



# Food-Related Well-Being in a Diaspora Situation: The Psychological Dimension

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The Refugee Consumer: Paradoxes of Integration in Everyday Life

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# Introduction

## Food and Migration

- Several political & ethnic armed conflicts → A massive increase in the number of people seeking protection (2.3 M in 2015 & 2016 a vast majority from Syria, UNHCR)
- Refugees face emotional problems, social & economic pressures
  - affect well-being
  - pose difficulties in integration process



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# Introduction

## Food and Migration

Refugees face multiple food-related challenges:

- reduced availability of food
- changed dietary habits
- irregular access to food and/or low quality diet
- little knowledge on how to use resources available

**Food** → avenue for helping refugees to resettle & to integrate  
→ opportunity for enhancing their well-being



Malakeh Jazmati,  
[Levante Gourmet](#)

# Introduction

## Food-Related Well-Being

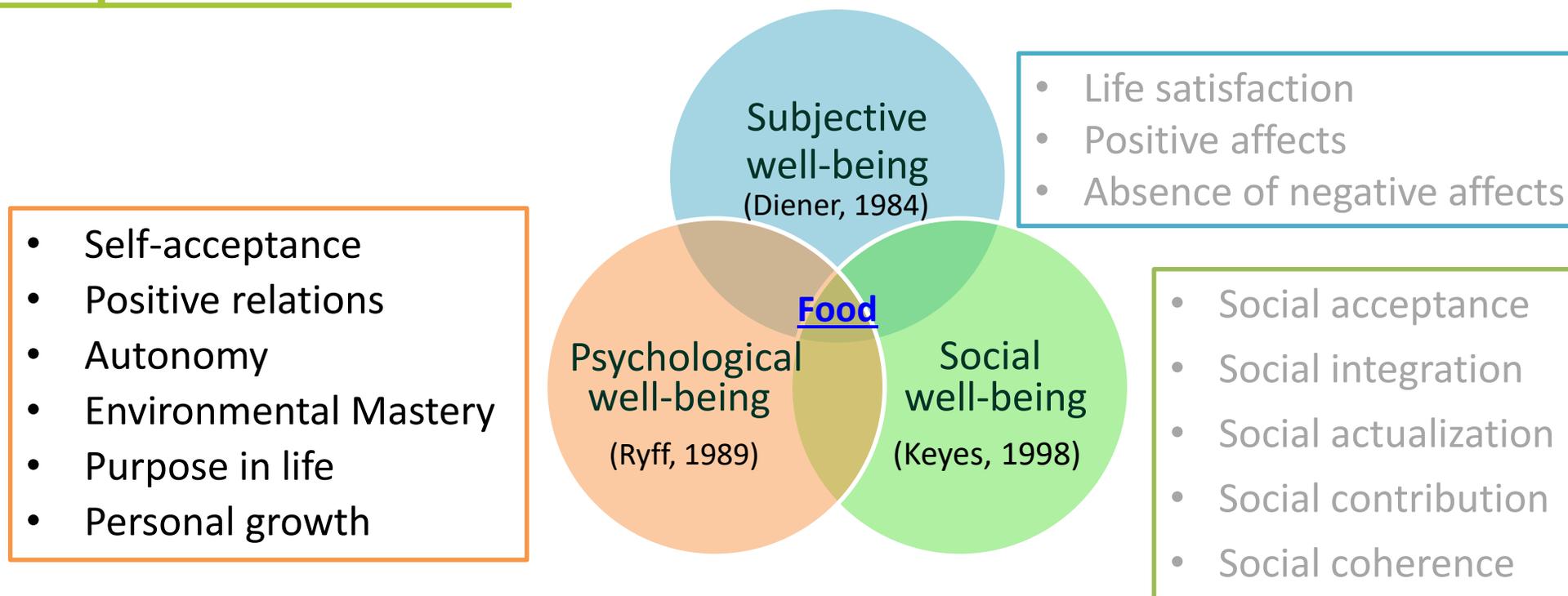
### Definition

“A positive psychological, physical, emotional, and social relationship with food at both individual and societal levels” (Block et al., 2011)



# Research Design

## Conceptual Framework



# Research Design

## Research Aims

- Understand the psychological dimension of Syrian refugees' food-related well-being
- Find insights that could help refugees to promote their overall well-being

## Research Question

How do Syrian refugees link their psychological well-being with their food situation?



