Research Square

Preprints are preliminary reports that have not undergone peer review.
They should not be considered conclusive, used to inform clinical practice,
or referenced by the media as validated information.

Nutritional Social Work in Egypt: A Scoping Review of Research

Ibrahim Sabry Ahmed

ibrahim_ahmed@social.capu.edu.eg

Capital University (formerly Helwan University)

Systematic Review

Keywords: nutritional social work, food security, Egypt, scoping review, social work practice

Posted Date: November 25th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11740456/v1

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Read Full License

Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Nutritional Social Work in Egypt: A Scoping Review of Research

Corresponding Author Information: Ibrahim Sabry Ahmed, Department of Community Organization, Faculty of Social Work, Capital University (formerly Helwan University), Ain Helwan, Helwan, Cairo 11795, Egypt.

E: ibrahim_ahmed@social.capu.edu.eg
ibrahimsabry2015@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1976-4476

Author Biography: Ibrahim Sabry Ahmed is a Professor of Community Organization at Capital University, Egypt. His research focuses on social innovation, interdisciplinary research, solution-focused practice, and institutional barrier analysis in social work.

Declarations

Contributor Statement: I, Ibrahim Sabry Ahmed, am the sole author of this manuscript. I conceived and designed the study, performed the literature review, developed the theoretical framework, collected and analyzed the data, wrote the complete manuscript, and critically reviewed and finalized the text for publication. No part of the research design, data analysis, or manuscript preparation was undertaken or assisted by any other individual, organization, or commercial writing/editing service.

Statement on Artificial Intelligence: The author declared that no artificial intelligence (AI) or generative AI-assisted technologies were used in the searching, summarizing, drafting, analysis, or generation of any content, text, data, or figures within this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Ethical Approval: This conceptual study involved no human or animal participants and therefore required no ethical approval.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests: The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Abstract

Despite ongoing development efforts, food and nutrition insecurity remains a critical challenge in Egypt, where nearly two-thirds of the population depends on subsidized bread amid widespread poverty and a double burden of malnutrition. While social workers serve in the key institutions providing food protection and community assistance, the scope and nature of their involvement in nutrition have not been fully mapped. This scoping review examines two decades of Egyptian social work literature (2006-2025) to clarify the characteristics of this scholarship, the professional roles identified, and the research gaps that persist. Adhering to the Arksey and O'Malley methodology and PRISMA-ScR standards, relevant Arabic and English publications were gathered through the Egyptian Knowledge Bank, Shamaa, Google Scholar, national social work journals, and reference tracking. Twelve peer-reviewed articles met the selection criteria for thematic synthesis. Results demonstrate rising academic interest across micro, mezzo, and macro practice levels. Nevertheless, the field remains constrained by descriptive single-governorate studies, small sample sizes, an exclusive focus on Arabic publication, and the total absence of the term 'nutritional social work.' Ultimately, the review outlines a path forward involving intervention-based research, curricular updates, and broader international engagement to integrate nutritional social work as a formal field in Egyptian practice.

Keywords: nutritional social work; food security; Egypt; scoping review; social work practice

In June 2024, Egypt raised the retail price of a subsidized baladi bread loaf from five to twenty piastres-the first such increase since 1989 (Jovanovic & Glauber, 2024). More than a simple economic adjustment, the decision affected the daily staple of an estimated 73 million people, roughly 65% of the population, who depended on the bread subsidy in 2023 (Jovanovic & Glauber, 2024). In a country where wheat provides about one third of daily calories and

where affordable bread has historically served as a social contract between the state and its citizens, food is inseparable from social policy, household survival, and everyday practice. The institutions that mediate this relationship-including ration-card offices, social solidarity directorates, community associations, schools, and university student services-are precisely the settings in which Egyptian social workers operate. How the profession has engaged with food and nutrition has therefore become a question of both scholarly and practical significance.

Food security, as articulated at the World Food Summit and subsequently upheld in international frameworks, is realized when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that satisfies their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2008). Of the definition's four pillars, three-access, utilization, and stability-are profoundly social in character. Access is shaped by income and social protection; utilization by care practices, health literacy, and sanitation; and stability by institutions and public policy. These are precisely the domains of social work, a profession situated at the intersection of households, communities, and the state and professionally mandated to connect vulnerable populations with resources, services, and rights. Egypt represents a paradigmatic case of the double burden of malnutrition. The 2025 Global Hunger Index places the country in the moderate hunger category, with a score of 10.5 and a ranking of 57th out of 123 countries (Concern Worldwide & Welthungerhilfe, 2025). Although child stunting decreased from 21% in the 2014 Egyptian Demographic and Health Survey to approximately 13%, child overweight remains at 14.2%, wasting at 3.3%, and anemia affects 27.2% of children under five and one quarter of women of reproductive age (UNICEF, 2024; Concern Worldwide & Welthungerhilfe, 2025). Care practices also remain fragile: exclusive breastfeeding fell from 34% in 2005 to 13% by 2014 (UNICEF, 2024). At the opposite end of the nutritional spectrum, adult obesity reached 43.9% in 2024, including 57.1% among women, positioning Egypt among the countries most severely affected by obesity worldwide (World

Health Organization [WHO], 2024). These nutritional outcomes unfold within a context of widespread economic vulnerability: national poverty was estimated at 29.7% in 2019/20 and 33.5% in 2021/22, while the population exceeded 107 million by late 2024 (World Bank, 2026; Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics [CAPMAS], 2024).

The social distribution of these outcomes explains why they are as much a concern for social work as for medicine. Childhood anemia mirrors household poverty; adult obesity is concentrated where energy-dense processed foods are the cheapest source of calories; and obesity among women can coexist with maternal anemia in the same households. Breastfeeding practices are shaped by maternal education, working conditions, and family support, not by clinical information alone. Each of these social gradient's cuts across domains that social workers already address, including income assistance, maternal and child welfare services, school health programs, and community organizing. For the profession, then, the central question is not whether it engages with nutrition, but how intentionally, how competently, and with what evidence base it does so.

