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Research Paper

Perceived Social Support and Interpersonal Communication on Sociocultural Adaptation among Indian Professionals in the UK

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ABSTRACT

Indian professionals employed in European countries, such as the UK, often face unique challenges compared to their domestic counterparts, particularly in adapting to a new sociocultural environment. Personal attributes such as perceived social support and interpersonal communication are critical in this adaptation process. This study investigated the role of these factors on the sociocultural adaptation of Indian professionals in the UK. Using a correlational research design, data were collected from 220 participants (110 males and 110 females) through purposive sampling. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Interpersonal Communication Inventory (ICI), and Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS-R) were administered to assess the respective constructs. The findings indicated a positive correlation between perceived social support and interpersonal communication. Moreover, sociocultural adaptation was positively associated with both perceived social support and interpersonal communication. The t-test analysis revealed significant gender differences in sociocultural adaptation, suggesting that gender influences how individuals adapt to a new cultural context. Regression analysis indicated that both perceived social support and interpersonal communication to be significant predictors of sociocultural adaptation. This study underscores the necessity of examining the influence of perceived social support and interpersonal communication on sociocultural adaptation, as existing research has inadequately addressed these factors in the context of Indian professionals in the UK. The findings can help in the designing and implementation of preparatory measures or modules for those migrating, designed to act in a preventive capacity.

Keywords: *Perceived social support, Interpersonal communication, Sociocultural adaptation*

In recent years, there has been a rise in the migration of individuals from India to foreign countries, driven by the pursuit of better employment opportunities. Relocating to a different country necessitates a high degree of adaptation, especially in contexts where cultural norms and social structures differ significantly from those in India. The United Kingdom is one of the most popular destinations for Indians seeking overseas employment, particularly in sectors such as information technology, healthcare, and education. According to the UK Home Office (2024), Indian citizens consistently receive the highest number of UK work visas among non-EU countries. Effective adaptation in such environments often depends

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on individual-level factors, with perceived social support and interpersonal communication skills playing a central role.

Socio-cultural adaptation refers to an individual's ability to handle the demands of daily life in a new cultural environment. The ability to navigate housing, food, transportation, cultural norms, social services, and interpersonal interactions constitutes a fundamental aspect of successful cross-cultural adjustment (Qi & Lee, 2009). When immigrants encounter difficulties with everyday tasks, they are more likely to experience psychological distress, reduced performance, and broader challenges in adapting to various aspects of the host culture (Shrinivas et al., 2005; An & Chiang, 2015). Both personal attributes and situational variables jointly influence immigrants' capacity to fit in and function effectively in their new society. Psychological adjustment is comprehensively explained by Berry's acculturation framework (2001), which outlines four strategies such as integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Among these, integration is consistently associated with the most favourable outcomes in terms of both mental health and social functioning. Ward's stress and coping model (1996) emphasizes that factors such as language proficiency, length of stay, motivation, cultural distance, and social support either facilitate or impede the adaptation process. Expatriate employees with higher level of cross-cultural competence tend to adjust more effectively to the host country and demonstrate enhanced job performance (Chen, 2019).

Perceived social support is a crucial factor in facilitating adaptation to a new environment, as it offers emotional stability. It refers to an individual's belief in the availability and responsiveness of others, encompassing emotional, instrumental and informational support (Vaingankar, Abdin, & Chong, 2012). Social capital theory (Putnam, 1994), Social Provisions Theory (Mancini & Blieszner, 1992) and social relationships theory (Weiss, 1974) emphasize the structural and functional aspects of social support in promoting an individual's sense of well-being. Ethnic communities, established social networks and religious organizations often serve as key source of support, offering assistance with housing, emotional well-being, employment and cultural adaptation (Chioneso, 2008; Hagan, 1998). Wang, Hong, and Pi (2015) found that online social support had a positive impact on individual's psychological and sociocultural adaption. Moreover, robust social support systems can buffer against challenges such as isolation, discrimination and cultural shock. For individuals experiencing a high level of cultural disruptions, social support serves as a protective role by reducing acculturative stress, enhancing emotional well-being and facilitating integration into the host culture (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Thomas & Sumathi, 2016). Interpersonal communication involves the exchange of information and meaning through both verbal and non-verbal cues, typically occurring in direct or mediated interactions (Ostańkowicz-Bazan, 2015). According to Kim (2001), effective interpersonal communication forms the foundation of social relationships and plays a vital role in immigrants' adaptation to a new culture. Successful communication depends on shared understanding and is shaped by the context, cultural factors, and language proficiency (Larsen, Mangrio, & Persson, 2021). However, barriers such as gender differences, social status, and cultural diversity can hinder the communication process (Alriyami, 2015; Klimova & Semradova, 2012). In workplace settings, strong interpersonal skills are essential for teamwork, professional success and leadership (Tarver, 2021).

