

## Understanding Algerian International Student Mental Health Experiences in UK (United Kingdom) Universities: Difficulties of Disclosure, Help-Seeking and Coping Strategies

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**Abstract :** Background: International students often encounter challenges while studying in the UK, including communication and language barriers, lack of social networks, and socio-cultural differences that adversely impact on their mental health. For Algerian international students (AISs), these challenges may be heightened as English is not their first language and the culture of their homeland is substantially different from British culture, yet research has to incorporate their experiences and perspectives. Aim: The current study aimed to explore AISs' 1) understandings of mental health; 2) issues of disclosure for mental health difficulties; and 3) mental health help-seeking and coping strategies. Method: In-depth, audio recorded semi-structured interviews (n = 20) with AISs in UK universities were conducted. An inductive, reflective thematic approach analysis was used. Finding: The following themes and associated sub-themes were developed: (1) Algerian cultural influences on mental health understanding(socio-cultural comparisons); (2) the paradox of the family (pressure vs. support); (3) stigma and fear of disclosure; (4) Barriers to formal help-seeking (informal disclosure as first step to seeking help); (5) Communication barriers (resort to mother tongue to disclose); (6) Self-reliance and religious coping. Conclusion: Recognising and understanding the challenges faced by AISs in terms of disclosure and mental health help-seeking is essential to reduce barriers to formal help-seeking. Informal disclosure among peers is often the first step to seeking help. Enhancing practitioners' cultural competences and awareness of diverse understandings of mental health and the role of religious coping among AISs' may have transferable benefits to a wider international student population.

**Keywords :** mental health, stigma, coping, disclosure

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