Acculturative Stress, Self-Esteem, and Coping
Among Burmese Female Migrant Workers

Sai Han Noom 1, Dr. Maria Belen Vergara 2
1. BA Psychology, Webster University
2. Assistant Professor, PhD Counseling Psychology, Webster University

Abstract

The significant increase in the number of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand along with their stressful working and living conditions provided the impetus for this study which explored the acculturation experiences of migrant workers. Specifically, this study examined the acculturative stressors, levels of acculturative stress and self-esteem, coping responses, and the relationship that acculturative stress may have with self-esteem and coping among Burmese female migrant workers in Thailand. Fifty-seven participants completed the Culture Shock Questionnaire (Mumford, 1998), Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989), Coping Responses Inventory (Moos, 1993), and a questionnaire that inquired about demographic information and acculturative stressors. The findings showed that Burmese female migrant workers experienced job difficulties, money, language, perceived discrimination, and police as the top five highest stressors. High acculturative stress and low self esteem were likewise reported. Approach coping of positive reappraisal and seeking guidance, and avoidance coping of seeking rewards and cognitive avoidance were the most frequently used coping response to acculturative stress. Acculturative stress was found to be negatively correlated with self-esteem and with avoidant coping responses such as acceptance and emotional discharge. Suggestions for promoting positive acculturative experiences of migrant workers and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: acculturative stress, self-esteem, coping, migrant workers
Background

Globalization of the world economy has generated increasing opportunities for international exchange of capital, goods, and services which has subsequently produced a significant rise in the migrant labor force. According to United Nations Department of Public Information (December, 2010), there are 214 million migrant workers worldwide, many of whom are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Economic deprivation is a major factor along with displacement due to armed conflicts, persecution, or natural disasters which compel Asian migrant workers to seek greener pasture abroad (Amnesty International, 2005). In mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand’s economic growth has made it a major destination among workers from neighboring countries (International Organization for Migration, January, 2011). Workers from Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and Cambodia comprised 1.3 million of two million migrant workers in Thailand (Fujita, Endo, Okamoto, Nakanishi, & Yamada, 2010). Of the migrant workers from Thailand’s neighboring countries, 82% were Burmese who worked in the agriculture, fisheries, manufacturing, construction, domestic, restaurants, and hotels sectors of the Thai industry (Fujita et al., 2010).

As migrants, Burmese workers experience acculturation which entails a demanding process of adjusting to the new culture and way of life (Berry, 1997). The acculturation process can become stressful and lead to acculturative stress when migrant workers experience difficulties with language, values, pace of life, and lack of familiarity with rules and laws (Park, 2009). The acculturative stress of Burmese migrant workers may be aggravated by formidable challenges posed by harsh working conditions, low income, heavy indebtedness, risk of being victims of human trafficking, harassment by police and military, high risk of illnesses, and limited access to affordable medical facilities (Fujita et al., 2010). Moreover, Burmese female workers contend with lower wages and lesser working days as compared with their male counterparts.

The stressful living and working conditions as typified by the experience of Burmese workers have led researchers (e.g., Berry, 1997; Hovey & Magana, 2003) in the field of acculturation and acculturative stress to identify migrant workers as a special population that requires empirical attention. Their life circumstances demand immediate and positive adaptation in order for them to function well in their host cultures. Thus, migrant workers are exposed to difficult situations that can trigger acculturative stress which can consequently lead to psychological distress. Empirical attention on migrant workers can provide valuable
understanding into their experience of acculturation and pave the way for programs and structures that can address their concerns and promote their well being and successful adjustment to their host cultures.

Studies on migrants have identified significant acculturative stressors such as status of immigration and anxiety (Mejia & McCarthy, 2010), difficulties in social adaptation (Neto, 2002), nostalgia (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, & Zhou, 2009), depression (Choi, Miller, & Wilbur, 2009; Mui & Kang, 2006), and comorbidity (Kiang, Grzywacz, Marin, Arcury, & Quandt, 2010). Culture shock, fear, guilt, and homesickness were found to be relevant acculturative stressors (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994) whereas perceived discrimination or hate exacerbated the acculturative stress among international university students (Horn, 2008) and immigrants from various ethnic minority groups (Faur, 2008).