The number of Indian professionals residing and working in the UK has been steadily increasing in recent years. However, existing research has not adequately examined the simultaneous influence of perceived social support and interpersonal communication on

sociocultural adjustment. This highlights a significant gap in the literature, particularly about the experiences of Indian professionals in the UK.

METHOD

Aim

This study aims to examine the influence of perceived social support and interpersonal communication on sociocultural adaptation of Indian professionals in the UK.

Objectives

- To find out the relationship between perceived social support, interpersonal communication and sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK.
- To find out the difference in perceived social support and sociocultural adaptation between male and female Indian professionals in the UK.
- To examine the predictive role of social support and interpersonal communication in sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK.

Hypotheses

- H_1: There is a significant relationship between perceived social support and interpersonal communication among Indian professionals in the UK.
- H_2: There is a significant relationship between social support and sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK.
- H_3: There is a significant relationship between interpersonal communication and sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK.
- H_4: There is a significant difference in perceived social support between male and female Indian professionals in the UK.
- H_5: There is a significant difference in sociocultural adaptation between male and female Indian professionals in the UK.
- H_6: Perceived social support and interpersonal communication significantly predict the sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK.

Operational definition

- Perceived social support refers to an individual's perceived availability of supportive behaviors that fulfill functional roles in various contexts (Ong & Ward, 2005).
- Interpersonal communication is the process through which individuals convey information, emotions, and meanings via verbal and non-verbal messages, typically in face-to-face interactions (Ostańkowicz-Bazan, 2015).
- Sociocultural adaptation refers to the extent to which individuals successfully adjust their behaviour and interactions to meet the demands of a novel cultural environment (Wilson, 2012).

Design

This quantitative correlational study investigated the relationships between perceived social support, interpersonal communication and sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK.

Variables Utilized

The dependent variable in the study is sociocultural adaptation, while the independent variables were perceived social support and interpersonal communication.

Sample

A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit Indian professionals in the UK. The total sample consisted of 220 participants, including 110 males and 110 females. During data collection, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied.

Inclusion criteria

- Individuals who voluntarily consented to participate in the study.
- Indian professionals who have been working in the UK for a minimum of six months.
- Age ranges from 25 to 40 years

Exclusion criteria

- Participants who had resided in the UK for less than six months
- Participants who were nationals of countries other than India.

Measures

- **The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)** was developed by Zimet, Dahlem, and Farley in 1988. It is a self-report 12-item instrument designed to assess perceived social support from family, friends and significant others. Each item is rated on seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "very strongly disagree" to "very strongly agree." The scale comprises three subscales: Significant Others (items 1, 2, 5, and 10), Family (items 3, 4, 8, and 11) and Friends (items 6, 7, 9, and 12). Scores for each subscale are calculated by summing the responses of the corresponding items and dividing the total by four. The total perceived social support score is obtained by averaging the responses to all 12 items, with higher scores indicating greater perceived social support. The MSPSS demonstrates satisfactory discriminant validity and the instrument has good psychometric properties, with subscale reliability coefficients ranging from 0.85 to -0.92, and an overall reliability of 0.87 to 0.93.
- **The interpersonal communication inventory (ICI)** was formulated by Millard J. Bienvenu, Sr (1969). It consists of 40 items rated on a three-point Likert scale. This scale measures the communication process as an element of social interaction to identify patterns, characteristics, and styles of communication rather than content itself. The scale encompasses the dimensions such as self-concept, listening, clarity of expression, difficulties in coping with anger, and self-disclosure. The instrument demonstrates high internal consistency, with a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.87.
- **The Sociocultural adaptation scale- revised (SCAS-R)** was constructed by Wilson in 2012. It is a 21-item scale rated on a five-point Likert scale. It measures domains such as academic/work performance, interpersonal communication, personal interests, community involvement, ecological adaptation and language proficiency. The scale reported high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.92.

