

ACCULTURATIVE STRESS, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADAPTATION AMONG MIGRATED STUDENTS

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KEYWORDS

Acculturative Stress, Social Support, Psychological Adjustment, Migrated Students

CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Noor, A., & Amin, Z. (2025). Acculturative stress, social support and psychological adaptation among migrated students. Pakistan Journal of Positive Psychology, 2(3), 26-30.

ARTICLE DETAILS:

Received on 15 Jul, 2025
Accepted on 13 Sep, 2025
Published on 25 Sep, 2025

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to examine the association between acculturative stress, social support and psychological adaptation in migrated students in Gujranwala, Pakistan. The correlational research design was embraced, and 120 students at the university (70 females and 50 males) that live in the hostels were involved in the study as purposive sample. Such standardized tools as Culture Shock Questionnaire (Mumford, 1998), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988), and Psychological Adaptation Scale were utilized (Franken et al., 2023). The findings showed that acculturative stress was significantly negatively related to both social support and psychological adaptation but positively related to social support. The variables of gender across the study variables were found to be statistically insignificant. The findings are indicative that increased social support is a key buffer to the negative psychological impact of acculturative stress that leads to smoother adaptation in migrated students. The study emphasizes the need to enhance social support systems within the academic institutions to improve the psychological well-being as well as adaptation of students who are culturally transitioning.

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of international migration is one of the most common features of the modern society in highly globalized world. When people and families move to another country and a different cultural context, they frequently face a process that is called acculturation and it consists of adjusting to the values, norms, and practices of the new cultural context (Malota et al., 2024; Riaz et al., 2025). Acculturation may introduce various stressors and problems, all of which are known as acculturative stress, and may affect the psychological well-being of individuals. The capacity to depend on the social support is essential in enabling migrant students to conquer these challenges. The psychological and emotional stress that individuals face when they seek to get familiarized with a new cultural setting is referred to as acculturative stress (Putri et al., 2024). It occurs when individuals change or immigrate out of their own culture to another one and experience challenges in understanding and assimilating in the habits, values, language, and social aspects of the new culture. This concept of acculturative stress was proposed as an alternative to the word culture shock (Oberg, 1960). This stress is brought about by the pressure to blend with the new ethnicity, first language and cultural norms of the host country. The phenomenon

is common among immigrants, refugees, international students, and other individuals in cultural adjustments (Gyasi-Gyamrah et al., 2024).

The current study identifies the importance of the acculturative stress, psychological adaptation, and social support in migrated students. Acculturative stress can be defined as the difficulties that are faced by individuals settling down to a new culture or environment (Berry, 2006). Migration students must be able to adapt in a psychological way, or their survival in the new environment will be impossible (Riaz & Rafique, 2019). Social support is very important in reducing the effects of acculturation stress and enabling psychological adaptation in migrant students (Abe, 2009). It might be a worthy input in both basic research field and applied research. The present research findings can contribute to the increased body of research work through investigation of the connection that exists between three significant constructs i.e. acculturative stress, psychological adaptation, and social support among migrated students. Much has been done concerning acculturative stress, psychological adjustments, and social support amid migrated students but predominantly in a western setting (Kristiana et al., 2022; Lashari et al., 2023). Previous studies offer valuable insights into the experiences of migrant students, the challenges they face during acculturation, and the role of social support in facilitating their psychological adaptation (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2020; Makarova & Sidler, 2023). After reviewing the studies, it is found that very little work has been done in Pakistani context. However, the current research was conducted on acculturative stress, psychological adaptation and social support in the Gujranwala city which is the 5th biggest city of Pakistan which was gap in indigenous context. On these basis, the following objectives were formulated;

1. To study the relationship between acculturative stress, social support and psychological adaptation among migrated students.
2. To study gender differences in acculturative stress, social support and psychological adaptation among migrated students.

II. METHOD

Participants

Correlation research design was used. It was considered that this design is the best appropriate design for the current research to find psychological changes of acculturative stress and social support in adaptation among migrated students (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 2015). The participants of the study were migrated students taken from hostels of universities by using purposive sampling technique. Migrated students (N = 120) were selected for this research in which 70 females and 50 males were included. The age range was 17 to 22.

Measures

The following instruments were used. [1] Culture Shock Questionnaire (Mumford, 1998). It is a 12-item questionnaire to measure culture shock. It is applicable to analyze differences in cultures and embrace new ways in which individuals conduct themselves, as well as to understand human nature better. The rating is done on a five-point Likert-type response format. [2]. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social support (Zimet et al., 1988). This scale is based on 12 items. It is a brief tool, which is used to evaluate how the individual perceives the support of three resources namely family, friends as well as a significant other. All of them are rated using a seven-point Likert-type response scale. [3]. Psychological Adaptation Scale (Franken et al., 2023). It is a 10-item scale. The ratings are done on a five-point Likert-type response scale. The scale is applied in the standardization of adaptation assessment and create an appreciation of associations between associated health outcomes, e.g., quality of life and psychological health.

