

## Adjustment Problem among First Year University Students in Ethiopia: Across Sectional Survey

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### Abstract

**Background:** Adjustment problems are the most common problems among first year students who are going through an active adjustment phase when they join the University.

**Objective:** To assess the prevalence and associated factors of adjustment problem among first year Madawalabu University students.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among first year students in Madawalabu University. A total of 422 first year students selected by simple random sampling were participated in the study. Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was used to measure the Adjustment problem. Multivariable binary logistic regression was applied to find out the explanatory variables associated with student maladjustment. Significance was declared at p-value <0.05.

**Results:** Out of the total 30.1% respondents had adjustment problem. Female students were more likely to have adjustment problem with [AOR=4.36, 95% CI (1.96, 9.68)] than male. Social, academic, personal and change factors tested for adjustment problem of the students had showed statistically significant association.

**Conclusion:** The study confirms that first year students joining university do face problems in adjusting themselves at the university. Efficient advisory mechanisms and extracurricular activities, psychological and academic counseling and guidance have to be geared to the needs of the students.

**Keywords:** Adjustment problem; Students; College/university; Student mental health

### Introduction

Joining the university for the first time is a stressful experience for many new University students [1-3]. Though many successfully make a good transition, some experiences long-term emotional maladjustment and depression [4]. Students who do not adjust well most of them time not to perform well academically and have less overall satisfaction with the college experience [5,6]. A successful adjustment strongly predicts students' academic success, mental health and personal development [7,8].

A study in Malaysia University reported that 26% found to be in the low category for their overall adjustment; had adjustment problem, 42.8% of the respondents were found to be at the low level for the Personal-Emotional Scale which indicated that many subjects in this study were exposed to psychological and somatic problems in adjusting themselves to campus life [9,10]. In United State students are likely to experience the following difficulties: academic pressures, financial problems, poor health, loneliness, interpersonal conflicts, difficulty in adjusting to change, and problems with developing personal autonomy [2,11]. A study in Zambia student identified forty-

five different kinds of problems were mentioned in all, 26 of which were academic in nature and 19 social and it was also suggested that Zambian students do experience a large number and wide variety of adjustment problems when they transfer from high school to university [12]. The study conducted recently at Hawassa University, Ethiopia, reported high prevalence of mental distress among first year students when compared to others [13].

Common associated factors of adjustment problem were; being away from home, family, and friends and adjusting to college classes and the accompanying workload difficulties with time management. Difficulty making friends 12% and roommate issues 12% were the next most commonly reported problems. Others factors include completely new and different social network and environment, difficulty in managing time and study skill, financial adjustments difficulty, making friends and general adjustment to new situations [1,9,14].

Even though many studies and interventions are under way to identify the adjustment problem which lead in to decreased dropout rate and help in improving personal and mental development of students in higher institutions around the world there are a few studies if any; to identify these problem, associated factors and attempted interventions in higher institutions in Ethiopia. Thus this study was conducted with the aim to assess prevalence and associated factors

with adjustment problem among first year Madawalabu University students.

## Materials and Methods

### Study setting

This cross sectional institution based study was conducted among first year Madawalabu University students/enrolled by 2010 academic year/for regular program, South East Ethiopia

### Sample size and sampling techniques

Sample size, calculated using single population formula with 95% CI,  $w=5\%$  and  $p=0.5$ , was 384 subjects. To compensate for possible non respondents, 10% i.e. 38 subjects were added to give a sample size of 422. Study subjects were selected proportionally using stratified sampling technique, schools were taken as strata. The contribution of each school to the university student population was preserved in the composition of the sample taken. Male to female ratio of the University students was also preserved in the sample.

### Data collection

A self-administered structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was distributed to the selected students after collected in four classrooms and facilitated by employed and trained data collection facilitators with close supervision.

### Measurements

The main dependent variable was adjustment problem. The following operational definitions are appropriate to this study: Adjustment problem is students with low score (67 to 360) for over all adjustment on SACQ. Academic adjustment problem is students with low score (24-121) for academic subscale. Social adjustment problem is students with low score (19-103) for social subscale. Personal Emotional adjustment problem students with low score (14-70) score for Personal-Emotional subscale. Institutional adjustment problem is students with low score (8-45) for Institutional adjustment subscale. Over all adjustment are the sum scores of all four subscales.

