

Acculturation and Mental Health Across Immigrant, Refugee, and International Student Populations

Akulturası dan Kesehatan Mental pada Populasi Imigran, Pengungsi, dan Mahasiswa Internasional

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ABSTRACT

Acculturation research has grown from a niche interest within cross-cultural psychology into a recurring reference point for clinicians and educators working with mobile populations. This review combines bibliometric mapping with a systematic synthesis of studies linking acculturation to mental health outcomes among immigrants, refugees, ethnic minorities, and international students. A Scopus search covering 2016–2026 yielded 65 records; after we screened these against PICO eligibility criteria, 49 empirical studies remained for analysis. Publication output rose sharply after 2023, with the United States anchoring nearly two-thirds of the corpus and Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology serving as the field's most frequent outlet. Keyword co-occurrence patterns cluster around three recurring mechanisms: acculturative stress as a proximal risk factor for depressive and anxious symptoms, ethnic or bicultural identity integration as a buffering resource, and discrimination as a contextual amplifier that interacts with both. Findings further show that outcomes for the same acculturation orientation diverge by generational status, migration circumstance (voluntary versus forced), and host-society receptiveness, indicating that no single acculturation strategy is uniformly protective. Organizations serving immigrant-origin populations, from universities to mental health services, should treat acculturation as a multidimensional and context-dependent process rather than a single score to be optimized.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian akulturası telah berkembang dari minat khusus dalam psikologi lintas budaya menjadi titik rujukan berulang bagi klinisi dan pendidik yang bekerja dengan populasi mobil. Tinjauan ini menggabungkan pemetaan bibliometrik dengan sintesis sistematis atas studi-studi yang mengaitkan akulturası dengan luaran kesehatan mental pada imigran, pengungsi, minoritas etnis, dan mahasiswa internasional. Pencarian Scopus yang mencakup 2016–2026 menghasilkan 65 rekaman; setelah kami menyaringnya menggunakan kriteria kelayakan PICO, tersisa 49 studi empiris untuk dianalisis. Jumlah publikasi meningkat pesat setelah 2023, dengan Amerika Serikat menjadi pusat hampir dua pertiga korpus dan Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology sebagai outlet paling sering di bidang ini. Pola ko-occurrence kata kunci mengelompok pada tiga mekanisme yang berulang: stres akulturatif sebagai faktor risiko proksimal untuk gejala depresi dan kecemasan, integrasi identitas etnis atau bikultural sebagai sumber daya penyangga, dan diskriminasi sebagai penguat kontekstual yang berinteraksi dengan keduanya. Temuan lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa luaran untuk orientasi akulturası yang sama dapat berbeda berdasarkan status generasi, kondisi migrasi (sukarela versus terpaksa), dan keterbukaan masyarakat penerima, yang mengindikasikan bahwa tidak ada satu strategi akulturası yang secara universal protektif. Organisasi yang melayani populasi dengan latar belakang imigran, mulai dari universitas hingga layanan kesehatan jiwa, seharusnya memperlakukan akulturası sebagai proses multidimensional dan bergantung konteks, bukan sebagai satu angka yang harus dioptimalkan.

Kata Kunci:

Akulturası; Stres Akulturatif; Kesehatan Mental; Identitas Etnis; Mahasiswa Internasional

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INTRODUCTION

Population mobility has outpaced the institutions built to receive it. The United Nations estimated 281 million international migrants in 2020, and international student enrolment has followed a similar upward curve since border restrictions eased after 2022 (IOM, 2024). Universities, primary care clinics and refugee resettlement agencies now routinely serve people who are navigating two or more cultural systems at once. Accordingly, the psychological burden of this adjustment process is now difficult to ignore, as reflected in both clinical caseloads and campus counseling statistics.

A substantial empirical literature has tried to specify what that cost looks like. Acculturative stress has been linked to depressive and anxious symptoms among trauma-exposed Latino young adults (Zvolensky et al., 2018) and among Hispanic college students more broadly (Jardin et al., 2018), while bicultural identity integration has repeatedly surfaced as a resource that dampens the same symptoms among Mexican-origin adolescents (Safa et al., 2019) and Asian and Latino undergraduates (Ramos et al., 2025). Parallel work has traced how family systems absorb and transmit acculturative pressure: parental acculturative stressors shape adolescent adjustment through interparental and parent-child conflict in Chinese American families (Hou et al., 2016), while accusations of assimilation within the family unit predict anxiety and depression among Latinx emerging adults independently of external discrimination (Thornhill et al., 2022). Discrimination itself recurs as a contextual amplifier rather than a separate risk factor, intensifying the acculturation-distress link for Chinese American adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic (Zong et al., 2022) and for Chinese American mothers navigating psychologically controlling parenting (Xue et al., 2024).

Two gaps limit what this literature can offer practitioners. The first is conceptual: research on acculturation sits in separate clusters built around specific groups, such as Latino communities, the Chinese diaspora, and refugee populations, that rarely cite each other's mechanisms, even when the underlying psychological process (stress appraisal, identity negotiation, exposure to discrimination) looks similar. Cavdar et al., 2021 and Deng (2025) both examine the ethnic identity-mental health link, one in British-born children of Turkish immigrants and the other in Chinese-language learners abroad, without either citing the other's theoretical frame. The second gap concerns risk contexts that acculturation theory, built largely on voluntary labor migration, was not designed to anticipate: unaccompanied refugee youth carrying pre-migration trauma into an acculturation process that begins without a family unit (Oppedal et al., 2022), crisis-displaced populations whose migration was neither planned nor chosen, and returnee students facing what recent work has termed reacculturation strain after coming home (Jin et al., 2024).

