

Mental Health Professionals' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Related to Nutrition in Mental Health Care: A Scoping Review

Jayne Leonard, MIACP^{1,2}, Dr Anne Griffin^{1,2}, Professor Patrick Ryan³, Dr Megan Lee⁴

¹School of Allied Health, University of Limerick, Ireland | ²Health Research Institute, University of Limerick | ³Department of Psychology, University of Limerick | ⁴Faculty of Society and Design, Bond University, Australia

Background

- Nutritional psychiatry is a rapidly emerging field that explores the relationship between mental health and nutrition.
- Existing literature primarily focuses on associations between diet and mental health status, biological mechanisms, and patient outcomes, with healthier diets generally linked to better mental health profiles.
- Despite the publication of 31,556 articles on nutrition and mental health between 2000 and 2024¹, there is a significant lack of research on the implementation of nutritional psychiatry, including how mental health professionals interpret this evidence, perceive its relevance, and integrate it into routine clinical care.
- As clients often seek complementary and alternative approaches to psychotherapy and medication^{2,3} – and as mental health care systems globally are struggling to meet demand^{4,5} – understanding how nutritional psychiatry can be translated into clinical practice is becoming increasingly important.

Research Question

What is currently known about the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of mental health professionals regarding nutrition and diet in the context of mental health care?

Aims & Approach

- This scoping review aims to map the extent, nature, and focus of the literature examining mental health professionals' engagement with nutritional psychiatry.
- A knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) framework was used to structure the synthesis, capturing what professionals know, believe, and do in relation to nutritional psychiatry, including perceived barriers and facilitators to implementation.
- Findings contribute to the translation of existing research into practice and may inform future research, policy, and clinical practice.

Methodology & Method

- Applied the JBI methodology framework⁶.
- A comprehensive search strategy guided by:



Population: Mental health professionals



Concept: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices related to nutrition and mental health



Context: Mental health care settings or educational settings related to mental health care

- Databases searched (December 2025):
 - PubMed; APA PsycInfo; CINAHL Ultimate; and Embase.

Findings (cont.)

Attitudes (9 papers)

- Clinicians held moderate to strong beliefs that nutrition was beneficial within mental health care. However, it appears to be less prioritised within organisational settings.
- Participants primarily viewed nutrition as a medication adjunct rather than a replacement.
- Prevalent beliefs about patient-level barriers (capacity, readiness) to implementation.

Practices (12 papers)

- Dietary discussions with clients were reported by most participants, but frequency varied.
- The most commonly recommended nutrition-related interventions included specific diets (e.g., the Mediterranean diet), nutritional supplements, and referral to a dietitian.
- Dietary changes were most commonly recommended for depression and anxiety.

Barriers and Facilitators

- Practitioner barriers related to lack of knowledge, education, and confidence; lack of time; and concerns regarding scope of practice.
- The absence of organisational and community supports, and patient-level barriers, were also reported.
- Less commonly discussed were facilitators, which included education, nutritional psychiatry clinical care guidelines, and other supports.

Discussion

- Across studies, there is strong interest in the role of nutrition within mental health care, yet implementation remains inconsistent.
- The gap appears structural rather than attitudinal: clinicians appear to be willing, but lack the training, guidance, and support required to integrate nutrition into practice.
- Barriers are primarily practitioner- and system-level, while facilitators remain underexplored.
- These findings highlight a need to move toward practical, implementation-focused solutions.

Conclusions

- Professionals show strong interest in nutrition but lack the training and support to integrate it into clinical practice.
- Therefore, education and system-level support is necessary to bridge the research-practice gap.

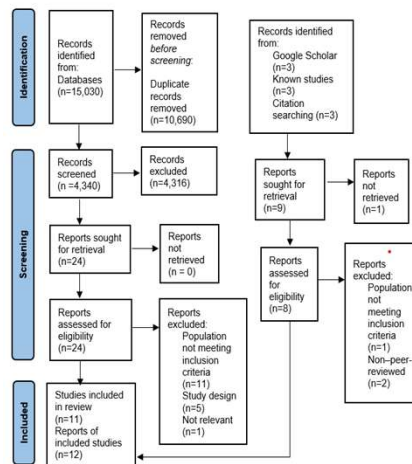


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart of study selection process

Findings

Knowledge (10 papers)

- The majority of participants reported no formal nutrition education, and many reported limited confidence in the application of knowledge.
- Studies assessing nutrition knowledge using assessment tools (n=6) reported low-to-moderate levels of objective nutrition knowledge, with self-rated knowledge similarly low.
- Very high proportions of respondents (92-97%) reported willingness to undertake further training.

Contact

Jayne Leonard, MIACP
University of Limerick, Ireland
Email: leonard.jayne@ul.ie

References

- Hiltensperger, R., Neher, J., Böhm, L., & Mueller-Stierlin, A. S. (2025). Mapping the scientific research on nutrition and mental health: A bibliometric analysis. *Nutrients*, 17(3), 399. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu17030399>
- Sobieraj, J., Sleziaik, J., Szyzka, M., Blaziejewska, M., Łukańska, K., Socomska, P., ... & Piotrowski, P. (2025). Self-administered complementary and alternative methods of treating mental disorders among students in Wrocław: A cross-sectional study. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 13, 1734137. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1734137>
- Wemrell, M., Olsson, A., & Landgren, K. (2020). The use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in psychiatric units in Sweden. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 41(10), 946-957. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840.2020.1744203>
- European Commission. (2023). *Mental health*. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3032>
- World Health Organisation. (2022). *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049338>
- Peters, M. D., Marnie, C., Tricco, A. C., Pollock, D., Munn, Z., Alexander, L., ... & Khalil, H. (2020). Updated methodological guidance for the conduct of scoping reviews. *JBI Evidence Synthesis*, 18(10), 2119-2126. <https://doi.org/10.11124/JBIES-20-00167>