A pre-tested self-administered questionnaire Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) developed by Baker and Siryk 1999, standardized and published by Western Psychological Service (WPS) consists of 67 self-rating responses used to assess students' adjustment to college and containing four subscales [15,16] which translated to Amharic, was used for data collection.

### Data analysis

Data entry was done using EPI Info 2002 software and then exported for analysis to the SPSS (statistical package of social science) software version 16. To find out the individual effect of explanatory variables and suppress confounding effect of variables binary logistic regression was used. Finally the results were interpreted as statistically significant association if  $p<0.05$  and 95% of CI.

## Results

### Socio-demographic characteristics

A total of 422 questionnaires were distributed and 392 were available for analysis giving a response rate 96%. Out of the 392 respondents 67.9% were male and 89.3% were single. Majority of the respondents were at younger age with 72.7% were at the age range of 18-22, mean age of 21.42. Majority of the respondents 44.4% were Orthodox religion sect followers and 51.0% were from Oromo ethnicity. Regarding respondents' parental marital condition majority 77.3% parents of the respondents were living together while the rest 22.3% were in other marital condition like divorced, separated in conflict or widowed. Substantial number of the respondents, 41.6% came from a distance of about less than 450km compared to the distance between 451 to 900km and 901km and more (Table 1).

Socio-demographic characteristics	F (%)	(n=392)
<b>Age group</b>		
18-22	285	72.7
23-27	91	23.2
28-32	16	4.1
Mean	21.42	
SD*	2.702	
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	126	32.1
Male	266	67.9
<b>School</b>		
Health Science College	35	8.9
School of Agriculture and Natural Resource	24	6.1
School of Behavioral Science	20	5.1
School of Biodiversity and Conservation	29	7.4
School of Business and Economics	73	18.6
School of Engineering and Technology	120	30.6
School of Language	16	4.1
School of Mathematical science	16	4.1
School of Natural Science	36	9.2
School of Pedagogy	10	2.6
School of Social Science	13	3.3
<b>Religion</b>		
Muslim	106	27
Orthodox	174	44.4
Protestant	94	24
Others	18	4.6

Ethnicity		
Amhara	97	24.7
Guraghe	20	5.1
Oromo	200	51
Tigræ	43	11
Wolayta	14	3.6
Others	9	4.6
Marital status		
Married	42	10.7
Single	350	89.3
Parental marital condition		
Live together	303	77.3
Widowed	47	12
Separated in conflict	24	6.1
Others	18	4.6
Psychological counseling		
Never	169	43.1
Once/ just for advice	211	53.8
Several times	12	3.1
Academic counseling/assistance		

Never	167	42.6
Once/just for advice	165	42.1
Several times	60	15.3
Distance respondents' home town from MWU in km		
Less than 450	163	41.6
451 – 900	133	33.9
More than 901	96	24.5

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n=392), MWU May 2011.

Regarding Psychological and Academic assistance/study counseling service; majority 53.1% respondents were received psychological counseling once. Almost equal numbers of students 42.6% and 42.1% of respondents were never received and received at least once/just for advice/for academic assistance or study counseling respectively, after they join the university. Only small numbers of respondents were received psychological and academic assistance/study counseling several times 3.1% and 15.3% respectively. Out of the all study subjects 118 (30.1%) had adjustment problem for overall adjustment/ low adjustment level score/(Figure1). Among the study subjects substantial number of respondents 156 (39.8%) and 116(29.6%) scored low for academic adjustment and social adjustment respectively. Table 2 below shows the detail of overall and subscale adjustment level of the respondents. Sixty (47.6%) female students were students with low score/adjustment problem/ while the remains 58 were male students.

Variable	High			Moderate			Low		
	Score	F	%	Score	F	%	Score	F	%
OA	488 and above	31	7.9	361 – 487	243	62	67 – 360	118	30.1
AA	173 and above	18	4.6	122 – 172	218	55.8	24 - 121	156	39.8
SA	156 and above	16	4.1	104 – 155	260	66.3	19 - 103	116	29.6
PEA	111 and above	96	24.5	71 – 110	188	48	14 - 70	108	27.6
IA	61 and above	97	24.7	46 – 60	213	54.3	8 - 45	82	21

