact on the welfare of refugees are linked to the shift from in-kind aid to cash aid.

A small number of studies have concentrated on refugees' livelihoods. Kaise (2006), for example, studied refugees' livelihoods and rights in camps through the Ugandan experience and found that depriving refugees of freedom of movement was a major threat to their livelihood. Outside the camps, Crabtree's (2010) study attempted to identify economic coping strategies for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and showed that refugees practised multiple forms of daily work in the face of economic deprivation.

Others have dealt with the extended problem of Syrian refugees. Matthew and Stevens (2016) studied the role of social networks in improving the economic performance of Syrian refugees in Jordan. They found that the pressures of asylum led to the collapse of social networks among refugees, reducing their benefits greatly. On the other hand, Thorleifsson's (2016) study of Syrian-refugee coping strategies in a Lebanese village showed that they benefitted from social networks, past savings, assistance, education and work to create a system for their livelihood. However, all these studies did not use an SLA that incorporates all possible assets, access and strategies, to guide them. In addition, they have not differentiated clearly between short-term and long-term strategies. This research aims to contribute to the literature by bridging this gap and attempts to answer the following overarching question: What factors have influenced the economic adaptation of refugees within Midyat Camp?

These can be divided into the following set of sub-questions:

- What is the relationship between the abundance of different types of capital and institutions?
- What is the role of each type of capital in determining coping and adaptation strategies?
- What is the relationship of institutions with the coping and adaptation strategies?
- What is the relationship of each type of capital and institutions to the degree of success in adaptation?
- Can we estimate a causal SLA using Structural Equations Modeling (SEM?(

Methodology

Data was gathered from Midyat Refugee Camp (hereafter Midyat Camp) in south-eastern Turkey. Midyat Camp was chosen from among 22 Syrian-refugee camps in southern Turkey for a number of reasons. First, it was a relatively small camp in terms of population, compared to other camps. Second, the camp is diverse in terms of ethnicity (Kurds and Arabs), religion (Muslim and Yazidi) and nationality (Syrian and Iraqi), which distinguished the camp from other

camps. Some 1269 out of 3903 refugees in Midyat Camp were Yazidis from Iraq—a religious minority considered to be ethnically Kurdish. Third, the establishment of the camp, about 5 years ago, gave the residents enough time to test many ways of adapting to their new environment. Finally, the camp is located in Mardin Governorate, making it relatively easy for the researchers, who come from the University of Mardin Artuklu, to access and obtain the necessary legal permits to enter.

For data-collection methods, we utilized a focus group and a questionnaire. The focus group was conducted to establish basic facts and perspectives that produced the data to design the questionnaire (Rabiee 2004). We conducted a focus group of 11 participants, who were sector heads selected in consultation with the camp administration. Livelihood issues in the camp were discussed. On the basis of this focus-group discussion, we excluded natural capital from the study, since we found that the refugees did not benefit from natural resources. We also excluded the vulnerability context, as the context of being a refugee can be considered one of many kinds of risk in SLA.

Drawing on DFID (1999), previous studies (Maxwell et al. 2003; WFP 2015; RFSAN 2016; OXFAM 2018) and the outcomes of the focus group, we designed a questionnaire that included 10 sections. The majority of our questions were closed questions with multiple choice (five-point Likert), as they can produce frequencies for statistical analysis (Cohen et al. 2000).

The questionnaire was discussed with a number of academic colleagues at Mardin University as well as with some camp staff. Eleven suitably qualified camp residents were recruited and trained as research assistants to administer the questionnaire.

A stratified random sample of the camp residents was selected through the method of studying every other tent. The camp was divided into 11 districts and the assistant researchers began the survey at the first tent, then moved to the third and the fifth and so on, so that all sectors were covered and about half of the families living in the camp were surveyed. The process of completing the questionnaire took about 10 days, in late August 2018. As a result, 398 full questionnaires were obtained, of which 393 were approved and inputted into Excel, SPSS and Amos for statistical analysis.

