

## **Influence of Acculturation on Psychological Distress and Intergenerational Cultural Dissonance**

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This research is a correlational cross-sectional study that envisions the effect of acculturation on returnee adolescents from western countries upholding individualistic culture to the collectivist culture of Pakistan. It primarily gauges psychological distress and intergenerational cultural dissonance (ICD) as experienced by acculturating adolescents. The sample consisted of 100 returnee adolescents with the age range of 14 to 19 years ( $M = 16.1$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ). The stipulated scales of the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (Paulhus, 2013), Kessler psychological distress scale K10 (Kessler et al., 2002), and Family Conflict Scale (Lee et al., 2000) were used. Data was collected using the purposive snowball strategy. Regression analysis, Pearson Correlation, and independent  $t$ -test indicated that Acculturation significantly predicted the level of Psychological-distress, and ICD, and females exhibited significantly more Psychological-distress and ICD than their male counterparts. The results facilitate multicultural competency and aid in a better understanding of returnee adolescents' psychological well-being.

*Keywords:* acculturation; psychological distress; intergenerational cultural dissonance

The flux of cross-border immigration has accentuated the exigency to understand the psychological and psychosocial impact of acculturation on returnee migrants. Migration is now considered a dynamic process that leads to reciprocal return migration (Dustmann & Weiss, 2007). Globally 20% to 50% of immigrants return to their heritage country within the first five years of their immigration (Dumont, 2011; Widmaier & Dumont, 2011). The frequent cross-border mobility of Pakistani returnees dominates the list of 83 nationalities (IOM, 2020). Returning migrants are defined as individuals who acquire the status of an international migrant for a short-term or long-term, and then return to their country of origin for at least a span of one year (Mahon, 2019). The migrants go through identity shifts that make the return more enticing than the original migration experience (Kim, 2006). The current study primarily used the dissimilitude of Eastern and Western cultures to ascertain the impact of acculturation between the collectivist country of Pakistan and analogous individualist countries, according to Hofstede's cultural dimension rankings (Hofstede, 2011).

Acculturation is an intricate process of immigrant adaptation to a new culture that involves their beliefs, value, and change in behavioral patterns (Berry et al., 2006). Acculturation is measured as a bi-dimensional process, host and heritage cultures maintain individuality and proceed in one direction (Arends & Vijuer, 2006). The contemporary literature reveals that the acculturation phenomenon may be a precursor for many psychological disorders (Achotegui, 2019), separation anxiety disorder, suicidal ideation and depression (Lafromboise & Malik, 2016), adjustment disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and mutism (Paniagua, 2014). The transitional process of return embarks higher influence when exposure occurs at a relatively younger age (Abrham, 2017; Cheung et al., 2010; Michel et al., 2012; Phinney & Ong, 2007). The acculturation is more pronounced in adolescents belonging to East and Southeast Asian countries (Kim & Park, 2008). It highlights the vulnerability of Pakistani adolescent returnees towards developing mental disorders while dealing with two cultural propositions simultaneously.

Acculturation psychology has theoretical and methodological roots in cross-cultural psychology. The social identity theory stresses the ascendancy of social context on an

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individual's higher mental functioning that humans have the innate ability to associate and categorizing their group preferences (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Berry's multidimensional model of acculturation is widely used for understanding cross-cultural disparities as it allows comparison of current and counter-current of migration (Berry, 2005; Berry et al, 2003). The accession of the host culture and retentiveness of heritage culture is traversed to generate four acculturation strategies acquired by migrants i.e., marginalization, integration, assimilation, and separation (Berry et al., 2003). The research was conducted to understand the preference in attitudes of returnee adolescents in Portugal during the process of acculturation. The results stipulated that the most adopted attitude for the returnee adolescents was 'integration', while marginalization was the least adopted acculturation strategy (Saggar & Somerville., 2012).

Acculturation is a transitional process; psychological distress attenuates as the acculturation strategy becomes demarcated. Psychological distress is also referred to as 'mental distress' and is defined based on the experiences related to an individual's internal life, with any range of symptoms from feeling confused, being troubled, or anything out of place, it is in fact a predecessor of mental illness (Horn et al., 2020). The push and pull of the migration process, social and cultural adjustments, individual coping mastery, and language acquisition, directly affect the levels of psychological distress (Berry, 2006). In Bangladesh, returnee migrants mentioned the immense psychological stresses of being unable to achieve the expectations demanded by their families and communities (Rahman, 2013). Another study corroborated that the returnee population in Ethiopia manifested psychological distress in form of somatic complaints with varying degrees of intensity (Habtamu & Zeleke, 2017).

