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The Psychological Effects of Migration and Coping Strategies among Immigrants in Host Societies

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Abstract :

. This study aimed to analyze the psychological effects resulting from the experience of migration and to explore the coping strategies employed by migrants to rebuild their sense of belonging in host communities. The study addressed the concept of migration and distinguished it from related concepts, then examined the psychological effects resulting from this experience, before transitioning to the various coping strategies employed by migrants. The results showed that migration represents a significant life stressor that can lead to a range of psychological effects, such as loss of identity and belonging, which manifests in a diminished sense of connection to one's roots, cultural adaptation difficulties, and feelings of alienation. Daily stressors can also contribute to exacerbating levels of psychological distress, with the potential emergence of various disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. The study also highlighted that the reconstruction of belonging occurs through the coping strategies employed by migrants, and that the success of this process remains contingent upon the availability of supportive factors in the host society.

Keywords: Migration, Psychological Effects, Coping Strategies, Identity, Host Communities.
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1. Introduction :

Migration has been a human phenomenon accompanying civilizations since ancient times. In the modern era, migration has become one of the most prominent global challenges that necessitates study and analysis from various scientific perspectives. This increased interest is due to the multi-dimensional repercussions of migration, both at the individual level for migrants and on the social and economic structures of host societies.

Statistics indicate that approximately 3.1% of the world's population are international migrants; in other words, 214 million people are currently defined as international migrants. This figure is expected to rise due to rapid economic, social, and political transformations (Virupaksha, et al., 2014).

Amid the increasing numbers of migrants worldwide, academic circles have paid particular attention to studying the psychological effects resulting from migration. This interest has led to the emergence of a specialized field known as "Cross-Cultural Psychology," which focuses on studying the challenges migrants face in host societies, the psychological and social interactions resulting from individuals' contact with new cultures, and analyzes the psychological and social adaptation processes that migrants undergo. On the other hand, it studies the factors that contribute to the success or failure of the acculturation process and its resulting long-term psychological effects.

Despite intensive research efforts, most studies remain focused on refugees and pre- and post-migration stressors, while research investigating these links in the context of non-refugee migrants remains relatively limited. Furthermore, studies that have examined the prevalence of traumatic experiences after resettlement in a new country and their psychological effects using representative samples are still scarce and require enrichment and in-depth analysis (Sangalang, 2019). Consequently, this study seeks to explore the nature of the psychological effects resulting from the migration experience and to uncover the coping strategies migrants employ to face the challenges they encounter in host societies, in order to enhance their sense of belonging and rebuild their identity. Accordingly, we pose the following questions :

- What is the nature of the psychological effects resulting from the migration experience?
- What are the coping strategies migrants adopt to face challenges and rebuild belonging in host societies?

Study Objectives:

This study aims to reveal the nature and severity of the psychological effects resulting from the migration process and to identify the coping strategies used by migrants to adapt to life in host societies.

Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study is evident in the following:

- It contributes to enriching knowledge within the fields of cross-cultural psychology and the sociology of migration.
- The findings may help develop theoretical models that explain the interaction between migration stressors and coping mechanisms.
- It opens new avenues for research into factors of psychological resilience and the protection of migrants' mental health.

- It provides a practical framework for non-governmental organizations and charitable institutions working in the field of supporting refugees and migrants to improve the quality of their services.
- It increases awareness among members of the migrant community about the importance of mental health and effective coping strategies.
- It assists physicians and psychotherapists in better understanding the unique cultural context of migrant patients, thereby improving the quality of diagnosis and treatment.

Study Terminology:

Migration:

Migration is defined as "the movement of individuals and groups from one location to another in search of better social, economic, or security conditions (Al-Siryani, 2010, p. 171). It is the process of "the transfer of a person from their original homeland and local environment to another country for livelihood and earning a living or for another reason" (Al-Khashab, 1965, p. 262).

Psychological Effects: Psychological effects of migration refer to the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions that emerge as individuals face multiple forms of adversity before, during, and after migration. These manifestations often include anxiety, sadness, sleep disturbances, fatigue, irritability, and other stress-related symptoms that can evolve into significant mental health concerns when prolonged or severe (World Health Organization [WHO], 2025).

Coping Strategies: Coping strategies denote the mental and behavioral efforts individuals use to handle external or internal demands that they perceive as exceeding their personal resources. Such strategies may focus either on directly managing the stressor or on regulating emotional responses to alleviate psychological strain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Host Communities: Host communities comprise the social, governmental, and non-governmental groups and institutions within the receiving country that interact with and support refugees or migrants. They encompass local residents and organizations that provide services, resources, and opportunities for social integration (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], n.d.).

