Building integration indices of immigrants in Greece: Definition, measurement and relations with sociodemographic factors

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Abstract

Despite the increasing numbers of immigrants in Greece (about 10% of the population), there has been no systematic definition and measurement of concrete integration indices. To fill this gap, a multidisciplinary research team collected empirical data from a representative sample of 1,843 immigrants across the country. This paper presents indices referring to acculturation (i.e., ethnic orientation, national orientation), psychological adaptation (i.e., subjective well-being, psychological symptoms) and sociocultural adaptation (i.e., social competence, supportive networks). These indices were examined for the whole sample as well as in relation to demographic variables (e.g., ethnic origin, length of stay in the host country). The relationships of acculturation and adaptation with other domains of integration were explored, such as general health, work status and social-political participation. The theoretical and empirical documentation of these indices constitutes a valuable tool for intervention planning and policy making; it also serves as a point of reference for future research.

Acknowledgment

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Ministry of Interior, Decentralization & E-government

European Union

European Integration Fund for the Third Country Nationals

Action 2.1-08: Definition of Indices for Evaluating Integration Policies for Third Country Nationals in the Greek Society.
Budget: 629,664 euros. **Funding:** EU 75%; National resources 25%

Definition of indices for evaluating immigration policies in the Greek society

Partners

- National and Kadopistrian University of Athens
- Hellenic Statistical Authority
- Hellenic Migration Policy Institute
- International Migration Organization

Targeted areas of integration

- Labor market
- Housing and living conditions
- Health and social services
- Education
- Political participation
- Acculturation and psychosocial adaptation

Acculturation and adaptation

- **Acculturation:** the phenomena which result when groups of individuals from different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups (Redfield et al., 1936).

- **Adaptation:** the short- and long-term changes (affective, behavioral and cognitive) that derive from the acculturative processes. These are usually summarized in two domains, i.e., sociocultural and psychological (Berry, 1997, 2006).

- The study of acculturative processes is necessary in order to account for fragmented and inconsistent findings in the study of immigration (e.g., Koneru et al., 2007).

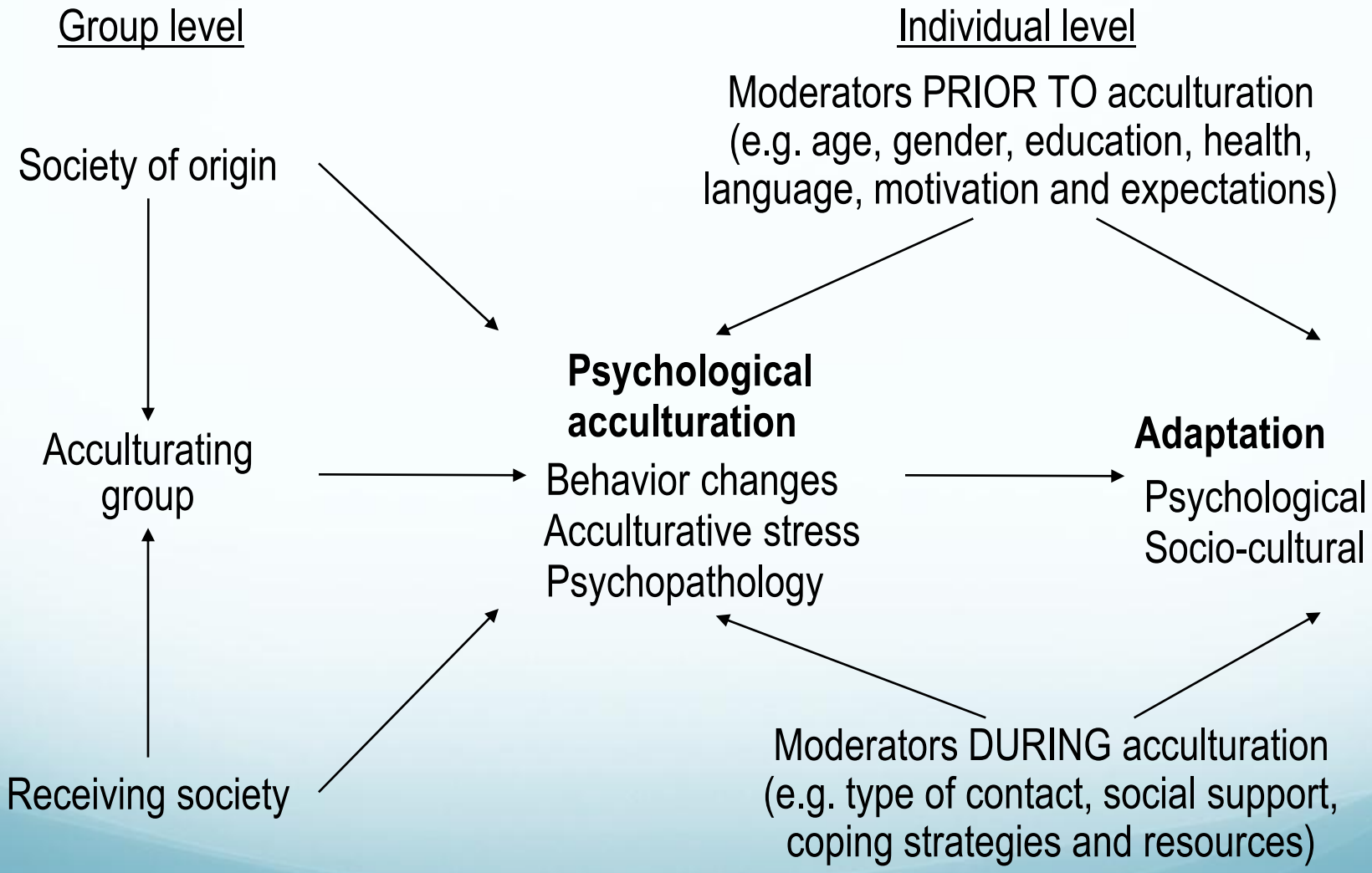
Three perspectives in studying acculturation (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001)

- **The stress and coping approach:** Considers cross-cultural transition as a series of stress-provoking life events that draw on adjustive resources and require coping responses.

- **The culture learning approach:** Views cultural competence as a process of learning the specific behavioral and social skills that are required to negotiate the new cultural milieu.

- **The social identification theories approach:** Draws on the literature of cultural identity and intergroup relations. Also, points to the importance of attitudes, values, expectations and attributions in intercultural encounters.

Acculturation framework (Berry, 1997, 2006)



The case of immigration in Greece

The case of immigration in Greece

- Transition from the emigration to immigration experience since the early ’90s.
- The number of immigrants quintupled within 10 years (1991-2001). Proportion of immigrants estimated to excel 9% or 1,000,000 (non-documented immigrants not included).
- Immigrants reside in areas all over the country. They usually occupy positions of low status (e.g., construction workers).
- About 60% of native Greeks reported that immigration is harmful (Public Issue, 2010). Greece has the second most negative profile in the EU in evaluating immigration (Eurobarometer, 2008).
- Recently (2010) legalization and citizenship has become easier, esp. for second generation immigrants. However, there are no cohesive, long-term, evidence-based policies.