Egypt's governmental response has yielded one of the largest food-oriented social protection systems in the developing world. The *tamween* system merges widely available *baladi* bread subsidies-budgeted at roughly EGP 91 billion (approximately US$1.85 billion) in FY2024/25-with ration cards that entitle enrolled households to subsidized oil, sugar, rice, and pasta (Jovanovic & Glauber, 2024). As a complementary measure, the Takaful and Karama conditional and unconditional cash transfer programs, administered by the Ministry of Social Solidarity across all 27 governorates since 2015, had reached more than 4.7 million poor households by 2025; state allocations for these programs are set to rise to EGP 54 billion in FY2025/26 (World Bank, 2026; Egypt State Information Service, 2025). National planning instruments, such as Egypt Vision 2030 and the National Food Security Strategy, integrate food

and nutrition targets into the sustainable development agenda. The implementation of these programs relies crucially on social workers, as eligibility assessment, case management, community outreach, and beneficiary counseling constitute core professional activities carried out in the ministry's local social units, schools, and a broad nongovernmental sector.

Social work is one of the oldest established professions in Egypt and the broader Arab region. Its institutional foundations date to the mid-twentieth century, when pioneers such as Ihsan El-Kousy helped shape early professional education in the field (Soliman & Abd Elmegied, 2010). Today, social work departments operate in universities throughout the country, and the profession is organizationally embedded in ministries, schools, hospitals, and thousands of civil society associations. Nevertheless, Egyptian social work scholarship remains predominantly Arabic-language and has only limited international visibility-a pattern documented more than a decade ago that persists today (Megahead, 2016; Soliman & Koran, 2025). Although research engagement with concrete practice problems, including food and nutrition, has grown substantially in volume, it remains scattered across national journals and has never been systematically mapped.

Internationally, the intersection between social work and food has gradually consolidated into an emerging specialization with its own contours. Reviewing the international literature on food insecurity in social work, Burgess and Shier (2018) concluded that the profession largely responds to food insecurity through remedial and community-level interventions, while the structural determinants that produce and sustain it receive limited attention. In 2022, Dylan and Cammaert gave this field its conceptual name: nutritional social work. They define it as practice that treats nutritional security as an instrumental component of food security and engages it across direct practice, community action, policy development, research, and social work education from a critical, anti-oppressive, and ecofeminist lens. In

this framing, nutrition is no longer a narrowly clinical concern but a matter of social justice, sustainability, and human rights, including the right to food.

Within this context, a clear gap emerges that cannot be overlooked. Over two decades, Egypt has accumulated a body of social work research on food security, food subsidies, malnutrition, and consumption rationalization; however, this body of work has not yet been read synthetically to reveal what it has established, where it has concentrated, and which issues it has left unaddressed. This gap is not a secondary academic detail; it is a precondition for localizing the nutritional social work framework in Egypt and for connecting Arabic-language scholarship in this field to international debates. This scoping review therefore seeks to answer three questions: (a) What are the characteristics of Egyptian social work research on food and nutrition published between 2000 and 2025, including its designs, settings, populations, and practice methods? (b) What roles, interventions, and professional contributions does this research identify across the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice? (c) What gaps emerge, and what research agenda follows for establishing nutritional social work in Egypt?

Methodology

Review Design

This review was guided by the five-stage framework for scoping studies proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005): identifying the research question; identifying relevant studies; selecting studies; charting the data; and collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. It also incorporated the methodological refinements advanced by Levac et al. (2010), namely clarifying the scope, treating stakeholder consultation as an optional stage, and transparently reporting the three steps of the final stage. Reporting followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018), and methodological decisions were cross-checked against current Joanna

Briggs Institute guidance (Peters et al., 2020). A scoping design was judged appropriate because the literature remains nascent, methodologically heterogeneous, dispersed across Arabic-language national journals, and as yet unmapped in terms of its conceptual vocabulary.

Review Questions

The review took shape around three questions. The first concerned the bibliographic and methodological characteristics of Egyptian social work research on food and nutrition-its publication year, outlet, design, setting, sample, population, and social work method. The second asked what roles, interventions, and professional contributions these research documents across the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice. The third asked what gaps and future directions emerge when this scholarship is examined against an international nutritional social work framework. These questions were deliberately descriptive and mapping-oriented rather than effect-oriented, in keeping with the exploratory purpose of a scoping review. Answering them requires no effect estimation or risk-of-bias appraisal; it requires the systematic charting of a literature that has never been mapped.

Identifying Relevant Studies

To reach the widest possible range of relevant literature, we searched in Arabic and English across a range of sources. These comprised the Egyptian Knowledge Bank, which aggregates major international and regional databases; the Shamaa database, which indexes Arabic-language social science research; Google Scholar; and the portals of the principal Egyptian social work journals: the Journal of Social Work (Helwan University), the Journal of the Faculty of Social Work for Social Studies and Research, the Cairo Journal of Social Work, the Egyptian Scientific Journal of Social Work, the Beni Suef Journal of Research in Developmental Social Work, and the Journal of Studies in Social Work and Humanities. We

also searched for dissertations deposited at Helwan University and the proceedings of its International Scientific Conference of Social Work.

In the Arabic search, we combined the term for social work (al-khidma al-ijtima'iyya) with those for food security (al-amn al-ghitha'i), nutrition (al-taghziya), malnutrition (su' al-taghziya), food subsidies (al-da'm al-ghitha'i), ration cards (al-bataqat al-tamwiniyya), and consumption rationalization (tarshid al-istihlak). In the English search, we combined "social work" with "food security," "nutrition," "malnutrition," and "Egypt." We supplemented this by hand-searching the reference lists of retrieved records and the tables of contents of the journals listed above for the period 2000-2025. Because the electronic archives of several Egyptian journals are incomplete, we consulted print-based tables of contents where necessary. The final consolidated search was conducted in October 2026, and no language restriction was imposed beyond the Arabic and English specified in the eligibility criteria.

Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility was specified using the population-concept-context framework. The population comprised Egyptian individuals and families, as well as groups, communities, organizations, and professional groups, insofar as their lives and livelihoods were studied in relation to food or nutrition. The concept comprised social work roles, methods (casework, group work, community organization, and policy and administration), education, and professional contributions bearing on food security, nutrition, malnutrition, food consumption and consumer culture, or food-related social protection. The context was Egypt, with studies conducted by social work researchers or published in social work outlets. Eligible source types were peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and peer-reviewed conference proceedings published between 2000 and 2025 in Arabic or English. Excluded were nutrition-

science, agricultural, and medical studies without social work content; opinion pieces without empirical or systematic conceptual content; and studies conducted outside Egypt.

Study Selection

Titles and abstracts of retrieved records were screened against the eligibility criteria, and the full texts of candidate records were subsequently assessed. Twelve studies published between 2006 and 2025 met the criteria and formed the corpus. The selection process is summarized in Figure 1.

Charting the Data

A charting form was developed a priori and piloted on the first three studies; it recorded bibliographic details, aim, design and methods, setting, sample and participants, social work method and practice level, principal findings, and recommendations. Following Levac et al. (2010), charting was iterative: the form was refined after piloting, and the full corpus was re-charted for consistency. The completed chart is summarized in Table 1.

Collating, Summarizing, and Reporting

Results were collated in three stages (Levac et al., 2010). First, a descriptive numerical analysis summarized the corpus by publication period, outlet, design, setting, sample, and population. Second, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted: initial deductive coding was informed by the micro-mezzo-macro heuristic and by the practice domains of the nutritional social work framework (Dylan & Cammaert, 2022), and codes were inductively refined into five themes. Third, the implications of the findings were considered against the Egyptian policy context and the international literature in order to derive implications and a research agenda. Quality appraisal was not undertaken, consistent with scoping review conduct, where the purpose is mapping rather than effect estimation (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters et al., 2020). The optional stakeholder consultation exercise described by Levac et al. (2010) was not

undertaken; the review is documentary by design, and consultation is reserved for a subsequent phase of this research program.

Ethical Considerations

The review analyzed published, peer-reviewed literature and involved no human participants; accordingly, no ethical approval was required. All sources are reported accurately and completely, Arabic-language sources are cited through transliteration and English translations of their titles, and no unpublished or confidential material was used. The author reports no conflicts of interest in relation to the reviewed studies or the programs they evaluate.

Figure 1

PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process



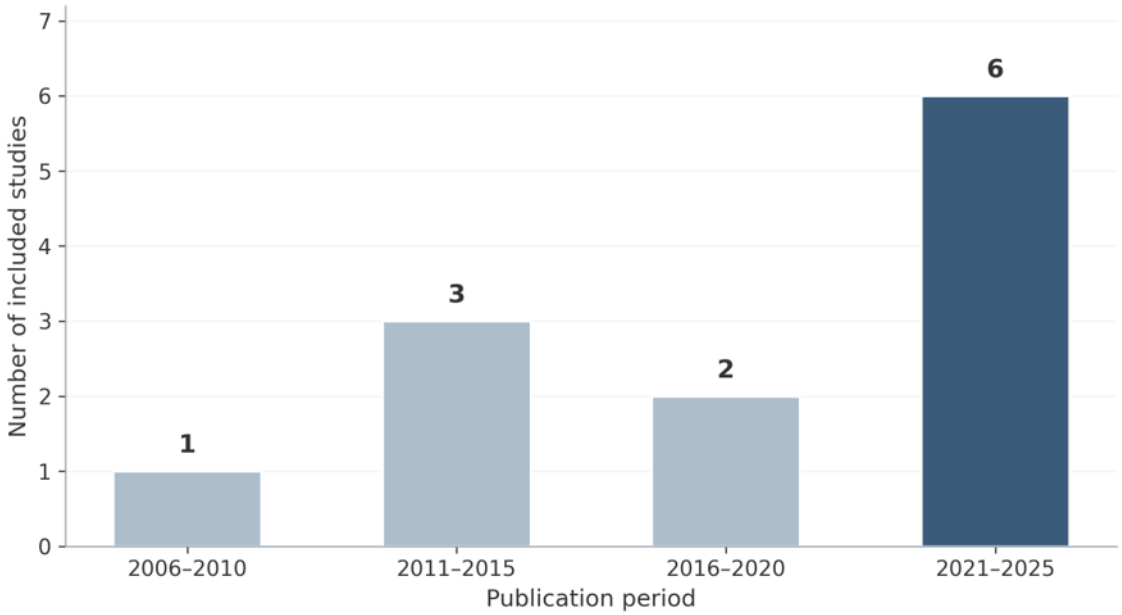
Results and Discussion

Overview of the Included Studies

The corpus comprises twelve studies published between 2006 and 2025 (Table 1). Scholarly attention has accelerated markedly: one study appeared in 2006-2010, three in 2011-2015, two in 2016-2020, and six in 2021-2025 (Figure 2). This acceleration parallels the deterioration of global and domestic food conditions after 2020, including the inflationary aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption of wheat imports following the Russian invasion of Ukraine; in 2022, Egypt sourced approximately three quarters of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine (Jovanovic & Glauber, 2024). The timing suggests that Egyptian social work scholarship responds to food crises much as the international literature does, by intensifying attention when food security re-enters public debate.

Figure 2

Distribution of the Included Studies by Publication Period (N = 12)



Note. Counts refer to peer-reviewed Egyptian social work studies addressing food and nutrition, 2006-2025.

