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THE SKILL OF ADAPTATION, HANDLING STRESS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT IN MOVING MILLENNIALS TO UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The proposed research is designed to address two major deficits in knowledge regarding the adaptation of students moving from their native place to the Indian university environment, including a lack of information about the impact of shifting on students at different age and course levels and the absence of longitudinal data regarding post-shifting adjustment. The focus of the study is on the emotional, behavioral, and academic adaptation of students, in relation to their level of post-shifting stress and the support provided by their social networks. Participants were 100 newly first year master students to last year doctoral students. Participating students from the first year master students were interviewed shortly after entry, with a second assessment 3 months later, and so were the case for others. Higher levels of stress and lower levels of social support following migration was expected to be associated with poorer adaptation. The proposed research will provide a much-needed window on the initial adaptation of moving students of which information is severely lagging with the Universities.

KEY WORDS: University, Adaptation, Stress, Emotion, Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Recent overviews of the literature mostly which belong to immigrant children in schools in U.S. suggest that most immigrant children adapt successfully (Fuligni, 1998a,b; Hernandez, 1999). However, Kao and Tienda (1995) found that immigrant adolescents had lower self-efficacy and were more alienated from peers than non-immigrants in a large national survey. Academically, immigrant students tend to outperform nonimmigrant students of the same cultural background (Fuligni, 1998a,b; Hernandez & Charney, 1998; Nord & Griffin, 1999; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995), but there is divergence across sociocultural boundaries. Latin American immigrants, for example, have not shown the same achievement advantage as other groups and are more likely to drop out of school (Fuligni, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995). Also, academic performance tends to deteriorate the longer students reside in the U.S. (Barr & Lacey, 1998; Fuligni, 1998b), as poor minority students in particular may assimilate to an urban underclass of peers antithetical to the educational establishment (Zhou, 1997).

Potential antecedents of adjustment in students who move away from their native place include family and peer values, language difficulties, socioeconomic status, family and school expectations, racial and ethnic prejudice, the student's age and temperament, stress related to immigration and loss of social relationships, conditions of migration, ethnic identification, acculturation, biculturalism and student-parent acculturation conflict (Barr & Lacey, 1998; Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Fisher, Jackson, & Villarruel, 1998; Fuligni, 1997; Gil & Vega, 1996; Hernandez & Charney, 1998; Rumbaut, 1997; Zhou, 1997). In general, however, the current data are insufficient and inconclusive for indian scenario.

The focus of the proposed study is on the emotional, behavioral, and academic adjustment of moving millennials, in relation to their exposure to family stress and their availability of social support following shifting from their native place. The hypothesis is that higher levels of family stress and lower levels of social support will be associated with poorer adjustment. Sources of post shifting stress to be examined in the study include general life stress, economic hardship, acculturation conflict, and perceived discrimination.

METHOD

SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

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The current analyses are based on a sub-sample of 100 participants , drawn from a larger study of university students (N = 146). The student participants (58 male, 42 female) were drawn from a population of newly joined Master Students (First Year), Second year Master Students, and Doctoral Students enrolled in University of Hyderabad, Telangana. Students born in the target locations who had resided in Telangana for less than one year were given study information by an interviewer fluent in their native language. The interviewer set a return appointment time, and, if the student returned a signed consent form, interviewed the student individually. The mean interview time was 35 minutes. The students in the sample ranged in age from 22 to 31 years, with a mean age of 22.75 (SD = 0.8) in the first year masters, 23.5 (SD = 1.2) in the second year masters and 28 (SD = 1.1) in the doctoral student group. Of the 100 participants, 37 were born in Southern part of India, 35 in Northern part of India, 16 in Eastern part of India, 12 in Western part of India. Parent surveys were either taken home at the time of the interview or via Skype or via telephonic conversation However, only 67 of the 100 parents answered the survey. Of the parents who completed surveys, most (70%) were mothers or, in a few cases, mother figures (grandmothers, aunts, etc.); 30% were fathers or father figures (grandfathers, uncles, etc.). Parents had a mean of 14.5 (SD = 4) years of education. South Indian parents had the most years of education followed by Northern, Western and Eastern Indian parents respectively. At the end of the survey, we asked a Professor of each student participant to complete a rating of the Students adaptation. Teacher ratings were received for 52 (52%) of the students. Subsequent analyses involving teacher-rated school adaptation were conducted separately for this sub-sample.

MEASURES

Measures of migration stress were included in the students interview. Students perceptions of social support were assessed. Measures of depression, psychological symptoms, and self-concept in the students interview assessed students adjustment, along with the index of university adaptation completed by the students professor.

STUDENT GROUPS

Students who were part of the analyses belonged to 17 states of India. On the basis of location of their states, they were divided into four categories namely South India (Telangana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Orrisa), North India (Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh), West India (Gujarat, Maharashtra) and East India (West Bengal, Assam).

