

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION-DRIVEN CULTURAL CHANGE ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING OF EARLY ADULTS (24–30 YEARS)

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of acculturation strategies on the psychological well-being of Pakistani migrants aged 24 to 30 living in European, American, Asian, Oceanian, and Gulf countries. A quantitative approach was used to collect data from 170 participants through a structured questionnaire that included demographic details, Berry's Acculturation Strategies, the Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS), and the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (RPWBS). Participants were selected using snowball sampling.

Statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlation, Kruskal-Wallis tests, and Spearman's rho, revealed no significant differences in psychological well-being across various acculturation strategies. However, significant positive correlations were found between psychological well-being and both ethnic society immersion (ESI) and dominant society immersion (DSI). These results suggest that engagement with either cultural domain enhances well-being, with integration being the most preferred acculturation strategy (65.3%).

Additionally, social integration was positively associated with cultural identity and well-being, highlighting the importance of social connections in migrants' mental health. Coping mechanisms, such as resilience, language learning, and cultural participation, showed a positive but weak correlation with well-being, indicating that individual coping strategies alone are insufficient without support from external social networks and inclusive communities.

INTRODUCTION

Migration has emerged as a defining feature of the 21st century, with approximately 281 million international migrants constituting 3.6% of the global population (IOM, 2022). Driven by economic, political, and social factors, global migration increased from 258 million in 2017 to nearly 281 million by 2020, marking a 49% rise since 2000 (Wang & Giovanis, 2023). High-income countries have experienced a steady influx, with migrant shares rising from 9.6% in 2000 to 14% by 2017. For countries like Pakistan, migration plays a crucial role in socioeconomic development, contributing significantly to remittances, which grew globally from US\$126 billion in 2000 to US\$702 billion in 2020 (Cheema et al., 2023).

Pakistan continues to be both a source and destination for migrants, with over 6.3 million Pakistanis living abroad and 3.28 million foreign nationals residing within its borders (Aziz et al., 2024). In 2024 alone, 727,381 Pakistani workers migrated overseas, with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Gulf states remaining primary destinations. Over 75% of these migrants were blue-collar workers, although a notable proportion included professionals like doctors and engineers (Staff, 2025). Migration, while economically advantageous, often presents psychosocial challenges. Migrants face stressors such as cultural dislocation, discrimination, language barriers, and loss of social networks, which significantly affect their mental health (Hasan et al., 2021; Doma et al., 2022). Young adults are particularly vulnerable, as early adulthood marks a critical stage of identity formation and psychological development (Moore et al., 2024). Acculturation, the process of adapting to a new culture can lead to acculturative stress, particularly when cultural values conflict or when migrants experience marginalization (Sanchez-Aragon et al., 2020; Martinet & Damasio, 2021).

Research highlights the importance of social support, ethnic identity, and cultural continuity as protective factors that enhance migrants' psychosocial well-being (Iqbal, 2015; Bekteshi & Bellamy, 2024). Moreover, integration strategies, community engagement, and bicultural competence have been linked to improved mental health outcomes and life satisfaction (Ward et al., 2021; Andronic &

Constantin, 2024). Despite these insights, there remains a gap in understanding the nuanced impacts of migration on the psychosocial well-being of early adult migrants, particularly within South Asian contexts such as Pakistan.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining how cultural adaptation, acculturation, and identity shape the psychological and social well-being of early adult migrants. By focusing on coping mechanisms and integration experiences, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of migrant resilience and adjustment.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to explore the impact of cultural adaptation on the psychosocial well-being of Pakistani migrants aged 24–30 years living abroad. This design allowed efficient data collection from a geographically dispersed population and was suitable for examining relationships among acculturation, cultural identity, and psychological well-being at a single point in time.

Participants and Sampling

The sample consisted of 170 Pakistani migrants aged 24–30, residing in regions including Europe, the Gulf, America, Asia, and Oceania. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, targeting both male and female individuals who had lived abroad for at least six months. Inclusion required informed consent and comprehension of the survey language.

Data Collection

Data were collected online via Google Forms over a four-week period. The survey was distributed through social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook) and expatriate community forums. Participants remained anonymous, and no identifiable information was recorded.

Measures

The questionnaire comprised three sections:

- **Demographics:** Age, gender, country of residence, duration abroad, marital status, education, and employment.
- **Psychosocial Well-Being:** Measured using the 18-item Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale, covering autonomy, environmental mastery,

personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

- Acculturation: Assessed using either the Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS) or Berry's Acculturation Model, categorizing strategies into integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS v25. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic and scale

variables. Spearman's rank correlation tested associations between acculturation and well-being. The Kruskal-Wallis H test and post-hoc pairwise comparisons assessed differences in well-being across acculturation strategies. A significance level of $p < .05$ was used.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Departmental Review Committee. Participants provided informed consent, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n = 170)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	29–30 years	53	31.2%
	27–28 years	46	27.1%
	25–26 years	42	24.7%
	23–24 years	29	17.1%
Gender	Male	122	71.8%
	Female	48	28.2%
Region	Europe	71	41.8%
	Gulf	44	25.9%
	America & Oceania	35	20.6%
	Asia & Others	20	11.8%
Duration Abroad	0–2 years	99	58.2%
	2–4 years	55	32.4%
	4+ years	16	9.4%

Table 1 represents the sample consisting predominantly of males aged between 27–30 years, mostly living in Europe or Gulf countries. The relatively recent duration of stay (majority < 2 years) indicates that most participants are still undergoing

adaptation, which contextualizes many of the psychosocial outcomes observed. High levels of postgraduate education suggest an educated migrant population with likely professional aspirations.