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2. Migration :

The concept of migration is broad, and various synonyms have been used for people who migrate. This depends on the type of process involved and the reasons for this migration. These terms are: emigrant (one who leaves their country), immigrant (one who enters a new country), refugee (a person residing outside their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion), asylum seeker (a person who has left their country of origin for any reason and has applied for shelter and protection in another country), and internally displaced person (a person forced to leave their home/area due to adverse circumstances such as political, social, or environmental conditions, etc., but who does not cross any international borders), among others (Virupaksha, et al., 2014).

John Clarke explains that a migrant is a person who decides to leave their original homeland without the intention of returning, whether permanently or for an indefinite period. In contrast, if the move is accompanied by a strong intention to return, the individual is termed an "expatriate." Thus, the term "migrant" carries a connotation of a weaker intention to return compared to the term "expatriate" (Dahha, 2019, p. 283).

Migration is generally classified into two main types: voluntary migration, which occurs by human will, and forced migration, which occurs against one's will.

Forced migration is defined as the involuntary movement of individuals or groups from their original homeland to other places, often due to violence practiced against them by some parties. This violence takes two forms:

- Physical Violence: Such as wars and forced occupation of lands.
- Psychological Violence: This involves the use of illegal coercive methods to force individuals or groups to leave their areas. These are often unjust methods used by some regimes against creative individuals with principles, particularly those they believe pose a threat to them (Al-Suqoor, 2006, p. 29).

Forced migration is characterized by being accompanied by several crises, the most prominent of which are the psychological effects resulting from the uprooting of a person from their homeland and their social and cultural environment.

We can briefly discuss the difference between forced migration and other migrations by considering a decisive factor: knowing whether individuals are willing to migrate. "It can be said that this point is the most critical, meaning that it is important whether one desires to migrate and leave their country and move to a new country. In other words, when it comes to migration, it is important to determine whether there are push factors or pull factors. That is, some people resorted to another country due to attractive factors, and another type of people were subjected to a driving force from emergency situations such as war. In this case, it can be said that this constitutes an important point in the adaptation process and the psychological state of the individual in their new place of residence" (Saghir, 2017, p. 161).

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3. Psychological Consequences of Migration:

At its core, migration is a means to improve living conditions or to avoid an unfavorable environment. However, it often involves profound psychological and social challenges, especially in the absence of social support and the multiplicity of institutional complexities and structural barriers. These challenges intensify when migration is forced, as the individual finds themselves compelled to leave their homeland without prior psychological preparation, suddenly finding themselves in a new, unfamiliar environment.

Research has increasingly focused on the psychological effects of post-migration stressors in the resettlement environment (Li, et al., 2016). The literature indicates that these factors collectively contribute to creating a state of psychological distress that is difficult to avoid. Many studies have shown that migrants are often more vulnerable to various psychological problems due to feelings of insecurity and the loss of social support networks. Over time, these stressors can escalate into psychological disorders or various health complications (Virupaksha, et al., 2014).

3.1 Loss of Identity and Belonging:

The relationship between identity and migration is a closely correlated and complex one. Migration, with its imposed social change and cultural interaction between different ethnicities, and the problems it creates related to integration and social harmony, intersects and overlaps with identity issues. The question of migration is, in one way or another, a question of identity, as the migrant, as pointed out by Abdel Malik Al-Sayyad, does not migrate with just their suitcase, but also migrates

with their culture, ideas, beliefs, and values—in other words, with their identity (Al-Essa, 2025, p. 26).

In this context, building a collective identity is not an automatic or simple process, but rather a complex progression in which subjective emotional factors and objective institutional factors, no less important, intertwine. These factors play a fundamental role in facilitating or hindering the process of belonging and thus identity building (Khaidoun, 2020).

3.1.1 Diminished Sense of Belonging:

Migration can cause deep psychological trauma, negatively reflecting on feelings of belonging and reinforcing states of alienation among individuals. This migration creates a rift in personal identity, resulting from the individual's loss of their familiar cultural framework and supportive social network, leading to a chronic feeling of psychological alienation. It is worth noting that identity is "intrinsically linked to belonging, and also intersects with concepts of 'otherness' and the dynamics of interaction between cultures and ethnic groups, making it sensitive to the repercussions of migration. Migration causes profound shifts in the migrant's bonds of belonging and places them before an existential problem related to the authenticity of their identity, a problem that often turns into a persistent psychological crisis (Al-Essa, 2025).