MIGRATION STRESS

Our measure of migration stress is a checklist of stressors related specifically to migration. Items on the scale tapped the domains of social disruption (leaving family and friends, not having relatives or friends nearby), experiences of prejudice and discrimination (unfair treatment because of skin color or birth states), adjusting to new circumstances (meeting new people, trying to make friends, living in new surroundings) difficulties being understood culturally and linguistically (teachers and others not understanding one's speech or culture), and family issues (family arguments, worries about money, and problems with knowing how to do things in the new surroundings). The list was derived from both the literature on migration and the experiences of the many migrant students. The present analyses include 19 items that were parallel for students and parents. Specifically, we asked participants, "Have any of these things been hard for you since you moved to the University of Hyderabad?". Alpha reliability for this scale was .77 for students en and .89 for parents.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social support availability was assessed on the parent survey with four items, asking: "How many people would help if a sick students needed to be picked up from University and take proper care at their own place in Hyderabad?" "How many people would help if your ward is in a financial emergency?" "How many people in the Hyderabad can your ward confide in?" and "How many people could help you obtain needed information?" Except for the "confide" item, these questions were adapted from the Suárez-Orozcos' Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation project. Responses on the 5-point scale could range from "No One" to "6 or more." The mean of these items was the index of support availability. Alpha reliability was 0.82 for this measure.

STUDENT ADJUSTMENT

Depression was measured with the short 10-item form of the Kovacs (1985). Scores range from 1 to 3, with higher scores indicating more depression. Alpha reliability was .68 (ranging from .53 for East Indians to .73 for South Indians). Psychological symptoms were assessed with a 22-item checklist which covers a range of symptoms related primarily to depression and anxiety. Alpha reliability was 0.84 (ranging from .71 for West Indians to .88 for North

Indians). Self-concept was indexed with an abbreviated 6-item version of the Harter (1985) self-concept scale, adapted to an interview format. Scores range from 1 to 6, with higher scores indicating more positive self-evaluation. Alpha reliability was .46 (ranging from .3 for East Indians to .54 for the West Indian group). The Professor-rated university adaptation measure (Alexander, Entwhistle, & Dauber, 1993) is a 14-item scale assessing interest and participation, attention span and restlessness, and cooperation and compliance. Scores range from 1 to 6, with higher scores signifying better adaptation. Alpha reliability was .90 (ranging from .8 for East Indians to .91 for the South and West Indian groups).

RESULT

Analyses addressed the comparability of stress for children and parents, the effects of stress on adjustment, and the role of social support in facilitating adjustment. The results of these analyses are described in the following sections. Each set of analyses included migrant group as a factor and findings regarding inter- group comparisons are included within each section. Preliminary analyses indicated that there were no significant differences by the course of the student on stress or adjustment measures. Gender effects were minimal and including gender of student or parent in the analyses did not result in any substantive change in the reported findings. Consequently, courses and gender were not included as factors in the final analyses.

COMPARABILITY OF STREDD FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

To assess whether parents and students differed in the amount of stress they reported, we conducted an analysis of variance of the parent and student stress scales (SPSS [1990] MANOVA) with generation (parent, student) as a repeated factor and group as a between factor. The analysis yielded a main effect of generation, $F(1, 100) = 29.50$, $p< .0001$. Students reported significantly more stress than parents. Table 1 indicates the numbers and percentages of parents and students reporting each type of stress, along with the results of nonparametric comparisons between parent and students for each item (SPSS [1990] Sign test). The prevalence of students experiencing each type of stress exceeded that of parents for most measures, with the notable exception of worries about money. Parents were far more likely to report worries about money than were students.

STRESS AFFECT ADJUSTMENT

To assess the relation of migration stress to adjustment, we created high and low stress groups of students and parents by dividing the sample at the median for each generation and performing MANOVAs on the adjustment measures by stress level and group. There were significant main effects of stress on all of the students and parent adjustment measures. Students evidenced greater depression, more symptoms, lower self-concept, and poorer school adaptation under high stress conditions. Parents reporting more stress had significantly diminished affect and life satisfaction. Means, standard deviations, and F values for these main effects of stress are included in Table 2.

SUPPORT

To address this question, we created a high versus low support variable by dividing the social support measure at the median. We then assessed whether parent and students stress differed as a function of differential levels of support. Main effects of support availability which was found for students was those in the lower support group had greater stress ($M = 9$, $SD = 3$) than did those in the higher support group ($M = 8$, $SD = 3.5$), $F(1, 100) = 4.1$, $p< .04$. There were no group effects in these analyses. Thus the effects of support on stress were consistent across groups.

