

Nádia Salgado Pereira, Vasco Ramos (ICS-ULisboa) | *Food (in)security, citizenship and mental health. Perceived effects of the economic crisis*

An abundance of research elucidates the effects of austerity on the living conditions of the Portuguese population. High unemployment rates and welfare retrenchment have been consistently linked with widening income disparity and increasing poverty levels. During the harder years of the economic crisis, an increasingly high number of individuals were resorting to food banks in order to access basic nutrition. Simultaneously, individuals on lower incomes reportedly struggle to access or afford healthy diets and low-income families' have an increased risk of obesity. Moreover, several studies stress the negative effects of the economic crisis on the mental health and well-being of the Portuguese population, namely higher rates of mental disorders and suicidal behavior, particularly among socially vulnerable individuals.

Food insecurity, defined as uncertainty in accessing sufficient quantity of quality food, is associated with changes in individuals' lifestyle and social activities. Ultimately, these changes may lead to social exclusion with major implications in individuals' current and future mental health and well-being extending well beyond nutrition. However, while food poverty is recognized as a feature of material deprivation, less is known about the psychological distress related to food procurement, preparation, and consumption among in-debt or low income families. Managing restricted incomes imposes an additional burden of responsibility, which call into question what it means to be a good parent or a member of society.

This chapter addresses these issues, by drawing on interviews carried out with low-income individuals in areas of Lisbon Metropolitan Area with increased risk of social exclusion and poverty. We sought to attain a comprehensive view of the perceptions of individuals on food insecurity and its relation with mental health and well-being. Findings will allow exploring how food insecurity may restrict individuals' engagement in social activities during a time of economic recession, and how social exclusion may affect psychological dimensions.