Are the student migrants satisfied with life? Effect of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination

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Abstract: International student migrants constitute the major population of world's leading universities and India is the second largest source of international students. Thus studying the psychological wellbeing of student migrants is imperative. This study analyses the effect of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination on student migrant's life satisfaction. Students who have migrated from other parts of India to Chennai (N = 132), and from India to other countries (N = 153) are the sample. The results suggest that acculturative stress and perceived discrimination individually have significant negative effect on life satisfaction of student migrants. The results of the multiple regression suggested that acculturative stress is so predominant that it wipes off any impact of perceived discrimination. This study makes out a strong case to address acculturative stress as it can negatively impact life satisfaction and prevent migration of students. Practical implications to parents and educators are discussed.

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1　Introduction

Study abroad has come to be recognised as a desirable trend that gives students the opportunities to develop the skills needed to compete in today's global job market (West, 2014; Altbach, 2004; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). An interesting urban phenomenon in the past decade is the migration of Indians abroad for higher education. The average age of these student migrants is about 17 years. Most of them are almost compelled to

migrate due to acute shortage of opportunities to pursue the stream of their choice. The total number of students from India studying overseas was 195,107 (Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow). The top five international destinations for Indian students were USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Russia.

Due to high cost of overseas education, students from rural areas do not prefer to study abroad (West, 2014). Instead they migrate to urban areas within their country of origin. Large scale rural-urban migration is observed in India due to the opportunities in the urban environment for education, work and personal reasons (Census of India: Migration, https://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/migrations.aspx). In the last decade, around 3.7 million of students migrated within India for educational purpose (Sharma and Chandrasekhar, 2014).

Student migrants generally do not prepare themselves for the acculturation process. Perhaps they are not even aware of it. Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that results from the contact of two or more cultural groups and their individual group members [Berry, (2005), p.698]. Acculturative stress is experienced during the process of acculturation. There are many causative factors contributing to acculturative stress which often leads to lower life satisfaction (Tonsing, 2013). Hence, it is a necessary for the student community to understand and get trained in diversity management (Avery and Thomas, 2004). It is essential for the students to apprehend diversity management, to sustain them during acculturation and as well in diversified team performance (Shaw, 2004).

During international migration the student migrant faces cultural shock, language barriers, academic difficulties, financial strain, interpersonal problems with host country students, racial discrimination, loss of social support, homesickness, etc. (Mori, 2000; Leong and Chou, 1996). Moreover, the student migrant has the anxiety to prove themselves in their independent status, for often they leave behind their family and friends (Bochner et al., 1977; Sam, 2001). When a student of rural background enters the new urban environment the problems faced are like feeling inferior, difficulty in making new friends, offensive verbal comments from the host students (Lee and Rice, 2007), teachers and society (Edwards and Romero, 2008). Hence, both international and domestic students are likely to experience lower life satisfaction.

Perceived discrimination is another important fall out of cross cultural difference. Perceived discrimination leads to anxiety, depression and distress (Chung and Epstein, 2014) and it is a major predictor of acculturative stress (Dawson and Panchanadeswaran, 2010). There is a negative relationship between perceived discrimination and life satisfaction (Tonsing, 2013). International and domestic student migrants are likely to perceive discrimination from co students, peers, teachers and immediate society with which they interact. Hence, perceived discrimination is likely to negatively impact life satisfaction of student migrants.

Adjusting to college life is a major milestone for most of the students. For student migrants it becomes even more stressful due to acculturation and adaptation process (Benita and Supriya, 2016). These drastic changes in life have a profound impact on immigrants' well-being (Sam, 1998). Life satisfaction falls within the scope of subjective well-being (Sam, 2001). Life satisfaction denotes an overall valuation of one's life, and is reflected to be a key indicator of migrant's successful adaptation to changes in life status (Oishi et al., 1999).