Potential solutions to both gaps already exist, though they are scattered. The process of acculturation, or orientation toward the culture of origin, has been shown to

act as a moderator in the relationship between stressors associated with being a minority group and physical health via anxiety among Latino immigrants (Cariello et al., 2020), suggesting that heritage-culture retention is not simply the inverse of adaptation but an independent protective channel. Autonomy-connectedness research adds a personality-level moderator to the same equation, showing that self-construal shapes how acculturation translates into psychopathological symptoms in a multicultural Dutch sample (Maas et al., 2019). What is missing is not evidence but integration: a framework that places stress appraisal, identity negotiation, and discrimination exposure on the same causal map, with generational status and migration circumstance specified as boundary conditions rather than afterthoughts.

Several contextual contingencies occur closely enough across studies to warrant explicit theorizing. Cultural distance between origin and host society changes the shape of the acculturation-adjustment curve, as globalization-based acculturation research from Ladakh (Ozer et al., 2019, 2021) and Denmark (Ozer & Schwartz, 2022) illustrates from opposite ends of the exposure spectrum. Host-society receptiveness matters independently of the migrant's own orientation: perceived multicultural norms predict wellbeing and attitudes toward international students over and above individual acculturation strategy (Ward et al., 2025), and diversity-receptive school climates change how immigrant students in Türkiye experience integration (Çapar et al., 2026). Digital and long-distance forms of cultural interaction further complicate this issue. Long-distance acculturation through media exposure affects well-being in Lebanon even without physical relocation (Soubra et al., 2024). Acculturation theory, originally built around physical migration, does not anticipate this pattern in its classic form.

This review draws on 49 empirical studies retained from a Scopus search covering 2016 to 2026, after screening 65 initially retrieved records against explicit eligibility criteria. Four questions guide the analysis: how has publication volume and disciplinary anchoring evolved over the period (RQ1); what geographic and institutional patterns characterize the field (RQ2); what thematic structure organizes the literature's keywords (RQ3); and through what mechanisms does acculturation relate to mental health, and how do those mechanisms vary by context (RQ4). The paper contributes a cross-population synthesis that existing single-group reviews cannot provide, alongside a bibliometric map that locates where the field's intellectual center of gravity currently sits. Section 2 details the search, eligibility, and analytic procedures. Section 3 reports the bibliometric results. Section 4 discusses findings by research question and proposes an integrative mechanism-in-context model. Section 5 concludes, and Section 6 outlines the review's limitations and a five-point future research agenda.

RESEARCH METHODS

Scope and research questions

This review examines acculturation in relation to mental health and psychological adaptation among all population groups experiencing ongoing intercultural contact: immigrants, refugees, ethnic and racial minority groups, international students, and their descendants. Four research questions structure the analysis:

1. RQ1. What is the volume, temporal trend, and journal/disciplinary anchoring of research on acculturation and mental health published between 2016 and 2026?
2. RQ2. What geographic and institutional patterns characterize this body of research?
3. RQ3. What thematic and keyword structures organize research on acculturation and mental health?

4. RQ4. Through what mechanisms do acculturation relate to mental health outcomes, and how do these mechanisms vary across sociocultural contexts?

Search strategy and data source

We retrieved records from Scopus on 21 July 2026 using the Boolean string: ("cultural identity" OR "ethnic identity" OR "multicultural" OR "indigenous" OR "minority" OR "social identification") AND ("mental health" OR "psychological well-being" OR "depression" OR "anxiety") AND ("cultural frame switching" OR "acculturation"). We applied no document-type, subject-area, or language filter at the search stage and drew on a single database; we treat this as a scope decision that trades breadth for a manageable, fully documented corpus, and Section 6 discusses what it costs the review. Table 1 summarizes the identification-to-inclusion pipeline.

Table 1. Search and Screening Pipeline.

Stage	Filter applied	Records remaining	Rationale
Identification	Scopus search, 2016–2026, no language/document filter	65	Raw export as supplied by the review team
Deduplication	DOI/EID check	65	No duplicate records detected
Title/abstract screening	PICo eligibility (Section 2.3) applied to all 65 records	65	Full corpus screened; none excluded for missing abstract
Eligibility exclusion	Acculturation construct not central, OR study not empirical	49	16 records excluded (see Section 2.3)
Included	—	49	Final corpus for bibliometric mapping and narrative synthesis

Eligibility criteria (PICo), screening and study selection

A Population–Interest–Context (PICo) frame, appropriate for a corpus that mixes quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods designs, guided eligibility decisions. We ran title/abstract screening and PICo eligibility assessment as one combined pass rather than two sequential stages, which is why Table 1 shows zero exclusions at the screening step: every exclusion in this review happened at the eligibility step, described below.

1. Population: immigrants, refugees, ethnic or racial minorities, international students, or second-generation descendants undergoing cross-cultural transition.
2. Interest of phenomena: acculturation, acculturative stress, or a closely related construct (ethnic identity, bicultural integration, enculturation) examined as a central explanatory variable, in relation to a psychological or mental health outcome

(depression, anxiety, distress, wellbeing, identity-related adjustment).

3. Context: empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), published in English between 2016 and 2026, with no geographic restriction.

Two exceptions to this rule arise directly from this framework. First, data showing that acculturation appears only as a covariate or moderator in a study whose primary focus lies outside the field of mental health (such as indicators of physical health, the validity of cognitive screening, or oncology-focused psychological disorders, etc.) are excluded, because the relationship between acculturation and mental health is incidental, not the subject of the research. Second, conceptual, perspective, and review-type articles (including one scoping review) were excluded from the primary synthesis to avoid double-counting evidence, though several are cited in Section 1 for context. Applying these rules removed 16 of the 65 identified

records: seven for lacking primary empirical data and nine for treating acculturation as a secondary covariate outside the review's substantive focus. Figure 1 (PRISMA 2020 flow) summarizes the process; because we assessed eligibility from

titles and abstracts rather than full text, we advise the authors to re-verify the handful of borderline inclusions (noted in the accompanying screening spreadsheet) once full texts are read in detail.

