



Impact of Migration and Acculturation on the Psychological Well-Being of Migrants

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of migration and acculturation on psychological well-being. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected from 170 participants residing across Europe, the Gulf, Asia, America, and Oceania through an online survey. Descriptive and non-parametric analyses were conducted to examine differences in well-being across acculturation strategies. Results indicated a significant difference in psychological well-being among acculturation strategies, with those adopting integration reporting the highest well-being scores. Additionally, strong cultural integration and cultural identity lead to better psychosocial well-being. Findings underscore that bicultural adaptation fosters emotional resilience, self-acceptance, and life satisfaction among migrants. The study highlights the importance of culturally inclusive environments and social support systems in promoting positive mental health outcomes among Pakistani migrants.

Keywords: Migration, Acculturation, Pakistani migrants, Bicultural adaptation, Acculturative stress

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a complex process involving major social, cultural, and psychological transitions. For migrants, particularly young adults and refugees, relocating to a new country presents both opportunities and challenges that significantly influence their mental and emotional well-being. Adapting to a new language, culture, and social environment can lead to acculturative stress, a specific type of stress that arises from the process of cultural adjustment and identity negotiation. Migrants often face additional challenges such as racial discrimination, language barriers, social isolation, and uncertainty about legal or economic stability. These combined stressors increase vulnerability to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. Understanding how migrants navigate these experiences is essential for fostering resilience and promoting healthy adaptation in new cultural contexts (Sanchez-Aragon *et al.*, 2020).

Acculturation plays a central role in shaping migrants' psychological well-being. It refers to the process through which individuals adapt psychologically and behaviorally to a new cultural setting. Berry's model of acculturation identifies four key strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Among these, integration maintaining one's cultural heritage while also engaging with the host society has been shown to result in more positive psychological outcomes. Migrants who integrate typically report higher life satisfaction, stronger self-esteem, and a greater sense of belonging, as they can draw strength from both cultures. Conversely, marginalization and separation often lead to isolation and identity conflict, negatively impacting mental health and social adjustment (Ward *et al.*, 2021).

For young migrants, especially adolescents and early adults, the acculturation process can be even more challenging due to its intersection with identity development. This period is marked by the exploration of personal values and goals, and when combined with the pressures of adapting to a new culture, it can result in identity distress, difficulty establishing a stable sense of self. Experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, and economic hardship further intensify these struggles. However, community support, cultural pride, and inclusive environments act as protective factors that reduce stress and enhance emotional well-being (Wagaman *et al.*, 2022).

The relationship between acculturation and quality of life is closely linked to how successfully migrants adapt while preserving their cultural roots. Maintaining cultural continuity while participating in the host society leads to higher life satisfaction and emotional balance (Prapas and Mavreas, 2019). Conversely, excessive pressure to abandon one's native culture or experiences of cultural rejection can undermine psychological well-being. Factors such as age, gender, education, and duration of stay influence how migrants experience and respond to acculturation stress. Those with higher education and employment opportunities tend to display greater adaptability and lower stress levels due to stronger coping mechanisms and social integration.

Psychological well-being itself is a broad and multidimensional concept encompassing emotional, social, and spiritual aspects. In many collectivist and Indigenous cultural frameworks, well-being is not limited to personal happiness but extends to family, community, spirituality, and a sense of belonging (Biles *et al.*, 2023). This holistic perspective is particularly relevant for migrant populations, where maintaining cultural and social bonds often serves as a key source of strength and stability. Migrants who retain close connections with their ethnic communities generally report higher happiness and reduced distress, even when facing the challenges of adaptation.

Globally, migration has deep economic, social, and cultural implications for both origin and destination countries. Although public debate often focuses on competition for resources or cultural tensions, migration can also enrich societies by promoting diversity, innovation, and intercultural understanding (Šedovič, 2024). However, the psychological dimension of migration remains less explored in many policy contexts. Migrants' subjective well-being encompassing emotional satisfaction, resilience, and perceived happiness is shaped not only by socioeconomic conditions but also by how welcomed and included they feel within host communities.