Moreover, acculturative stress was related with language fluency (Neto, 2002), cognitive flexibility and general self-efficacy (Kim & Omizo, 2005), and social support (Kiang, Grzywacz, Marin, Arcury, & Quandt, 2010). Acculturative stress was found to be correlated with low self-esteem (Cavazos-Rehg & De Lucia – Waack, 2009; Kim & Omizo, 2005; Neto 2002; Park 2009) and suicidal ideation (Hovey & Magana, 2003) among teenage migrants of varied ethnicities. Low self-esteem was likewise correlated with anxiety and hopelessness (Sonderegger, Barrett, & Creed, 2004) and depression (Hovey & Magana, 2002; Park, 2009) among child and adult migrants.

On the other hand, there have been studies which focused on coping responses to normative stress and acculturative stress. Both active or approach and passive or avoidance coping responses are potentially effective as protective factor against stress and psychosomatic illnesses among Asian Americans (Jeong, 2009). However, approach coping (e.g., problem solving) have been found to be generally effective as a buffer against the debilitating effects of stress (Folkman, 1997), occupational burnout (Rohde, 2010) among low-wage earning Latino migrants, and depression among Latino adult immigrants (Torres, 2010). Approach coping responses have also been shown to promote adaptive adjustment among Pakistani immigrants in Canada (Jibeen & Khalid, 2010) and resiliency and cultural identity among Japanese women migrants in America (Heberle, 2010). Avoidance coping may not be effective in mitigating the effects of stress (Torres & Rollock, 2004) as these responses have been shown to be related to high levels of acculturative stress and low levels of adjustment when compared to active coping (Crockett, Iturbide, Stone, McGinley, Raffaelli, & Carlo, 2007). However, approach coping such as logical analysis and seeking
guidance when used in conjunction with avoidance coping such as cognitive avoidance, acceptance/resignation emotional discharge alongside emotional intelligence have been linked with effective management of acculturative stress among international university students (Vergara, Smith, & Keele, 2010). Quality of relationships provided the foundations for coping, resiliency, and positive sense of self in the face of cultural conflicts among Chinese women immigrants in America (Yuen, 2008).

This review of literature on the acculturation have shown that considerable empirical attention has been directed at the experience of immigrants to North American or European countries (e.g., Cavazos - Rehg & De Lucia - Waack, 2009; Park, 2009) and international university students (e.g. Kim & Omizo, 2005; Horn, 2008). However, there seems to be a dearth in literature on the acculturation experiences and concerns of migrant workers which have been identified as a special client population due to their difficult life circumstances. This study is an attempt to shed light on the acculturation experience of migrant workers, particularly Burmese female workers in Thailand by looking into the acculturative stressors, levels of acculturative stress and self-esteem, coping responses, and exploring the possible relationships of acculturative stress with self-esteem and coping responses.

**Objectives of the Study**

This study represents an attempt to highlight the acculturative experiences of Burmese female migrant workers in Thailand that represent a segment of the special client population as defined in the literature on acculturation due to their special circumstances and needs. By exploring the factors that contribute to their problems and coping, and the psychological impact of dealing with multiple demands of living and working in a foreign country, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of empirical literature on acculturative stress, and to identify potentially fruitful avenues for future research. Finally, this study hopes to furnish professionals in the health and welfare disciplines, socio-civic organizations, and government institutions with valuable insights into the plight of migrant workers so that developmental, remedial, and rehabilitative efforts can be directed toward this valuable segment of the society whose commitment of lives and energies push the frontiers of economic development.
Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions: (a) What are the acculturative stressors of Burmese female migrant workers? (b) What is the level of acculturative stress of Burmese female migrant workers? (c) What is the level of self-esteem of female Burmese migrant workers? (d) What are the coping responses of Burmese female migrant workers? (e) Is there a relationship between acculturative stress and self-esteem among Burmese female migrant workers? and (f) Is there a relationship between acculturative stress and coping responses among Burmese female migrant workers?