The SLA is a multilevel approach assessing risk, assets, institutions, adaptation strategies and outcomes. This approach can be tested by many variables and many levels of simultaneous regressions. So we used SEM, as it 'permits relations amongst multiple variables to be modeled and statistically tested. . . . SEM techniques are therefore a more preferred method to confirm -or disconfirm- theoretical models'(Schumacker and Lomax 2016: 6).

After analysing the data, we were not able to hold discussions of the findings with refugees in the camp, as it had closed subsequent to our survey. To remedy this, we contacted a group of 30 people who had been living in the camp and were now living in Midyat city, and held three focus groups to discuss the findings with them.

Table 1

The Arithmetic Mean for Estimating the Refugees' Capital

Capital	Mean
Financial	1.2714
Human	1.955
Social	2.0872
Physical	3.3279
Total	2.1602

Findings

The residents of the camp were divided between Iraqi and Syrian nationals. All of the Iraqis were Yazidi Kurds, while the Syrians were Arab Muslims. The sample was made up of 12.9 per cent women and 87.1 per cent men. This corresponds to the nature of Syrian and Iraqi societies in terms of men's leadership role in households. The sample tended to be young: only 13.3 per cent of the age groups were over 51, while 86.7 per cent were under the age of 51. This corresponds to the nature of the population pyramid in developing countries in terms of the predominance of young people.

In sustainable-livelihoods models, five types of capital are studied. But, given the particular circumstances of the camp, and our observation that refugees did not rely on natural resources, we focused our questions on four types of capital: physical capital, human capital, social capital and financial capital. Relying on the Likert scale, number 5 indicates the highest level of capital availability, while the minimum level is 1.

Table 1 shows the mean for each type of capital. Physical capital is the most abundant and was just above the middle level 3, at 3.3279. This is explained by the fact that the estimate of physical capital depended mainly on the infrastructure provided by the state, which was available to a good degree in the camp and its surroundings (focus-group outcomes and personal observation). At the second level comes social capital, which reached less than the middle level at 2.0872, but it is ranked at a higher rank than human and financial capital. This derives from cultural and social similarities between the host community and the refugees that have allowed the refugees to make some social ties with the host community. In addition, the Syrian refugees tended to have fled their country as groups of relatives who have settled in places close to one another, making it relatively easy to maintain some of their social relationships (focus-group outcomes). In third place was human capital, which reached /1.955/. Its low level is due to the fact that refugees with high human skills did not settle in the camp, but went to large cities where they have opportunities to achieve a better life (focus-group outcomes). In last place comes financial capital, with an average of 1.271. This was expected, as the refugees left behind most of their property when they fled the conflict (focus-group outcomes).

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha

Dimensions	Cronbach's alpha
Human capital	0.713
Social capital	0.655
Institutions	0.617
Long-term strategy	0.785
Satisfaction	0.878
All	0.666

It was found that men had a higher level of social capital than women. This is a result of the greater social role of men in Syrian, Iraqi and Turkish social contexts. Therefore, men have a greater ability to move about and build social relations, as well as to participate in social organizations and activities. The level of social capital among Iraqis was higher than that of the Syrians. This was due to the fact that the Iraqis were Yazidi, which, as a small religious minority, tends to be more cohesive, as well as the existence of large Yazidi communities in the diaspora that could help Yazidi refugees. In addition, communication with their relatives inside Iraq is considerably easier compared with the difficulties for Syrians connecting with relatives inside Syria. We noted that the level of social capital declines with age, due to the greater capacities of young people to adapt to changing circumstances, to build new social relationships and to acquire skills and languages better than older people (focus-group outcomes and personal observation).

We noted that financial capital rises with the medium-aged groups, especially in the category 31–40—a group that is relatively young and active. In addition, women tended to have a higher level of financial capital than men due to the fact that women tend to be more economical with their financial resources than men. Syrian refugees had a higher level of financial capital than Iraqis (focus-group outcomes and personal observation).

The human capital of men was greater than that of women, stemming from the greater opportunities available for men to learn and acquire skills than women have. Younger people have a higher level of human capital compared to the elderly—a result of the already noted greater ability of young people to learn and acquire skills and languages. The human capital of Iraqis appeared to be higher than that of Syrians. This may be due to the large size of Iraqi families compared to Syrian families (focus-group outcomes and personal observation).

