



The Relationship Between Saudi Students Studying Abroad and Depression

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■ ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on emotional highs and lows connected to depression and anxiety in Saudi international students and aims to construct a healthy outlet from the root of damage itself. An Acculturative Stress Scale and a Quantitative method will be applied in order to find out problems and draw solutions through the distribution of questionnaires. The expected sample will be specific to undergraduate Saudi students studying in Russia and USA and undergraduate international students studying in the USA. Expected findings include understanding how factors such as homesickness and inability to blend into a new culture actually stand in the way of being able to lead a healthy new life.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIDDLE EASTERN STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD AND DEPRESSION

Change is not an easy step, especially if the change is jumping from one phase in life to another. Eighteen to twenty-five is that crucial stage of change that most people struggle during, lose people, find opportunities, face challenges within themselves, fall and come back together again, understanding just how strong human psychology is, and can be, regardless of what it is put through. This usually includes the transition from high school to university, and more often than not in the modern days, this means shifting abroad. While academic education is a necessity, so is one's mental health and understanding its highs and lows, especially during a tough transition like this. This paper focuses on these highs and lows connected to depression and anxiety in Middle Eastern international students and aims to construct a healthy outlet from the root of damage itself.

Psychological stress in any form can have an effect on one's day-to-day activities. Moving somewhere new is automatically connected to isolation and loneliness before anything else, and circumstances as such can become the obstacle between a person and his or her achievements and opportunities. Additionally, new culture means culture shocks and homesickness. Many sources clarify the pressure students tend to face as the new environment allows them to believe they need to do better in order to adjust and push themselves to a point where they often face burn outs and hence, lack of productivity. Recent researches point to the increasing statistics of youngsters of Middle East moving to the US for further education. While the change of more people wanting to do better is nationally a great win, the problem arises when these students soon face the different emotional barriers in a place with polar opposite views that the one they are used to.

It is often seen that students tend to change their social habits after moving abroad, and more often than not, these habits are connected to depression and anxiety. These may be as a result of language barriers, cultural differences, stereotypes adopted from the media and many more. When thinking specifically of students from Middle Eastern countries, their values and culture differ greatly from those of European or American countries. While physical adaptation is not difficult as humans, adapting mentally to a new environment and people is a different case. Therefore, in order to prevent high potential to be wasted due to ignorance of their mental wellbeing, this paper will also be highlighting the importance of conducting a research like this where people are educated not only on how they can overcome their own situation, but also how they can one day be the key to unlock someone else's trouble when moving his or her whole life from one place to another.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The research topic revolves around understanding and expanding on the mental drawbacks of moving abroad for education. To clarify, it involves the action of relocating for the purpose of education and career advancement. The target audience of this research will of course include students between the ages of eighteen to twenty-five.

This particular age, in psychology, is the phase during which humans are more prone to observing, learning and accordingly shaping themselves to who they are and who they have the potential to become. It is crucial and filled with change. Previously, mental health was not given the stage as it is in the recent years of mental health awareness. More people are learning to be self-aware and introducing campaigns to raise awareness regarding the issue.

Historically, it was seen that students moving abroad usually did not achieve the expected grades or form many social groups. This was faulted for not being able to adapt to a different teaching and learning method. However, the more research is carried out nowadays, the more people have realized that it was ultimately due to depression and anxiety becoming the barrier to just how great they could be. It leaves them without any productivity or hope for it. They usually face physical reactions as a result of the mental ones, become tired too easily, stop trying to be social or achieve all that they aspired to before moving abroad and eventually give up. Therefore, when students are helped out of these tricky situations, they are better able to grow to their potential self.

It is important to note that the drawbacks are not greater than the benefits included when moving abroad. The drawbacks include mental strain that are possible to address and help. In return, one achieves the opportunities to gain things like language, education, experiences, skills and a sense of independence. This research hence, aims to understand the very factors that become a barrier to these benefits.

■ KNOWLEDGE GAP

While the issue of international students struggling to feel a part of their new environment is quite known, the gap stands where there just isn't a number of them coming up and admitting to it. Hence, very few studies document the occurrence and prevalence of mental health issues of students abroad, much less Middle Eastern students in specific. The lack of research in the area of study abroad participants' mental health unfortunately challenges study abroad professionals who are often the front-line people providing assistance.