Building acculturation and adaptation indices: Some methodological and research notes

- Selecting target groups: temporary *vs*. long-term immigrants, refugees, non-documented immigrants…
- Reference group: other immigrants, natives
- Self-reports *vs*. objective measures
- Use of long *vs*. short scales
- Reliability, validity and comparability of indices
- Building upon already existing databases (e.g., 3-month labor market survey of EL.STAT.)
- Lack of official integration indices of psychological interest.

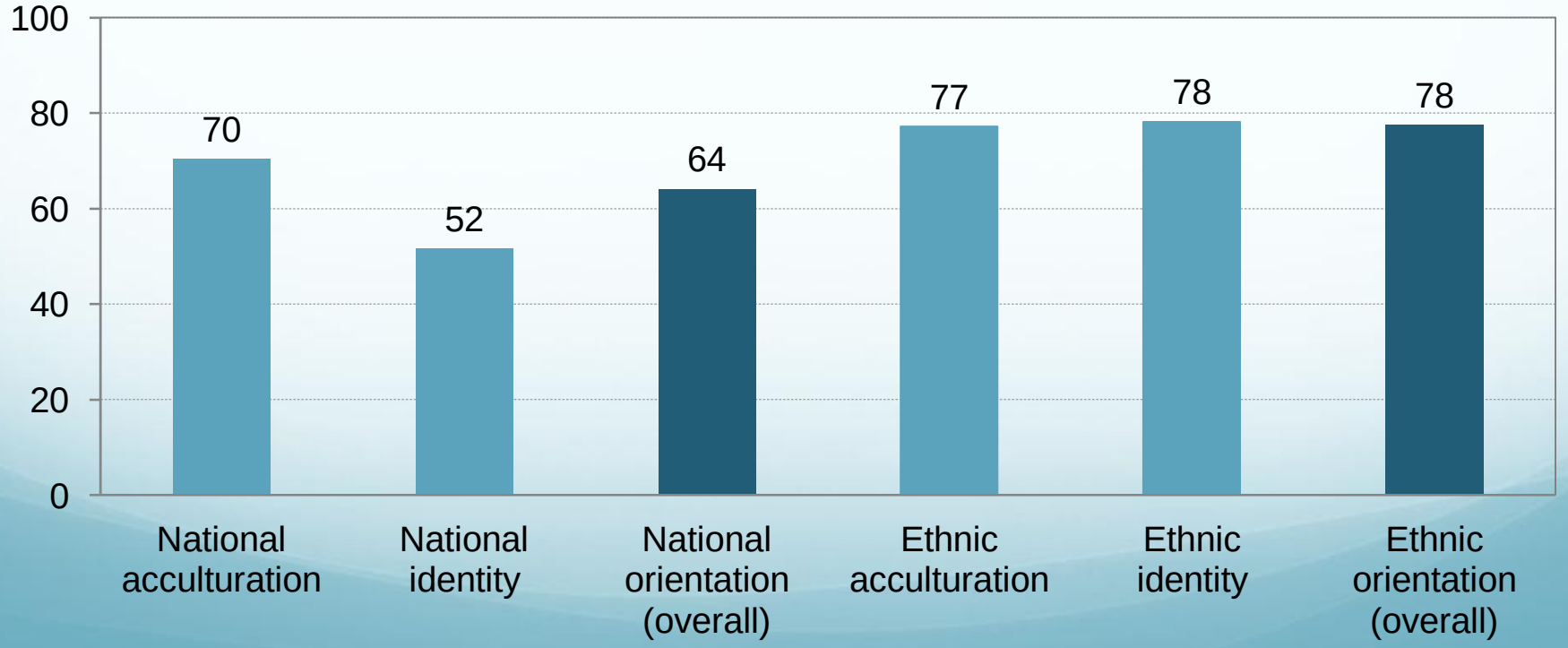
Participants

- Stratified sampling was used in order to obtain a representative data set in terms of immigrant population characteristics as well as their distribution across the host country, as it appears in EL.STAT records.

Country of origin	N	Age (mean)	Women (%)	Educ. (9/pts)	Length of Stay (yrs)	Urban (%)
Albania	1,124	36.2	46.7	4.5	12.6	37.9
E.U. new members	265	38.8	60.6	4.8	9.6	38.1
East Europe (non-E.U.)	225	39.8	64.4	5.5	10.7	61.3
Asia, Africa, S.America	229	34.2	17.5	3.9	8.6	70.3
Total	**1,843**	**36.8**	**47.3**	**4.6**	**11.4**	**44.8**

