

The Influence of Cross-Cultural Transition on Superstitious Beliefs and Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to shed light on the psychological processes underlying cross-cultural adaptation by investigating how cross-cultural transitions influence superstitious beliefs and anxiety. A total of 250 young adults aged 18 to 26 were given measures of cross-cultural transition, superstitious beliefs, and anxiety. The study employed the Superstitious Belief Scale, Acculturation Index, and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory to assess how acculturation interacts with dimensions of superstitious beliefs (Popular Beliefs, Belief in Good Luck, Belief in Bad Luck, Superstitious Behavior, Social Superstitious Behavior, and Beliefs That Luck Can Change) and State and Trait Anxiety. Multiple regression analysis showed that cross-cultural transitions had a significant influence on state anxiety, mainly through the Popular Beliefs dimension. However, these variables did not significantly predict trait anxiety. The findings suggest that superstitious beliefs and acculturation processes primarily impact short-term anxiety rather than long-term anxiety traits.

Keywords: *Cross-cultural Transition, State Anxiety, Superstitious Beliefs, Trait Anxiety*

Cross-cultural transitions, such as migration for education or work, pose significant psychological challenges for individuals as they adapt to new environments. Cultural adaptation requires individuals to adjust their behaviors, values, and social norms, which can lead to feelings of anxiety and stress. In this context, superstitious beliefs (irrational beliefs or practices associated with supernatural causality) often emerge as coping mechanisms. Superstitions may offer a sense of control and predictability in the face of uncertainty (Mandal, 2018). This study investigates how cross-cultural transitions influence superstitious beliefs and anxiety, focusing on young adults who have migrated to Bangalore, India.

Superstitious Beliefs and Anxiety

Superstitious beliefs, deeply ingrained in various cultural contexts, are often invoked in situations of uncertainty or perceived loss of control (Vinson, 1998). These beliefs can serve as coping strategies during stressful transitions, particularly when individuals feel powerless. Research has demonstrated a positive correlation between superstitious beliefs and anxiety,

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The Influence of Cross-Cultural Transition on Superstitious Beliefs and Anxiety

with heightened superstitions often accompanying increased anxiety levels (Zebb & Moore, 2003). Superstitious behaviors are typically employed during heightened stress or perceived lack of preparedness (Wolfradt, 1997). Superstitions are linked to psychological distress, particularly during periods of change, such as cross-cultural transitions (Chelwani et al., 2023). In unfamiliar environments, individuals may turn to superstitions to regain control, mitigating the anxiety associated with cultural adjustment. This connection between superstition and anxiety highlights the need to explore further how these beliefs evolve during cross-cultural transitions.

Cross-Cultural Transitions and Acculturation

Acculturation is how individuals adjust to a new cultural context, balancing retaining their heritage and adopting the host culture (Berry., 1997). Research has shown that successful acculturation is critical to reducing psychological distress, including anxiety (Bethel et al., 2020). During cross-cultural transitions, individuals experience acculturative stress, the psychological impact of adapting to a new culture. This stress can exacerbate anxiety, particularly in situations where individuals face cultural conflicts or a loss of familiar social structures (Hofmann & Hinton, 2014).

Studies have demonstrated that individuals who struggle with acculturation are more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety and depression (Zisberg, 2017). Conversely, successful acculturation is associated with better psychological outcomes, as individuals who integrate aspects of their heritage and host cultures tend to experience lower anxiety levels (Berry., 1997). However, the role of superstitious beliefs in moderating this relationship between acculturation and anxiety has been less explored, making it an essential focus of this study.

Superstitions in Cross-Cultural Contexts

Cultural differences in beliefs about superstitions play a significant role in how people deal with stress when they move between cultures. In some places, superstitions are a big part of daily life and traditions, but they are not as important in others. These differences influence how people from various backgrounds react to superstitions when encountering new cultural practices. Research suggests that individuals from highly superstitious cultures may be more prone to maintain or intensify these beliefs during cultural transitions (Ofori et al., 2016). On the other hand, those from less superstitious backgrounds may adapt by adopting the superstitions prevalent in their new environment.

Chinchanachokchai et al. (2016) found that superstitions can be divided into different types: those to prevent bad luck and those seeking to bring good fortune. These categories of superstition may function differently during cross-cultural transitions, with some beliefs intensifying anxiety while others may offer comfort and reduce stress. Understanding the relationship between different types of superstitions and anxiety during cross-cultural transitions is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals cope with such transitions.