With regard to physical capital, the mean for women was lower than that for men—a result of the poor opportunities for women in general. In addition, the physical capital available for young people is greater than for those who are older. The level of physical capital of Iraqis was higher than that of Syrians (focus-group outcomes and personal observation).

Table 3

The Results of CFA

Questions	Factor loading	Average variance extracted	Questions	Factor loading	Average variance extracted
H3	0.692		Sa1	0.772	
H5	0.866		Sa2	0.857	
H6	0.825		Sa3	0.859	
Human capital		63.64 per cent	Sa4	0.824	
S2	0.614		Sa5	0.732	
S3	0.878		Sa6	0.635	
S4	0.850		Sa7	0.667	
Social capital		62.33 per cent	Satisfaction		59.001 per cent
I1	0.603				
I4	0.754				
I5	0.800				
I6	0.633				
Institutions		49.31 per cent			
L1	0.762				
L2	0.748				
L4	0.741				
L5	0.803				
L6	0.725				
Long-term strategies strategies		57.178 per cent			

Before estimating the structural model, we tested for reliability. First, Cronbach's alpha test was carried out. This test assesses the internal consistency of questionnaires that are made up of multiple Likert-type scales and items. Second, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)—a multivariate statistical procedure used to test how well the measured variables represent the number of constructs (Schumacker and Lomax 2016: 93)—was conducted.

The results of Cronbach's alpha showed that the levels of financial capital and physical capital were less than 0.6, so they were deleted. In addition, one question relating to human capital and three relating to institutions were deleted to achieve an acceptable level. After that, the levels of Cronbach's alpha coefficients were those shown in Table 2.

With CFA, six questions relating to institutions and one relating to long-term strategies were deleted, as their loading was less than 0.6. Table 3 shows the resulting analysis. Thus it was acceptable to proceed to estimate the structural model.

Estimating the structural model has given mixed indications of goodness of fit. Chi-square was 635.741, degrees of freedom were 231 and probability level (p) was $0.00 < 0.05$; this level of p is unacceptable, but chi-square df = 2.752 (less than 5) is acceptable. The comparative fit index was 0.884 (less than 0.90), which means that

Table 4

The Estimated Structural Model (Standardized Coefficients)

Tested paths	Estimated coefficients	*P*
Social capital to institutions	0.273	0.000**
Human capital to institutions	0.416	0.000**
Institutions to the severity of short-term strategies	–0.075	0.367
Social capital to the severity of short-term strategies	–0.068	0.312
Human capital to the severity of short-term strategies	0.264	0.000**
Institutions to the long-term strategies	0.514	0.000**
Human capital to the long-term strategies	0.110	0.174
Social capital to the long-term strategies	0.041	0.568
The severity of short-term strategies to the long-term strategies	–0.030	0.589
The severity of short-term strategies to satisfaction	–0.070	0.129
The long-term strategies to satisfaction	0.214	0.005**
Social capital to satisfaction	0.100	0.098
Institutions to satisfaction	0.465	0.000**
Human capital to satisfaction	0.002	0.977

**Significant at the level 0.01.

the fit was not good. The root mean square error of approximation was 0.067 (less than 0.08), which means a good fit. The standardized estimation of paths is shown in Table 4.

As can be seen from Table 4, the coefficient of six paths are significant, whereas the others are not. Those paths are: Social Capital to Institutions, Human Capital to Institutions, Human Capital to Severity of Short-Term Strategies, Institutions to Long-Term Strategies, Long-Term Strategies to Satisfaction and Institutions to Satisfaction. Accordingly, we can draw a graph for the relationships between different variables of SLA. Figure 2 shows those relationships.