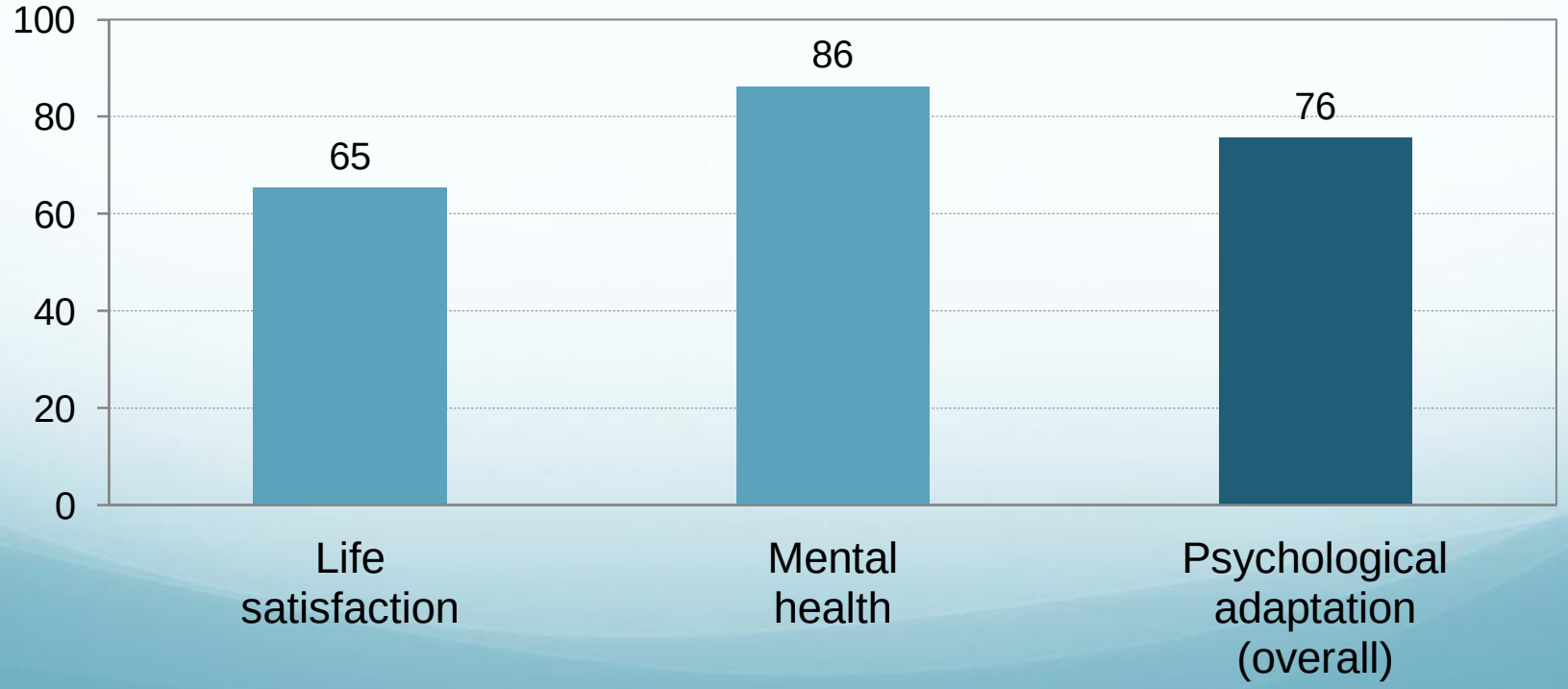
Measures: Acculturation orientation

- **National (Greek) orientation** (3 items, α=.76). Relations with members of the host society, preference over the Greek lifestyle and identity.
- **Ethnic orientation** (3 items, α=.71). Relations with ingroup members, maintenance of own cultural traditions and identity.



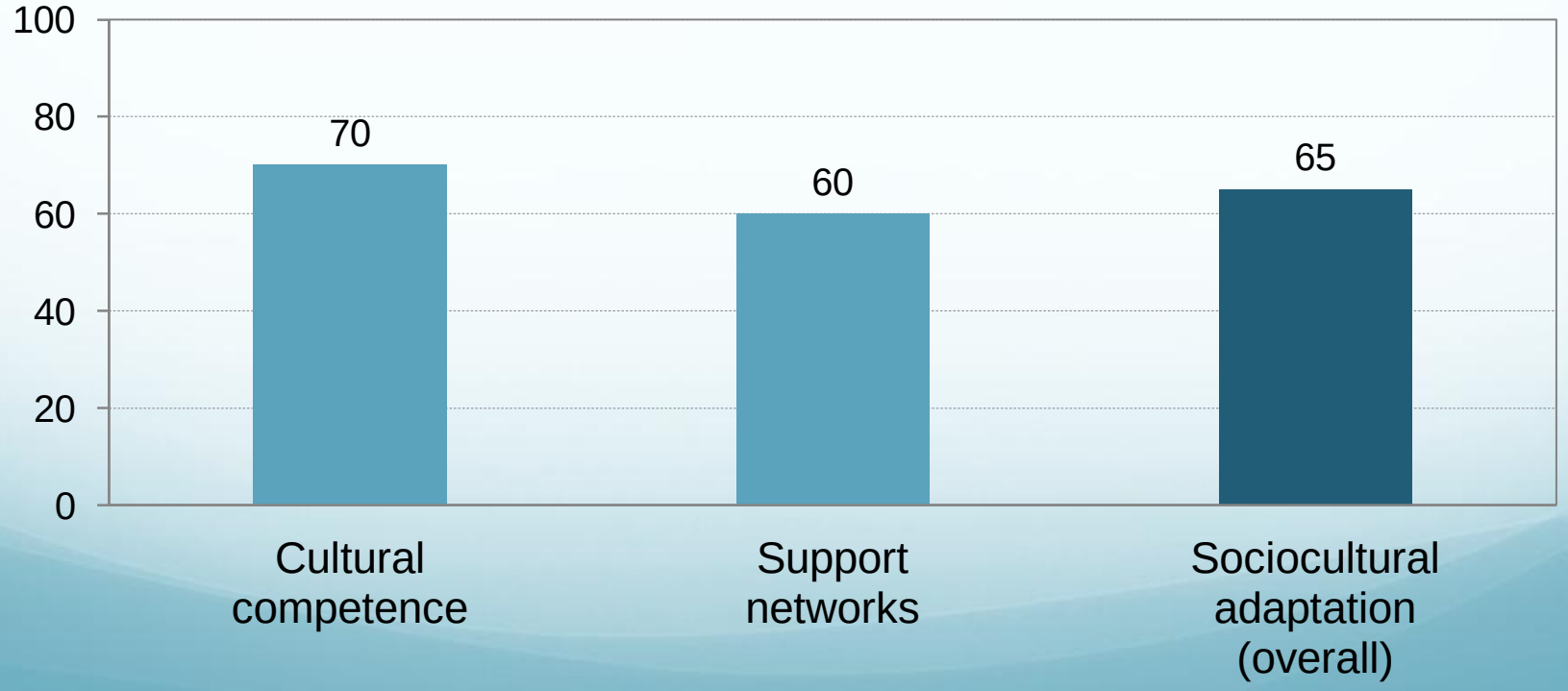
Measures: Psychological adaptation

- **Life satisfaction** (3 items, α=.82). Perceived happiness, satisfaction with life, fulfilled expectations.
- **Mental health** (7 items, KR20=.70). Absence of psychological symptoms, e.g., headaches, insomnia, anxiety, weakness *(reversed coding)*.