Methodologically, the corpus is predominantly characterized by descriptive and survey-based designs. Seven studies employed descriptive or descriptive-analytical surveys; three

were evaluative studies-of ration-card subsidies, the Takaful and Karama program, and students' curricular knowledge; one was a quasi-experimental intervention study; and one was a conceptual paper. Geographically, ten studies were confined to a single governorate: three in Fayoum, two in Cairo, and one each in Alexandria, Qalyubia, Assiut, Port Said, and Beni Suef. Two studies addressed national or conceptual scopes. Upper Egypt, the country's poorest region, accounted for five of the twelve studies. Reported sample sizes ranged from 13 to 362 participants, with a median of approximately 100. Target populations included children, women, university and preparatory-school students, low-income families, social protection beneficiaries, and personnel of governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

The venues in which these works appear are the national social work journals and university presses identified in the search strategy, led by the journals of the Helwan Faculty of Social Work, the Egyptian Scientific Journal of Social Work, and the Cairo Journal of Social Work, alongside one doctoral dissertation and one set of international conference proceedings. All twelve studies were published in Arabic. This distribution confirms both the vitality of a national publication ecosystem for food-related social work research and its detachment from international indexing-a combination that renders the field simultaneously active and invisible. One implication deserves emphasis: this corpus would be invisible to any English-only search, and the resulting invisibility is precisely what the present synthesis begins to correct.

A fourth descriptive finding pertains to the distribution of practice methods across the reviewed corpus. Casework and direct intervention appear in three studies (Al-Harishi, 2021; El-Ezaby, 2023; Amer and Amer, 2024); group work in two (Ismail, 2014; El-Gabaly, 2022); community organization in three (Ibrahim, 2006; El-Sady, 2014; Awais et al., 2025); and policy and administrative practice in four (El-Desouky, 2013; Abdel Azim, 2017; Abdel Galil and El-Deeb, 2020; Yousef, 2023). The profession's full classical repertoire of methods is therefore

represented, with no single method predominating. This breadth constitutes a strength of the Egyptian literature, yet it simultaneously reflects its fragmentation: the methods are deployed in isolation from one another, and no study integrates, for instance, direct practice with community organization or policy advocacy within a single programmatic logic.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Included Studies (N = 12)

Study	Aim / focus	Design	Setting	Participants	Level
Ibrahim (2006)	NGO contributions to confronting food crises and achieving food security	Descriptive survey	Fayoum	NGO staff, members, and beneficiaries	Mezzo
El-Desouky (2013)	Ration-card subsidy policy and food security of limited-income households	Evaluative survey	Banha, Qalyubia	Subsidy beneficiaries and officials	Macro
Ismail (2014)	Group work and women's consumer culture	Descriptive survey	Cairo	300 women in NGOs	Mezzo
El-Sady (2014)	Capacity building of NGOs for food security	Doctoral field study	National (NGOs)	NGO stakeholders	Mezzo
Abdel Azim (2017)	Adequacy of social security transfers for food needs	Descriptive survey	Fayoum	13 social security specialists	Macro
Abdel Galil and El-Deeb (2020)	Social Return of the Takaful and Karama program	Evaluative case study	Assiut	362 beneficiaries; 188 program workers	Macro
Al-Harishi (2021)	Professional intervention for child food security	Quasi-experimental	Fayoum	20 children	Micro
El-Gabaly (2022)	Group work for consumption rationalization	Descriptive survey	Alexandria	63 preparatory-school students	Mezzo
El-Ezaby (2023)	Malnutrition effects among university youth	Descriptive-analytical survey	Port Said	46 institute students	Micro
Yousef (2023)	Social work methodology against food wars	Conceptual paper	National	Not applicable	Macro
Amer and Amer (2024)	Students' knowledge of maternal-child nutrition guidance	Evaluative survey	Cairo	171 social work students	Micro / education
Awais et al. (2025)	Nutritional needs of low-income families	Needs assessment	Beni Suef	147 low-income families	Mezzo

Note. Level refers to the primary level of social work practice addressed: micro (direct practice), mezzo (group and community practice), macro (policy and program evaluation).

Thematic Synthesis

The five themes were deductively derived from the micro-mezzo-macro heuristic and the practice domains of the nutritional social work framework and were inductively refined as

the charting process progressed. Theme 1 addresses direct practice; Themes 2 and 3 address group and community practice; Theme 4 addresses policy practice; and Theme 5 addresses the profession's own education and conceptual development. Each theme is presented with its constituent studies, its principal findings, and its interpretation against the international framework.

Theme 1: Direct Practice with Children, Youth, and Students (Micro Level)

Three studies document social work's direct practice roles in nutrition-related problems. Al-Harishi (2021) implemented and evaluated a professional intervention program designed to achieve food security among children: twenty purposively selected children attending a public library program in Fayoum during 2020-2021 completed pre- and post-intervention administrations of a food security scale, and the quasi-experimental comparison demonstrated meaningful gains in the children's understanding of food security concepts and in the behaviors associated with securing it. The study recommended institutionalizing such programs to build children's knowledge of sound nutritional practices.

El-Ezaby (2023) surveyed 46 students at the Higher Institute of Social Work in Port Said and documented the negative sequelae of malnutrition among university youth, including increased susceptibility to colds, weakened immunity and frequent infection, hair loss, weight gain, and dyspnea, alongside health problems such as poor memory and concentration, social problems including attraction to fast-food advertising and eating outside the home, and psychological problems including disordered appetite, depression, and anxiety; the study assigned the professional practitioner a central role in modifying dietary behavior, raising health awareness, organizing media campaigns, and building partnerships with health and community institutions.

Amer and Amer (2024) evaluated the cognitive preparedness of 171 social work students at Al-Azhar University to deliver health and nutritional guidance to mothers of infants from birth to weaning and found substantial knowledge gaps, which they addressed through a proposed casework-based instructional program. Taken together, these studies establish a micro-level evidence base for nutritional social work with the youngest age groups, but the evidence remains small in scale, site-specific, and oriented toward awareness outcomes rather than dietary or anthropometric change. From the standpoint of nutritional social work, they mark a transition from ad hoc awareness activity toward programmatic intervention with measured outcomes, a transition that future intervention research can extend to clinical and dietary indicators.

