

Tallinn High School of Humanities

**ANALYSIS OF THE STRESS LEVELS AND THEIR
REASONS EXPERIENCED WITHIN THE PERIOD
OF ADAPTATION OF EXCHANGE STUDENTS
WHO STUDIED IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES
UNDER THE YFU ESTONIA PROGRAM**

The current study

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Tallinn 2021

Copyright declaration

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ABSTRACT

The current study analyzed the levels of adaptational stress and their reasons that YFU Estonia exchange students experienced during their adaptational period through the questionnaire type of survey. The respondents consisted of 47 Estonian exchange students who studied in Asia, Latin America, Scandinavia and Western Europe.

The data was collected through the online survey that consisted of a nine-item Psychological Stress Measure test (PSM) and a questionnaire about the reasons. The stress levels were compared to regions where they were experienced and the reasons also were analyzed regarding to the region.

The two null-statement hypothesis supposed that Estonian students who studied in Scandinavia and Western Europe experienced the lower adaptational stress levels than those who studied in Asia and Latin America, and the most common and leading reason for acculturative stress in all the regions was the language barrier.

The empirical analyses were conducted and hypotheses were partly supported.

Key words: adaptational stress, acculturate stress, exchange year, adaptation, regions

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INTRODUCTION

Doing an exchange year requires a lot of courage, bravery and commitment. And what is more important, it requires mental and physical strength as well as a stable stress resistance. Going abroad for a year or semester has recently become increasingly popular. More and more students go abroad every year. Unsurprisingly, before the departure future exchange students are obligated to go through special preparations, which are normally held by former exchange students in order to be ready to deal with an adaptational stress in a new country, culture and mentality.

The relevance of the study is based on the research paper where the results showed that exchange students from various countries in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the former Soviet Union experienced some kind of stress during their studies abroad. But the stress levels that students experienced were different since the adjustment impact shows strong dependencies on cultural differences which, in their turn, depends on a cultural background. These stress levels experienced by exchange students are in correlation with the cultural differences between their home and host countries and the obtained ratio is stable in the first approximation. (Suanet & Van de Vijer, 2009)

The study object of this current study is to examine the level of stress and its reasons that Estonian exchange students experience while their adaptation to a new environment.

Deriving information from the study the author sets the objects the author of the current study set the following procedure:

1. Research the information about stress, adaptation to new cultures and exchange programs
2. Collect information about the stress experienced by exchange students from YFU Estonia and what impact cultural differences make on them
3. Conduct a stress level survey test with Estonian exchange students who studied in different countries
4. Reduce initial non-deterministic data and check null-hypothesis
5. Support or refute hypothesis

6. Complete a conclusion based on the numerical results obtained above

Based on the theoretical part, the author puts forward two null hypothesis statements:

1. Estonian exchange students who studied abroad under the YFU Estonia program in the countries with a less cultural difference such as in Scandinavia and Western Europe experienced less stress during the adaptation period than those in the countries like in Asia and Latin America with a higher cultural difference.
2. An insufficient knowledge of the language of the host country is a most popular reason for adaptational stress.

The procedure for this current study is to proceed empirical study based on the questionnaire and numerical analysis of the obtained data. Proceed theoretical study based on previously obtained results to choose optimal distribution(s) to provide null-hypothesis study and calculate the level and dispersion of the selected distribution. “Analysis of the stress levels” in this work implies to comparing the stress levels on the scale from 1 to 8 based on the nine-item Psychological Stress Measure (PSM-9), being in dependencies on the country where students were studying and finding out particular reasons which caused the stress also relying on the comparison of the countries’ differences.

1. STRESS

1.1. A brief history of a term “stress”

Hippocrates, Aristotle and other ancient scientist had already described stress and its antagonistic impacts. Claude Bernard, one of the world’s greatest psychologists, who was working in Paris during the end of the 19th century, made a greatest discovery and formally described how tissues and cells in multicell organisms may be shielded from stress. Later, American psychologist and a Harvard University professor in the Department of Physiology, Walter Bradford Cannon, explained the psychological process that keep up the greater part of the consistent states in the organism and called it “homeostasis”. And finally, Dr. Hans Selye, an Austrian-Hungarian endocrinologist, also known as a “father of stress”, begun his first researches about stress back in 1926 still during the studies in the medical school. Hans Hugo Bruno Selye was the first scientist to describe the term “stress” and research its concept on hormonal level. All the further researches about stress are based on the discoveries that Selye made. (Fink, 2016)

1.2. Adaptational stress

Adaptational stress or general adaptation syndrome (GAS) was proposed by Hans Selye that is connected with the “fight-to flight” concept-the acute stress response, that postulates that creatures respond to danger with an overall release of the thoughtful sensory system, preparing the creature for battling. This response was described by Walter Bradford Cannon and later recognized to be the first stage of GAS. Hans Selye conducted several clinical observations, where he monitored patients that had a common response by the body to a stressful stimulus, and performed experiments on laboratory rats. These observations led Selye to a conclusion that this type of a body response, stress, to external factors causing by hormonal and chemical overproductions in organisms and high blood pressure. (Fink, 2016)

Aside from the numerous particular protection responses (arrangement of explicit antibodies, adjustment to cold and morphine, hypertrophy of much-utilized muscle gatherings) there is

an incorporated condition of firmly interrelated versatile responses to vague pressure itself; this has been named the "General Adaptation Syndromes" (G.A.S.). It creates in three phases: the " Alarm Reaction " (A.R.), the Stage of Resistance, and the Stage of Exhaustion. The greater part of the trademark appearances of the A.R. (tissue catabolism, hypoglycaemia, gastro-intestinal disintegrations, release of secretory granules from the adrenal cortex, haemoconcentration) vanish or are really switched during the phase of obstruction, yet return in the phase of fatigue. This recommends that the capacity of living creatures to adjust to changes in their environmental factors, their flexibility or " transformation energy," is a limited amount; its size seems to rely to a great extent on hereditary factors. To sum up, in biological perception stress is the interaction between damage and defense. Notwithstanding harm and safeguard, each stressor moreover produces certain particular activities (sedatives follow up on the nervous system, diuretics upon water digestion, insulin upon the glucose) very separated from their stressor impacts. Subsequently the overall transformation condition never happens in its unadulterated structure, yet is constantly confounded by superimposed explicit activities of the inspiring stressors. (Selye, 1950)

Stress that is experienced during the adaptation to a new culture is described as acculturative stress. Acculturative stress or also known as adaptational stress to a new culture specifies into a number of stages that a acculturating individual goes through. First one is labeled the "honeymoon", that includes feelings of exhilaration and delight in the students who are just starting their adaptation. If an individual remains in a host country long enough, it is most likely to experience adverse behavior, which is normally followed by some kind of stress caused by misunderstandings and those negative emotions. (Kali A. Demes, Nicolas Geeraert, 2015)

1.3. Cultural shock

In one of the studies Young Yun Kim described adaptational stress as a "cultural shock". Although distinctive in individual circumstances, students who had just arrived to the host country realize themselves in want of creating associate degreeed maintaining a comparatively

stable operating relationship with the host environment. The method of adapting to an unfamiliar with culture unfolds through the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, a process that's deeply frozen within the natural human tendency to realize an inside equilibrium in the face of adversarial environmental conditions. The variation process usually begins with the psychological and physiological experiences of dislocation and force ordinarily called symptoms of disorientation. Over time, via non-stop learning and understanding a new culture, maximum humans are capable of acquire growing tiers of purposeful and mental efficacy vis-a-vis the host environment. Underpinning the cross-cultural variation procedure are the 2 interrelated studies of deculturation of a number of the unique cultural habits, on the one hand, and acculturation of latest ones, at the other. The cumulative final results of the acculturation and deculturation studies is an inner transformation with-inside the course of assimilation into the mainstream culture. Fundamental to this variation cycle are one's capacity to impart in understanding to the standards and practices of the host culture and constant and dynamic commitment in the relational and mass correspondence exercises of the host country's society. (Kim, 2017)

1.3.1. Common reasons of an adaptational stress

In the research paper of Sonja Manz were described three main categories that influence the magnitude of the cultural shock or adaptational stress. These three categories are:

1. Cultural variations - the final results of the culture shock seems to be a characteristic of the variations among the personal and the overseas culture. As those variations are multidimensional, the cultures can be very comparable on one thing and really exceptional on others.
2. Individual differences – this component refers to variations in persona and the capability to deal with new environments. It additionally consists of demographic variables which includes age, sex, socio-monetary class, and education
3. Sojourn experience - the studies sojourners have and the remedy they obtain from the local population of the host society have a robust impact at the version process

There are individual, culture and society related factors that have an impact on the cultural shock. Withal language best belongs to the surface level of cultures, it's miles the vehicle of lifestyle transfer. In widespread it could be stated that language fluency bears a truthful dating to sociocultural adjustment. It is without delay associated with extended interplay with host nationals and consequently the lower in sociocultural adjustment problems. Apart from that the social network that is surrounding the exchange students during the adaptation period is playing a huge impact on the amount of stress that they experience. By social network are meant local habitants of the host country, such as host family members and friends. As well the cultural shock is associated with the host environment, a few cultures are less difficult to healthy adapt to into than others. This declaration refers back to the idea of cultural distance accounting for the adjustment issues. This idea turned into added through Babiker et al. in 1980. (Manz, 2003) Other researches additionally determined a sturdy courting among cultural distance and sociocultural adjustment issues. (Wang & Schaan, 2008)

In the study that was conducted in 2012 in England there was found that less-developed English language skills of international students were the reason for having a hard and stressful time while adapting to a new culture. (Yvonne M., 2012)

1.4. Stress measurements

There is no any specific or generalized scale or tool to measure stress from all the causes. As mentioned before, stress occurs for various reasons and every unique individual has its own inimitable reaction to it, which at the same time might be similar to others'. Most evaluations of stress identify with life occasions, and both past and current life stressors, intense and constant, assume a significant part. In any case, past the effect of stressors, it is the revealed condition of feeling focused on that is the basic indicator of medical affliction One of the researchers used an effective off-the-shelf methods for cross-domain adaptation of user-level stress models to measure county-level stress. (Chandra Guntuku, 2019)

Another study used the Trier Social Stress Test. There it was demonstrated as a psychological stress protocol to be used in an exceedingly laboratory setting. Protocols that permit analyzers to check the biological pathways of the strain response in health and malady are basic to the

progress of research in stress and anxiety.¹ Although various protocols exist for causation stress response within the laboratory, several neglect to supply a realistic context or to include aspects of social and psychological stress. Of psychological stress protocols, meta-analysis suggests that the Trier Social Stress Test (TSST) is that the most helpful and applicable standardized protocol for studies of stress secretion reactivity. (Birkett, 2011)

A lot of other tests were developed to measure and define the level of stress. One of those is a nine-item Psychological Stress Measure (PSM-9). This test was derived from PSM-25. This tool is pointed straightforwardly on the situation of feeling focused, is suitable for surveying stress clinically in every body and filling in as an end result measure. The equipment is large and strong and easy to govern in scientific offerings settings; it has an everyday dispersion, which makes it a very sensitive to-alternate tool in rehashed measures to archive progress. (Lemyre & Lalande-Markon, 2009)

2. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Cultural difference is often called as cultural distance, which suggests how disparate two cultures are, is moreover expected to be a judicious factor of how acclimatizing individuals conform to another culture. The differentiations can be credited to ones' food tendencies, climate, language, religion, customs, characteristics and conviction frameworks like collaboration or freedom. One of the current studies suggests that the more significant the difference between the home and host cultures are, the greater is the adaptational stress. Prior between culture voyaging experience which can isolate between understudies from different countries or continents could likewise impact coming about acculturative stress. (Kröner-Herwig & Akhtar, 2015)

International students often share regular scholarly stressors, for example, family related pressing factors, grant necessities, monetary weights, rivalry in class, and course-related pressure, adaptation to a new culture. In any case, insights of scholarly pressure and adapting systems may vary across different cultures. Consequently, worldwide understudies may contrast in their insights furthermore, responses to scholastic stressors. (Misra & Castillo, 2004)

3. INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

The idea of promoting one's country's values, culture, interests and lifestyle through educational exchange programs, which consisted and still do of sending young representatives from one country abroad, came to realization after the World War 1, when the necessity and importance of understanding and comprehending other people from different countries increased after everybody realized that war type of conflicts would have been avoidable if the communication had been improved, because the consequences of the war were quite deplorable. After the outbreak of World War 2, countries' governments like American and German made the final decision that the public authority needed to focus on informing individuals in foe, allied and unbiased about the situations on the battlefields. Even already during the war American government extended their exchange programs in Africa, Middle East and Asia. And what is more, American public authorities offered monetary help to schools in these areas that were American funded. Later on, exchange programs increased the popularity and became relevant on almost every continent; different types of international exchange programs such as FLEX, ASSE, YFU and many others allowed high school students to travel and study abroad. (A. V. Kourova, O. P. Mikhanova , 2015)

3.1. Youth For Understanding

Youth For Understanding (YFU) is a nonprofit organization and also one of the oldest, largest and most respected international exchange organizations that is devoted to sending high school students to international exchanges. YFU was founded by Rachel Anderson. She was involved with the Michigan Council of Churches ecumenical movement and in 1947 she and her husband attended Council's first World Conference after WW2. The event was held in Amsterdam, the city that had been in a blackout during the horrific events of the war, and a ceremony was held to praise the city lights being turned on without precedent for years. This exact occasion inspired Dr. Rachel Anderson to organize an exchange student program to help connect the tremendous crack of post-war scorn. After she realized that she never wanted to let the lights go out again. (YFU, n.d.)

In 1951 an American minister, John Eberly, perceived that the hardships predominant in post-war Germany were constructively affecting the nation's youth, placing them in a pattern of misery, despair and bitterness. He gave an idea to the local church leaders to create a youth exchange program, that would bring German students to the United States to live and experience another culture in a hope that by the return back to the motherland German youth would be motivated to rebuild their country with a help of the experience and information that they observed during their studies in the United States. Dr. Rachel Anderson had been handed the leadership of this idea, and that helped her to found YFU, where she also had been an executive director for a long time afterwards. In 1973 she was also nominated to Nobel Peace Prize for that. (YFU, n.d.)

Later on YFU program had expanded to various countries across the world, and now, in the 2021, you can already go on an exchange through YFU to 60 countries. Students, during their studies abroad with YFU, stay with host families. Those families are kind locals who opened their family's doors for a complete stranger, so as to help the exchange student achieve the greatest and deep understanding of the culture of a host country. YFU offers programs for a year, semester, summer and has just weekly programs. Programs can vary from normal once to specific programs with art, nature, theater etc. activities. And besides all of that every former exchange student has an opportunity to become a volunteer in the organization in order to be part of the experience for longer, help future students and promote YFU's missions, visions and values. (YFU USA, n.d.)

3.1.1. YFU Missions, visions and values

All countries' YFU share the same values, missions and visions. YFU propels intercultural understanding, exchange students get deep rooted learning and worldwide capabilities. That, along with mutual respect and social obligation through groundbreaking educational international exchanges for teens, families, and networks, upheld by devoted volunteers and professional staff. YFU's vision is uniting the world and making it more empowered with a feasible peace. All members of this nonprofit organization share the same values, and they are the base to how all the programs and other operations are carried out. YFU values a long-term learning, learning for life-is what it promotes. All the volunteers in the organization are

dedicated to their work and engaged into all YFU's activities, their relationships with people are caring and people-oriented. Since YFU is promoting cultural understanding and focuses on sustainability, quality and cooperating international solidarity, it has a valuing diversity of inclusiveness, uniqueness and justice. (YFU, n.d.)

3.1.2. YFU Estonia

YFU Estonia also works in the honor of open and understanding world. Its specific value, that is carried by every member is a thought "Together is cool", and also carries all the same values and missions as all the other YFU organizations. YFU Estonia was established in 1993, after again becoming an independent country from the Soviet Union. But it started in 1992, when two Estonians went to Denmark as exchange students. Every year anywhere between 50-90 students from Estonia go abroad with YFU. (YFU Eesti, n.d.)

