

What makes an international student in the U.S. have less psychological distress?: Secrets of adjustment

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Abstract

Methodology

Results

This comparative research study aims to better understand the differences in adjustment between students who had relocated from a different country from those who had not by looking at factors of adjustment.

Introduction

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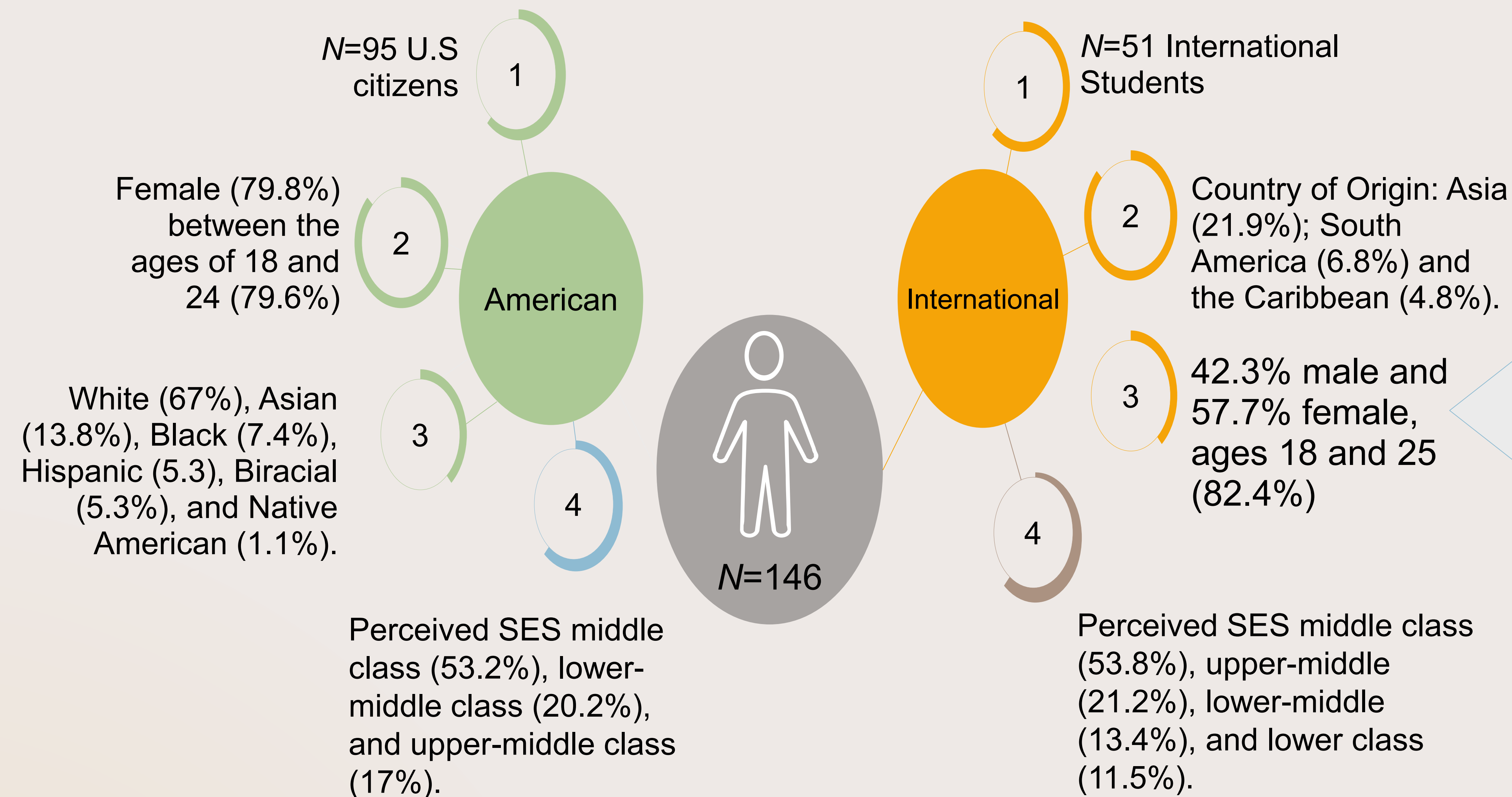
International students in the U.S. are likely to experience unique difficulties on college campuses facing language barriers, financial difficulties, and adjustment complications in a new culture.

02

When a student faces cultural barriers like these, unsuccessful adjustment can negatively impact a student's experience on campus increasing depression, anxiety, distress and other adverse symptomatology that can negatively impact their well-being.