Theme 2: Group Work and Community Education on Consumption (Mezzo Level)

Two studies employ group work-social work's signature mezzo-level method-in food-related education with women and students, treating them not as numbers or passive recipients but as actors in their everyday lives. Ismail (2014) examined the role of group work from a cognitive-behavioral perspective in shaping consumer culture among 300 women participating in non-governmental organizations in northern Cairo. The study traced three dimensions-consumer awareness, saving awareness, and consumer socialization-and found widespread weakness and distorted socialization related to the use of food and water. It recommended awareness campaigns, training in sound consumption behaviors, and support for families in transmitting rational consumption within the family.

El-Gabaly (2022) surveyed 63 preparatory-school students in Alexandria and developed a proposed group work scheme to cultivate consumption rationalization, linking wasteful consumption to contemporary diseases and to household indebtedness that threatens family stability and dignity. Together, the two studies reveal a distinctly Egyptian practice

idiom-consumption rationalization (tarshid al-istihlak)-through which social work connects food, household economics, and values education, while framing women as primary gatekeepers of household nutrition. This idiom is a genuine local contribution: it embeds dietary behavior within family budgeting and moral economy, anticipating the international argument that food practice must be understood in household and community context rather than as isolated individual choice. The approach is preventive rather than remedial, and its household orientation builds a natural bridge to the family economic coping strategies emphasized in international food insecurity research.

Theme 3: Civil Society Organizations and Community Practice (Mezzo Level)

Three studies address the organizational infrastructure of community-level food work, yet they are not concerned with food merely as an administrative item or a figure in a report; rather, they frame it as a human right and a matter of dignity and life. Ibrahim (2006) documented the contributions of non-governmental organizations in Fayoum as developmental partners of the state in confronting food crises and achieving food security. He identified their roles in securing family food needs, combating foodborne disease, promoting breastfeeding, and protecting consumers, and he highlighted the social worker's function in program planning and in mobilizing local leadership.

El-Sady (2014), in a doctoral dissertation, specified the human, technical, financial, technological, organizational, environmental, and strategic-planning requirements for building the institutional capacities of non-governmental organizations working on food security, identified the obstacles impeding them, and proposed a future vision with implementation mechanisms.

Awais et al. (2025) conducted a needs assessment of 147 low-income families benefiting from a charitable association in Beni Suef. Among families in which 61% of

household heads were female and 62% were illiterate, unmet needs were led by dairy products (78%), fruits (62%), and animal protein (58%), while vegetables (20%) and starches and legumes were largely covered by ration cards and dry food parcels. The study recommended reshaping food assistance around measured gaps and building a unified database of low-income households. These studies positions need assessment, capacity building, and program planning-core community organization competencies-as the profession's principal contributions to the food security delivery system, and the most recent of them demonstrates a methodological maturation toward quantified gap analysis. Read together, the three studies trace an arc from crisis response, through institutional capacity building, to precision targeting based on measured household gaps-an arc that mirrors the maturation path that community food security practice has followed internationally.

Theme 4: Policy Analysis and Social Protection Evaluation (Macro Level)

Four studies engage the macro level through a humanistic, people-centered lens. El-Desouky (2013) evaluated subsidy policies delivered through ration cards in Qalyubia, finding that in-kind subsidies make a substantial contribution to protecting limited-income households and mitigating price inflation, although self-sufficiency outcomes remained only moderate because of grain shortages, rising world prices, weak agricultural investment, storage losses, and administrative targeting failures that leak benefits to non-deserving recipients.

Abdel Azim (2017) assessed the adequacy of monthly social security transfers in satisfying food needs through a survey of specialists in Fayoum's social security units, finding significant differences across income strata and recommending the empowerment of consumer protection associations and the inclusion of sound food culture in curricula. Abdel Galil and El-Deeb (2020) evaluated the social return of the Takaful and Karama programme in Assiut through surveys of 362 beneficiaries and 188 workers, documenting social, economic, health,

and educational returns alongside difficulties in service utilization, and recommending strengthened health and educational services and greater governmental and community support. Yousef (2023) offered the corpus's most structural contribution: a conceptual methodology for confronting food wars-understood as the use of food as an instrument of geopolitical pressure amid the Russia-Ukraine war, climate change, market monopolization, and unmanaged population growth-through a three-dimensional framework of prevention, reduction, and mitigation, operationalized in eight steps deployed through community institutions, digital technology, social workers, youth, and religious leadership, and grounded in systems theory and the right to food.

Collectively, these studies show social workers operating as evaluators and analysts of Egypt's food-related social protection architecture, with Yousef (2023) approaching the critical-structural lens advocated by international nutritional social work. In effect, the Egyptian macro literature evaluates the delivery system of nutritional security, and the questions it raises about targeting, adequacy, and conditionality are precisely the questions that a humanistic nutritional social work policy agenda would formalize.

Theme 5: Professional Education and Conceptual Development

A final cross-cutting theme touches the very heart of the profession: what kind of profession do we seek, and which human being does it serve? Amer and Amer (2024) combined a knowledge evaluation with an analysis of relevant textbooks and a proposed instructional program, thereby diagnosing a curricular gap in maternal and child nutrition guidance. Abdel Azim (2017) recommended embedding a sound food culture within study programs. Yousef (2023) called for the scientific development of academics and students, the training of field practitioners in the proposed methodology, and doctoral-level intervention research. Al-Harishi

(2021) similarly urged the expansion of child food security programs across institutions serving children. These calls parallel the modernization agenda for Egyptian social work education articulated by Soliman and Koran (2025). Nevertheless, none of the twelve studies employs the term nutritional social work or engages in its international framework; this absence itself constitutes a finding of the present review. Table 2 summarizes the mapping of the corpus onto the five domains of the nutritional social work framework.

