

Far from Perfect:
Iranian International Students' Experience
of Human Dignity within the Canadian
Immigration System

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Why I studied:

- Canadian immigration system
- Iranian international students
- Human dignity



Why is human dignity important?

- One of the fundamental notions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- A primary concept in both the Canadian and Iranian constitutions
- An important factor in both the motivation to migrate and the experience of settlement in a new country
- Exploring situations in which HD is at risk

Conceptual framework



How did I conduct the study?

- Qualitative study
- Semi-structured interview
- Thematic analysis
- 24 international students (10M-10W)
- Living in Montreal at least 2 years
- At least bachelor degree from Iran
- Age 25-45



What did I
find?



A contradiction between Canada's need for immigrants and their complex immigration application procedures

- *“Immigration is a win-win situation”*
- Condemning Canadian immigration criteria for selecting migrants in favor of Canada's economic interests over humanity
- Being treated as objects to the Canadian government's ends or goals
- Calling for more sympathy and consideration of students' needs while establishing eligibility criteria

Human dignity = Humanity

Example:

“Justin Trudeau settled about 20,000 to 30,000 Syrian refugees in Canada, which I think was a propaganda issue because Canada needs immigrants, and it is not just a humanitarian act. I think it happens because of Canada's need to have specialized and expedient immigrants, and a war like the Syrian war was an opportunity for Canada to attract all of Syria's elites”

Frustration with arbitrary changes to immigration rules during their course of studies as an international student

- Threatening their personal autonomy and limiting the possibility of planning for their future
- Linguistic discrimination

Human dignity= personal autonomy/human rights

Example:

We came across 18,000 returned cases and my case was one of these cases... All my plans have been disrupted. I mean, the plan I made for my life during the last year and a half has been ruined by these new conditions. Cases are being evaluated retroactively. In fact, when a law is passed today, it applies to all cases that have been in the queue for the past! When I submitted my application, I met all the requirements, but now they are judging my case with new law; you have violated my rights here!

Lack of clarity for processing times

- Putting students in a precarious status financially and psychologically
- Denying immigrants' basic rights and freedom of movement
- Inhibiting students from remaining in Canada after their graduation

Human dignity= Basic rights/ freedom of movement

Example:

“In the Canadian immigration system, our basic human rights, and our human dignity are not respected...They did not sympathize with or support me when I had the problem; they should not procrastinate in such cases. The long processing time should be for someone who travels [outside of Canada] regularly, not for me who only visited Toronto during the last three years. I believe that the rules and regulations should be clearly explained. If I was given precise information about the processing time of my application, I might have chosen to leave Canada sooner , before my mother died; I must be able to choose and plan for my life.”

Discrimination based on nationality

- Immigrants from various countries are treated differently in terms of:
 - Processing time
 - Length of security check
 - How tough are being treated by some officials

Human dignity = equality of treatment/ human values

Example:

“Racial discrimination is very annoying to me. In selecting immigrants, they see the files with a discriminatory perspective. If you are European, American, or a French-speaker, it helps you and facilitates your application, but if you are from the Middle East, they are very tough to review your file at the end, or if they see a problem, they reject the case quickly and without any consideration. They do not think that this student has spent a lot of time, money and effort, and that means that human values and human dignity are not seen. They look at you as a case and not a human. However, if the case is from developed countries, they review it accurately, they do not cancel the case quickly, because it influences Canada's credibility among developed countries, and it is important for the Canadian government. However, regarding developing countries and the third world, these things are not considered.”

International students' agency in relation to the Canadian immigration system

- Protesting, using social media (hashtags), or asking support from MPs, human rights offices and lawyers
- Feeling of satisfaction that there are opportunities to speak out
- Availability of the means or opportunities to speak out, air disagreements or ask for support

Exercising one's human dignity

Example:

“My case took a very, very long processing time, two months more than a regular processing time. I called the parliament member in our neighborhood, and he appointed a person to follow my issue up; it was very interesting to me that a person from the parliament has been appointed for my work...My study permit was issued late, so it prevented me from attending the conference. However, while the Canadian immigrant sector does not have a proper approach concerning human dignity, the fact that another part of the government can intervene in the case of an international student was very important to me, in terms of human dignity.”

Conclusion

- **Equality** : Being treated equally by the immigration officials and policies/ not prioritizing one language or nationality over others
- **Humanity**: Being considered human beings rather than objects/ being treated with sympathy, kindness and consideration
- **Respect**: Individual autonomy
- **Human rights**: Being able to plan for future life/ freedom/ the level of living by human rights and being able to move freely
- **Justice**: Being treated in a right way

Implications & recommendations

1. Creating institutions or representatives that have enough authority to interfere in the Canadian immigration system.
2. The government of Quebec and Canada should take legal remedies that facilitate and speed up evaluating immigration applications.
3. Challenging the main economic policy approach in Canada to become more in line with the needs of human beings and respect immigrants' HD.

Implications & recommendations

4. Provide longer student visas and post-graduate work permits, especially while waiting for PR.
5. Asking for transparent and precise policies regarding PR eligibility criteria, processing times and Canadian diplomacy about different nationalities.
6. Offering adequate educational, settlement and migration services for international students; the services that require a collaboration between universities and the settlement sector (with the help of IRCC)

Thanks

