

## ACCULTURATION AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG GREEK-CANADIANS IN TORONTO

ELEFThERIA A. SANDS

*York University*

*and*

JOHN W. BERRY

*Queen's University*

### ABSTRACT

Acculturation occurs when culturally diverse groups of people come into continuous first-hand contact inducing changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Following immigration, individuals of various acculturating groups can adapt in various ways (Berry, 1984): They can integrate, assimilate, or separate themselves, or they can become marginalized. Sometimes migration can be associated with mental health breakdown depending on factors related to the migrating group (e.g., language fluency) and/or the host society (e.g., discrimination). Marginalization has often been found to be associated with such breakdown. The present study had three goals: (a) to compare the level of acculturative stress in first- and second-generation Greek-Canadians, (b) to evaluate whether marginalization is associated with higher levels of stress, and (c) to compare the level of depression in both generations. Results showed stress and depression levels were not significantly different between the two generations, and marginalization was associated with more stress and depression in both generations.

Acculturation is a phenomenon that has been studied extensively for several decades and increases in importance as the world experiences more and more unrest, forcing millions of people to flee or emigrate from their country of origin. Acculturation occurs when culturally diverse groups of people come into continuous first-hand contact eliciting changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups (Redfield et al., 1936).

Acculturation occurs on two levels: the group level and the individual level. The latter is referred to by Graves (1967) as "psychological acculturation," and refers to changes within individual members of an acculturating group as they take part in the acculturation process in which their cultural or ethnic group is en-

---

This paper is based on an unpublished Master's thesis by Almyroutis (1991) at Queen's University. It was submitted under the name of Sands, due to a legal name change of the original author. Results from this thesis were also presented as a poster at the 1991 Canadian Psychological Association's Annual Convention in Calgary under the former name. Requests for reprints should be sent to Eleftheria Terri A. Sands, Department of Psychology, York University, 4700 Keele St., North York, On M3J 1P3.

gaged. Many factors such as premigration knowledge, prior intercultural encounters, and education are known to play a role in an immigrant's psychological acculturation (Berry & Kim, 1988).

### ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES

Berry (1984) has developed a model proposing four possible acculturation strategies which may be used by individuals of various acculturating groups after immigration. These are: integration, assimilation, separation/segregation, and marginalization. Integration entails both the maintenance of traditional culture and identity as well as active participation in the dominant society. Integration also represents a situation where both the acculturating and dominant groups must make some mutual adjustments.

In the case of assimilation, acculturating individuals adopt the dominant group's attitudes and behaviours while the traditional culture and identity of the acculturating group are abandoned.

Separation involves the acculturating group's desire to maintain a traditional way of life outside that of the larger society. While separation is self-imposed, in the case of segregation, the acculturating group is excluded by the dominant group, without regard for the wishes of the acculturating group.

Lastly, marginalization is associated with a considerable degree of psychological distress and conflict, since such individuals or groups neither find their identity in their traditional culture nor in that of the larger society. As a result, they usually feel isolated, alienated, and experience loss of identity at a cultural and psychological level. Consequently, emotional stress could be a result, and indeed some studies have found this to be the case (e.g., Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987).

Many studies have developed scales to assess the acculturation strategies adopted by individuals of various cultural and ethnic groups, including French-, Portuguese-, Hungarian-, and Korean-Canadians (Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989). The present study assesses these acculturation strategies and the mental health of first- and second-generation Greek-Canadians living in Toronto. More specifically, it examines whether marginalization is associated with acculturative stress and depression in this sample, and compares first- and second-generation Greek-Canadians on these mental health variables.

