# LEARNED HELPLESSNESS AND VALUES IN YOUNG MIGRANTS FROM THE CENTRAL ASIA IN THE PROCESS OF SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION

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Abstract: This paper present the research aimed at studying learned helplessness and values in young migrants from the Central Asia who are educated in Russia at different stages of sociocultural adaptation. The psychological diagnostic study using the Sh. Schwartz questionnaire of values, as well as the learned helplessness questionnaire, has shown that learned helplessness accompanies the process of sociocultural adaptation of the migrants and features nonlinear trends. The young migrants' values also change in the course of sociocultural adaptation and are associated with learned helplessness. Regardless of their adaptation stages, the migrant students coming from the Central Asia value maintaining and improving the well-being of the people they are in close relationships with. The migrants are aimed at kindly relations, which enables them to satisfy their needs of positive interaction and affiliation, as well as to level out the condition of learned helplessness.

Keywords: migrants, sociocultural adaptation, learned helplessness, values, cultural values, maladjustment.

## 1 Introduction

Migration of population is a complex natural social process increasingly gaining momentum around the world. The task of migration policy of the state is assistance in resolving the problems of adaptation and further integration of migrants. Support of the host party incorporates several tiers: the information one, the professional one, and the sociocultural one (Vorobyeva & Topilin, 2014).

One of the categories of migrants needing support is study migrants. This group is mainly made up by individuals of the young adult age who move to a new country for improving their educational and professional levels. New social surrounding, another ethnocultural and linguistic environment, other values and norms of relationships in the society, the standard crisis of the young adulthood associated with personal and professional self-identification, varying requirements for organizing the study activity, plus uncontrollable stress events due to moving can cause difficulties of the adaptation process.

Particularities of the foreign students' process of adaptation are discussed in works by T. P. Donskikh (2010), L. N. Kobernik, A. V. Pogukaeva (Pogukaeva et al., 2016), S. I. Modnov, L. V. Ukhova (2013), et al. The authors emphasize that successful adaptation can have a fruitful effect on the process of learning, which is the principal objective of migrant students' moving. On top of language barrier, foreign students may face such adaptation problems as distinctions in customs, values, traditions, conditions, and particularities of life activity (Modnov & Ukhova, 2013; Pogukaeva et al., 2016; Williams & Johnson, 2011). Given the fact that differences between the cultures of one's native and host states imply differences in values, a number of authors note that values act as an important factor of adaptation to the new sociocultural environment: "the more distinctions between the culture of a migrant and the host culture there are, the more distinctions in behavior and values of others there are, and the more difficult and prolonged the process of the migrant's adaptation will be" (Yakunina & Kotomkina, 2016, p. 61).

Thus, facing the situation of uncertainty when entering a new culture that is accompanied by a confusion in values, migrants may develop the condition of learned helplessness characterized by passivity, lack of motivation to active changes, maladaptive behavior. With regard to this, the question of studying the condition of learned helplessness and values in migrants becomes especially relevant. Rendering social and psychological assistance to migrants for overcoming the condition of helplessness, helping them adapt to the system of values of the host community will contribute to their more successful adaptation in the new conditions of life activity, as well as to reducing the interethnic tension.

## 2 Literature Review

Learned helplessness is a psychological phenomenon that has been known in science since the 1960s owing to the concept of M. Seligman (2006) who studied this phenomenon. The syndrome or condition of learned helplessness is generally understood as one developed under the impact of prolonged, repeated social factors affecting all the spheres of personality (Volkova, 2018). Learned helplessness manifests itself as inhibition of behavior, weak motivation, disorders of cognitive activity, and psychosomatic disorders. Researchers confirm that learned helplessness is formed under the effect of negative experience of uncontrollable events in the early ontogenesis (Seligman, 2006).