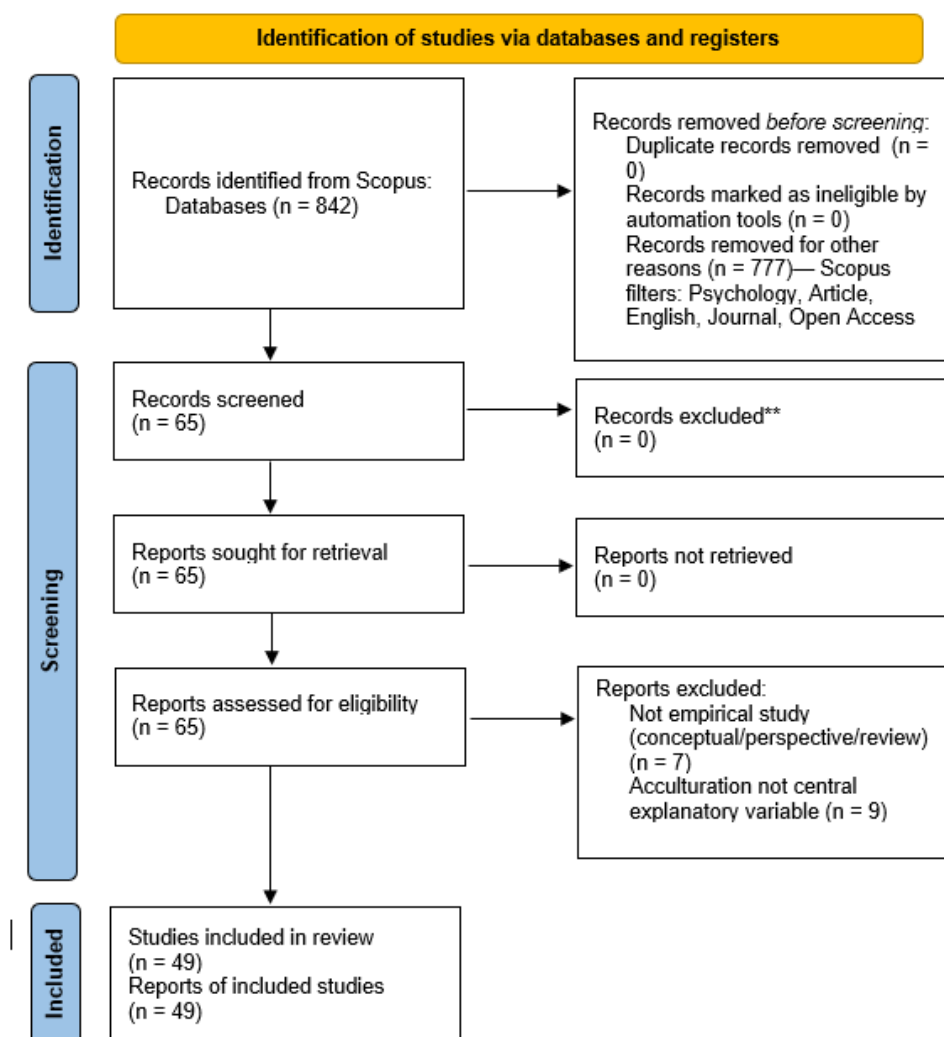


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow

Data extraction, coding, and bibliometric procedures

For each included record, we extracted publication year, source title, author keywords, country of author affiliation (derived from the affiliation string), and citation count as reported in Scopus. We ran the corpus through the bibliometrix R package, Biblioshiny interface, to generate the aggregate profile in Table 2, the country production map in Figure 3, and the keyword co-occurrence network in Figure 4; we computed the source and country frequency counts in Tables 3 and 4 directly from the Scopus export fields. A corpus of 49 records sits below the size at which co-occurrence networks typically resolve into stable, well-separated clusters, so we read Figure 4 as illustrative of the field's thematic structure rather than a definitive map. We recommend that anyone extending this review with a larger corpus re-run the network analysis with a minimum co-occurrence threshold of two and check cluster stability across resolution values between 0.8 and 1.2, as is

conventional in the field. We normalized author keywords to lowercase and singular form before counting, and we counted near-synonyms (e.g., "depression" and "depressive symptoms") separately to preserve the corpus's actual terminology rather than impose a taxonomy after the fact.

Synthesis and theorising

We synthesized studies by research question rather than by population subgroup, so we could compare mechanisms recurring across Latino, Chinese-diaspora, refugee, and international-student literatures directly. We first grouped studies by the mechanism they tested (stress appraisal, identity negotiation, discrimination exposure, family transmission), then examined each group for the contextual moderators, generational status, migration circumstance, host-society climate, that changed the strength or direction of that mechanism. This grouping grounds the integrative model in Section 4.5.

