

## *An Exploratory Study on Racial Experiences and Resiliency of Foreign Medical Students*

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### **Abstract**

Medical students aspire to gain a degree in a foreign land and encounter new experiences in the host country. The aim of the study was to explore the lived racial experiences of foreign medical students. A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized by the researcher. Foreign medical students (N=15) participated in an open ended interview questions. Thematic analysis showed that the participants defined racism as being judged based on skin color, race, and caste. Moreover, the results showed that the participants' were hurt, sad, angry and disappointed resulting to emotional distancing. They sought family support through open and constant communication. Likewise group of friends provided the sense of safety and security inside and outside the educational environment. Participants handled their experiences cognitively by avoiding negative thoughts and staying positive; and behaviorally by being passive, staying calm and ignoring people who discriminate them. They reached out, made friends with other people and assimilated the host culture. The racial experiences of the participants in their educational environment helped them to become resilient and focused on their goal.

Keywords: Racism, Resiliency, Foreign Students, Lived Experiences

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## Introduction

It is quite ironic and perplexing in today's time when you view what is going on in the world. Since before the issue of 'racism' brought about drastic consequences to the lives of people all over the world. Just when one think that we have evolve to a better unified future globally, the underlying existing social behavior shows its evil head again. Any type of social behavior or actions with unusual awareness of such social negative actions is very prominent all over the world. The reality of racism is an element of the representation of the social world and is the characteristic of the mainstream that makes it work. Groups are founded with the self-interpretation where the central myth underlies prejudices that are rationalized and institutionalized. From the phenomenological perspective, racism is a phenomenon of negative sociality.

The steady rise in the number of international students in higher education has been a growth in the research dedicated to the international sojourn, defined by Ward, (2015) as temporary between-culture contact. Given the economic dependence of universities on the fees from international students, it is important that there is a clear understanding of the issues facing them if an optimum service is to be delivered, so that student retention is improved and positive word of mouth helps to increase recruitment. Increased numbers of international students in British higher education and intensified competition for their recruitment both nationally and internationally have put pressure on institutions to improve their product.

Encounters with racism and the international student experience by Brown and Jones (2013), surveyed 153 international postgraduate students, 49 had experienced some form of abuse. In most cases, this took the form of verbal abuse though racism manifested physically for nine students. Strong emotional reactions were reported, including sadness, disappointment, homesickness and anger. There was a consequent reluctance to return to the UK as a leisure tourist or to offer positive word of mouth to future students. The aim of the study was to gauge the incidence of racism visited on a cohort of international students in England and to explore its impact on the student experience.

Truong and Museus (2012) conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 participants who experienced racism and racial trauma in doctoral study. They presented a taxonomy of how doctoral students of color cope and respond to racism in their programs. Participants reported using a variety of approaches to maintain their well-being and negotiate relationships within their programs, such as utilizing support networks, avoiding racist environments, transferring out of their programs, seeking interventions, and documenting and filing complaints.

According to Salahuddin and O'Brien (2011), if, when confronted with racism, a person can maintain pride and strong self-esteem, and avoid harmful outcomes such as depression and social dislocation, they can be said to exhibit resilience. Pyke (2010) have identified that much of the harm of racism comes from its internalization by those who experience it.

Development, change or any movement involving intricate process of cultural, linguistic, social, psychological, and geographical changes across culture may result to traumatic experiences. Accommodating and assimilating the shift and merging of cultures includes conflict of cultural beliefs of groups, language or communication barriers or difficulties and perceived notions of prejudices and discriminations. It is a two-way and multidimensional process of various level of change in behavior, values, and interactions resulting from cultural experiences.

Every once in a while the effects of racism is felt thru to some events or experience that reminds how damaging or hurtful the experience is to all especially students. Researchers from time to time have studied and documented the influence and effect of racism on the human psyche.

Cultural bigotry and judgement are happening everyday even right now including schools. It happens distinguishably between minority and majority members of a community. The consequences of the experiences of racial discrimination are very severe from the range of psychological mental health to physical health or even death.

Thus, the experiences the students encountered evidently gives rise in utilizing their coping mechanism in order to function more effectively in school to reach their goals. Students experience great anxiety and distress when targeted. Feelings of fear, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, low academic performance and depression are experienced.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical race theory (CRT), created by Bell and Freeman, an organizing framework useful in understanding human behavior and social processes relevant to racial group categorizations and racial stratification. The theory examines the oppressive dynamics of society to inform about individual, group and social transformation. It places race at the center of the analysis and provides a critical perspective on how racial stratification continues to influence the lives of racial/ethnic minorities.

Cognitive-relational emotion theory (Lazarus & Folkman), where the qualitative data are gathered and describe, particularly the relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being.