# Research Design

## Research Methods

Explorative qualitative approach

Data collection:

- 34 semi-structure in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees and asylum seekers
- Purposive and snowball sampling

Data analysis: qualitative content-based analysis

## Results

### Self-Acceptance Related to Food

- No evidence of stigmatization related to body shape or diet
- Participants have a strong affinity to their Syrian food, which is diverse, fresh and natural “like bio”, rich in vegetables, tasty, fatty, and time-consuming
- Comparison between what they used to have in Syria and what is available in the new food environment

*“Germans love our food”*

*“Less diverse”, “full of hormones and synthetic products”, “only shape no taste”, “light”*

# Results

## Positive Relations with Food

- Relationship between the participants' emotional situation & food  
→ loss of appetite OR emotional eating
- Food → comforting role OR block out worries and negative thoughts

- During the war, positive relationship with food

*“When I was psychologically comfortable, I was eating in an organized way. But now, because I am overthinking, I feel that I am a little insatiable, I want to make myself happy with something and that thing is food”*

*“When your child asks you for food, and you cannot provide it, one feels too upset and vanquished”*

# Results

## Autonomy Related to Food

During war	Migration journey	Initial reception centers	Collective camps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High food prices</li> <li>• Experiencing siege</li> <li>• Being forced to eat “<i>everything bad and uneatable</i>”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not a priority</li> <li>• “Travel food”</li> <li>• Receiving food in a humiliating way</li> </ul> <p>➔ Aversive classical conditioning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient food, but not familiar to their taste, ambiguous composition</li> <li>• Coping mechanisms:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eating only bread / cold food</li> <li>• Purchasing electric</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>“They were throwing food at us, I mean, I felt like animals and they were throwing food at them”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared kitchen</li> <li>• Management of food banks (Tafel)</li> <li>• Access to information:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language barrier</li> <li>• Solidarity</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Results

### Environmental Mastery Related to Food

- A feeling of being controlled and restricted

#### Availability of traditional food products

- Existence of ethnic food retailers
- German retailers offering oriental products
- Navigating & discovering the German food environment
- Degraded quality, frozen, or canned → making food from scratch (cheese, labneh, pastries) or abandon them

*“On some days you become restricted in everything”*

#### Accessibility of traditional food products

- High prices in ethnic retailers
- Time and long distances
- Concerns about proscribed ingredients
- Lack of knowledge about the available quality schemes and certifications

*“until now I don’t know what does it mean bio, I suspect it means local products”*

## Results

### Purpose of Life & Personal Growth Related to Food

- A desire to have a better diet which is more organized & diverse → better health
- Lack motivation and guidance on how to reach this
- A sense of urgency to develop and advance themselves

“My existence in Germany was vital to open my eyes onto the world and to know how the life is going on. And to know where to position me in this society and how to construct it by myself and how to look for my happiness by myself.”

## Discussion

### Food-Related Psychological Well-Being Depends on:

- Preserving dietary patterns, as a way of creating a sense of place and maintaining ethnic identity (Parasecoli, 2014; Vallianatos et al., 2008)
- Having a positive relationship with food, since food is used to reduce anxiety and discomfort particularly in stressed people (Köster et al., 2015; Canetti et al., 2002)
- Autonomous food choice and control over the food environment → food-related values (Dieterle, 2016)

# Conclusion

## The Way Forward to Achieve a Sustainable Food System

Effective programmes:

- Knowledge, skills and resources to navigate new food environment
- Protect traditional dietary patterns
- Alleviate the adverse health effects that result from changes in dietary habits

Engaging refugees & empowering them to achieve an inclusive, diverse, and sustainable food system



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