

# International Journal of Health Science

Acceptance date: 15/01/2025

## MENTAL HEALTH AND COPING VS. EMPLOYABILITY IN IMMIGRANTS. SALINAS, ECUADOR: LITERATURE REVIEW

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**Abstract: Objective:** To describe mental health disorders and coping with employability in immigrants reported in the literature. **Methods:** A systematic and reflective review was conducted between January and April 2024. The MeSH terms used were “mental health”, “coping strategies”, “employment” and “immigrant” together with the DECS terms “mental health” “coping strategies”, “employment” and “immigrants”. In all the databases reviewed, “Last 5 Years” and “Free Full Text” were applied as search limits. **Results:** The studies revealed that immigrants in Salinas, Ecuador, face significant challenges in finding employment, including language barriers, lack of education, skills, discrimination. These challenges resulted in stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as showing that immigrants use a variety of coping strategies, including social support, seeking help at community health centers, and engaging in self-care activities. **Conclusion:** The findings highlight the need for interventions that address the mental health sequelae of immigrants and support them in their search for employment minimizing future mental health effects and employment outcomes in Salinas, Ecuador. **Keywords:** Employment, coping strategies, immigrants, mental health.

## INTRODUCTION

Migration can be understood as any movement of people who decide to move within or outside their territory of origin, and is also defined as a person who has changed his or her habitual residence from the place of origin to a specific place of destination. However, the Salinas canton in Ecuador is a tourist city that attracts a significant number of immigrants arriving from various neighboring countries, mainly Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Peru, the United States, among others, in search of better economic opportunities or security. On the other hand, the process of adapting

to a new environment and finding a secure job can be a major challenge that causes them certain problems at the level of mental health.

According to data extracted from the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador (INEC), in 2021, reported an immigrant population of approximately 15% of the total population, and an unemployment rate amounting to 12.5%, compared to 6.5% compared to the general population<sup>(1)</sup>, statistics that highlight the need to address these challenges in the target population. Now, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)<sup>(2)</sup>. They show that there are approximately 10,887,474 migrants in South America, with an increase of 66%, which allows us to respond that there are many people living outside their countries of origin, reaching approximately 42.7 million.

However, these data warn that mental health and how to deal with it in this population group continue to be a neglected issue that deserves immediate attention due to the inequalities to individual, family and collective health, as there are additional challenges to find a job, such as language barriers, cultural differences and discrimination that can generate feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and alterations in mental health<sup>(3, 4)</sup>.

Despite the above, some authors consider that the health of all migrants is an urgent matter at the regional level<sup>(5)</sup>, while others point out that these users have significant barriers to access health care<sup>(6)</sup>. However, in Ecuador it has been seen that the development of mental symptomatology arises as a response to the social determinants of health that afflict migrants in pre-migratory, migratory and post-migratory periods, so there is no document specifically in Salinas that summarizes what is known about the factors that act on the mental health of immigrants in each of the neighborhoods of that canton. Therefore, the following article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mental he-

alth challenges faced by immigrants and the coping strategies they use to deal with these challenges in Salinas, Ecuador during 2024.

