

Adjustment of College Freshmen: the Importance of Gender and the Place of Residence

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Abstract

This study aims at finding out the effect of gender and place of residence on the adjustment of freshmen in the university. The researcher studied a sample of 117 freshmen in Tafila Technical University. The subjects come from different districts in Jordan. The measurement of college adjustment was applied. This scale consists of 36 items distributed on four dimensions. Means and standard deviations were used to analyze the data. The result showed that male students are more inclined to adjustment than females.

Keywords: Adjustment, Freshmen, Place of residence

1. Introduction

Late adolescence and emerging adulthood is increasingly recognized as an important developmental period (Arnett, 2000; Dornbusch, 2000; Sherrod, Haggerty, & Featherman, 1993). In this period, a growing number of youths enroll in postsecondary education (Pratt, 2000). In the last 30 years, increasing numbers of young adults are completing college. Freshmen beginning college usually have expectations about college life long before actually leaving home. Some students look forward to college and are eager to experience more freedom and adventure. Other individuals may be enthusiastic about college initially, but then discover that the actual experience falls short of their expectations. They don't feel happy, comfortable, or secure in their new environment. In addition, there are some students who know that leaving home will be difficult and, therefore, dread the thought of packing and going to college (Wade, Cairney, & Pevalin, 2002). No matter what the expectations are, nearly every student encounters challenging experiences or obstacles at the beginning of college that they didn't anticipate. Positive life changes produce stress, and certainly the changes involved in leaving home for college are demanding and can lead to varying emotions including sadness, loneliness and worry (Wintre, & Yaffe, 2000). These feelings are typical and part of the normal developmental transition to college. Entering college requires youths to face multiple transitions, including changes in their living arrangements, academic environments, and friendship networks, while adapting to greater independence and responsibility in their personal and academic lives. Although many successfully make this transition to college, others experience long-term emotional maladjustment and depression (Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000; Hammen, 1980; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). The National Center for Educational Statistics found that approximately one third of entering college students leave higher education without obtaining a degree, and most do so during their 1st year (Bradburn & Carroll, 2002). Thus, gaining a better understanding of what factors may promote positive adjustment in the 1st year of college is warranted (Pratt). Two constructs that have not often been considered but may potentially contribute to better adjustment in college students during their first year are a sense of university belonging (e.g., Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002) and the quality of their friendships (e.g., Fass & Tubman, 2002). Schools are recognized as important developmental contexts for academic and socioemotional development (see Eccles & Roeser, 2003) of younger students. Yet, researchers have rarely considered the school context when examining the adjustment of late adolescents as they attend college. Some researchers have suggested that the degree of affiliation that the student feels toward the university (i.e., university attachment) is linked to better social adjustment (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000), lower levels of depressive symptoms, higher academic motivation, and lower attrition rates (Beyers & Goossens, 2002).

Changes to Expect in the First Year of College

Increased personal freedom many students welcome the freedom to make their own decisions about what they want to do each day while in college (Sherrod, Haggerty, & Featherman, 1993). Others may find this level of freedom to be strangely unfamiliar or difficult. Freshmen who live on campus may maintain daily or frequent contact with family by way of phone or computer, but they make many more personal decisions and choices than they did in high school (Smerdon, 2002).

Increased responsibility

Along with an increase in personal freedom is greater responsibility for one's daily schedule. Freshmen must make choices about when and how to study, socialize with new acquaintances, become involved in activities, budget money, exercise, and make time to eat and sleep (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). They faced with the challenge of learning how to balance going to class, participating in activities, completing schoolwork on time, taking basic care of oneself and having fun as well. Students are faced, often for the first time, with the need to take more initiative to address responsibilities (e.g. scheduling classes, buying personal items, making appointments to take care of health needs, asking professors and staff for assistance or help) (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000).

Managing time

Freshmen typically experience changing demands on their time. Days are less routine and predictable (Anderman, & Freeman, 2004). Some freshmen feel they have virtually no time for themselves because of the time and energy needed to manage multiple obligations. College classes may seem difficult and draining, and/or may involve more hours of studying. However, other students may find the academic workload manageable, but then feel they have too much free time that isn't relaxing or comfortable (Armsden, & Greenberg, 1987).

