ARTIGO

The sociocultural and psychological adaptation of Syrian refugees in Brazil

Adaptação sociocultural e psicológica de refugiados sírios no Brasil

Adaptación sociocultural e psicológica de refugiados sirios en Brasil

Manoela Sarto de Lucena[1]
orcid.org/0000-0003-4431-520X
manoelasl@gmail.com

Raquel Carvalho Hoersting[2]
orcid.org/0000-0002-0157-6947
rhoersting@upei.ca

João Gabriel Modesto[3]
orcid.org/0000-0001-8957-7233
joao.modesto@ueg.br

Abstract: Considering the challenges of the cultural adaptation process for refugees and the importance of analyzing these in a Latin American context, the present study aimed to investigate the influence of cultural orientations and cultural distance on psychological and sociocultural adaptation of Syrian refugees living in Brazil. Eighty-four adult Syrian refugees, living in Brazil for at least 6 months completed an online survey regarding acculturation variables. Results showed that greater perception of cultural distance was related to lower sociocultural adaptation; higher rates of home culture orientation were related to low psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Having a Brazilian culture orientation was related with better psychological and sociocultural adaptation. The present research has theoretical and practical implications, allowing for a better understanding of some aspects of the adaptation of Syrian refugees in Brazil.
Keywords: acculturation, psychological adaptation, refugees

Resumo: Considerando os desafios do processo de adaptação cultural para os refugiados e a importância disto para o contexto da América Latina, o presente estudo teve como objetivo investigar a influência da orientação cultural e distância cultural na adaptação psicológica e sociocultural de sírios no Brasil. 84 refugiados sírios, morando no Brasil há pelo menos 6 meses, responderam um survey online sobre variáveis relacionadas à aculturação. Os resultados evidenciaram que maiores índices de percepção de distância cultural estão relacionados com menores índices de adaptação sociocultural. Possuir uma orientação para a cultura brasileira está relacionado a melhores índices de adaptação psicológica e sociocultural. A presente pesquisa possui implicações teóricas e práticas, permitindo um melhor entendimento de alguns aspectos da adaptação de refugiados sírios no Brasil.
Palavras-chave: aculturação, adaptação psicológica, refugiados

Resumen: Considerando los desafíos del proceso de adaptación cultural para los refugiados y la importancia de esto para el contexto de América Latina, el presente estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar la influencia de la orientación cultural y distancia cultural en la adaptación psicológica y sociocultural de sirios en Brasil. Ochenta y cuatro refugiados sirios, viviendo en Brasil por lo menos 6 meses, respondieron un cuestionario online sobre variables relacionadas a la aculturación. Los resultados evidenciaron que mayores índices de percepción de distancia cultural estubieron relacionados con menores índices de adaptación sociocultural. Poseer una orientación hacia una cultura brasileña está relacionada a mejores índices de adaptación psicológica y sociocultural. La presente investigación tiene implicaciones teóricas y prácticas, permitiendo un mejor entendimiento de algunos aspectos de la adaptación de refugiados sirios en Brasil.
Palabras clave: aculturación, adaptación psicológica, refugiados

[1] Universidade de Oslo (UiO), Oslo, Noruega.
[2] Universidade de Prince Edward Island (UPEI), Prince Edward Island, Canada.
[3] .Universidade Estadual de Goiás (UEG), Formosa, GO, Brasil.

Brazil is one of the countries that hosts the most refugees in Latin America. The highest numbers of refugees living in Brazil are from Syria—and until the end of 2018, represented about 36% of the refugee's population in Brazil (followed by Congolese [15%], and Angolese [9%], Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública, 2019). Syrian requests for refugee status to Brazil slowly began in Brazil after the civil war outbreak in Syria in 2011, but significantly increased in 2013 after the Brazilian government instituted policies to facilitate the entry of these migrants into the national territory. Since 2013, Brazilian diplomatic missions were allowed to issue 'humanitarian' visas to individuals affected by the conflict, bypassing some requirements usually applied to other immigrants (Ministério da Justiça, 2015). Since 2016, Venezuelan refugee solicitations in Brazil have increased significantly, making this the top refugee claimant group since 2016 while the number of Syrian refugee requests has lowered to 409 in 2018 (Delfim, 2019).

Unfortunately, the assistance and integration of these refugees into Brazilian society are hindered by numerous limitations at arrival (e.g., housing, sociocultural, legal, and psychological issues) (Bógus & Rodrigues, 2011). As it occurs in other countries, refugees arriving to Brazil face systemic challenges and access to support services, which are compounded by limited resources and lack of integration of programs and institutions, leading to a limited scope of services (Bustamante, Leclerc, Mari, & Brietzke, 2016). Although refugees in Brazil may face challenges to accessing some services, they are legally protected, and have a right to medical care and education through the public system (Moreira, 2014). Food and housing are provided through agreements with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (mostly religious institutions) that work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (ACNUR/UNHCR) in the country (Moreira, 2014).

