

International migration, food insecurity, and mental health: A scoping review protocol

Alice Blukacz^{a*}, Báltica Cabieses^a, Catalina Huerta^a, Amelia A. Lake^{b, c}, Jo Smith^{b, c}, Emma L. Giles^{b, c}, Faye Deane^{b, c}

^aCentro de Salud Global Intercultural, Instituto de Ciencias e Innovación en Medicina, Facultad de Medicina Clínica Alemana, Universidad del Desarrollo y Facultad de Psicología Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile; ^bSchool of Health and Life Sciences, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, United Kingdom; ^cFuse, The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION Food insecurity is a global priority that has been found to negatively impact mental health, increasing the risk of mental disorders and severe mental illness. International migrants may face food insecurity throughout their migratory cycle due to a range of risk factors, such as poor transit conditions, precarious employment, financial pressure, discrimination, and lack of availability and access to culturally relevant food, among others. Although there are multiple reviews on migration, food insecurity, and health in general, no scoping review has been conducted on food insecurity among international migrants focusing on mental health.

OBJECTIVE To investigate the available evidence on food insecurity and mental health among international migrants.

METHODS A search of scientific literature in English, Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese published since 2013 will be performed in the Web of Science, PubMed, Medline, APA PsycArticles, Cinahl, and ASSIA databases, including grey literature available in Google Scholar. Two authors will independently review titles, abstracts, and full texts before extracting data from publications complying with the eligibility criteria. Extracted data will be descriptively mapped according to emerging thematic categories.

EXPECTED RESULTS The review will contribute to identifying what is known about international migration, food insecurity, and mental health, gaps in the literature, opportunities for specific research subtopics, and how food insecurity and mental health can be linked in the existing literature.

KEYWORDS International migration, food insecurity, mental health, protocol

INTRODUCTION

One-third of the global population, approximately 2.4 billion people, experienced moderate to severe food insecurity in 2022, making it a top priority for policymakers at all levels [1]. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, food insecurity is defined as a "lack of regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life" [2]. Food insecurity has been found to negatively impact mental health, increasing the risks of common mental health disorders such as stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders [3,4]. Furthermore, severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder, and mood disorder with psychotic

features, may, in turn, be a risk factor for food insecurity [5]. Finally, food insecurity may aggravate an existing severe mental illness [6].

The International Organization for Migration defines international migrants as "any person who is moving or has moved across an international border (...) away from his/her habitual place of residence" regardless of their migratory status [7]. In 2022, 281 million people were considered international migrants worldwide [8]. Recent research has documented food insecurity throughout the migratory cycle, as it is an important driver of migration worldwide and can also be experienced during transit and settlement in a new country [9–12]. It is important to note that international migrants are an extremely heterogeneous population group, and the experience of migrating varies widely, depending on reasons for migrating, country of origin, transit, arrival, race, gender, and social class, among other factors. In this context, not all international migrants have or will experience food insecurity, and the relationship between migration and poor mental health is not definitive [13]. However, from an intersectional viewpoint, gender, race, and class in the context of human mobility may

* Corresponding author a.blukacz@udd.cl

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Postal address Edificio O Avenida Plaza 680, Las condes, Santiago, Chile

lead to or exacerbate precarious circumstances that increase the risk of experiencing food insecurity, with an impact on mental health [14–16].

In this regard, some specific risk factors for food insecurity that have been found to impact mental health in the general population may be especially relevant to international migrants. These include discrimination [17], unemployment, informal or precarious employment as a result of irregular or temporary migratory status [18,19], having additional financial pressures related to sending remittances to support family in the country of origin [20,21], lack of access to nutrient-dense food like fruits and vegetables throughout the migratory cycle [22], experiencing relative food insecurity (in relation to the local population or their country of origin) [23], not being able to find or afford culturally relevant food [24], not being able to acquire food in a socially acceptable way [25], which may differ across different cultures [26], and having limited social support networks mediating the effect of food insecurity on mental health [27].

Furthermore, research suggests that food insecurity in migrant children is equal to that of migrant adults [28,29]. Considering that almost half (48.4%) of mental health disorders develop before the age of 18 years, with a peak median global onset of 14.5 years [30], food insecurity in this population may promote the onset of mental health conditions later in life, further compounding the mental health crisis [31]. Additionally, gender is relevant, considering that migration trends have become increasingly feminized, and food insecurity is strongly associated with poor mental health among women [27,32]. More specifically, transgender and gender non-conforming people experience higher unemployment, underemployment, and discrimination, leading to higher food insecurity [33] in this particular population [34]. Finally, these potential risk factors may have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, as migratory flows declined due to border closures and other mobility restrictions that limited the opportunities to find work or access food banks [35,36].

The authors conducted a preliminary search in October 2023 in the scientific databases *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, PubMed, Web of Science, as well as Google Scholar for existing scoping and systematic reviews on the topic. Several systematic, scoping, and narrative reviews have been conducted on migration, food insecurity, and health in general, without a specific focus on mental health [16,28,37–42]. Other systematic and scoping reviews have been conducted on migration and mental health without a specific focus on food insecurity [43–47]. Furthermore, a narrative review on food-related challenges and mental health among African migrants in the United States was recently published [48]. However, to the best of our knowledge, no scoping review has been conducted on food insecurity among international migrants in general, with a special focus on mental health.