### ACCULTURATIVE STRESS

Migration has often been found to be associated with mental health breakdown (Berry, 1988). As the term implies, acculturative stress is defined as stress due to stressors that are part of the acculturation process. Although groups and individuals share the experience of acculturation, and common stressors in the new environment may impinge on all members, they may not all experience acculturative stress to the same extent. This is because there are many mediating variables which may function as "buffers" to mental breakdown or which combine to bring about acculturative stress (Berry, 1988). Some of these mediating factors are: the type of acculturating group (e.g., refugees may be expected to experience more

difficulties than immigrants since the former are involuntary migrants) and the nature of the larger society (i.e., whether it is tolerant or prejudiced, multicultural or not).

Beiser et al. (1988) have also outlined some factors related to emotional distress among migrants. These are: negative public attitudes, separation from family and community, inability to speak English or French, and failure to find suitable employment.

As an acculturation strategy, marginalization has been found to be the least desirable mode of acculturation, leading to a variety of possible acculturative stresses and mental health problems (e.g., Berry et al., 1987).

The first goal of the present study was to examine whether first- and second-generation Greek-Canadians differ in levels of acculturative stress. It was hypothesized that first-generation Greek-Canadians would be found to have more problems in this regard than second-generation Greek-Canadians for the following possible reasons: The former group would be expected to have more language difficulties (having arrived directly from Greece) and to have to adapt in various other ways such as finding a new job, finding their niche in Canadian society, and modifying unrealistic expectations. In contrast, the second generation, having been born in Canada, was not expected to have the aforementioned difficulties and thus should have lower stress levels.

Related to this, the second goal of the study was to determine whether marginalization (as measured by one of the four subscales of the Acculturation Attitudes Scale) is associated with higher acculturative stress. It was hypothesized that the first generation would be more marginalized and, thus, have higher stress levels. It is important to note that both "marginalization" and "marginality" will be referred to in this article. Marginalization is the term used to refer to one of the four acculturation attitudes. The term "marginality" refers to a scale devised by Mann (1958) to indicate alienation, isolation, and general maladjustment.

## LIFE STRESS AND DEPRESSION

The relationship between life stresses and depression has been studied extensively from many orientations and perspectives (e.g., Billings & Moos, 1982). Although studies have found a correlation between life stress and depression, causality cannot be established; it may be that depression brings about stressful life events, or that stressful events precipitate depression. Perhaps even a combination of the two may be more accurate.

Several demographic and social factors have been found to predict depression: gender, age, marital status, education, and social support (e.g., Marrett, Oxman, & Gerber, 1987).

## ACCULTURATION AND DEPRESSION

Acculturation, as a significant set of life events, can also have adverse effects on acculturating individuals' mental health if certain conditions (including premigration, migration, and postmigration factors) exist. There are many studies which have reported higher levels of depression and other mental health difficulties in



migrants than in the general population (e.g., Ghaffarian, 1987). Others, however, have found either lower rates of breakdown or equal rates (e.g., Halldin, 1985). These inconsistent findings may validate Berry's (1989) assertion that acculturative stressors need not necessarily lead to acculturative stress or other difficulties, but that such experiences may depend primarily on characteristics of the dominant society and of the individual undergoing acculturation.

In this study it was expected that first-generation Greek-Canadians who were found to be marginalized, single, less educated, and speak little or no English, would be more depressed than second-generation Greek-Canadians who would be more assimilated into Canadian society, more highly educated, and relatively fluent in English. Therefore, marginalization was expected to be positively correlated with depression.

## METHOD

### Sample

The present study included 163 first- and second-generation Greek-Canadians (from Greece and Cyprus) living in Toronto. There were 87 first-generation participants and 76 second-generation participants.

### Materials and Procedure

All participants were given a consent form asking them to complete a questionnaire in either Greek or English, depending on the language with which they felt more comfortable. Twenty-three persons fluent in both Greek and English were asked to fill out both a Greek and English package in its entirety in order to assess the effect of language (answering the English version versus the Greek version); that is, to test whether it results in different scores on the same measures. The questionnaire consisted of six scales and other questions: (a) an Acculturation Attitudes Scale (AAS; Kim, 1984); (b) a modified Cawte Stress Scale (Cawte, Bianchi, & Kiloh, 1968); (c) a Marginality Scale (Mann, 1958); (d) the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961); (e) the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale (SDS) (Zung, 1965); (f) the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988); and (g) questions about demographic, behavioural, and psychological information as well as stressful life experiences.