Intergenerational cultural dissonance (ICD) is a conflict between parents and children on account of discordance and understanding of cultural values. Parents and children have their own pace of interpretation, adaptation, and absorption of cultural aspects (Costigan & Dokis, 2006). A longitudinal study conducted on South Asian American adolescents concluded that disparity in cultural practices and acceptance led to intergenerational discrepancies among immigrant families (Ying & Han, 2007). Existing literature has documented the correlation between intergenerational dissonance and acculturation (Lee et al., 2005; Tsai, 2007; Lui, 2015; Weaver & Kim, 2007).

The present study could be postulated using the Acculturation gap distress hypothesis model, it is often regarded as an 'Immigrant Phenomenon'. It suggests that migrant youth and parents grow distant from each other based on the changes in language, lifestyle, and religious values, eventually leading to conflicts within the family (Telzer et al., 2011).

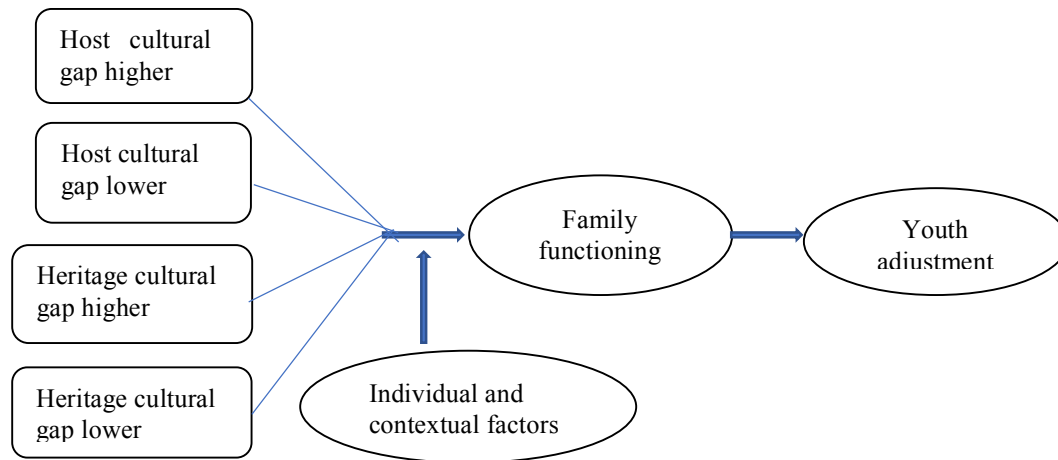


Figure 1. Expansion of acculturation gap-distress model, demonstrating types of acculturation gaps (Telzer, 2011, p. 336).

The phenomenon of returning home has been largely forsaken by researchers and practitioners who deal with migrant mental health issues (Magala, 2008). There is a dearth of studies on Pakistani adolescents, considering the psychological and behavioral implications of acculturation to both home and host cultures. In Pakistan, there are no facilities for immigrant mental health, and the phenomenon of acculturation is not considered significant. Adequate preparations are required for strategic reintegration following the return to the heritage country to neutralize psychological distress and family discordance. This study addresses the psychological repercussions of acculturation and it would aid clinicians, parents, and institutions in understanding and devising effective interventions for returnee adolescents.

### Method

The current study employed a correlational cross-sectional research design. The sample consisted of 100 adolescent returnees, with an age range of 14 years to 19 years ( $M = 16.3$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) determined through G\*Power. The data was collected using a purposive snowball sampling strategy from the main cities of Punjab i.e.; Lahore, Faisalabad, and Islamabad. The participants fulfilled the criteria of adolescents returning to the heritage country of Pakistan from any of the western countries during the last 1 to 4 years, with a minimum stay of 3 years in the host country. Exclusion criteria included any diagnosed psychological disorder, i.e., neurodevelopmental disorders, substance abuse, stress-related disorders, anxiety disorders, somatic symptom disorders, or any medical condition causing stress or family interaction issues, i.e., physical disability or any diagnosed chronic illness.