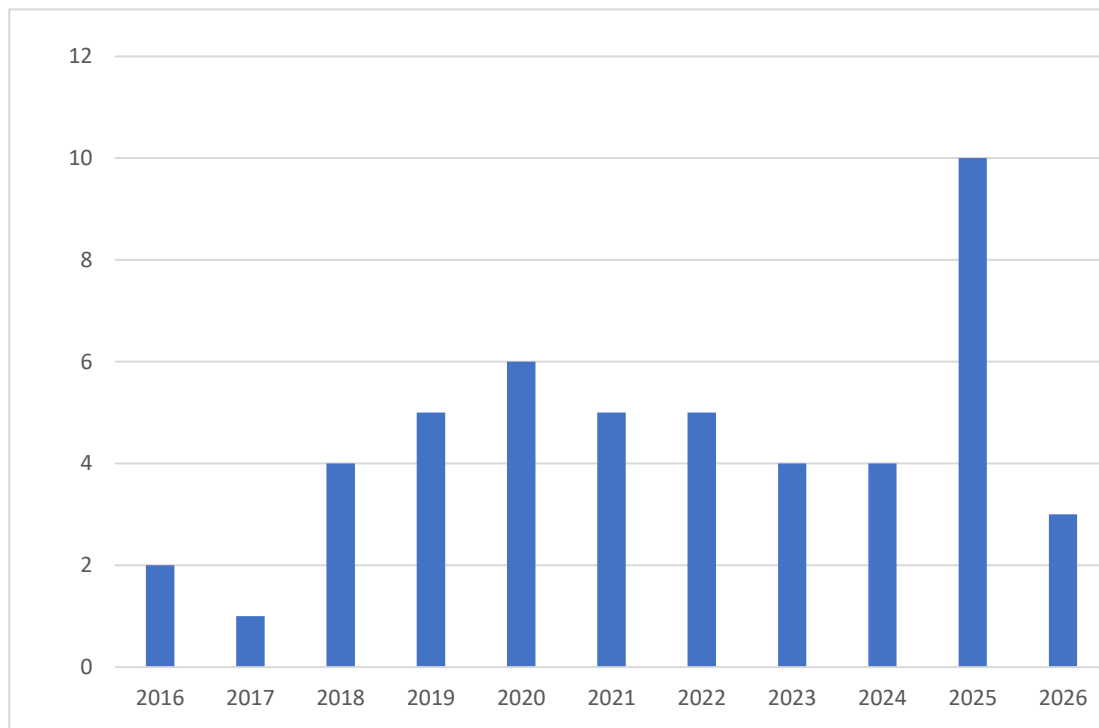


Figure 2. Annual Scientific Production

RESEARCH RESULTS

Holistic analysis of the dataset

Annual results remained moderate and stable throughout the first half of the period, with two records set in 2016, one in 2017, and four in 2018. This trend then rose gradually starting in 2019 (five records) and peaked in 2025 with ten records, while three more records for 2026 had been recorded at the time of the search. Close to a third of the entire 49-study corpus was published in the final two years covered, a concentration that suggests acculturation-mental health research has moved from a steady background interest into a more actively pursued line of inquiry, plausibly linked to renewed attention to migration and international student mobility following pandemic-era disruptions.

Table 2. Core Dataset Summary

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	2016:2026
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	32

Documents	49
Annual Growth Rate %	4.14
Document Average Age	4.22
Average citations per doc	14.96
References	7595
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	363
Author's Keywords (DE)	205
AUTHORS	
Authors	190
Authors of single-authored docs	2
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	2
Co-Authors per Doc	4.27
International co-authorships %	32.65
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	49

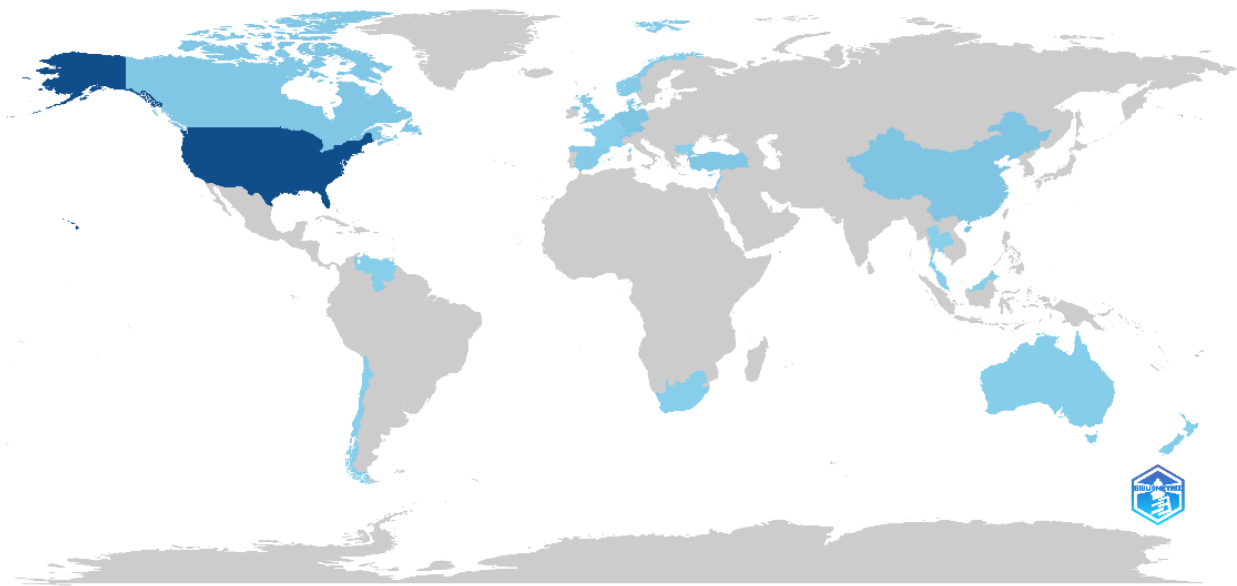


Figure 3. Country Scientific Production Map (Number Of Articles By Corresponding Author’s Country)