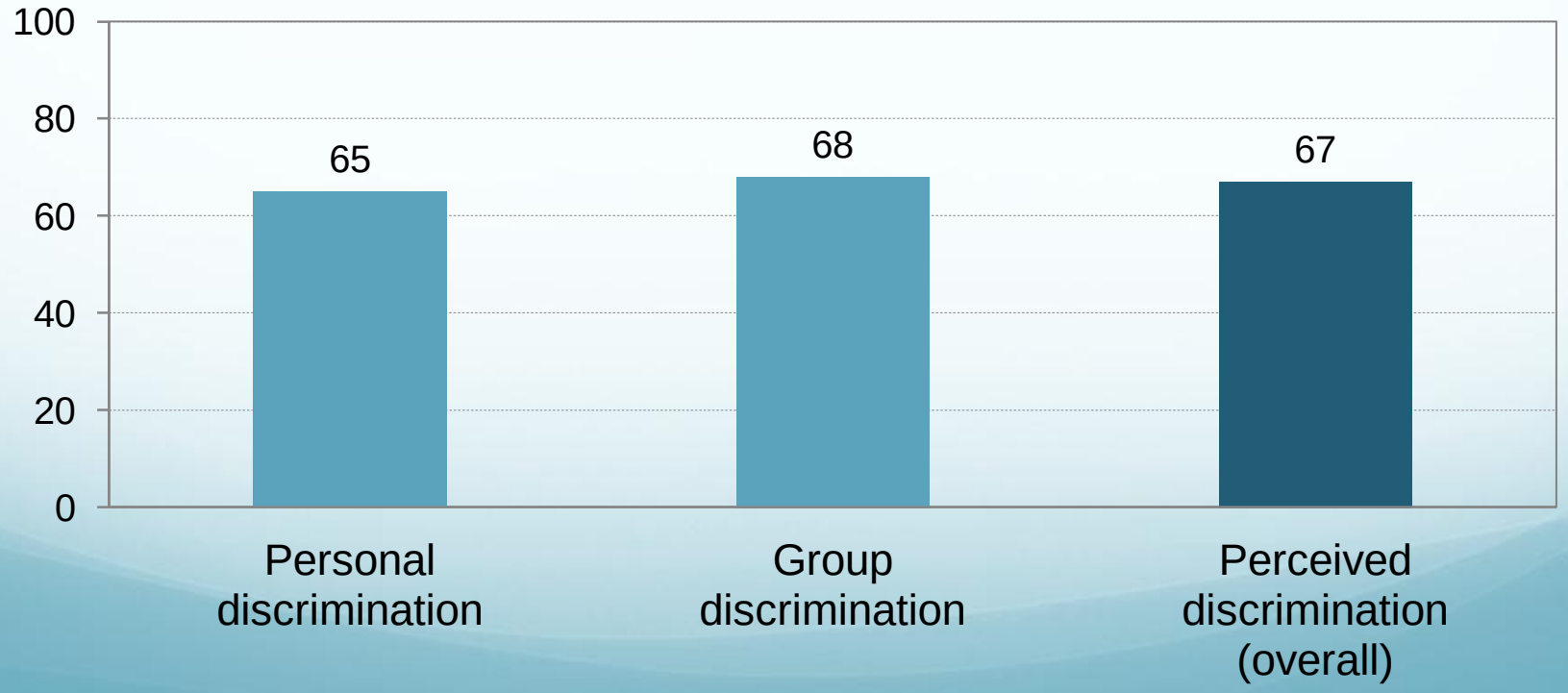
Measures: Sociocultural adaptation

- **Cultural competence** (6 items, α=.87). Carrying out effectively everyday tasks and interactions, e.g., shopping, use of public transport, exchange with state authorities, etc.
- **Support networks** (6 items, α=.68). Use of social services or informal resources (e.g., friends and neighbors) when in need.



Measures: Perceived discrimination

- **Personal discrimination** (2 items, α=.87). Threat is perceived to be addressed against the self *(reversed coding)*.
- **Group discrimination** (2 items, α=.87). Undermining of identity is attributed to ethnic group membership *(reversed coding)*.



Findings

- The descriptive statistics presented so far confirm the internal consistency of the indices and can serve as a baseline for future research.
- Further information relevant to the validity and interpretability of the scales will be explored by studying:
  - ✓ the correlation patterns between acculturation and domains of adaptation,
  - ✓ the variation of acculturation and adaptation as a function of sociodemographic factors, and
  - ✓ the complex relationships of acculturation and adaptation with other important, non-psychological integration indices of immigrants.

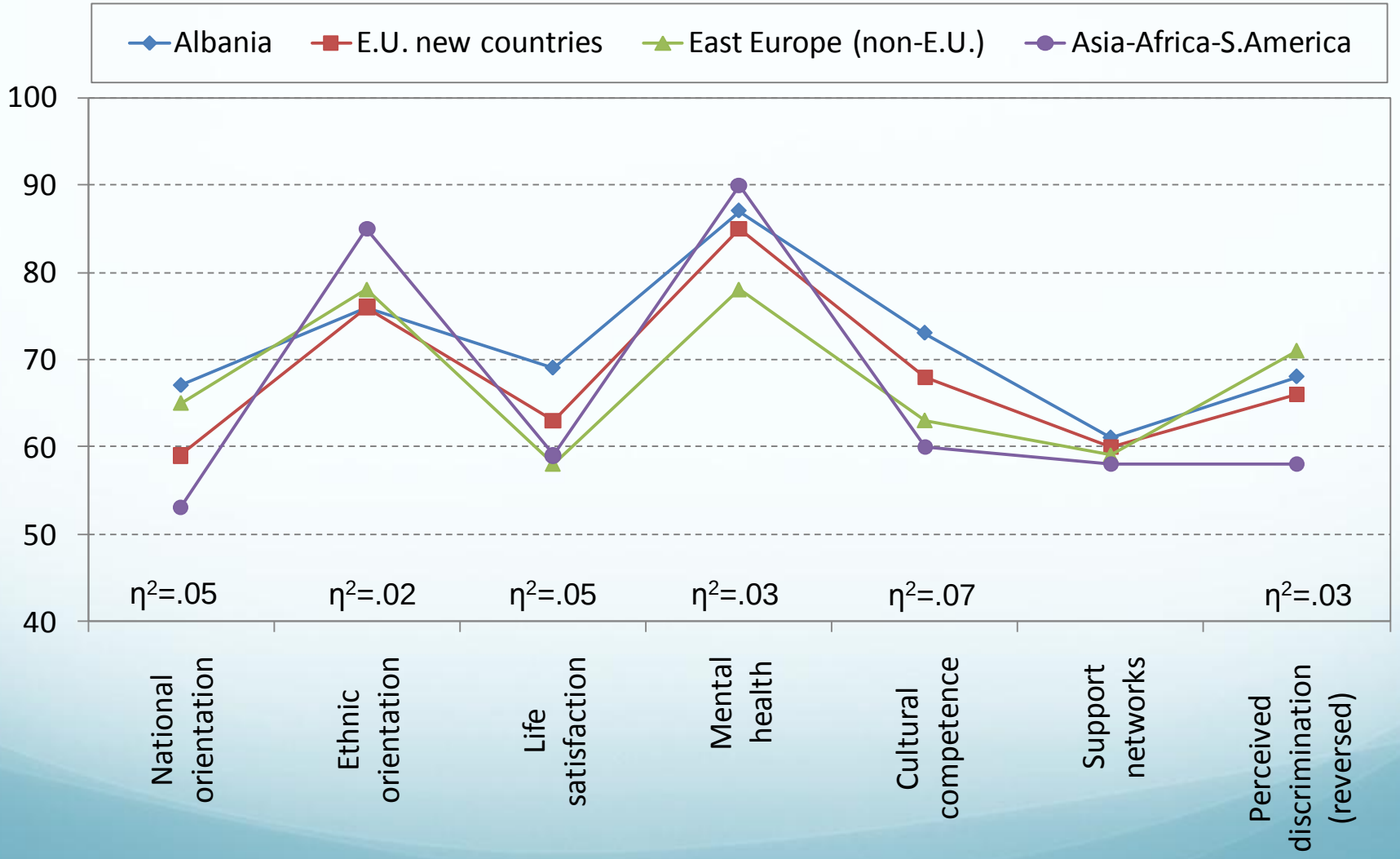
Links between acculturation and adaptation

- **National orientation** was related to increased **life satisfaction** (r=.39, p<.001), higher **cultural competence** (r=.50, p<.001), and lower level of **perceived discrimination** (r=-.22, p<.001).
- **Ethnic orientation** had a positive relationship with **perceived discrimination** (r=.15, p<.001); apart from this weak finding, it did not co-vary with any adaptation index.
- The relationship between **national** and **ethnic orientation** was negative, but of trivial magnitude (r=-.10, p<.001).
- Significant coefficients were found between domains of adaptation towards expected direction. Moreover, links of **perceived discrimination** with adaptation indices emerged, though of low to moderate size.