A recent study by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (ACNUR/UNHCR, 2019) with a representative sample of refugees from several Brazilian states found that refugees in Brazil have a monthly income of less than R$3,000 (about 800 USD), are more educated than the Brazilian population, and about half have experienced some form of discrimination since arriving in Brazil. Although knowledge of the local language is a barrier to the adaptation of refugees in the receiving country, about 90% of refugees say they speak Portuguese. Those conceded refugee status have access to free Portuguese classes in large urban centers across Brazil (ACNUR/UNHCR, 2019). The same report stated that there were refugees in Brazil who generally experienced low levels of integration and association but that the results also show "positive future prospects (including in terms of economic growth) related to the refugees' permanence in Brazil" (p. 13) and that most of the opportunities for contact and integration are through work-related activities (ACNUR/ UNHCR, 2019). Considering the challenges of the cultural adaptation process for refugees and the importance of analyzing these in a Latin American context, the present study focuses on the psychological processes of cultural orientations (home and host) and perceived cultural distance on psychological and sociocultural adaptation of Syrian refugees living in Brazil.

The process of acculturation, psychological and sociocultural adaptation

Historically, migration research has conceptualized the adaptation of migrants to their new cultural and social environment as a diversified and complex process, involving different patterns and strategies (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Titzmann & Fuligni, 2015). The term "culture shock" was coined by Oberg (1960) to describe the feeling of moving to any country that is different from one's country of origin. According to the author, there is an anxiety that comes as a result of the loss of familiar signs and symbols of social relationships that include words, gestures, facial expressions, customs or norms acquired unconsciously in the natural course of growth. In evaluations of empirical research on cultural

shock, Miller (1986) concluded ten causes for cultural shock: climate, dress code, language, education, eating habits, infrastructure, religious belief, entertainment, family life, and dating. Most cultural shock symptoms have been examined and indicate that such threats to sensitive areas of confidence and self-esteem can cause extreme reactions related to cultural adaptation (Kohls, 2001). The extent and results of this "cultural shock" and post-adaptation may depend on many factors, from cultural distancing to migration motivation and expectations.

Migration may cause ruptures in the external cultural structure of individuals, which can also cause ruptures in the person's internal psychological structure (Wiese & Burhorst, 2007). After a move to a new country, reference systems used to understand the world and its relationships are no longer the same; migrants might experience a loss of familiar signs and symbols, of social relationships and status, and of customs or norms that are acquired throughout a lifespan. The prolonged and first-hand contact between individuals or groups of different cultures can result in changes of the original pattern of either host or heritage groups and the adoption of certain aspects of one or both cultures (Sam & Berry, 2006; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). These changes are often referred to as acculturation and can lead to changes in individual and cultural identity (Wiese & Burhorst, 2007). The process of acculturation occurs after immigration, or even after a temporary stay in another country when adjustments to the culture of the host country are made. It is important to mention that social support (Tashima & Torres, 2018), interpersonal relations with members of the host culture (Horenczyk, Jasinskaia-Lahti, Sam & Vedder, 2015), as well as political aspects, tend to influence the process of acculturation (Abraído-Lanza, Echeverría, & Flórez, 2016).

Berry (1997) proposed that intercultural contact may result in four acculturative strategies for those who undergo the process of acculturation. Berry's model of acculturation evaluates on two dimensions: how much does the person seek to maintain connection with (a) the culture of origin (heritage)? and/or (b) the new culture (host)? When individuals move to a new country, it might make sense to embrace and adopt most elements of their new culture, but not maintain their heritage culture—Berry called this acculturation strategy assimilation. Likewise, to others it might make sense to keep and maintain strong links with their original culture but not the host culture—this reflects an acculturation strategy of separation. Yet for others, they might maintain a balance or connection with the two cultures—called integration. In some cases, immigrants might have difficulty maintaining links with home or host cultures—called marginalization.

Although there is not a complete consensus in past research literature, a meta-analysis (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012) verified that the integrationist orientations—that is, when the home and host cultures are valued and endorsed—are more strongly associated with psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Regarding the other three strategies, marginalization is more often associated with maladaptation, which can lead to serious psychological disorders, including clinical depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders (Berry, 1998).

Other models have expanded Berry's (1998) model and recognized that acculturation strategies are complex and dependent on a variety of variables. Bourhis et al. (1997) reasoned that acculturation is the product of both the immigrant and the society in which they acculturate, and proposed a model focused on the congruence of attitudes of immigrant groups, their host society, interpersonal, and intergroup consequences. Similarly, Piontkowski et al., (2002) also sought to understand acculturation attitudes by analyzing minority (i.e., immigrants) and majority group (i.e., host society) attitudes and their level of concordance. They found that in general, the greater discrepancy between the groups' expectations and the reality lead to perceived intergroup relationships that were seen as more threatening and less enriching. Navas et al. (2005), posed that different acculturation strategies are adopted for different social and

group domains, and have focused their model on idealized (or desired) acculturation strategies and actual strategies implemented by minority and majority groups and compared these to each other (Navas et al., 2005).