A considerable gap remains between dominant narratives, professional materials, and empirical evidence, which is necessary to bridge to expand research efforts with this population and facilitate data-based decision-making by study abroad programs regarding the mental health support services that these students need. Therefore, this paper intends to expand on the limited previous research by exploring the prevalence and characteristics of mental health issues in Middle Eastern students studying abroad, specifically in the US.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological stress in any form can have an effect on one's day-to-day activities. Moving somewhere new is automatically connected to isolation and loneliness before anything else, and circumstances as such can become the obstacle between a person and his or her achievements and opportunities. Additionally, new culture means culture shocks and homesickness. Many sources clarify the pressure students tend to face as the new environment allows them to believe they need to do better in order to adjust and push themselves to a point where they often face burn outs and hence, lack of productivity. Recent researches point to the increasing statistics of youngsters of Saudi moving to the US for further education. While the change of more people wanting to do better is nationally a great win, the problem arises when these students soon face the different emotional barriers in a place with polar opposite views that the one they are used to. Studying abroad is a growing trend in higher education. In fact, over a span of only twenty years the number of students studying abroad has increased from less than 50,000 students in 1985-1986 to more than 240,000 students in 2006-2007 (OpenDoors Online/IIE Network, 2008). It focuses on some of the factors of how psychological stress can alter with their achievements and functioning. It states that some students face cultural shock which is the root of a stressful life, which if not dealt with, will cause more mental harm. The findings indisputably show that psychological anxiety and its effects must be addressed if students are to operate at their best and benefit from studying abroad. It is often seen that students tend to change their social habits after moving abroad, and more often than not, these habits are connected to depression and anxiety. These may be as a result of language barriers, cultural differences, stereotypes adopted from the media and many more. The previous studies help understanding that the different variables affect the way the students moving abroad live their daily lives. While physical adaptation is not difficult as humans, adapting mentally to a new environment and people is a different case. Therefore, in order to prevent high potential to be wasted due to ignorance of their mental wellbeing, this paper will also be highlighting the importance of conducting a research like this where people are educated not only on how they can overcome their own situation, but also how they can one day be the key to unlock someone else's trouble when moving his or her whole life from one place to another.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Mental Health Issues Revolving Around Depression and Anxiety in Middle Eastern Students Studying Abroad and Ways to Overcome Them.

METHODOLOGY

The research will revolve around a quantitative method and make use of an Acculturative Stress Scale. Questionnaires will be distributed through online means and a verbal consent will be taken for the information to be used in the research. The Acculturative Stress scale is the development and testing of a new 36-item scale in Likert format, designed to assess the acculturative stress of international students, includes perceived discrimination, homesickness, fear, guilt, perceived hatred, and stress due to change (cultural shock), identified as major contributing factors.

The research topic revolves around understanding and expanding on the mental drawbacks of moving abroad for education. To clarify, it involves the action of relocating for the purpose of education and career advancement. The target audience of this research will of course include students between the ages of eighteen to twenty-five who are either Saudi and studying in Russia and USA and international students studying in the USA. This particular age, in psychology, is the phase during which humans are more prone to observing, learning and accordingly shaping themselves to who they are and who they have the potential to become. It is crucial and filled with change. Previously, mental health was not given the stage as it is in the recent years of mental health awareness. More people are learning to be self-aware and introducing campaigns to raise awareness regarding the issue.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Data will be collected via the two forms which include Beck's Depression Inventory and Acculturative Stress Scale. The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) is a 21-item, self-report rating inventory that measures characteristic attitudes and symptoms of depression. On the other hand, the Acculturation Stress Scale was designed for these very targeted specific students moving abroad as Acculturative stress itself can be defined as the stress that emerges from conflicts when individuals must adjust to a new culture of the host society.

Beck's Depression Inventory

1

- 0 I do not feel sad.
- 1 I feel sad
- 2 I am sad all the time and I can't snap out of it.
- 3 I am so sad and unhappy that I can't stand it.

2

- 0 I get as much satisfaction out of things as I used to.
- 1 I don't enjoy things the way I used to.
- 2 I don't get real satisfaction out of anything anymore.
- 3 I am dissatisfied or bored with everything.