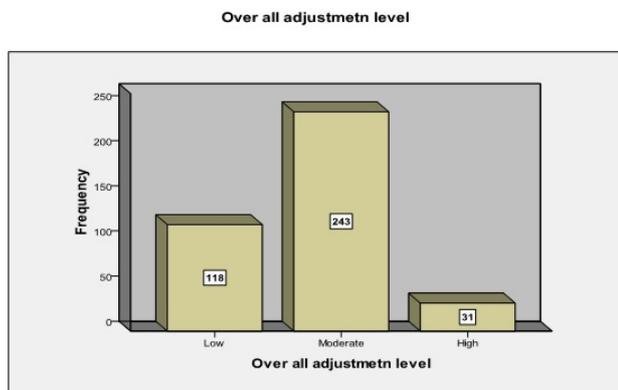
Notes: OA: Overall Adjustment AA: Academic Adjustment SA: Social Adjustment PEA: Personal-Emotional Adjustment IA: Institutional Attachment f= frequency NB: \* - p<0.05 \*\* - referent category

**Table 2:** The Distribution of respondents' (n=392) Overall and Subscale Adjustment Level, Madawalabu University, March 2011.

Among the all study subjects 228(58.2%), respondents had varying degree of difficulty from “Difficulty in managing time and study skill” followed by “Difficulties in adjusting to university classes and the accompanying workload”, which was found to be 212(55.5%). Comparatively, reported difficulty for “Health problems” and “Confused career direction” comprises less percentage of difficulty reported by respondents; 150(38.3%) and 119(30.4%), respectively (Table 3).

There was significant difference in adjustment problem between different psychological counseling service of the respondents and reported difficulty from health problem, however, after adjusted for

certain variables mentioned below their significance has failed to resist. Moreover, there was no association between adjustment problem and religion, ethnicity, marital status, age group, school, distance of home town of the respondents from Madawalabu University and marital condition of the respondents' family. Sex categories of the students have statistically significant association with adjustment problem. The likely hood of female students having adjustment problem is higher compared to male students [AOR=4.36, 95% CI (1.96, 9.68)].



Academic factors “Managing time and study skill” and “Adjusting to university classes and the accompanying workload” also observed to have strong statistically significant association with students’ adjustment problem. The likely hood of having adjustment problem of students having difficulty from this factor is higher compared to students not having difficulty from this factor with [AOR=9.30, 95% CI (3.80, 22.73)] and [AOR=10.34, 95% CI (4.36, 24.54)] for “Managing time and study skill” and “Adjusting to university classes and the accompanying workload” respectively (Table 4).

Associated factors	Degree of difficulty		
	No difficulty	Some difficulty	Great difficulty
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
Being away from home, family, and friends for the first time and homesickness	203 (51.8)	133 (33.9)	56 (14.3)
Change in living arrangements or living in dormitory	202 (51.5)	153 (39.0)	37 (9.5)
Difficulties with socializing or making friends	207 (52.8)	139 (35.5)	46 (11.7)
Completely new and different social network and environment	203 (51.8)	147 (37.5)	42 (10.7)
Difficulty in managing time and study skill	161(41.1)	178(45.4)	53 (13.5)
Difficulties in adjusting to university classes and the accompanying workload	180 (45.9)	161 (41.1)	51 (13.0)
Health problems	238 (60.7)	105 (26.8)	49 (12.5)
Confused career direction	273 (69.9)	108 (27.6)	11 (2.8)

**Table 3:** Difficulties from potential associated factors with their severity among respondents (n=392), Madawalabu University, March 2011.

Explanatory variables	Frequency Adjustment problem			COR ( 95% CI)	AOR ( 95% CI)
	N (%)	Yes	No		
<b>Sex</b>					
Female	126(32.14)	60	66	3.26 (2.07, 5.14)*	4.36 (1.96, 9.68)*
Male **	266(67.86)	58	208	1	1
<b>Psychological counseling</b>					
Never	169(43.1)	79	90	4.14 (2.62, 6.55)*	2.18 (0.97, 4.91)
Ever **	223(56.9)	48	173	1	1
<b>Academic counseling</b>					
Never	167(42.6)	81	86	4.79 (3.01, 7.62)*	3.64 (1.60, 8.31)*
Ever **	225(57.4)	37	188	1	1
<b>Being away from home, family, and Friends for the 1st time and Home-sickness (change)</b>					
Yes	189(48.2)	87	102	4.73 (2.94, 7.63)*	5.83(2.65, 12.84)*
No**	203(51.8)	31	172	1	1