Right now, YFU Estonia has exactly 39 different countries, where Estonian youth can go under the organization. All of those destinations are located in Europe, Asia, Africa, Oceania, Latin and North America- such countries as Latin African Republic, New Zealand, Vietnam, India and many more. (Eensalu, 2020)

(In this current study the stress levels of the students who studied in Europe, America and Asia will be examined)

PROCEDURE

For completing this current study the first step was to collect information about the topic and present it in the theoretical part of the study. The author of the work completed the research on already existing studies and articles about stress, stress levels, adaptational stress, their measurements and most commonly its accruable reasons, international exchange programs and specifically YFU Estonia organization.

Afterwards, the null-hypothesis statements were set.

To perceive the second part of the study and collect data about the stress levels and their reasons of Estonian high school exchange students who studied abroad with YFU Estonia program the author conducted a survey in a questionnaire form. It consisted of 9 questions about the exact reasons of the experienced during the adaptational period and a nine-item Psychological Stress Measure (PSM-9). The questionnaire was distributed to YFU Estonia exchange students, to Estonian high school teens, who studied in Asia, Scandinavia, Western Europe and Latin America, via email and Messenger.

With an accuracy of 95% and an error rate of 5% the general number of 50 people created a selection frame of 44 required answerers. The author managed to receive back 47 answers.

When the answers were received, the author reduced non-deterministic data, handled it to Excel to perceive the data into the graphs. The graphs were made for every question, where data was presented in % correlating with the area of where an exchange student spent their year abroad. The data represented on the resulting graphs was analyzed and the null-hypothesis statements were checked.

RESULTS AND ANALYSES

In January 2021 the author sent the questionnaire to YFU Estonian exchange students through the YFU Estonia office by email. The respondents (N=47) who took part in a survey did their exchanges in 16 different countries. The results are represented in Figure 1.

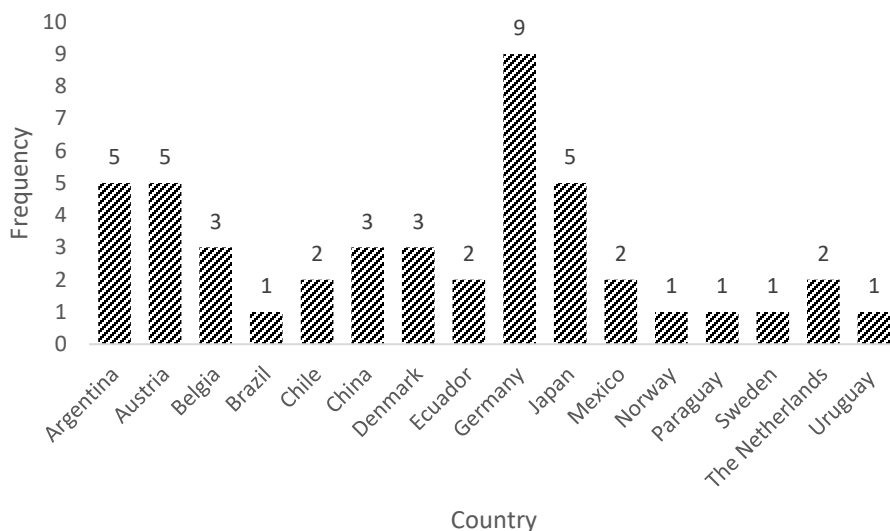


Figure 1. Number of students who studied abroad under the YFU Estonia program distributed by their host countries

Host countries represented in Figure 1. were separated into 4 regions by the author: Asia (China and Japan), Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay), Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) and Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands). The percentage share of respondents of each region out of the total is represented in Figure 2. According to the results obtained from the answers of the respondents a bit less than a half (~41%) of students spent their exchange year in Western Europe, 17% in Asia, 30% in Latin America and 12% in Scandinavia.

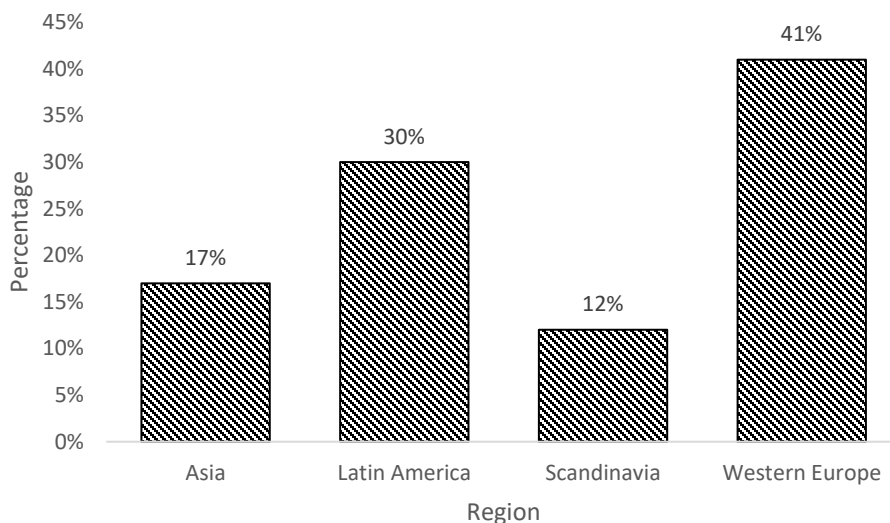


Figure 2. Percentage share of students separated to regions

Stress levels

The first part of the questionnaire was a PSM-9 test, which separates stress by the results into three different levels: low stress level, mild and high. The results can be seen in the *Figure 3*. The results based on PSM-9 confirm the first null-statement hypothesis: “Estonian exchange students who studied abroad under the YFU Estonia program in the countries with a less cultural difference such countries as in Scandinavia and Western Europe experienced less stress during the adaptation period than those in the countries like in Asia and Latin America with a higher cultural difference.”

According to *Figure 3*, the results of the PSM-9 test on Estonian exchange students showed that nobody experienced the low level of stress, 50% of students who studied in Asian and Latin American experienced mild stress level and 50% experienced high level of stress while adapting to a new culture, which is 10% more than high stress level in Scandinavian countries (40%) and 24% more than in Western European countries (26%). In conclusion more students who studied in Asian and Latin American countries experienced higher stress levels during adaptation.

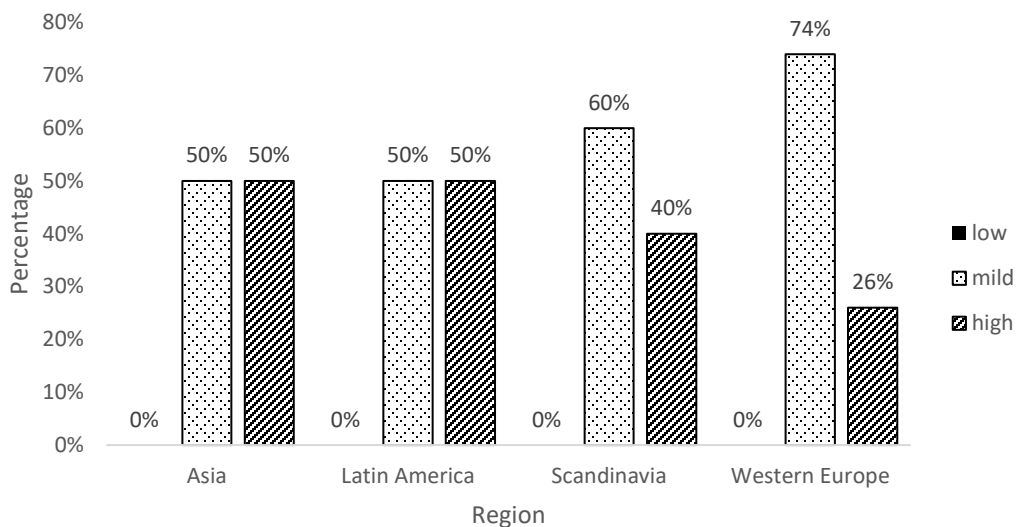


Figure 3. Percentage share of students in different host countries and their stress level during adaptation based on PSM-9

The results of the self-assessments of in general rating their stress during the adaptation are shown in Figure 4. partly refutes the first null-statement hypothesis. It converges that in Latin America more students experienced a high level of stress than in Western Europe, however the result also showed that the biggest percentage share of students who experienced high level of stress studied in Scandinavia, which partly refutes the first null-statement hypothesis.