Technical Terms

The following are operational definitions of the variables in the study. Acculturative stressors are aspects of the living and working conditions of migrant workers as measured by a brief questionnaire that required participants to list down the stresses they encountered as migrant workers. Acculturative stress refers to the experience of culture shock and interpersonal stress related to adjustment to a new culture as measured by the Culture Shock Questionnaire (Mumford, 1998). Self-esteem describes feelings about self as a worthwhile and competent person as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989). Coping responses are the types of approach or avoidance coping as measured by Coping Responses Inventory (Moos, 1993).

Framework of the Study

The framework of this study is based on Berry’s (1997) concept of psychological adjustment to acculturation. Psychological acculturation refers to the adjustment that happens within the individual as influenced by interactions with aspects of the new culture. In context of the experience of Burmese female migrant workers, this study focuses on the psychological aspects of adapting to new culture such as self-esteem and coping responses which are deemed to be influenced by the external culture (i.e., living and working conditions in the host country).

Migrant workers perform a very special role that is different from workers in their home countries, immigrants, or refugees. Migrant workers leave their home country for
another to engage in gainful employment which they believe would improve the quality of their lives (International Labor Organization, 1999). Unfortunately, some of these migrant workers have been driven by desperation from extreme economic deprivation and political persecutions that threaten life and liberty so that they enter a foreign country with legal documents for employment or residence (Fujita et al., 2010). More often than not, these migrant workers do not receive adequate protection as persons working in their home countries. Whether or not they are documented, migrant workers are often without recourse but to persist in jobs that may be considered by locals to be “dirty, dangerous, or demeaning” to pay debts incurred from moving to the host country and to prevent going back to their home country. They also face a new challenge—that is discrimination—while seeking employment. Although they may be as skillful as workers from the host country, the preferences of employers are often against them (Snodgrass, 2007).

Thus, it stands to reason that the life circumstances of migrant workers are stressful. They may need to struggle with adequately adjusting to the new culture, a new pace of life and new languages while sustaining satisfactory performance to keep their jobs (Berry, 1997). The demands of adapting to the new culture of their host country serve as acculturative stressors that strain the psychological resources of migrant workers.

While working and fending off stress in their daily lives, migrant workers also have to struggle with the problems with low self-esteem. The difficulty in managing stressful living and working conditions are aggravated by perceived discrimination such that Burmese migrant workers tend to conceal their nationality to avoid possible discrimination at work (Fujita et al., 2010). As illustrated by some people who have worked and lived in Thailand, they have hid their identity as Burmese in fear of workplace discrimination and harassment. These situations may lead to the escalation in the levels of acculturative stress that can in turn further deplete their sense of worth as persons.

In the face of acculturative stressors that can escalate the levels of acculturative stress, migrant workers rely on approach or avoidance coping responses. Approach coping entails a cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral involvement that is geared toward addressing the problem directly by logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking guidance, and problem solving (Moos, 1993). On the other hand, avoidance coping are responses that are aimed at moving away or escaping the reality of the problematic situation through cognitive avoidance, acceptance/resignation, seeking reward, and emotional discharge. Migrant workers who are faced with the challenge of managing intensely stressful living and working
conditions are likely to resort to these coping in the hope of experiencing relief or arriving at effective solutions to their problems of acculturation.

**Research Methodology**

This study employed a descriptive – correlational design to for the following purposes: (a) to describe the acculturative stressors, levels of acculturative stress and self-esteem, and coping responses of female Burmese migrant workers; and (b) to determine the possible relationship of acculturative stress with self-esteem and coping among Burmese female migrant workers.

