

# A Survey Report on Female International Students October 2009

**“I am the student,  
I am the cook,  
I am the mother,  
I am the wife,  
I am the home maintainer”  
– Jigisha, India.**





**A Project of the  
Victorian Immigrant  
& Refugee Women's Coalition**



**Supported by  
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# A Survey Report on Female International Students October 2009

## Support Needs of Female International Students in Melbourne's TAFE and Private Colleges

*“When I tell people about my problems,  
they tell me to marry”  
– Lily, Taiwan.*

A Project of the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition

Supported by the City of Melbourne





## FOREWORD


If your office is located in Melbourne CBD, you cannot help but be touched by the lives of international students who now comprise a significant number of people you see walking, eating, studying, talking, and shopping in the city.

In recent years there has been a phenomenal growth in overseas students that have entered Australia under the student visa program of the Australian Government. The City of Melbourne has the largest concentration of international students in Australia. The Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition (VIRWC) is located in the Queen Victoria Women's Centre (QVWC) along Lonsdale Street in the City.

The QVWC is within distance of many private colleges and institutes that provide two-year diploma courses to hundreds of thousands of international students. The presence of our office in the QVWC has become even more important. Our office provides a welcoming environment to female international students because we have a diverse team of staff and volunteers that are sensitive to their problems and can relate to them.

Over the last three years, field placement coordinators from private colleges and TAFE institutes have sought our cooperation to take in students for field placements. As we opened our doors to them, we discovered the complexity of problems the women face. When we set up a Family Law Advice Service for migrant and refugee women needing legal advice and support, we came across different types of issues mostly resulting from the vulnerability of their status as students without permanent residence in Australia.

While our organisation operates state wide and reaches out to female migrants and refugees who are already permanent residents and Australian citizens, the plight of female international students has gradually become a big concern to us. When these women come to seek help, they are in serious difficulties with no organizational backup. They have no financial support and are mostly dependent on the 20-hour job they have and on their husbands or partners for tuition fees, house and transport. They come to us because they have nowhere to go. They cannot get proper help from existing agencies because they are not permanent residents and/or recipient of Centre link benefits.



Then international education reached a crisis point, in the past year or so, as violence against male international students became daily news. But we know that the men are not alone in the receiving end of violence and other forms of discrimination against this sub-sector of Melbourne's students. We also know that the victimisation is not only between the mainstream community and this sub-sector. It is also within the group of international students

As a peak body working to empower migrant and refugee women in Australia, we believe we need to give voice to female international students. They comprise half of international students in Victoria. As the other gender, they remain voiceless in a society where men are always the preferred articulator of ideas and issues.

Tapping on the language skills of our students on placement, we decided to survey the needs of Chinese and Indian/Sri Lankan female international students. In the process, we discovered there was an unfinished survey of information needs of female international students that was also done by students on placement at the Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE), an agency also based at the QWVC. We asked the permission of WIRE to use their survey as it contributes to the surveys we have done.

This Report is underpinned by the surveys we conducted as VIRWC and the WIRE survey. From these surveys we are able to get a deeper understanding of the international students' phenomenon from a woman's perspective.

We hope this Report will result to a more gender and culturally-sensitive response to the overall needs of international students in this country.

Lastly, we would like to thank the City of Melbourne for providing us a grant for the printing and launch of this Report.



Jeanette Hourani  
Chairperson



Melba Marginson  
Executive Director



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report lists findings from four research studies on the needs of female international students. The research involved different sets of respondents.

- 17 women from a range of cultural/linguistic backgrounds interviewed in-depth on their experiences as international students
- 22 Indian/Sri Lankan women surveyed on their experiences as international students
- 21 Chinese women surveyed on their experiences as international students
- 102 women from a range of cultural/linguistic backgrounds surveyed on their information needs.

This Report is intended to provide a clearer picture of the needs and aspirations of female international students studying in Melbourne's TAFE and private colleges. It has focused mainly on students in those institutions. The VIRWC believes that international students in these educational institutions are in a more difficult situation compared to their counterparts in universities.


The VIRWC embarked on undertaking the surveys after receiving a significant number of domestic violence cases involving female international students through its Family Law Advice Service.

### Aims

The VIRWC wants to make this Report available to relevant agencies, authorities and groups so that female international students will receive more help and assistance and feel connected with the mainstream society.

It aims to focus media coverage on the female section of international students and raise the level of reporting of positive actions undertaken by the students themselves and by sections of government, non-government and community sectors. This Report is designed to benefit primarily female international students. Its objective is to give voice to their needs and aspirations.

It is hoped the local Melbourne community will become more informed about its emerging communities, particularly international students. Residents will be more enriched by becoming better connected to this new group of people.