Moreover, learned helplessness tends to permeate (become generalized) in all spheres of life of a person so early as after its first manifestation in life activity (Tsiring, 2008). Learned helplessness is associated with the attributional style as one's subjective perception of the world around one. As noted by O. V. Volkova (2018), parental behavior models are the only patterns available for the children to use. O. V. Volkova (2018) points out that a child's mind is developed via learning the social and historical experience (upbringing, education), which means, the child's optimistic or pessimistic attributional styles are formed under the influence of the life space in which he or she is placed. This space is full of cultural traditions, stable behavior patterns, and specific child-to-parent relationships.

Foreign studies commonly consider learned helplessness as a condition arising as a response to uncontrollable, mostly negative events (Tsiring, 2008). Migration can act mainly as an uncontrollable event. Quite naturally, uncontrollability of consequences of the activity cultivates pessimism, passivity, persistent unwillingness to overcome difficulties, object attitude to the reality around one, and striving to place responsibility for consequences of any activity to the external determinants. Clearly, this mental condition will be associated with the process of sociocultural adaptation of a person migrating to another country. The difficulty of sociocultural adaptation consists in the cultural gap between one's native and host cultures, the duration of living in the new society, knowledge of the new culture, as well as the necessity of contacting representatives of the host culture (Tatarko, 2018). Social support by the local citizens is extremely important for sociocultural adaptation of migrants, as it provides social resources that are essential for adapting to the new environment and interacting with other members of the host society (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Bearing in mind the psychological nature of learned helplessness and the deficits accompanying this condition (motivation, cognitive, emotional ones), one can suppose that this phenomenon hinders sociocultural adaptation to the foreign cultural environment. Alongside this, the process of sociocultural adaptation is distinguished by its nonlinear trends. The contemporary migrants are viewed as people having two or more identities and included into several social contexts at a time. Such a transnational view of sociocultural adaptation of migrants is described by modern studies (Kostenko, 2014). Owing to digital technologies, the present-day migrants are included into the institutions of the host country while retaining close relations with the sending country simultaneously: they fly home to visit relatives and friends often, they share videos and pictures of important life events with them

via the Internet, and they even run businesses beyond the boundaries of the host states (Foner, 2000). That is, while being full-fledged members of the new society, they remain members of the sending society, too. Traditionally, the adaptation processes of migrants are focused on studying cultural attitudes, their changes during the process of adaptation, particularities of acculturation of various groups, their integration into the structure of host countries, and are aimed at including them into the host community. Acculturation involves changes in the material culture, norms and models of behavior, and, which is the most important, values (Endryushko, 2017).

Values play an important part in life activity of individuals, they are the main principles upon which their life is built. Based on one's own system of values, one makes this or that choice, develops an attitude to the world around one, to other people, and to oneself. Values determine the focus of behavior and importance of people's actions. Values are stable opinions of a certain way of behavior being more preferable from the personal or social viewpoint than the opposite or reverse way of behavior (Rokeach, 1979). Sh. Schwartz meant by values the needs that directly depend on culture, environment, and mentality of a particular society (Schwartz, 2008; Schwartz et al., 2012). In psychological studies, a value is identified through value orientations, attitudes, norms, ideals, through personal meaning and importance. Perceived as a subjective image, values are a reflection of cultural and historical norms. Values are associated with the type of dignified behavior and act as a social and individual reference point defining the particular style of life. Studies of various aspects dealing with the problem of values can be found in works of D. A. Leontiev (1996), N. M. Lebedeva, A. N. Tatarko (2007), Sh. Schwartz (2008), M. Rokeach (1979), et al.

It is at the student age that one has one's own worldview shaped which creates an opportunity for one's internal system of values to be created, so the young adult age is the decisive one in terms of the formation of a person's value-related system (Yanitsky, 2000).

During the process of adaptation of migrant students to the new sociocultural environment, reappraisal of their values occurs, new personal meanings, social attitudes, and other particularities of behavior and activity are cultivated. At the early stages of adaptation, the structure of migrants' values is characterized by the lack of harmony, and opposite motivation orientations are noted in it: to keeping their own integrity and to being open to changes (Vorobyeva & Topilin, 2014; Tatarko, 2018). It is not the rejection of cultural values learned in their native country and complete acceptance of values of another culture that is considered to be the criterion of successful adaptation, but it is the ability to combine different value-related systems, having learned and accepted the new cultural norms and values.