Owing to the difficulty of gathering Burmese female migrant workers, some of whom disclosed their caution in interpersonal interactions as such may inadvertently lead to legal problems and subsequent deportation, it was not possible to conduct systematic sampling. Thus, it was deemed essential to solicit the assistance of two individuals who were known to the researchers and were likely to be perceived trustworthy by the migrant workers. These two individuals who served as research assistants for recruiting participants were (a) a Burmese female long-time resident of Thailand by virtue of marriage to a Thai national and who had been working as aide for processing legal documents of Burmese migrant workers; and (b) a well esteem monk at a temple in Bangkok who generously volunteered his help. An orientation was provided to the research assistants to ensure understanding of the purpose of the study and the measures used, and uniformity of instructions to solicit research participation. Participants were gathered by purposive sampling of persons whom the two research assistants came in contact within the duration of the three-month data gathering period which ran from September to November, 2010 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The participants were (a) 57 female Burmese migrant workers who had been living and working in Thailand at the time of the study; (b) from 18 to 38 years old (M=28.83, SD=4.39), (c) single, (d) working as domestic helper (41 or 72%) or in a clothing or plastic factory (16 or 28%), and (d) documented workers possessing valid work permit and other required legal documents. The participants were limited to (a) female Burmese workers because studies (e.g., Fujita, 2010) have shown that there may be a gender-based differences in their living and working conditions; and (b) single (unmarried) female workers because family support has been demonstrated to be associated with acculturative stress and depression (Jon, 1998). Considering the lack of information concerning accurate population size and the subsequent lack of opportunity to conduct probability sampling, the participants
should be considered as the population of Burmese female migrant workers and caution should be exercised in the interpretation and generalization of findings.

The measures used were the Culture Shock Questionnaire (Mumford, 1998), Coping Responses Inventory (Moos, 1993), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989), and a questionnaire to gather demographic information from participants. All these measures were translated into Burmese and then back translated into its original English form by two college graduates with comparable competency in English and Burmese languages.

The Culture Shock Questionnaire (Mumford, 1998) is a 12-item measure of acculturative stress which consists of culture shock and interpersonal stress. High total scores suggest high levels of acculturative stress. For this study, the average score of 8.63 which represents the overall mean of persons with culture shock from Asian countries (i.e., India, Pakistan, Nepal, Malaysia, China, and Malaysia) on the 12-item questionnaire was used as index for interpreting scores. The instrument is a valid measure of acculturative stress as it accurately differentiated the degrees of culture shock across persons experiencing acculturation as shown by significant correlation between Culture Distance Index which was .50 with core culture shock items and .58 with interpersonal stress items. A reliability analysis on the 12 items (7 core culture shock items and 5 interpersonal stress items) yielded Cronbach's α of 0.79.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989) quantifies global positive and negative attitudes towards the self. It is a 10-item Likert response scale which ranges from 4 = strongly agree to 1= strongly disagree. Possible scores are from 10 to 40, with a high score indicating high self-esteem. Validity of the test is established by a correlation between self-esteem and stability of perception of other people whereas the high reliability of the test is demonstrated by test-retest correlations which are typically in the range of .82 to .88, and Cronbach's alpha for various samples are in the range of .77 to .88.

The Coping Resources Inventory—Adult Form (Moos, 1993) is a 48-items measure eight different types of coping responses to stressful life circumstances. The first set of four scales measures approach avoidance which are logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking guidance and support, and problem-solving. The second set of four scales measures avoidance coping such as cognitive avoidance, acceptance or resignation, seeking alternative rewards, and emotional discharge of approach and avoidance coping. Approach coping is defined by logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking guidance, and problem solving.
Avoidance coping is composed of cognitive avoidance, acceptance/resignation, seeking reward, and emotional discharge. Scores of 45 and below are interpreted as below average use of coping response, and scores of 55 and above as above average. The eight indices of coping responses are moderately and positively correlated (average \( r_S = .29 \) for men and .25 for women) and are stable over time among both men and women (average \( r_S = .45, \) and .43, respectively for the eight indices).

Analysis of data on acculturative stressors was done by classifying stressors under common themes (e.g., job difficulties, money) and recording the frequency counts per stressor identified. It should be noted that some participants mentioned more than one stressor. Scores for acculturative stress, self esteem, and coping responses scores were obtained following the scoring and interpretation requirements of the corresponding measures. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were obtained and used to describe the levels of acculturative stress and self esteem, and to identify the degree of reliance on specific coping responses. Pearson r was used to determine the relationship of acculturative stress with self-esteem and coping. Hypotheses on correlation were tested using .05 level of confidence. Statistical analyses were accomplished using the Statistical Package in Social Sciences (SPSS, version 17).