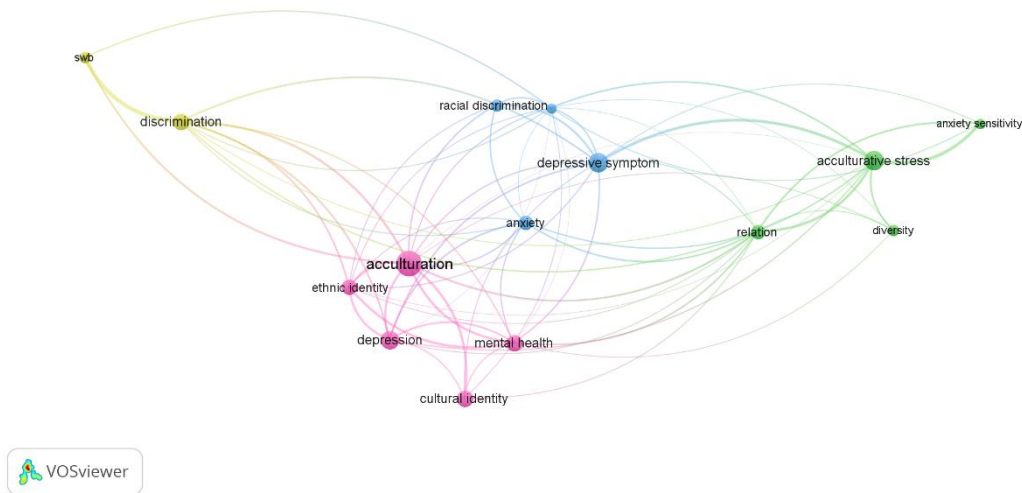


Figure 4. Keyword Co-Occurrence Visualisation

Source and disciplinary anchoring

Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology accounted for nine of the 49 studies, roughly one in five, making it by a wide margin the field's central outlet. *Frontiers in Psychology* followed with four studies, and *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* with three; the remaining studies spread across specialized outlets in eating behavior (*Appetite*, *Acta Psychologica*), intercultural relations (*International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*), and a long tail of single-study journals spanning psychiatry, education, and regional area-studies outlets. This concentration in one flagship journal, alongside a long tail elsewhere, indicates a field with a recognized disciplinary home in ethnic minority psychology but with active satellite literatures in adjacent specialties that do not always cite back to the core journal.

Table 3. Most Productive Sources (Top Journals And Article Counts).

Sources	Articles
Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology	9
Frontiers In Psychology	4
Journal Of Youth and Adolescence	3
Acta Psychologica	2
Appetite	2
International Journal of Intercultural Relations	2
Journal Of Cross-Cultural Psychology	2

Institutional and geographic patterns

Author affiliations traced back to the United States in 31 of the 49 studies, an outsized share that reflects both the size of the US immigrant-origin research infrastructure

and the corpus's heavy representation of Latino and Asian-American focused work. China (five studies) and Turkey and the Netherlands (four each) formed a second tier, followed by smaller but recurring contributions from the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, South Africa, Switzerland, Spain, Germany, and Hong Kong. Single studies from Thailand, Cyprus, and Azerbaijan extend the geographic range but do not yet constitute an established research base in those settings. The concentration in the US and a small number of European and East Asian countries means the evidence base says comparatively little about acculturation processes in South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, or Southeast Asia, despite substantial migration flows in and out of those regions.

Table 4. Most Productive Countries/Regions.

Rank	Country	Articles
1	United States	31
2	China	5
3	Turkey	4
4	Netherlands	4
5	United Kingdom	3
6	Denmark	3
7	Norway	2
	South Africa	2
	Switzerland	2
	Spain	2
	Germany	2
	Hong Kong	2
	Thailand, Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Belgium, Vietnam, France, Canada (each)	1 each

Intellectual and topical structure

Author keyword frequencies place *acculturation* itself at the center of the field, appearing in 18 of the 49 studies, with *mental health* (eight studies), *acculturative stress* and *depression* (six each), and *cultural identity*, *ethnic identity*, and *depressive symptoms* (five each) forming the next tier. *International students* and *anxiety* each recur in four studies, while *psychological adaptation*, *discrimination*, *globalization*, and *enculturation* appear in three studies apiece. Read together, these keywords cluster into three loosely bounded but recurring thematic groups: a stress-and-symptom cluster (acculturative stress, depression, anxiety, depressive symptoms), an identity cluster (cultural identity,

ethnic identity, biculturalism, self-construal), and a context cluster (discrimination, globalization, international students). The studies most frequently cited in this corpus do not fall within a single group but rather exist at the intersection of groups, and the dominant studies in the sample directly link psychological and sociocultural adaptation to refugee status (Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., 2021, 88 citations), followed by work connecting acculturation conflict to discrimination and ethnic identity among Latino youth (Huq et al., 2016, 62 citations) and studies clarifying the acculturative stress-symptom pathway among Hispanic college students (Jardin et al., 2018, 49 citations) and Chinese American families (Hou et al., 2016, 49 citations). This pattern suggests that the field's most influential contributions are the ones that bridge stress, identity, and context rather than isolating a single mechanism.

Figure 5 summarises this ranking visually for the 15 most-cited studies, showing citation count, research method, and country of first affiliation together; the full ranking of all 49 studies, including research method and country for every record, appears in Table S3 (Supplementary Materials).

DISCUSSION

Volume and disciplinary anchoring (RQ1)

The steep rise in output after 2023 coincides with, but cannot be fully attributed to, the resumption of international mobility following pandemic-era border closures. Studies examining acculturation among returnee students (Jin et al., 2024) and adjustment among foreign students on Chinese campuses during the pandemic itself (Li et al., 2023) suggest a more specific driver: the pandemic created a natural, if unwelcome, experiment in interrupted and resumed acculturation, and researchers appear to have responded to it directly rather than simply resuming a pre-existing trend line. The dominance of a single flagship journal, *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, alongside a long tail of specialized outlets, points to a field that has an institutional home but whose findings do not always travel back into it; work published in nutrition and eating-behavior journals on acculturative stress and disordered eating (Wang et al., 2022, 2025), for instance, engages acculturation theory substantively without necessarily reaching the audience that reads the field's central journal.

