

Factors affecting the social and economic security of international students: first results from student interviews

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Lack of student security provision in international student market

- 1980-2000 cross-border students rose from 1 million to 1.7 million with many paying full fees. It has become a global market
- most cross-border students move from emerging economies to OECD nations. Many become permanent migrants
- students fall between nation of origin and the nation of education and have little codified social and economic security. 'Consumer rights' covers only a fraction of security.

The social and economic security of international students...

is broader than social welfare, consumer protection or pastoral care. It includes, e.g.:

- health care, welfare, housing
- financial welfare and freedoms
- legal and civil rights, including mobility
- consumer protection
- freedom from abuse and discrimination
- freedom from exploitation at work

Theorising the social and economic security of international students

- globally mobile international students are **rights-bearing subjects**, with multiple rights
- student security is provided via a student security **regime** a fragmented complex of institutions, agencies and support networks
- this regime is one factor shaping global student **markets** and student choices in those markets

Markets and social security

- Social security has a hostile yet inter-dependent relationship with the market
 - Polanyi (1944)
- A study of choice-making by Chinese students demonstrated that a safe environment was the most significant predictor ($p < .001$) of intentions to choose Australia. Similarly, focus groups in Indonesia and Taiwan found many parents send their children to Australia not the USA because Australia is deemed safer.

International students as multiple rights-bearing subjects

International students have rights as –

- human beings
- students in formal education
- consumers in a market
- in the case of working students, as employees

The regime of international student security (1)

The *security regime* consists of three primary domains:

- government/state
- the semi-governmental education sector
- informal sectors and networks (family, friends, student networks, sports clubs, NGOs, religious institutions, etc.).

The regime of international student security (2)

- This regime is culturally specific, varies by time/place, and for different types of students
- The three domains are not always in mutual communication or otherwise synchronised, but interface. There are overlaps and gaps that are significant (especially the gaps)
- e.g. the pastoral role of universities is informal and does not cover everything, especially when the university is at fault, much is left to informal support networks, e.g. in a crisis, but not all students have access to such networks

The study: 200 interviews

- 200 student volunteers from population of 155,000
- 90% in Melbourne/Sydney, nine universities
- semi-structured interviews, 30-60 minutes, conducted by former international student
- 134 transcriptions completed :
- 51% students female, 51% students aged 25 years or less, students from 34 different nations:
- 83% from East, Southeast or South Asia (compared to 85% in base population, 60% postgraduate compared to 45% in population)

Interviews covered...

- age, sex, course, national origin etc.
- financial arrangements, problems
- work-related issues and problems
- accommodation, health, welfare
- languages, problems with academic English
- personal security and safety
- cross-cultural, including discrimination
- experiences with institutions and government
- personal and family ties, networks, NGOs
- back-up systems, dealing with crises
- how student security could be improved

Some key questions (all students)

QUESTION	YES %
Does English create difficulties for you in your academic work?	35
Are you experiencing/ have you experienced financial difficulties?	42
Are you working/ have you worked while in Australia?	66
Have you ever experienced problems at work? (% of those working)	19
Have you experienced discrimination or bad treatment in Australia?	51
Are you safe and secure in Australia?	90
Have you experienced periods of loneliness or isolation in Australia?	69
Should better or different prior information be provided to students?	78

Globally mobile, linguistically national

- I always think in Chinese first, in Mandarin, and then translate it into English. There is a delay in time... I don't know that is very difficult for us to write essays in English, because you can find a lot of resources and you can refer to the resources and then you can write in the academic format. I think my difficulty is just oral communication, daily language.
 - female, 29, Masters, studying in Sydney, from Taiwan

Globally mobile, linguistically unequal

nation of origin	% reporting difficulties with academic English
China	65
other East Asia	73
Indonesia	41
Malaysia	36
Singapore	0
other Southeast Asia	40
India	0
other south Asia	27
all other nations	20
<i>all students</i>	35

Globally mobile, locally jobless

- ‘Finding a job here especially in Ballarat ... I’m finding it a bit different. I don’t know, maybe the reason may be that there are not enough jobs. One of the reasons may be cultural problems’.
 - female, 34 years, PhD, studying in regional city, from Sri Lanka

Globally mobile, locally unacceptable

- I have no job now. I did work part-time before, but that was because my friend had already created the job... otherwise, you know, people are not very willing to give me a job because of my appearance. I can't do most of the jobs, I can't be an accountant, they don't want me there, they don't want me to be anywhere where I'm visible. And as for some other jobs, I'm not too comfortable doing them.
 - male, 30, Masters, studying in Sydney,
Sikh from India

Globally mobile, locally uninternshipped

- I'm doing my Masters in Banking and Finance. After my studies I intend to go back to my country... But when I try to get an internship, with real hands on experience in banking and finance, they say it is not open for people who have no permanent residence... this means I'm not getting with my degree what other people are getting, either back home, or in the States or Canada.
 - female, 22, Masters, studying in Sydney, from India

Globally mobile, locally unsafe

- I was walking home after work, eight guys were there. They saw me and started hitting me... They took everything: my wallet, my digicam, my mobile phone, my watch. I saw them coming and I was pretty sure what they wanted to do to me. So I put everything in my hand, and I said, ok, take whatever you want, just take it, let me go. But even though I give them everything, they started hitting me. The worse part is they hit me on my face and head, not on the body. I was just on the ground, try to protect my head... I called the police and they took me to hospital. They haven't bothered to call back.
 - male, 24, Masters, in Sydney, from India

Globally mobile, locally alone

- *Q. Have you experienced periods of loneliness or isolation while in Australia?*
- Yes, yes, oh, especially right at the beginning when I first got here. I didn't have anyone to talk to, that was the thing... I used to be on the phone everyday with my Dad 'I wanna go home'. It's like every single day, I'll cry and cry on the phone ... there was a lot of loneliness.
 - female, 22, Masters, studying in provincial city, from Zimbabwe

Globally mobile, globally gendered

Proportion answering 'yes' to the question	FEMALE %	MALE %
Does English create difficulties for you in your academic work?	39	29
Have you experienced discrimination?	62	40
Have you ever experienced problems at work?	24	15
Have you experienced periods of loneliness or isolation?	67	72

Globally mobile, locally targeted

- ... when I first came last year, I walked with my headscarf to school, and everybody was staring at me. I wore it for three days, but I didn't feel safe with people staring at me. I decided not to wear it... This year, I decided I want to wear my headscarf again, until... we were in the class, and somebody threw stones at the window. It happened four times...

Q. It's not the students?

Yes, it's some of the students there. The teacher even asked for special security for our night classes.

- female, 35, Masters, provincial city, from
Brunei

Globally mobile, nationally differentiated

	India %	China %	Indonesia %	Malaysia %
academic English problems?	0	65	41	36
financial difficulties?	35	45	41	57
problems at work?	17	35	7	9
discrimination/bad treatment?	40	55	64	64
isolation/ loneliness?	60	55	82	73

International student security is both a private benefit and a global public good.

Whether and how such global public goods are provided, determines whether the opportunities created by globalisation are made broadly accessible.