Title: Invisible lives: understanding the food insecurity and food-seeking behaviour among Bangladeshi undocumented migrants amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract: Background: Undocumented migrants often face significant socio-economic and health vulnerabilities, which are further intensified during global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Among these challenges, food insecurity emerges as a critical concern, particularly for migrants lacking legal status, social protection, and access to basic services. This study examines the prevalence of food insecurity and food-seeking behaviour-related coping mechanisms among Bangladeshi undocumented migrants living in Malaysia, Iraq, and Libya during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: Twenty-seven undocumented Bangladeshi migrants were interviewed using a qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA). The author combined an integrated data-driven inductive technique to code and analyse the data. The data analysis followed the six-step process of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Results: The study reveals that COVID-19 has significantly impacted their food security, including food unavailability and inaccessibility, decreasing consumption, increasing reliance on cheaper and malnutrition food, as well as hunger and starvation. To cope, they adopted various food-seeking behaviors, such as receiving support from friends and relatives, taking loans, seeking food assistance from different sources, and selling personal belongings.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the vulnerability of undocumented migrants during crises and suggest the need for targeted policy interventions to enhance food security for this marginalized group. The study offers critical insights for policymakers, aid organizations, and stakeholders to develop effective strategies and policies that mitigate food insecurity among undocumented migrants, thereby contributing to achieving sustainable development goals by 2030.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; Bangladeshi migrants; Food insecurity; Food-Seeking behavior; Undocumented migrants; Vulnerable populations.

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