13% percent of students who spent their year abroad in Asia rated their stress level as low despite the results of PSM-9 (0%), which is the same amount (13%) as for high; and the biggest percentage share as high as 74% rated their stress as “mild”. The mild level of adaptational stress has a variance of 24% and of 37% for high level compared to the results of the PSM-9 in Figure 3. This refutes the first null-statement hypothesis, since the high level of stress was experienced by the smaller percentage share of students than in Scandinavia (60%) and in Western Europe (26%).

Those respondents who studied in Latin America 29% percent rated their stress level as low, which is exactly 29% more than in the results of the PSM-9. Mild and high stress levels were both chosen by 36% of the students and both had difference with PSM-9 by 14%.

More than half (60%) of exchange students who studied in Scandinavian countries rated their stress during adaptation as high, which is 20% more than in the results of the PSM-9. Low and mild stress levels were equally self-rated by students as 20% for each. For mild stress level it has a 40% difference with PSM-9 results and a 20% difference for low stress level. Even though by the PSM-9 test results the first null-hypothesis statement was correct it is the opposite for the self-rating in case of Scandinavia. As shown in Figure 4 the largest part of students who experienced high level of adaptational stress were studying in Scandinavia.

In case of Western Europe 32% percent of respondents rated their adaptational stress as low, 42% as mild, and 36% as high as shown in Figure 4. It has a 32% variance from PSM-9 by low and mild levels. The high level of stress in this situation converges with PSM-9 results.

The graphs represented in Figure 3. and Figure 4. show different data, because on the first one results were received from the scientific, psychological test and the other just represents the opinion of the exchange students of themselves.

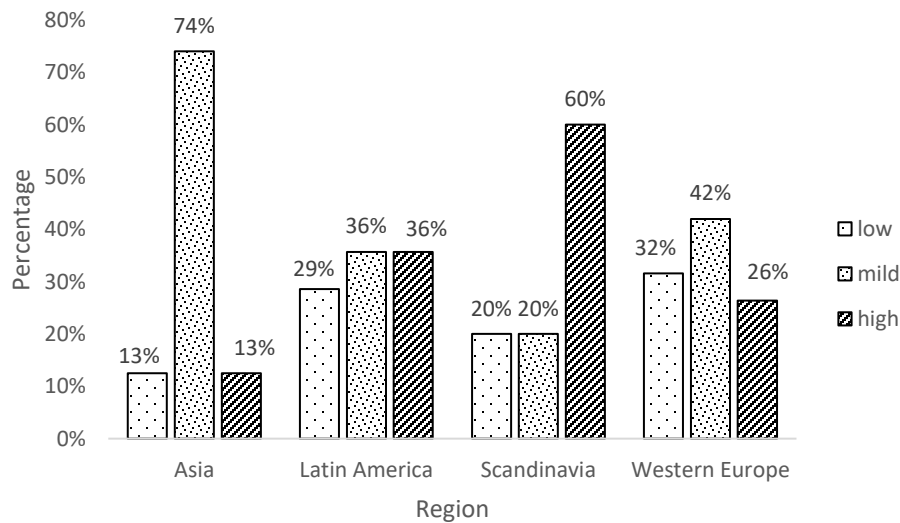


Figure 4. Self-rating of adaptational stress level by exchange students distributed by regions

Reasons of adaptational stress

One of the parts of exchange year is living in a host family, and it might take extra energy and effort to adapt to it. (Seokhoon, 2019)

To analyze the reasons of adaptational stress the author asked how stressful was it for students to adapt to their host families. The results has proven that only a small part of Estonian YFU students found it very stressful to adapt to a new family: 12% in case of Asia, 0% for Latin America, 20% for Scandinavia and 6% for Western Europe. The biggest part in Asia (63%) and in Latin America (93%) considered that it was just a little bit stressful to adapt to a new family. For students in Scandinavian countries it was only 20% and for Western Europe 47% as much as for not stressful in this region. A quarter (25%) of students who were in Asia did not experience stress due to adapting to the family. In Latin America only 7% were not stressed due to this particular reason. Students who studied in Scandinavia showed the higher percentage share (60%) of those who did not feel stressed during adaptation specifically because of the host family. This results are shown in Figure 5. and also partly support the first null-statement hypothesis, because in students in Scandinavia (60%) and Western Europe (47%) did not experience any stress due to the adaptation to a new family, which is more than in Asia (25%) and in Latin America (7%).

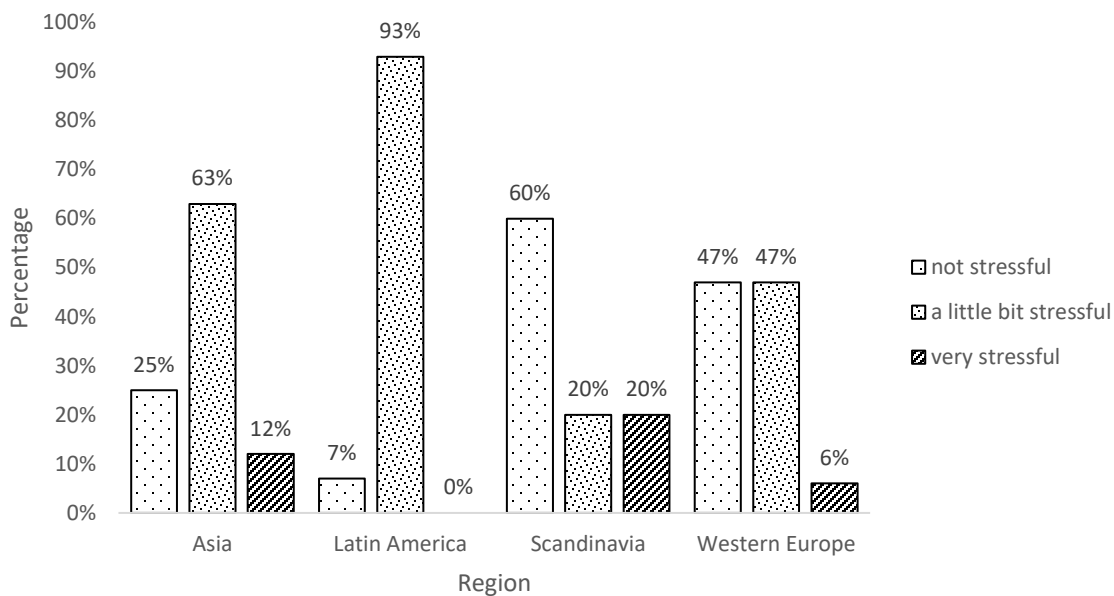


Figure 5. Stress rating of exchange students caused by adapting to a new family in different regions

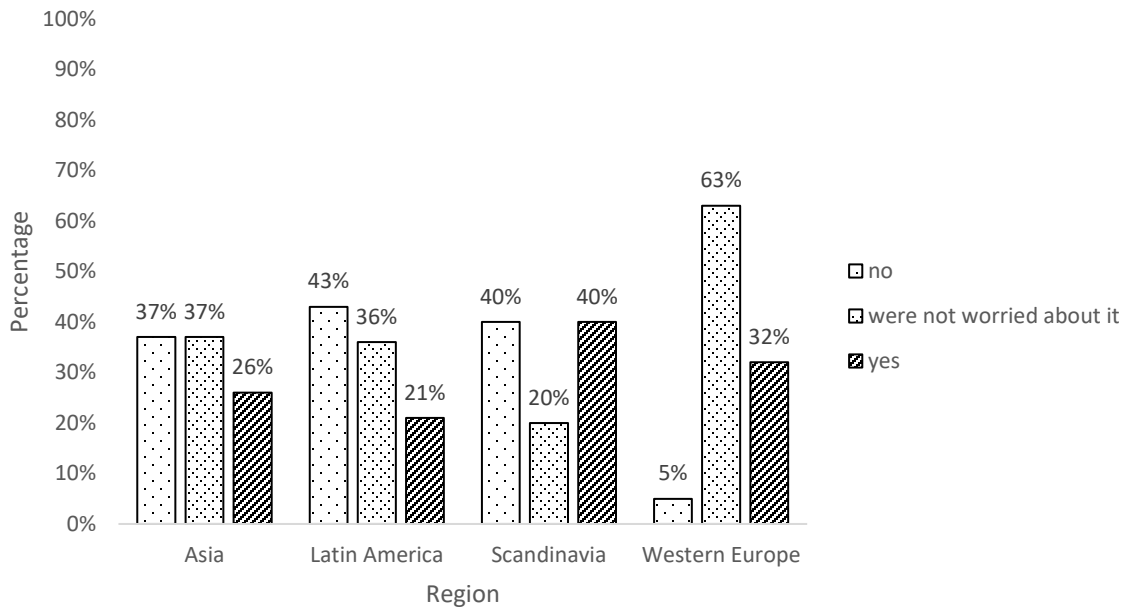


Figure 6. Problems with finding new friends in the host country of exchange students in different regions

According to the Figure 6. in Latin America was the largest percentage share (43%) of Estonian exchange students who did not have any problems with finding new friends in their host countries. It was close to the students in Scandinavia (40%) and right after followed by students who studied in Asia (37%). But in Western Europe, however, only 5% of students did not face problems with finding friends. In Scandinavia 40% of students did have problems with finding new friends, which can be explained by the “cold” Scandinavian culture (Oxfeldt, Nestingen, & Simonsen, 2017). In Western Europe 32% percent of students faced this problem, in Asia 26% and in Latin America only 21%. The third part of the students were those who did have problems with finding friends, but it did not trigger stress, which made up 37% in Asia, 36% in Latin America, 20% in Scandinavia and 63% in Western Europe.