Table 2

Mapping the Corpus onto the Domains of Nutritional Social Work

Domain of nutritional social work	Egyptian evidence	Observed gaps
Direct practice (micro)	Al-Harishi (2021); El-Ezaby (2023); Amer and Amer (2024)	Small samples; awareness-oriented outcomes; no validated dietary or food security measures
Community action (mezzo)	Ismail (2014); El-Gabaly (2022); Ibrahim (2006); El-Sady (2014); Awais et al. (2025)	Awareness orientation; limited attention to food justice and structural determinants
Policy development (macro)	El-Desouky (2013); Abdel Azim (2017); Abdel Galil and El-Deeb (2020); Yousef (2023)	Descriptive evaluation; no longitudinal analysis of policy impacts on nutrition outcomes
Research	The twelve studies constituting this corpus	Arabic-language publication; weak international indexing and visibility
Education	Amer and Amer (2024); Abdel Azim (2017); Yousef (2023)	No explicit curricular framework; the term nutritional social work is absent

Note. Domains follow Dylan and Cammaert (2022). No study in the corpus uses the term nutritional social work or cites its international framework.

Discussion: Toward Nutritional Social Work in Egypt

Viewed through the framework of Dylan and Cammaert (2022), the Egyptian corpus is remarkable for its breadth yet fragmented in its integration. All five domains of nutritional social work are represented: direct practice (Theme 1), community action (Themes 2 and 3), policy development (Theme 4), research (the corpus itself), and education (Theme 5). What is missing is the integration concept. Egyptian scholarship proceeds under local idioms-food security, consumption rationalization, and consumer culture-without recognizing, or being recognized within, the international consolidation of nutritional social work. This situation is

not unique to Egypt; it is the expected condition of a national literature published primarily in Arabic, and it is precisely the condition that a deliberately bilingual research agenda can remedy.

This temporal pattern reinforces the present interpretation and brings it closer to lived reality. Half of the corpus was published in the five years after 2020, and its two most recent contributions are also its most ambitious: a quantitative assessment of household needs (Awais et al., 2025) and a geopolitical framework for professional action (Yousef, 2023). This trajectory parallels the international consolidation of nutritional social work during the same period-a consolidation accelerated by the pandemic-era intensification of food insecurity in high-income countries. The Egyptian field is therefore not lagging in substance; it lags in the name that could give it coherence, in methodological rigor, and in the language through which its findings reach others.

This pattern also recurs in international findings. Burgess and Shier (2018) concluded that social work addresses the food insecurity experienced by people primarily through remedial and community-level responses rather than structural transformation; the Egyptian literature similarly priorities awareness-raising, needs assessment, and programme delivery over rights-based or food-justice approaches, with Yousef (2023) constituting a partial exception through its geopolitical framing. Nevertheless, Egyptian scholarship exhibits notable strengths. It engages the state's social protection apparatus-including ration cards, bread subsidies, and conditional cash transfers-as a legitimate arena of professional practice, reflecting the profession's embeddedness in the Ministry of Social Solidarity and its local units. It also regards civil society as a delivery partner, aligning with international calls for community-anchored food practice. Moreover, it explicitly positions women as household

nutrition managers, consistent with the gendered structure of food responsibility, while leaving the structural analysis of that burden largely underdeveloped.

A second point of convergence with international literature concerns the profession's structural position. Egyptian studies show social workers delivering and evaluating programmes, and occasionally critiquing them, even though their parameters are defined elsewhere-by ministries, donors, and international wheat markets. Burgess and Shier (2018) observed the same ambivalence in high-income contexts, where social workers administer emergency food provision while rarely challenging the poverty that renders it necessary. An explicit nutritional social work would not abandon the delivery role, which is indispensable in Egypt, but would supplement it with a vocabulary that has been missing: rights, structural analysis, and community food sovereignty, as supplied by the international framework.

The way this body of research was conducted, however, places a limit on the conclusions it can support. Of the twelve studies, seven are descriptive surveys; the only intervention study is based on twenty participants (Al-Harishi, 2021); two studies have fewer than fifty participants (El-Ezaby, 2023, n = 46; Abdel Azim, 2017, n = 13); and ten studies are confined to a single governorate. In most cases, researchers developed their own instruments, and no study used internationally validated measures of household food insecurity or dietary quality. Publication is almost exclusively in Arabic in national journals-a pattern consistent with Megahead (2016)-which restricts citation, replication, and integration into international evidence syntheses. Such limitations are familiar in an emerging field; they are best read as a maturation agenda rather than as a judgment that diminishes the value of the work already done.

Gaps and Future Research Agenda

Reflecting on the existing literature, five gaps emerge, each with corresponding research priorities. The first is terminological and conceptual: adopting and localizing nutritional social work would provide the existing strands with a shared vocabulary and connect them to international theory. The second is methodology: the field requires intervention and evaluation research, including experimental and quasi-experimental designs, mixed methods, longitudinal follow-ups of Takaful and Karama cohorts, and multi-site samples, alongside validated instruments for measuring food security and dietary intake. The third concerns populations: older adults, persons with disabilities, street children, and migrant and refugee communities-all groups at elevated nutritional risk in Egypt-are absent from the corpus, as is the diet-mental health interface now emerging in international clinical social work.