Results

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Acculturative Stressors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acculturative Stressors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job difficulties</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Participants identified 72 stressors.
The findings of the study showed that Burmese female migrant workers experienced stressors related to living and working in a foreign country. As shown in Table 1, job difficulties was noted as the most common acculturative stressor which occupied 25% of 72 stressors experienced by migrant workers. Money was mentioned as the second (18.1%) and language was the third (16.7%) common acculturative stressors.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation between Acculturative Stress, Self-Esteem, and Coping Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Acculturative Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acculturative Stress</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>-.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach Coping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical Analysis</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Guidance</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Coping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Avoidance</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance/Resignation</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>-.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Rewards</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Discharge</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=57.*p < .05

As shown in Table 2, Burmese female migrant workers reported high levels of acculturative stress (M=11.2, SD=3.1) and low levels of self-esteem (M=12.9, SD=4.1). They relied on approach and avoidance coping responses less frequently to manage acculturative stress as indicated by below average means which ranged from 12.9 (positive reappraisal) to 5.1 (acceptance and resignation). Nevertheless, the most commonly used approach coping were positive reappraisal (M=12.9, SD=2.6) and seeking guidance (M=12.7, SD=3.1) whereas the most commonly used avoidance coping were seeking rewards (M=10.8, SD=2.5) and cognitive avoidance (M=10.2, SD=3.5).
The findings likewise evidenced a significant negative relationship between acculturative stress and self esteem ($r = -.37, p < .05$) as shown in Table 2. Finally, acculturative stress was also found to be inversely associated with acceptance ($r = -.38, p < .05$) and emotional discharge ($r = -.31, p < .05$). Approach coping responses as well as avoidance coping responses of cognitive avoidance and seeking rewards were found to have no significant correlation with acculturative stress (correlation coefficients ranged from .00 to .24, $p > .05$).

Conclusions

In the light of the foregoing findings of the study, the following conclusions are made:
(a) Acculturative stressors are present in the living and working conditions of Burmese female migrant workers in Thailand.
(b) High levels of acculturative stress are experienced by Burmese female migrant workers.
(c) Low levels of self-esteem are experienced by Burmese female migrant workers.
(d) Approach coping of positive reappraisal and seeking guidance, and avoidance coping of seeking rewards and cognitive avoidance are the most frequently used coping response to acculturative stress.
(e) Acculturative stress contributes to low-self esteem of Burmese female migrant workers.
(f) Acceptance and emotional discharge are significant avoidant coping responses that are relied upon by Burmese female migrant workers to manage acculturative stress.

Discussion

The findings shed light on the stressors that Burmese female migrant workers faced in their host country. They identified the top five most commonly experienced acculturative stressors as: (a) job difficulties (e.g., working long hours in the factory); (b) money (e.g., salary earned in one month was barely enough to live on); (c) language (e.g., unable to speak Thai fluently which causes misunderstanding between bosses and workers); (d) perceived discrimination (e.g., subjective feeling that one is looked down upon for doing work that can be considered dirty, dangerous, or demeaning); and (e) police (e.g., having to a large sum of money when caught by police despite having work documents). Travel (e.g., prohibited by
employers from travelling to other districts), religion (e.g. unable to practice religion freely), and health (e.g., no health insurance from employers) were likewise mentioned as less commonly experienced stressors. Stressors from job difficulties, language, and police are congruent with the hardships which migrants experienced as they strive to adapt to a new culture (Neto, 2002) and to meet the host country’s requirements for individuals with migrant status (Mejia & McCarthy, 2010). Perceived discrimination was noted as a commonly experienced stressor among Burmese female migrant workers which reinforces previous findings on the exacerbating influence of this stressor on migration experience (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Faur, 2008). Other stressors related to travel, religion, and health can be attributed to various subjective experiences of culture shock (Berry, 1997).