The Report will be valuable information for the Melbourne community. When people understand the situation of international students, misunderstanding, prejudices, perceptions will be challenged. Communication can become more effective, leading to development of strategies that solve some of the problems now causing tension and distress amongst this vulnerable group.

The VIRWC will thus achieve its goal of assisting vulnerable women and providing them with skills and voice to be able to survive in their new home.

## **Key Findings**

This Report identified five areas of overarching concern to female international students in Melbourne from the four research studies: Housing, Language, Discrimination, Mental Health and Services.

1. The studies confirmed lack of housing support. Seventy four percent of the female international students indicated they needed housing related support but were not able to find or use it. Women cited difficulty in finding real estate agencies willing to assist them in finding rental properties.
2. All the surveys indicated language and communication to be the most concerning area for female international students.
3. The women felt explicitly discriminated against and felt that the government was not doing enough to address this discrimination or other problems they were experiencing as international students.
4. While the vast majority of female international students were satisfied with their studies overall, high percentages experienced negative feelings during their stay in Australia.
5. The services most commonly used by female international students were the health services.
6. There are many unmet mental health needs among women students.
7. The women were not accessing support services at their colleges or in the community in a manner and extent that would address their needs. They were unaware of such services or how to contact them. Others found it problematic to access services only in English or they felt uncomfortable discussing their personal issues with 'strangers' of completely different cultural backgrounds.



8. Culture plays a big role in the reluctance of female international students to speak out about their problems and issues they encounter.
9. Female international students believe their lack of PR status is a strong reason why they do not get the services they need. They are largely unaware of community organisations, and the types of assistance and support these organisations could provide to them.
10. While a large number of the women said that they would be interested in joining community organisations, they cited barriers preventing this. These barriers included lack of time and money, language barriers, transport issues and childcare to name but a few.
11. Of the 16 education providers covered in the research, only four of six universities provided most of the 19 services needed by students. The services provided by TAFE institutions were more basic, if satisfactory. The private colleges were limited in their facilities and services.

## **Ways Forward**

Melbourne's TAFE and private training colleges should be required to attend to the welfare needs of their female international students. The mandatory requirements of educational providers in the Educational Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act need to be strengthened to achieve this.

Any support program for female international students should be culturally and gender sensitive.

Decision makers are requested to seriously consider supporting and funding the initiatives of the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition as outlined in this Report, and other organizations working to help the students.



# 1. Introduction

Australia is increasingly becoming a destination for international students to further their education. Research has shown that in 2008, 435,263 international students enrolled in courses in Australia,<sup>1</sup> an increase of 18% from 2007<sup>2</sup>. International education has now become Australia's third largest export market, earning over \$15 billion in export income annually.

Students come from all different countries of the world and while studying, they are also adapting to a new environment, society and culture. Throughout their time, students undergo various experiences and problems such as language and financial difficulties, depression, isolation, the yearning for their home country and insecurity for the fear of being not accepted by the host nation. As hosts of this nation, it is our responsibility to protect the welfare and safety of our special guests. In spite of this responsibility, there have been violent attacks targeting international students and these students responded through demonstrations by taking it to the streets of Melbourne.

Recent spate of violence against Indian international students, revelations of scams among migration agents selling student visas to overseas market and exposes of corrupt practices by some Australian private college operators have prompted top federal and state government officials to make personal visits to India to mend damaged diplomatic relations. The Rudd Government's most recent effort to hold a two-day Roundtable with 31 selected international students representing 19 countries and 5 continents clinched a Communique between the students and the Australian Government which could result in better international tertiary education provision and support programs for international students.

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<sup>1</sup> Studies in Australia, [http://www.studiesinaustralia.com/why\\_study\\_in\\_australia/international\\_students\\_in\\_australia](http://www.studiesinaustralia.com/why_study_in_australia/international_students_in_australia)

<sup>2</sup> Lowy Institute Policy Brief August 2009, *Australia's Poisoned Alumni: International education and the costs to Australia.*



However, there seems to be a lack of equal presence of female international students in media coverage, student demonstrations and government responses. The VIRWC is concerned about the welfare of the women and wishes to improve community understanding of this particular group. Female international students carry the weight of not just their studies in an overseas environment but also the additional responsibilities as wives, mothers, sisters, which makes their experience an even more demanding one.

Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of focus on female students whether in the context of demographical data or research. Hence it was decided to conduct this study to identify the issues and problems of female international students, the causes of their problems, highlight their greatest concerns and their goals as Australian students and potential residents.

The first part of the study summarizes the greatest concerns that these young women are facing. These fall under the headings of:

- Housing
- Language
- Discrimination
- Mental Health
- Services

The second part of the paper provides analysis of data collected in an in-depth interview-survey of 17 women, who spoke about their main problems and anxieties as international students. The VIRWC is currently considering recommendations that can assist these students to enjoy their rightful welfare.