Thus, we can say that human capital and social capital affect the institutions positively (and significantly) and the effect of human capital is stronger. This is expected, as people with higher human skills (languages, experiences, etc.) and higher social capital (social networks with relatives and the host community) can more easily deal with government and civil barriers. This can help refugees to deal with formal and informal obstacles to undertaking economic activities (focus-group outcomes). Human capital only significantly affects the short-term coping strategies and reduces their severity as human capital can be used directly in the face of a rapid change of living conditions (focus-group outcomes and personal observation). This agrees partially with Thorleifsson's (2016) findings that refugees benefit from their human skills in coping. His study also showed that Syrian refugees benefit from social networks in Lebanon—something that was not

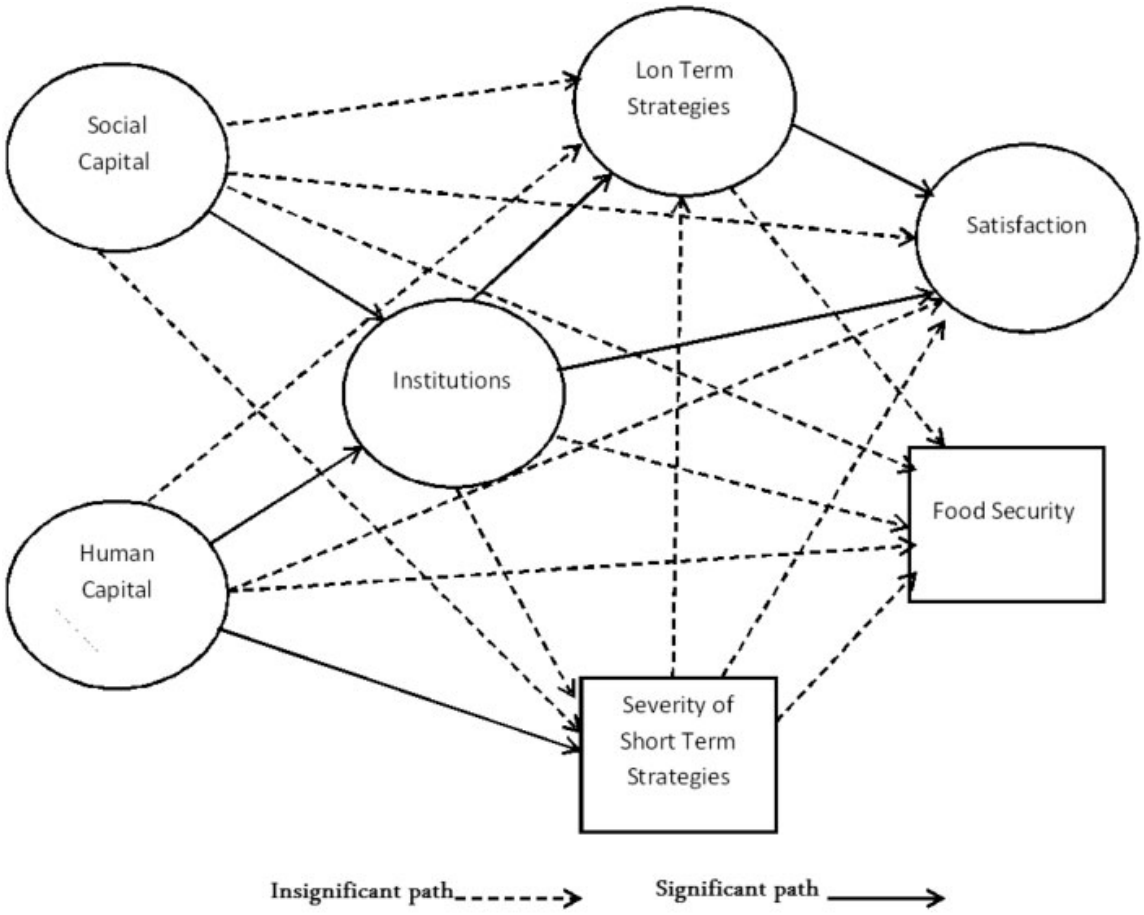

Figure 2.
The SLA-Tested Paths

confirmed in this study. In addition, the insignificant effect of social capital is consistent partially with the results of Matthew and Stevens' (2016) study, which found that Syrian refugees do not benefit from social networks because they have collapsed under the pressures of asylum in Jordan. But our study indicates that the Syrian refugees in Midyat Camp used their social capital through institutions to follow long-term adapting strategies.