Studying migrants' values at different stages of adaptation will allow tracing down changes of the values over time, and studying the interrelation between the values and condition of learned helplessness will open up prospects for building efficient programs of psychological assistance to migrants.

**3 Research Methodological Framework**

The objective of this research is to study migrant students' learned helplessness and values at different stages of adaptation. The tasks of the research are as follows:

1.  Studying the extent of expression of learned helplessness at each sociocultural adaptation stage.
2.  Exploring values in migrant students at different adaptation stages.
3.  Studying the interrelation of learned helplessness and values in migrant students at different stages of adaptation.

The respondents sampling was made up by young people studying at regional universities of the Russian Federation in various focus areas of training (Chelyabinsk, Orenburg, Moscow, and Yekaterinburg). The total scope of sampling

amounted to 222 people, of them 108 male respondents, and 114 female ones. Their average age was 20. The survey was conducted using Google Forms. The stages of sociocultural adaptation were considered from the standpoint of H. Triandis' (2007) approach to sociocultural adaptation trends in migrants. The conceptual U-curve model describes five stages of sociocultural adaptation in the foreign ethnic environment plotted over time. So, at the first stage of sociocultural adaptation, there were 40 people, at the second one – 49 people, at the third one – 92 people, at the fourth one – 25 people, and 16 people at the fifth stages.

Psychological variables were measured using the following psychological diagnostic techniques:

4.  Questionnaire of learned helplessness (D. A. Tsiring (2008)). The questionnaire consists of 56 statements describing conditions. For example, "I am pessimistic" or "I am too anxious".
5.  Questionnaire of values by Sh. Schwartz (Karandashev, 2004). This questionnaire is used for studying the trends of values both for groups (cultures) when associated with changes in the society, and for individuals in relation to their life changes.

The authors used descriptive statistics, correlation analysis (Pearson's test), and the nonparametric H-Kruskal-Wallis test as the methods of mathematical statistics.

**4 Results and Discussion**

For achieving the research objective, the authors conducted diagnosing learned helplessness in the said migrants at different stages of adaptation. The adaptation stages were identified according to the model of H. Triandis (2007). In Table 1, the mean values of the learned helplessness indicator are presented for different stages of the sociocultural adaptation process.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

|    | Stages of adaptation | Arithmetic mean | Standard deviation |
|----|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. | Stage of adaptation 1 | 14,83 | 12,29 |
| 2. | Stage of adaptation 2 | 14,53 | 10,65 |
| 3. | Stage of adaptation 3 | 15,52 | 10,3 |
| 4. | Stage of adaptation 4 | 17,1 | 11,5 |
| 5. | Stage of adaptation 5 | 10,8 | 5,8 |

*Source: authors*

Table 1 gives descriptive statistics of the research variables. According to the test norms, intermediary values of the learned helplessness indicator recorded at all stages of sociocultural adaptation confirm the trend of the condition of learned helplessness to emerge.

It can be seen from the table that the highest indicator of learned helplessness is observed at the fourth stage (M=17,1), which corresponds to the depression stage according to H. Triandis (2007). The lowest learned helplessness indicator has been registered at the fifth stage of adaptation (M=10,8), the so-called active stage. The pattern of the learned helplessness indicator over time fits into the U-model but it has its particularities. So, at the first two stages, the euphoria and tourism ones, the migrant students commence their familiarization with the new culture optimistically and in a positive frame of mind; they study the new educational space and get included into new sociocultural relations. Here, learned helplessness may be present, perhaps, as a result of a slight feeling of losing control over the situation. Further on, at the third stage which corresponds to the orientation one, the indicator of learned helplessness grows slightly, to reach its peak at the fourth stage. The authors associate this time span (4-5 years) with the fact of graduation from the educational institutions, as one has to solve new problems: looking for a job, accommodation, or entering the next level of education, which are extremely stressful for the migrants.

