

Association between migratory process and alcohol and substance use: Evidence from Brazilian immigrants in the UK

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BACKGROUND

Reports from organisations responsible for assisting Brazilian immigrants in the UK report that young adult Brazilians are misusing alcohol and other substances more heavily in the UK than in Brazil (i.e. Casa do Brasil em Londres). The problematic use of alcohol and other substances in young adult Brazilian immigrants is in line with several studies indicating that substance use, and misuse patterns, among some minority ethnic groups in the UK are high (i.e. Oxford et al., 2004; Heim et al., 2004; Erens & Laiho, 2001). Although these studies have provided important epidemiological data relating to alcohol use and misuse across minority ethnic groups, they are of limited use in terms of understanding to what extent the process of adapting to the UK is putting these people at risk.

More information is needed on how the interaction of multiple variables, which arise through migration to the UK, is affecting the use of alcohol and other substances.

The purpose of the present study is to explore whether the migratory process to the UK has an influence on current patterns of alcohol and substance use amongst Brazilian immigrants.

METHOD

DESIGN: Correlation Design

PARTICIPANTS: Brazilian immigrants in the UK (N=141, mean age of 28.9, SD = 5.8). Seventy four women (74) and 67 men.

MEASURES:
Multidimensional Acculturative Stress Scale (MASS: Jibeen and Khalid, 2010). Measures five distinct factors related to acculturative stress; discrimination, threat to ethnic identity, lack of opportunities and financial mobility, homesickness and language barriers.

Type and frequency of substance use in the last month (SACS: Christie, et al., 2007)

PROCEDURE: Participants were recruited via ‘Casa do Brasil em Londres’

RESULTS

Sample characteristics:

- The mean length of residence in the UK was 6.56 years (SD=4.5)
- During the month prior to the study the percentage of the sample that had used the following substances were:
 - 95% (N=134) alcohol
 - 33% (N=47) tobacco
 - 10% (N=14) sedatives
 - 39% (N=55) other substances (illegal)
- 36% of the sample (N=50) consumed alcohol more than once a week and 8% of the sample (N=11) consumed alcohol almost everyday of the week
 - 52% (N=69) 1-4 drinks on a night out
 - 48% (N=64) more than 4 drinks on a night out

Differences between length of residence and the 5 dimensions of acculturative stress

The average total score of each acculturative stress subscales according to length of residence is showed on table 1. A one way ANOVA demonstrated that the effect of length of residence was significant only for language score , F(2,136) = 9.43, $p<.001$

Table 1:
Mean and standard deviation for total scores on MASS

Length of residence	Discrimination/ Marginalization	Threat to Ethnic ID	Lack of Opportunity/ Financial Mobility	Homesickness	Language
2 YEARS OR LESS	12.48 (3.1)	9.04 (3)	19.04 (5.2)	5.72 (1)	5.64 (2)
BETWEEN 3 TO 5 YEARS	12.58 (4.9)	9.30 (3.1)	16.89 (3.9)	6.11 (1.7)	5.63 (2)
6 YEARS OR MORE	13.27 (5.3)	10.51 (3.5)	16.94 (4.9)	6.29 (1.5)	4.06 (2.2)

Table 2:
Regression Analysis of each MASS subscale’s effect on Alcohol and Substances Use

Substance	Measures	B	SE B	β	t	p
ALCOHOL (e.g. beer, wine, spirits)	Discrimination/Marginalization	-.01	.01	-.06	.67	.545
	Threat to Ethnic ID	.02	.02	.12	.12	.202
	Lack of Opportunity/Financial Mobility	.00	.01	.02	.00	.982
	Homesickness	-.05	.04	-.10	-.10	.244
	Language	-.03	.03	-.10	-.10	.320
TOBACCO (e.g. cigarettes, cigars, pipe)	Discrimination/Marginalization	.43	.65	.02	.17	.865
	Threat to Ethnic ID	.06	.03	.18	2.18	.031*
	Lack of Opportunity/Financial Mobility	.01	.03	.05	.51	.607
	Homesickness	-.07	.07	-.10	-1.06	.290
	Language	-.02	.05	-.04	-.44	.661
SEDATIVES (e.g. sleeping pills, benzos, downers, valium)	Discrimination/Marginalization	-.01	.01	-.11	-1.11	.269
	Threat to Ethnic ID	.02	.01	.16	1.76	.081
	Lack of Opportunity/Financial Mobility	.01	.01	.04	.36	.717
	Homesickness	.00	.02	.01	.02	.982
	Language	.03	.01	.20	2.43	.016*
OTHER SUBSTANCES (cannabis, cocaine, amphetamines, hallucinogens, BZP)	Discrimination/Marginalization	-.00	.02	-.01	-.07	.947
	Threat to Ethnic ID	.07	.03	.22	2.64	.009*
	Lack of Opportunity/Financial Mobility	.03	.02	.11	1.06	.289
	Homesickness	.05	.07	.07	.81	.421
	Language	.03	.05	.06	.67	.501

* $p<.05$

Predicting Alcohol and Other Substance use:

To determine to what extent the five dimensions of acculturative stress (MASS) predict the use of alcohol and other substances a series of linear regressions were performed (Table2)

SUMMARY

- Total scores in four MASS subscales did not decline with the increase in length of time resident in the UK, expected for language barriers.
- Although four of the MASS subscales did not significantly differ across length of residence, an overall increase on the experience of stress was found in nearly all stress domains.
- The stress caused by, for example, not knowing which culture to belong to was shown to be a risk factor for tobacco and other substances use.
- Difficulties in speaking and understanding English were shown to predict use of sedative drugs.

CONCLUSIONS

This is the first study to investigate patterns of alcohol and substance use among Brazilian immigrants in the UK. Findings suggest that some variables that have arisen through migrating to the UK tend to continue throughout the years of residence. Additionally, this study provides further evidence on how aspects of migrating to the UK might be affecting specific domains of the immigrant population’s psychological well-being and their susceptibility to substance misuse.

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