

**ACCULTURATION DIFFERENCES IN FAMILY
UNITS FROM FORMER YUGOSLAVIA**

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution

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Abstract

Focus of on-going cross-cultural investigation has throughout the time shown that inadequate language skills paired with absence of knowledge of cultural practices and norms within the receiving society would create a number of *stress behaviors* among immigrants, often manifested as *lowered mental health status- depression, anxiety, confusion; feelings of marginality and alienation; psychosomatic symptoms and identity confusion* (Berry and Annis, 1988; Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989; Kessler, Turner and House, 1988; Shams and Jackson, 1994; Vega et al., 1986; Vinokur, Price and Caplan, 1991; Winefield, Winefield, Tiggermann and Goldney, 1991). It was further noticed that refugee populations across the world are adapting to the receiving societies in a much slower rate than other migrating groups (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989), and yet due to sensibilities surrounding research of a refugee population, there are still questions surrounding this process. In addition, it appears that the attempts to demystify acculturation and uncover objective underpinnings of it, has further reduced the current concept undermining validity and reliability of the findings. Therefore need for subjective experience and definition of acculturation, as well as reconsideration of complexity of the phenomenon (acculturation) was recognised by this research.

This study was designed to offer a qualitative insight into the acculturative differences within a family unit among refugees from former Yugoslavia. 21 women, recent refugee- arrivals were requested to participate in the open- end interview. In the semi- structured

interview the women were asked to give a detailed account of their personal, their partners' and their children's experiences concerning the emotional, social, economical, occupational and psychological aspects of their and their family- members' acculturation processes. The obtained data was analysed through the means of narrative and Erickson's analytic induction. The results showed that cultural incompatibilities have spread into diverse spheres of living, thus complexity of the acculturation-related problems was acknowledged. The results showed that (1) split families (due to immigration), (2) inability to establish new social ties in the novel environment and (3) decay in professional status were often reported in connection with eroded physical and mental well-being of the participants and their families. The research also looked at cultural diversities, and gender differences, concentrating on concepts of resilience and coping strategies within the acculturative practice. It appears that cognitive restructuring and the ability to "let go" of the previous lives was the best coping mechanism.

Acculturation Differences in Family Units from Former Yugoslavia

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