Different surroundings and relationships at college freshmen have to adjust to new surroundings, and relate to unfamiliar people. Other students often seem very different from family, friends and acquaintances from home (Arnett, 2000). Freshmen who live away from home typically have to learn to relate to and negotiate conflicts with new roommates. There may be the hope that one's roommate will be a close friend, and it can be disappointing when this kind of relationship does not develop (Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996). Freshmen also experience new expectations from adults at college. For example, professors typically do not call if a class is missed, but will likely grade for attendance. In college, there is usually less interaction between parents and the school, and students are faced with the need to work out problems or concerns directly with professors, Residence Life, etc (Ashwin, 2003).

Changing relationships with family and friends from home

As students experience more freedom and responsibility in college, relationships with parents and other significant people change (Baumeister, & Leary, 1995). Freshmen, as well as their parents, may fear losing aspects of their relationship with each other. Frequent calls home from freshmen are common, especially during the first few months away at college. It may be very hard to say goodbye at the end of holiday or semester breaks. It may also be difficult to re-adjust to rules at home, such as curfews, chores or responsibilities for younger siblings (Beyers, & Goossens, 2002). It is important to point out that parents also need to adjust during this period. They are dealing with their child becoming more independent in some ways, but still needing them too (Brown, & Klute, 2003, Chipuer, 2001).

The National Center for Educational Statistics found that approximately one third of entering college students leave higher education without obtaining a degree, and most do so during their 1st year (Bradburn & Carroll, 2002). Nearly 30-40% of college students drop out without obtaining a college degree, and many of these students never return to college to complete degrees (Consolvo, 2002). Individuals who are able to succeed at handling their independence and newfound freedoms are able to make new relationships while maintaining old relationships (Holmbeck & Leake, 1999). Thus, gaining a better understanding of what factors may promote positive adjustment in the 1st year of college is warranted (Pratt). Two constructs that have not often been considered but may potentially contribute to better adjustment in college students during their freshman year are a sense of university belonging (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002) and the quality of their friendships (Fass & Tubman, 2002). Schools are recognized as important developmental contexts for academic and socio emotional development (see Eccles & Roeser, 2003) of younger students. Yet, researchers have rarely considered the school context when examining the adjustment of late adolescents as they attend college. Some researchers have suggested that the degree of affiliation that the student feels toward the university (i.e., university attachment) is linked to better social adjustment (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000), lower levels of depressive symptoms, higher academic motivation, and lower attrition rates (Beyers & Goossens, 2002). Previous studies have suggested that relationships and making meaningful connections are important for

students to adjust to the college environment. Students who have been able to establish bonds in their new environment adjusted better than students who were isolated and not as successful in establishing new friendships and relationships. The theory of attachment has been used to explain the importance of emotional bonds and healthy adjustment. Healthy individuals tend to have secure attachments to parents, guardians, and significant others in their lives. Individuals with secure attachments tend to have an easier time transitioning to college than individuals who do not have secure attachments (Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, 1995). Relationships with parents may change when students go to college, which can be a difficult transition for all involved, and cause additional stress and pressure on the students as they move through the developmental process and become adults (Mudore, 1999). The process of adjustment can be frustrating and overwhelming for many students, leading to emotional maladjustment and depression (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000), which may, in turn, negatively effect college performance.

High levels of social support buffer individuals from stress (Robbins, Lese, & Herrick, 1993). Attachment theory has emphasized the importance of healthy emotional bonds, and students who are able to create and maintain healthy bonds with others tend to have an easier time adjusting to college (Rice et al., 1995). Social adjustment may be just as important as academic adjustment, according to Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) who studied 155 freshmen and found that "personal adjustment and integration into the social fabric of campus life play a role at least as important as academic factors in student retention".

One way of assisting students in establishing connections is to help them become involved in campus life. Students' social adjustments to the college environment have been linked to their involvement in the university (Tafila) and have appeared to be a major factor in a student's overall adjustment (Adams, Ryan, & Keating, 2000). Numerous studies conducted in the 1990s indicated that students need continued support to become involved in activities and that this improves their overall adjustment (Dinger, 1999). The transition to college is difficult for many students and students need support and encouragement to join various organizations and participate in activities to feel like they are a part of the university community (Consolvo, 2002). Activities serve not only as a coping mechanism, but also have assisted students in making new friends and finding their place in the university community. Thus it is only natural that the residence halls would be ideal places to have activities for freshmen and help create a sense of connection to the university.

This study aims to identify the level of adaptation to college of freshmen students at Tafila Technical University terms of psychological adjustment, academic, social, achievement of objectives. In addition, to identifying the difference of higher levels of adjustment between males and females, the study focused on the identification of the impact of place of residence of students at the university to adapt to them.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

All participants (n = 117) in this study were first year traditional age freshmen at Tafila Technical University. They were all between the ages of 18 and 20. See Table 1 for the gender of participants and the place of residence of the participants. There were slightly more male participants than female participants.