Resilience theory of Norman Garmezy states that, someone with great resilience is not necessarily someone who is extremely brave despite adversity, it is someone who is able to show functional adequacy despite the emotional turmoil.

The distress is associated with the feelings of being rejected, isolated and ostracized. The victim being targeted cannot do anything – color of the skin and hair, difference in size or shape, their religious belief or cultural heritage/background. The attacker develops at the same a sense of false pride when it comes to superiority. The ironic situation is that teachers and parents are unaware of the cruelty and distress, or misery being felt and inflicted to the student.

The purpose of the research was to explore, acknowledge and draw a mind map of the participants' experiences with racism and how it has affected their cognitive, affective and behavior, how they coped and became resilient from their experiences.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

The researcher wanted to know the following:

1. What were the thoughts of the participants about their racial experience?
2. How affected were the participants of the experience?
3. What were the reactions of the participants on their racial experiences?
4. How did the participants' handled the racial experiences?

The research study was to provide a qualitative examination of the lived racial experiences of the foreign medical students and to lay hold of and describe the phenomena of racism to have an understanding and describe what it is like to be a foreign medical student and how the racial experience is handled and resilience they develop due to the experience.

## **Methods**

A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized in the study. It was used to distill data, determining broad patterns to conduct a more thematic granular research and analysis. It used an interview as an instrument to gather the racial experiences and coping styles that developed the resiliency of the participants from the experiences.

A researchers-made open-ended interview questions were open ended questions used to gather the needed data for the categories and themes. The qualitative data helped to gather detailed views of the participants.

Thematic analysis as defined (Saldana, 2015; Boyatzis,1998) was used as a means to gain insight and knowledge from data gathered. The method enabled the researcher to develop a deeper appreciation for the group or situation being researched. By using thematic analysis to distill data, the researcher determined broad patterns to conduct a more granular research and analysis. Themes from the data gathered and not imposed or predetermined.

The participants of the study were the foreign medical students of the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA. The sampling criterion for the qualitative research was purposive. 15 participants with ages ranging from 20-23 years old were picked to participate in the interview who are studying Medicine Program.

## **Findings**

Racism was defined by the participants as a discriminative form of behavior towards differences in race, religion, culture, color, etc. Stereotyping based on one bad experience from one individual has been generalized towards the whole race. Participants felt stereotyped particularly with the odor and the behavior or some. They felt hurt, disappointed and angry.

The racial experiences have been taken deeply that it affected the participants cognitively, affectively and with that their behavior towards the experience has been ignorance, letting it pass and avoidance.

Biases, discrimination and unfair treatment of professor was consistently mentioned by the participants. These participants were my students during their bachelor degree and they were bubbly, participative, and very active in class and around the university. It was quite refreshing handling foreign students. Learning their culture, beliefs and practices were an eye opener to me as a researcher. To become more effective with them I had to learn from them as they well also learn from us.

All participants resorted to ignoring the racial experiences. "Ignorance is a bliss," as they say. To me this is the key to the resiliency of the students. Whether ignoring, letting it go and avoiding racial incidences these reactions guided the students developing their resiliency towards racism.

Table 1: Themes

<b>Theme #1</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
<p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <p>The mental or psychological state of the lived racial experiences which the participants goes through that caused to question their sense of identity, heritage and culture. At the same time utilizing these inherited customs leading them to stay positive and optimistic towards their goal.</p>	<p>Sense of Identity</p>	<p>“It’s not my fault I’m like this, I was made like this...I didn’t choose to be like this. I’m very happy of who I am. It doesn’t matter what others think of me. I accept myself.” P9</p> <p>“I know and I stand to what I believe in....the way you live and what we live by like rules, culture and religious practices.” P1</p>
	<p>Staying Positive</p>	<p>“...I have no problem accepting and correcting as I must. It is an inconvenience to them and to the country that I have inhabited in....I must adapt to the cultural norms and expectations.“ P4</p>
<b>Theme #2</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
<p><b>Affective</b></p> <p>The emotions that the participants felt with their lived racial experiences, facing the surge of feelings such as sadness, anger, disappointment and confusion that they have never felt before. This brought the avoidance or emotional detachment, resulting in seeking support from family members and friends within their race.</p>	<p>Emotional Distancing</p>	<p>“.....I feel hurt and I ask myself why, but I keep it to myself and shake the feeling off so it will not affect me.” P1</p> <p>“...I didn’t feel good at all.... I feel a bit sad and you do feel fear ....I just ignore those racial slurs and remarks.” P2</p>
	<p>Seeking Support</p>	<p>“.... I go with my friends, talk to my own kind especially to my family. ....It helps me feel close at home and safe and secure no matter how far they are....I stick to my group of friends to feel safe.” P11</p>
<b>Theme #3</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
<p>Behavioral</p> <p>Responses of their behavior towards the lived racial experiences manifested to the way they react to the encountered</p>	<p>Staying Calm</p>	<p>“Like I said...I don’t pay attention... I just keep my cool and continue doing what I’m doing.” P10</p> <p>“... making jokes.. out of any small things....just to keep up to finish the</p>