### Assessment Measures

#### *Vancouver Index of Acculturation -VIA*

The Vancouver Index of Acculturation is a 20-item self-report bi-dimensional instrument that is rated on a 9-point Likert-type scale. The half items assess identification with the culture of Origin (Heritage Scale) and the other half item assesses Host (Mainstream) culture simultaneously. A high score on a subscale indicates a positive orientation (Paulhus, 2013). The

Cronbach's alpha for the heritage subscale was .91 and for the host subscale, it was .94, with an overall Cronbach's alpha of .83 in the current study.

### ***Kessler Psychological Distress – K 10***

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) is a clinical measure of psychological distress. The K10 scale involves 10 questions about emotional states each with a five-level response Likert scale. The measure can be used as a brief screening tool to identify levels of distress (Kessler et al., 2002). K10 had strong scale reliability for the current sample with Cronbach's alpha reliability value of .84.

### ***Family Conflict Scale -FCS***

The Family Conflict Scale (FCS) is a well-suited 5-point Likert-type scale for measuring intergeneration cultural dissonance created by the parent-child conflict within the family. The scale has 20 items, comprised of two subscales; Plausibility of occurrence (FCS–Likelihood) and Gravity and intensity of conflict (FCS–Seriousness) (Lee et al., 2000). For the current sample, the FCS Likelihood and seriousness subscales have Cronbach's alpha values of .79 and .84 respectively, whereas the overall scale has a reliability of .94.

### **Procedure**

Prior formal permission was acquired from the authors of stipulated instruments, and the institutional administration. A preclusive pilot study was conducted on four participants to gauge viability, duration and improve upon the study design. Online Google forms were mainly used for collecting respective data due to the limitations of the pandemic situation. The participants were selected through a purposive snowballing sampling strategy by targeting returnees studying in English medium institutions and via referrals, from the cities of Punjab province. Consent was obtained from the parents of the participants under the age of 18. Social media and telecommunication were used for active correspondence. Formal permission from authors was obtained through email correspondence. Informed consent from parents and participants was also acquired. Debriefing was done, and confidentiality and the right to withdraw were assured to the participants.

### **Results**

To analyze the data descriptive and inferential statistics were used in different steps. Descriptive analysis has been used for demographical variables, and the relationship between variables has been tested through Pearson product correlation. Moreover, Multiple Hierarchical Linear regression included covariates as well as the predictor and outcome variables.

**Table 1**  
*Sociodemographic Statistics of Variables*

<i>Baseline Characteristic</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age			16.1	1.89
Gender			1.54	.50
Male	54	27.1		
Female	46	31.8		
Education Level			1.98	.58
Secondary	18	10.6		

High School	66	38.8		
College	16	9.4		
Language Acquisition			2.30	.57
Only Understand	15	8.8		
Speak	82	48.2		
Read and write	3	1.8		
Host Western Country			1.5	.61
Europe	55	32.4		
North America	39	22.9		
Australia	6	3.5		
Length of Stay in Pakistan			2.83	.95
Length of Stay in West			5.05	1.83

Note.  $N=100$

The psychometric analysis of demographical variables yielded that returnee adolescents are more acculturated towards their western host culture ( $M = 32.8$ ,  $SD = 21.4$ ) than their heritage culture of Pakistan ( $M = 29.2$ ,  $SD = 16.9$ ). Moreover, the findings also suggested that returnee adolescents are likely to exhibit a moderate level of psychological distress ( $M = 25.58$ ,  $SD = 7.5$ ).

**Table 2**

*Comparison of mean values to Measure the Gender Differences regarding Acculturation, Psychological Distress and Intergenerational Cultural Dissonance*

Variables	Female		Male		$t(98)$	$p$	Cohen's $d$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$			
Acculturation (Sub-scales)	54.44	23.21	66.82	29.02	2.36	.02	0.47
Heritage	22.96	22.96	28.91	17.15	2.0	.04	0.29
Host	30.31	13.53	29.56	10.73	-.30	.76	0.06
Psychological Distress	23.09	6.56	26.02	7.73	1.97	.05	0.40
ICD (Sub-scales)	53.14	14.73	61.63	18.36	2.56	.01	0.51
Frequency	26.31	7.99	28.36	9.76	1.15	.25	0.22
Seriousness	25.53	8.11	28.26	9.27	1.56	.12	0.31

Note.  $n.s > 0.05$ ,  $p < .05$ . Cohen's  $d$  value of  $0 < d < 0.2$  represents Small effect size,  $0.2 < d < 0.8$  represents Medium effect size and  $d > 0.8$  represents Large effect size; ICD= Intergenerational Cultural Dissonance

Independent sample  $t$ -test stipulated that the gender difference is non-significant for acculturation and its subscales. Females exhibited significantly higher psychological distress and intergenerational cultural dissonance than their male counterparts.