3

- 0 I don't feel I am any worse than anybody else.
- 1 I am critical of myself for my weaknesses or mistakes.
- 2 I blame myself all the time for my faults.
- 3 I blame myself for everything bad that happens.

4

- 0 I don't cry any more than usual.
- 1 I cry more now than I used to.
- 2 I cry all the time now.
- 3 I used to be able to cry, but now I can't cry even though I want to.

5

- 0 I can sleep as well as usual.
- 1 I don't sleep as well as I used to.
- 2 I wake up 1-2 hours earlier than usual and find it hard to get back to sleep.
- 3 I wake up several hours earlier than I used to and cannot get back to sleep.

6

- 0 My appetite is no worse than usual.
- 1 My appetite is not as good as it used to be.
- 2 My appetite is much worse now.
- 3 I have no appetite at all anymore.

7

- 0 I haven't lost much weight, if any, lately.
- 1 I have lost more than five pounds.
- 2 I have lost more than ten pounds.
- 3 I have lost more than fifteen pounds.

8

- 0 I can work about as well as before.
- 1 It takes an extra effort to get started at doing something.
- 2 I have to push myself very hard to do anything.
- 3 I can't do any work at all.

9

- 0 I make decisions about as well as I ever could.
- 1 I put off making decisions more than I used to.
- 2 I have greater difficulty in making decisions than I used to.
- 3 I can't make decisions at all anymore.

10

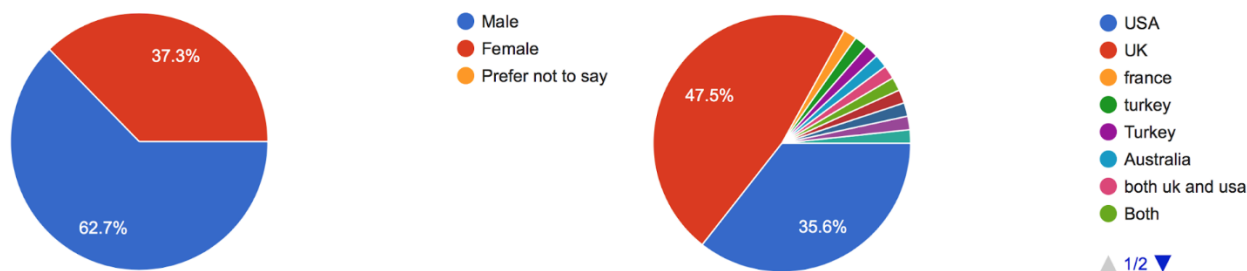
- 0 I am no more irritated by things than I ever was.
- 1 I am slightly more irritated now than usual.
- 2 I am quite annoyed or irritated a good deal of the time.
- 3 I feel irritated all the time.

Acculturation Stress Scale

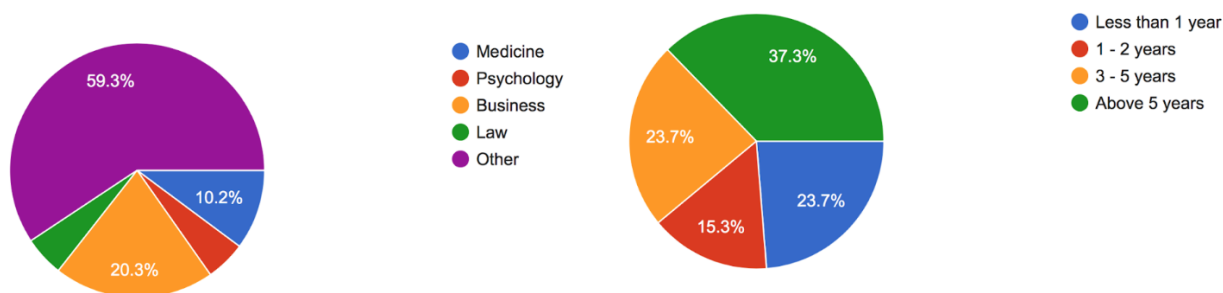
No.	Test
1	Many opportunities are denied to me
2	I am treated differently in social situations
3	Others are biased towards me
4	I feel that I receive unequal treatment
5	I am denied what I deserve
6	I feel that my people are discriminated against
7	I am treated differently because of my race
8	I am treated differently because of my color
9	I feel sad leaving my relatives behind
10	Homesickness bothers me
11	I feel sad living in unfamiliar settings
12	I feel uncomfortable adjusting to new foods
13	I feel intimidated to participate in activities
14	I miss the people and country of my origin
15	I generally keep a low profile due to fear
16	Due to language difficulties, I find it difficult to express myself
17	I feel nervous to communicate in English
18	I am losing my ethnic identity
19	I feel inferior to this society
20	It makes me angry when I hear negative stereotypes about my country or people

