
Culture Shock, Social Support and Mental Health Problems in Foreign Medical Students in Romania

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Introduction: Studying abroad is a growing trend in higher education. Culture shock is a form of psychological distress associated with migration. Social support has been identified as significantly related to the onset and outcome of psychological disorders. There are studies investigating the processes of acculturation of the students as temporary migrants, with particular attention to medical studies. In Romania there is virtually no research addressing processes of acculturation of temporary immigrants.

Aims: The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between culture shock, social support, personality factor and psychological adaptation in foreign medical students studying at University of Medicine "Iuliu Hatieganu" Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Methods: A total of 167 first year foreign students from English Section, completed 5 self-administered questionnaires: Culture Shock Questionnaire, Social Support Questionnaire, STAI, NEO-FFI and a questionnaire about alcohol, smoking and illicit drug use.

Results: Gender and the quality of support received were found to be strongly associated with culture shock. Furthermore, culture shock was significantly positively related to the level of state anxiety. There are personality characteristics like extraversion and openness that influence the drug taking and drinking habits of students.

Conclusion: Social support is an important factor associated with the degree of culture shock and should be taken into consideration in order to protect against or help to overcome this kind of psychological distress experienced by foreign students. Adequate counseling should be provided by educational institutions, taking into consideration the way social factors and personality are associated with migrant students' mental health.