An examination of the adjustment journey of international students studying in Australia

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Abstract   This study examined at two Australian university campuses the types of problems that prompt international students to seek counselling services. The concerns reported by ninety students fell within three broad categories; adjustment issues, academic concerns and psychosocial problems. Follow-up interviews with a subset of these students (21) were used to gain more detailed information about their personal adjustment issues and also their experience of counselling services. Counsellors were also interviewed to obtain their perspective on the adjustment and counselling experience of students. Most problems for students occurred within the first 12 months of commencing studies and for many tended to reduce in incidence thereafter, but for some students the issues and problems remained ongoing. While the findings are limited to international students at only two Australian campuses, and furthermore the sample sizes are not large, the results suggest that these students often face extreme adjustment difficulties. Moreover, it is suggested that such students tended to only access counselling services when near the point of collapse, or following academic referral. The importance of pre-departure orientation packages for prospective students, while still in their home country, might reduce the incidence of such adjustment issues.

Keywords   International students · International education · Counselling · Adjustment

Introduction

The increased propensity for students to undertake tertiary education outside their normal country has brought with it a readiness for an increasing number of tertiary

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students to pursue their education in a foreign country. In this context, international students comprise a group of individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship in order to participate in international educational experience. According to Australian Education International (AEI), international student data for 2009 shows that in Australia there were 631,935 enrolments by full-fee paying international students on a student visa (AEI Industry Publication 2009). This represents an increase of 16.8 % on 2008 enrolments and compares with growth of 20.2 % between 2007 and 2008. In 2009, year-to-date enrolments exceeded 600,000 for the first time (AEI Industry Publication 2009).

Of international higher education enrolments in 2009, 72.4 % came from Australia's top ten markets which include; China, India, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Nepal, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brazil and Saudi Arabia. China and India are the largest source of both enrolments and commencements with China accounting for 18.0 % growth on 2008, whilst India 25.4 % growth on 2008 figures (AEI Industry Publication 2009). According to AEI, education exports increased from $12.2 billion in 2007 to $15.7 billion in 2008, making education Australia's third largest export industry.

Arthur (2004) argued that international students are essentially people in cross-cultural transition. First, they are required to navigate the demands of leaving home, secondly, they must adjust to the culture of the host country and finally, they are required to make the re-entry transition to their home country. Given this, it is not surprising that one of the most pressing concerns for international students is adjustment (Arthur 2004; Lin and Yi 1997; Leong and Chou 1996; Brinson and Kottler 1995; Sandhu 1994).

Challenges faced by international students include; racial discrimination, language barriers and concerns, accommodation difficulties, loneliness, isolation and cultural misunderstanding (Robie and Ryan 1996). These difficulties can impact on students' academic success. For example, Bayley et al. (2002) argued that the capacity of international students to succeed in their courses is affected by their English-language proficiency. Their audit survey conducted at three universities in Melbourne showed that a significant proportion of university teaching staff have concerns regarding the English-language proficiency of international students.

In addition, international students encounter social and psychological problems while studying abroad. Barker et al. (1991) showed that Asian students had more difficulty in adapting to various social situations (e.g. going to pubs, dating,) than Australian students. Poyrazli et al. (2001) noted that students' inability to adjust to a new environment can affect them psychologically generating such things as stress and depression and the triggering of headaches. Schweitzer (1996) also reported that their counselling services centre reported an increasing incidence of students with complex and serious problems associated with international students. He also identified that the overall frequency of emotional distress (45 %) was high and was an issue among international students that needed to be examined further in order to improve our understanding of the nature and precursors of this distress. In an earlier study examining suicidal ideation and behaviour amongst the general student population (1,678 undergraduates) at an Australian university, Schweitzer et al. (1995) found that 77 % of Asian students reported suicidal behaviour.

The findings of Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) in their longitudinal study of 294 domestic and international students in a Mid-Western University in the United States, showed that Asian international students reported receiving less social support than domestic students. The authors argued that this is understandable given that international students are deprived of their former social support when they relocate, whereas domestic sojourners still have more access and opportunity to interact with significant others.