The role of cultural differences on life satisfaction was pronounced (Oishi et al., 2013). This comparative study therefore, focused on the impact of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination on life satisfaction of international and domestic student migrants. The influence of each of the four domains of acculturative stress on life satisfaction of student migrants was tested. This study may perhaps be the first study of these relationships among student migrants. Considering that Indian students migrate within India, as also internationally, understanding these relationships maybe meaningful. There are also similar reports of large scale student migration from Asia, Europe and Africa to USA and other developed parts of the world. Education is not only a key revenue earner but also a parameter of a nation's economic progress and human development. We therefore premise that, the outcomes of this research, could have implications for educational administrators and policy makers.

2 Review of literature

2.1 Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction has been defined as the global evaluation of a person's quality of life based on the person's own chosen criteria (Shin and Johnson, 1978; Sam, 2001). In determining one's life satisfaction, evaluations are based on a comparison with a standard that each individual sets for themselves. This is particularly important when the focus is on people of diverse ethnic background, and who may have different values and perceptions of what actually good life is (Kim and Noh, 2015). Judgments of life satisfaction are determined by success or failure in important life domains (Hunter et al., 2008). For students, academic performance is an important life domain (Pavot and Diener, 2008; Schimmack et al., 2002). The other important life domains are family, self, friends and living environment (Cummins, 1996; Matthews et al., 2010). People who are more satisfied with their life tend to be healthier than those who are less satisfied with their lives (Palmore and Luikart, 1972).

Life satisfaction helps us to understand the psychological wellbeing of immigrants (Tonsing, 2013). It is important to understand life satisfaction in order to understand whether the student migrants have settled in their new environment. Hence, it becomes the major positive outcome of acculturation. In the context of student migrants, acculturative stress is an important issue that merits research. In this study we relate acculturative stress and perceived discrimination with life satisfaction of international and domestic student migrants. Considering that both international and domestic student migrants face discrimination, this is also a key area of research. Both acculturative stress and perceived discrimination can impact the life satisfaction of student migrants. Hence, our study focuses on these relationships. Since life satisfaction is a strong pull factor in attracting and retaining talented student migrants, understanding predictors of student life satisfaction is perhaps important considering the increasing multicultural context of higher education.

2.2 Acculturative stress

The acculturation process is not uniform for all immigrants, often they experience acculturative stress during this process. It differs based on the cultures which come in

contact and also on the individual capability and motive (Berry, 1984). Student migrants also face similar challenges as they need to adapt to the new environment. For student migrants, acculturative stress is inevitable. Acculturative stress is stimulated by stressors which are connected with adjustment to a new culture such as language, food, living arrangements, making new friends, etc. (Maneze et al., 2014).

Another major contributor to acculturative stress of student migrants is disparity in their academic expectations and the harsh realities of academic rigor. Sometimes students may expect to perform academically better than what they did in their home country (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Smith and Khawaja, 2011). However, their academic performance may be below their expectations due to the difficulties in adapting to the new educational, cultural, and social environment. In addition, students may be pressured by their family and others to achieve a high level of academic performance (Mori, 2000; Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

The student migrants also encounter a number of lifestyle acculturative stressors like financial difficulties (Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007; Roberts et al., 1999), work restrictions in the host country (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000), accommodation and transportation (Bradley, 2000; Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007). Often, they borrow heavily to migrate. The fear of failure to repay adds to their woes (Rapoport and Docquier, 2005).

Good interpersonal relationships make life easier for student migrants (Sanders et al., 2002). The ability of students to socialise, generally helps them to overcome acculturative stress. However, this is a major challenge for student migrants, especially because of their native culture. In making new friends with locals, Asian international students find it more difficult rather than their American and European counterparts. This is because Asian cultures are collectivistic (Triandis, 1999). Therefore, these students find it difficult when interacting with friends from the Western culture that emphasises individualism, assertiveness, and self-sufficiency over interdependence and relatedness (Mori, 2000; Yeh and Inose, 2003).

Similarly, rural culture is characterised by common bloodlines, intimate relationships, and communal behaviour whereas urban culture is characterised by distant bloodlines, unfamiliar relations, and competitive behaviour (Banerjee, 2008). Thus domestic student migrants experience a culture shock when they move to a different culture in their own country.

The cultural change experienced in domestic migration and international migration cause acculturative stress. This in turn can negatively impact their life satisfaction. This study analyses the impact of acculturative stress on the life satisfaction of international and domestic student migrants. We therefore hypothesise that:

H1a   Acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of international student migrants.