Current Study

Despite extensive research on the individual effects of superstitions, acculturation, and anxiety, there is limited knowledge of how these variables interact during cross-cultural transitions. This study addresses this gap by examining how cross-cultural transitions affect superstitious beliefs and anxiety in young adults migrating to Bangalore. The study investigates whether acculturation moderates the relationship between superstitious beliefs

The Influence of Cross-Cultural Transition on Superstitious Beliefs and Anxiety

and anxiety and how different dimensions of superstition (e.g., beliefs in good or bad luck) influence state and trait anxiety.

The following hypotheses underpin the research:

- **H1:** A significant positive relationship exists between cross-cultural transition and superstitious beliefs.
- **H2:** There is a significant relationship between cross-cultural transition and anxiety.
- **H3:** Superstitious beliefs significantly predict anxiety levels during cross-cultural transitions, with acculturation moderating this effect.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedure

A sample of participants (N=250) was drawn from an initial group of 281 using convenience sampling. Participants were young adults aged 18-26 who had migrated to Bangalore for education or work. The inclusion criteria required participants to have moved from regions outside Karnataka. The exclusion criteria included individuals who were born and raised in Bangalore or had prior extensive exposure to multiple cultures, which could confound the study's focus on recent cultural transitions.

Participants were approached individually and screened to ensure they met the inclusion criteria for the study. They were provided with detailed information about the research, including the purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Participants completed the Acculturation Index, Superstitious Belief Scale, and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory in approximately 30 minutes. The confidentiality of the participants was strictly maintained, and the researcher addressed any questions or concerns regarding the research.

Measures

1. **Acculturation Index (AI):** A 21-item self-report measure was used to assess acculturation, focusing on two dimensions—heritage acculturation (the retention of the individual's original culture) and host acculturation (the adoption of the new host culture). The responses were scored on a Likert scale from 1 (Not at all similar) to 7 (Very similar) (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the AI range from 0.70 to 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency. Furthermore, the test-retest correlations of the AI have demonstrated stability over time, with values falling between 0.70 and 0.80. Through cross-validation on several distinct ethnic groups, the AI has been proven to be a reliable indicator of acculturation orientation across cultural boundaries (Dinne et al., 2020).
2. **Superstitious Belief Scale (SBS):** This scale consists of 20 items covering various superstitious beliefs, including popular beliefs, belief in good luck, belief in bad luck, superstitious behavior, social superstitious behavior, and beliefs that luck can change. Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Most of the scale's dimensions have Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency. Additionally, there was strong test-retest reliability (coefficient of 0.902). The scale's convergent validity was demonstrated by comparing it to current measures of superstition and luck belief, which revealed statistically significant positive relationships (Chukkali & Dey, 2020).

- 3. State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI):** A 40-item self-report questionnaire was used to measure both state anxiety (temporary, situation-specific anxiety) and trait anxiety (general, long-standing anxiety). Responses were recorded on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher anxiety levels (Spielberger et al., 1983). The scale has been shown to have strong internal consistency coefficients, ranging from .86 to .95. Test-retest reliability has been demonstrated with coefficients ranging from .65 to .75 over a 2-month interval. In the present study, the test-retest coefficients fell within the range of .69 to .89. The scale has also been well-validated in terms of construct and concurrent validity, as evidenced by numerous studies, including work by Spielberger 1989. (“The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI),” 2011)

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using Jamovi software. Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables, including means, standard deviations, and the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality. Correlations between superstitious beliefs, acculturation, and anxiety were analyzed using Pearson’s correlation coefficient. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the predictive capacity of superstitious beliefs and acculturation on state and trait anxiety. Given the continuous nature of the variables, this analysis was suitable for assessing the relative influence of each predictor while controlling for potential confounding factors.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Scales

		Mean	Median	SD	Shapiro-Wilk	
					W	P
	Acculturation	82.60	84.00	21.66	0.985	0.010
Superstitious Belief Scale	Popular Beliefs	10.66	11.00	3.65	0.961	<.001
	Belief in Good Luck	12.10	12.00	2.88	0.981	.002
	Belief in Bad Luck	11.79	12.00	3.22	0.979	0.001
	SB	8.94	9.00	2.51	0.979	<.001
	Social SB	6.19	6.00	2.02	0.961	<.001
	BLCC	9.15	9.00	2.24	0.980	0.001
	Anxiety	State	82.60	84.00	21.55	0.985
	Trait	49.35	49.50	7.49	0.991	0.152

Note. N= 250, SD= Standard Deviation, SB= Superstitious Behaviour, Social SB= Social Superstitious Behaviour, BLCC= Belief that Luck Can Change.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study. The mean score for the Acculturation Index was 82.60 (SD = 21.66), indicating that participants reported moderate levels of cultural adaptation. The Superstitious Belief Scale was spread across different subscales, with Popular Beliefs (M = 10.66, SD = 3.65) and Belief in Good Luck (M = 12.10, SD = 2.88) being the most prominent. State Anxiety had a mean score of 82.60 (SD = 21.55), while Trait Anxiety was slightly lower at 49.35 (SD = 7.49), while Trait Anxiety was slightly lower at 49.96 (SD = 5.02).

