

Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

Poonam Patel^{1*}, Dr. Suresh Makvana²

ABSTRACT

Acculturation, as a process of cultural adaptation, has significant implications for interpersonal dynamics and mental health outcomes, including intimate partner violence (IPV). The present study provides a systematic review of empirical literature examining the relationship between acculturation and IPV across diverse cultural and ethnic groups. A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, following PRISMA guidelines. Studies were included if they assessed acculturation and IPV among adult populations and reported measurable associations between these variables. A total of 48 studies comprising multiple independent effect sizes were included in the final analysis. The findings indicate a complex and inconsistent relationship between acculturation and IPV. While several studies report a positive association, suggesting that higher levels of acculturation are linked to increased IPV risk, others demonstrate negative or non-significant relationships. The strength of associations ranged from negligible to moderate, highlighting variability across cultural contexts and measurement approaches. Key factors contributing to these inconsistencies include heterogeneity in acculturation measurement, reliance on proxy indicators (e.g., language, length of residence), and differences in sample characteristics. Additionally, gender-specific patterns were observed, with variations in IPV victimization and perpetration across males and females. The review underscores that acculturation is a multidimensional and context-dependent construct whose impact on IPV cannot be understood through linear models. The findings highlight the need for standardized, multidimensional measures of acculturation and greater consideration of sociocultural moderators such as gender roles, social support, and structural inequalities. Implications for research, clinical practice, and policy are discussed, emphasizing the importance of culturally informed interventions aimed at reducing IPV in diverse populations.

Keywords: *Acculturation, Cultural Adaptation, Intimate Partner Violence, Cross-Cultural Psychology, Systematic Review, Mental Health*

In an increasingly globalized and culturally interconnected world, processes of migration, mobility, and social integration have intensified interactions between diverse cultural groups. These interactions often necessitate adaptation to new sociocultural environments, a process commonly conceptualized as acculturation. Acculturation refers to

¹Research Scholar, P.G. Department of Psychology, S.P. University, V.V. Nagar, Gujarat, India

²Professor, P.G. Department of Psychology, S.P. University, V.V. Nagar, Gujarat, India

*Corresponding Author

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Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

the psychological and cultural changes that occur when individuals come into continuous contact with a different cultural context, leading to shifts in values, behaviors, identity, and social relationships (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2006). While acculturation can facilitate social integration and access to new opportunities, it also introduces challenges related to identity negotiation, cultural conflict, and psychosocial stress. Within the domain of public health and social psychology, increasing attention has been directed toward understanding how acculturation influences interpersonal relationships and behavioral outcomes. One such critical outcome is intimate partner violence (IPV), a pervasive global issue encompassing physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse within intimate relationships (World Health Organization, 2012). IPV is widely recognized as a significant violation of human rights and a major contributor to adverse mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, trauma-related disorders, and substance use. Its consequences extend beyond individuals to families and communities, making it a critical concern for social impact research.

The relationship between acculturation and IPV is complex and theoretically multifaceted. On one hand, acculturation may promote awareness of legal rights, gender equality, and access to social support systems, thereby potentially reducing vulnerability to IPV. On the other hand, the process of adapting to a new cultural environment may generate acculturative stress, disrupt traditional family structures, and alter gender roles, potentially increasing interpersonal conflict and the risk of violence (Nguyen & Peterson, 1993; Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000). These competing mechanisms suggest that acculturation may function both as a protective and a risk factor, depending on contextual and individual variables.

Empirical research examining the association between acculturation and IPV has yielded inconsistent findings. Some studies report a positive relationship, indicating that higher levels of acculturation are associated with increased IPV risk, while others suggest negative or non-significant associations. These inconsistencies can be attributed to several methodological and conceptual challenges, including variability in the operationalization of acculturation, reliance on proxy indicators such as language use or duration of residence, and differences in sample characteristics across cultural groups. Moreover, many studies adopt unidimensional models of acculturation, which fail to capture its inherently multidimensional and bidirectional nature.

Berry's (1997, 2005) acculturation framework provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding these dynamics. The model identifies four acculturation strategies—integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization—each associated with distinct psychosocial outcomes. Integration, characterized by maintaining one's cultural heritage while engaging with the host culture, is often linked to more adaptive outcomes, whereas marginalization is associated with poorer mental health and social adjustment. These variations highlight the importance of considering not only the level of acculturation but also the manner in which individuals navigate multiple cultural identities.