Procedure

Data were collected through a self-administered online survey. Before participation, informed consent was obtained, and the objective of the study was explained. The researcher's contact details were provided to the participants for any queries. Individuals who were unwilling to complete the questionnaire due to personal reasons retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The responses were collected from the participants and subsequently analysed. All the collected responses remained strictly confidential and were used solely for research purposes.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse the data. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the associations among sociocultural adaptation, perceived socio support and interpersonal communication. An independent sample t-test was performed to compare sociocultural adaptation and perceived social support between male and female participants. Furthermore, linear Regression analysis assessed the predictive influences of perceived social support and interpersonal communication on sociocultural adaptation.

RESULTS

Table No.1: Statistical description of variables

Variables	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Perceived social support	220	21	84	48.68	16.24
Interpersonal communication	220	41	111	66.73	13.91
Sociocultural adaptation	220	21	105	64.81	14.12

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics that provide an overview of the dataset (N = 220). Participants reported moderate levels of perceived social support, with considerable variability across individuals. Interpersonal communication scores indicated a moderately high level of communicative competence. Similarly, the degree of sociocultural adaptation reflected that most participants were functioning effectively in adjusting to the host culture, although some individual differences were observed.

Table No. 2: Correlation analysis among perceived social support, interpersonal communication, and sociocultural adaptation

Variables	1	2	3
Perceived Social Support	1	-	-
Interpersonal Communication	0.48**	1	-
Sociocultural Adaptation	0.33**	0.29**	1

*Note: ** = P<.01*

Table 2 shows the correlation coefficient among the study variables. The results indicated a significant moderate positive correlation between perceived social support and interpersonal communication ($r = 0.48$, $p<0.01$). The findings also indicate a significant positive correlation between perceived social support and sociocultural adaptation ($r = 0.33$, $p<0.01$). In addition, the analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between interpersonal communication and sociocultural adaptation ($r = 0.29$, $p<0.05$).

Table No.3: Gender difference in variables

Variables	Male (n=110)		Female (n=110)		t-value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Perceived Social Support	47.53	15.20	49.83	17.20	-1.05
Sociocultural Adaptation	60.76	15.70	68.87	11.00	-4.43**

Note: M and SD are used to represent mean and standard deviation respectively
***= p<0.01*

Table 3 presents the mean, standard deviation, and t-value of male and female participants on perceived social support and sociocultural adaptation. The t-value of -1.05 indicates that the difference in perceived social support between the two groups is not statistically significant. However, the findings demonstrate that male and female Indian professionals in the UK differ significantly in terms of sociocultural adaptation.

Table No. 4: Linear regression analysis predicting the influence of perceived social support and interpersonal communication on sociocultural adaptation

Variables	R^2	Adjusted R^2	S.E	β	F	P
Perceived Social Support	0.11	0.10	13.32	0.33	28.33	0.01
Interpersonal Communication	0.08	0.08	13.53	0.29	20.71	0.01

a. Dependent Variable: Sociocultural Adaptation.

Table 4 shows the results of linear regression analysis with perceived social support and interpersonal communication as predictors of sociocultural adaptation. The R^2 value of perceived social support was 0.11, indicating that it accounted for 11% of the variance in the outcome variable, sociocultural adaptation, with F (1, 218) = 28.33, p = 0.01 ($p \leq 0.05$), suggesting a good fit for the data. The standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.33$) indicated that perceived social support positively predicted sociocultural adaptation. Similarly, the R^2 value of interpersonal communication was 0.08, suggesting that it explained for 8% of the variance in sociocultural adaptation. The regression model was statistically significant, F = 20.71, p = 0.01 ($p \leq 0.05$). The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.29$) indicated a positive predictive relationship, meaning that higher level of interpersonal communication was associated with greater sociocultural adaptation. Overall, perceived social support contributed more significantly to the prediction of sociocultural adaptation than interpersonal communication.