A study of international students in New Zealand demonstrated that social isolation and difficulty in meeting and developing friendships with local students "is a feature of the life of most Asian students" (Li et al. 2002, p. 12), something also reported by Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) who studied 15 Asian students in a semi-urban campus in the United States. While the students in the Poyrazli study reported many positive experiences, they also raised several concerns about their adjustment process. While some of them appeared to fare better than others in their social interactions, many expressed dissatisfaction about their inability to form friendships with American students. These findings agree with those reported earlier by Nicholson (2001) that revealed Asian students have major difficulties in making friends with American students. It was concluded that local students could help Asian students adjust by befriending them. In contrast, Novera (2004) claimed that Indonesian postgraduate students had fewer problems in adjusting to the social and cultural life in Australia than meeting its educational demands. However, some Asian students in the study did mention their difficulties in relation to their daily interactions with local people, suggesting cultural specificity to this phenomenon.

While the above studies have examined the adjustment challenges of international students (e.g. Arthur 2004; Hechanova-Alampay et al. 2002; Poyrazli et al. 2001; Rajapaksa and Dundes 2002), few specifically focused on the precise adjustment issues that prompted students to seek counselling services. Also no studies were found that examined the counsellors' perspective of the students' adjustment experiences.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the major adjustment issues reported by international students from two Australian universities which prompted them to seek counselling, and to seek the counsellors' views on the adjustment issue they identified. It was felt this to be is a useful area for research, because it may determine whether there is agreement between the problems as perceived by the student, as against that which is identified by the counsellor. This may also allow insight into how to better provide culturally sensitive counselling services; thereby increase the return rate of international students to counselling services.

Methodology

A questionnaire and interview-based qualitative approach was used to explore the nature of problems students encounter while studying abroad particularly in the first 12 months which may lead them to seek counselling. Two large Victorian universities were selected for this study. Participants were recruited from their International Student Associations after obtaining ethical consent from the Human

Research Ethics Committee of each campus. Data were collected from both undergraduate and postgraduate international students comprising 52 males and 38 females from South East Asia (Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia), the Indian Sub-Continent and also from Europe.

Questionnaire

Prior to the preparation of the questionnaire, informal focus groups were convened with international students wherein typical adjustment issues, currently being experienced by international students which prompted them to seek counselling, were identified. These then informed the final structure and content of the questionnaire used in the formal study.

The questionnaire had two parts. The first section sought demographic data related to student's course of study, education level attained, country of origin, gender, marital status and duration of residency up to that point. The second section asked students to self-identify what they saw as their prevailing adjustment issues, under the following headings; (i) adjustment (e.g. isolation, loneliness, homesickness, financial difficulties) (ii) academic concerns (e.g. language problem, assignment writings) and (iii) social/psychological issues (depression, racial prejudice, anxiety, anger). Students were asked to nominate whether these issues were "never a problem", "has been a problem" in the first 12 months and "ongoing problem."

Follow-up personal interviews

Students completing the questionnaire were invited to attend personal interviews where the issues identified in Section "Methodology" could be further explored. Twenty one students (16 females and 5 males) agreed to this. A semi-structured interview approach was adopted using a set of general questions based upon what the students had reported in the questionnaire. This allowed insights into their concerns and provided greater certainty in identifying the student's primary adjustment issues. All the names of students (and counsellors) reported in this study are pseudonyms.

Counselling services

Twelve counsellors, predominately Anglo-Saxon, from counselling services at the students' institutions, were interviewed in order to determine what they saw as the predominant adjustment issues faced by international students. Counsellors also gave an indication of the frequency with which issues presented and their relative severity.

Counsellors who had available time as well as personal and professional interest in counselling across cultures participated in the study. The questions posed to counsellors at the interview were mailed to them in advance. Transcripts of the interviews were checked by the counsellors for accuracy.

Analysis

SPSS was used to analyse both demographic data (Section "Introduction"), and student's adjustment concerns (Section "Methodology"). The latter were summarised, tabulated and compared. Students' and counsellors' interview transcripts were read separately by the researcher and in conjunction, to find patterns, themes, insights and categories of responses. Merriam's comparative analysis methodology (2002) was adopted because of the qualitative nature of the study. This method argues that the systematic and constant making of comparisons is essential to conceptual development at all levels in the analysis of qualitative data.

Results

Student questionnaire

Demographic data

Table 1 summarises the demographic data of the participants. Students from South East Asia comprised three-quarters of the cohort (75.6 %), followed by students from India (22.2 %), and Europe (2.2 %).

More than two thirds (70.0 %) of the sample were undergraduates, the mean age of the students was 23.9 years old and the number of male participants exceeded the females ($n = 53$ and 37 respectively). Thirty per cent of students were studying within the Faculty of Business and Economics, followed by Information Technology (18.9 %), Engineering (17.8 %) and the remainder in Medicine, Science, Education and Law/Arts. A majority of students were unmarried (88.9 %).

