



# The Psychological Effects of Migration on Persian Women Immigrants in Australia

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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to investigate the position of Persian women immigrants within the family and their well being after migration. The study also examined how Persian women are affected emotionally by the conflict between the values of their own and the values of the host culture. The present study also examined various aspects of acculturation including measures of assimilation through attitudes to Australia, the desire to live in Australia and the desire to return to Iran.

The sample of the present study comprised 209 Persian women selected from different religious faiths and age groups. Three states were targeted: South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales. Eight focus groups were run for a sample of 58 Persian women in three target states.

A Questionnaire survey and focus group interviews were employed to obtain the required data. This combined qualitative and quantitative approach allowed a thorough and complementary examination of the adjustment of Persian women in Australia. The study was conducted in two stages. Quantitative data was collected in stage one through the questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was available to the participants either in English or in Persian translation. Qualitative data was collected through focus group interviews in stage two. The second stage focused on a sub-sample of participants in stage one. Focus group interviews pertain to participants' attitudes and experience of living in Australian society, and the tensions and pressures generated for them in the new environment.

This study represents the development of a composite study model, based on interactions of concerned measures and includes potential predictors of psychological outcome measures. Various statistical analyses of the questionnaire survey were performed to test the study's hypotheses.

The data analysis led to the conclusion that, personal characteristics such as age, education, marital status, length of stay, and employment play significant roles in Persian women's adjustment in Australia. Those who are younger and are more integrated to the Australian society have less adjustment problems with better mental health. Life in Australia is stressful for professional women who are not working or working in an area inconsistent with their



qualifications. Persian women challenge male authority after migration and this challenge has brought tension and family conflicts for some. However, in some Persian families male authority increased due to the lack of husband's employment. Lack of extended family support and language proficiency were two important factors in the adjustment process.

The study group reported adjustment problems in several areas. Problems of separation from family members, English language, problems in raising children, lack of close friends, not having enough money, and conflict between Persian groups received major emphasis.

Overall, problems of adaptation (problems encountered upon arrival), and the problem index (adjustment problems) showed fairly consistent associations with mental health measures. Self-esteem was significantly predicted by the problem index variable. Thus the more adjustment problems, the poorer the self-esteem and the greater the psychological distress. Tension symptoms significantly correlated with problems of adaptation. Thus the more problems encountered upon arrival increased the chance of having tension symptoms that consequently led to poorer emotional well-being. A small negative yet significant correlation was found between life satisfaction in Australia with family role performance and problems of adaptation, and a medium positive correlation was found between life satisfaction and identification with Australia.

This is the first study that looks at the psychological well-being of a sample of Persian women in Australia and illustrates the impact of migration and the adjustment process of this newly established immigrant group. The study's findings can assist mental health professionals and service providers to offer appropriate care that fits with the traditional beliefs and expectations of this minority group.

In order to consider implications of this work for health professionals and social service providers who work with Persian immigrants this thesis provides recommendations for intervention and prevention work with immigrants. Implications of this study's findings for further research are also discussed.