Oftentimes the type of acculturation strategy adopted is dependent on group- and individual-level factors. For example, political and socioeconomic factors play a role in the adaption of a new migrant, as well as the attitudes and expectations for the immigrant of the host country (Piontkowski et al., 2002). Individual factors such as stress, coping, personality and social support, among others also play a role in acculturation outcomes. For instance, the Multidimensional Individual Difference Acculturation (MIDA; Safdar, Lay, Struthers, 2003) model incorporates individual level variables previously formulated in the acculturation literature. This model is based on stress and coping theories (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and assumes that intercultural encounters can lead to difficulties that lead individuals to experience stress. Among the predictors of psychological wellbeing (Ryff & Singer, 1996), psycho-physical and sociocultural adjustment (Searle & Ward, 1990) are coping strategies, family connection, ethnic and national identity (Phinney, 2003), and acculturation attitudes. Berry's (1998) model of maintenance of the heritage culture and adoption of the receiving culture is incorporated in the model as a mediator.

Similarly, Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver (2007) developed another framework that also includes acculturation strategies as an intermediate variable between the predictor and adaptation outcomes. After systematically reviewing various studies and models of acculturation, they presented a compilation of the most frequently described and tested variables in the literature. For these authors, the acculturation process can be better understood by dividing them into acculturation conditions (antecedents), acculturation orientations (strategies), and acculturation outcomes (consequences).

Outcome variables have generally focused on psychological wellbeing (i.e., psychological adaptation), sociocultural competence (i.e., sociocultural adaptation) in heritage cultures, and sociocultural competence in mainstream culture (Searle & Ward, 1990). Simply put, the adaptation of immigrants can be defined as a "fitting in" process in the host society and of good functioning in this new environment (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). This process also includes negotiating various identities that might develop from these lived experiences (LaFromboise, Cole & Gerton, 1993).

Based on previous research, two distinct aspects of intercultural adaptation (or outcome variables) have been identified. The first aspect is sociocultural adaptation, which is based on the culture learning approach and reflects the ability to engage in constructive interaction with a different culture. The other is psychological adaptation, which facilitates the individual's sense of wellbeing, positive assessment of situations, and overall satisfaction with life (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Although the two types of adaptation are related, they are different and are not always correlated (Demes & Geeraert, 2014; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Psychological adaptation has been considered an important issue for immigrants' health, but previous surveys have shown mixed results. A meta-analysis with first-generation immigrants to Canada showed that they tended to have better rates of mental health than their host or home country counterparts (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Other studies have demonstrated that immigrants, when compared to the local population, suffer from higher levels of emotional stress and worse mental health (Aroian & Norris 2002, Ward & Kennedy, 2001). This, however, seems to be particularly the case for refugees (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Low adaptation among immigrants is directly related to high levels of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and other psychological problems (Ward et al., 2001). Another important predictor of adaptation and often used in acculturation research is cultural distance, that is, the perceived difference between two cultures. Studies indicate that the greater the difference between cultures, more difficulties are predicted (Demes & Geeraert, 2014). In a study on

the adaptation of Brazilians in Japan, an effect of cultural distance in the process of acculturation was also verified (Tashima, 2018).

For some people, the process of acculturation can be smooth and fast, while for others, it can take more time. These individual differences appear to be related to demographic factors such as age, intrapersonal factors such as personality and attitudes, and interpersonal factors such as social and cultural contexts. This process can bring difficulties and psychological distress, but it can also provide opportunities to develop new coping strategies and creative solutions, as well as promote resilience (Wiese & Burhorst, 2007).

Study overview

Different models of acculturation have helped researchers and policymakers understand how to better serve the growing population of migrants and refugees around the world. While most research is based on patterns of migration that are from low- and middle-income countries into Western developed countries-- the so-called Global "South-North" migration (Castles, De Hass, & Miller, 2014)—the Global South account for about 85% of refugees' global population (ACNUR/UNHCR, 2018). In other words, the Global South, those countries with economic difficulties and limited resources (Levander & Mignolo, 2011), are not only a major source of refugees, but also receive and host the majority of global refugees, including Syria (among others; ACNUR/UNHCR, 2018). The patterns of refugee settlement are different in the Global North than in the Global South (ACNUR/UNHCR, 2018), but research in this area is incipient.

Research by Brazilian researchers on the adaptation and acculturation of immigrants in Brazil is beginning to emerge, (see Galina, Silva, Haydu, & Martin, 2017 for a literature review on qualitative studies) but none yet explores acculturation variables with Syrian Refugees living in Brazil. Therefore, the focus of this study is to better understand the social and psychological basis of the processes of adaptation and acculturation in this Global South-South migration. Specifically, we investigate the influence of cultural orientations (home and host) and perceived cultural distance on psychological and sociocultural adaptation of Syrian refugees in the Brazilian context.