H1b   Acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of domestic student migrants.

Acculturative stress has four domains namely social, attitudinal, familial and environmental (Padilla et al., 1985). The social domain deals with the social aspect of life such as having friends, communicating with others, feeling understood, etc. The attitudinal domain deals with how an individual evaluates the new environment like new colleagues and new neighbours and integrates with it. Familial domain considers the issues which arise due to gap in expectations of the family members. The effect of the

new environment and the difficulties faced in adjustment process is captured in the environmental domain. In spite of the collective importance of each of these domains in understanding life satisfaction, their individual impact is likely to differ based on the nature of migration (i.e., international or domestic). We therefore hypothesise that:

H2a   Social domain of acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of international student migrants.

H2b   Social domain of acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of domestic student migrants.

H3a   Attitudinal domain of acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of international student migrants.

H3b   Attitudinal domain of acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of domestic student migrants.

H4a   Familial domain of acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of international student migrants.

H4b   Familial domain of acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of domestic student migrants.

H5a   Environmental domain of acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of international student migrants.

H5b   Environmental domain of acculturative stress has negative influence over life satisfaction of domestic student migrants.

3   Discrimination

In the course of adapting to a new culture, people experience various types of stressors, which are the results of personal, demographic, or social makeup of an acculturating individual and a host culture (Berry and Kim, 1988; Lucero-Miller and Newman, 1999). These stressors include perceived discrimination, homesickness, fear, guilt, and perceived hatred (Kimbrough et al., 1996; Noh and Kaspar, 2003; Oh et al., 2002; Sandhu and Asrabadi, 1994). Among these stressors, perceived discrimination seems to be the most common stressor in international students' acculturation process (Sandhu and Asrabadi, 1994). As this is related to the host culture members' attitudes and behaviour towards the student migrants, it can directly influence international students' relationships and communication with host culture members.

Perceived discrimination is defined as a behavioural manifestation of a negative attitude and unfair treatment toward members of a group (Banks et al., 2006; Williams et al., 1999). Perceived discrimination leads to harmful psychological health outcomes including depression (Sanchez and Awad, 2016; Leong et al., 2013; Wei et al., 2012), psychological distress (Chung and Epstein, 2014), suicidal behaviour (Wei at al., 2010; Gomez at al., 2011), anxiety and low well-being (Paradies, 2006; Pascoe and Smart Richman, 2009).

International student migrants have reported significant level of discrimination in all the countries. International students from Asian, African, Latin American, and Middle

East countries often report significant perceived discrimination compared to domestic students or European international students (Hanassab, 2006; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007; Lee and Rice, 2007). Lee and Rice (2007) reported that international students experienced significant discrimination due to feelings of inferiority, direct verbal abuses, and physical attacks. Overt discrimination was displayed through discriminatory comments and direct offensive behaviours from co-students, teachers and society (Romero and Roberts, 2003; Rosenbloom and Way, 2004; Edwards and Romero, 2008). Increasing cases of assaults on international student migrants by members of the host society are suggestive of social prejudices and hostility (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010; Johnston et al., 2011).

Even in domestic migration, students experience perceived discrimination (Chou, 2012; Du et al., 2014). India is ethnically and religiously heterogeneous (Budhwar et al., 2008). Hence, discrimination is based on social categories, religious communities, castes and regions (Deshpande, 2011; Nath et al., 2012). Additionally, students perceive discrimination based on gender (Saha, 2013), economic difficulties and life style (Nath et al., 2012). Perceived discrimination may communicate to students that they are unwelcome in the educational institution (Faircloth and Hamm, 2005). It develops a barrier for their higher educational pursuits leading them to perceive that their future career success is questionable (Chavous et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2003).

Perceived discrimination of students has negative effect on their academic performance (Craig and Smith, 2014) as well as their psychological well being (Pascoe and Smart Richman, 2009; Safi, 2009). Therefore, it has a significant impact on the level of acculturative stress of international students (Finch et al., 2001; Pascoe and Smart Richman, 2009; Dawson, 2009; Alamilla et al., 2009; Dawson and Panchanadeswaran, 2010) and has been studied extensively by researchers. However, in spite of several reports of discrimination against domestic student migrants, there is no systematic research of its impact on acculturative stress.