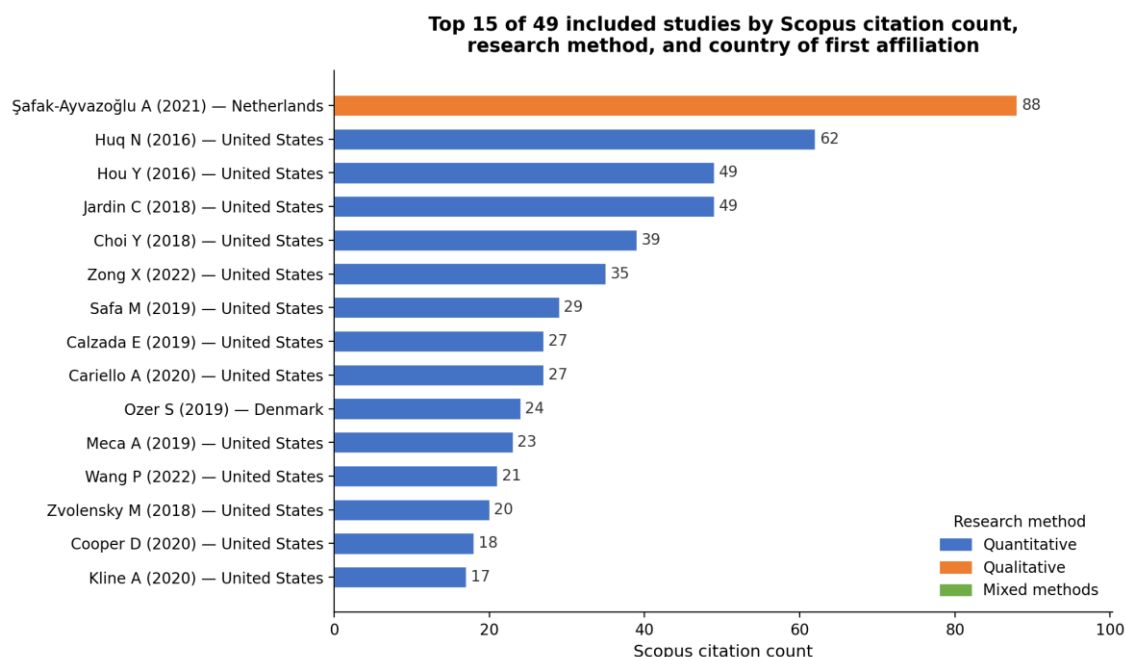


Figure 5. Top 15 of 49 Included Studies by Scopus Citation Count, Research Method, and Country of First Affiliation.

Geographic and institutional patterns (RQ2)

The near-total concentration of author affiliations in the United States, China, Turkey, and a handful of European countries maps onto where large, well-funded immigrant-origin research infrastructures already exist, rather than onto where acculturation-related mental health burden is necessarily highest. Studies based on smaller-scale contributions or from a single country, such as South Africa, Thailand, Cyprus, and Azerbaijan, provide clues as to the future direction of this field. However, a single study from each of these regions is insufficient to serve as evidence of a sustainable local research base. This distribution matters practically: intervention models validated on US Latino or Chinese-diaspora samples e.g., the culturally adapted Taoist Cognitive Therapy tested by Chang et al., (2020) may not transfer cleanly to refugee or labor-migration contexts in regions the corpus barely covers.

Thematic and keyword structure (RQ3)

The three clusters of keywords identified in Section 3.4, namely “stress and symptoms,” “identity,” and “context,” align closely with three theoretical strands that have historically tended to be treated separately in acculturation research: the stress and coping model, the social identity approach, and the minority stress framework, which focuses on discrimination. That the most-cited studies in the corpus sit at the intersection of these clusters, rather than squarely within one, is consistent with a field gradually converging on integrated models even where individual studies still frame themselves within a single tradition. Ethnic identity and the integration of bicultural identities frequently emerge among various diverse population groups, such as among Filipino and Korean-American youth (Choi et al., 2018) and the Malaysian Chinese community (Zheng et al., 2025).

Because these phenomena recur across such different groups, they look like a general protective mechanism rather than a finding specific to one population.

Mechanisms linking acculturation to mental health, and their contextual variation (RQ4)

Three mechanisms recur across otherwise disconnected population literatures. First, acculturative stress operates as a consistent proximal risk factor for depressive and anxious symptoms, whether measured through anxiety sensitivity in trauma-exposed Latino adults (Zvolensky et al., 2018) or through eating disinhibition as a downstream behavioral marker among Asian young adults (Wang et al., 2022). Second, identity-related resources (ethnic pride, bicultural identity integration, and clarity of cultural preferences) serve as buffers against this risk. Specifically, ethnic pride moderates the trauma–depression pathway only among Latina mothers with low interpersonal functioning (Kim et al., 2020), while bicultural identity integration protects some Asian and Latino undergraduates from depressive symptoms but not from the emotional eating that sometimes accompanies them (Ramos et al., 2025). A recent seven-day diary study extends this identity-buffering picture to everyday life: national, but not ethnic, identification tracked with lower momentary acculturative stress, suggesting that the identity component measured and the timescale of observation both shape whether identity resources appear protective (Emmer et al., 2026). Third, discrimination consistently exacerbates acculturation stress rather than replacing it. This in turn amplifies its negative impact on Chinese-American adolescents, as seen during stress-inducing events such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Zong et al., 2022). Similar findings apply to the parenting behaviors of Chinese-American mothers, which are

specifically influenced by symptoms of depression rather than by general well-being (Xue et al., 2024). A 2026 moderated-mediation study adds a further mechanism to this pattern, showing that acculturative stress predicts social isolation among multicultural adolescents through social withdrawal, an effect buffered when in-school support is high (Jo et al., 2026), which suggests that host-institution climate can interrupt the discrimination-to-isolation pathway before it compounds acculturative stress.