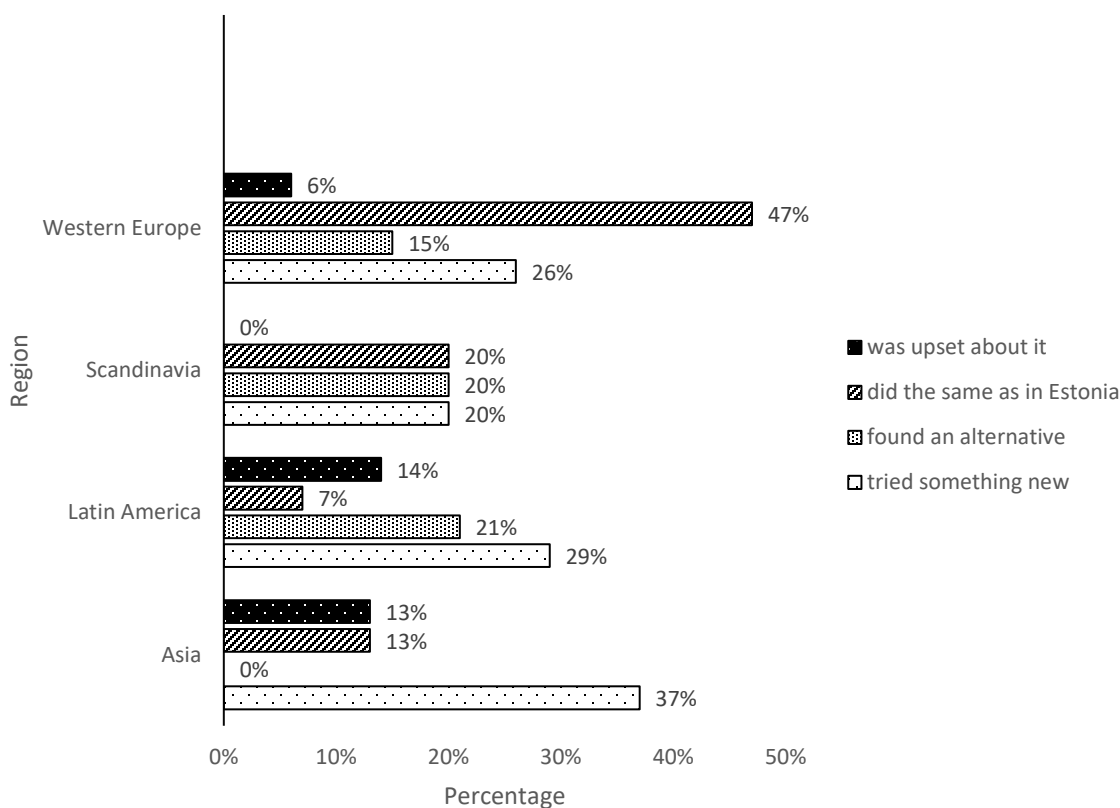


Figure 7. Things that Estonian exchange students did with their hobbies in different countries while studying abroad

In the results according to the graph shown in Figure 7. only 6% of students who studied in Western Europe and 0% of students who were in Scandinavia were upset about not being able to continue doing their hobby in their host country and it was hard for them to cope with this problem, so they were stressed over it. In Latin America 14% of students did not experience stress due to their old hobbies and in Asia 13%. The other students found different ways to not be upset about not being able to continue doing their hobbies. 6% of respondents who studied in Western Europe were just simply not upset about this factor, the same did 40% of those who spent their abroad in Scandinavia, 29% of students who were in Latin America and 37% in Asia. 47% of respondents who studied in Western Europe did the same hobby as in Estonia, 15% found an alternative and 26% tried something new. In Scandinavia 20% of students had the opportunity to do the same hobby as in Estonia, another 20% found an alternative and another 20% tried something new and did not experience stress. Students who studied in Latin American countries had the smallest percentage share (7%) of those who did the same as in Estonia, 21% found an alternative and 29% tried some new hobbies. Estonian exchange students who spent their year abroad in Asia had the biggest percentage share (37%) of students who tried new things, 13% did the same as in Estonia and none of the students found an alternative to their usual hobbies.

In different countries people have different hobbies, due to countries culture, people's mentality, climate, geographical location and different historical situations. That means that some things that are popular in one region might not be common in others. (Zakrevskaya, 2020)

The results of the questionnaire also showed that the percentage share of students who did experience the cultural shock and studied in Asia (50%) and in Latin America (43%) was bigger than in Scandinavia (20%) and Western Europe (21%). In Asia 13% of students did not experience any cultural shock, in Scandinavia 21%, in Latin America 21% and in Western Europe 32%. A lot of students turned out to have just a small cultural shock in Asia 37%, in Latin America 36%, in Scandinavia 60% and in Western Europe 47%. The results are represented in Figure 8.

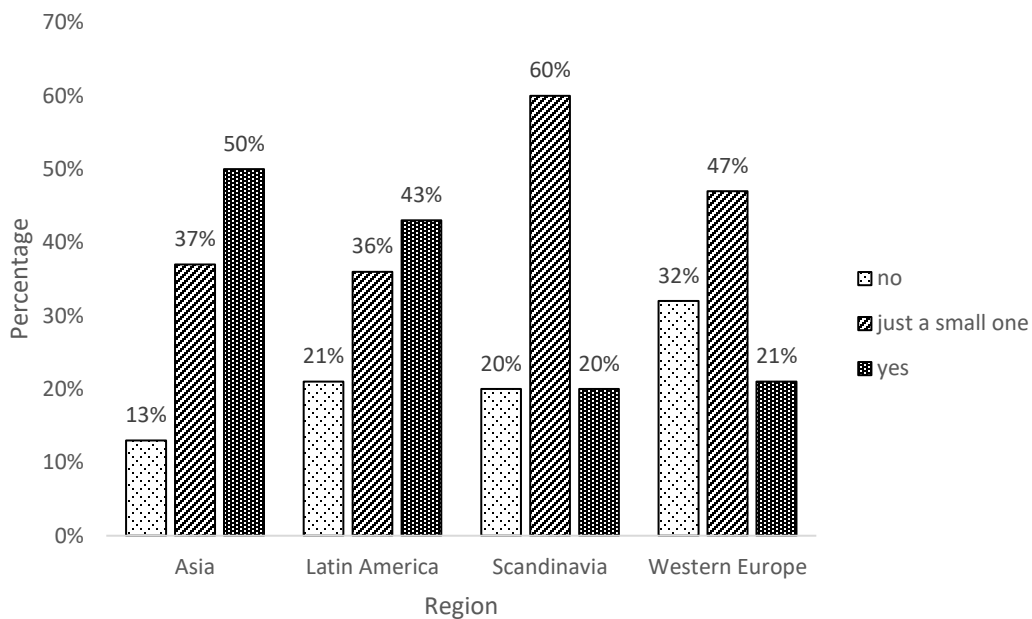


Figure 8. Percentage share of exchange students in different countries who had a cultural shock

