

CSSHE 2021

International Students, Resilience and Systems of Support: Who is Responsible?

Kanchan Ladhar, Margaret Walton-Roberts
(Professor BSIA and WLU), and Jenna Hennebry
Assoc. Professor BSIA and WLU (Wilfrid Laurier
University).

mwaltonroberts@wlu.ca



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Introduction



Examine the stressors, cultural shocks, and long-term challenges experienced by international students on their journeys, with a case study of in Kitchener-Waterloo (attending three PSE institutions).



Contribute to policy improvement regarding support, and consider where responsibility for the success of international students resides.



Context: International students as the ‘ideal candidates’

In 2019, 827,586 international students held valid study permits in Canada.

Reflects the ‘race for talent’ (Shachur 2006), neoliberal/self reliant selection/settlement model (Mitchell 2004).

International students are “ideal candidates for permanent residency” (Government of Canada, 2020).

Yet, education system is not equipped to adequately respond to the needs of these students, and neither are community-based immigrant service providers (Todd, 2021; Keung, Teotonio & Lafleche, 2019).



April 2021 – Government of Canada announcement of a pathway that will grant an additional 90,000 people permanent residency who contribute to the Canadian economy as essential workers and international graduates.



Resilience and responsibility

- Canada's internationalization strategy is a form soft power, reproduces neoliberalism generating the 'self-responsibilizing' student (Johnstone and Lee, 2017)
- Concept of resilience-individual as bearing sole responsibility for their experiences and outcomes of migration, individualizes systemic problems and inequities (Garrett 2016).
- Students are facilitated to 'learn while they earn', implicit form of responsabilization.



Building on Success: International Education Strategy (2019-2024)



Methods

- Qualitative, semi-structured interviews and group interviews with international students living in the Kitchener CMA
 - 29 interviews (20 individual, 9 group), Jan to March, 2019. 12 male and 17 female, from India, China, Malaysia, Jamaica, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tanzania, and United Arab Emirates.
 - Interview questions relating to major challenges, key motivations, sense of belonging in the community, their educational background, and aspirations.



Findings

- Nine themes identified:
 - Most significant; seeking employment and job search (22), use of Transit (21), plans to save money (16), lack of awareness of local city services (15).
 - Moderate to low prominence included; social integration (10), racial discrimination (8), sharing information with family (6), food security (5), and volunteering (4).



Employment

- Employment (job search) most commonly discussed, 90% expressing the need to obtain a PT job during studies. All 29 students came to Canada with funding provided by their parents
- 40% of the sample highlighted negative experiences related to job search, despite the significant employment experiences amassed during their studies, and expressed concern about meeting demands for PR:

*“I have been hard on myself academically and financially which is why I currently have two part-time jobs. Although it can be difficult to balance school, at least I do not ask my parents for extra money”
(Interviewee 20).*

*“In order for me to obtain permanent residency, I must be employed for a job that relates to my field of study. I have been working at Subway which is completely irrelevant to my educational qualifications”
(Interviewee #13).*



Income and saving funds

Students' desire to 'save money' was the third most popular topic discussed:

- Along with the stress that comes from maintaining decent **grades**, the 16 students who discussed saving money admitted to experiencing equal or more **stress** from financial issues.
- **None** of the students in our study indicated they had benefitted from external scholarships before or after coming to Canada

During my first few days in Canada when I paid \$1500 for my accommodation I was only left with \$200 in my bank account. I did not spend any money, not even on something as simple as Tim Hortons either because I was saving up until I received financial assistance from my parents. (Interviewee 2)



Awareness of services

The fourth theme was surprising, in so far as it suggested that international students lacked awareness of the services available.

- Of the 15 students who mentioned this theme, all admitted that they were **unaware of the many services** existing within the city.

“We are not aware of all the services in the Kitchener-Waterloo Region and what the city has to offer; they need to be marketed better to be more visible to students” (Interviewees 16, 21 and 28).

“I would like to go to a place where if I have any questions I can ask someone right away and get assistance anytime, but the information doesn’t just come to you, you must seek it yourself” (Interviewee 26).



Discrimination

A minority of students (8) referenced discrimination; but for those who did confront it, their experiences were **profoundly distressing** and consequential:

I experienced a racial attack on the bus in Kitchener where a man began to shout at me, telling me to go back to my country. I was so hurt that no one on the bus stood up for me, and instead everyone watched or ignored as he continued to verbally abuse me. My friends, as well as a free help-line phone service helped me de-stress. (Interviewee 6)

Racialized students also expressed being **very conscious** of their position within the classroom and the responses of teaching staff:

Coming from a country with entirely a black population, I sense I am different in Canada. I began to feel this way when my professor had commented in front of the whole class when I walked in late, but didn't say a word when a Canadian student walked into class late. (Interviewees 3 and 12)



Conclusion

International students cope with the stressors associated with pursuing international higher education, and in addition, in order to access PR they must also engage in a self-responsibilized pathway.



In recounting of their experiences, the sense of building resilience was apparent. However, their lack of awareness of the full range of resources available to them suggests they have taken on the full mantle of self-responsibility.



This suggests the journey toward resilience has substantial room for partners (and not only universities) to step in to support students on their journey.



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