Adjustment issues

Table 2 summarises the most common adjustment problems and difficulties reported by the students in the questionnaire. While loneliness, homesickness, and inadequate accommodation each affected approximately 50 % of all students in their first 12 months of relocation, these issues did not appear to be an ongoing problem for the majority of those so affected. In contrast, nearly one in three students reported financial difficulties in the first 12 months, and for the majority of these it remained an ongoing issue. Inappropriate behaviour was least problematic affecting only one in seven students.

Of the 21 students who participated in the follow-up interviews, 14 students experienced ongoing problems with adequate accommodation, loneliness, homesickness and financial difficulties. These issues affected most students regardless of the levels of study, gender and countries of origin and were evident during the first 12 months of arrival. The following comment is from a Bangladeshi postgraduate student:

Table 1 Participant characteristics

Characteristics	n	%
Sex		
Female	37	41.1
Male	53	58.9
Marital status		
Unmarried	80	88.9
Married	10	11.1
Country of origin		
Sub-continent	20	22.2
SE Asia	68	75.6
Europe	2	2.2
Study level		
Undergraduate	63	70.0
Postgraduate	27	30.0
Faculties		
Business/economics	27	30.0
IT	17	18.9
Engineering	16	17.8
Medicine	8	8.9
Science	8	8.9
Law/arts	8	8.9
Education	6	6.6

Table 2 Percentage and frequency of responses relating to adjustment issues of international students

Item	Never a problem		Has been a problem		Ongoing problem	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Financial difficulties	41	45.6	28	31.1	21	23.3
Loneliness	34	37.8	44	48.9	12	13.3
Lack of stability	52	57.8	28	31.1	10	11.1
Adequate accommodation	39	43.3	43	47.8	8	8.9
Isolation	51	56.7	31	34.4	8	8.9
Homesickness	39	43.3	44	48.9	7	7.8
Behaving appropriately	72	80.0	13	14.4	5	5.6
Adjusting to different culture	54	60.0	32	35.6	4	4.4

This experience of isolation, homesickness and loneliness are all inter related. As I have not been away outside my own country before, it was a real experience for me. So in every respect I felt isolation. I could not be a part of the ongoing activities because all the time I have been thinking of my parents, and husband. (Sharny)

(Please note that in this, and subsequent quotes, no effort has been made to correct the English expression).

Issues with public transport, particularly for students without cars and who had long distances to travel were also identified in interviews. The comment below illustrates some of the frustrations experienced by this student:

> Transport? Again, this is very difficult because we (Indians) are mostly night creatures, so we end up working late evenings and the place where I am living, Dandenong, and 7 pm is your last bus. The only other alternative is to take a taxi. Let's say, for example, if you are studying at night and suddenly you ran short of coffee or I'm desperate to have a cigarette, I have to get a taxi to Seven Eleven to pick up a cigarette, because I need to study and I can not afford to waste my studies. Transport becomes a big problem. (Gregory)

Academic concerns

Table 3 shows the main academic issues reported by students in relation to academic life. Of these, problems with time management and expressing ideas, each affected nearly half the students, at some time in the first 12 months, while performance pressures, assignment writing, poor academic results and language problems each affected approximately one third. Different study methods were also a problem for 25 % of students.

While the concern with time management and study methods were not ongoing problems for most, the issues of expressing ideas, pressure to perform, poor results, and language proficiency were ongoing for in approximately half the students. The issue of assignment writing however, remained for the majority of students beyond the first year that reported this problem.

The interview data reflects that academic issues were a concern for over half of the students interviewed. Thirteen of the 21 students encountered difficulties with written language, assignment preparation, and pressure to perform academically. This pressure arose by virtue of many of them being supported financially by their parents. On the other hand, 10 students reported problems with time management and adapting to different study methods. Many students did not anticipate the

Table 3 Percentage and frequency of responses relating to academic issues of international students

Item	Never a problem		Has been a problem		Ongoing problem	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Difficulty expressing ideas	32	35.6	38	42.2	20	22.2
Assignment writing	40	44.4	32	35.6	18	20.0
Pressure to perform	41	45.6	33	36.7	16	17.8
Poor results	48	53.3	28	31.1	14	15.6
Language problems	51	56.7	27	30.0	12	13.3
Time management	37	41.1	42	46.7	11	12.2
Different study methods	61	67.8	23	25.6	6	6.7

difference in teaching pedagogies between Australia and the home country and its impact on their study.