Hence, it is very important to analyse the presence of perceived discrimination of international and domestic student migrants. This study has analysed the effect of perceived discrimination on the life satisfaction of international and domestic student migrants. We therefore hypothesise that:

H6a   Perceived discrimination has a negative influence over life satisfaction of international student migrants.

H6b   Perceived discrimination has a negative influence over life satisfaction of domestic student migrants.

4   Methodology

4.1   Sample

The sample consists of 285 students of which 153 (53.68%) were international student migrants and 132 (46.31%) were domestic student migrants. The data were collected using survey method. The study was conducted in Chennai, the metropolitan capital city of Tamil Nadu, India. The domestic student migrants consisted of students who had migrated from other parts of India to Chennai for purposes of college education. Structured questionnaire in English was distributed to students during their recess time.

The data was collected from international student migrants using e-questionnaire method. The online questionnaire was sent through email to Indian students who were pursuing college education in American and Australian universities. The source contacts were obtained through social networks and snowball technique was used. Clarifications were explained by the data collector.

A sample of 180 domestic student migrant respondents were approached. However, of these only 73.33% of responses were usable. Similarly, the e-questionnaire was sent to 180 international student migrants. Only 85% of the responses in this sample were usable. Hence domestic student migrants and international student migrants constituted the sample for this study. The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1   Demographic profile

Variables		International		Domestic	
		Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent
Gender	Male	61	40.00	38	28.79
	Female	92	60.00	94	71.21
Age	16–20	65	42.48	66	50.00
	21–25	88	57.52	58	43.94
	26–30	-	-	8	6.00
Stream of study	Arts and science	41	27.15	40	30.30
	Engineering	79	52.31	84	63.63
	Others	31	20.52	8	6.06
Place of stay	In hostel	35	22.86	48	36.64
	With family	114	74.51	56	42.75
	With friends	4	2.61	27	20.61

Note: The numbers do not always sum up to 285.

The mean age of students is 20.80 ± 2.43. The overall sample consisted of 34.74% of male students and 65.26% of female students. There were more number of students pursuing engineering. Most of the students were staying with their family.

4.2   Measure

4.2.1   Demographics

The demographic variables like age, gender, stream of study, migration type and place of stay were considered. Age was asked as an open ended question. Stream of study was close ended question with options 'arts and science', 'engineering' and 'others' (denotes the other fields of study like medicine, music, dance, etc.). Migration type was asked using the options 'international' (i.e., cross border migration) and 'domestic' (within country migration). All domestic migrants were from rural areas to urbanised Chennai. Place of stay was measured under the options of 'in hostel', 'with family' and 'with friends'.

4.2.2 Acculturative stress

Acculturative stress was measured using the modified shorter version of social, attitudinal, familial and environmental (SAFE) scale developed by Padilla et al. (1985). The shorter version consisted of 17 items to measure the level of acculturative stress. The sample rated the statements on a scale of 1 to 5, where '1' denoted strongly disagree and '5' denoted strongly agree. The acculturative stress score ranged from 17 to 85. Sample items were "it bothers me that I cannot be with my family" and "it is hard to express to my friends how I really feel." The Cronbach's alpha of the acculturative stress scale was 0.778 for the overall sample.

4.2.3 Perceived discrimination

Perceived discrimination was measured using the seven item scale developed by Padilla et al. (1985). The sample rated the statements on a scale of 1 to 5, where '1' denoted strongly disagree and '5' denoted strongly agree. Examples of the items were "people look down upon me if I practice customs of my culture" and "it bothers me that I have an accent." The score of perceived discrimination ranged from 7 to 35. The Cronbach's alpha of the overall sample for the discrimination scale was 0.678.

4.2.4 Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction was measured using a single question: how satisfied are you with your life? The respondents' response ranged from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 5 (absolutely satisfied).