DATA ANALYSIS

The questionnaire was sent to 60 different participants among whom 37.3% were female and 62.7% were male, all between the ages of 18-30. About 83.1% of said participants were currently studying in either the US or UK.



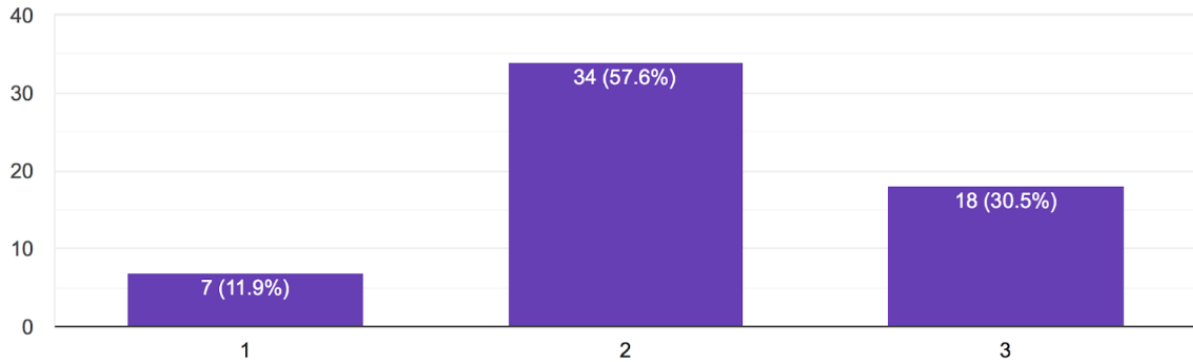
Over 50% of the students were in the upper middle class family, most of whom were abroad for their Undergraduate degrees, highlighting the issues surrounding middle class people. It was analyzed that 59.3% of students going abroad were opting for majors that were not traditionally or culturally common like Medicine, Law, Business and Psychology. As a result, most of these participants had already lived there a long time - 37.3% lived over 5 years, and only 15.3% were among those who had lived less than a year or 2.



81.4% of these students chose 'yes' to facing language barriers, while 62.7% agreed to have faced problematic cultural shocks which automatically resulted in over 60% of the students feeling homesick during their years of educational experience. While 55.9% did not have a hard time dealing with productivity as a result, 44.1% of the students were highly affected by this issue. However, on a scale of 1-3, only 11.9% of the students picked a productivity rate of 1 and nearly the same results were seen regarding their focus level.

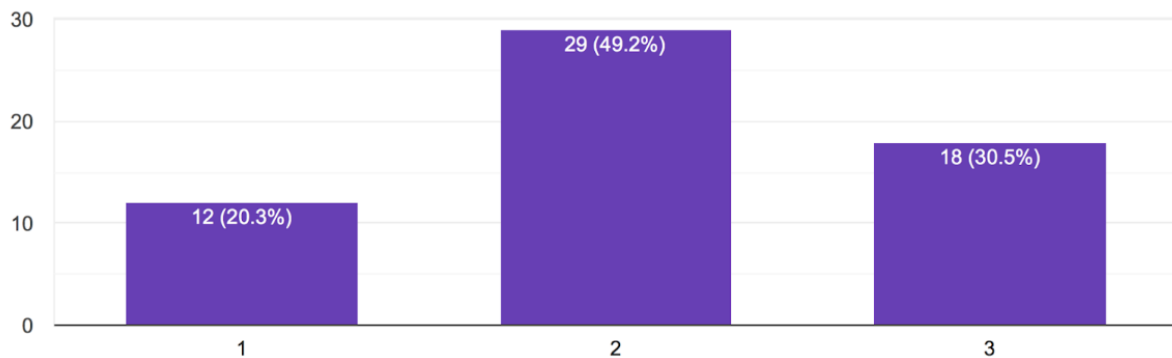
How would you rate your productivity at the time from a scale of 1-3?