> Yes, particularly in class, because in my home country there is a different culture in the way we conduct classes and the way we participate in class. So in my mind, when I arrived here first time and I went to class I was so quiet, looking around, never answering questions. In comparison to my Australian counterparts, they're so talkative and have so much to say. (Youqian)

For those students who indicated time management as a problem, this was commonly ascribed to procrastination and poor time management. The following remark by Lauren, describes this:

> My problem was that I was used to being extremely busy and when you're really busy you can be so efficient. Because you have to be, you just do it, whereas now I have too much spare time. That's my problem. It sound ridiculous I know, but that's my problem, it's like: "Oh. I have another 3 days so I don't have to rush" and then all of a sudden you have to hand this in 24 h and you're panicking, more than panic, and hysterical. And I'm thinking "what have I done"? (Lauren)

Social/psychological issues

Table 4 summarises those issues reported by students within the social and psychological sphere. Of the psychosocial issues identified in the questionnaire, loneliness and anxiety each affected about one third of students while depression, stereotyping, anger, and lack of support each affected approximately one quarter in the first 12 months of relocation. A lack of friends was the least reported issue. For the majority of these issues, for most students, they were not ongoing problems.

The interview data suggest that for the majority of students, loneliness and lack of friendships (Australian friends) were of greatest concern. Moreover, 14 had experienced depression, whilst twelve revealed that they experienced anxiety, and

Table 4 Percentage and frequency of international students' social and psychological issues

Item	Never a problem		Has been a problem		Ongoing problem	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Anxiety	49	54.4	31	34.4	10	11.1
Depression	56	62.2	25	27.8	9	10.0
Stereotyping	56	62.2	25	27.8	9	10.0
Racial prejudice	63	70.0	19	21.1	8	8.9
Lack of support	60	66.7	22	24.4	8	8.9
Anger	58	64.4	24	26.7	8	8.9
Loneliness	53	58.9	31	38.4	6	6.7
Lack of friends	71	78.9	14	15.6	5	5.6

poor support mechanisms. As students explained, these were largely related to study and their personal performance:

> Anxiety is an ongoing problem for me. For example, I don't have any exams now but still I am anxious all the time because I have constant pressure of coming to the campus to check my mail and keep track of what is happening in my country and let them (my parents) know how I am doing. (Sharny)
> Depressed… I feel dark sometimes with my study and my assignments. I feel like maybe English is not my first language, however I put all my effort on my assignments, but at the end I just get a low mark. It's very frustrating; I've even tried to talk to the lecturer and the lecturer say "you are not giving me enough things so I can't give you more than that." So I feel very depressed by that. (Yoke Pang)

Rohan, a postgraduate from Bangladesh, was exceptionally troubled by his lack of social interaction and friendships despite feeling he's been here long enough:

> I have been here now for 9 months and I still have no friends. How can that be explained? I have plenty of non-Australian friends but no Australian friends. From my point of view, I say that I knew a lot of Australians, particularly my classmates; but this interaction is only limited to the classroom. I talked with my other international friends and they' all share similar views. (Rohan)

Another student comment about social connectedness:

> Sometimes everything is so overwhelming and I feel very isolated⋯ I'm being alone and my family is all back home. I don't have any friends and sometimes when you need someone to talk to, there is no one available. (Sat)

In contrast, while social and psychological issues affected a large number of students, one undergraduate interviewee was free from this dilemma:

> Never (referring to social/psychological problems). I consider the people here very, very friendly and I have never gone through with any of the above mentioned problems (depression, anxiety) because I have lots of friends and the first person who helped me get all my notes was an Australian. (Iga)

In the follow-up personal interviews, a number of students elaborated on personal experiences that they linked to racial prejudice in their place of employment during their studies. Gregory described how he was often denied promotion in his workplace despite possessing the right qualifications and being constantly reminded by his superiors that he was doing a great job:

> In my workplace, there is 100 % racism going on; a subtle racism where you cannot ever prove it. You know you are good and you have heaps of qualifications and yet when you go and ask for promotion or for any other thing—sorry, they won't give the work but they will give it to their own community. And that is 100 % racist. (Gregory)

Interestingly, according to the interviews, the above major life issues might not have been related to students' cultural background, gender, age and level of study.

Counsellor interviews

All counsellors confirmed that the overwhelming majority of international students that they saw experienced an intense period of change as they entered a new environment in the host country. This period of adjustment could span anywhere between 3 months to virtually an indefinite period for those students that never fully adjust. On average however, according to the counsellors interviewed, 12 months seemed to be the usual period of adjustment for overseas students, a period of time which concurs with student feedback.