On the social level, many forced migrants face significant difficulties in the process of integration within host societies, where they encounter racist attitudes, language barriers, or various forms of discrimination. These factors contribute to increased feelings of isolation and alienation and lead to further erosion of the sense of belonging, hindering their psychological and social adaptation in the new environment.

3.1.2 Cultural Grief:

This condition appears particularly in contexts where the migrant's cultural background differs from that of the host society. The exacerbation of this phenomenon is attributed to linguistic barriers that prevent the individual from expressing themselves or understanding the social environment properly, which may lead to distortions in their perception and the formation of prejudices about the host society. "This generates a feeling of shock, which psychologists have called the shock of cultural uprooting" (*déracinement*) (Yahyaoui, 2010, p. 65).

3.1.3 Cultural Disconnection:

The incompatibility between the migrant's values and the norms of the host society leads to identity conflict and social withdrawal (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

3.2 Chronic Psychological Stress:

Daily stressors in an unstable environment are among the most dangerous consequences of forced migration. Living in an environment lacking material and legal security, or experiencing racial discrimination, leads to the exacerbation of psychological stress symptoms, increasing the likelihood of developing psychological disorders.

3.3 Emerging Psychological Disorders:

Psychological disorders may not appear immediately during the migration process but after days, weeks, months, or even years—sometimes even five years or more after resettlement (Sukiasyan, 2024).

Exposure to repeated stressors or traumatic events during the journey and in the receiving country can lead to the emergence of various psychological disorders, including: post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and others.

3.3.1 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

Migration is a profound human experience that transcends in its implications mere geographical relocation, carrying within it psychological and social challenges that may surpass all material

considerations. This is especially true in the case of forced migration, where the individual is compelled to leave their homeland against their will, without adequate psychological preparation. The migrant goes through a series of successive psychological stressors, starting from the moment of forced departure, through the difficulties of the journey, and up to the challenges of integration into the new society. Leaving the homeland can constitute a traumatic event, especially when the cultural, social, and economic contexts differ between the home country and the host country.

In this context, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) emerges as one of the common psychological disorders among migrants, resulting from their exposure to traumatic events such as violence, loss of a sense of safety, or separation from the familiar social and cultural framework. Symptoms of this disorder appear through the recurrent reliving of traumatic events, avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, and hypervigilance and arousal, which negatively affects the individual's ability to adapt and integrate into their new environment.

A study by Sangalang et al. (2019) examined how pre- and post-migration traumatic events, in addition to post-migration stressors, are related to psychological problems and levels of psychological distress. The results showed that exposure to trauma in the pre-migration stage constitutes a risk factor for developing a wide range of psychological disorders among both Asian and Latino migrants. There were clear negative effects of post-migration trauma in both groups. Factors such as discrimination, cultural stressors, and family conflicts also contributed to increasing the risk of psychological disorders and distress in different and complex ways.

3.3.2 Depression and Anxiety:

The migrant, especially in the early stages of the experience of alienation, faces an increased feeling of loneliness and social isolation, in addition to a sense of alienation and difficulties in communicating with others. Their suffering is manifested in two parallel daily struggles: an internal struggle represented by homesickness and attempts to adapt to the loss of the familiar frame of reference, and an external struggle through which they seek to assert themselves and secure their material and psychological needs in a new environment that often differs in its cultural and social standards and values from what they were accustomed to in their home country (Azzaam, 2016, p. 20).

Homesickness—the recollection of images of the past, childhood experiences, and beautiful memories—is a natural phenomenon in itself, playing a positive defensive role by maintaining the symbolic continuity of connection to the home country. However, its danger emerges when nostalgia takes on a regressive character (*Regression*), as an unconscious defense mechanism in the face of frustration and painful reality, thus turning into an expression of the lost need for warmth and security. It may even instill in the migrant a feeling of existential loss. In such a case, the past becomes a "psychological prison" that hinders integration into the present, where nostalgia turns into an excessive mental activity of memory, repeatedly recalling events and times that are impossible to retrieve, loaded with a high emotional charge of pain associated with the loss of everything dear and precious (Bououn & Adwan, 2013, p. 231).

Most people cannot perceive the amount of patience and endurance that living and settling in a different environment and a new, unfamiliar culture may require (Al-Essa, 2025, p. 209). Therefore, migrants may suffer from anxiety due to the daily challenges they face, and sometimes due to uncertainty regarding their legal status and that of their families.