Given Egypt's demographic transition, the silence on older adults is particularly consequential: the Karama component explicitly targets citizens aged 65 and above, yet no study examines their nutritional situation or the social work response surrounding this growing caseload. Similarly, the country's substantial refugee and displaced populations, whose food security is largely managed through civil society and international organization channels in which Egyptian social workers participate, remain unstudied. The fourth is theoretical: critical, anti-oppressive, ecofeminist, and food justice perspectives (Dylan & Cammaert, 2022) have no counterpart in Egyptian literature, leaving the structural determinants of the double burden-including gender, poverty, and market power-undertheorised. The fifth is infrastructural: the unified beneficiary database proposed by Awais et al. (2025) exemplifies the data systems required to link needs assessment with programme design and evaluation; without such systems, programme scale-up risks reproducing the targeting problems documented more than a decade ago (El-Desouky, 2013). To these may be added a visibility gap: bilingual publication and active indexing would bring Egyptian evidence into international syntheses from which it is currently absent.

Limitations

This review has limitations that qualify its findings. The corpus is small, reflecting both the nascent state of the field and the review's concentration on Arabic-language outlets; English-language studies of food-related social work in Egypt conducted by non-Egyptian scholars may therefore have been missed. Screening was conducted by a single reviewer rather than by two independent reviewers, increasing the risk of selection error. Grey literature beyond dissertations and conference proceedings was not systematically searched, and the electronic archives of several Egyptian journals are incomplete; relevant records may thus have been overlooked. Charting relied on the full texts available to the reviewer, and no quality appraisal was undertaken. In keeping with scoping review conventions, the findings characterize the field rather than validate the effectiveness of the interventions described. In addition, the interpretation of Arabic-language studies, including the translation of titles and key findings reported here, is the reviewer's own, and nuances of the original terminology may not be fully preserved.

Conclusion and Implications

Two decades of Egyptian scholarship demonstrate that social work in Egypt already practices elements of nutritional social work. The twelve studies charted here intervene with children and youth (Al-Harishi, 2021; El-Ezaby, 2023; Amer and Amer, 2024), educate women and students as household consumers (Ismail, 2014; El-Gabaly, 2022), build the capacity of civil society organizations (Ibrahim, 2006; El-Sady, 2014; Awais et al., 2025), evaluate the state's subsidy and cash-transfer architecture (El-Desouky, 2013; Abdel Azim, 2017; Abdel

Galil and El-Deeb, 2020), and theorize the geopolitics of food (Yousef, 2023). This engagement spans every level of practice and every classical method of the profession; it has accelerated markedly since 2021; and it is anchored in the institutions through which food reaches Egyptian households. Its weaknesses are equally clear: descriptive designs, small and single-site samples, Arabic-only publication, and the absence of an integrating framework under which these separate strands could accumulate into a recognizable body of knowledge.

These implications are actionable. At the practice level, social work units in schools, universities, health facilities, and local social solidarity directorates can institutionalize food security screening within routine assessment and adopt structured, evidence-based nutrition education programs, such as that piloted by Al-Harishi (2021) and those proposed by El-Gabaly (2022) and El-Ezaby (2023). In education, faculties of social work can infuse nutritional content across the casework, group work, community organization, and policy curricula, responding to the knowledge gaps documented by Amer and Amer (2024) and to the modernization agenda advanced by Soliman and Koran (2025). At the policy level, the findings support nutrition-sensitive refinements to Takaful and Karama (Abdel Galil & El-Deeb, 2020), improved targeting and governance of in-kind subsidies (El-Desouky, 2013), strengthened consumer protection (Abdel Azim, 2017), and the unified household database proposed by Awais et al. (2025). In research, priority should be given to intervention studies with validated outcome measures, conducted across multiple governorates and reported bilingually. Dissemination matters as much as design: each practice, education, and policy measure should be accompanied by bilingual publication so that Egyptian evidence informs both national policy and international scholarship.

This review makes three contributions. First, it brings together, for the first time, Egyptian social work research on food and nutrition, transforming a scattered national literature

into a mapped evidence base that practitioners, educators, and policymakers can consult. Second, it is the first application of the nutritional social work framework to Egyptian scholarship, showing that the framework's five domains are already populated even though the term itself is absent. Third, it outlines a research agenda whose components-intervention designs, validated instruments, unexamined populations, critical theory, and data infrastructure-are specific enough to guide doctoral projects, special journal issues, and cross-sector partnerships. The same mapping exercise can be replicated for other national literatures in which food-related social work practice precedes its conceptualization, making the Egyptian case both a methodological template and a substantive finding.

The Egyptian experience is not confined to its local context. Many developing societies, including those of Southeast Asia, confront the same configuration: a heavy double burden of malnutrition, extensive food subsidies or cash transfers, and a social service workforce stretched across state and civil society institutions. The parallels are concrete rather than incidental: conditional cash transfer programs built on the same design logic as Takaful and Karama-such as the Philippines' Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program-face the same questions of nutrition-sensitive design and beneficiary graduation that the Egyptian evaluative literature raises (Abdel Galil and El-Deeb, 2020). A localized Egyptian nutritional social work would therefore generate evidence of direct transferable relevance wherever food policy and social work intersect. With more than 107 million people, a rapidly growing research community, and a profession positioned at every level of the food system, Egypt offers strategic ground on which nutritional social work can move from implicit practice to explicit specialization, while advancing the second Sustainable Development Goal of zero hunger and the food security targets of Egypt Vision 2030.

Declarations

Contributor Statement: I, Ibrahim Sabry Ahmed, am the sole author of this manuscript. I conceived and designed the study, performed the literature review, developed the theoretical framework, collected and analyzed the data, wrote the complete manuscript, and critically reviewed and finalized the text for publication. No part of the research design, data analysis, or manuscript preparation was undertaken or assisted by any other individual, organization, or commercial writing/editing service.

Statement on Artificial Intelligence: The author declared that no artificial intelligence (AI) or generative AI-assisted technologies were used in the searching, summarizing, drafting, analysis, or generation of any content, text, data, or figures within this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Ethical Approval: This conceptual study involved no human or animal participants and therefore required no ethical approval.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests: The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

Abdel Azim, I. N. (2017). The adequacy of the monthly social security assistance program for satisfying food needs under current variables. *Journal of Social Work*, *57*(5), 101-176. https://doi.org/10.21608/egjsw.2017.179617 [In Arabic].

