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Cultural Adaptation of Non-Resident College Students in Delhi, India

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ABSTRACT

Cultural adaptation is a vital concern for migrant students, as the process of relocation disrupts daily functioning and significantly impacts psychological and social well-being.

Non-resident college students in India often experience challenges related to separation from familial support, management of financial resources, and adjustment to new linguistic, cultural, and urban environments. Using Berry's (1992) acculturation theory, the paper explores the cultural adaptation experiences of non-resident college students in Delhi. Directed content analysis was used to elucidate key patterns in the participant's narratives, gathered by means of semi-structured interviews (n = 50).

Findings indicate that despite pervasive challenges such as homesickness, financial constraints, and social isolation. Gendered coping differences emerged, with females emphasizing emotional resilience and peer support networks, whereas males focused more on pragmatic engagement with academic and urban stressors. Regional distinctions were observed, as southern Indian students reported greater initial cultural dissonance than northern peers, yet relied on micro-adaptive behaviours such as preservation of ethnic practices and the cultivation of peer alliances to enhance resilience. Structural barriers including limited transportation, environmental pollution, and restricted healthcare access further complicated cultural adaptation. The findings extend acculturation theory by incorporating gender and regional specificity into the urban Indian educational context, emphasizing the interaction between individual agency and socio-structural factors. Recommendations include the development of culturally sensitive institutional policies and targeted support mechanisms that better accommodate the heterogeneous needs of non-resident students.

Keywords: cultural adaptation, acculturation, directed content analysis, social support, migration