4. Coping and Integration Strategies:

Individuals and groups, during the process of interaction with the environment in which they live, seek to build a desired identity that is valued by others. They resort to strategies for coping and integrating with the new society. We will present the two most important theories in the field of cross-cultural psychology: Carmel Camilleri's theory of identity strategies and John Berry's theory of acculturation strategies.

4.1 Camilleri's Theory of Identity Strategies:

Carmel Camilleri believes that "in light of the heterogeneity between the migrant's original culture on one hand, and the host society's culture on the other, the migrant suffers from two things: cultural conflict and low self-esteem" (Camilleri, 1990, p. 88), where "this conflict is between the norms and values of their original culture and the values of the host society's culture. The other issue the migrant suffers from is low self-esteem, due to their unequal relationship with the host society, which is always dominated by a kind of hegemony, dependency, stereotypes, and a demeaning view of the migrant by this society" (Dasen & Ogay, 2000, p. 59).

4.1.1 Identity Strategies to Avoid Cultural Conflict:

The migrant, consciously or unconsciously, adopts multiple identity strategies to confront the pressures arising from cultural difference. These strategies range from avoiding conflict through what is known as simple harmony, to transcending it through complex harmony, or adopting methods aimed at reducing its severity.

In the strategy of simple harmony, the migrant may resort to abandoning one dimension of their identity and holding onto the other. They may preserve their original culture and live according to its standards and values as if they never migrated, while avoiding integration into the host society or maintaining only a minimum of it. Conversely, they may abandon the ontological dimension of their identity and focus on the pragmatic integrative dimension, adopting behavior completely harmonious with the values of the host society, to the point of detachment from their cultural roots. However, complete abandonment of the original identity remains a rare occurrence, as most migrants maintain a connection, even if symbolic, to their native culture (Azzaam, 2016, p. 31).

The strategy of complex harmony, on the other hand, is based on adhering to the original culture while simultaneously striving to integrate into the host society and adopt some elements of its culture. This is done by reformulating the cultural values and standards of both parties and bringing them closer, either in a subjective way subject to the migrant's orientations and desires, or according to a rational logic (Camilleri, 1990, p. 101). This strategy requires a degree of intellectual maturity and psychological flexibility that enables the migrant to overcome the problem of identity contradiction.

When avoiding cultural conflict fails, the migrant may resort to strategies to reduce its severity. This relies on a process of differential evaluation of values, whereby values compatible between the two cultures are reinforced and conflicting values are marginalized, by giving greater importance to values harmonious with the host society and less importance to values that conflict with it (Camilleri, 1990, p. 107).

4.1.2 Identity Strategies for Restoring Self-Esteem:

The unequal relationship between the migrant and their original culture on one hand, and the host society and its culture on the other, constitutes a psychological and social challenge that negatively reflects on the migrant's self-image, leading to shaken self-esteem and weak achievement of a positive social identity. Facing this reality, the migrant develops identity strategies aimed at restoring the value of the shattered self (Camilleri, 1990, p. 58), which can be classified as follows:

Firstly: Dependent Identity Strategies

These strategies are characterized by being a direct reaction to the negative stereotypes prevalent in the host society. In this context, some migrants accept these perceptions and integrate into them passively, behaving according to the stereotype promoted by the host society about them, which is known as the "negative identity" (*Identité négative*) (Camilleri, 1990). This strategy appears particularly among first-generation migrants.

In a parallel direction, some migrants transfer the image of resentment and rejection to other members of their original group, where they disavow their original affiliation and accuse other migrants of the negative attributes ascribed to them by the host society, in what is known as the "displacement strategy" and creating a "displaced negative identity" (*Identité négative déplacée*) (Camilleri, 1990). There is also the "identity by distinction" strategy (*Identité par distinction*), where the individual accepts the stereotypes about their original group but distinguishes themselves from it, while refusing complete identification with the host society (Azzaam, 2016, p. 34).

Secondly: Reactive Identity Strategies

Some migrants adopt reactive strategies that express their rejection of reality and resistance to it. A portion of them cling to their original identity, rejecting negative stereotypes and the values of the host society, where this rejection becomes a source of pride in their origins and protection for the violated self, in what is known as the "defensive identity" (*Identité défensive*) (Camilleri, 1990).

On the other hand, another segment, especially among youth and second and third generations, seeks to exaggerate their original identity, in an attempt to affirm their original belonging. This is manifested through behaviors expressing excessive care for cultural appearances (Amin & Venet, 2014). This strategy is often accompanied by entering into a confrontational relationship with the host society, which led Camilleri to name it the "polemical identity" (*Identité polémique*) (Azzaam, 2016, p. 35).