Abdel Galil, E. M., & El-Deeb, M. N. D. (2020). The social and economic return of social protection programs: An applied study of the Takaful and Karama program in Assiut.

Journal of the Faculty of Social Work for Social Studies and Research, 21, 415-450. https://doi.org/ 10.21608/jfss.2020.119309 [In Arabic].

Al-Harishi, J. A. F. M. A. (2021). The effectiveness of a professional social work intervention program for achieving food security for children. *Journal of the Faculty of Social Work for Social Studies and Research, 22*(5), 329-359. https://doi.org/10.21608/jfss.2021.145838 [In Arabic].

Amer, A. I. M. I., & Amer, O. M. A. M. (2024). The cognitive evaluation of social work students regarding the health and nutritional guidance provided to mothers of infants. *Cairo Journal of Social Work*, 42, 7-48. https://doi.org/10.21608/cjsw.2024.254266.1105 [In Arabic].

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *8*(1), 19-32. https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616

Awais, M. A. A., Abdel Azim, I. N., & Ali, A. M. (2025). Estimating the basic nutritional needs of low-income families. *Journal of Research in Developmental Social Work*, *8*(2), 229-245. https://doi.org/10.21608/baat.2025.369467.1205 [In Arabic].

Burgess, D., & Shier, M. L. (2018). Food insecurity and social work: A comprehensive literature review. *International Social Work, 61*(6), 826-842. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872816672519

Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics. (2024). *Egypt population clock*. https://www.capmas.gov.eg

Concern Worldwide, & Welthungerhilfe. (2025). *Global Hunger Index 2025: Egypt*. https://www.globalhungerindex.org/egypt.html

Dylan, A., & Cammaert, J. (2022). Nutritional social work: What it is and why it matters. *Journal of Social Work*, *22*(2), 323-344. https://doi.org/10.1177/14680173211008367

Egypt State Information Service. (2025). *Takaful and Karama: Egypt's social safety net*. https://www.sis.gov.eg

El-Desouky, S. I. (2013). Subsidy policies as a mechanism for achieving food security for limited-income groups: An applied study of ration card beneficiaries. In *Proceedings of the 26th International Scientific Conference of Social Work: Social work and the development of informal settlements* (pp. 3745-3871). Faculty of Social Work, Helwan University. [in Arabic].

El-Ezaby, G. A. (2023). The role of professional practitioners in confronting the negative effects of malnutrition among university youth. *Egyptian Scientific Journal of Social Work, 1*(1), 241-269. https://doi.org/10.21608/ales.2023.418979 [In Arabic].

El-Gabaly, H. G. K. (2022). The role of group work programs in developing awareness of consumption rationalization culture among preparatory-stage students. *Journal of the Faculty of Social Work for Social Studies and Research, 27*(2), 693-744. https://doi.org/10.21608/jfss.2022.346065 [In Arabic].

El-Sady, R. M. (2014). *The availability of institutional capacity-building requirements for non-governmental organizations and the achievement of food security* [Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Helwan University] [in Arabic].

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2008). *The state of food insecurity in the world 2008: High food prices and food security - Threats and opportunities*. https://www.fao.org/3/i0161e/i0161e.pdf

Ibrahim, W. Y. (2006). The contributions of non-governmental organizations in confronting food crises and problems to achieve food security. *Journal of Studies in Social Work and Humanities, 21*(4), 1941-2006. [In Arabic].

Ismail, F. A. A. (2014). The role of group work from a cognitive-behavioral perspective in developing women's consumer culture: A descriptive analytical study. *Journal of Social Work*, 52, 205-257. [In Arabic].

Jovanovic, N., & Glauber, J. W. (2024). *Egypt increases price of subsidized bread for the first time since 1989: Implications for nutrition and food security* [Blog post]. International Food Policy Research Institute. https://www.ifpri.org/blog/egypt-increases-price-of-subsidized-bread-for-the-first-time-since-1989-implications-for-nutrition-and-food-security

Levac, D., Colquhoun, H., & O'Brien, K. K. (2010). Scoping studies: Advancing the methodology. *Implementation Science*, *5*, Article 69. https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-5-69

Megahead, H. A. (2016). Research on social work practice in Egypt and the Arab World. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *27*(3), 358-365. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731516662319

Peters, M. D. J., Marnie, C., Tricco, A. C., Pollock, D., Munn, Z., Alexander, L., McInerney, P., Godfrey, C. M., & 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

Soliman, H. H., & Abd Elmegied, H. S. (2010). The challenges of modernization of social work education in developing countries: The case of Egypt. *International Social Work, 53*(1), 101-114. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872809348951

Soliman, H., & Koran, J. (2025). Modernization of social work education in Egypt. *Social Work Education*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2025.2552214

Tricco, A. C., Lillie, E., Zarin, W., O'Brien, K. K., Colquhoun, H., Levac, D., Moher, D., Peters, M. D. J., Horsley, T., Weeks, L., Hempel, S., Akl, E. A., Chang, C., McGowan, J., Stewart, L., Hartling, L., Aldcroft, A., Wilson, M. G., Garritty, C., Straus, S. E. (2018). PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR): Checklist and explanation. *Annals of Internal Medicine, 169*(7), 467-473. https://doi.org/10.7326/M18-0850

UNICEF. (2024). *Nutrition in Egypt*. https://www.unicef.org/egypt/nutrition

World Bank. (2026). *The World Bank in Egypt: Overview*. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/egypt/overview

World Health Organization. (2024). *Prevalence of obesity among adults, age-standardized: Global Health Observatory data*. https://www.who.int/data/gho

Yousef, A. A. H. M. (2023). A social work methodology for the three-dimensional confrontation of food wars. *Egyptian Scientific Journal of Social Work, 1*(1), 226-240. https://doi.org/10.21608/ales.2023.418977 [In Arabic].