In this context, this scoping review aims to gather and synthesize the available evidence on food insecurity and mental health among international migrants. The results of the review

will be relevant to researchers in the field who are seeking to develop further studies on this topic, as well as policymakers in the field seeking to help address these issues.

METHODS

Study design

A scoping review will be conducted according to the Joanna Briggs Institute guidelines [49]. The results will be reported following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Review (PRISMA-ScR) [50]. This protocol is registered on the Open Science Framework platform and is accessible through the following link: <https://osf.io/xt6a3>

It was selected as a study design because the topic addressed in this article is at the intersection of three issues that have been researched separately, as shown in the introduction; however, it is necessary to explore the existing evidence encompassing all three dimensions. In that sense, conducting a scoping review is appropriate as it uses a systematic approach to review the available literature and maps the evidence from both scientific and grey literature; it includes a range of study designs, evaluates topics beyond intervention effectiveness, and identifies main concepts, theories, sources, and knowledge gaps [50–52].

Research question

The scoping review will address the two following research questions:

- What evidence is available on food insecurity and mental health among international migrants?
- How does the existing evidence link food insecurity and mental health among international migrants?

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Participants

This review will consider evidence that explicitly includes international migrants, as defined in the introduction, from any country with any migratory status and of all genders and ages. First and second-generation migrants will be considered. Second-generation immigrants are those born in a country where at least one first-generation immigrant parent resides and, in some cases, holds their nationality [53]. Evidence stating ethnicity without detailing the country of origin will be excluded. Evidence focusing only on internal migrants, defined as people moving within their country's borders for any reason [54], will also be excluded.

Concept

The concept of interest in this scoping review is the interaction between food insecurity and mental health in the context of international migration. Any evidence focusing solely on the topic or reporting specific results as part of a broader focus will be included. We used the Food and Agriculture Organization's

definition of food insecurity, presented in the introduction, and will encompass four dimensions: availability, access, utilization, and stability over time [55]. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a complex continuum of mental well-being encompassing more than the absence of mental disorders [56]. In that sense, this scoping review will consider evidence describing symptoms and diagnosed conditions, including severe mental illness, as well as mental and emotional well-being, or its absence.

CONTEXT

Types of evidence sources

Any type of evidence, including other reviews and editorials. For feasibility reasons, only English, Spanish, French, Italian, or Portuguese studies published from 2013 to 2023 will be included in the review.

SEARCH STRATEGY

Evidence published in scientific journals will be identified through a search in the Web of Science, PubMed, Medline, APA PsycArticles, Cinahl, and ASSIA databases. As the review question is broad, an additional search on Google Scholar will be conducted to identify grey literature on the topic, including non-peer-reviewed reports. For feasibility reasons, only the first 100 search records on Google will be reviewed.

The research team developed the search strategy based on their expertise and previous experience conducting systematic and scoping reviews on related topics. It will include the following terms and will be adapted according to the technical specificities of each database:

<p>International migrants</p> <p>("transients and migrants" OR "emigrants and immigrants" OR "refugee" OR "asylum seeker" OR "migration background" OR "immigrant background" OR "migrant" OR "immigrant" OR "irregular migrant" OR "undocumented migrant" OR "nomad" OR "foreigner" OR "foreign-born" OR "foreign born" OR "displaced" OR "stateless" OR "state-less" OR "noncitizen" OR "non-citizen" OR "outsider" OR "newcomer" OR "newly arrived" OR "new arrival" OR "ethnic minority")</p>
<p>Food insecurity</p> <p>("food security" OR "food insecurity" OR "food poverty" OR "food hardship" OR "food deprivation" OR "food availability" OR "food access" OR "food utilization" OR "food insufficiency" OR "hunger" OR "food inequalities" OR "food assistance" OR "food aid" OR "food bank" OR "food pantry" OR "meal" OR "food provision" OR "food parcel" OR "food box" OR "diet" OR "diet quality" OR "healthy diet" OR "nutrition" OR "nutritional quality")</p>
<p>Mental health</p> <p>("mental health" OR "mental illness" OR "severe mental illness" OR "serious mental illness" OR "mental disorder" OR "mental health challenges" OR "diagnosed mental health condition" OR "psychological stress" OR "psychiatric illness" OR "psychiatric disorder" OR "psychiatric symptom" OR "psychiatric morbidity" OR "psychiatric disability" OR "psychopathology" OR "psychological morbidity" OR "psychological disability" OR "personality disorder" OR "posttraumatic stress" OR "distress" OR "stress" OR "PTSD" OR "anxiety" OR "depression" OR "depressive disorder" OR "psychosis" OR "psychotic" OR "schizophrenia" OR "schizoaffective" OR "bipolar")</p>

The identified records will be uploaded to the Rayyan platform for screening. After removing duplicates, a pilot test of the screening process of the titles and abstracts will be conducted, where a random sample of 15 records will be reviewed by two members of the research team using the eligibility criteria previously set. Discrepancies and suggestions to adjust the set of criteria will be discussed and approved by the whole team before starting the screening process. Complete review of the selected articles after the initial screening process will be conducted separately by two researchers, and any discrepancies will be resolved by a third researcher. The reasons for excluding full-text articles will be recorded in the Rayyan platform and reported in the Prisma flowchart.