Table 2: Acculturation Strategies and Immersion Levels

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Acculturation Strategy	Integration	111	65.3%
	Marginalization	16	9.4%
	Separation	11	6.5%

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	Assimilation	10	5.9%
Acculturation Level	Higher ESI (Ethnic)	120	70.6%
	Higher DSI (Dominant)	38	22.4%
	Equal Immersion	12	7.1%

Table 2 shows the overwhelming preference for **integration** (65.3%) and **ethnic immersion (ESI)** (70.6%) reflects a bicultural orientation—migrants wish to maintain cultural roots while engaging with the host society. However, fewer individuals report

equal immersion, indicating limited full bicultural balance. This may stem from practical challenges such as language barriers or discrimination in host countries.

Table 3: Correlation between Key Variables

Variable Pair	Spearman's rho (ρ)	p-value
ESI (Cultural Identity) ↔ Well-being	0.448**	0.000
DSI (Dominant Immersion) ↔ Well-being	0.461**	0.000
Social Integration ↔ Cultural Identity	0.377**	0.000
Social Integration ↔ Well-being	0.347**	0.000

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 3 indicates that integration was associated with the highest psychological well-being scores, the differences across acculturation strategies were not statistically significant ($p = 0.346$). However, acculturation levels—both ESI and DSI—were moderately correlated with well-being. This suggests that active engagement with either cultural domain enhances well-being, though integration alone may

not be a determining factor without supportive environments.

Importantly, social integration positively influenced both cultural identity and well-being, as confirmed by significant Kruskal-Wallis results. This underscores the idea that social connectedness and community belonging are crucial for migrants' mental health.

Table 4: Thematic Summary of Migration Experiences

Theme	Key Insights
Challenges	Language barriers, discrimination, unfamiliar customs, lack of halal food
Adjustment Factors	Self-motivation, open-mindedness, local engagement, language learning
Social Support	Family, friends, community groups, education/work-based assistance
Host Society Experiences	Mixed: Inclusion by locals and services, but also racism, cultural confusion

Coping showed a statistically significant but weak positive correlation with well-being. This highlights the role of individual resilience, yet suggests that coping alone is insufficient without external support.

Migrants often cited language learning, cultural participation, and mindset as personal strengths. External factors such as support from institutions and inclusive communities were equally important.

Table 5: Well-Being Outcomes by Strategy and Coping

Variable	Result
Kruskal-Wallis on Strategies ↔ Well-being	$H = 3.309$, $p = 0.346$ → Not significant
Kruskal-Wallis on Integration ↔ Well-being	$H = 40.510$, $p = 0.002$ → Significant
Kruskal-Wallis on Integration ↔ ESI	$H = 51.433$, $p < 0.001$ → Highly significant

Variable	Result
Coping ↔ Psychological Well-being (Spearman's rho)	$\rho = 0.197, p = 0.010 \rightarrow$ Positive but weak

Table 5 reveals that participants faced linguistic, social, and cultural obstacles, with experiences of discrimination being particularly detrimental. However, positive accounts of inclusivity and community engagement offered a balancing narrative. This duality emphasizes that systemic and social responses in host countries can either mitigate or intensify the psychological burden of migration.

Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that migration is a multifaceted experience, heavily influenced by acculturation strategies, social integration, and coping mechanisms. A significant portion of the sample preferred an integration acculturation strategy, where migrants sought to maintain their cultural identity while engaging with the host society. This preference for integration correlated with positive well-being outcomes, though the relationship was not entirely dependent on acculturation strategy alone.

Social integration emerged as a critical factor influencing both cultural identity and psychological well-being, highlighting the importance of community support and connectedness in helping migrants adapt and thrive in their new environments. Despite the challenges faced, such as language barriers, discrimination, and unfamiliar customs, migrants who had access to strong social networks, family, friends, and community groups reported better well-being. Additionally, the presence of external support, such as work or educational assistance, was crucial for mental health during the migration process.

The study also emphasized that while coping mechanisms (e.g., personal resilience, language learning, open-mindedness) are important, they are not sufficient on their own. External factors, including inclusive communities and institutional support, play an equally important role in ensuring a positive adaptation experience. However, the presence of systemic challenges like racism and cultural confusion continues to negatively affect the psychological well-being of migrants.

In conclusion, the findings underline the need for policies and interventions that foster social inclusion, reduce discrimination, and promote cultural exchange. Supporting migrants' integration into the host society, both through institutional support and fostering a welcoming environment, can significantly improve their overall well-being.

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