**Table 3**

*Intercorrelations for Acculturation, Psychological distress, and Intergenerational Cultural Dissonance (ICD) and Each Sub-Scale of Acculturation and ICD*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Acculturation	-	.608**	.614**	.459**	.576**	.505**	.515**
Heritage	-	-	.263*	.347**	.334**	.280**	.366**
Host	-	-	-	.186	.360**	.307	.213**
Psychological Distress	-	-	-	-	.466**	.477**	.449**
ICD	-	-	-	-	-	.741**	.723**
Frequency	-	-	-	-	-	-	.755**
Seriousness	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. ICD= Intergenerational Cultural Dissonance; ICD-Frequency = Frequency subscale; ICD-Seriousness = Seriousness subscale. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

Findings indicate that acculturation has a significant positive relationship with psychological distress and intergenerational-cultural dissonance, leading to accentuated mental health risk and parent-child conflict.

**Table 4**

*Regression coefficients of Acculturation on Psychological Distress*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>
Constant	28.34		8.76	25.29		7.74
Age	-.12	-.02	.47	-.60	-.13	.42
Language	.44	.02	.84	.81	.04	1.63
Acculturation				.12	.49	.02
$\Delta R^2$	.01			.23		
F	.07			9.54		

Note:  $N=100$ , *B* = unstandardized coefficients, *SE* = standard error,  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient,  $\Delta R^2$  = R square change, Language = Heritage language acquisition.

The impact of acculturation on psychological distress was examined in two steps. In Model 1, the control variables of age and language acquisition were included. In Model 2, acculturation was added as a predictor. Regression analysis indicated that acculturation significantly predicted the level of psychological distress and acculturation explained 23 % variance in the outcome variable of psychological distress.

**Table 5***Regression Coefficient of Acculturation on Intergenerational Cultural Dissonance (ICD)*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>
Constant	21.62		19.63	18.89		16.40
Language	2.22	.20	1.06	.96	.09	.90
Stay in west	-.38	.00	4.13	.57	.01	3.45
Acculturation				.30	.55	.05
$\Delta R^2$	.04			.34		
F	2.23			16.47		

Note:  $N=100$ ,  $B$  = unstandardized coefficients,  $SE$  = standard error,  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient,  $\Delta R^2$  = R square change, Language= Heritage 3language acquisition, stay in west= Length of stay in Western country.

The hierarchical regression model included the control variables of age and Heritage Language acquisition and it explained a 34% variance in the outcome variable of intergenerational cultural dissonance.

### Discussion

The data analysis highlights the effect of acculturation on returnee adolescents. The acculturating individuals vary in their degree of change, effect, and adaptation based on their migration experiences, inducement, familial support, and cultural factors (Arends & Vijver, 2006; Berry, 2001; Celenk, 2011).

The acculturation orientation draws on Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) by establishing salient ingroup and outgroup identifications. Berry et al., (2006) concluded that the level of integration is analogous to sociocultural factors like cultural distance and maintaining bicultural identity leading to integration (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). The findings demonstrate that overall the adolescents are more acculturated towards the host culture of the western country than the heritage culture of Pakistan. The acculturation preferences towards host or heritage values define the integration level and directly influence the distress level among returnees (Bourhis et al., 2009).

The acculturation process is highly influenced by socio-contextual components and its psychological impact varies according to sociocultural factors (Fox et al., 2017). The covariates of age and Heritage language acquisition were appended for a broader understanding of cause and effect between variables. The regression analysis revealed that age yielded a significant relationship with ICD in model 1. Most of the studies claim that return migrants of a young age are more prone to social adjustment problems (Hautaniemi et al., 2013). Sociocultural factors like the age of immigrants, gender, education, and language acquisition are important factors contributing to the acculturation process (Berry, 2003; Wong, 2008). Adults and parents retain their native language even after spending long years, but children are known to master the host language within the first two years of migration and it makes the discussion of the abstract issue more challenging among families (Birman, 2006).