Data extraction

Data will be extracted from the selected literature to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, with the following template adapted from the Joanna Briggs Institute recommendations: author(s), year of publication, country of origin, objective, type of migrant(s), dimension(s) of food insecurity, mental health issue(s), methods, main results, key findings relevant to the scoping review questions, comparison with local populations [49].

Extraction will be piloted with the first 15 publications in order to adjust the template if needed. Two researchers will extract data from these publications and discrepancies and suggestions for adjusting the template will be discussed. Any unresolved discrepancy will be discussed with a third researcher.

Analysis of the evidence and presentation of the results

The data extracted will be descriptively mapped according to general emerging thematic categories. Considering that qualitative and quantitative data are expected to be included, no formal qualitative coding of the data will be performed. The categories will be used to structure the mapping and allow to answer the research questions established for this scoping review.

Tables may be used to summarise the main characteristics of the publications, including year and country of publication, method, and population.

Considering that grey literature will be included, no appraisal of the quality of the evidence will be carried out.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The scoping review will map the existing evidence on the topic and how it links food insecurity and mental health among international migrants. To our knowledge, this is the first review

to bring together international migration, food insecurity, and mental health. Food insecurity has been a global priority for several decades [57] and is a recognized social determinant of mental health. The circumstances and conditions under which international migration sometimes takes place create a context where food insecurity is experienced. As mental health is increasingly becoming an urgent concern for public health globally [58], it is of interest to explore its links with food insecurity in contexts where social vulnerability may be experienced. Furthermore, as the topic is expected to have been scarcely researched, the scoping review will contribute to:

- Identifying what is known about international migration, food insecurity, and mental health.
- Identifying gaps in the literature on the topic regarding research methods, studied population, and geographical areas.
- Identifying opportunities for specific research subtopics to be carried out in the future.
- Exploring how food insecurity and mental health may be linked in the existing literature.

This scoping review will have several strengths. The first is the application of a rigorous protocol following Joanna Briggs Institute and PRISMA-ScR guidelines. Registration and publication of the protocol will ensure transparency, enhancing the replicability and credibility of the review. The second has to do with the interdisciplinary expertise of the research team involved in the topics included in this review. This contributes to ensuring that the specificities of each of the three areas are properly addressed and represented, from the research terms to the conclusions that may be drawn. Finally, the decision to include grey literature allows for an inclusive approach to the topic outside of scientific evidence, which may ultimately provide a broader and enriched overview.

However, some limitations may be anticipated. The first one has to do with language limitations since evidence in languages other than those considered may exist. The second one is that although four scientific databases will be searched, as well as Google Scholar, some of the literature of interest may be involuntarily excluded.

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Migración internacional, inseguridad alimentaria y salud mental: protocolo de una revisión de alcance

RESUMEN

INTRODUCCIÓN La inseguridad alimentaria es una prioridad mundial que, según se ha constatado, repercute negativamente en la salud mental, aumentando los riesgos de padecer trastornos mentales comunes y enfermedades mentales graves. Los migrantes internacionales pueden enfrentarse a la inseguridad alimentaria a lo largo del ciclo migratorio, debido a una serie de factores de riesgo como las precarias condiciones de tránsito, la precariedad laboral, la presión financiera, la discriminación y la falta de disponibilidad y acceso a alimentos culturalmente relevantes, entre otros. Aunque existen varias revisiones sobre migración, inseguridad alimentaria y salud en general, no se ha realizado ninguna revisión de alcance sobre la inseguridad alimentaria entre los migrantes internacionales con especial atención a la salud mental.

OBJETIVO Investigar la evidencia sobre inseguridad alimentaria y salud mental entre los migrantes internacionales.

MÉTODOS Se realizará una búsqueda de literatura científica en inglés, español, francés, italiano y portugués publicada desde 2013 en las bases de datos Web of Science, PubMed, Medline, APA PsycArticles, Cinahl, y ASSIA, y de literatura gris en Google Scholar. Dos autores revisarán de forma independiente los títulos, resúmenes y textos completos, antes de extraer los datos de las publicaciones que cumplan los criterios de elegibilidad. Los datos extraídos se mapearán descriptivamente según categorías temáticas generales emergentes.

RESULTADOS ESPERADOS La revisión contribuirá a identificar lo que se sabe sobre la migración internacional, la inseguridad alimentaria y la salud mental, las lagunas en la literatura sobre el tema, las oportunidades para subtemas específicos de investigación, y explorar cómo la inseguridad alimentaria y la salud mental pueden estar vinculadas en la literatura existente.



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