The fifth adaptation stage is characterized by a low learned helplessness trend; it is associated with mastering the skills of interaction in the new culture and self-fulfillment. Here, depressive conditions and coping with stress situations are milder, and optimistic expectations of the future are noted.

Values are an important basis for building one's life scenario, choosing the strategies of professional and personal self-identification. A stable and non-controversial system of values enables migrants to maintain their personal integrity at the challenging stage of adaptation to the new sociocultural environment. Finding themselves in conditions of life that are different from the habitual ones, migrants have to learn new social norms and rules; however, the complete rejection of their own opinions and values can affect the process of adaptation and further integration adversely. Disharmony of the values structure contributes to the migrants' negative perception of the situation formed, feeling lonely, helpless, and unwanted.

With regard to this, the authors have studied values of the migrant students at different stages of adaptation. Figure 1 shows the mean indicators of the migrant students' values.

Figure 1 Mean values of indicators of the migrant students' values at different stages of adaptation
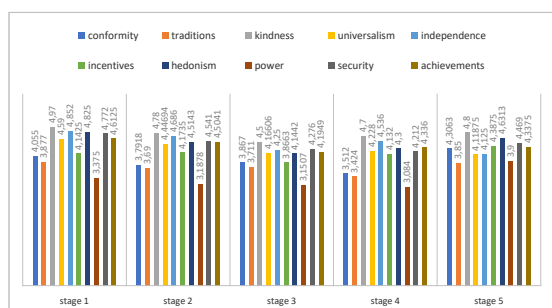


*Source: authors*

According to the data obtained, at each of the adaptation stages, the "Kindness" value is the leading one, while "Power" is the least pronounced value, except the last stage of adaptation where the lowest indicators are demonstrated by the "Traditions" value.

Relying on the data presented, the authors can note that at the first stage of adaptation, the most pronounced values are "Kindness", "Independence", and "Hedonism". The value of "Kindness" implies maintaining and improving the well-being of the close ones, and kindly ways in daily interaction with the people with whom the individual is in a close contact. For a person having the pronounced "Kindness" value, it is important to be useful, honest, and lenient toward the person's relatives and friends.

The determining objective of the "Independence" value is the aspiration to independent thinking, opting for ways of action, to manifesting initiative that are conditioned by the subject's need of being autonomous and independent. The "Hedonism" value implies the necessity of satisfying biological needs and pleasure taken in it. At this stage, the least pronounced value is "Power"; it is based on the need of dominating, leading, achieving a certain social status, and influencing other people.

So, finding themselves in another country, the migrants tend to keep up positive interaction with their close ones for maintaining and improving the well-being of the group; they manifest their own independence enabling them to adapt to the new conditions to a greater extent, too, and they enjoy their life when meeting their needs. The authors explain the data obtained as follows: at the first stage of adaptation, the migrants need support and care to a greater extent, they have a need of building new relationships, and they are also homesick. So, at this stage, hedonism can act as a resource filling the migrants emotionally. Meanwhile, the new sociocultural environment can respond to

their aspiration to win the leading position and manifestation of power by misunderstanding and rejecting the migrants.

At the second stage of adaptation, the migrants get closer acquainted with the host country which can affect the individuals adversely in the form of rejection and disregard (Triandis, 1995). Such values as "Kindness", "Independence", and "Hedonism" remain expressed at this stage, and so do "Security" and "Achievements". The motivation objective of security is the aspiration to stability, to reducing uncertainty and improving the predictability of events and phenomena taking place, which allows bringing down anxiety and emotional discomfort. The "Achievements" value consist in one's achieving success that is approved of by the group. "Power" remains the least pronounced value. Alongside this, it can be noted that the "Conformity" value indicator decreases, that is, one's need in limiting one's actions and intentions for the interests of the group becomes less than it used to be at the first stage of adaptation. So, on the one hand, the migrants strive to show their abilities and competence for gaining social approval, while they work toward independence from the others' opinion and lower conformism.