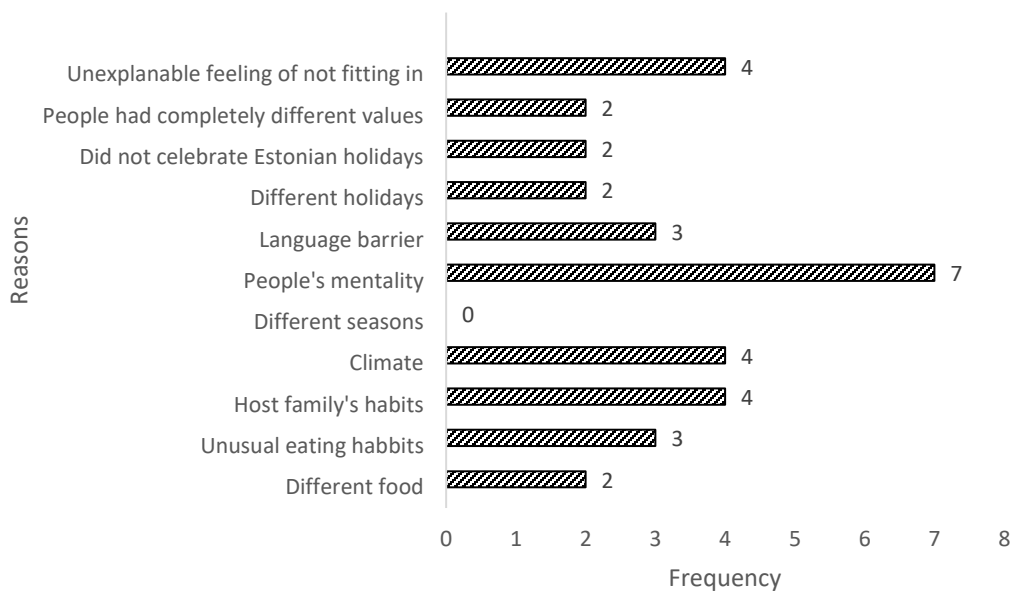


Figure 9. Reasons of cultural shock for exchange students who studied in Asia

The most common trigger for cultural shock among Estonian students who studied in Asia turned out to be the local people's mentality. This is followed by reasons as climate, host families' unusual habits and unexplainable feeling of not fitting in. Then came the language barrier and unusual eating habits. The reasons that did not have a big impact on the cultural shock on students who were in Asian countries were local people's different values compared to Estonians, different holidays and the insufficiency of celebrating Estonian holidays and different food. The results can be seen in Figure 9.

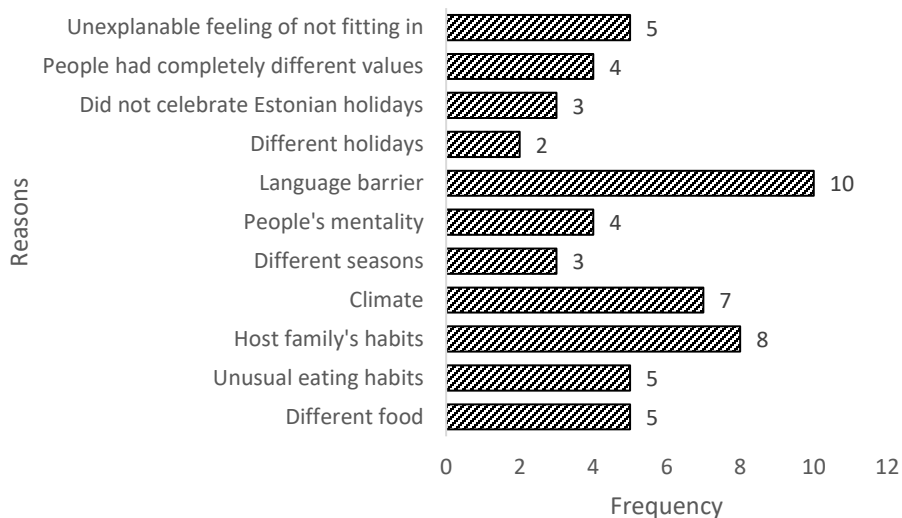


Figure 10. Reasons of cultural shock for exchange students who studied in Latin America

On Figure 10. the reasons of cultural shock and adaptational stress of students who studied in Latin American countries are shown. The main reason was the language barrier, which supports the second null-statement hypothesis. A bit less common reasons were feelings of not fitting in, climate, host family's habits, unusual eating habits and different food. And the minor reasons for Latin American region were different holidays, not celebrating Estonian holidays, people's mentality and different seasons.

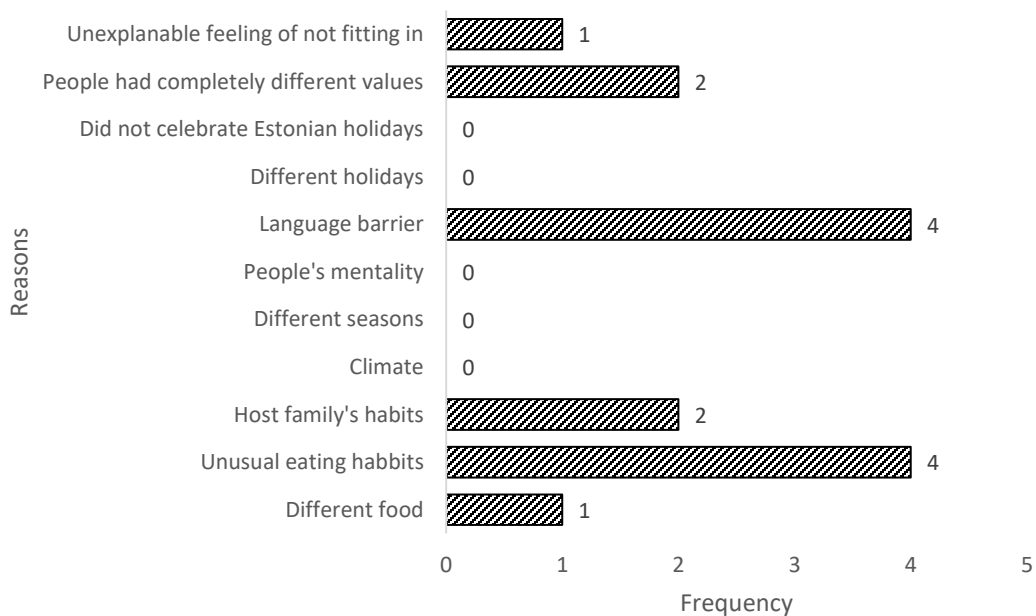


Figure 11. Reasons of cultural shock for exchange students who studied in Scandinavia

YFU Estonia exchange students who spent their year in Scandinavian countries had the smallest number of reasons for cultural shock compared to Latin America, Asia and Western Europe. The results shown on the Figure 11. also support the second null-statement hypothesis that was put forward by the author that the language barrier was the main reason for adaptational stress and in case of Scandinavia it turned out in this study to be true. The other reasons here that had the same frequency as a language barrier were unusual eating habits. Other minor reasons with a smaller frequency were local habitants' different values compared to Estonians, host families' habits, different food and an unexplainable feeling of not fitting in.

On Figure 12. are represented reasons of cultural shock of students who studied in Western Europe. For that particular region the null-statement hypothesis is unjustified, because the main reasons for stress were host families' habits and countries' unusual eating habits. The reasons with a bit lower frequency were language barrier, unexplainable feeling of not fitting in and people's mentality in the host country. And the most rarely seen reasons for

adaptational stress in Scandinavia were different holidays, different food and people's dissimilar values.