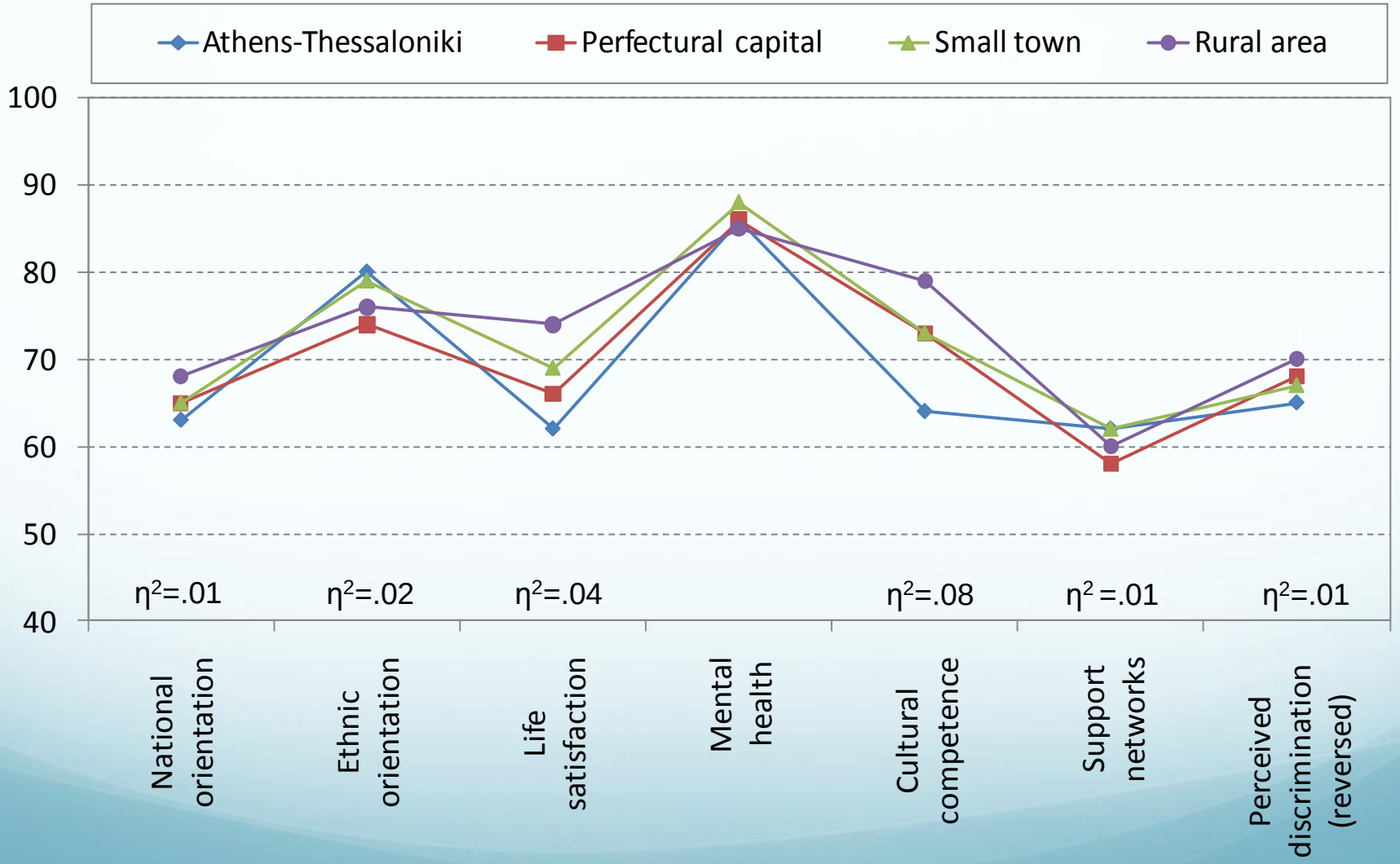
Acculturation and adaptation as a function of sociodemographic factors

- A series of multivariate ANOVAs tested for the effect of socio-demographic factors on acculturation and adaptation indices. These factors included country of origin, level of urbanization in the area of residence, length of stay in the host country, education level and sex.
- Because of the large sample, only effect sizes (not the actual significance levels) will be presented.
- It should be noted that these analyses do not reveal causal relationships and require caution in their interpretation since demographic variables are difficult to disentangle in many occasions.

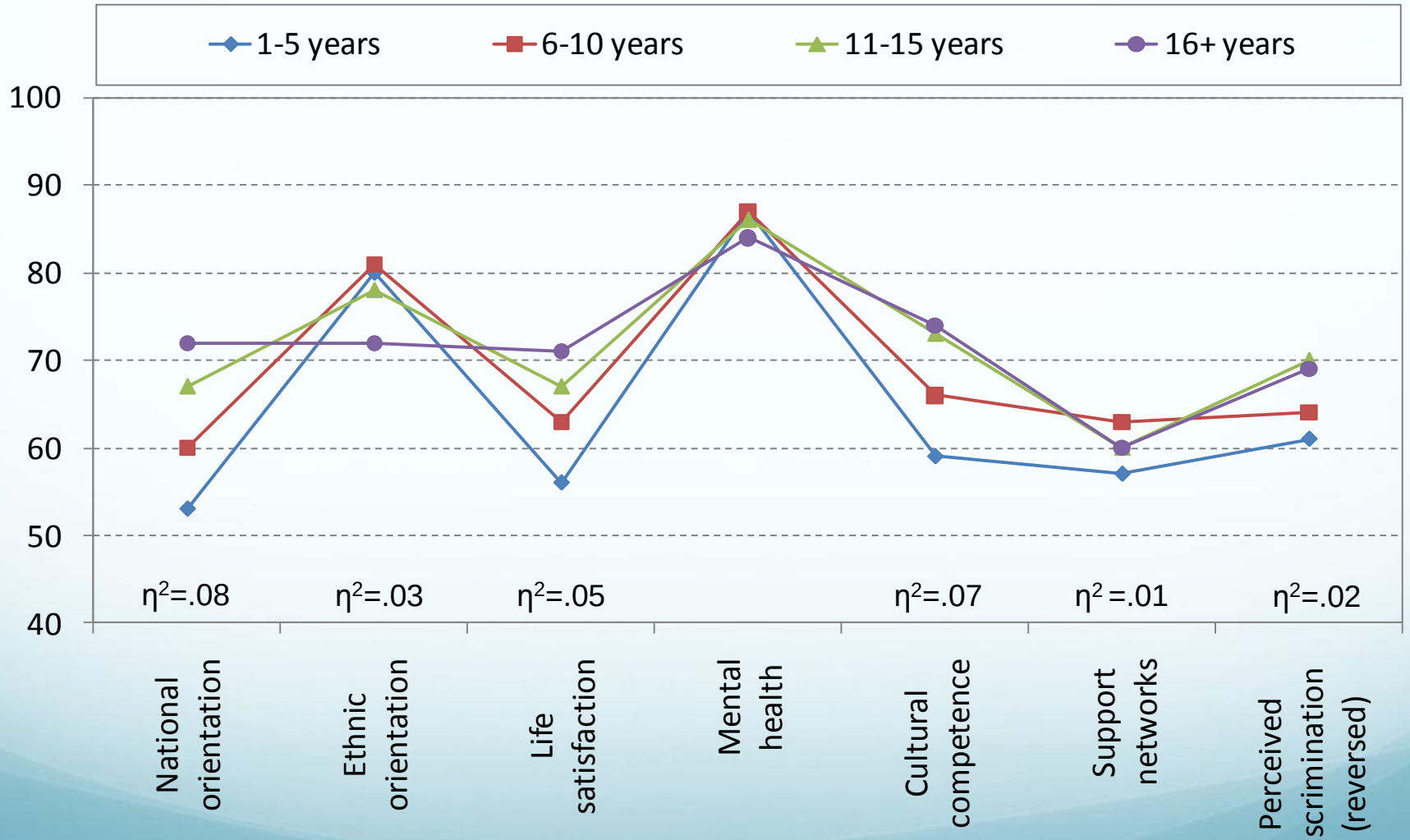
Acculturation and adaptation indices of immigrants as a function of country of origin