Next we assessed both direct and moderating effects of support on students adjustment by including the dichotomized stress and support measures as independent variables, along with group, in students MANOVAs with the adjustment measures as dependent variables. Only one significant main effect emerged for students adjustment. Students in families with greater support availability had higher University adaptation ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.7$) than did students with less support ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 0.62$), $F(1, 100) = 4.94$, $p< .04$. There were no interactions by stress or group in any of the analyses of students outcomes.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we explored life stage differences in the experience of stress and the operation of social support among student groups who move to University system varying in socioeconomic characteristics and receiving contexts. We specifically asked four research questions: (1) are the stresses of migration of student comparable for parents who reside at their native place or move along with student to the same city and on the students ; (2) does migration stress diminish students adjustment; (3) does the availability of social support facilitate adaptation, and (4) to what extent do the findings vary by migration group

(Students birth place)? The findings relative to each of these questions are discussed in the following sections.

Are the stresses of immigration comparable for parents and children?

Our findings suggest that both parents and students experience considerable amounts of post-migration stress of student, but students reported significantly more stress than parents overall and more in most areas except for monetary worries. This pattern of effects may be related to students inability to control their migration. Uncontrollable and unanticipated events are more likely to be experienced as stressful than those under the individual's control (Pearlin, 1999; Schulz, Wrosch, & Heckhausen, 2003). Parents' markedly greater concern with monetary worries likely reflects the realistic economic peril that many migrant students face when they arrive and the heavy responsibility that parents often carry with respect to finding work and providing for their families (for the families who move with the student to the same city) . This parental concern with meeting basic needs may override concerns with social disruption and other hardships of migration that are more salient to students.

Does stress affect adjustment?

The stresses associated with migration are clearly and strongly related to psychological adjustment in students across a range of measures of adaptation. This finding affirms the disruptive nature of this major life transition and the need for personal and contextual resources to facilitate the students ability to cope with post-migration difficulties.

Does social support help?

The availability of social support was linked to reduced stress and better adjustment in in students. The weaker effect of support for students may reflect a general developmental lag between students and their peer groups and professors in the effectiveness of social support. Students also have difficulty compensating for support resources, particularly friendships loss. Another possibility is that students initial post-migration stress is so high that the available support is insufficient to offset its effects, particularly with regard to internalized adjustment difficulties (depression, self-esteem, and other internalized symptoms). Students may function well in University with added support, but it may not make them feel better in the initial phases of adaptation. As they become more accustom to their social milieu and develop new friendships, the support derived from these relationships may be more comforting.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In sum, our findings provide the following answers to our research questions: (1) both parents and students experience a number of stressors in the months following migration, but students report hardships more frequently than parents (who are with the student or back in their native place) in most areas assessed; (2) migration stress has a significant impact on the initial post-migration adjustment of children; (3) the availability of social support is linked to reduced stress and more positive adjustment for children (4) there are inter-group differences in stress and social support availability, but the effects of stress and support are largely comparable across the student groups participating in this tudy. Further research is needed to corroborate these results, but the current findings support the conclusion that migration is a highly stressful transition, regardless of the age and courses of interest of the migrant student.

Table 1: Students and parents answering "Yes" to each migration stress item

Migration Stress Item	Student (% Yes)	Parent (% in Yes)*
Has leaving friends been hard for you?	82	64
Leaving family members?	89	87
Trying to make new friends?	51	42
Living in the neighborhood you live in now?	33	21
Living in the hostel/house you live in now?	32	27
Meeting people who are not from state of origin?	42	26
People not understanding the way you speak?	55	50
People not understanding ways of doing things?	52	31
Family members fighting or arguing with each other?	32	25
Not having relatives nearby?	61	52
Not having friends nearby?	54	46
Family members worried about money?	34	70
Family members not knowing how to do things here ?	39	40

Family members disagreeing about how to do things here?	33	25
Professors (or others) not understanding you?	43	21
Prejudice towards you?	39	26
People treating you unfairly because of skin color?	22	13
Students/Neighbors from different places fighting or arguing with each other?	39	31
Having to learn English?	54	52

* for parents who moved with their students to the same city (Hyderabad)

Table 2: Effects of Migration Stress

Adjustment Measure	**Low Migration Stress**		High Migration Stress	
	M*	SD*	M*	SD*
Child				
CDI	1.2	0.2	1.3	0.25
Symptoms	4.7	3.2	8.1	4.3
Self-Concept	4.2	1.3	3.5	1.3
University Adaptation	5	0.7	4.8	0.8
Parents**				
Affect Balance	7	1.8	6	2.2
Life Satisfaction	4	0.7	3.8	0.7

* M is mean

** SD is standard deviation

***for parents who moved with their students to the same city (Hyderabad)

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