DISCUSSION

Perceived social support and interpersonal communication play a crucial role in facilitating sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK as they adjust to a new environment. Correlation analysis revealed that an increase in perceived social support is associated with a corresponding increase in interpersonal communication. This may be because perceived social support from individuals with a similar cultural background provides a sense of familiarity and emotional comfort, thereby promoting interpersonal communication by creating a safe and comfortable space for open and effective interaction. Additionally, perceived social support contributes to the development of social networks, offering greater opportunities for meaningful interaction. This finding aligns with prior research by Anders and Tucker (2000), who highlighted that lower communication competence is linked to smaller social support networks. Therefore, the hypothesis H_1 was supported. The second hypothesis (H_2) was also supported by table 2, which indicated a significant positive correlation between perceived social support and sociocultural adaptation. As perceived social support increases, sociocultural adaptation tends to improve. This may be because professionals who perceive strong social support are better equipped to manage stress, provide guidance and emotional comfort, and help to navigate cultural and social challenges more effectively. Social support may also enhance a sense of belonging, which facilitates smoother cultural adaptation. This finding is consistent with a previous study by English, Zhang, and Tong (2021), who found a positive association between social support and sociocultural

adaptation. The findings also revealed a positive relationship between interpersonal communication and socio-cultural adaptation, implying that improved communication may enhance relationship-building, aid in understanding cultural norms, and support the overcoming of adaptation challenges. These findings are in line with Gladkova (2017), who concluded that communication competence is certainly an important factor in stimulating cultural adaptation and familiarizing individuals with cultural norms and social realities of a new environment. Thus, hypothesis H_3 was accepted.

The t-test analysis examined gender-based differences in perceived social support and interpersonal communication. The results showed that male and female professionals did not differ significantly in their level of perceived social support, leading to the non-acceptance of hypothesis H_4. These may be due to factors such as shared cultural background, workplace inclusivity, and equal access to the community network for both genders. These findings contradict previous research (Sharir et al., 2007; Kendler et al., 2005; Cashwell, 1995), which reported a higher level of social support among females. Thus, it can be inferred that gender is not a contributing factor influencing perceived social support among Indian professionals in the UK. The fourth hypothesis (H_5) was supported, as the findings indicated that female Indian professionals in the UK exhibited significantly greater sociocultural adaptation compared to males. This may be due to women's greater engagement in social support networks, which contributes to better adaptation outcomes (Mahmood & Galloway Burke, 2018). Such involvement may lead to cultural learning and emotional adjustments. Also, women are often more open to expressing emotions, seeking help, and participating in social interactions, all of which enhance integration into the host culture. A previous study by Güzel and Glazer (2019) also found that females tend to adapt better in adjusting to new cultures and integrating into communities.

The regression analysis presented in table 4 identified perceived social support and interpersonal communication as significant predictors of sociocultural adaptation, thereby supporting hypothesis (H_5). This suggests that enhancing perceived social support and interpersonal communication may improve sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK, as they promote a sense of connectedness, reduce stress and aid in navigating cultural differences effectively. The results are consistent with prior research (Ward et al., 2001; Kim, 2001; Berry, 1997), which emphasized that strong social networks and effective communication are key facilitators of cultural adjustment among the migrant population.

In summary, cultivating effective communication and promoting social connectedness can help employers create a culturally responsive ecosystem that enhances adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the role of perceived social support and interpersonal communication in sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK. Significant correlations were identified among sociocultural adaptation, interpersonal communication and perceived social support. A significant gender-based difference was also observed in sociocultural adaptation. Furthermore, both interpersonal communication and perceived social support emerged as significant predictors of sociocultural adaptation. These findings provide valuable insights for fostering an inclusive environment for migrant professionals within the host culture. This study also lays a foundation for further research and for the development of

interventions aimed at enhancing the ability of migrant professionals to adapt effectively to diverse sociocultural environments.

Implications

The study highlights the important role of perceived social support and interpersonal communication in enhancing sociocultural adaptation among Indian professionals in the UK. These findings point to practical steps that organizations, support networks and policymakers can implement to improve adaptation outcomes for migrant professionals. Initiatives such as peer mentoring, orientation programs, community events, and networking forums can create opportunities to build trust and foster a sense of connection and support among individuals. This study also emphasizes the need for an inclusive workplace environment that respects cultural diversity and ensures equal access to support resources, regardless of gender. Programs that acknowledge and build on this strength may ease the adaptation process. Furthermore, organizations should consider providing training in cultural intelligence, communication competencies and stress coping strategies to reduce cultural barriers and enhance professional confidence.

Limitations

The limited duration of the study introduces several inherent limitations. As it employed a primarily correlational research design, it did not examine or control the confounding variables that may potentially influence the results. Besides, the data were obtained through a self-report questionnaire, which may be subject to social desirability bias and lack of conscientious responding. Also, the absence of longitudinal data limits the understanding of changes in variables over time.

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Conflict of Interest

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