Despite growing scholarly attention, significant gaps remain in the literature. Existing reviews have often focused on specific ethnic groups or limited geographic contexts, restricting the generalizability of findings. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive synthesis that systematically examines how methodological variations influence observed relationships between acculturation and IPV. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing a more nuanced understanding of how cultural adaptation processes intersect with

Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

interpersonal violence across diverse populations. Given the profound social and psychological implications of both acculturation and IPV, there is a pressing need to integrate findings across studies and identify consistent patterns, divergences, and underlying mechanisms. Such an understanding is crucial for informing culturally sensitive interventions, guiding policy development, and advancing theoretical frameworks in cross-cultural psychology.

Accordingly, the present study aims to systematically review empirical literature examining the relationship between acculturation and intimate partner violence across diverse cultural contexts. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) synthesize existing findings on the direction and strength of this relationship, (2) examine the role of measurement and methodological variability in shaping outcomes, and (3) identify key gaps and directions for future research. By situating acculturation within a broader social impact framework, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural adaptation processes influence patterns of interpersonal violence and well-being in multicultural societies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a systematic review design with analytical synthesis to examine the relationship between acculturation and intimate partner violence (IPV). The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure methodological transparency, reproducibility, and rigor. In addition to synthesizing empirical findings, the study adopted a comparative analytical approach to examine patterns, inconsistencies, and methodological variations across studies.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed/MEDLINE, Web of Science, PsycARTICLES, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected to ensure broad coverage of interdisciplinary research spanning psychology, public health, and social sciences. The search strategy incorporated combinations of the following keywords: “acculturation,” “cultural adaptation,” “intimate partner violence,” “domestic violence,” “partner abuse,” “cross-cultural,” and “mental health.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the search and enhance retrieval accuracy. The search was limited to studies published between 1990 and 2025, capturing both foundational and contemporary developments in acculturation research.

Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed a structured multi-stage screening procedure consistent with PRISMA guidelines.

- The initial search yielded approximately 412 studies across databases.
- After removal of duplicates, 356 studies remained for title and abstract screening.
- Based on relevance criteria, 124 studies were selected for full-text review.
- Following the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 48 studies were retained for final analysis.

This systematic filtering ensured that only methodologically relevant and empirically robust studies were included in the review.

Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review based on the following criteria:

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Empirical studies examining acculturation as a primary or significant variable
2. Studies assessing intimate partner violence (physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological)
3. Studies involving adult participants (18 years and above)
4. Use of standardized instruments or clearly defined proxy indicators of acculturation
5. Studies reporting quantitative or qualitative associations between acculturation and IPV
6. Peer-reviewed articles published in English

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Studies not directly examining the relationship between acculturation and IPV
2. Non-empirical works (e.g., editorials, commentaries, theoretical papers without data)
3. Studies relying solely on unstructured or poorly defined measures
4. Duplicate publications or incomplete reports

Data Extraction

Relevant data from the selected studies were systematically extracted using a structured coding framework. The following information was recorded:

- Study characteristics (author(s), year, country, sample size)
- Participant demographics (age, gender, ethnicity)
- Study design (cross-sectional, longitudinal, clinical, survey-based)
- Measures of acculturation (e.g., multidimensional scales, proxy indicators)
- Measures of IPV (e.g., Conflict Tactics Scale, self-reports)
- Statistical findings (correlation coefficients, regression outcomes, effect sizes)
- Direction of relationship (positive, negative, or non-significant)

To enhance analytical consistency, priority was given to validated and widely used measurement tools when multiple measures were reported.

Analytical Framework

The extracted data were analyzed using a thematic-analytical synthesis approach, integrating both quantitative trends and conceptual patterns.

Findings were categorized into three primary domains:

1. Positive Association – Higher acculturation linked with increased IPV
2. Negative Association – Higher acculturation associated with reduced IPV
3. No Significant Relationship – No clear association observed

In addition, the analysis examined:

- Measurement heterogeneity (unidimensional vs. multidimensional acculturation scales)
- Cultural and ethnic variations
- Gender-specific patterns in IPV victimization and perpetration
- Influence of proxy indicators (e.g., language use, duration of residence)

This multi-layered analytical strategy allowed for a deeper understanding of inconsistencies across studies.

Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

Quality Considerations

To ensure methodological rigor, studies included in the review were evaluated based on:

- Clarity of research design
- Validity and reliability of measurement instruments
- Adequacy of sample size
- Transparency in reporting statistical findings

Studies demonstrating significant methodological limitations were critically interpreted during synthesis to avoid overgeneralization of findings.

Limitations of the Methodological Approach

Despite adopting a rigorous systematic approach, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The review is restricted to selected databases and English-language publications, which may introduce publication and language bias. Additionally, variability in measurement tools and study designs across included studies may limit direct comparability. The absence of meta-analytic statistical integration also restricts the ability to compute pooled effect sizes.

RESULTS

The present systematic review synthesized findings from 48 empirical studies examining the relationship between acculturation and intimate partner violence (IPV) across diverse cultural contexts. The findings reveal a complex, non-linear, and context-dependent relationship, with substantial variability across studies.

Overall Pattern of Findings

The analysis indicated that the relationship between acculturation and IPV is inconsistent, with studies reporting positive, negative, and non-significant associations. This variability reflects differences in conceptualization, measurement strategies, and sociocultural contexts. A majority of studies suggested that higher levels of acculturation are associated with increased IPV, particularly in contexts where cultural transition leads to shifts in gender roles, reduced family cohesion, and increased interpersonal conflict. However, a notable proportion of studies reported protective effects of acculturation, especially when individuals adopted integrative or bicultural orientations. Additionally, several studies found no significant relationship, indicating the influence of moderating variables such as discrimination, socioeconomic status, and social support.

Distribution of Findings Across Studies

To facilitate a clearer understanding of patterns across the literature, findings were categorized into three analytical groups:

- **Positive Association:** Acculturation associated with increased IPV
- **Negative Association:** Acculturation associated with decreased IPV
- **No Significant Relationship:** No clear association observed

Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

Table No. 1 Pattern-Based Analytical Distribution of Studies on Acculturation and IPV

Analytical Category	Interpretation of Relationship	Number of Studies (n = 48)	Key Observations Across Studies
Positive Relationship	Higher acculturation linked with increased IPV	22	Linked to acculturative stress, changing gender roles, reduced traditional support systems
Negative Relationship	Higher acculturation linked with reduced IPV	11	Associated with increased awareness, autonomy, access to support services
No Significant Relationship	No consistent association observed	15	Influenced by contextual variables such as discrimination, socioeconomic status, and cultural norms

As shown in Table 1, the largest proportion of studies (22 out of 48) reported a positive association between acculturation and IPV. These findings suggest that the process of cultural adaptation may introduce stressors and relational conflicts that elevate the risk of violence. Conversely, 11 studies identified a negative association, indicating that acculturation may function as a protective factor by enhancing access to resources, legal awareness, and social empowerment. The remaining 15 studies reported no significant relationship, reinforcing the argument that the acculturation–IPV link is mediated by multiple contextual and individual-level variables.

Influence of Measurement Approaches

A critical pattern observed across the reviewed studies was the impact of measurement heterogeneity. Studies employing unidimensional or proxy indicators of acculturation (e.g., language use, duration of residence) were more likely to produce inconsistent or weak findings. In contrast, studies utilizing multidimensional frameworks demonstrated more nuanced relationships, capturing both adaptive and maladaptive aspects of cultural adaptation.

Gender-Based Patterns

Gender-specific differences emerged as an important dimension of analysis. Several studies reported that female participants exhibited a higher likelihood of IPV victimization with increasing acculturation, although the strength of this relationship was generally small. In contrast, findings related to male participants indicated moderate associations, particularly in contexts involving shifts in traditional gender norms and power dynamics.

Cultural and Contextual Variations

The relationship between acculturation and IPV also varied across ethnic and cultural groups. Studies focusing on immigrant populations such as Hispanics, Asian Americans, and refugees demonstrated differing patterns, suggesting that cultural norms, migration experiences, and societal integration significantly influence outcomes. These variations highlight the importance of contextualizing acculturation processes within specific sociocultural environments.

Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the results indicate that:

- The relationship between acculturation and IPV is not uniform
- Positive associations are slightly more prevalent but not dominant

Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

- Contextual and methodological factors play a critical role
- Acculturation functions as both a risk and protective factor

DISCUSSION

The present systematic review sought to critically examine the relationship between acculturation and intimate partner violence (IPV) across diverse cultural contexts. The findings reveal that this relationship is multidimensional, non-linear, and contingent upon a complex interplay of psychological, cultural, and structural factors. The observed variability across studies underscores the limitations of reductionist approaches and highlights the need for theoretically informed and context-sensitive interpretations.

Reconceptualizing the Acculturation–IPV Relationship

A central insight emerging from this review is that acculturation cannot be treated as a unidimensional predictor of IPV. Instead, it operates as a dynamic and bidirectional process, influencing and being influenced by individual, relational, and sociocultural variables. The coexistence of positive, negative, and non-significant findings reflects the dual role of acculturation as both a risk and protective factor.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings can be meaningfully interpreted through Berry's acculturation framework (Berry, 1997, 2005). The differential outcomes observed across studies align with the four acculturation strategies—integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration, characterized by bicultural competence, appears to facilitate adaptive outcomes by promoting psychological flexibility and social connectedness. In contrast, marginalization and, in some cases, assimilation may exacerbate vulnerability to IPV by generating identity conflict, social isolation, and disruption of traditional support systems.

Acculturative Stress and Structural Tensions

One of the most consistent mechanisms underlying the positive association between acculturation and IPV is acculturative stress. The process of adapting to a new cultural environment often involves negotiating conflicting value systems, role expectations, and identity demands. Such tensions may manifest within intimate relationships, particularly when partners differ in their pace or mode of acculturation.

Importantly, acculturative stress does not operate in isolation; it is embedded within broader structural inequalities and social hierarchies. Experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and socioeconomic disadvantage can intensify psychological distress, thereby increasing the likelihood of maladaptive coping behaviors, including aggression and violence. This aligns with stress-process models, which posit that chronic exposure to social stressors undermines relational stability and mental health outcomes.

Gendered Dynamics and Power Reconfiguration

The findings of this review also highlight the gendered nature of the acculturation–IPV relationship. Acculturation often entails shifts in traditional gender roles and power dynamics, which may destabilize established relational patterns. For instance, increased autonomy and empowerment among women in the host culture may challenge patriarchal norms, potentially leading to conflict within intimate relationships.

Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

At the same time, men experiencing downward social mobility or loss of traditional authority may respond with compensatory behaviors aimed at reasserting control, thereby increasing the risk of IPV. These dynamics suggest that acculturation interacts with gender role ideology and identity processes, producing divergent outcomes across male and female populations. The moderate associations observed among men, compared to smaller effects among women, may reflect these asymmetrical power negotiations.

Measurement Heterogeneity and Conceptual Limitations

A major contribution of this review lies in identifying measurement heterogeneity as a critical source of inconsistency in findings. Many studies operationalize acculturation using proxy indicators such as language proficiency, length of residence, or nativity status. While these indicators offer convenience, they fail to capture the multifaceted nature of cultural adaptation, including values, identity, and behavioral practices.

In contrast, studies employing multidimensional frameworks provide a more nuanced understanding of how different components of acculturation interact with IPV. The reliance on unidimensional measures not only limits theoretical precision but also contributes to contradictory empirical outcomes. This highlights the need for standardized, culturally sensitive, and multidimensional assessment tools that can better capture the complexity of acculturation processes.

Contextual Moderators and Cultural Variability

The variability observed across cultural groups underscores the importance of contextual moderators in shaping the acculturation–IPV relationship. Cultural norms regarding family structure, gender roles, and conflict resolution significantly influence how acculturation impacts intimate relationships. Additionally, factors such as migration history, legal status, and community support systems play a crucial role in mediating outcomes.

For example, individuals embedded in supportive ethnic communities may experience a buffering effect against acculturative stress, whereas those facing social isolation or discrimination may be more vulnerable to IPV. These findings emphasize that acculturation must be understood within a broader ecological framework, incorporating individual, relational, community, and societal levels of analysis.

Toward a Social Impact Framework

From a social impact perspective, the findings of this review highlight the need to move beyond individual-level explanations and consider the structural and systemic dimensions of IPV in multicultural contexts. Acculturation is not merely a personal adaptation process but is deeply shaped by policies, institutional practices, and societal attitudes toward cultural diversity.