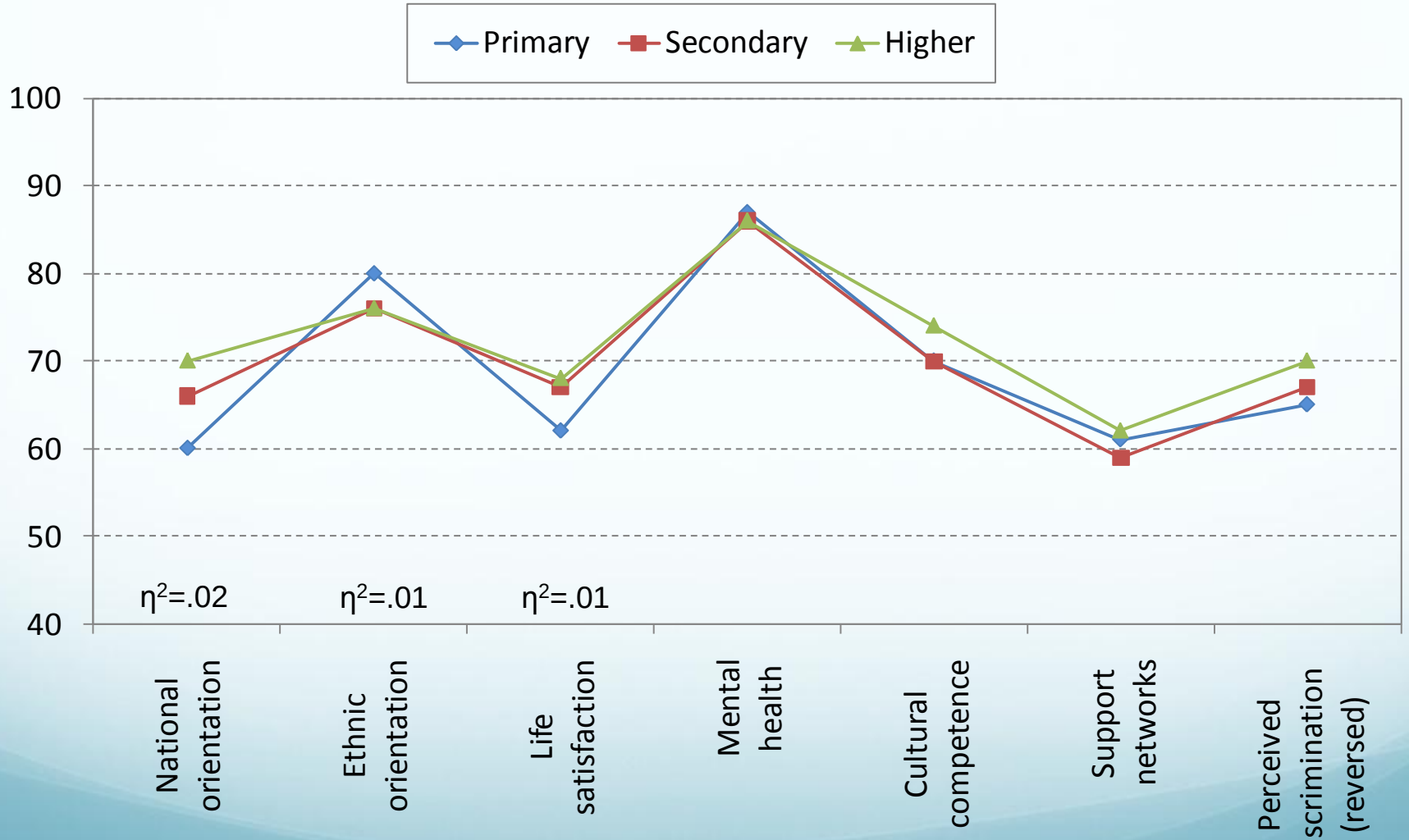
Acculturation and adaptation indices of immigrants as a function of urbanization level



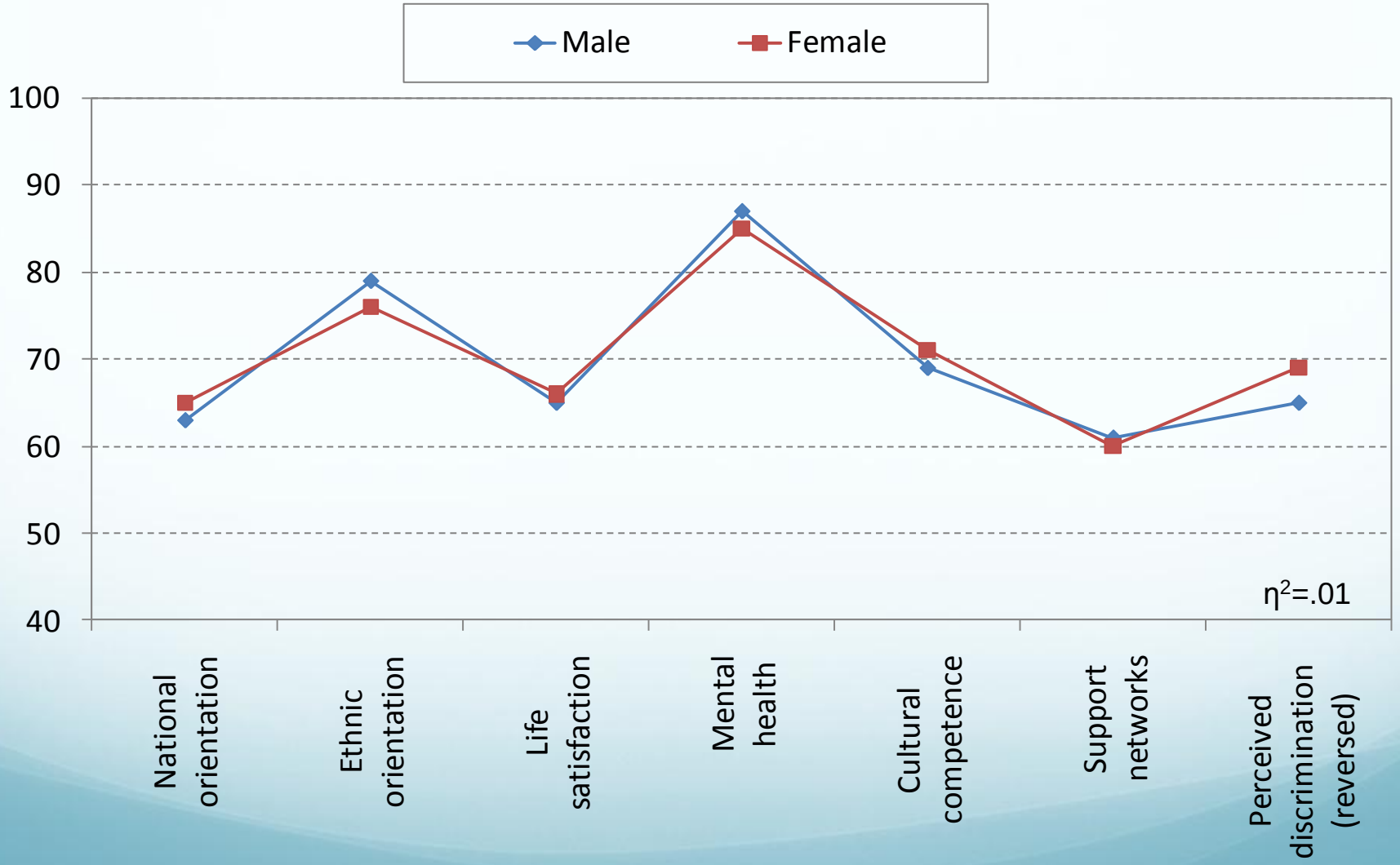
Acculturation and adaptation indices of immigrants as a function of length of stay