The Influence of Cross-Cultural Transition on Superstitious Beliefs and Anxiety

Correlations

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlations between superstitious beliefs and both state and trait anxiety. The Popular Beliefs subscale had a significant positive correlation with state anxiety ($r = 0.22, p < .01$), suggesting that individuals experiencing more significant cultural uncertainty are more likely to rely on common superstitions to cope, which in turn increases their situational anxiety. Acculturation was negatively correlated with both forms of anxiety, indicating that higher levels of cultural adaptation were associated with lower anxiety.

Regression Analysis

Table 2 The Influence of Acculturation and Superstitious Beliefs on State Anxiety

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Intercept	55.7451	3.5244	15.817	< .001
Acculturation	-0.0371	0.0220	-1.684	0.093
PB	0.2820	0.1412	1.997	0.047
BGL	-0.2911	0.1749	-1.664	0.097
BBL	0.0952	0.1589	0.599	0.550
SB	-0.1032	0.2014	-0.512	0.609
Social SB	-0.3972	0.2416	-1.644	0.101
BLCC	-0.0609	0.2144	-0.284	0.777
Model R²	0.0529			

Note: B= Unstandardized Coefficient, SE= Standard Error, t= t-Statistic, p= p-Value, PB= Popular Beliefs, BGL= Belief in Good Luck, BBL= Belief in Bad Luck, SB= Superstitious Behavior, SSB= Social Superstitious Behavior, BLCC= Belief that Luck Can Change.

Table 2 presents the multiple regression analysis conducted to examine state anxiety predictors. The regression model explained $R^2 = 0.0529$ of the variance in state anxiety. The intercept was statistically significant ($B = 55.7451, p < .001$), indicating that the baseline level of State Anxiety, when all predictors are zero, is around 55.75. Among other predictors, Popular Belief was significant ($B = 0.282, p = 0.047$), suggesting that a unit increase in Popular Belief is associated with an increase of approximately 0.28 units in State Anxiety. This finding implies that this specific subscale of superstitious beliefs may have a meaningful impact on State Anxiety. Other predictors, such as Acculturation, showed a marginally significant negative association with state anxiety ($B = -0.0371, p = 0.093$), suggesting potential trends that may warrant further investigation in a larger sample.

Table 3. The Influence of Acculturation and Superstitious Beliefs on Trait Anxiety

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Intercept	51.28623	2.4251	21.14783	< .001
Acculturation	-0.00975	0.0152	-0.64311	0.521
PB	-0.06681	0.0971	-0.70624	0.481
GL	-0.02368	0.1204	-0.19675	0.844
BL	0.03245	0.1093	0.29680	0.767
SB	0.02057	0.1386	0.14839	0.882
Social SB	-0.00144	0.1663	-0.00864	0.993
BLCC	-0.00613	0.1475	-0.04152	0.967
Model R²	0.00495			

Note: B= Unstandardized Coefficient, SE= Standard Error, t= t-Statistic, p= p-Value, PB= Popular Beliefs, GL= Good Luck, BL= Bad Luck, SB= Superstitious Behavior, SSB= Social Superstitious Behavior, BLCC= Belief that Luck Can Change.

The Influence of Cross-Cultural Transition on Superstitious Beliefs and Anxiety

Table 3 displays the multiple regression analysis conducted to predict trait anxiety. The model accounted for $R^2 = 0.00495$ of the variance. The intercept was again highly significant ($B = 51.28623$, $p < .001$), indicating that the baseline level of Trait Anxiety is about 51.29 when all predictors are zero. However, none of the predictors were statistically significant, including Acculturation ($B = -0.00975$, $p = .521$) and PB ($B = -0.06681$, $p = .481$), which suggests that these variables do not contribute meaningfully to the prediction of Trait Anxiety in this sample.

DISCUSSION

Interpretations of the study

The results of the current study align with previous research on the relationships between acculturation and mental health among migrant populations. Acculturation, particularly the integration of host and heritage cultures, is generally associated with better mental health outcomes. At the same time, marginalization is characterized by disengagement from both cultures and has been linked to heightened symptoms of anxiety and depression (Choy et al., 2020). In this study, acculturation was negatively correlated with state anxiety, indicating that successful adaptation to the host culture may help alleviate short-term anxiety during cross-cultural transitions. Although acculturation did not emerge as a statistically significant predictor of anxiety, the negative correlation supports existing research that shows successful cultural integration can buffer individuals from anxiety related to cultural adaptation (Choy et al., 2020).