Institutions have positive and significant effects on long-term strategies and satisfaction. It means that institutions are mediating refugees' use of their capital and can help indirectly in following their long-term strategies and success in adaptation and directly through affecting the level of satisfaction. Thus, institutions are inescapably intermediaries for refugees to benefit from the different kinds of capital and follow long-term strategies for economic adaptation. This is consistent with the conditions of living in a camp where all activities of refugees are heavy regulated. As economic structures and freedom of movement can be considered factors in institutions, this finding supports Alloush *et al.*'s (2017) assertion that the economy within each camp reflects the structure of the economic context around it. Furthermore, it affirms the finding of Kaise (2006) that the denial of freedom of movement was a major threat for refugees' livelihood, as well as

supporting Jacobsen's (2002) finding that restricting refugees to camps prevents benefiting from them as productive economic actors.

The positive and significant effects of long-term strategies on satisfaction mean that it is a way of succeeding in economic adaptation, as they lead to the accumulation of different kinds of capital that help refugees to be active in the economy (focus-group outcomes).

Relating to estimation of a causal SLA, as many questions and two kinds of capital were deleted because they did not satisfy the standard of validity and reliability, and as the measures of model fit were mixed and there are many significant paths from refugees' assets to the measures of success in adaptation, we cannot give a clear answer. However, we think that this could be done by carrying out some more focus groups and interviews, using bigger samples and redesigning the questionnaire's questions.

Conclusion

We conclude that the most important factors in determining the economic adaptation of refugees are social capital, human capital and institutions. Human capital, in particular, helps in reducing the severity of coping strategies. Looking at the level food security as a measure of success in adaptation, this is determined by factors beyond our tested model, perhaps because of the fact that refugees receive many kinds of aid. For the SLA, we could not decide clearly that it could be an empirical model, as the indications of the goodness of fit were mixed.

There were certain limitations in our study. After starting our research project in Midyat Camp, we learned that the camp was to be closed in about one month's time. However, as we had already been given permission to work in the camp and as it would have been very difficult to get a permit to work in another camp quickly (permission usually takes about 6 months), we decided to continue at Midyat Camp, although we were forced to work within a very tight time frame. This had an impact on designing the questions for the questionnaire and there was not enough time to make suggested tests (such as a pilot test). This tight time frame also meant we did not have enough time to collect data for a bigger sample. We expect that this was one of the reasons why some themes in the questionnaire gave us an unacceptable level of reliability and forced us to delete two kinds of capital—financial and physical.

Besides the time constraints, there were other factors that reduced the reliability of responses relating to questions on these two kinds of capital. With regard to financial capital, people generally tend to avoid giving honest answers about their financial situation. Here, the refugees interviewed may also have been afraid that their aid might be stopped if they revealed their true financial situation. In the case of physical capital, as this is generally provided by the host government, participants may have tried to avoid giving honest answers about this. Accordingly, we suggest for future studies on refugees' economic adaptation that better questionnaires are prepared, drawing on more focus groups and in-depth interviews, that more pilot tests are carried out and that larger samples are used.

However, drawing on our results, we can offer some suggestions related to the three most important factors that help in refugees' adaptation. As we can see, human capital is the most important factor for adaptation, and any chance of developing human skills can help refugees. Thus, the Turkish government, interested parties in the international community and non-governmental organizations can help in this by providing more opportunities for vocational training, learning Turkish (and other languages) and education for refugees. With regard to social capital, maintaining connections between refugee families, the participation of refugees in Turkish trade unions, professional associations, and cultural and social events between refugees and the host community should be encouraged. For institutions, access to work permits, and entry and exit to and from the similar camps are important. Also important is raising the percentage quota for the employment of Syrian refugees who are allowed to work in Turkish companies, which may be beneficial in this context.

Finally, as our findings have shown and in accordance with Jacobsen's findings, we recommend that refugees should not stay in camps for more than 1 year. After that, all interested parties should work to help refugee camps, as this will help both refugees and the host community to benefit from refugees as an economic resource (Jacobsen 2002). We further recommend that the period of the temporary stay in a camp should be utilized to train the refugees in a variety of competencies and support them in improving their language skills.

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