

Evidence and Influences Regarding Food Insecurity Among Refugee in the USA: A Systematic Review



Habiba Ali Nur,¹ Abiodun T. Atoloye,² Heidi Wengreen,¹ Martha Archuleta,² Mateja R. Savoie-Roskos,² Ron Munger,² Gary Straquadine,³

¹ Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences, Utah State University, Logan, Utah

² Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut

³ College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences, Utah State University Eastern, Price, Utah

Introduction

As refugees resettle in a new country, they face many challenges including language barriers, lack of a network of social support,¹ change in lifestyle, limited transportation, limited access to available food assistance,² and a food environment different than the one they were accustomed to, and these differences may increase their risk for both under and over-nutrition³. These challenges may disproportionately increase the risk of food insecurity among refugees relative to the native population. The factors that contribute to the risk and prevalence of food insecurity among refugees include financial difficulties, the trauma of resettlement, challenges of a recent arrival in a new country, low socioeconomic status (SES) and general economic and social disparities.^{4,5}

However minimal research has been conducted on the prevalence and the impact of food insecurity among refugees in the United States. A systematic review of the studies that examine the issue of food insecurity among refugees would be beneficial for developing policies intended to address the challenges in food security among refugees and assisting in the development and implementation of sustainable intervention program.

Objective

This systematic review sought to increase our understanding of the extent and the impact of food insecurity among refugees in USA.



Helping Refugees Make a Home in the USA

Methods

- The study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA).⁶
- The databases, PubMed, MEDLINE, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Academic Search Ultimate, CAB Direct, ERIC, Psych info, Agricola, and Education Source, were searched for peer-reviewed articles published between the years 2000 and 2020.
- The search terms used were (food insecurity and refugee in the USA), or (food security and refugee in the USA).
- The inclusion criteria were:
 - peer-reviewed articles published in the English language;
 - published between January 1st, 2000, and August 30th, 2020;
 - conducted in the USA;
 - investigating the challenges, barriers, other determinants of food insecurity among refugees, and influences of food insecurity;
 - covering solutions to alleviate food insecurity for refugees.
- The exclusion criteria were studies covering food insecurities of refugees resettled in other countries or in refugee camps.
- The Hawker et al. method⁷ was used to assess the quality of each study included in this review.

Results

- The mean quality score was 31.9 (SD=2.5) with a range of 9-36.
- Food insecurity among refugees ranged from 4% to 85% (median: 61%). The 4% food insecurity was much less than the percent food insecurity reported by other studies. The study that reported the 4% was about refugees who were involved in community gardening who used their harvest for their own families or exchanged with their friends.
- Common challenges included acculturation, sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors, food environment, lack of resources, utilization and reciprocation of support, and depression.
- Three studies showed that food insecurity affected dietary intake with increased consumption of meat and eggs, decreased consumption of fruits and vegetables and increased consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and snacks and increased prevalence of chronic diseases and overweight/obesity.

Conclusions and Implications

- The rate of food insecurity among refugees is higher than that reported among the general population in the USA.
- Refugees are especially vulnerable to food insecurity due to the many challenges they face with adapting to a new environment, language, and culture as well as limited transportation, access to available food assistance, and network of social support system.
- Food insecurity among refugee populations is associated with dietary behaviors that contribute to poor health.
- Providing refugees with the education and resources needed to select, obtain, and consume healthy foods may improve their physical and mental health and ultimately help them to live a happy and successful life in their resettled communities.

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Nutrition Educator Competencies

1.5, 1.6, and 10.1

Results

Systematic Review Process Flowchart