A third category is characterized by their belonging to the original identity at the theoretical level without their behavior reflecting this belonging at the practical level, which Camilleri called the "nominal identity" (*Identité par principe*) (Azzaam, 2016, p. 36).

These strategies emphasize the complexity of the identity-building process in the context of migration and the interaction of psychological and social dimensions in shaping the self-perception of migrants.

4.2 Berry's Theory of Acculturation Strategies:

Berry introduced the concept of "acculturation strategies" in 1980 to refer to the conscious and unconscious processes and mechanisms that migrants adopt to adapt themselves to the culture of the host society (Berry, 1980, p. 20).

Berry's theory assumes that migrants adopt multiple identity strategies during the acculturation process, based on their attitude towards their original culture and the host society's culture. This attitude is determined by two basic variables: the degree of desire to maintain the original cultural identity, and the degree of desire to interact with the host society and adopt its values (Berry, 2000, p. 2).

The theory defines three levels of adjustment: behavioral (change in habits and behaviors), psychological (psychological challenges and difficulties), and situational (the individual's attitudes towards the original and host cultures). The process refers to the mechanisms by which groups adapt to other cultures, highlighting its complexity for Muslim migrants due to the contradiction between the values of their original societies and the reality of Western societies, which may generate feelings of inferiority or false superiority, and escalate confrontational tendencies if integration is understood as abandonment of religious identity (Al-Essa, 2025, p. 214).

The factors influencing the choice of acculturation strategies are linked to the characteristics of the host society, including its social and economic structure, prevailing ideological attitudes, its degree of openness to foreign cultures, and the immigration policies in force. These factors also relate to the characteristics of the migrant's original society, in terms of its economic, political, and demographic situation, its cultural features, and its degree of openness to other cultures and its capacity for development (Azzaam, 2016, p. 40).
It is worth noting that these factors collectively form a crucial framework in guiding the choices of individuals and groups during the process of cultural adaptation in different migration environments.

5. Conclusion :

The study's results show that migration can leave profound psychological effects, manifested in the loss of identity and belonging, through a diminished sense of connection to one's roots, the emergence of feelings of cultural grief, and disconnection from the familiar civilizational framework. Daily stressors—especially in unstable environments—can also contribute to increased levels of psychological stress, with the potential emergence of various psychological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression.

It is important to note that the severity of these effects varies from one individual to another, depending on multiple and interrelated factors. Psychological challenges are not exclusively related to migration-related traumas, but also to the effectiveness of the coping mechanisms the migrant employs to adapt to the new environment. In this regard, post-migration stressors—such as exposure to discrimination or family conflicts—constitute a pivotal factor that can either increase the severity of these effects or contribute to their alleviation.

Scientific evidence shows that the success of migrants' psychological adaptation is contingent on the availability of a strong community support network and the implementation of structured programs that help rebuild identity and enhance belonging. Without this support, the risk of exacerbating the feeling of psychological alienation increases, threatening the migrant's mental health and pushing them towards social isolation and depression. Therefore, there is a need to adopt supportive policies aimed at enhancing psychological resilience and facilitating the process of positive integration.

On the other hand, the role of coping mechanisms emerged as an intermediary link between stressors and psychological outcomes. Participation in transnational social networks—as indicated by the work of Dahha (2019)—was not merely a means of emotional support, but an effective tool for building a hybrid identity that allows the migrant to belong to multiple spaces without feeling contradiction. This aligns with the perspective of "transnational communities," which transforms migration from a process of severance to a process of connection. However, the success of this mechanism depends on the host society's acceptance of this form of flexible belonging, emphasizing the interactive, rather than individual, nature of the adaptation process.

Despite the theoretical contribution of this study in shedding light on the psychological effects of migration and coping mechanisms, its most significant limitation lies in its treatment of the subject of migration in general without taking into account the stratified nature of migration experiences, which differ radically according to various contexts. Therefore, this study can be considered a preliminary framework that requires development through comparative research that considers the plurality of contexts. Accordingly, we recommend the following:

- Analyze the impact of traumatic events on the effectiveness of coping mechanisms among migrants.
- Conduct a comparative study of the experiences of migrants in European countries (social welfare system) versus Gulf countries (sponsorship system).
- Analyze how hybrid identity is formed among the children of migrants in contexts of Islamophobia.
- Establish specialized mental health clinics for migrants.
- Encourage community awareness programs to combat racial discrimination and promote a culture of integration.
- Develop guidance manuals on coping mechanisms and resources available to migrants in different languages.

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6. Appendices:

Must be set in the same form for the tables and forms and numbered as indicated in the research paper.