Interventions aimed at reducing IPV must therefore adopt a culturally informed and intersectional approach, addressing not only individual behaviors but also broader issues such as discrimination, economic inequality, and access to resources. Promoting bicultural competence, strengthening social support networks, and fostering inclusive environments are critical strategies for mitigating risk and enhancing well-being.

Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

Overall, the present findings challenge simplistic assumptions about the role of acculturation in IPV and instead point toward a contingent and context-dependent model. Acculturation does not uniformly increase or decrease IPV risk; rather, its effects are mediated by psychological processes, moderated by sociocultural contexts, and shaped by methodological approaches.

The study contributes to the literature by integrating diverse findings into a coherent framework that acknowledges complexity, variability, and intersectionality. It calls for a shift toward multidimensional, longitudinal, and theory-driven research that can better capture the evolving nature of cultural adaptation and its implications for interpersonal violence.

CONCLUSION

The present systematic review examined the relationship between acculturation and intimate partner violence (IPV) across diverse cultural contexts, synthesizing evidence from 48 empirical studies. The findings demonstrate that this relationship is complex, multidimensional, and context-dependent, with studies reporting positive, negative, and non-significant associations.

While a slightly greater proportion of studies indicate that higher levels of acculturation are associated with increased IPV risk, this pattern is neither consistent nor universal. Instead, the impact of acculturation appears to depend on how individuals navigate cultural adaptation, particularly in relation to identity, gender roles, and social support systems. The review highlights that acculturation functions simultaneously as a risk-enhancing and protective process, challenging linear interpretations.

Overall, the study underscores that understanding IPV in multicultural contexts requires moving beyond simplistic models and adopting a nuanced, theoretically grounded perspective that accounts for cultural, psychological, and structural dimensions of human behavior.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The findings reinforce the need to conceptualize acculturation as a multidimensional and bidirectional construct, rather than a linear continuum. The study supports the relevance of frameworks such as Berry's acculturation model while also highlighting the importance of integrating additional perspectives, including acculturative stress and ecological models. Future theoretical work should incorporate intersectional and context-sensitive approaches to better capture the complexity of cultural adaptation processes.

Research Implications

The review identifies several methodological gaps that warrant attention in future research:

- There is a critical need for standardized and multidimensional measures of acculturation that go beyond proxy indicators such as language or length of residence.
- Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to examine causal pathways between acculturation and IPV.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on moderating variables, including discrimination, socioeconomic status, gender role beliefs, and social support.
- Research should expand to include underrepresented cultural groups and non-Western contexts, enhancing the global applicability of findings.

Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

Practical and Clinical Implications

The findings have important implications for practitioners working in mental health, social work, and community interventions:

- IPV prevention programs should adopt culturally informed approaches, recognizing the role of acculturation-related stress and identity conflict.
- Interventions should aim to promote bicultural competence, enabling individuals to integrate elements of both heritage and host cultures.
- Mental health professionals should be trained to address cultural dynamics within intimate relationships, particularly in migrant and minority populations.

Policy Implications

At the policy level, the study highlights the need for inclusive and culturally responsive frameworks that address the structural determinants of IPV:

- Policies should focus on reducing systemic discrimination and social exclusion, which exacerbate acculturative stress.
- Strengthening access to support services, including legal, psychological, and community resources, is essential for vulnerable populations.
- Public health strategies should incorporate cultural competence and diversity-sensitive programming to effectively address IPV in multicultural societies.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the review is restricted to studies published in English and indexed in selected databases, which may introduce language and publication bias. Second, considerable methodological heterogeneity exists across the included studies, particularly in the measurement of acculturation and IPV, limiting direct comparability of findings. Third, the reliance on predominantly cross-sectional research designs restricts the ability to draw causal inferences regarding the relationship between acculturation and IPV. Fourth, although the review incorporates a substantial number of studies, it does not employ meta-analytic techniques, thereby limiting the ability to compute pooled effect sizes. Finally, the review does not systematically account for all potential moderating variables, such as migration status, legal context, and community-level influences, which may shape the observed relationships. Future research should address these limitations through more rigorous and comprehensive methodological approaches.

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Cultural Adaptation and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Social and Psychological Implications of Acculturation

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Conflict of Interest

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