We hypothesized that higher levels of perceived cultural distance would be negatively related to psychological (H1) and sociocultural (H2) adaptation, since the greater the perceived distance between the home culture and host cultures, the more difficult adaptation appears to be. Previous studies corroborate this relationship among exchange students in Russia (Suanet & Van de Vijver, 2009) and Brazilians immigrants in Japan (Tashima, 2018). Additionally, we believed that home culture orientation would be negatively related to psychological (H3) and sociocultural (H4) adaptation, considering that individuals who are oriented towards their home might be more connected to their origins which could make the adaptation process difficult, especially when not employing an integratist acculturative approach (Berry, 1997). On the other hand, a greater orientation towards the host culture would contribute to higher rates of psychological (H5) and sociocultural (H6) adaptation. These relationships were also identified in Tashima's study (2018) on Brazilian adaptation in Japan.

Method

Participants

Refugees are non-voluntary migrants who are unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country because of a "well-founded fear of persecution" due to race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin and are given refugee status, this was defined in the 1951 United Nations (UN) convention and was ratified by law in Brazil in 1997 (ACNUR/UNHCR, 2018a). It is worth mentioning that a person who requests the competent authorities to be recognized as a refugee but has not yet had his or her request deliberated by the (Brazilian) National Refugee Committee is known as an asylum seeker. Participants for the study were both asylum seekers and refugees who could have arrived in Brazil as either recognized by UNHCR, have received 'humanitarian' visas

issued by the Brazilian government, or have been sponsored by a family member.

Because of the shared national background and socio-political histories, we limited our sample to those individuals who were originally from Syria rather than including a broader sample of other refugee experiences in Brazil. Although other refugee populations in Brazil may share some commonalities with Syrian refugees, they also experience diverse backgrounds, histories, political history, economies and reasons for migrating that are not shared with Syrians living in Brazil. There is often more differences within a single nation sample than between nations (Smith, Fischer, Vignoles, & Bond, 2013), and by limiting our sample to Syrian refugees, we hoped to capture the unique experiences of a particular group, within a point of time in history, and believe this study allows for important advances for the understanding refugee adaptation in Brazil.

A total of 84 Syrian refugees, mostly male (69.05%), with ages that ranged from 18 to 59 years—52.63% between 18 and 29 years old—residents of São Paulo (89.74%), were invited to participate in an online survey in Arabic regarding their experiences in Brazil. Participants were recruited through acquaintances referrals, interpersonal networks of the researcher and colleagues, and social networks.

Participants had been living in Brazil between six months to five years. Of these, 13.09% lived in Brazil from one to two years, 17.85% from two to three years, 19.04% from three to four years, and 14.29% from four to five years. Over half of the participants (53.57%) reported not knowing anyone before moving to Brazil, and only 16.67% reported knowing someone who lived in Brazil before moving. Of the total participants, 41.67% were accompanied to Brazil, and 28.57% came by themselves.

Instruments

Four Brief Acculturation Scales (Demes & Geeraert, 2014) were used to measure various aspects of a participant's cultural adaptation. These subscales have been translated and validated into Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Thai, and Turkish. Recent studies showed that an Arabic language version we received from the scales' authors are suitable for use with Arabi-speaking students and refuges (Alqahtani & Pfeffer, 2017; Copoc, 2019).

The four subscales are:

a) The Brief Scale for Sociocultural Adaptation was used to assess the level of sociocultural adaptability specific to the participant's cultural delocalization. This 12-item scale was rated on a seven--point Likert-type scale (1 = very difficult; 7 = very easy; =0.84). Sample items were, "Thinking about living in Brazil, how easy or difficult is it for you to adapt to … Social norms (how to behave in public, style of clothes, what people think is funny)," and "… Values and beliefs (what people think about religion and politics, what people think is right or wrong)."

b) The Brief Psychological Adaptation Scale was used to measure the level of specific psychological adaptability to Brazil. This 8-item scale was rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = never; 7 = always; =.82). Sample items were, "Think about living in Brazil. In the last 2 weeks, how often have you felt … Homesick when you think of Syria," and "Sad to be away from Syria."

c) The Brief Scale of Perceived Cultural Distance was used to measure how different participants perceive cultural differences between their home and host cultures. This 12-item scale was rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = very similar, 7 = very different; =.84). Sample items were, "Thinking about living in Brazil, in your opinion, how different or similar are these two countries in terms of … Social norms (how to behave in public, style of clothes, what people think is funny)," and "… Values and beliefs (what people think about religion and politics, what people think is right or wrong)."

d) The Brief Acculturation Strategy Scale was used to measure the strength of cultural orientation (home or host) of parti-

Manoela Sarto de Lucena · Raquel Carvalho Hoersting · João Gabriel Modesto
The sociocultural and psychological adaptation of Syrian refugees in Brazil

7/12

cipants. This four-item item scale (four items measured home culture orientation, and four times measured host culture orientation) was rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; orientation toward home =.73 & host =.77). Sample items for home culture orientation were "It is important for me to have Brazilian friends," and "It is important for me to do things the way Brazilians do". Sample items for host culture orientation were "It is important for me to have Syrian friends," and "It is important for me to do things the way Syrians do."

