



Community gardens as psychosocial interventions for refugees and migrants: a narrative review

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Introduction

In the post-migration setting, refugees and labour migrants tend to suffer high levels of mental illness. Research has shown that increased social support through community-based programs can significantly relieve psychological distress and improve refugees' quality of life. Mental health programs enabling a connection to the land may be of value, as they help cultivate a sense of place and belonging in the host country.

Organisations working with refugees and migrants worldwide recognise the importance of gardening programs for these populations. No review on the impact of community gardens as psychosocial interventions for refugees and migrants had been done previously.

Objectives

1. Identify the psychosocial outcomes of community garden interventions for refugees and migrants.
2. Outline the factors that might lead to the observed outcomes.

Results

Four consistent themes arose from the analysis. Community gardening programs promoted:

1. Continuity and adaptation (81% of articles)



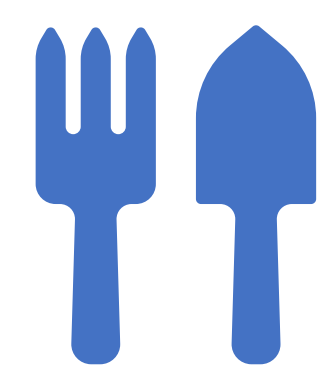
Continuity in identity

Through gardening, refugees' agricultural knowledge is valued and it enables engagement with cultural traditions

Developing a sense of belonging

Gardening can nurture a sense of place and belonging to the land, and facilitate adaptation by linking the present experience to past identities

3. Sense of meaning and self-worth (67% of articles)



Meaningful occupation

Participants felt a sense of agency and ownership from choosing the food they grew or having a space to perform traditional practices without fear of judgment

Ownership

Gardeners felt a sense of self-worth when able to provide for themselves and others by growing and sharing food

2. Social connectedness (81% of articles)



Relationships with other refugees or migrants

The communal space created by community gardens enables isolated individuals and families to develop bonds with other refugees and migrants

Relationships with members of the host country

Relationships can grow from having supportive program staff, engaging with volunteers, and interacting with people in the garden's neighbourhood

4. Overall wellbeing (95% of articles)



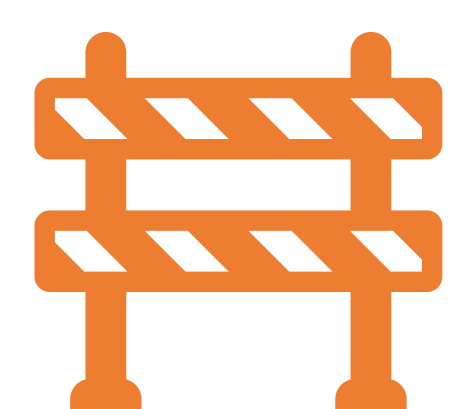
stress reduction and contact with nature

Food security

Beautifying the landscape

Physical activity

5. Challenges



- Different host country growing conditions
- Limited access to land
- Program design (e.g. uncertainty about the future post-program)
- Safety issues (e.g. due to complaints from host community about gardens not fitting Western norms of "neat" gardens)

Discussion and Conclusions

- This review indicates that **community gardens** can be **effective psychosocial interventions** as **part of a network of services** supporting the resettlement of refugees and migrants.
- Results are consistent with the Adaptation and Development after Persecution and Trauma (ADAPT) model: five psychosocial pillars – roles and identities, bonds and networks, safety and security, existential meaning, and justice – are disrupted by mass conflict and need to be re-established in the process of recovery [1].

- Need for critical perspectives: Increased reflexivity may bring awareness to colonial elements such as failing to recognise the depth of traditions and agricultural knowledge of refugee communities when designing programs and shed light on aspects of programs that can lead to feelings of lack of safety.
- Research Implications: Further participatory action research is needed to develop guidelines for the successful implementation of community gardens by resettlement organisations.