Migration circumstance changes how these three mechanisms combine. For unaccompanied refugee youth, ethnic identity crisis and discrimination predict wellbeing longitudinally in a population that entered the acculturation process without the family buffer that most stress-and-coping models assume (Oppedal et al., 2022), and Syrian refugees' psychological adaptation in Turkey unfolds against a backdrop of forced departure that voluntary-migration frameworks do not model well (Şafak-Ayvazoglu et al., 2021). A 2026 longitudinal study of refugees in protracted displacement adds a further layer to this picture, showing that economic and social stressors predict mental health problems primarily through emotion dysregulation, a pathway distinct from the ethnic-identity and discrimination mechanisms already discussed (Specker et al., 2026). Host-society climate operates as a further boundary condition largely external to the migrant's own strategy: perceived multicultural norms shape wellbeing and outsider attitudes independently of individual acculturation orientation (Ward et al., 2025), and school-level diversity receptiveness shapes how immigrant children experience integration in Türkiye (Çapar et al., 2026). Position in the generational hierarchy and life stage add another dimension, such that the same acculturation orientation that supports the psychological adaptation of first-generation international students manifests differently among immigrant children born in the UK (Deng, 2025). For this second group, the cultural transition they face is inherited, unlike the transition directly experienced by the first group (Cavdar et al., 2021) and differently again for veterans reintegrating into civilian society after a period of institutional rather than geographic displacement (Miller & Saling, 2025).

Theoretical implications

The pattern across Sections 4.1–4.4 supports a mechanism-in-context model of acculturation and mental health: acculturative stress, identity-related resources, and discrimination exposure combine to predict psychological outcomes, but the strength and even the direction of each pathway shifts with migration circumstance, generational position, and host-society receptiveness. Five propositions formalize this model for future testing.

1. P1. Acculturative stress predicts depressive and anxious symptoms across population groups, but the strength of this association is attenuated when identity-related resources (ethnic pride, bicultural integration) are high.
2. P2. Identity-integration resources buffer acculturative stress more reliably for voluntary migrants than for forced migrants, whose identity negotiation begins under conditions of trauma exposure that identity resources alone do not resolve.
3. P3. Discrimination amplifies the acculturative stress–symptom pathway rather than acting as an independent risk factor, such that its effect is strongest precisely where acculturative stress is already elevated.
4. P4. Host-society receptiveness (perceived multicultural norms, institutional diversity climate) moderates individual acculturation outcomes independently of the migrant's own acculturation orientation, up to the point where unreceptive climates suppress the protective value of any orientation.
5. P5. Generational status changes which mechanism dominates acculturative stress and identity negotiation are more explanatory for first-generation and first-arrival populations, while family-transmitted and inherited cultural conflict better explain outcomes among second-generation and descendant populations.

Table 5. Evidence mapping for the mechanism-in-context model.

Design principle	Mechanism(s)	Design/method	Population/touchpoint	Exemplar evidence
Stress appraisal	Acculturative stress → depressive/anxious symptoms	Cross-sectional survey	Hispanic college students; trauma-exposed Latinx adults	Jardin et al. (2018); Zvolensky et al. (2018)
Identity buffering	Ethnic/bicultural identity → reduced symptom severity	Longitudinal, mixed methods	Mexican-origin adolescents; Asian/Latino undergraduates	Safa et al. (2019); Ramos et al. (2025)

Discrimination amplification	Discrimination acculturative stress → symptoms/parenting behavior	Person-centered, moderated mediation	Chinese adolescents; American mothers	American Chinese	Zong et al. (2022); Xue et al. (2024)
Forced-migration boundary condition	Trauma exposure changes stress–adaptation link	Longitudinal; qualitative interview	Unaccompanied refugee youth; Syrian refugees		Oppedal et al. (2022); Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al. (2021)
Host-climate moderation	Institutional receptiveness → wellbeing, independent of orientation	Scale validation; qualitative	International immigrant schoolchildren	students;	Ward et al. (2025); Çapar et al. (2026)

CONCLUSION

This review combined bibliometric description with a systematic synthesis of 49 empirical studies to ask how acculturation relates to mental health across immigrant, refugee, ethnic minority, and international student populations. We found a field concentrated in the United States and centered on a single leading journal but expanding quickly. Topically, the field revolves around three interrelated mechanisms (stress appraisal, identity protection, and discrimination amplification) that no prior single-population review had summarized together. Unlike reviews organized around one migrant group, the mechanism-in-context model proposed here treats generational status, migration circumstance, and host-society receptiveness as boundary conditions that determine which mechanism dominates, not as background variables to control away. Every one of the 49 studies is cross-sectional or observational; none tests an intervention. With that limit in view, the synthesis points to two tentative implications for organizations working with culturally diverse populations: acculturation support probably works better when it varies by migration circumstance than when it follows one script for every group, and an institution's own receptiveness may function as an active ingredient in adaptation outcomes rather than a passive backdrop. Only an intervention trial that manipulates host-society receptiveness directly could confirm the second claim; the studies synthesized here can only suggest it.

Limitations and Future Research

Three limitations qualify for these conclusions. First, the corpus was drawn from a single database (Scopus) using one search execution, so records indexed only in PubMed, PsycINFO, or regional databases are absent; the true evidence base is almost certainly larger and more geographically varied than what this review captures. Second, we screened titles and abstracts rather than full texts, so a small number of borderline inclusion and exclusion decisions (documented in the accompanying screening file) still need full-text confirmation before anyone treats this corpus as final. Third, the corpus skews heavily toward English-language publications from the United States, China, and a small set of European countries, leaving acculturation

processes in South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and much of Southeast Asia essentially undocumented in this review

Supplementary Materials

Table S1–S3 report affiliation, country, and study level productivity for the 49 include studies, extracted form the Scopus export fields. Institution names were parsed automatically by matching segments containing “University/Institute” and excluding sub-unit labels (e.g., “Department of”, “School of”); the University of California entry aggregates multiple campuses because in the source strings. Country reflect the affiliation of the first listed author per record, which does not always match the country the study was conducted in. Research the method in Table S3 was classified automatically from abstract keywords (e.g., “cross-sectional”, “regression” → quantitative; “interview”, “ethnographic” → qualitative; “mixed method” → mixed methods) and should be spot-checked before use in the final manuscript.