The migrants' value-related system undergoes some change at the third and fourth adaptation stages. So, at the third stage, the indicators of all values go several points down. "Kindness" remains the most pronounced value, while "Power" – the least. At the fourth stage, lower figures are observed in the "Conformity" and "Traditions" values. This stage marks the beginning of the completing period of adaptation, as the migrants continue adapting to the new life socially, study the language of the host community harder, learn its customs, traditions, and values. Given such plunging into the life in the foreign state, reduction of the "Traditions" value becomes the necessary condition for learning and possibly adopting the new traditions, ideas, and customs.

The "Kindness" and "Power" values remain the most and the least pronounced ones (respectively) in the migrants throughout all adaptation stages, except the last, fifth stage of adaptation where the "Power" value indicator becomes higher than previously. The authors explain this fact as follows: at the fifth adaptation stage, the migrants become more stress-resistant and adapted to the new motherland, and aspiration to self-fulfillment, searching for new opportunities, and achieving new objectives are observed in them. The lower value of the "Independence" indicator is observed at the fifth stage, too, as compared to the previous ones; that is, an individual's need of being autonomous and independent becomes less pronounced in the course of adaptation to the new country. It can be supposed that this is associated with the growth of the "Conformity" indicator: now, the migrants defend their rights for the freedom of thought and deed to a smaller extent, but they strive to curb actions and intentions which do harm to others or disrupt social harmony. Thus, at the fifth stage of adaptation, the "Kindness" and "Hedonism" values remain the most pronounced ones in the migrants' system of values, and the improved indicators of the "Power" and "Conformity" values are observed, and so is the less expressed "Independence".

Next, the authors performed correlation analysis of the migrant students' learned helplessness and values at different stages of adaptation. Its results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Intercorrelations of the research variables: learned helplessness and values in the migrant students at different stages of adaptation

| Values | Learned helplessness | |
|---|---|---|
| | Pearson's correlation | p |
| conformity | -0,292 | 0,000 |
| traditions | -0,356 | 0,000 |
| kindness | -0,372 | 0,000 |
| universalism | -0,363 | 0,000 |
| independence | -0,389 | 0,000 |
| incentives | -0,379 | 0,000 |
| hedonism | -0,304 | 0,000 |

| power | -0,241 | 0,000 |
| security | -0,385 | 0,000 |
| achievements | -0,386 | 0,000 |

*Source: authors*

As it is seen from the table, negative correlation relationships have been found between learned helplessness and all values: conformity, traditions, kindness, universalism, independence, incentives, hedonism, power, security, achievements. That is, values are pronounced to a smaller extent in the migrants experiencing the condition of learned helplessness than in those not feeling any helplessness in the adaptation process. Based on this, it can be supposed that values act as an intrapersonal resource helping one cope with the feeling of helplessness in the process of adaptation.

**6 Conclusion**

When entering an environment which is different from their native culture, migrants have to reject their habitual way of life, to learn other social norms and rules regulating behavior in the society. The condition of helplessness emerging in the situation of uncertainty can entail difficulties in the process of adaptation. As a result of the research conducted, the authors have found that learned helplessness accompanies the process of migrants' adaptation in the new cultural environment, and the trends of learned helplessness correspond to stages of sociocultural adaptation.

Studying the migrant students' values, the authors have found that, regardless the adaptation stage, the most pronounced value is "Kindness" which implies the migrants' maintaining and improving well-being of the people with whom they are in close relationships. Building kindly relations enables the migrant students to satisfy their needs of positive interaction and affiliation. With the formed stable system of values, the migrants will be able to adapt to the new sociocultural environment more successfully, to avoid the condition of learned helplessness relying on their own resources, with values acting as one of them. It should be emphasized that the age studied by the authors, young adulthood, is an important stage in shaping the value-related system. With regard to this, the obtained results can be used not only in designing the adaptation assistance programs for study migrants, but also in psychological working with the personal sphere of values and meanings.

As prospects for further studies, the authors would like to note the opportunity of exploring the relationship of learned helplessness and values at different stages of adaptation in migrant students. Moreover, it is planned to conduct comparative analysis of the particularities of study and labor migrants' adaptation and personal characteristics, with subsequently developing practical recommendations for psychologists who work with various categories of migrants.

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