METHODS

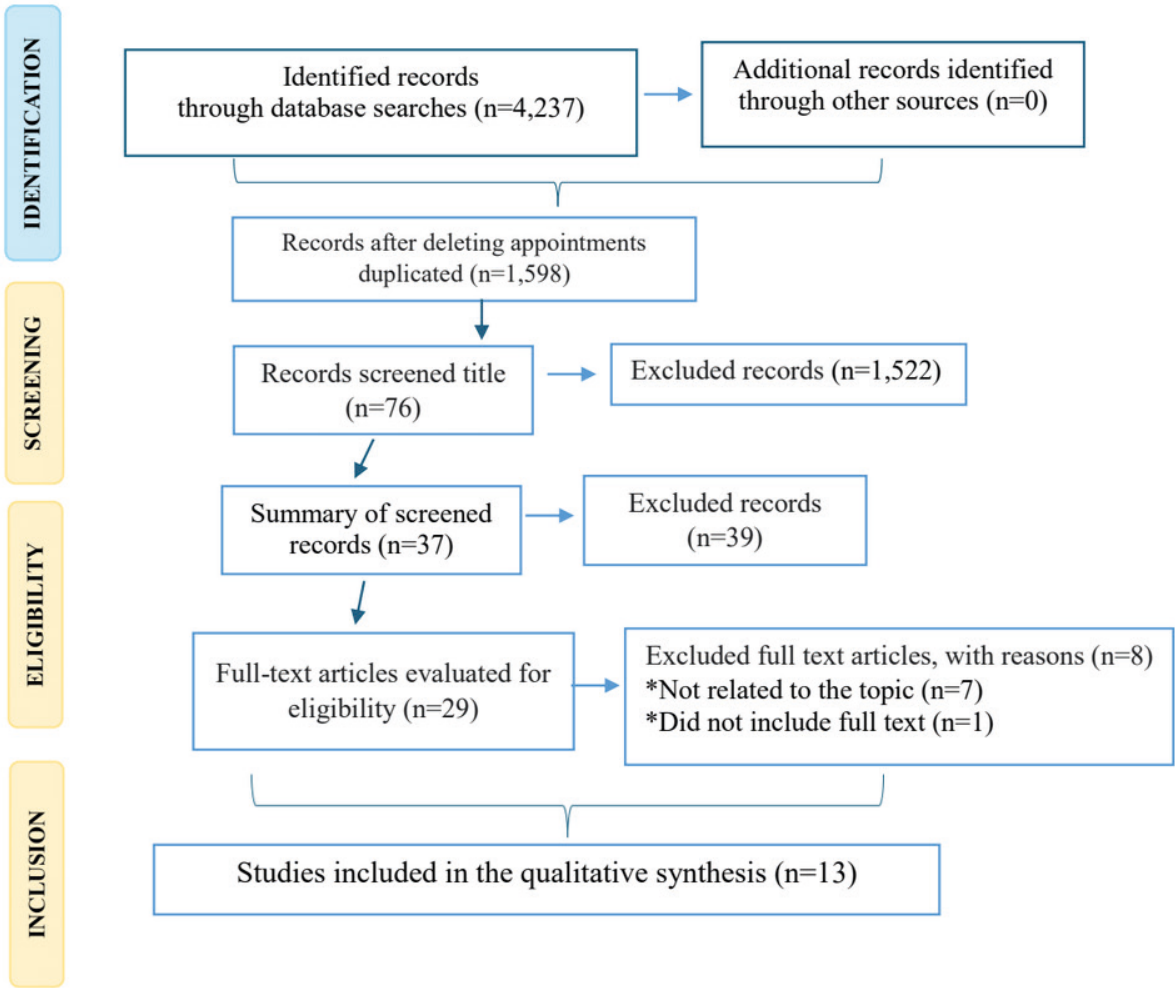
DESIGN / TYPE OF STUDY

A systematized review of articles was carried out, the results of which reported alterations in mental health and coping strategies in the face of employability in immigrants. The criteria of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guide <sup>(7)</sup>.

LITERATURE SEARCH PROCESS

The search for articles was carried out in the electronic databases Virtual Health Library, Google Scholar, Medline, Pubmed, Scielo, Scopus, Wellcome open research and Web of Science. The search was conducted between January and May 2024. The MeSH terms used were “mental health”, “coping strategies”, “employment” and “immigrant” along with the DECS terms “mental health” “coping strategies”, “employment” and “immigrants”. In addition, the Boolean operators AND and OR were used. In all databases reviewed, “Last 5 Years” and “Free Full Text” were applied as search limits.

Figure 1 shows the flow chart, which details the search process carried out.



PRISMA flow diagram of the selected studies.

Sánchez, E, Martínez-Alarcón L, Mera-Lemp MJ, Aguado-Moreno L, Herrera, G.

## ELIGIBILITY OF STUDIES AND EXTRACTION

All articles referring to some type of mental health alteration and coping strategies for employability in the context of immigrants were included. The selected articles were extracted by the researchers, recording: author, year and reference, country, design, purpose of the study and relevant background.

## RESULTS

Thirteen articles were selected <sup>(7-19)</sup>, of which were carried out in countries such as: three in Colombia<sup>(8)</sup>, four in the United States <sup>(11 - 12, 13, 14)</sup>, one in the United Kingdom <sup>(15)</sup>, as well as one in Spain <sup>(16)</sup>, Norway<sup>(17)</sup>, Ukraine <sup>(18)</sup>, Hong Kong <sup>(19)</sup> and China <sup>(20)</sup>. Of the total number of articles, all addressed mental health and only 5 of them referred to coping as a predictor of employability just because of having the status of migrant, however the rest of the papers addressed it from other mental health disorders, such as: well-being, acculturation, anxiety and fear <sup>(21)</sup>.

Among the forms in which mental health alterations were presented, the following were found: anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, inattention, discrimination, among others that could be influenced by certain genetic, environmental, social and psychological factors <sup>(22)</sup>. However, with regard to coping strategies for employability, some articles evaluated coping strategies in the context of the immigrant, where there is still little literature on the formation of support networks in communities and other social environments, which is a fundamental strategy for coping with migration, whether among neighbors, friends and family to face their problems and find participation in self-care activities.