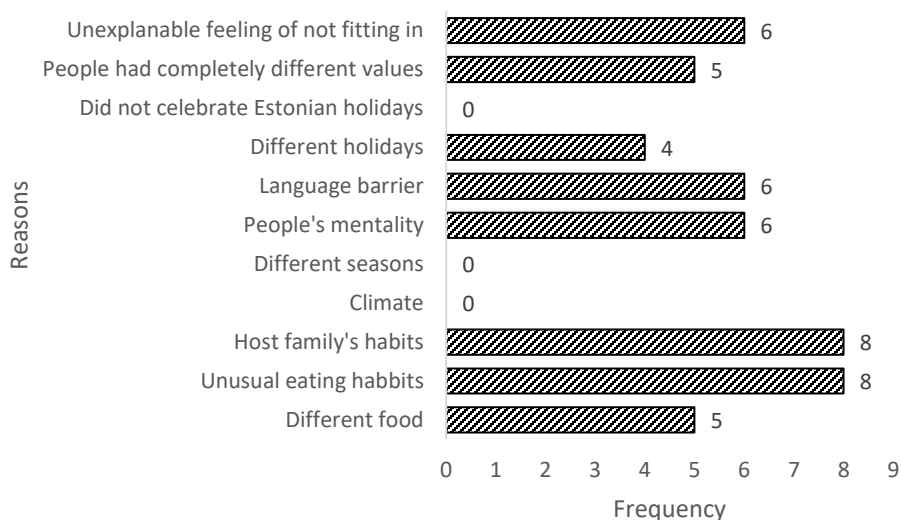


Figure 12. Reasons of cultural shock for exchange students who studied in Western Europe

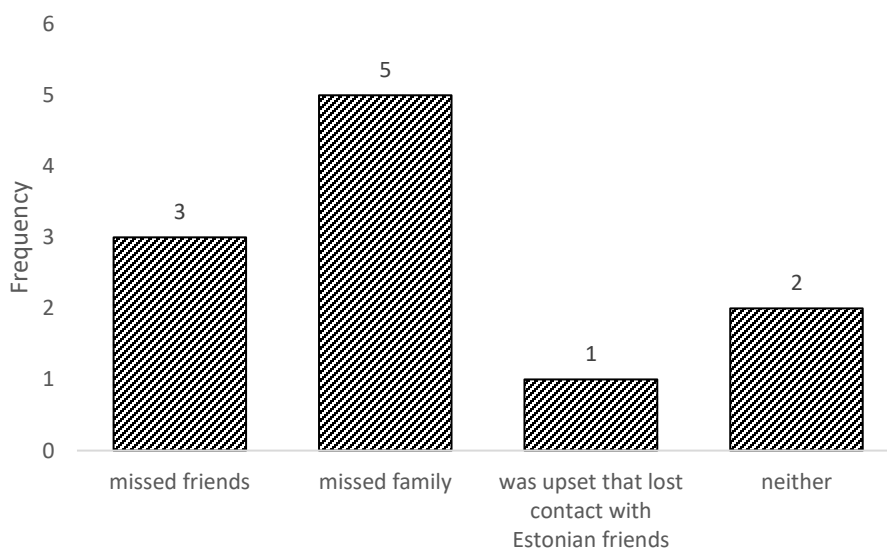


Figure 13. Different reasons that caused Estonian exchange students in Asia homesickness

The most common reason for feeling homesick for students who studied in Asia was missing their Estonian family as shown in Figure 13. The least common was being upset due to

loosing contact with old friends from Estonia. And options “neither” and “missing friends” fell in the middle.

Very similar results were got from the students who studied in Latin America the most common reason for feeling homesick for students was missing their Estonian family and the least common was being upset due to loosing contact with friends from Estonia. Results are represented in Figure 14.

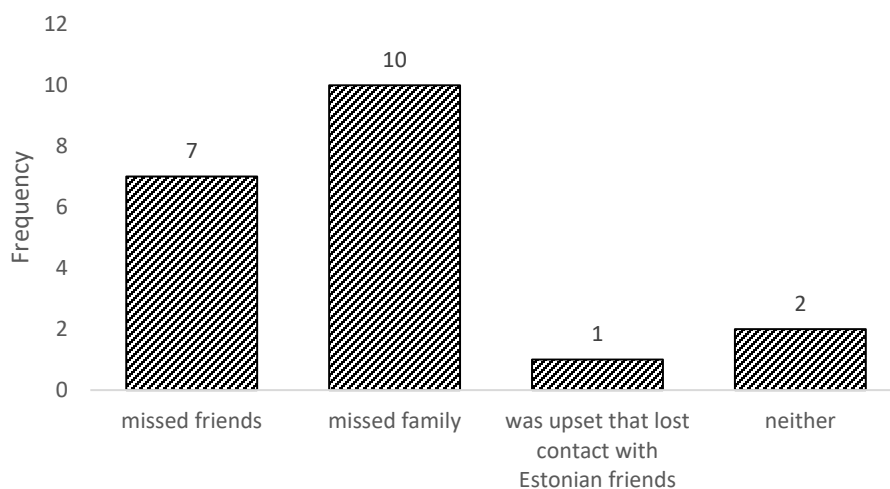


Figure 14. Different reasons that caused Estonian exchange students in Latin America homesickness

In Scandinavia, however, as shown on Figure 15., the most common reason for feeling homesick was missing friends. The least common were both neither and being upset about loosing contact with Estonian friends. The average amount of Estonian exchange students who studied in Scandinavia missed their natural families.

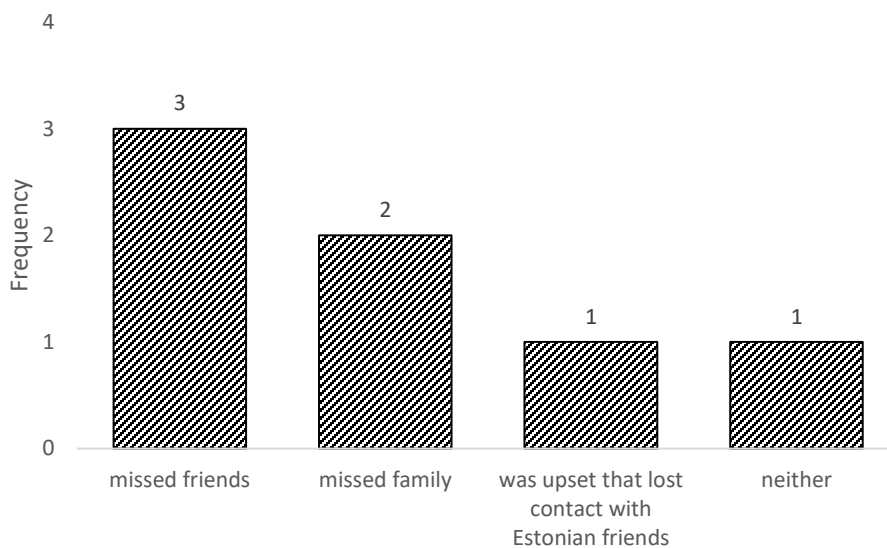


Figure 15. Different reasons that caused Estonian exchange students in Scandinavia homesickness

Students who were in Western Europe experienced homesickness mostly because of missing their families and friends as shown in Figure 16. As everywhere else very small amount of students was upset about losing their Estonian friends when they did so. In Western Europe the average number of students did not experience homesickness due to described reasons.

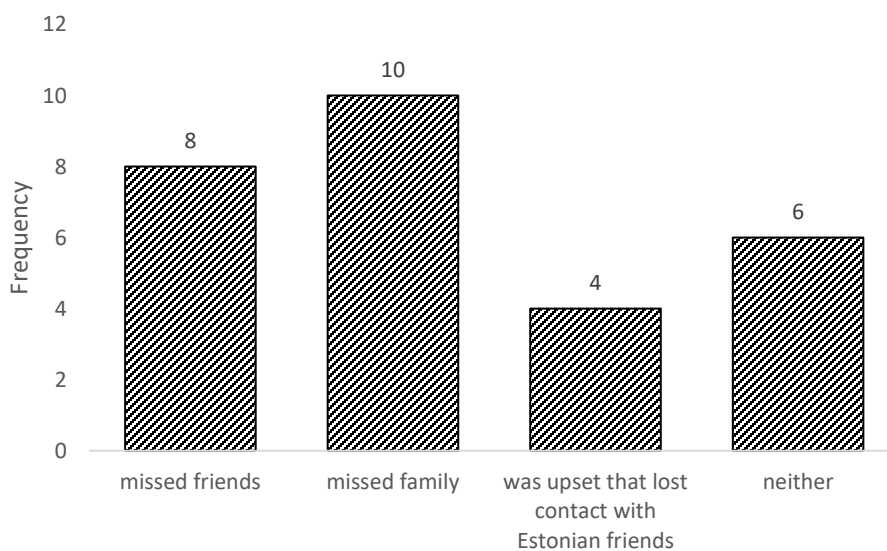


Figure 16. Different reasons that caused Estonian exchange students in Western Europe homesickness

The respondents were asked to name other reasons for feeling adaptational stress, the results are shown in Figure 17. Only three new reasons were mentioned: school stress, changing host families and gaining weight. Out of all the respondents (N=47) 11 students answered to this question. 7 students said that they were very stressed due to having problems with the host family, which led to family change. Only one student mentioned a weight gain that caused stress and three students were worried about school in their host country, which was supported by explanation that they could not receive extra help from teachers and the language barrier played its role there too.