Change in living arrangements or Living in dormitory (change)					
Yes	190(48.5)	93	97	6.79(4.10,11.26)*	4.76 (2.14, 10.60)*
No**	202(51.5)	25	177	1	1
Difficulties with socializing or Making friends (social)					
Yes	185(47.2)	86	99	4.75 (2.96, 7.64)*	3.46 (1.62, 7.37)*
No**	207(52.8)	32	175	1	1
Completely new and different social Network and environment (Social)					
Yes	189(48.2)	93	96	6.90(4.16, 11.45)*	6.95(3.12, 15.47)*
No**	203(51.8)	25	178	1	1
Difficulty in managing time and study Skill (Academic)					
Yes	228(58.2)	101	127	6.88 (3.90, 12.11)*	9.30(3.80, 22.73)*
No**	164(41.8)	17	147	1	1
Difficulties in adjusting to university classes and the accompanying workload( Academics)					
Yes	212(55.5)	94	118	5.18 (3.12, 8.61)*	10.34(4.36, 24.54)*
No**	180(45.5)	24	156	1	1
Health problems (Personal)					
Yes	150(38.3)	63	87	2.46 (1.56, 3.83)*	1.93(0.91, 4.09)
No**	242(61.7)	55	187	1	1
Confused career direction (Personal)					
Yes	119(30.4)	49	70	2.07 (1.31, 3.27)*	2.45(1.13, 5.32)*
No**	273(69.6)	69	204	1	1

NB: \*- p<0.05 \*\* - referent category

**Table 4:** Adjustment problem in relation to explanatory variables of respondents (n=392), MWU March, 20011.

## Discussion

The prevalence of adjustment problem is 118 (30.1%), which is little bit higher than the prevalence study using the same instrument conducted in Malaysia which is 26% [9]. Could be as a result of comparatively less conducive living and learning environment as well as less available psychological and academic counseling services in our study settings.

Regarding subscale 156(39.8%) respondents had adjustment problem for academic adjustment. This is also high compared to study finding in Malaysia which is 26% [9]. This difference might be from fragmented provision of advisory mechanisms, psychological and academic counseling at our study setting. In line with others [12] this study showed that common adjustment problems were academic adjustment and social adjustment problems in nature. Personal-emotional adjustment problem was 108(27.6%) which is small report compared to the study finding in Malaysia that is 42.8% [9]. This difference may be from unlearned and cultural influence in expressing personal-emotional feelings in our study setting. Institutional adjustment problem 82(21%) is also high compared to report finding in Malaysia 14.8% [9]. This might be from being new University with

great emphasis is given constructions and varies developmental activities with less emphasis on institutional attachment of students for our study setting compared to later setting.

Finding of this study shows that female students were found to be affected by adjustment problem about 4 folds than male which consistent with the finding in other study [9,4,3]. This might be from less likely to express their difficulties or feelings with their peers as well as less participation at social activities compared to male.

The students' background characteristics like distance of the University and socio-demographic characteristics such as religion, ethnicity and parental marital condition of the respondents are not significantly related to university adjustment similar to study conducted on Latino students [17,18]. It permitted us to conclude that the variation in University adjustment had less to do with preexisting or socio-demographic characteristics than with the nature of the environments in which these students found themselves.

Difficulty from "Being away from home, family, and friends" in this study w/c was 189(48.2%); found to be higher compared to that report among Malaysian students which is 20% [9]. It might be from discrepancy in communication and transportation mechanisms of two

setting. "Confused career direction" which is personal factor was also statistically associated with adjustment problem. Similarly other study also reported confused career direction, as common sources of adjustment problems for new college students [14].

In general based on our research report, the adjustment difficulties faced by first year students were found to be academic problems, institutional, as well as social and personal problems in consistent to a research conducted in a local public university in Malaysia [10].

## Conclusion

About one third of the students had found to have adjustment problem. The likelihood of having adjustment problem was higher among female students, those who never get academic counseling and being away from home, family, and friends. Academic adjustment problem followed by social adjustment problem was found higher among the adjustment subscales scores. Generally academic problem, away from home, social and personal factors were observed to have significant association with adjustment problem. In this study, there was no significant difference observed in adjustment problem between different age group, religion, marital status, ethnicity, distance of home town from the University and marital condition of the respondents' family.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that we have no conflict of interests.

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