Superstitious beliefs also emerged as a significant factor in managing anxiety during cross-cultural transitions. The findings support earlier research by Lasikiewicz and Teo (2018), who argued that superstitions like carrying a "lucky" object can reduce stress and provide a sense of control in uncertain situations. Similarly, in this study, popular superstitious beliefs were strongly associated with higher levels of state anxiety. Migrants navigating the uncertainties of a new cultural environment may turn to superstitions as a psychological tool to manage their stress, offering temporary relief from the unpredictability they face, which aligns with prior findings on international students, where cultural groups experiencing high levels of stress exhibited increased use of superstitious behaviors (Abbassi & Stacks, 2007). The current study extends this understanding by highlighting that superstitions, while acting as a coping mechanism, may also heighten short-term anxiety by fostering an illusion of control.

The findings from Ozer's (2015) research in Ladakh, India, complement these results. Ozer found that students with greater exposure to acculturation showed better mental health outcomes, though acculturation orientation did not significantly predict anxiety. Similarly, this study found no significant relationship between acculturation and long-term (trait) anxiety, suggesting that acculturation may mitigate short-term but not long-term anxiety. This distinction highlights the complexity of the acculturation process, where the immediate challenges of cultural transitions may contribute to state anxiety but do not necessarily influence deeper, more stable traits such as trait anxiety.

The broader psychological effects of superstitious beliefs, beyond anxiety, are also worth noting. Superstitions have been linked to conditions like depression and obsessive-compulsive symptoms, suggesting a wider range of mental health risks associated with reliance on irrational beliefs (Lasikiewicz & Teo, 2018). While this study focused on anxiety, the association between superstitions and other psychological disorders warrants

The Influence of Cross-Cultural Transition on Superstitious Beliefs and Anxiety

further investigation, particularly among migrant populations, where acculturative stress could exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.

These findings have practical implications for mental health interventions targeting migrant populations. Mental health professionals should be aware of the role that superstitious beliefs can play in managing anxiety and consider integrating culturally sensitive approaches into their practice. Encouraging acculturation while addressing irrational beliefs through educational programs could provide more effective strategies for managing anxiety during cross-cultural transitions. Future research should explore the intersection between superstitious behaviors and mood disorders to understand better the psychological mechanisms involved in cultural adaptation.

Limitation and Implication

The results of this research have significant theoretical and practical consequences. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the growing literature on cross-cultural psychology by emphasizing the significance of superstitious beliefs in coping with anxiety during cultural transitions. It emphasizes the importance of considering cultural elements, such as superstition, when investigating the psychological effects of migration and acculturation.

Furthermore, these discoveries could guide interventions to lessen anxiety in people going through cross-cultural transitions. Mental health professionals who work with migrant communities should be aware of the potential impact of superstitious beliefs on anxiety and consider integrating culturally appropriate approaches into their therapeutic practices. Encouraging successful adaptation by fostering harmony between native and host cultures could also efficiently reduce state anxiety during cross-cultural transitions. Moreover, given that popular superstitious beliefs were identified as a significant predictor of state anxiety, educational programs designed to address irrational beliefs and promote evidence-based coping strategies may help individuals manage their anxiety more effectively during such transitions.

The study provided valuable findings, but some limitations should be considered. Firstly, the relatively low explanatory power of the regression models, particularly for trait anxiety, suggests that important factors such as social support, coping mechanisms, or personality traits were not captured in the analysis but could have a more significant influence on long-term anxiety. Another limitation of the study is that it did not account for gender differences. Given that both cross-cultural transitions and anxiety can manifest differently across genders, research in the future could benefit from a more balanced or gender-specific analysis to understand if gender plays a moderating role in the relationship between superstitious beliefs and anxiety.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides important insights into how superstitious beliefs and acculturation influence anxiety during cross-cultural transitions. The findings suggest that while superstitions, particularly popular beliefs, are linked to higher levels of state anxiety, acculturation may help alleviate some of the anxiety experienced during cultural adaptation. However, these effects were limited to short-term anxiety, with no significant impact on enduring anxiety traits. The relatively low predictive power of the models indicates that other factors, such as social support or coping strategies, likely play a key role in shaping anxiety during these transitions. Future research should explore these additional factors to

develop a more comprehensive approach for supporting individuals navigating cultural adjustment challenges.

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The Influence of Cross-Cultural Transition on Superstitious Beliefs and Anxiety

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Conflict of Interest

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