Adjustment issues

Student adjustment concerns which may prompt them to seek counselling as reported by counsellors included; homesickness, isolation, lack of support and loneliness. It was the view of counsellors that feelings of displacement were very real to many students and that this could then lead to major psychological problems such as anxiety and depression. Counsellors stressed that these problems generally arise from culture shock and poor support mechanisms for students:

> I see clients with a broad spectrum of issues: homesickness, adjustment, culture shock, and some experiencing psychotic breakdown. (Jessica)
> International students generally don't have a good support system. I don't think they have the same buffers against stress and distress that local students do. (Fay)

Academic

Academic issues are other pressing concerns for many international students. Counsellors reported that whilst many students possess a reasonable command of the English language, academic tasks such as essay writing, comprehension of written texts and participation in tutorials affects some students. This was possibly due to the new learning environment students are confronted with, and, for some students, poor study and time management skills:

> Language issues and the way academic system works here can be very confusing for international students. It's more lecturing here than learning things by heart and our expectation of students to be more independent in their thinking. (Helen)
> I see quite a few international students around exam times and at the beginning of the year when they're trying to adjust to different learning and teaching styles. (Rebekah)

Social/psychological

Social and psychological concerns were identified by counsellors. These included relationship issues, poor friendship circles, depression and insomnia, substance abuse, high levels of anxiety, and in some instances, psychotic episodes. Several

counsellors stressed that some psychological concerns required students to return to their home country, while others resorted to hospitalisation and heavy sedation:

> Its relationships and much deeper psychological issues: depression, anxiety and psychiatric issues. (Eliza)
> Depression, serious depression, potential for suicide, and sometimes concern about someone else who is really depressed. (Rose)

Another counsellor explained:

> There are family issues where students are under pressure to do certain courses by their family and they don't really want to do that course. (Rebekah)

Counsellors also reported that students presented with issues related to the difficulties in making the transition to adulthood in the absence of their usual support structures such as family:

> Becoming a young man or woman in a foreign country, but also as an individual from a collectivist society and having to return to a collectivist society. (Eliza)

Other counsellor-reported issues centred on student sexual preferences:

> Students can also be grappling with being gay, which is not permitted in the home country, and finding how to deal with it here and how to deal with the same issue when they go back home. (Joan)

Discussion

Perhaps, not surprisingly, the results revealed that students experienced significant transitional problems whilst studying abroad, and that these problems fell into three broad categories; adjustment, academic and socio-psychological concerns. Regarding transitional issues, this study sought to firstly, identify precisely which of these issues brought students to counselling services, and secondly, whether there was agreement between the adjustment issue that brought students to counselling and the adjustment issue ultimately identified by the counsellor. A good correlation was found between the student-identified adjustment issue that bought them to counselling, and the issue actually identified by the counsellor. Moreover, 21 students who took part in the in-depth interviews had experienced all of the identified adjustment issues to various degrees. Face-to-face interviews with the students also revealed high levels of disappointment and frustration during their adjustment period.

Adjustment issues

The study revealed that international students experienced multiple adjustment problems in the first 12 months that may prompt them to seek out counselling services. In their initial transition to university from their home country, personal

problems largely related to loneliness, home sickness and inadequate provision of accommodation. Based on the interview data, it appears that exposure to unfamiliar surroundings, as well as lack of support creates a sense of homesickness and loneliness for students. This is consistent with the findings of Arthur (2004), Lin and Yi (1997) and Leong and Chou (1996).

Financial pressures are also of a concern to some international students regardless of their country of origin, age, and gender. It is not clear whether this is related to socio-economic background or alternatively, to the costs involved in living in Australia. Related to this, international students must assume full-time status while they are enrolled at university and the opportunity to work is hindered by legislation that requires them to work minimal amount of hours. The responsibility of paying tuition fees and cost of living therefore, pose a significant challenge to the students' finances which may further contribute to their level of stress.

Other adjustment issues related to their struggle is adjusting to a different culture, travelling on public transport and encountering racial discrimination. More recent studies (Lin and Yi 1997; Arthur 2004) have noted discrimination in relation to employment opportunities. In our study, 30 % of students experienced some form of discrimination. This was also elaborated in interviews as relating to employment opportunities and these experiences added to their sense of marginalisation.