5 Data analysis

The data analysis was done using IBM SPSS Statistics 20 version. One way ANOVA was used to find the variation in demographics over acculturative stress, perceived discrimination and life satisfaction. Linear regression was used to analyse the relationship between the variables of the study.

6 Results

The mean, standard deviation and inter correlation coefficient within the main study variables are given in Table 2. The values tell us about the strength of the relationship between the variables. The correlations are all significant ($p < 0.01$), and in the direction envisaged.

ANOVAs of the demographic variables showed that the level of acculturative stress varies based on stream of study of the student migrant ($F = 7.01$, $p < 0.01$). The life satisfaction of students also varied based on their stream of study ($F = 6.73$, $P < 0.01$). Other demographics did not impact the life satisfaction of students. The perception of discrimination varies based on stream of study ($F = 17.69$, $p < 0.01$) and migration type ($F = 10.37$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 2   Mean, standard deviation and correlations among variables (N = 285)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
For domestic sample (N = 132)									
Acculturative stress	2.93	0.63	1	0.76**	0.78**	0.76**	0.68**	0.72**	–0.78**
Social	2.57	0.78		1	0.50**	0.40**	0.35**	0.64**	–0.49**
Attitudinal	3.02	0.83			1	0.49**	0.33**	0.61**	–0.68**
Familial	3.15	0.81				1	0.39**	0.53**	–0.59**
Environmental	3.02	0.87					1	0.33**	–0.53**
P. discrimination	3.09	0.69						1	–0.62**
Life satisfaction	3.23	1.11							1
For international sample (N = 153)									
Acculturative stress	2.82	0.73	1	0.80**	0.81**	0.77**	0.73**	0.71**	–0.81**
Social	2.44	0.84		1	0.58**	0.51**	0.44**	0.74**	–0.65**
Attitudinal	2.87	0.89			1	0.51**	0.51**	0.61**	–0.69**
Familial	2.98	0.92				1	0.52**	0.39**	–0.56**
Environmental	3.01	0.86					1	0.48**	–0.66**
P. discrimination	2.80	0.78						1	–0.62**
Life satisfaction	3.48	1.19							1

Note: **$p < 0.01$.

To analyse the proposed hypotheses, a series of linear regressions were conducted. The criterion variable, life satisfaction remained the same, but the predictor variable changed for each equation. All the 12 hypotheses were supported and the beta values are reported in Table 3.

Table 3   Results of Regression analyses

	Domestic				International			
	R	R^2	F	β	R	R^2	F	β
Acc. stress	0.78	0.60	196.36	–0.78	0.81	0.66	286.95	–0.81
Social	0.49	0.24	42.03	–0.49	0.65	0.42	107.99	–0.65
Attitudinal	0.68	0.47	113.17	–0.68	0.69	0.48	138.65	–0.69
Familial	0.59	0.35	70.99	–0.59	0.56	0.32	69.98	–0.56
Environmental	0.53	0.28	50.79	–0.53	0.66	0.44	117.31	–0.66
Discrimination	0.62	0.38	81.01	–0.62	0.62	0.38	95.81	–0.62

Notes: Dependent variable: life satisfaction.
    **$p < 0.01$

And finally the effect of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination on life satisfaction was tested using multiple linear regression. And the results suggest that acculturative stress is the major predictor of life satisfaction of both domestic ($\beta = –0.68$) and international ($\beta = –0.74$) student migrants. Perceived discrimination became insignificant for both the groups. Acculturative stress explained significant portion of

variance in life satisfaction of domestic (R^2 = 0.61, $F_{(2,129)}$ = 100.88, $p < 0.01$) and international (R^2 = 0.66, $F_{(2,150)}$ = 145.97, $p < 0.01$) student migrants.

