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Life Satisfaction and Realized Expectations Post-Immigration (Using the Reali Scale) Among English-Speaking Immigrants

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Purpose:

Background:

In 2016, approximately 244 million immigrants (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Population Division, 2016) arrived to primarily high-income countries mostly with the goals of: (1) improving their economic situation or (2) finding stability and safety after fleeing from political unrest, persecution, or violence (Paat, 2013). Yet, other immigrants made the decision to leave their country of origin for their ancestral home; these immigrants are described as returning from diaspora. Examples include Finns (Mahonen, Leinonen, & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013), and Germans (Stoessel, Titzmann, & Silbereisen, 2014) returning from diaspora after living in Russia; and Jews returning to Israel from diaspora after living in a variety of countries (Schiefer, Mollering, & Daniel, 2012; Titzmann, Silbereisen, Mesch, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2011; Zaban, 2015).

Life satisfaction is important for immigrants and for their new host societies. Many studies suggest that acculturation is the most important indicator of life satisfaction. Acculturation is comprised of language acquisition (Dela Cruz, Padilla, & Agustin, 2000; Lee, O'Neill, Ihara, & Chae, 2013), and the rarely measured variable of realized expectations (Mahonen, Leinonen, & Jasinskaya-Lahti, 2013).

Objectives:

In this study, we hypothesized that life satisfaction would be positively associated with acculturation (defined as the level of: language acquisition, having realized – or met - expectations, and self-identification with host country) for English-speaking immigrants, regardless of country of origin (after adjusting for confounding effects from demographic characteristics, reason for immigration and family support).

Methods:

This cross-sectional study included a convenience sample of English-speaking participants who answered a three-page, structured, anonymous questionnaire available through a link on a well-known internet site. The three-page questionnaire contained 51 questions on demographic characteristics (e.g., birthdate, gender, marital status, country of birth, date of immigration, monthly income), reasons for immigration, family support (e.g., immigrated with family, had family already in Israel), and three scales. The three scales used in this study were: the valid and reliable Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and two other scales designed specifically for this study on language ability and realized expectations. Of the 950 questionnaires that were begun on the internet site, 729 were completed (76.7% response rate). Due to the diversity of respondents, only questionnaires of immigrants from the following four countries were included (n=641): 6.2% (n=40) from Canada, 10.3% (n=66) from SA, 20.6% (n=132) from the UK, and 62.9% (n=403) from the USA.

Results:

Among demographic variables, most respondents were: female, between 40-64 years old, married, and with college degrees. About two-thirds reported low- or middle-income levels; and on average, reported immigrating almost 17 years ago. More than four-fifths reported excellent/good health status. Among the reasons for immigration (respondents could list more than one), about four-fifths mentioned Zionist or religious reasons, and less than half reported economic or personal reasons. Family support variables indicated that almost half arrived with a family member and about a third had a family member in Israel on their arrival. Multivariable results found that greater life satisfaction was found in immigrants who reported excellent/good health status ($B=3.21$, 95% CI=1.79, 4.63, $p<0.0001$), and having a higher level of realized expectations after immigration ($B=0.64$, 95% CI=0.40, 0.88, $p<0.0001$) after adjusting for blocks of variables including: acculturation variables (self-identity, language level, level of realized expectations for immigration); demographic characteristics; and family support variables.

Conclusion:

Only partly supporting this study's hypothesis, life satisfaction was strongly linked to the acculturation variable of having a higher level of realized expectations for life after immigration (and being in good health). Life satisfaction was not associated with the other acculturation variables of language acquisition or self-identification with host country.

Consistent with our results, a study examining life satisfaction and realized expectations in Finns returning from diaspora in Russia found that social expectations but not economic expectations were strongly linked to life satisfaction even after a year follow-up period (Mahonen et al., 2013). This study noted that since their sample consisted of immigrants due to diaspora, and these immigrants were more interested in the social and cultural rather than the economic aspects of life. Moreover, since these immigrants were both coming from and arriving to high-income countries, the authors noted that economic issues were less important. These same beliefs are germane to this study as immigrants were leaving from Canada, the UK and the US, which are high-income countries, and arriving to the high-income country of Israel. While having realized expectations post-immigration is strongly related to life satisfaction, the number of years in the host country is not. Pro-active counseling may enable prospective immigrants to conceive of more realistic expectations and develop strategies to acculturate into the society so that they are more likely to realize their expectations for socialization, employment and lifestyle post-immigration. More studies are needed to measure the conception and construction of realized expectations among immigrants.

Title:

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Keywords:

Acculturation, Immigrants and Quality of Life

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Abstract Summary:

This study examined the relationship between life satisfaction and acculturation for immigrants from four English-speaking countries, adjusting for confounders including: family support, demographic characteristics, and years in the host country. Findings suggest that after adjusting for confounders, life satisfaction was connected to health status and realized expectations post-immigration.

Content Outline:

Life satisfaction and Realized Expectations Post-Immigration (Using the Reali Scale) among English-speaking Immigrants

Introduction

1. Large and increasing numbers of immigrants arrive to primarily high-income countries.
 - o Reasons are primarily to improve economic status and safety.
 - o Diaspora – to return to one's ancestral home is a less common reason.
2. Life satisfaction is important for immigrants and for their new host societies, and acculturation is strongly related to life satisfaction.
 - o Acculturation is comprised of language acquisition and self-identity
 - o Rarely mentioned is the acculturation issue of realized expectations.

Methods

1. Cross-sectional study
2. Convenience sample of English-speaking participants (n=641) from Canada, from South Africa, UK, and the USA.

Results

1. Life satisfaction was strongly linked to the acculturation variable of having a higher level of realized expectations.
2. Other acculturation variables such as language proficiency and self-identification were not related to life satisfaction (after taking into account the demographic and family support variables).

Conclusion

1. Consistent with our findings, the single other study found on diaspora immigrants and life satisfaction, found that realized expectations was an important variable.
2. For diaspora immigrants, social expectations appear more important than economic expectations.
3. Pro-active counseling may enable prospective immigrants to conceive of more realistic expectations and develop strategies to acculturate into the society.
4. More studies are needed to measure the conception and construction of realized expectations among immigrants.

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