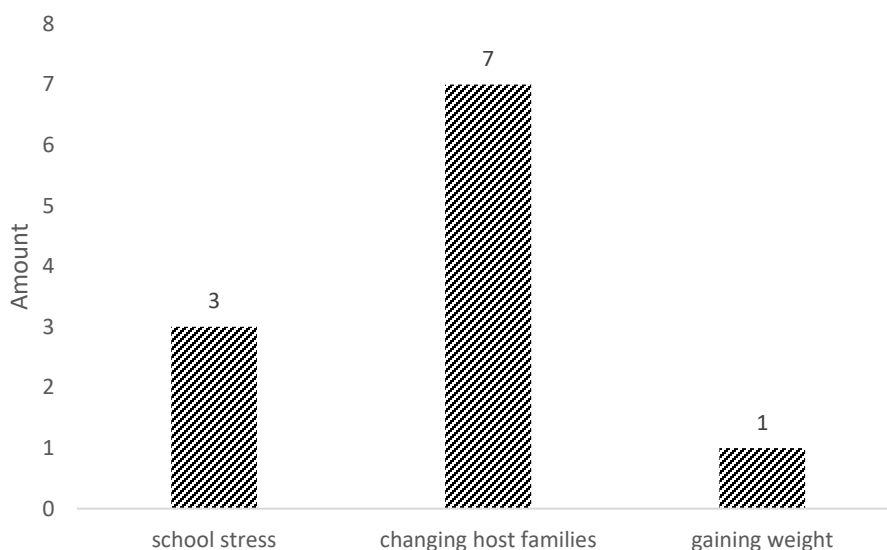


Figure 17. Other reasons that caused YFU Estonia exchange students stress during adaptation

DISCUSSION

The current study showed that the adaptational stress evolves of various factors at the same time. There cannot be only one reason for every student. Reasons vary and are in a correlation with different regions, where students spent their years abroad. In one region some of the stressors are leading while in the other region they do not matter at all. For example, in the results of this current study turned out that “host country’s people’s mentality” was not a stressor for Estonian exchange students who studied in Scandinavia, while it definitely affected students who were in Asia, Latin America and Western Europe.

Despite the fact that a significant number of students answered that they did not have a cultural shock, the results of the PSM-9 test showed the opposite: nobody had a low level of stress during the adaptation. This digression is suggested to be caused by humans’ inability to understand their own feelings, since adaptational stress in an environment that exchange students are thrown into is completely yet unknown and hard to identify and describe, but also the PSM-9 test is just generalized.

This current study is compared to a comparative research work that was aimed to find out if American or international students experienced more stress while studying in the US. The findings emphasize the need to recognize cultural differences in stress management. (Misra & Castillo, 2004)

CONCLUSION

In this current study the author was analyzing the stress levels of Estonian exchange students who studied in Asia, Latin America, Scandinavia and Western Europe under the YFU Estonia program and also finding the reasons that caused that adaptational stress.

The first step of the analysis of the stress levels to compare the stress levels based on the PSM-9 test of exchange students distributed by geographical regions. And also then compared to the stress levels that were rated just by exchange students themselves. In case of PSM-9 the first null-statement hypothesis that was put forward by the author was supported and turned out to be true.

The second null-statement hypothesis was supported only partly. It was true in case of Latin America and Scandinavia; there the language barrier was the most common reason for adaptational stress. However, in Western Europe and Asia the dominant reasons were different.

In the progress of the study there were found several sources that supported the fact that the greatness of the adaptational stress depended on the cultural distance; and that various factors affected the cultural shock.

АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной исследовательской работе были проанализированы уровни адаптационного стресса и их причины, которые студенты по обмену из YFU Estonia испытывали в течение своего адаптационного периода. Респонденты состояли из 47 эстонских студентов по обмену, которые учились в Азии, Латинской Америке, Скандинавии и Западной Европе.

Данные были собраны с помощью онлайн-опроса, который состоял из теста измерения психологического стресса из девяти пунктов (PSM) и опросника о причинах стресса. Уровни стресса определялись по регионам, где обучались студенты, а также был проведен анализ причин стресса.

Первая гипотеза, которая состояла в том, что эстонские студенты, обучавшиеся в Скандинавии и Западной Европе, испытывают более низкий уровень адаптационного стресса, чем те, кто учится в Азии и Латинской Америке, подтвердилась полностью.

Вторая гипотеза, которая состояла в том, что наиболее распространенной причиной адаптационного стресса во всех регионах является языковой барьер, подтвердилась частично.

Ключевые слова: адаптационный стресс, год по обмену, адаптация.

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APPENDIX

ANALYSIS OF THE STRESS LEVELS AND THEIR REASONS EXPERIENCED WITHIN THE PERIOD OF ADAPTATION OF EXCHANGE STUDENTS WHO STUDIED IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

This is the questionnaire for the current study of Julia Jurkina. It is meant for YFU Estonia students. This questionnaire consists of two parts, is anonymous and will take you only about 10 minutes to complete

PART 1. Psychological Stress Measure (PSM-9), (L. Lemyre, R. Tessier, 1988, 2002) This part of the questionnaire is BASED on PSM-9. This tool is aimed directly at the state of feeling stressed, is suited for assessing stress clinically in the general population and serving as an outcome measure. The tool is valid and reliable and easy to administer in health care settings; it has a normal distribution, which makes it a very sensitive-to-change instrument in repeated measures to document progress.

PLEASE ANSWER HOW YOU FELT DURING THE ADAPTATION TO YOUR HOST COUNTRY.

Check the number that best indicates the degree to which each statement has applied to you while adapting to a new culture.

1- NOT AT ALL 8-EXTREMELY

1. I feel calm

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

2. I feel rushed; I do not seem to have enough time

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

2. I have physical aches and pains: sore back, headache, stiff neck, stomachache

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

I feel preoccupied, tormented, or worried

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

3. I feel confused; my thoughts are muddled; I lack concentration; I cannot focus

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

4. I feel full of energy and keen

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

5. I feel a great weight on my shoulders

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

6. I have difficulty controlling my reactions, emotions, moods, or gestures

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

7. I feel stressed

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

PART 2. Questionnaire

Half way done! 😊 Just 9 questions left

1. Please write down your host country *

.....

2. How would you rate your stress in general during adaptation on your exchange on the scale 1-8? 1-not stressed at all and 8-extremely stressed

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

3. Did learning a new language affect how you feel (stressed, tired, devastated, needing more sleep)?

- No, did not affect my well-being at all
- I had a language barrier, but I stayed calm and didn't worry about it
- I had a language barrier, which honestly made me a bit stressed

4. How stressful was it to adapt to a new family?

- Not stressful at all despite all the differences
- Some family rules and traditions were confusing, so it was a bit hard
- Very stressful and hard

5. Did you have any problems with finding new friends?

- Finding new friends was easy for me
- I didn't mind having some time to myself (I wasn't worried about not getting friends)
- I found it hard to get to know new people and I was stressed because of that

6. Were you stressed because you couldn't continue doing your hobby in your host country?

- It was a good chance to try something new
- I found an alternative
- It wasn't a problem for me
- I was upset about it

- I had a chance to do the same what I did in Estonia

7. Did you have a cultural shock?

- Yes
- No
- Just a small one

7.1 If yes or just a small one, then what triggered it

- Different food
- Unusual eating habits
- Host family's habits
- Different food habits
- Climate
- Different seasons (if you lived in the Southern hemisphere)
- People's mentality
- Language barrier
- Different holidays
- Host country didn't celebrate holidays that I used to celebrate in Estonia
- People had completely different values
- Unexplainable feeling of not fitting in

8. Were you homesick especially because of missing family and friends who were in Estonia?

- I missed my friends
- I missed my family
- I was upset, because I started losing contact with my Estonian friends
- Neither

9. Did you experience stress for any other reasons?

.....

Thank you very much for your time and answers!