59 responses



How would you rate your level of focus at the time on a scale of 1-3?

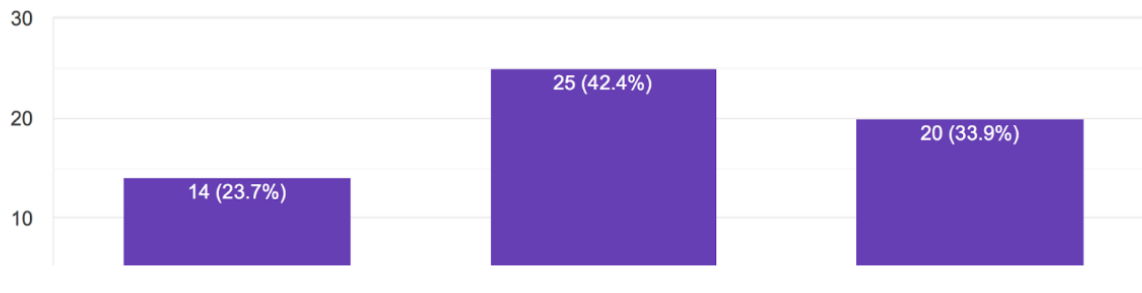
59 responses



57.6% of students were unable to speak up about their current emotions regardless of the fact that they were aware that they should have. On the other hand, in terms of mental health between 1-3, where 1 is considered good, the results were not satisfactory - only 23.7% of students were actually in a stable state. In a more open-ended question, students were asked what they would have chosen to avoid this issue and the responses highlight the very necessity of this research paper. These responses include: therapy, emotional support, family support, "support from my existing circle back home, instead of them ignoring me because "i'm no longer in town"", "maybe a platform that helps student abroad with emotional,mental difficulties (homesick, language barriers)", practical field experiences, guidance, etc. A good percentage of the students also agreed to a smoother transition if the host country promoted more cultural diversity.

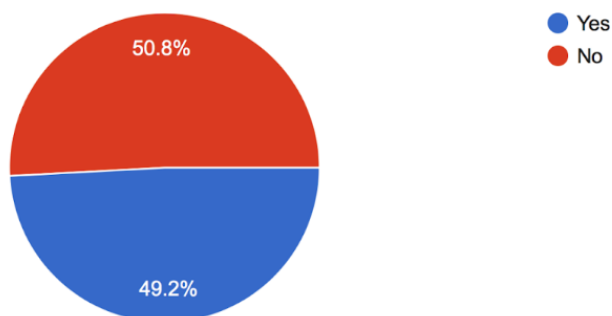
How would you rate your mental health at the time from a scale of 1-3?

59 responses



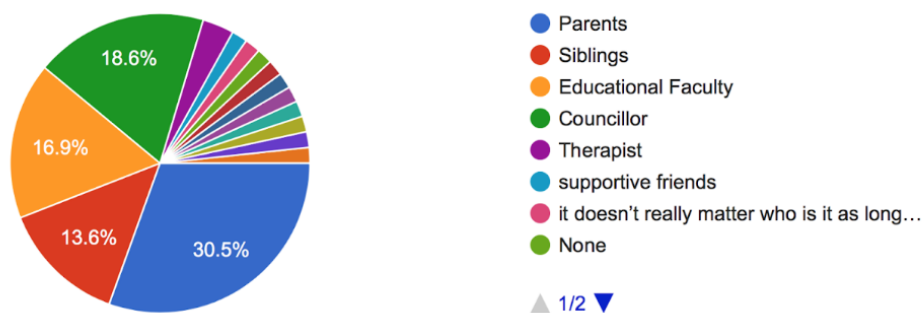
Do you believe if your host country had more cultural diversity, it would have been easier?

59 responses



Who would this support be expected from?

59 responses



■ CONCLUSION

Via this research, the main issues surrounding depression and anxiety when Saudi students go for studying abroad, and the factors that cause struggle are highlighted. As a result, awareness about the following topics such as mental health awareness programs, knowledge of students' rights, and making sure these students know they are not alone, can be brought up to enlighten students, therefore reducing the problems they may face to some extent, before or after they leave their home country.

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