All potential participants were told their participation would be voluntary and anonymous, and that they could request information about the study upon its completion. A consent form was included in the package briefly describing the study which attempted to "assess how first- and second-generation Greek immigrants adjust to life in Toronto, Canada."

### Translation

All the scales (except for the BDI which had already been translated into Greek by Jemos [1984]) were translated by the method of forward and back translation (Brislin, 1986).

# Sampling Procedure

Greek-Canadian volunteers were obtained by various means: at Greek festivals, churches, organizations, dances, by word of mouth, and through acquaintances. All people younger than 16 years of age and those not born in Greece, Cyprus, or Canada were excluded from the study. Participants were classified as first or second generation depending on their place of birth and age of arrival in Canada. Those who were born in Greece and arrived in Canada after age six were classified as first generation. Those who were born and raised in Canada, or who were born in Greece but moved to Canada at or before age six (i.e., school age) were classified as second generation.

# RESULTS

Cross-tabulations showed that more first-generation Greek immigrants filled out a Greek questionnaire and were mostly older (40 years plus). The first generation consisted of 44 males and 39 females (51% vs 45%) but the second generation consisted of 22 males and 54 females (29% vs 71%). Members of the second generation generally chose an English questionnaire, and were mainly between 21 and 30 years of age. Approximately 40% of the first generation had some college or university education and 30% had mainly Greek friends. In contrast, 69% of those in the second generation had a college or university education and 25% indicated having a fairly equal number of Greek and non-Greek friends.

There were no significant differences in total, psychological, or somatic stress between the two generations as examined with simple *t*-tests. However, the second goal (to verify whether greater stress is associated with marginalization as an acculturation strategy) was supported since acculturative stress was positively associated with both marginalization and marginality, and with depression in both generations.

No significant differences in levels of depression between the two generations were found either with the BDI or Zung. Therefore, the third hypothesis (that the first generation would be more depressed than the second) was not confirmed.

The demographic (age, gender, marital status, education, English language comprehension, Greek language comprehension, and language of interview) and psychological variables (marginalization, Greek orientation, Canadian orientation, ethnic identity, social support, and stressful life events) were combined in a stepwise regression, and their outcomes on the same four scales were assessed (i.e., BDI, Zung, Cawte, and Marginality). For the first generation, females and marginalized people were more stressed, whereas understanding English and being married were associated with less stress. Being married and having a higher English comprehension also signalled less marginality and less depression (according to the BDI); marginalization was positively associated with marginality and depression. On the SDS, marginalization predicted depression, but completing the questionnaire in English and having a Greek orientation was associated with less depression.

For the second generation, being married was associated with more stress (unlike the first generation) as were being female and/or being a marginalized individual. Older people were less stressed, had lower marginality, and were less de-

pressed. However, marginalized individuals also experienced more marginality and depression. Lastly, better English comprehension was related to lower depression.

## DISCUSSION

The second generation experienced more stressful life events than the first generation; however, it was clear that stressful life events correlated positively with marginality and depression in both generations, and also with acculturative stress in the first generation. The latter finding means that although the first generation experienced fewer events, these events nevertheless had an effect on their mental health. Furthermore, stressful life events proved to be the most significant predictor of depression in the regression analysis for the first generation but not for the second, indicating that although the second generation reported more stressful life events, it may be more important to look at the type rather than the number of life events as being important contributors to depression.

There is no doubt that having strong, stable social supports, especially at times of stress, reduces or prevents depression (e.g., Barnett & Gotlib, 1988; Bell, LeRoy, & Stephenson, 1982). As expected, in both generations, having a strong total social support network was related to experiencing less depression. However, for the second generation, having adequate social support was also related to lower marginality. Since the second generation reported having more support from friends than the first generation, it could be that strong friendships buffer the experience of marginality or general isolation and alienation. That is, having a peer to confide in and depend on in difficult times may bind a person to others, to their culture, and/or to the society in which the person lives.

