

A Phenomenological Study of Help Seeking Behaviours and Coping Strategies of International Students of Non-European Backgrounds

Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the subjective experience of what are the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of International Students from non-European backgrounds. Eighteen students from eleven non-European countries on three sites were interviewed. Using a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to capture the knowledge of the experiential experts, i.e., the students themselves, with the hope that it can be used to enhance provision for this client group in university counselling services. The study was motivated by the distinct under-use and under-representation of such students using traditional counselling services. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed to address the research questions from a first-person-perspective, helping to shed light on the sense making of International Students of non-European backgrounds, when confronted with challenge. Themes such as culture shock, culture, family, spirituality/religion, identity, sense of justice, resistance, perceived barriers and reflections on how to improve transition were categorised, with *impact of transition*, *living with challenge – coping*, *living with challenge – seeking help*; *shifting identities* and *enhancing cultural engagement* as super-ordinate themes emerging. The study revealed that patterns of help-seeking typically followed preferential relationships, called here *hierarchy of helping*. The findings are discussed with regard to implications for individual practice and staff training in transcultural work to enhance cultural engagement in educational settings.