Acculturation and adaptation indices of immigrants as a function of education level



Acculturation and adaptation indices of immigrants as a function of sex



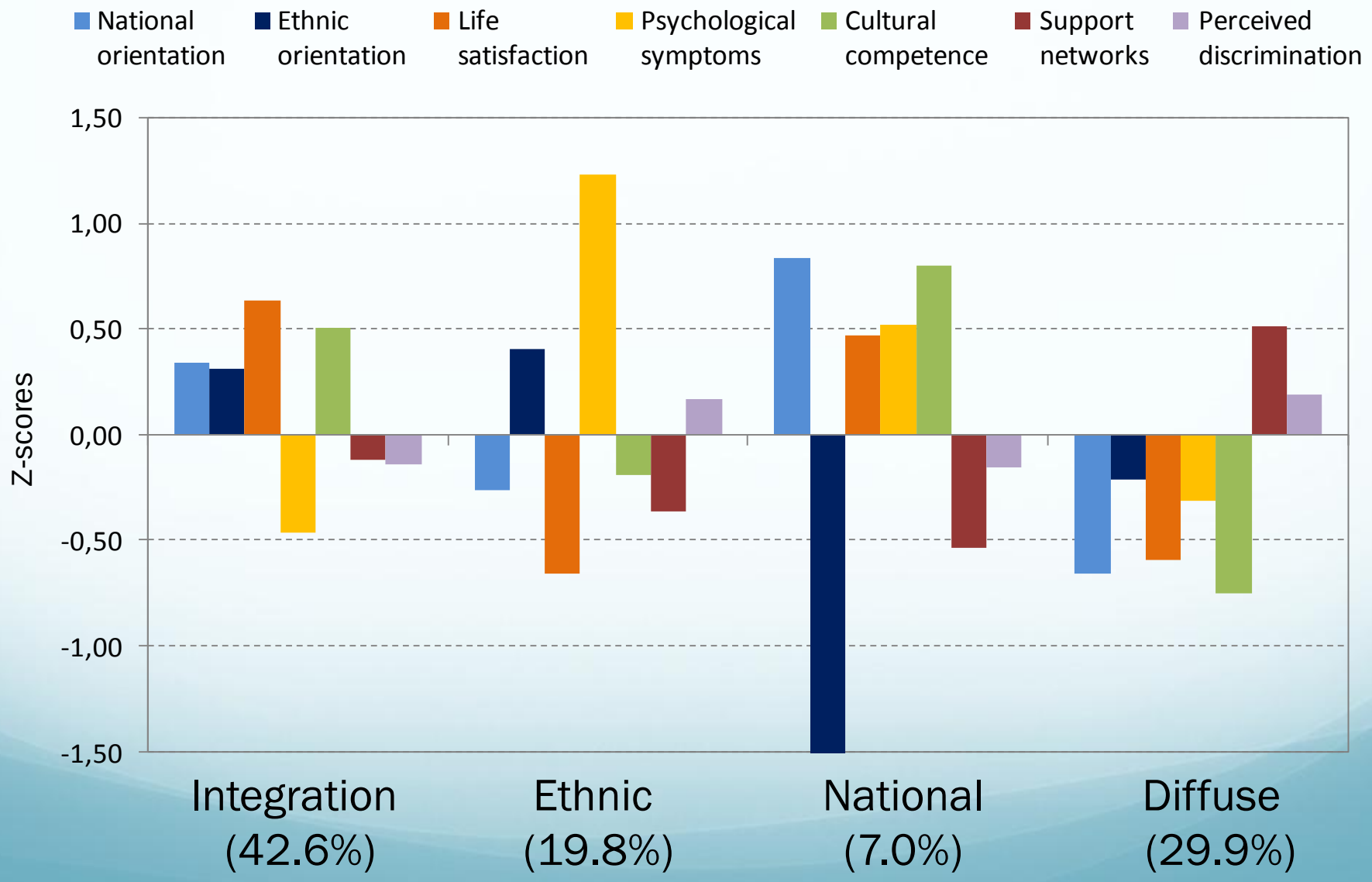
Acculturation and adaptation as a function of sociodemographic factors: summary

- Long-term immigrants, Albanians, and those residing in rural areas (*vs*. newcomers, immigrants from Africa, Asia or South America, and those who live in big cities) revealed a more positive pattern of acculturation and adaptation, esp. in what concerns national orientation, life satisfaction and cultural competence.
- Education level seemed to relate more with acculturation, rather than with adaptation.
- Sex had the weakest effect on acculturation and adaptation, compared to other demographic variables.