The findings also suggested that acculturation significantly predicted 23% variance in psychological distress. The findings are in line with the previous literature that postulates that the prevalence of common mental disorders was found to be 27.6% among migrant returnees (Habtamu & Zeleke, 2017). Moreover, different studies found that return migrants of a young

age are more likely to face psychological distress after their return (Hautaniemi et al., 2013; Ndreka, 2019; Yendaw et al., 2019).

Migrant adolescents acquire cultural knowledge from their parents as well from their variegated socio-cultural exposures. Cultural modulations help them define their own pace of transition (Orellana et al., 2001). Current findings indicated that acculturation also exhibited a significant positive relationship with intergenerational cultural dissonance, leading to a risk of parent-child conflicts among acculturating families. The regression analysis also significantly predicted the outcome variable of intergenerational cultural dissonance. The externalizing and internalizing problems of adolescents have been linked to family conflicts (Formoso et al., 2000; Schwartz et al., 2005). The parent-child conflicts based on cultural disparities prevail in all the youth despite their age group (Formoso et al., 2000; Phiney et al., 2005).

The existing literature highlights that the role of gender expectations is inevitable in understanding the acculturation process (Ward & Kennedy, 1997; Zlobina et al., 2006). The gender difference for acculturation and its subscales was statistically nonsignificant. Literature backs this notion that males and females acculturate at the same rate (Kulis et al., 2007; Lee & Jeong, 2021). The female adolescents yielded high scores on psychological distress and intergenerational cultural dissonance than their male counterparts. The young returnee females tend to toil up and exhibit obscurity during the re-entry process (Ying & Han, 2007). The women's lack of authority and self-expression makes them more vulnerable to psychological issues than males (Niaz & Hassan, 2006). Females encounter a heightened level of psychological distress and family conflict on social values and traditional role expectations (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2012; Ali, 2018). The acculturation experience may be very different for males and females based on social values and traditional role expectations (Berry, 2005; Sam & Berry 2010). The current findings were the protraction of the existing body of literature, as they validated our hypotheses that acculturation has a significant impact on the psychological distress and intergenerational cultural dissonance of returnee adolescents.

## **Conclusion**

This study corroborated that return is not simply a matter of going home, it is a much more complex matter in which migrants negotiate transnationally rooted forms of belonging. The acquired acculturation strategy is deemed crucial for acculturating individuals. The findings demonstrated that adolescents are more inclined towards the host culture of the western country than the Heritage culture of Pakistan. The current study findings suggested that acculturation significantly predicted the level of psychological distress and intergenerational cultural dissonance in adolescents. It imparts that returnees are dislocated from one culture and they are subjected to psychological distress and family discordance leading to intergenerational cultural dissonance. It was also observed that female adolescents are more profoundly affected during the transitional process of acculturation and exhibit higher psychological distress and ICD than males. It highlights that the role of gender expectations is inevitable in understanding the acculturation process. Immigrant mental health must be highlighted to promote the psychological well-being and family dynamics of returnee adolescents.

## **Implications**

Immigrant mental health is not a recognized field in Pakistan. Mental health professionals can use the findings to increase their multicultural competency in providing services to a distinct immigrant group and study findings can be implemented in counseling and clinical settings. The



findings can also aid parents and adolescents in understanding family conflicts actuating during the process of acculturation. It is beneficial to reinforce educational institutions to better plan and enhance the learning experiences of returnee immigrant students.

### Limitations and Suggestions

The sample is only derived from the cities of Punjab, and other regions need to be included in future research for a comprehensive understanding of the studied variables. The data is collected only from middle and late-age adolescents, further age groups can be incorporated to observe the impact of age on acculturation, ICD, and psychological distress. There is a huge challenge in recruiting acculturating individuals experiencing a similar process of transition after migration. It would be riveting to include the impact of personality dimensions on acculturation styles. Longitudinal studies and qualitative research will provide inclusive insight into the acculturation process. Moreover, it is suggested to study the acculturation level of adolescents, as well as their parents, for gauging a sound comparison of differences during the process of cultural transition.

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