### Future Research Directions and Implications

The levels of acculturative stress, marginality, and depression were comparable in first- and second-generation Greek-Canadians. It is possible that this ethnic group, in general, has managed to acculturate successfully (due to adequate social support, employment, etc.) with minimal mental health problems. On the other hand, perhaps the fact that Greek culture attaches a great stigma to mental health problems may prevent members from reporting difficulties, or any difficulties may be translated into physical complaints. This could be assessed in the future by incorporating more questions regarding physical health and illnesses, and correlating these measures with acculturative stress.

In future studies efforts should be made to understand the specific difficulties encountered by various ethnic groups. It would be important to also look at social variables such as: (a) the role that a large same-ethnic population in Canada plays in terms of strengthening a sense of identity and reducing feelings of marginality; (b) whether there is open prejudice and discrimination perceived by Greek-Canadians (and other groups) which may account for higher levels of marginality and thus, acculturative stress, depression, and/or other problems; and (c) the level of pride and esteem derived from belonging to one's ethnic group (through a belief in a rich history, accomplishments, etc.) which may carry over to feelings of efficacy, contentment, and good health in their adopted country. These are crucial variables which may account for varying mental health and adjustment across groups living in Canada and should be included in future acculturation studies.



The present study focused on the acculturation strategies and health of Greek-Canadians. The findings have several implications:

(1) It is now known that Greek-Canadians overwhelmingly choose to retain their ethnic identity and behavioural characteristics while at the same time working effectively in a non-Greek society. This preference for integration is important in that Greek immigrants who may not already have acquaintances/relatives in Canada can be easily integrated into the Greek-Canadian community by informing them of names of organizations (and other Greek community information), and providing them with a sense of belonging and an important source of social support. This can translate into their experiencing less acculturative stress and may also decrease the chances of developing physical and mental health problems.

(2) Better English language comprehension predicted less marginality and less depression in the first generation. Therefore, new immigrants not proficient in English could be offered intensive English lessons provided by qualified bilingual Greek-Canadians working in immigration and/or other social service organizations. Not only might this circumvent feelings of alienation and depression, but it could translate into easier access to more job opportunities and upward social mobility.

In summary, services such as these could be beneficial to young and older new Greek immigrants and further studies could aid in illuminating other specific stress factors and conditions which aid or reduce adjustment to the host society.

## RÉSUMÉ

L'acculturation se produit quand des groupes de cultures différentes viennent en contact direct et continu, entraînant alors des changements dans la culture d'origine dans l'un ou dans les deux groupes en présence (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Suite à l'immigration, les individus de divers groupes en processus d'acculturation peuvent s'adapter de plusieurs façons (Berry, 1984): ils peuvent s'intégrer, s'assimiler, se séparer ou encore, être marginalisés. L'immigration peut parfois être associée à des crises dépressives, relatives à des facteurs propres au groupe d'immigrants (par exemple, la maîtrise de la langue) ou à la société-hôte (par exemple, la discrimination). La marginalisation s'est révélée être souvent associée à de telles crises. La présente étude poursuit trois objectifs: (a) comparer le niveau de stress produit par l'acculturation chez les Canadiens d'origine grecque de la première et de la seconde génération, (b) évaluer la relation entre la marginalisation et des niveaux plus élevés de stress, et (c) comparer le niveau de dépression entre les deux générations. Les résultats montrent que les niveaux de stress et de dépression ne diffèrent pas de façon significative entre les deux générations et que la marginalisation est associée à un degré plus élevé de stress et de dépression dans les deux générations.