7   Discussion

Our result suggests that the level of acculturative stress experienced by student migrants does not vary based on gender. However, Berry et al. (1987) have found that female migrants experience high level of acculturative stress compared to males. In our study, acculturative stress did not differ across gender, quite similar to the work of Choi (1997) and Thomas and Baek Choi (2006). Thus the pressure of settling in to the new educational environment is similar across genders. The respondents in our study were college students and were all relatively young. The older students of age 21–25 had a higher level of acculturative stress than students of age 16–20. According to Sodowsky and Lai (1997) age and acculturative stress level are positively related. Our study also threw up similar results with the older sample experiencing higher acculturative stress than the younger sample. In this study the sample consist of only students at the graduation level. Younger students perhaps have the capacity to bounce back faster after set back. This acculturative stress levels are lower. Students who were doing Engineering experienced more acculturative stress than the others. Our results are quite similar to those reported by Sahney et al. (2004) and May and Chubin (2003). The field of engineering has become more competitive (Gereffi et al., 2008) and this may be the reason for increased levels of acculturative stress.

In this study, the life satisfaction of student migrants does not vary based on age and gender. While some researchers have found that life satisfaction varied between male and female (Matthews et al., 2012; Joshanloo and Afsari, 2011), some other researchers have found that there is no significant difference in life satisfaction based on gender (Verkuyten, 2008; Sam, 1998). Life satisfaction of the individual was not based on the age of the individual (Spreitzer and Snyder, 1974; Safi, 2010). However, Verkuyten (2008) concluded that older people were less satisfied with their life. In this study life satisfaction varied based on stream of study. This may be due to the varied workload between the courses which in turn affects their social life. Poor social life usually negatively impact life satisfaction of students. The tougher the stream lesser was the time to socialise, consequently the acculturative stress reported was higher.

The results of linear regression analysis suggest that collectively acculturative stress has a negative significant influence on life satisfaction of both domestic and international student migrants. The result is similar to that reported by Abolghasemi and Varaniyab (2010). The negative influence of acculturative stress on life satisfaction is more or less same for both domestic (β = –0.78) and international (β = –0.81) student migrants. H1a and H1b are supported.

The results supported the Hypotheses H2a and H2b significantly. The social domain has greater negative significant influence on life satisfaction for international students rather than domestic students. International student migrants find it difficult to make friends and to communicate with others as compared to domestic student migrants. This may be due to the factors like social circumstances, fear of being discriminated, personality, etc. In India each region has its own regional language (e.g., Hindi, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, etc.) and distinct regional customs and traditions. Due to this factor domestic migrants also have difficulty in making friends which in turn

increases the stress due to social domain. Oh et al. (2014) have reported that perceived social support increases life satisfaction. In this study too we have found that the acculturative stress caused by lack of social support decreases life satisfaction. Developing right social support could reduce acculturative stress and improve life satisfaction.

H3a and H3b hypotheses were also supported significantly. Attitudinal domain has a significant negative influence over life satisfaction of international students and domestic students. Attitudinal domain deals with how individual evaluate the new migrant environment. When they develop negative attitude towards the situation it leads to acculturative stress which affects the life satisfaction negatively. International student migrants face drastic changes in day to day activities. Society sees them differently, and host members generally do not interact with migrants like they do with their fellow host members. Consequently, they develop negative attitude towards the new environment. For domestic student migrants the challenges are quite similar, however the impact is lesser.

Hypotheses H4a and H4b were supported significantly. Indian shares a strong family bonding. Children are brought up under the care of parents or grandparents. When they migrate the absence of the family invariably affects them negatively. The student migrants get home sick especially when they stay in hostels. The negative effect of familial domain of acculturative stress is more or less same for both international and domestic student migrants. This may be due to the fact that the absence of family members create a vacuum that affects their life satisfaction. Homesickness has a negative influence over social life and academic life satisfaction (Terry et al., 2013).

Student's environment includes the college environment and place of stay environment. How the student migrants perceive their environment has a major effect on their life satisfaction. The living environment has a positive influence over overall life satisfaction (Huebner, 2004). Environmental domain has greater negative significant influence over life satisfaction of international students compared with domestic students. The change in the environment is too much to take in for international students. The new environment causes feelings of isolation which becomes the major source of acculturative stress. When the mismatch between the old and new environment is high it affects the student migrant's perception about life and in turn their life satisfaction. In the case of domestic students the environment is fairly familiar, only the people and some practices followed may differ. Therefore, comparatively, international student migrants have a large cultural gap to adjust to which in turn negatively affects their life satisfaction to a greater extent. Our results support the premise that stress caused by negative perception of the environment has a negative effect on life satisfaction. Thus Hypotheses H5a and H5b were supported.

