Psychological Distress Among South Asian STEM and Non-STEM Students by Gender

The nature of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines, along with unavailability of culturally compatible personal support in STEM environments, may generate high levels of psychological distress for students from underrepresented populations. South Asian international students (n=198) completed self-report measures of depression and self-esteem. Participants reported their major, number of roommates, number of South Asian roommates, and GPA. Contrary to hypotheses, STEM students experienced less distress than their peers, and number of roommates (total and South Asian) was significantly negatively correlated with depression for STEM women. Multiple regressions confirmed that a Major X Number of South Asian roommates interaction significantly incremented prediction of depression. Exploration further revealed a positive relationship between GPA and depression for women, a negative relationship between GPA and depression for men, and no relationship between GPA and self-esteem for STEM students. Results suggest that STEM disciplines may support men’s performance and the level of cultural support provided by roommates, although these may exacerbate distress among STEM women.