For South Asian migrants, including those from Pakistan, migration experiences are profoundly influenced by strong family structures, religious beliefs, and communal values. Upon migration to Western societies, they often encounter cultural contrasts that can lead to cultural dissonance and psychological strain (Pandey *et al.*, 2024). Nevertheless, many South Asian migrants rely on faith-based coping strategies and intra-community support systems to maintain stability. Religious involvement and adherence to traditional values serve as protective factors, helping them overcome discrimination and adapt more effectively to new environments.

Overall, the impact of migration and acculturation on psychological well-being depends largely on how individuals balance their original and new cultural identities. Migrants who adopt bicultural strategies embracing both their heritage and host cultures experience greater life satisfaction, adaptability, and emotional stability. Social and economic factors such as education, employment, and family support further strengthen this adjustment process. Therefore, creating culturally sensitive mental health services and inclusive policies is essential to support migrants' psychological well-being and successful integration into host societies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the impact of migration and cultural adaptation on the psychosocial well-being of Pakistani migrants aged 24–30 years living abroad. This design was chosen to collect data at a single point in time, enabling efficient analysis of the relationship between acculturation strategies and psychological well-being among a geographically diverse population.

The study sample consisted of 170 Pakistani migrants residing in regions such as Europe, the Gulf countries, America, Asia, and Oceania. Participants were recruited through a snowball sampling technique, which allowed the researcher to reach a dispersed migrant community via online networks. Inclusion criteria required participants to be Pakistani by origin, aged between 24 and 30 years, residing abroad for at least six months, and willing to provide informed consent. Individuals outside this age range, those currently in Pakistan, or with incomplete responses were excluded to ensure data accuracy and relevance.

Data were collected online using Google Forms, ensuring accessibility and confidentiality. The questionnaire comprised three main sections. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations summarized demographic data and acculturation patterns. To test the study hypotheses, non-parametric statistical tests were applied due to the non-normal distribution of variables. The Kruskal-Wallis H test compared psychosocial well-being across the four acculturation strategies.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was granted by the Departmental Review Committee. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No personal identifiers such as names or IP addresses were collected. All participants provided digital informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequence. The study adhered strictly to ethical principles of respect, privacy, and autonomy throughout the data collection process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that most participants (62.94%) were postgraduate degree holders, followed by 22.94% with undergraduate qualifications. Only a small portion had intermediate, doctoral, or other forms of education. This

Table 1: Educational level of the respondents

Education Level	F	%
Postgraduate	107	62.94
Undergraduate	39	22.94
Intermediate	9	5.29
Ph.D.	8	4.71
Other	7	4.12
Total	170	100

These findings are consistent with prior studies indicating that educational attainment predicts smoother cultural adaptation and lower acculturative stress among migrants (Bashir *et al.*, 2022; Jibeen, 2010; Ward *et al.*, 2021).

Table 2: Employment status of the respondents

Employment Status	F	%
Employed	101	59.4
Student	45	26.5
Unemployed	18	10.6
Homemaker/House wife	2	1.2
Other	4	2.3
Total	170	100

proportion of employed individuals indicates that many respondents were economically active and possibly better adjusted to the host environment. These results align with prior findings that economic participation enhances migrants' psychosocial adjustment and sense of belonging (Kuo, 2014; Riaz and Rafique, 2025). Conversely, unemployment has been linked to acculturative stress and diminished life satisfaction (Ward *et al.*, 2021).

Table 3: Marital status of the respondents

Marital Status	F	%
Married	103	60.6
Single	61	35.9
Divorced	5	2.9
Other	1	0.6
Total	170	100

more independent, may face challenges related to isolation or the absence of familial support networks. The dominance of married respondents suggests that family structures play an important role in emotional adjustment and mental health stability among migrants. These findings echo prior research suggesting that marital and family support significantly enhance migrants' psychosocial well-being (Balidemaj, 2018; Hjellset *et al.*, 2019). Conversely, single or divorced migrants may face higher risks of social isolation and psychological distress due to limited emotional networks.