The findings further demonstrated that Burmese female migrant workers suffered from high levels of acculturative stress. They described their condition as characterized by feelings of shock or disgust with aspects of the host culture (Kim & Omizo, 2005); feelings of lack of acceptance from others (Faur, 2008; Horn, 2008; Kiang et al., 2010); homesickness (Choi, Miller, & Wilbur, 2009; Mui & Kang, 2006; Sédikides et al., 2009), helplessness, and wish to escape from the current situation (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994); strain from the pressing demands to adjust quickly and adequately to the new situation, and subsequent confusion about identity (Heberle, 2010). It is worth mentioning that although the self-reported culture shock experience of the Burmese female migrant workers were accompanied by symptoms of maladjustment, acculturative stress is considered a normal human response to an alien cultural environment, which can be disabling in some individuals (Mumford, 1998).

This study also ascertained that Burmese female migrant workers who experienced high levels of acculturative stress also suffered from low levels of self-esteem. Low self-esteem is marked by an overall low valuing of one’s worth and competency (Rosenberg, 1989). The significant negative relationship between acculturative stress and self-esteem has been established in previous studies equating the absence of stress-buffering effects of healthy self-esteem on stressful situations found in acculturation (Cavazos-Rehg & De Lucia – Waack, 2009; Kim & Omizo, 2005; Neto 2002; Park 2009) to the development of anxiety (Sonderegger, Barrett, & Creed, 2004), depression (Hovey & Magana, 2002), and self-deprecating thoughts (Hovey & Magana, 2003). Clearly, the intense culture shock has taken its toll on the self that is perceived as worthless, incapable, and incompetent in adapting to the acculturation demands.
Efforts to cope with the experience of acculturative stress have been demonstrated in the results of this study which showed that Burmese female migrant workers used both approach and avoidance coping to manage acculturative stress. In their attempts to buffer the distress from acculturation, Burmese female migrant workers focused on the benefits that can be derived from their difficult situation and sought advice and support from others. They also tried to avoid thinking about their problematic situation and found ways to distract themselves with pleasurable activities. However, both positive and negative coping responses were relied upon less frequently as compared to migrants in general which could explain the persistence of high levels of acculturative stress. Nevertheless, avoidance coping such as acceptance and emotional discharge has been found to be negatively associated with acculturative stress. This means that when these coping responses are more often resorted to by wholeheartedly accepting difficult situations and expressing their frustrations, then acculturative stress can be managed adequately. These findings find validation in previous studies that discussed the stress-buffering effects of both approach and avoidance coping (Crocket et al., 2007; Folkman, 1997; Jeong, 2009; Jibeen & Khalid, 2010; Torres & Rollock, 2004; Vergara, Smith, & Keele, 2010; Yuen, 2008).

Although the findings of the study contributed to the understanding of living and working conditions of Burmese female migrant workers in Thailand, there are several limitations which suggest that the findings of this study should be viewed with caution. The small number of participants considerably restricted the generalizability of the results of the study. Moreover, the wide age range of participants suggests a lack of homogeneity in the experiences and demands of daily living. Reliance on measures of variables that were developed for non-Asian participants coupled with the use of English-Burmese translation may have reduced the accuracy of reporting of the experiences of participants. Finally, absence of pretest measure of pre-existing stress, anxiety, depression, or other alarming life events (e.g., illness or death of a loved one) may have compounded the participants’ experience of acculturative stress.

Recommendations

Future research can consider exploring factors that may serve as competing hypotheses in explaining the acculturation experience of migrant workers. Factors such as the migrant workers’ attitude toward and length of stay in host country, education, ethnicity,
gender, marital status, and status of mental health can contribute to establishing a clear and accurate representation of the acculturation experience of migrant workers. The conduct of qualitative studies to allow for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenological experiences of this special population can yield valuable information for establishing constructs, building theories, and developing instruments that can authentically capture the reality of migrant workers. Furthermore, counseling process and outcome studies to examine suitable therapeutic approaches for managing acculturation can empower mental health professionals with effective techniques for empowering migrant workers with a wide repertoire of efficacious coping responses.

On the other hand, the results of this study can encourage governments and socio-civic organizations to galvanize their efforts in establishing and implementing regulations and mechanisms that can effectively protect the rights, welfare, and well being of migrant workers whose persevering commitment of talents, strength, and life make them humble but important contributors to the economic development of their host countries.

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