Perceived discrimination has significant negative influence over life satisfaction of international and domestic student migrants. In the case of international students, perceived discrimination is high (Safi, 2010; Lee and Rice, 2007; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007). But the cultural change causes the perceived discrimination among domestic students also. Authors who have studied perceived discrimination with life satisfaction of college students have found it to be negatively significant (Verkuyten, 2008; Sam, 2001). Our Hypotheses H6a and H6b are well supported. Perceived discrimination lowers the morale and self worth causing lowered life satisfaction.

But when acculturative stress and perceived discrimination are together entered the effect of perceived discrimination diminishes to insignificance for both the groups. Acculturative stress becomes a more prominent issue as compared to perceived discrimination. Probably because cross cultural migrants expect some form of discrimination and therefore may not be totally overwhelmed when confronted with such experiences. However, acculturative stress is something that most student migrants may not have even heard of. Hence, they are stumped when faced with acculturative stress. Our results are partially similar to the works of Tonsing (2013) in which both acculturative stress and perceived discrimination are insignificant predictors of life satisfaction of immigrants. But in our study for both the groups' acculturative stress plays the major predictor role of life satisfaction. This may be due to the fact that irrespective of the geographical distance they migrate, domestic and international student migrants experience loneliness, homesickness, financial strain, fear about the new environment, and fear about the commitments back home which in turn leads to acculturative stress. And due to these factors student migrants experience less life satisfaction. This may be improved by providing special workshops, or training programs or counselling centres in the host society or host university to train the student migrants to cope up.

8   Implications

This study creates awareness about acculturative stress to parents. Since the past decade, most students from rural India are forced to migrate to urban India due to limited educational facilities. Some others are also forced to migrate abroad due to the limited opportunities back home to study what they desire to. They are likely to experience some form of acculturative stress or the other. Perceived discrimination is a serious issue that has negative consequence on the academic performance and life satisfaction of both domestic and international migrants. Besides it leads to negative health outcomes such as mental strain, anxiety, depression, distress and even suicidal ideation. The educators and the administrators should therefore be cautious in handling the immigrants. Perceived discrimination has not been studied on domestic student migrants in India. Hence this study is exploratory in nature. However, considering, the rise in reports of discrimination against domestic and international student migrants, and its negative impact on moral, cultural and political fabric of countries it deserves intensive studies.

Interpersonal skill development programs and etiquette training programs could be conducted for the student migrants to facilitate a smooth acculturation process. Additionally, this would help them to develop their communication skills, to interact with host members, motivate them to understand others actions and reactions and facilitate them to handle the peculiarities of the host environment. Parents must nurture the quality of adaptability in their children at the young age itself so that they grow up strong enough to face challenges of migration smoothly. Student migrants need to develop an open mind to experience and enjoy the new culture. Both acculturative stress and perceived discrimination have serious negative impact on life satisfaction. Therefore, there is a need to address these issues cautiously, yet promptly.

9   Limitations and future prospects

The data was collected using self-rated questionnaire. Hence, problems associated with common method bias may affect the results. Methodologically, our study is a cross sectional one. Future researchers should track the relationships tested in this study across different kinds of migrants at different phases of their acculturation process. They could consider studying the moderating effects of academic performance, coping strategies and perceived social support on acculturative stress, perceived discrimination and life satisfaction.

10   Conclusions

The findings of the current study give us an overall understanding about the acculturative stress level, perceived discrimination and life satisfaction of student migrants. Not every student migrant actually experiences acculturation problems. However most times they do believe they have problems. Sometimes these beliefs may at best be perceived not real. Yet, these beliefs can destroy their ability to sustain the rigors of the course. It may even destroy their peace and reduce their life satisfaction. How they overcome it depends on the social characteristics and coping ability of the student. When a student is under stress naturally the satisfaction with life is less. When a student experiences acculturative stress as well as perceived discrimination the level of life satisfaction naturally goes down further. This is self-destructive as also undesirable to the society at large. Hence, understanding the antecedents of student life satisfaction is imperative.

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