On the other hand, employability continues to be a neglected issue in this population group where immigrants stated that every day they encounter obstacles in accessing employ-

ment, due to the fact that the conditions in which their jobs are developed are precarious and they perceive tensions in their relations with members of society, which can add new sources of stress to the migratory process, a critical aspect for their social inclusion, which is hindered and strained by various elements mentioned above<sup>(23)</sup>. The details of each item are presented below in Table 1.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to review the state of the art of mental health, coping and immigrant employment in Salinas, Ecuador. Most of the articles reviewed <sup>(3 - 5, 8, 10, 11)</sup>, concluded that there is still a complexity of this problem and the need for comprehensive interventions that address the various dimensions that characterize it. Thus, the results confirm the initial hypothesis that the search for employment in a new cultural and social environment can have a significant impact on the mental health of immigrants, generating stress, anxiety and depression <sup>(16, (21))</sup>.

However, other studies reviewed <sup>(18 - 15, 23)</sup>, coincide in pointing out that immigrants of different nationalities face a series of obstacles to finding employment, including language barriers, lack of formal education and specific skills, discrimination and lack of support networks <sup>(9- 12, 13, 17)</sup>. These challenges can lead to feelings of frustration, helplessness and hopelessness, which in turn can exacerbate mental health problems.

Despite the difficulties faced by immigrants also other authors <sup>(6 - 14, 19)</sup>, suggested that they should develop various coping strategies to adapt to their new environment and overcome obstacles to employability, where the most common strategies include social support from family and friends, seeking help at community health centers, and participating in self-care activities such as physical exercise and meditation <sup>(20, 22)</sup>.

AUTHOR, YEAR AND REFERENCE	LANGUAGE OF THE ARTICLE	COUNTRY IN WHICH THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED	MAIN OBJECTIVE	METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN	POPULATION	INSTRUMENT
Ramire-Martinez, GP; Ortiz-Camacho, KN; Beltrán-Requeneth, LC. 2019 <sup>(8)</sup>	Spanish	Colombia	Characterize the development of employability programs aimed at immigrant victims of the armed conflict.	Quantitative, empirical-analytical and descriptive study, using the systematic review technique.	62 articles selected with full text reading.	Review systematic review of the scientific literature
Rios Casas F, Ryan D, Perez G, Maurer S, Iran AN, Rao D, Ornelas IJ. 2020 <sup>(11)</sup> (c)	English	United States	We sought to describe the mechanisms linking immigration-related stressors and mental health, and which coping strategies are used to maintain well-being.	Qualitative study, four focus groups with Latina immigrant women recruited through two community organizations serving Latino immigrants in western Washington.	8-10 women for each focus group.	focus group.
Choy B, Arunachalam K, S G, Taylor M, Lee A. 2020 <sup>(15)</sup> .	English	United Kingdom	This study aims to examine the correlation between the different types of migrant acculturation strategies according to Berry's model of acculturation (integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization) and their effects on mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD.	Three databases (PubMed, Ovid and Ebsco) were searched using different combinations of search terms to identify relevant articles to be included	21 primary studies were included in the review, which evaluated 61,885 migrants in total	Systematic review
Liem A, Renzaho AMN, Hannam K, Lam AIF, Hall BJ. 2021 <sup>(20)</sup> .	English	China	Explore the experiences and coping of migrant workers in the context of acculturation	Systematic review, mixed methods.	11 studies reviewed.	Systematic review
Kamila-Angelika Hynek, et al., 2021 <sup>(17)</sup> .	English	Noriega	Analyzing how income is related to work after the adoption of coping measures and mental disorders among young immigrant and non-immigrant women in Norway: a national registry study.	Prospective cohort study	Women aged 23 to 40 who resided in Norway for at least three consecutive years between 2006 and 2013 (N = 640,527).	Perceived Employability Scale (EEP).
Ramírez-Conde A, Atehortúa Rivera, PA, Riaño Hernández, DR. 2021 <sup>(9)</sup> .	Spanish	Colombia	To determine the prevalence of psychological well-being and distress in Colombian adolescents, as well as and to establish the correlation between psychological well-being and distress scales of well-being.	Quantitative, descriptive and correlational study.	1,450 adolescents between 12 and 18 years of age	KIDSCREEN - 10 (K-10) Mental Health (MHI-5) and the Well-Being Index (WHO-5)
Candanoza-Carrascal, LT. 2021 <sup>(10)</sup> .	Spanish	Colombia	To critically analyze the variables of perceived discrimination, psychological wellbeing and coping strategies of Venezuelan migrants living in Colombia.	Descriptive and documentary study.	17 studies that met the inclusion criteria,	Systematic review of the literature.