Procedure

In an attempt to gather as much of a diverse sample of Syrian refugees as possible, participants were recruited electronically through acquaintances referrals, interpersonal networks of the researcher and colleagues, and by social media. Interested participants were given an online web address where they first were given a choice to complete the study in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese. After choosing their preferred language, participants were directed to an informed consent webpage that described their rights as participants before being allowed to complete the survey. The informed consent page was translated and back-translated for accuracy in language. The four Brief Acculturation Scales (Demes & Geeraert, 2014) are available and validated in many languages, including those mentioned above. It should be noted that all participants chose to complete the survey in the Arabic language.

Ethical Considerations

The present study followed the ethical principles provided by the American Psychological Association. A consent form was presented to participants that contained information regarding confidentiality, purpose, procedures, and duration of the study. They were also presented with the contact information of the principal investigators and information regarding participant rights, such as the right to interrupt participation at any time without incurring any sanction. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of [Data was removed for confidentiality of blind review], number: 84743318.1.0000.0023.

Results

In order to test the hypotheses of this study, multiple regressions were conducted using the forced entry method. This method was chosen because it did not presuppose, a priori, a difference in importance between the predictor variables inserted in the model (Field, 2013). First, the assumptions for multiple regression models were tested for psychological adaptation (hypothesis 1, 3, and 5) and sociocultural adaptation (hypothesis, 2, 4, and 6) as criterion variables. These assumptions were satisfactorily met. Second, we present the results of the hypothesis testing.

When psychological adaptation was entered as a criterion variable, the independence error assumption (Durbin-Watson Test = 2.07) was within an acceptable parameter (Field, 2013) and normality residues tested by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test revealed a normal distribution (D[60]=0.07, p=0.200). The assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were checked through a graphical representation of the models, although not presented in this article.

When sociocultural adaptation was entered as a criterion variable, the independence error assumption (Durbin-Watson Test = 1.72) was also within an acceptable parameter and normality residues tested by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test revealed a normal distribution (D[60]=0.08, p=0.200). Linearity and homoscedasticity were also determined by analyzing graphical representations of the model. Multicollinearity assumption was met revealing an absence of multicollinearity (VIF=1.083) for both psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

A multiple regression was conducted to test the hypotheses in which psychological adaptation was an outcome variable. Results showed that greater perception of cultural distance had a negative effect on psychological adaptation (commensurate with hypothesis 1). Furthermore,

while home culture orientation revealed no statistically significant effects on psychological adaptation (hypothesis 3), host country orientation had a positive effect (commensurate with hypothesis 5). The model explained 30% of the variance of psychological adaptation. These results are show in Table 1.

TABLE 1 – Multiple Regression Model for Psychological Adaptation

Variable	Model parameter
Cultural distance (H1)	$=-0,43$, $p<0,001$
Home culture orientation (H3)	$=-0,13$, $p=0,245$
Host culture orientation (H5)	$=0,23$, $p=0,046$
	Adjusted $R^2=0,30$

An additional multiple regression was conducted to test the hypotheses in which sociocultural adaptation was an outcome variable. Results showed that greater perception of cultural distance and higher levels of home culture orientation had a negative effect on sociocultural adaptation, while a host country orientation had a positive effect (commensurate hypothesis 2, 4, and 6). These results are show in Table 2.

TABLE 2 – Multiple Regression Model for Sociocultural Adaptation

Variable	Model parameter
Cultural distance (H1)	$=-0,40$, $p<0,001$
Home culture orientation (H3)	$=-0,22$, $p=0,037$
Host culture orientation (H5)	$=0,33$, $p=0,003$
	Adjusted $R^2=0,41$

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the influence of cultural orientations and perceived cultural distance on psychological and sociocultural adaptation of Syrian refugees in Brazil. Results showed that the perception of cultural distance and orientation toward home cultures were related to lower levels of psychological and sociocultural adaptation, and

host orientation was related to better psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

Although perceived cultural distance is generally related to more practical issues such as sociocultural adaptation (Tashima, 2018), we found that perceived cultural distance was also related to not only sociocultural adaptation but also psychological adaptation. Berry (1997) hypothesized that perceiving larger differences between host and heritage culture could be a challenge to the adjustment and acculturation process. Previous studies have found that the acculturation process tend to be more challenging when the perceived difference between home and host culture are greater (Galchenko & Van de Vijver, 2007; Taušová, Bender, Dimitrova, & Van de Vijver, 2018), but this perception itself may be the result of multiple variables.

Perceived cultural differences may reflect one's sense of unfamiliarity with the host culture that reflects the stressful challenges of learning a new culture. This may lead to coping with these differences by withdrawing from the host culture and relying more on home cultures (Taušová, Bender, Dimitrova, & Van de Vijver, 2018). This may explain why perceived cultural distance and loneliness have been related to mood disturbances in the past (Searle & Ward, 1990), and to more struggles in negotiating and integrating multiple identities (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012).

