

Sociodemographic Determinants of Acculturation Stress Among International University Students

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Published: 29 June 2022

To cite this article (APA): Talwar, P., Rethinasamy, S., Abd Ghani, K., Tan, K. W., & Mat Yusoff, N. F. (2022). Sociodemographic Determinants of Acculturation Stress Among International University Students. *EDUCATUM Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(1), 23-30. <https://doi.org/10.37134/ejoss.vol8.1.3.2022>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.37134/ejoss.vol8.1.3.2022>

Abstract

The study attempted to identify which sociodemographic factors predict acculturation stress and also to examine the levels of acculturation stress amongst 208 international students enrolled in a Malaysian university. A convenience sampling technique was implemented for data collection by utilizing a self-reported questionnaire. As for the sociodemographic factors predict acculturation stress multiple regression analyses demonstrated that among the independent variables, family support, year of study, difficulties in comprehending lectures, and strains of relationship with boyfriend/girlfriend had significant predictive effects on acculturation stress. Young and male international students expressed significantly higher levels of acculturation stress than their older and female counterparts. Students who acknowledged strong family support and were single depicted lesser acculturative stress compared to those with inadequate support and were in a romantic relationship.

As for the levels of acculturation stress, findings revealed that acculturation stress was relatively high amongst most of the international students. Perceptions of discrimination and rejection, as well as feelings of homesickness and fear were portrayed by large numbers of students.

Keywords: Acculturation stress, Acculturation factors, International students, Study abroad, Sociodemographic correlates

INTRODUCTION

Studying abroad has become an increasingly popular choice for higher education, among aspiring students. In keeping with this trend, it has been noted that growing numbers of foreign students, particularly from the Middle East, Africa and several parts of Asia, are likewise pursuing their higher education in Malaysia (Azman & Abd. Aziz, 2006). Overseas education may provide many benefits; however, it can also pose challenges to students as they have to adjust to a new environment, a different culture, achieve proficiency in a new language, and overcome feelings of isolation and acculturative stress (Jeong et al., 2011; Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Iorga et al., 2020).

There has been a steady increase in the enrollment of international students in Malaysian universities over the last two decades. In order to enrich the educational experience of foreign students, issues pertaining to the transitional and adjustment difficulties of this vulnerable demographic needs to be addressed. Prior research has indicated that international students may experience many challenges as a result of language and cultural barriers, academic and financial difficulties, interpersonal problems, racial discrimination, loss of social support, alienation, depression and homesickness (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Nguyen, Tam & Serik, 2019). Any of these issues, in due course, could affect their acculturation process and heighten acculturative stress.