Table 6. Top affiliation by number of articles (institutions appearing in ≥ 2 of 49 studies).

Rank	Institution	Articles	% of 49
1	University of California (sistem; beberapa kampus)	6	12,2%
2	University of Miami	4	8,2%
3	University of Texas at Austin	3	6,1%
3	Tilburg University	3	6,1%
3	Aarhus University	3	6,1%
3	University of Johannesburg	2	4,1%
6	University of Houston	2	4,1%
6	University of Texas Anderson Cancer Center	2	4,1%
6	University of Maryland	2	4,1%
6	Old Dominion University	2	4,1%

Rank	Institution	Articles	% of 49
6	Florida International University	2	4,1%

Table 7. Most Productive Countries (First-Author Affiliation, 49 Included Studies).

Rank	Country	Articles	% of 49
1	United States	25	51,0%
2	China	3	6,1%
2	Denmark	3	6,1%
4	United Kingdom	2	4,1%
4	Turkey	2	4,1%
4	Netherlands	2	4,1%

Rank	Country	Articles	% of 49
4	Germany	2	4,1%
8	Thailand	1	2,0%
8	Cyprus	1	2,0%
8	Norway	1	2,0%
8	Lebanon	1	2,0%
8	Canada	1	2,0%
8	Spain	1	2,0%
8	Malaysia	1	2,0%
8	New Zealand	1	2,0%
8	Hong Kong	1	2,0%
8	Australia	1	2,0%

Table 8. Full Ranking of the 49 Included Studies by Scopus Citation Count, With Research Method and Country of First Affiliation.

Rank	Study (first author, year)	Cited by	Method	Country
1	Şafak-Ayvazoglu A (2021)	88	Qualitative	Netherlands
2	Huq N (2016)	62	Quantitative	United States
3	Hou Y (2016)	49	Quantitative	United States
3	Jardin C (2018)	49	Quantitative	United States
5	Choi Y (2018)	39	Quantitative	United States
6	Zong X (2022)	35	Quantitative	United States
7	Safa M (2019)	29	Quantitative	United States
8	Calzada E (2019)	27	Quantitative	United States
8	Cariello A (2020)	27	Quantitative	United States
10	Ozer S (2019)	24	Quantitative	Denmark
11	Meca A (2019)	23	Quantitative	United States
12	Wang P (2022)	21	Quantitative	United States
13	Zvolensky M (2018)	20	Quantitative	United States
14	Cooper D (2020)	18	Quantitative	United States
15	Kline A (2020)	17	Quantitative	United States
16	Cavdar D (2021)	16	Quantitative	Turkey
17	Maas J (2019)	15	Quantitative	Netherlands
18	Thornhill C (2022)	14	Quantitative	United States
19	Chang D (2020)	13	Quantitative	United States
19	Martinez-Taboada C (2017)	13	Quantitative	Spain
21	Ozer S (2022)	12	Quantitative	Denmark
22	Areba E (2021)	11	Quantitative	United States

Rank	Study (first author, year)	Cited by	Method	Country
22	Li J (2023)	11	Qualitative	China
24	Conroy K (2021)	10	Quantitative	United States
24	Jin R (2024)	10	Quantitative	China
24	Ozer S (2021)	10	Quantitative	Denmark
27	Oppedal B (2022)	8	Quantitative	Norway
27	Sabado J (2023)	8	Quantitative	United States
27	Saifan D (2018)	8	Quantitative	United States
27	Soubra N (2024)	8	Quantitative	Lebanon
31	Kong D (2025)	6	Quantitative	Hong Kong
32	Malkoff A (2020)	5	Quantitative	United States
32	Wang P (2025)	5	Quantitative	United States
32	Xue X (2024)	5	Quantitative	United States
35	Baumert J (2023)	3	Quantitative	Germany
35	Kim S (2020)	3	Mixed methods	United States
37	EL-Awad U (2025)	2	Quantitative	Germany
37	Leanza Y (2025)	2	Quantitative	Canada
37	Schmidt A (2023)	2	Quantitative	United Kingdom
40	Dannhauser B (2025)	1	Qualitative	United Kingdom
40	Manyeruke G (2024)	1	Quantitative	Cyprus
40	Miller A (2025)	1	Qualitative	Australia
40	Ramos D (2025)	1	Quantitative	United States
40	Ward C (2025)	1	Quantitative	New Zealand
45	Deng Z (2025)	0	Mixed methods	Thailand
45	He K (2026)	0	Quantitative	United States
45	Liu J (2026)	0	Quantitative	China
45	Zheng J (2025)	0	Quantitative	Malaysia
45	Çapar D (2026)	0	Qualitative	Turkey

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ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study is a bibliometric-systematic review of previously published publicly available literature indexed in Scopus. It did not involve direct collection of data from human or animal participants, and it therefore did not require approval from an institutional ethics committee.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors declare no known competing financial or personal interests that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

TRANSPARENCY OF DATA

The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the review reported; that no important aspects of the review have been omitted; and that any deviations from the planned search and screening process are explained in Section 2. The full screening record for all 65 identified records, including the rationale behind each inclusion and exclusion decision, is

available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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All author contribution for this article.

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