Procedure

The participants were contacted at different hostels in Gujranwala. Every respondent was given a sheet of information on which he/she could get comprehensive details on what the research is, and a consent form to ensure that he/she is volunteering to be part of the research. The correlational method was used to analyze the data and make conclusions. Before processing the questionnaire, the researcher explained the whole procedure in detail to prevent misperception. Furthermore, the questionnaire was provided in an envelope. This helps in

ensuring confidentiality. In the study, we understood that acculturation causes negative effects among students in which stress is the leading cause. Social support plays a crucial role for the migrated students to adjust in the new environment. In the current study, data collection was conducted through questionnaires. The questionnaires were given to both male and female students.

III. RESULTS

Table 1: Psychometric Properties of Study Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α
Acculturative Stress	10.70	4.21	4-18	.78
Social Support	43.37	7.39	27-58	.76
Psychological Adaptation	28.83	4.89	18-38	.72

Table1 shows psychometric properties of the scales. Results show that all scales have satisfactory alpha reliability coefficients (range from 0.72 to 0.78).

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Acculturative Stress, Social Support and Psychological Adaptation among Migrated Students

Variables	1	2	3
1. Acculturative Stress	--	-.28*	-.40*
2. Social Support		--	.76*
3. Psychological Adaptation			--

* $p < .01$

Table 2 shows relationship between acculturative stress, social support and psychological adaptation among migrated students. Results show that acculturative stress has significant negative relationship with social support $r(118) = -.28, p < .01$, and psychological adaptation $r(118) = -.40, p < .01$. Social support has significant positive relationship with psychological adaptation $r(118) = .76, p < .05$.

Table 3: Gender Differences in Acculturative Stress, Social Support and Psychological Adaptation among Migrated Students

Variables	Males		Females		<i>t</i> (118)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Acculturative stress	10.08	4.19	11.29	4.18	1.57	.11	.01
Psychological adaptation	29.22	4.74	28.46	4.92	.85	.39	.12
Social support	43.50	7.06	43.25	7.75	.17	.85	.15

Table 3 shows gender differences in acculturative stress, social support and psychological adaptation among migrated students. Results are non-significant on acculturative stress $t(118) = 1.57, p > .05$, social support $t(118) = .17, p > .05$, and psychological adaptation $t(118) = .85, p > .05$, among migrated students.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study revealed a significant negative relationship between acculturative stress and both social support and psychological adaptation among migrated students, indicating that as stress related to acculturation increases, the students' psychological well-being and adaptation decrease. This comes in line with the acculturation framework of Berry (2006), which assumes that acculturation cannot be successful when the stress is high during the cultural transition. These findings are also in line with recent research by Assafuah (2024) and Mulyadi et al. (2024) that reported that students with cultural and linguistic barriers tend to report a higher level of anxiety, homesickness, and isolation. Such stressors interrupt emotional stability and impair adaptive coping processes in situations where an individual feel that he or she is not well supported by his or her peers or

institutions. Therefore, the research validates the role of both social and institutional settings in alleviating the stress and facilitating a less challenging psychological adjustment throughout the migration process.

The research also established a high positive relationship that exists between social support and psychological adaptation, which indicates that the higher the perceived support of family members, peers, and other influential people, the better the psychological adaptation of migrated students. This result is in line with previous empirical studies by Bekiros et al. (2022) and Garmendia et al. (2023), who noticed that social support is a buffering factor against stress and emotional burnout. The support networks mean a sense of belongingness and validation that overcomes the ill impacts of the acculturative challenges. This might be more acute in the Pakistani case, where collectivist cultural beliefs focus on interdependence and community ties. The findings suggest that higher education institutions and policymakers ought to emphasize on designing peer tutoring programs, counseling facilities, and inclusive student environments that enhance social connectedness and resiliency in students.

Lastly, the difference in gender in the stresses of acculturating, social support, and psychological adaptation was observed to be not statistically significant meaning that both the male and female migrated students are subject to the same pattern of stress and adaptation. This finding is in contrast to the previous assumptions that female students may have higher acculturative stress because of the influence of sociocultural expectations (Antoniadou and Quinlan, 2020), whereas it fits in the newly evolving literature that globalization and escalating social media connectivity are closing these gender differences (Gyasi-Gyamerah et al., 2024; Riaz et al., 2025). The results indicate that the quality of the support systems of migrated students affects more issues related to adaptation of the latter than gender. In general, the paper highlights the importance of the role of social and emotional resources in supporting psychological adaptation, and it can be of immense value to universities to develop culturally responsive support systems to enhance the well-being of students.

V. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to determine the complex association between the acculturative stress and social support with psychological adjustment as well as to determine the gender differences among the variables of the study. The results illuminate the complexity of the acculturation process and the consequences of acculturation to the adaptation of migrated students. The findings were in line with the objectives.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The author received no funding from any organizations.

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