Farashah, Ali; Blonquist, T; Al-Ariss, A & Grace Chun Guo. 2023 <sup>(12)</sup> .	English	United States	Examines the perceived employability of skilled	We conducted a systematic review (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).	88 research articles published during 2009-2019.	Systematic review
Goldman-Mellor, S., et al. 2023 <sup>(13)</sup> .	English	United States	To understand the mental health experiences of first- and second-generation Latinos in rural Areas.	Quantitative, descriptive correlational study	35 Latino residents of rural California counties during July 2020-February 2021	Questionnaire [PHQ]-2 and Generalized Anxiety Disorder [GAD].
Kerti, KA, Van Engen, M., Szabó, O., Kroon, B., Bleijenberg, I. and Freese, C. 2024 <sup>(18)</sup> .	English	Ukraine	The authors conducted 22 in-depth longitudinal interviews with 11 Hungarian migrant workers in the Dutch logistics sector, before and during the COVID-19 crisis, using thematic analysis and visual diagrams to interpret them.	Longitudinal qualitative study with phenomenological approach	22 interviews with 11 Hungarian migrant workers.	Interview
Sumerlin TS, Kim JH, Hui AY, Chan D, Liao T, Padmadas S, Fong E, Chung RX. 2024 <sup>(19)</sup> .	English	Hong Kong	To evaluate the association between working conditions and mental health, and the mediating roles of stress and job satisfaction, among MDD women in Hong Kong.	Longitudinal study.	1965 surveys between August 2020 and August 2021.	cross-sectional online survey
Gómez-Salgado, J; Carrión-Rico, D; García-Iglesias, J; Climent-Rodríguez, JA; Miranda-Plata, R; Pichardo-Hexamer, R; Navarro-Abal, Y; Fagundo-Rivera, J; Vaca-Acosta, RM; Ruiz-Frutos, C; Allande-Cussó, R. 2024 <sup>(16)</sup> .	Spanish	Spain	Assessing psychological distress in a sample of unemployed immigrants living in informal settlements in the province of Huelva (southern Spain).	Observational, descriptive, cross-sectional study during the months of April to June 2021.	317 immigrant subjects	General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) and sociodemographic data sheet.
Abularrage-Tara, F; Wurtz, M; Goleen Samari. 2024 <sup>(14)</sup> .	Spanish	United States	Examining coping strategies and resilience among immigrant communities.	Qualitative study	44 first- and second-generation cisgender immigrant women of different national origins.	In-depth interview.

Table 1. *Distribution of each article reviewed.*  
Note: *Sánchez, E, Martínez-Alarcón L, Mera-Lemp MJ, Aguado-Moreno L, Herrera, G.*

Source: Own elaboration.



The findings of this review suggest the need to implement multidimensional interventions that address both the mental health and employability needs of immigrants. These interventions should consider aspects such as: access to culturally sensitive mental health services, including individual and group therapies, workshops on stress and anxiety management, as well as psychological support for families<sup>(1,2)</sup>.

It is also important to develop job training programs in order to provide immigrants with the skills and knowledge necessary to access the local labor market<sup>(24 - 25 , 26)</sup>. These programs should include training in the Spanish language, computer skills and vocational education and not least to foster the social inclusion of immigrants, through intercultural awareness campaigns, cultural exchange programs and the creation of community support networks<sup>(27 - 28, 29, 30 , 31)</sup> .

On the other hand, and no less important, it should be noted that this literature review has some limitations. Firstly, it focused on studies published in the last five years, which means that older research was not included in the analysis and, secondly, the review was limited to studies published in English and Spanish, which could have excluded relevant research in other languages. All of these selected aspects penetrate the need to delve deeper to understand the rise or decline of this phenomenon.

## CONCLUSIONS

The evidence reviewed indicates that mental health alterations in the immigrant context increased, with employability being an influential factor, thus highlighting the need for interventions that address the mental health sequelae of immigrants and support them in their search for employment, minimizing all those effects at the mental level that they may present in the future, as well as working on the orientation of coping strategies in Salinas, Ecuador.

As a possibility for future research, we propose the follow-up of those who experienced mental health alterations in order to generate effective interventions to improve their well-being. In addition, this type of work reveals the need to implement comprehensive interventions that address both the mental health and employability needs of immigrants, promoting well-being, security, personal motivation and their full integration into Ecuadorian society.

## CONFLICTO DE INTERESES

Los autores declaran no tener conflictos de intereses.

## CONTRIBUCIONES DE LOS AUTORES

*Yanedsy Díaz Amador*: Realizó la concepción y el diseño del trabajo.

*Yanedsy Díaz Amador y Víctor Manuel Reyes*: La recogida de datos, análisis y la interpretación de los datos.

*Yanedsy Díaz Amador y Víctor Manuel Reyes*: La escritura del artículo.

*Yanedsy Díaz Amador y Víctor Manuel Reyes*: Realizaron la revisión crítica con importantes contribuciones intelectuales.

*Yanedsy Díaz Amador y Víctor Manuel Reyes*: La aprobación de la versión final para su publicación.

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