## REFERENCES

- Almyroudis, E. (1991). The acculturation of Greek immigrants in Toronto, Canada. Unpublished master's thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, ON.
- Barnett, P.A., & Gotlib, I.H. (1988). Psychosocial functioning and depression: Distinguishing among antecedents, concomitants, and consequences. *Psychological Bulletin*, 104, 97-126.
- Barrett, J., Oxman, T., & Gerber, P. (1987). Prevalence of depression and its correlates in a general medical practice. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 12, 167-174.

- Beck, A.T., Ward, C.H., Mendelson, M., Mock, J., & Erbaugh, J. (1961). An inventory for measuring depression. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 4, 561-571.
- Beiser, M., Barwick, C., Berry, J.W., daCosta, G., Fantino, A.M., Ganesan, S., Lee, C., Milne, W., Naidoo, J., Prince, R., Tousignant, M., & Vela, E. (1988). *After the door has been opened: Mental health issues affecting immigrants and refugees*. A report of the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues affecting Immigrants and Refugees. Ottawa: Ministry of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and Health and Welfare Canada.
- Bell, R.A., LeRoy, J.B., & Stephenson, J.J. (1982). Evaluating the mediating effects of social support upon life events and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 10, 325-340.
- Berry, J.W. (1984). Multicultural policy in Canada: A social psychological analysis. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 16, 353-370.
- Berry, J.W. (1988). Acculturation and psychological adaptation: A conceptual overview. In J.W. Berry & R.C. Annis (Eds.), *Ethnic psychology: Research and practice with immigrants, refugees, native peoples, ethnic groups and sojourners* (pp. 41-51). Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Berry, J.W. (1989). Psychology of acculturation. In J.J. Berman (Ed.), *Cross-cultural perspectives: Nebraska Symposium on Motivation* (Vol. 37, pp. 201-234). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Berry, J.W., & Kim, U. (1988). Acculturation and mental health. In P.R. Dasen, J.W. Berry, & N. Sartorius (Eds.), *Health and cross-cultural psychology: Towards applications* (pp. 207-236). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Berry, J.W., Kim, U., Minde, T., & Mok, D. (1987). Comparative studies of acculturative stress. *International Migration Review*, 21, 491-511.
- Berry, J.W., Kim, U., Power, S., Young, M., & Bujaki, M. (1989). Acculturation attitudes in plural societies. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 38, 185-206.
- Billings, A.G., & Moos, R.H. (1982). Stressful life events and symptoms: A longitudinal model. *Health Psychology*, 1, 99-117.
- Brislin, R. (1986). The wording and translation of research instruments. In W.J. Lonner & J.W. Berry (Eds.), *Field methods for cross-cultural research* (pp. 137-164). London: Sage.
- Cawte, J., Bianchi, G.N., & Kilch, L.G. (1968). Personal discomfort in Australian aborigines. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 2, 69-79.
- Ghaffarian, S. (1987). The acculturation of Iranians in the United States. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 127, 565-571.
- Graves, T. (1967). Psychological acculturation in a tri-ethnic community. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 23, 337-350.
- Halldin, J. (1985). Prevalence of mental disorder in an urban population in central Sweden in relation to social class, marital status and immigration. *Acta psychiatrica scandinavica*, 71, 117-127.
- Jemos, J.J. (1984). *The standardization of the Beck Depression Inventory in a Greek population sample*. MD thesis, University of Athens, Athens, Greece.
- Kim, U. (1984). *Psychological acculturation of Korean immigrants in Toronto: A study of modes of acculturation, identity, language, and acculturative stress*. Unpublished master's thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, ON.
- Mann, J. (1958). Group relations and the marginal man. *Human Relations*, 11, 77-92.
- Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M.J. (1936). Memorandum for the study of acculturation. *American Anthropologist*, 38, 149-152.
- Zimet, G.D., Dahlem, N.W., Zimet, S.G., & Farley, G.K. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52, 30-41.
- Zung, W.W.K. (1965). A self-rating depression scale. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 12, 63-70.