Table 4: Acculturation Strategies Used by Migrants

Strategy	F	%
Integration	111	65.29
Marginalization	16	9.41
Assimilation	10	5.88
Separation	11	6.47
Total	170	100

mental health outcomes, as it allows individuals to benefit from both cultural systems. Migrants who integrate tend to experience lower levels of cultural stress, better social adjustment, and higher life satisfaction. On the other hand, those who marginalize or separate may struggle with isolation and reduced psychological well-being. According to Berry's (1997) model, integration promotes positive mental health outcomes by fostering bicultural competence and social inclusion. Consistent with this framework, previous studies found that migrants who adopt integration report higher life satisfaction and lower acculturative stress (Choy *et al.*, 2021; Wu *et al.*, 2018; Madina and Ahmad, 2023, Birtel and Mitchell, 2023). Conversely, marginalization and separation are often associated with isolation and reduced well-being.

Table 5: Acculturation Immersion Levels of Migrants

Immersion Level	F	%
ESI Higher Immersion	120	70.59
DSI Higher Immersion	38	22.35
Equal Immersion	12	7.06
Total	170	100

sense of identity and belonging, serving as a psychological anchor during migration. However, a smaller proportion's engagement with the host culture shows that some individuals actively participate in new cultural systems, promoting cross-cultural competence. The limited number of participants with equal immersion suggests that achieving a balanced bicultural identity is less common but potentially the most psychologically beneficial

educational distribution suggests that the sample predominantly consists of highly educated individuals, which may positively influence their ability to adapt to new environments. Education often provides migrants with better communication skills, cross-cultural understanding, and coping strategies, all factors that can enhance psychological resilience and well-being. Thus, the high level of education among respondents likely contributes to smoother cultural integration and reduced acculturative stress.

Table 2 shows that the majority of migrants (59.4%) were employed, while 26.5% were students. A smaller number were unemployed (10.6%) or engaged in household roles. Employment plays a vital role in psychological well-being, as it provides financial stability, purpose, and social interaction. Being employed can help migrants establish social connections within the host community, which promotes a sense of belonging and emotional security. Conversely, unemployment or underemployment may lead to stress, isolation, and decreased well-being. The large

Table 3 indicates that a majority of participants (60.6%) were married, while 35.9% were single. A few respondents were divorced or reported other marital conditions. Marital status can significantly influence psychosocial well-being during migration. Married individuals may benefit from emotional support, companionship, and family cohesion, all of which buffer against cultural stress and loneliness. Single migrants, while potentially

The data in Table 4 reveals that most respondents (65.29%) adopted the Integration strategy, while smaller proportions reported Marginalization (9.41%), Assimilation (5.88%), or Separation (6.47%). This pattern suggests that the majority of participants prefer to maintain their original cultural identity while engaging with the host culture. According to Berry's acculturation framework, integration is linked with positive

Table 5 shows that the majority of participants (70.59%) had higher immersion in their ethnic society (ESI), while 22.35% were more engaged with the dominant society (DSI). Only 7.06% reported equal immersion in both cultures. These results indicate that most migrants maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to their home culture even while adapting to the host environment. This cultural connection provides a

approach. This suggests that although Pakistani migrants preserve strong ties to their cultural roots, relatively few achieve a balanced bicultural identity a condition often linked with optimal psychological outcomes. Maintaining ethnic identity provides emotional grounding and continuity, whereas engagement with the host culture fosters adaptability and competence (Prapas and Mavreas, 2019; Riaz *et al.*, 2019). These results reinforce the notion that bicultural immersion, though less common, may yield the most stable and resilient form of adaptation (Berry, 1997; Wu *et al.*, 2018; Naeem *et al.*, 2020; Qureishi, 2023; Joseph *et al.*, 2023; Hosseini *et al.*, 2024; Liu *et al.*, 2025).

Conclusion

The majority adopted the integration strategy, reflecting a balanced approach to maintaining cultural identity while engaging in the host culture. Results indicated a significant difference in psychological well-being among acculturation strategies, with those adopting integration reporting the highest well-being scores. Additionally, strong cultural integration and cultural identity lead to better psychosocial well-being. Findings underscore that bicultural adaptation fosters emotional resilience, self-acceptance, and life satisfaction among migrants. The study highlights the importance of culturally inclusive environments and social support systems in promoting positive mental health outcomes among Pakistani migrants. It is suggested that government should arrange mental health programs to eradicate psychological issues.

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