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## Psychological Food-Related Well-Being in a Diaspora Situation

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### Abstract

Food is more than just nutrients and has emotional and symbolic functions. Therefore, food has recently been considered an avenue for helping refugees to resettle and integrate into their new communities. For refugees, food is central for going back to their roots and for building new relationships within the host society. This paper presents an in-depth investigation of refugees' well-being in a food context from a psychological perspective, as they are confronted with a new food environment and forced dietary changes. Following a positive psychology framework of well-being, a qualitative content-based analysis was conducted to analyse 34 in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees residing in Stuttgart, Germany. This study revealed that participants have a strong affinity to their past food-related life and a continuous comparison between what they are used to and what is currently available to them in the new food environment. They have a positive relationship to food, where food plays a comforting role or is used as a way to mentally block themselves against their thoughts and worries. Moreover, participants have loose autonomy and weak environmental mastery over food choices, especially during the war, migration journey, and the temporary settlement in initial reception centres. They expressed their desires, which lacks motivation and guidance, to learn and improve their dietary behaviour in order to enhance health. The insights gained from this research are useful to have a better understanding of the challenges faced by refugees and to inform strategies on how to enhance refugees' integration through food and improving their overall well-being.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, positive psychology, refugees, well-being