The university has over 3000 students of which over 1174 are freshmen. The sample consisted of (70) students living out of Tafila, and (47) students living in Tafila. Early in the second semester of college, students were administered the CAS (College Adjustment Scale) was used to determine if there were significant differences between the groups based on gender and place of residence.

2.2 Instrument

Barthelemy and Fine created the College Adjustment Scale in (1995) and published by College Student Journal. The instrument consists of 36 items and fourth scales. These scales measure interpersonal problems, academic problems, social problems, and future goals. The internal consistency of reliability for the scales ranges from .80 to .92 indicating a high degree of reliability. The scores are given in both percentages and T-scores. A T-score of 70 or above is considered significant on an individual scale. Lower scores indicate a higher level of adjustment to the college environment.

2.3 Procedure

Survey method was chosen for data collection, were distributed to identify the study a random sample of university students to know the level of adaptation to university they have.

2.4 Data Analysis

SPSS for Windows was used for descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviation, range) and inferential statistics (reliability, analysis of variance). Independent sample T-tests were used to determine if there were significant differences in college adjustment and gender. T-test on the college adjustment scale was calculated to determine if there were significant differences in adjustment and place of residence.

3. Results

Table (1) shows the means and standard deviations for the total scale, the average performance of students (0.49) This means that the level of adaptation to their low. To learn Mean performance on the sub-items of the scale look at the Table (2).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table (2) describes the means and standard deviations for the sub items of college adjustment scale. Data indicated that the variables are less influential in adapting to university students is the item where academic average (0,87). Then the item achieve the objectives by the amount of the average is (0,54) then the item emotional averaging (0,49) but for the provision of social averaged (0,27) and this indicates that more factors influence in the adjustment of students and due to the different place of residence of students.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Table (3) describes the averages and standard deviations of the scores of respondents on college adjustment scale, disaggregated by gender and place of residence for them.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Table(4)describes the differences between gender and sub-items to the measure of university adjustment, it was found that males are more adaptive than females on the item of social adjustment, where there are significant differences on the item of social adjustment The ratio Sig. (2-tailed.029), mean 2.13. While there are no statistically significant differences between gender and the other, three sub-items.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Table (5) shows the averages and standard deviations for the sample of male and female sub-items of the scale: the academic adjustment, achieve goals, psychological adjustment, and social adjustment.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

To learn about the differences between the place of residence of students and the level of adjustment with the terms of the scale, T-test is used. Results of table No (6) to the existence of statistically significant differences between place of residence and level of adaptation to have are as follows: $p=.024$, $.000$, $.019$, and $.024$.

INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

To know significant differences between place of residence and level of adaptation was extracted averages, it was found that the averages were higher among students who live inside the Tafila was averages are as follows: 2.24, 2.76, 2.44, and 2.76. The reason for this is that students who live in Tafila did not differ in their environment, and they live with their families, which contributes to the high levels of academic adjustment, such adjustment and the ability to achieve their goals, and the ability to adapt to the emotional, social and establish friendships and good social relationships. See table (7).

INSERT TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

4. Discussion

This study examined the effect of place of residence of the new students adapt to university level have, in addition to knowledge of the differences between males and females in the level of adjustment for them. Results of the study indicated there are significant differences between males and females in the level of adaptation of university and was high in male-item social adjustment, while no differences sealed on other items on the scale of adjustment, due to the female tend to use relationships and socialization experiences in college to adjust more than their male counterparts (Kenny & Rice, 1995). Females have traditionally been thought of as being more social and having a more difficult time adjusting to the college environment and making social connections than their male counterparts and numerous studies have found high levels of differences in the social adjustment of males and female (Cook, 1995). However, the differences in the adjustment levels for the groups in this study were not as high as other studies have reported. This may be due to several factors such as the changing roles of women in society, as well as the fact that more opportunities for leadership are now available for women than