03

This study aims to investigate which factors contribute most to successful and unsuccessful adjustment of international students in order to better serve the needs of foreign students.



Procedures/Participants

- Participation was voluntary and confidential. Participants were recruited from several colleges. International students had moved to the U.S. within the past nine months.

Measures

- Demographic questionnaire
- Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS; Hobson et al., 1998)
- AMAS-ZABB Acculturation Scale (Zea, Asner-Self, Birman & Buki, 2003)
- SCL-90-R (Derogatis, Rickels, & Rock, 1976)
- SCID (SCID; First, Spitzer, Gibbon, & Williams, 1997)
- Mini-International Neuropsychiatric Interview (M.I.N.I.; Sheehan et al., 1998)

Analysis

- Independent-samples t-test, ANOVA, Correlational, and Regression analyses were used.

- 1) International students did not have significantly different levels of psychological distress from U.S. students. U.S. students reported heightened levels of stress in comparison to international students.**
 - US: ($M = 250, SD = 227$) international students [$M = 119, SD = 106; t(143) = 3.90, p < .001$].
 - 14% of U.S. students stress of 471 or higher
 - 33% of International students stress of 35 or below
- 2) Among international students, those who displayed lower U.S. acculturation also reported higher psychological distress.**
 - U.S. acculturation and GSI ($r = -.33, p < .05$)
 - U.S. acculturation and anxiety ($r = -.42, p < .01$).
- 3) Competencies of International students are:**
 - A) competency in English was very much related to U.S. competence, ($r = .53, p < .01$).
 - B) culture of origin language was very much related to culture of origin competence, ($r = .61, p < .01$).
 - C) U.S. competence was also very much related to culture of origin competence, ($r = .28, p < .05$), pointing to a level of competence across cultures.
- 4) U.S. acculturation and stress are significant predictors of psychological distress among international students:**
 - such that higher levels of stress and lower U.S. acculturation predict higher anxiety
 - ($F(4, 42) = 3.78, p < .01$); with stress ($\beta = .34$) and U.S. acculturation ($\beta = -.31$)
 - such that higher levels of stress predict higher symptomatology
 - ($F(4, 42) = 2.55, p < .05$), and stress ($\beta = .31$)

Conclusion

01

International students may experience less psychological distress than American university students because international students in the U.S. may experience America as similar to their country of origin. Alternatively, international students may still be experiencing the "honeymoon" portion of cultural adjustment (Olberg, 1960) given studying in the U.S. is a life-long dream for many international students. The 9-month period of transition defined in our sample may not be long enough to rule out excitement as a protective factor against distress.

02

Lower U.S. acculturation was attributed to higher psychological distress. Ward and Rana-Deuba (2000) found that mood disturbances are higher among foreigners who lack social connection with hosts exhibited more negative psychological effects than individuals with more social connections with co-nationals. This suggests that international students with less connectedness with the foreign country of study exhibit more distress when studying overseas. Though it is helpful to know what is impacting psychological distress among internationals, this finding also leads to question under what circumstances do they thrive. Understanding what works along with what does not may help identify factors by which marginalized or supposedly stressed individuals grow into their optimal selves (Frazier et al., 2006).

03

Among international students, those who showed English language competencies also showed U.S. competence connected to lower psychological distress. Interestingly, international students who reported more culture of origin competence and culture of origin language competence also reported U.S. competence. This suggests that students increasing adaptation does not necessarily lead to loss of culture of origin (Zea et al., 2003) and may suggest the opposite. International students' competence across cultures (U.S. and their culture of origin) and competence across languages (English and their culture of origin language) point towards strengths and factors of resilience and coping, which characterizes international students' decreased psychological distress.

04

International students with high stress and lower U.S. acculturation predict higher anxiety. Anxiety is not impacted by socio-economic status. These findings highlight the importance for international student competencies in acculturation (culture of origin, culture of origin language and English language competencies) in decreasing anxiety among international students at American universities.



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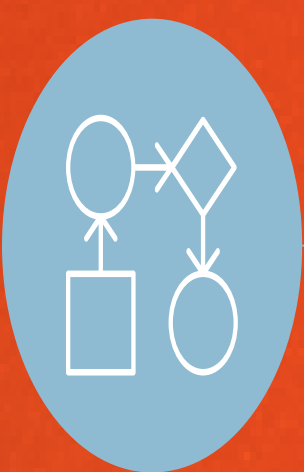
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