situation such as staying calm and collected ignoring the experience/s. Also challenging the racial experiences by not responding directly or reasoning out. Keeping their angry thoughts inside or by simply dissociating themselves with the situation.		ordeal .... we don't want to make a fuss. “ P7
	Challenging Racism	“I try to protest it as much as I can, but people tend to overpower you. So sometimes it becomes useless.” P12 “... raise my voice against it no matter how strong the other side of the argument is. P15
<b>Resiliency</b>	<b>Transcript</b>	
How the participants coped and handled their lived racial experiences have contributed highly to the development of their resiliency in order achieved their goals. By being understanding to the diversity, not giving much thought to the experiences, not being offended, letting go of the angst, being positive and getting rid of the negative thought.	“...there's just lots of diversity...you have to talk to them...and to understand them.” P2 “I don't give it much thought....” P3 “I have been able to overcome and actually portray myself alone not as an Indian as an individual as supposed to an entire country” P4 “.....I ignore because I know that those people don't have a broad perspective.....” P6 “Frankly I just let it go .....not going to stay in this country for a long time.....so probably I'm not going to experience it again so just let it go.” P8 “To be positive. To get rid of negative thoughts.” P14 “I don't get offended when I talk in English cause I tried. The accent is different, but the thing is I try.” P13	

## Discussions

Racism, what does it mean to each participants', since the term encompasses a wide range of definition depending on the situation based on the race, color and religion, where people feel they are superior towards others. presented at the moment. It can fuel present situation or precipitate situations that has laid dormant before. It can be beliefs that characterizes the abilities attributed to a person or people. Racism has been used to discriminate individuals to foster fear or hatred influencing how we relate to other people.

Migrating from one's culture to another culture that is quite alien with communication barrier, lack of accessibility such as food, place of worship ad being alone without a family member nearby affects the well-being of the impressionable young adult that can lead to detrimental outcomes to their mental and physical health.

The participants of the research are the foreign international medical students who have been in the university since their bachelor programs proceeding to medicine. Interviewing the participants individually gave them a sense of security and confidentiality about their identity. They were a little bit more comfortable in sharing their experiences once they felt secure. Their willingness to share the experiences was a way for them to relate their racial experiences and somehow get some answers to their question brought about by the encounters.

The participants acknowledged that they have felt emotions like they never felt before when it came to their racial experiences. Sadness, disappointments and especially anger were experienced. The racial experiences of the participants is supported by the study of Brown and Jones (2013). They felt hurt to the way they were treated, being neglected, rejected and avoided within the campus even though they tried to communicate and associate with the local (Filipinos) concerning their studies among other things. They think they are misunderstood and not given a chance to be known individually but instead stereotyped based on the bad experiences the locals had with some other foreigners. These results is supported by Salahuddin and O'Brien (2011) and Pyke (2010).

The racial experiences had been taken deeply that it affected the participants cognitively, emotionally and with that their behavior towards the experience has been ignoring the incidents, letting it pass and avoid situations that lead to the experience/s.

They coped by avoiding probable racial experiences, seeking support from families and friends of the same race, staying calm and positive and with their perseverance, resiliency was developed so as they can reach their goals. The experiences developed hardness within the participants. Sadness was first felt then hardness inside. It shows that the racial experiences developed the participants' road to resiliency. The way they cope and handled the situation successfully. One also stated that the reason for ignoring the racial experiences was because they are only here temporarily and stay together within their own network to feel secured and be safe. They will be going home once they graduated. As this result is supported by Truong and Museus (2012).

The racial experiences that the participants shared were mostly concentrated within the campus since their daily routine revolve around the campus including living within and around the university. College life according to them was supposed to fun filled activities associated with the academe, but it seems that the local does not want to involve them with the college activities. No recognition and importance were given as part of the academe making them feel inferior. They have understood the situation so they also expect some unbiased consideration to their situation. They do not demand priority but rather fair and unbiased treatment.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the results and discussions, the following conclusions were derived. All participants' concept of racism is form of treating another person based on race, color and culture. Being discriminated due to the difference from one another. Some were not easily forthcoming with personally experiencing racism, but slowly shared their experiences by citing instances of racial experiences.

Learning more about the diversity of cultures of the foreign students will help the institution prepare themselves in catering the academic needs of the students as well as their social needs. Repeated racial experiences should be prevented to prevent further mental and physical health problems. Further, activities and accommodations should be available since the students resides within the campus and the surrounding area which is close by to the university. These repeated experiences will affect the students mental and physical health. Hatred and fear developed due to the repetition of the experiences is detrimental to one's capacity to function fully.

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