In this study, we also found that lower psychological and sociocultural adaptation was influenced by greater orientation towards the home culture (Syria). Although this pattern of relationship is not a consensus in the literature (Demes & Geeraert, 2014), the research by Maydell-Stevens, Masgoret, and Ward (2007) pointed out that preference for orientation towards the home cultures was associated with social isolation, perception of discrimination, feeling of hopelessness, low self-esteem, pessimism, and other maladaptive strategies. This might be true for Brazil, where Syrian and middle-eastern communities are still small relative to the broader population, and cultural enclaves may not serve yet as a place of belonging but of isolation.

Manoela Sarto de Lucena · Raquel Carvalho Hoersting · João Gabriel Modesto
The sociocultural and psychological adaptation of Syrian refugees in Brazil

9/12

Another significant finding in this study is that greater orientation to the host culture (Brazil) was related to better psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. These results are in line with theoretical expectations about the role of assimilation of the host culture in cultural adaptation. If, on the one hand, maintaining Syrian culture seems to undermine Syrian adaptation in Brazil, on the other hand, endorsing Brazilian culture favors higher levels of psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation among the participants. Those that endorse greater Brazilian cultural orientations may also have higher outlets for social support, connectedness, belonging, and opportunities for employment (Dimitrova, Aydinli, Chasiotis, Bender, & Van De Vijver, 2015).

Although the sample this size is generally found with similar studies on acculturative populations, especially among refugees, it does present some limitations for further statistical analysis. Also, the sample was collected in the large urban city of São Paulo through a convenience sample and did not allow for regional comparisons. This study may better reflect the experiences of Syrian refugees in urban contexts rather than the acculturative experiences of Syrian refugees in other parts of Brazil (i.e., small cities, rural areas). Future researchers may also wish to direct attention to the particular acculturative differences that may exist in different Brazilian regional contexts or even expand the focus to include refugees from other countries.

Another limitation is the use of a cross-sectional design to assess refugee adaptation. New studies can carry out longitudinal designs that favor the gradual follow-up of the process of refugee adaptation. The use of longitudinal methods is important in advancing the current body of literature on adaptation and has been used to a limited extent in the existing literature on adaptation to predictors of sociocultural adaptation (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Hirai et al., 2015). With adaptation being recognized as a process-oriented concept (Demes & Geeraert, 2014; Oberg, 1960; Ward & Geeraert, 2016), longitudinal methods must be implemented more frequently and deeply in future research to allow for the analysis of changes over time. The use of such methods will help to describe the process of adaptation to a new country and culture, rather than observing a very limited single time.

Despite the indicated limitations and future research suggestions, the present research has important implications. The presence of refugees in Brazil is an issue that deserves to be highlighted due to the expressive growth of these groups and the sociocultural implications of this process. Because it is a rising, but still scarce research theme in Brazil, several hypotheses from other cultural contexts were used as a basis for this research. In this study we found that

Syrian refugees in Brazil share some acculturative experiences that are similar to other worldwide migrant populations. While the relationship between perception of cultural distance and cultural orientation on adaptation might be similar to other migrant populations, future studies will need to explore the culture-specific individual and group level variables such as stress and coping, social support, religion, and barriers to inclusion in Brazilian society, including the attitudes of Brazilians toward refugees themselves. As Brazil continues to receive larger numbers of migrants and refugees, it will be imperative that it understands the complex and unique dimensions of the acculturation process for the populations it receives. In this way, policies can be made that are informed in research within the complex Brazilian society and that enhance the wellbeing and create positive experiences for members of culturally plural societies.

References

Abraído-Lanza, A. F., Echeverría, S. E., & Flórez, K. R. (2016). Latino immigrants, acculturation, and health: Promising new directions in research. Annual Review of Public Health, 37, 219-236. http://https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-032315-021545

Alqahtani, H. A. & Pfeffer, K. (2017). Intercultural Adjustment: Female Saudi Students, Experiences of Adaptation and Acculturation in the United Kingdom. In 8th International Conference on Langauge, Innovation, and Education. Retrieved from http://proceedings.icsai.org/8iclice/8iclice-040.Pdf

Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para Refugiados. (2018a) Perguntas e Respostas (Questions and Answers). Retrieved January 01, 2018, from http://www.acnur.org/portugues/dados-sobre-refugio/perguntas-e-respostas/

Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para Refugiados. (2018b). Dados sobre refúgio (Refuge information). Retrieved April 11, 2018, from http://www.acnur.org/portugues/recursos/estatisticas/dados-sobre-refugio-no-brasil/

Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para Refugiados. (2019). Socioeconomic Profile of Refugees in Brazil: Subsidies for Policy Making. Retrieved December 1, 2019, from https://www.acnur.org/portugues/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Executive-Summary-Online.pdf

ArendsTóth, J. & Van de Vijver, F. J. (2007). Acculturation Attitudes: A Comparison of Measurement Methods 1. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 37, 1462-1488. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2007.00222.x