Academic issues

It was found out that certain aspects of academic life are of a particular concern to students namely managing their time, difficulty in expressing ideas and assignment writing. Some students came from an educational background where examinations were the primary assessment tool and such examination often only tested logic skills and fact recall rather than the capacity to express ideas and views. Hence, being required to submit written assignments, felt alien to students; and consequently, this was an exceptionally difficult task for some and the pressure to succeed often affected their academic results.

Many students commented on their increased level of anxiety when required to present tutorial papers in class. Students' difficulty in participating in tutorials stems from their perceived inadequacy in English and coming from educational background where this form of teaching was not common.

The findings on the academic difficulties experienced by students are consistent with the findings of Robertson et al. (2000), Li et al. (2002) and Bayley et al. (2002) who showed that language problems and differing study methods are major concerns for international students, particularly those from Asian backgrounds. Other possible explanation that contributes to academic stressors is personal procrastination and poor time management skills, which result in erratic homework schedules and leaving study commitments far too late. This may be further exacerbated by the absence of direct parental support and supervision. Given this, it is no surprise that students mentioned the high level of tension in their life which sometimes manifested itself in high levels of anxiety.

Social/psychological issues

Psychosocial stressors such as loneliness and anxiety also affected international students in one way or another. A lack of personal friendships and social interactions, particularly with other Australian students seemed to heighten their sense of loneliness and disconnectedness. This may have arisen because many international students feel more confident in interacting with other international students only, largely due to the absence of a language barrier. This finding is supported by the work of Barker et al. (1991), who noted that problems experienced by students are often affected by lack of social networks and friendships. Hellsten (2002) and Hedges and Soutar (2003) point out that social and personal adjustment to life in the host country is essential for international students if they are to succeed. If so, universities should be encouraged to consider such factors in pre-arrival information for intending overseas students, and also, to perhaps imbed within the curriculum, opportunities to address such issues.

One of the main aims of this study was to obtain counsellor's perspective on students' adjustment experience that may prompt them to seek counselling. All counsellors confirmed that international students experience many adjustment problems on arrival to the host country, including homesickness, loneliness and isolation. Academic and socio-psychological concerns such as depression and anxiety were part of the adjustment phase.

Interestingly, in the counsellors' opinions, the types of problems with which students present to counselling services have changed with time. While previously it related to academic progress, counsellors are reporting more relationship problems and much deeper psychological issues, depression, anxiety, and psychiatric issues. This is consistent with Stone and Archer (1990) who argued that the level of psychopathology in overseas students has increased over the past decade. Their research found that between 30 and 65 % of male students and between 26 and 62 % of female students had diagnosable psychiatric ailments. Several counsellors felt that this was due to a general increase in the expectation and demands placed in students.

Many cultures, in particular Asian ones, emphasize the primacy of parents in the children's lives. Here it found that parental expectations of success placed on international students was quite prominent. Exacerbating this was knowledge by the student of their family's financial outlay and commitment to their overseas education which was sometimes very costly, and beyond their means. Hence, this urgent need for students to succeed at all costs could, understandably, drive some students to the edge.

The findings here indicated that international students face considerable stressors in studying at two Australian Universities, and these impacts negatively on their physical and psychological health. Many of these students access counselling services only when in extreme pain. Whether this justifies corrective action by university or governmental authorities is a policy question for those bodies. One possibility is the use of better pre-departure orientation packages for prospective students and their parents to assist them in grasping the complexities of studying abroad. Also, thought might be given to culturally-sensitive educational support

which addresses the unique learning styles of international students. Financial assistance through easy payment schemes or low interest rate schemes may be useful in alleviating financial hardships by some students. Moreover, the findings suggest that a continuous need by counselling services and universities to develop and upgrade regularly programs to assist students, particularly in the area of cultivating friendships and support networks at their host institution.

The study had several limitations, one of which is the low sample size of male students in the interviews. This did not allow greater insights into how male students experience their adjustment in comparison to females, or what they reported at counselling. The low response rate limits the generalisability of the findings. Second, this study was confined to two large urban campuses. It would be useful to conduct further studies to ascertain whether students at similar and or regional universities have similar issues.

The result of this study provides insights of international students' adjustment experiences that may lead them to seek counselling from their perspective and the counsellors that deal with them in the context of counselling. A sample of 90 students does not permit firm conclusions to be drawn about the whole international student population, but it does enable some conclusions about the experiences of these students at the campuses studied. For students to succeed academically and socially requires an effort by the university administrators to implement the recommendations highlighted earlier in this paper.

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