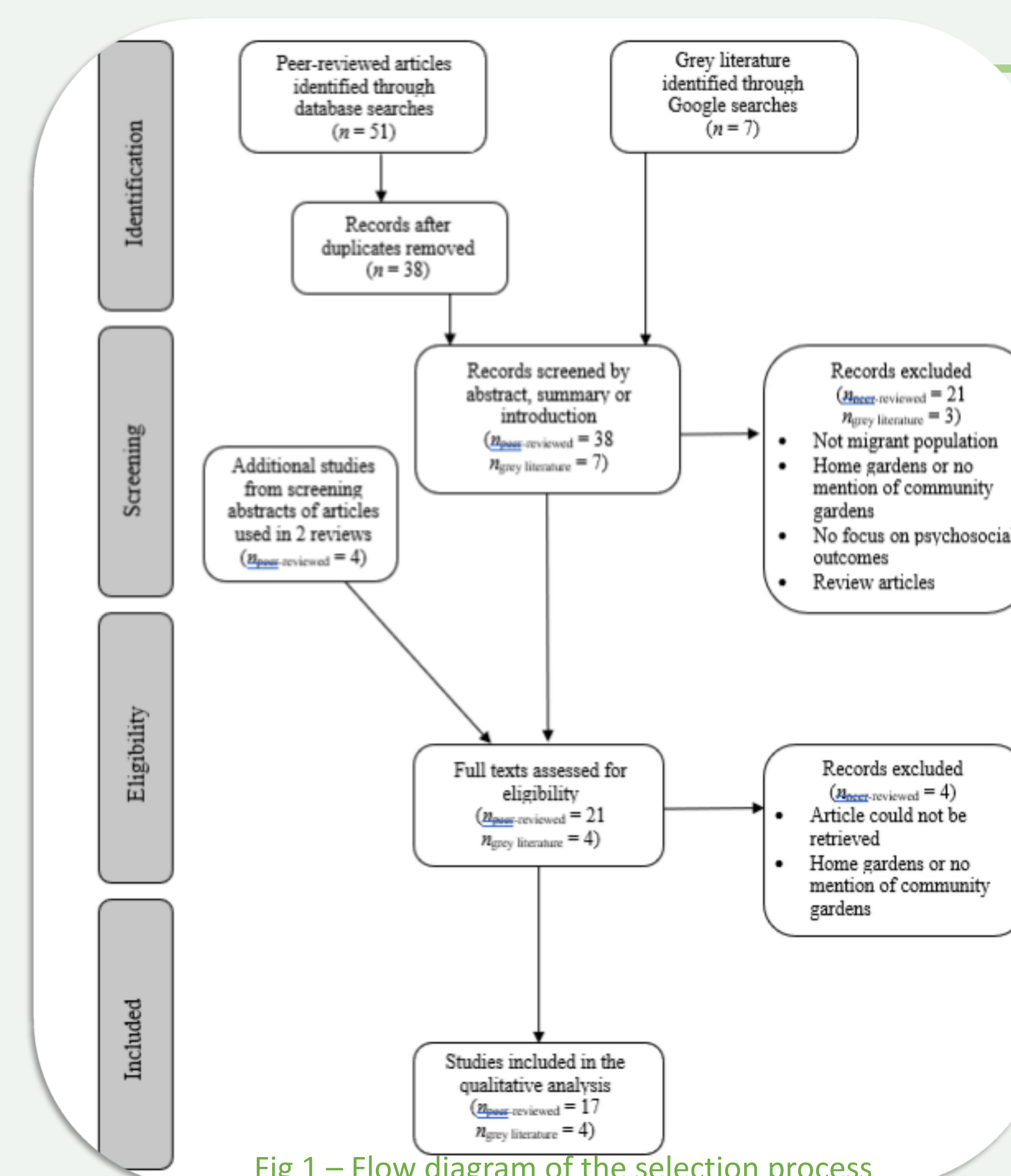


Fig 1 – Flow diagram of the selection process

Methods

- We searched peer-reviewed journal articles and grey literature published until 2021.
- Search terms: (refugee* OR immigrant* OR migrant* OR asylum seeker* OR newcomer*) AND (garden* OR gardening* OR horticulture*) AND (wellbeing OR well-being OR social integration OR social connectedness OR health promotion OR psychiatr* OR psycholog* OR mental*).
- A total of 21 articles were included for qualitative analysis.
- Why a qualitative analysis and narrative approach?
 - The literature rendered more qualitative studies than quantitative.
 - To better capture experiences of study participants in the papers reviewed.
- Pertinent literature was used to identify themes about psychosocial outcomes. Emergent themes were also identified during the full-text review.