Aroian, K. J. & Norris, A. E. (2002). Assessing risk for depression among immigrants at two-year follow-up. Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 16(6), 245-253. https://doi.org/10.1053/apnu.2002.37279

Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. Applied psychology, 46, 5-34. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x

Berry, J. W. (1998). Acculturation and health: Theory and research. In S.S. Kazarian & D.R. Evans (Eds.), Cultural Clinical Psychology: Theory, Research and Practice, 39-57. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bógus, L. M. & Rodrigues, V. (2011). Os refugiados e a políticas de proteção e acolhimento no Brasil: História e Perspectivas. UFES Dimensões, 27, 101-114. Retrieved April 11, 2018 from http://www.periodicos.ufes.br/dimensoes/article/view/2585/2081

Bornstein, M. H. (2017). The specificity principle in acculturation science. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12(1), 3-45. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691616655997

Bustamante, L. H. U., Leclerc, E., Mari, J. D. J., & Brietzke, E. (2016). It is time to prepare mental health services to attend to migrants and refugees. Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria, 38, 263-264. https://doi.org/10.1590/1516-4446-2015-1883

Castles, S., De Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2014). The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world (5th ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Copoc, P. (2019). Acculturation of Syrian Refugees in Germany. SURG Journal, 11, 1-12.

Delfim, R. B. (2019). Brasil tem 161 mil solicitações de refúgio aguardando análise. Retrieved December 1, 2019, from https://migramundo.com/brasil-tem-161-mil-solicitacoes-de-refugio-aguardando-analise/

Demes, K. A. & Geeraert, N. (2014). Measures Matter: Scales for Adaptation, Cultural Distance, and Acculturation Orientation Revisited. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 45, 91-109. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022113487590

Dimitrova, R., Aydinli, A., Chasiotis, A., Bender, M., & Van De Vijver, F. J. (2015). Heritage identity and maintenance enhance well-being of Turkish-Bulgarian and Turkish-German adolescents. Social Psychology, 46, 93-103. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000230

Field, A. (2013). Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics. (4th ed.). London: Sage.

Galchenko, I. & Van De Vijver, F. J. (2007). The role of perceived cultural distance in the acculturation of exchange students in Russia. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 31, 181-197. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2006.03.004

Galina, V. F., Silva, T. B. B. D., Haydu, M., & Martin, D. (2017). A saúde mental dos refugiados: um olhar sobre estudos qualitativos. Interface-Comunicação, Saúde, Educação, 21, 297-308. https://doi.org/10.1590/180757622016.0929

Hechanova-Alampay, R., Beehr, T. A., Christiansen, N. D., & Van Horn, R. K. (2002). Adjustment and strain among domestic and international student sojourners: A longitudinal study. School Psychology International, 23(4), 458-474. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034302234007

Hirai, R., Frazier, P., & Syed, M. (2015). Psychological and sociocultural adjustment of first-year international students: Trajectories and predictors. Journal of counseling psychology, 62(3), 438. https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000085

Horenczyk, G., Jasinskaja-Lahti, I., Sam, D. L., & Vedder, P. (2015). Mutuality in acculturation. Zeitschrift für Psychologie. https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000150

Kirmayer, L. J., Narasiah, L., Munoz, M., Rashid, M., Ryder, A. G., Guzder, J., Hassan, G., Rousseau, C., Pottie, K. for the Canadian Collaboration for Immigrant and Refugee Health (CCIRH). (2011). Common mental health problems in immigrants and refugees: general approach in primary care. Canadian Medical Association Journal, cmaj-090292. https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.090292

Kohls, R. L. (2001). Culture shock: Occupational hazard of overseas living. Survival kit for overseas living (4th ed.) 91-100. London: Intercultural Press.

LaFromboise, T., Coleman, H. L., & Gerton, J. (1993). Psychological impact of biculturalism: Evidence and theory. Psychological bulletin, 114(3), 395-412. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.114.3.395

Lazarus, R.S. & Folkman, S. (1984). Coping and Adaptation. In W.D. Gentry (Ed.), Handbook of Behavioral Medicine, 282-325. New York: Guilford Press.

Levander, C. & Mignolo, W. (2011). Introduction: the global south and world dis/order. The Global South, 5, 1-11.

Maydell-Stevens, E., Masggoret, A. M., & Ward, T. (2007). Problems of psychological and sociocultural adaptation among Russian speaking immigrants in New Zealand, Social Policy Journal of New Zealand: te puna whakaaro, 30, 178-198. Retrieved from http://dro.deakin.edu.au/view/DU:30034195

Miller, E. J. (1986). Culture Shock: A Students Perspective of Study Abroad and The Importance of Promoting Study Abroad Programs. Presented at the 10th Annual Conference of Intercultural and International Communication, Miami, United States of America.