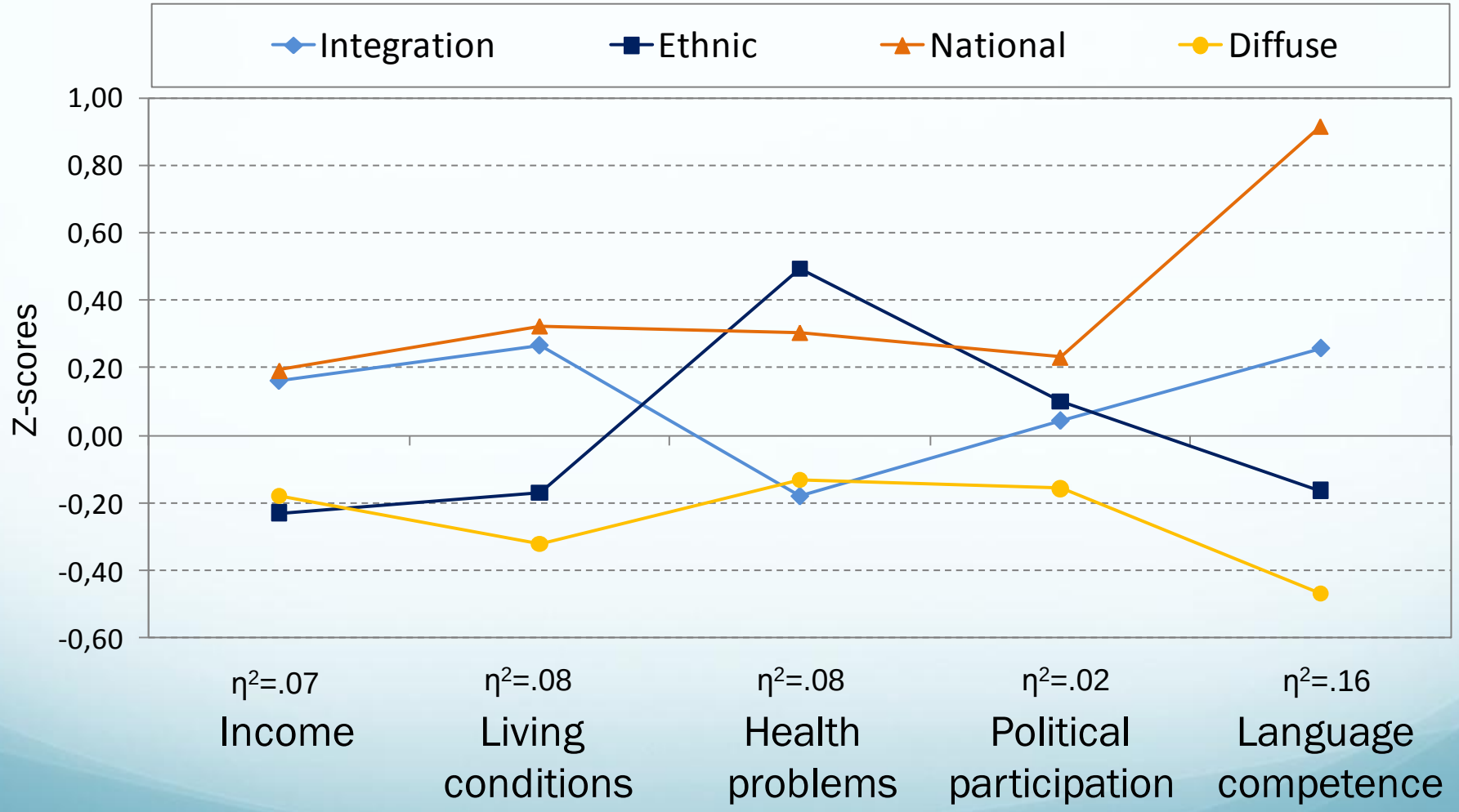
Links of acculturation and adaptation with non-psychological integration indices

- Acculturation and adaptation profiles of immigrants, as they emerged using cluster analysis, were studied in relation to a set of non-psychological integration indices:
  - ✓ **Income.** A combination of objective (i.e., monthly salary) and subjective (i.e., compared to one's needs) measures.
  - ✓ **Living conditions.** Level of satisfaction with the quantity and quality of in-house facilities.
  - ✓ **Physical health problems.** A composite of positive answers to health-related life events.
  - ✓ **Political participation.** Being involved in political parties, unions, NGOs or ethnic associations.
  - ✓ **Language competence.** Greek language skills in oral and written communication.

Acculturation and adaptation profiles (results of cluster analysis)



Acculturation and adaptation profiles in relation to non-psychological indicators



Links of acculturation and adaptation with non-psychological integration indices: summary

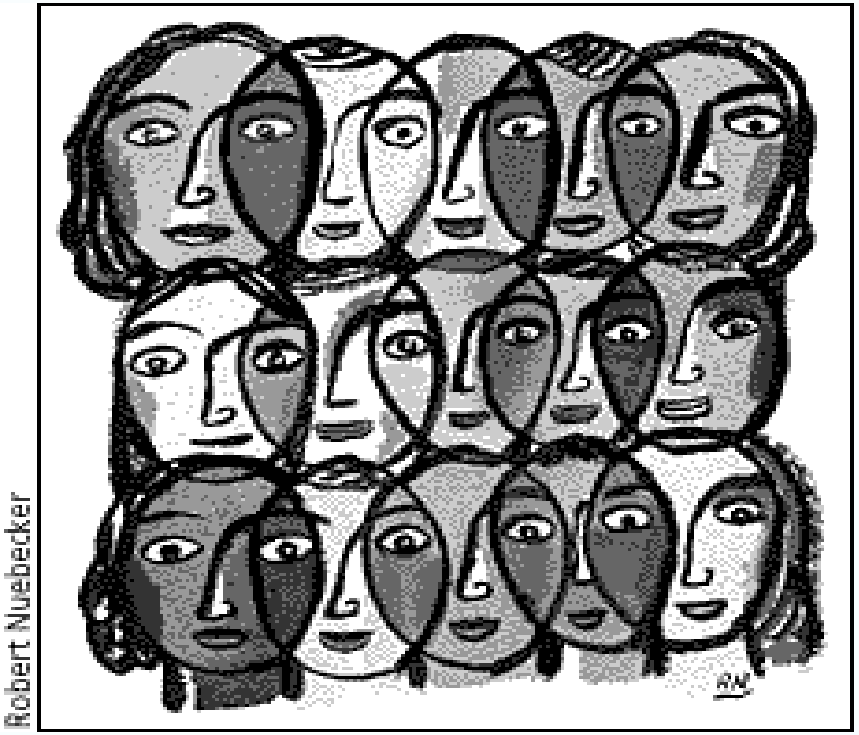
- Adaptation profiles of immigrants were largely defined on the basis of their acculturation orientation. The terminology proposed by Berry & colleagues (2006) was successfully adopted.
- As expected, integration produced the most favorable psychological pattern. Interestingly, support networks seemed to be activated by poorly adapted immigrants.
- Integration and, to a lesser extent, the national profile were related to more positive non-psychological outcomes. The ethnic and, especially, diffuse profiles were positioned towards the negative pole, i.e., lower income, worse living conditions, more health problems and lower language skills.

Conclusions

- The indices produced in this project fill in a gap in the study of immigration in Greece; they can serve as a valuable tool in guiding evidence-based policies and interventions.
- In line with previous findings (e.g., Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 2008; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2008; Pavlopoulos et al., 2010), national orientation proved to be a more important predictor of adaptation than ethnic involvement.
- Immigrants in Greece do not form a homogenous group; their acculturation and adaptation varies primarily in relation to context variables (e.g., cultural distance, density of residence) and less so as a function of individual characteristics (e.g. sex, education level). This situation demands for focused interventions, in addition to general policies.

Strengths, limitations and future directions

- The methodology of the project (large representative sample, interdisciplinary approach) allows for a deeper understanding of acculturation and adaptation of immigrants.
- However, little is know about non-documented immigrants because they are not included in most studies.
- Replication of findings is strongly suggested since immigrant population is constantly changing, esp. in the light of the present economic crisis in Greece. State institutions, such as EL.STAT., may undertake this task on a periodical basis.
- Causal relations cannot be established using a correlational design. Longitudinal studies are necessary, although quite difficult to carry out with a population of high mobility.



Thank you for your attention!

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