ever before. What is unclear is the amount of impact gender had on adjustment. Freshmen are in a new environment where they may not know anyone and programs that foster social relationships and connections can assist students in not feeling lonely, depressed and can alleviate fears. McWhiter (1997), in his study of 625 college students, found that female students are more likely to experience loneliness and social isolation than their male peers. Pittman (2008), in his study of 79 college students, found that female students are more social isolation than their male. There are several models of college student development. One widely recognized and utilized model in the student services field is the Dakota Model (Lavelle & O'Ryan, 2001). The Dakota Model of College Student Development was developed based on factor analysis of 738 students' responses to various items such as career beliefs and social beliefs. Students who are high in the social factor have an excellent understanding of social relationships and social skills. These students tend to have an easier time making friends and becoming involved in college life. In recent years the focus has been on creating small group environments that promote opportunities for personal growth and development in both academic and social spheres. In a study of 102 freshmen at a large Midwestern university Lavelle and O'Ryan (2001) found that smaller groups promote intimacy and more complete development of the students. These small groups created a family type of environment that also encouraged students' involvement and increased their ability to adjust to college in the social realm. This research supports Tinto's (1975) idea that cooperative learning is important in assisting students to adjust to the college setting (Boyle, 1989). College students undergo numerous developmental changes. Developmental systems models stress assisting students to cope with the process of change should be the focus of college programs. The research with college students suggests that becoming individual and maintaining relationships is the main overall focus of the transition into adulthood (Lerner, Lerner, Stefanis, & Apfel, 2001). Moreover, for the impact of place of residence at the level of adaptation Social to that there is no change to the original place of residence and place of the university of study, did not suffer these students transition and change the housing or to move away from their families. So do not face the difficulties and problems with others within the university or the feeling of alienation. In addition, for the new students who live outside the Tafila cannot adapt to the new university environment. Freshmen need specific opportunities to integrate into college life in order for the university to increase the retention rates and assist students in obtaining success in college. The university environment can provide varied and exciting activities for new students. Activities having a focus of female-interest, male-interest, and more frequently interest for all students might present a connection, a "home" for new students especially those who might be shy or reticent to mix with people whom they do not know. On campus living environments, can be tailored to meet the needs of several groups, offering comfort and support.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on knowledge of the impact of gender, place of residence of the new students at the level of academic and social adjustment, emotional and achieves the goals they have within the new university environment. Results of the study indicated that new students coming from other cities are not able to adapt to university because of the difference, the built environment to the location of the university, in addition to the sense of alienation from family and friends. In addition, the location of the university is far away from the capital and other districts, more ever the university is comparatively small in both its space and the number of students. It lacks student services and entertainment. This encourages students to move to other universities, or to leave the university and stop the study. The study also revealed that males can adjust them selves more than females because they have the ability to have social relations with the others in this area more than the females who have group residences under the supervision and regulations of the university, this limits their interaction with the others and forming healthy social networks.

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Table 1. The means and standard deviations for the grades of the sample in the total scores of college adjustment scale.

N	Mean	Std. Deviation
117	.49	7.20

Table 2. The means and standard deviations for the sub items of college adjustment scale Sub items of college adjustment scale

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic	117	.87	5.40
Objective	117	.54	3.82
Emotion	117	.51	3.36
Social	117	.37	2.46

Table 3. The means and standard deviations for the grades of the people in the sample on the college adjustment scale.

Place of residence Gender	Male	Female	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
In tafila	30	17	47	9.1	1.1
Out tafila	39	31	70	8.4	1.4

Table 4. Independent sample T-Test to compare gender and sub items of college adjustment scale

t-test for Equality of Means			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Academic	-1.930	115	.056
Objective	.269	115	.789
Emotion	1.202	115	.232
Social	-2.216	115	.029

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.05$

Table 5. The means and standard deviations for the gender in the sub items of college adjustment scale

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic	Male	69	2.11	.41
	Female	48	2.01	.32
Objective	Male	69	2.64	.52
	Female	48	2.43	.41
Emotion	Male	69	2.33	.43
	Female	48	2.12	.40
Social	Male	69	2.13	.41
	Female	48	2.01	.40

Table 6. Independent sample T-Test to compare place of residence and sub items of college adjustment scale

t-test for Equality of Means			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Academic	2.284	115	.024
Objective	4.226	115	.000
Emotion	2.373	115	.019
Social	2.284	115	.024

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.05$

Table 7. The means and standard deviations for the place of residence in the sub items of college adjustment scale

	Place of residence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic	In Tafila	47	2.24	.19
	Out Tafila	70	2.03	.43
Objective	In Tafila	47	2.76	.39
	Out Tafila	70	2.30	.48
Emotion	In Tafila	47	2.44	.48
	Out Tafila	70	2.23	.36
Social	In Tafila	47	2.76	.39
	Out Tafila	70	2.24	.36