Ministério da Justiça. (2015). Conare renova medida que facilita emissão de vistos a pessoas afetadas pelo conflito na Síria (Conare renews measure to facilitate visas for people affected by the conflict in Syria). Retrieved April 10, 2018 from http://www.justica.gov.br/news/conare-renova-medida-que-facilita-emissao-de-vistos-a-pessoas-afetadas-pelo-conflito-na-siria

Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública (2019) Refugio em números 4ª edição. Retrieved December 1, 2019, from https://www.justica.gov.br/seus-direitos/refugio/refugio-em-numeros

Moreira, J. B. (2014). Refugiados no Brasil: reflexões acerca do processo de integração local. REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana, 22, 85-98. https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-85852503880004306

Nguyen, A.-M. D. & Benet-Martínez, V. (2012). Biculturalism and Adjustment. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 44, 122-159. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022111435097

Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. Practical Anthropology, 4, 177-182. https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405

Phinney, J. S. (2003). Ethic identity and acculturation. In K. M. Chun, P. Balls Organista, & G. Marín (Eds.), Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research, 63-81. American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10472-006

Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M. J. (1936). Memorandum for the study of acculturation. American anthropologist, 38, 149-152. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1936.38.1.02a00330

Ryff, C. D. & Singer, B. (1996). Psychological well-being: Meaning, measurement, and implications for psychotherapy research. Psychotherapy and psychosomatics, 65, 14-23. https://doi.org/10.1159/000289026

Safdar, S., Lay, C., & Struthers, W. (2003). The process of acculturation and basic goals: Testing a multidimensional individual difference acculturation model with Iranian immigrants in Canada. Applied Psychology, 52, 555-579. https://doi.org/10.1111/1464-0597.00151

Sam, D. L. & Berry, J. W. (Eds.). (2006). The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, W. & Ward, C. (1990). The prediction of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions. International journal of intercultural relations, 14, 449-464. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(90)90030-Z

Smith, P. B., Fischer, R., Vignoles, V. L., & Bond, M. H. (2013). Understanding social psychology across cultures: Engaging with others in a changing world. London: Sage.

Suanet, I. & Van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2009). Perceived cultural distance and acculturation among exchange students in Russia. Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 19, 182-197. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.989

Tashima, J. N. (2018). Adaptação cultural de imigrantes brasileiros no Japão. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Universidade de Brasília, Brasília).

Tashima, J. N. & Torres, C. V. (2018). Percepções de brasileiros acerca do processo de adaptação cultural ao Japão. REMHU, Rev. Interdiscip. Mobil. Hum., Brasília, 52, 223-241. https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-85852503880005213

Taušová, J., Bender, M., Dimitrova, R., & Van de Vijver, F. (2019). The role of perceived cultural distance, personal growth initiative, language proficiencies, and tridimensional acculturation orientations for psychological adjustment among international students. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 69, 11-23. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.11.004

Titzmann, P. F. & Fuligni, A. J. (2015). Immigrants' adaptation to different cultural settings: A contextual perspective on acculturation: Introduction for the special section on immigration. International Journal of Psychology, 50, 407-412. https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12219

Ward, C., Bochner, S. & Furnham, A. (2001). The Psychology of Culture Shock. Hove, England: Routledge.

Ward, C. & Geeraert, N. (2016). Advancing acculturation theory and research: The acculturation process in its ecological context. Current Opinion in Psychology, 8, 98-104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.09.021

Ward, C. & Kennedy, A. (2001). Coping with cross-cultural transition. Journal of cross-cultural psychology, 32(5), 636-642. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022101032005007

Ward, C. & Kennedy, A. (1999). The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. International journal of intercultural relations, 23(4), 659-677. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(99)00014-0

Wiese, E. B. P. & Burhorst, I. (2007). Transcultural psychiatry: A mental health program for asylum-seeking and refugee children and adolescents in the Netherlands. Transcultural Psychiatry, 44, 596-561. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461507083900

Endereço para correspondência:

Raquel Carvalho Hoersting
550 University Avenue, Charlottetown
PE C1A 4P3, Canada, +1 902 566-0563
Department of Psychology
rhoersting@upei.ca

Manoela Sarto de Lucena

Psicóloga Clínica e possui mestrado em psicologia social e intercultural do Global-MINDS (Global Mobility, Inclusion and Diversity in Society), Erasmus. Tem foco em apoio psicossocial e psicologia emergencial com refugiados e trabalhadores humanitários. Este trabalho fez parte da sua monografia no seu curso de graduação em psicologia no Centro Universitário de Brasília – UniCEUB.

Raquel Carvalho Hoersting

Doutora em psicologia pela Universidade do Norte do Texas (University of North Texas – UNT), Raquel Carvalho é Professora Adjunta (Assistant Professor) no programa de doutorado em psicologia clínica da University of Prince Edward Island, Canadá, com pesquisas de pós-doutorado pela Universidade de Brasília (UnB) e estudos e atuação nas áreas de psicologia intercultural e trauma.

João Gabriel Modesto

Professor da Universidade Estadual de Goiás e do Programa de Mestrado em Psicologia do Centro Universitário de Brasília