In the third and final section, the paper summarizes findings from three research studies of Chinese and Indian/Sri Lankan students and a random survey with 102 participants of various ethnic groups, backgrounds and ages. These studies all contribute to understanding of the issues facing female international students and can help the Australian community, governments and education institutions to create and design more flexible solutions to difficulties they face as female students.

*"I am the student,  
I am the cook,  
I am the mother,  
I am the wife,  
I am the home maintainer"*

– Jigisha, 32,  
India.



## 2. Issues and Concerns of Female International Students

While all students face challenges related to their life as young students, the challenges faced by international students are often compounded by the fact that they are far away from home, often in a culturally and linguistically unfamiliar environment, and lack the support networks that many young Australian students can rely upon. Similarly, international students from different countries can face different issues and concerns from one another.

The surveys identified five areas of overarching concern to female international students in Melbourne: housing, language, discrimination, mental health and services.

### 2.1 Housing

*“Access to appropriate housing is essential if overseas students are to have a positive overall experience. This is becoming more difficult to ensure as the general housing market in Victoria, and in Melbourne especially, becomes tighter. There is also concern that overseas students may face particular problems in accessing accommodation not faced by domestic students.”*

*(Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce Report, 22 December 2008, p.6)*

As the Overseas Education Experience Taskforce<sup>3</sup> notes, “access to appropriate (in style and location) and affordable accommodation is a critical part of the overseas student experience.”<sup>4</sup> While the shortage of appropriate and affordable housing, flowing from the continuing population growth and rising house prices, is a national level issue in Australia<sup>5</sup> and also affects members of the general Australian community, there is evidence

*I went to a house inspection. I didn't know the street and rang the real estate office to say I was going to be late. When I arrived, the woman said, "I don't know what you're talking about". I was already there. She never looked at me, just on her computer screen. I don't think people care about me. I'm like air because I can't speak English properly*

- Lily, 31, Taiwan.

<sup>3</sup> A Victorian Government initiative set up to “investigate and address key issues affecting the experience that adult (over 18 years) overseas students have while studying in Victoria”  
*(Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce Report, 22 December 2008, p.6)*

<sup>4</sup> *Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce Report, 22 December 2008, p.6*

<sup>5</sup> The shortage of affordable housing in Australia is well documented, the Australian census of 2006 placing the number of homeless people nationally each night at 100,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The Australian Federal Government, recognising this, launched its White Paper ‘Road Home – A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (2008).



that international students have been particularly seriously affected by the current housing situation in Melbourne.

Reports in Australian media have revealed the crowded and squalid conditions of the substandard accommodation that many international students are forced to live in during their studies in Melbourne. Similar issues with housing came up in the surveys of female international students.

The surveyed students cited challenges, in the first instance, in finding estate agencies willing to assist them in finding rental properties. Finding rental properties becomes a difficult and time-consuming chore, and students often end up living far away from their campuses in crowded, dirty and noisy housing. The students cited incidences where landlords of their own ethnic background raised rental prices higher than the expected price of rental properties generally. Landlords/estate agents were also accused of ignoring any maintenance needs and requirements of the properties, of being unwilling to return bond money, and generally ‘giving hard time’ to tenants making their stay uncomfortable.

The WIRE survey has further confirmed the lack of housing support. Seventy four percent of female international students surveyed indicated they needed housing related support but were not able to find or use it.

## 2.2 Language

Language, as our main tool of communication, plays a key role in an international student’s experience of studying overseas. Language, being equipped with an adequate standard of English in this case, is central because it affects all areas of the student experience, including study, work, welfare, social life as well as social inclusion more generally. Language enables a student to cope with the daily realities of being an overseas student in a foreign country.


Many of the young women surveyed found language and communication to be the area of most concern for them. A specific group of young Chinese women surveyed for instance

*I feel guilty with my parents sending money to me for 5 years. I still don't have a job. I told them to stop sending even if I only get \$200/wk for waitressing and paying \$120/wk for rent*

– Xiao, 21, China.

*Language is like the door. I try to open my door but I cannot open. They cannot see how much big my room is.... how much knowledge I have.*

– Lily, 31, Taiwan.



stated that they were unable to visit doctors or dentists because they were unable to articulate their symptoms or to talk about their illnesses. Similarly, they felt that they were unable to communicate adequately with student agencies or welfare organisations about their personal issues of concern. While some of the students had found service providers from the same ethnic background as them, it often turned out that these service providers spoke a different dialect from that of the students.

## 2.3 Discrimination

*The ability to interact freely and closely with local students and others is a core component of the overseas student experience. There are many factors currently working against this happening as well as it should.*

(Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce Report, 22 December 2008, p.14)

According to the Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce Report such developments as the “rapid rise in the number of overseas students”, “inception of Voluntary Student Unionism” as well as “the way some classes and institutions are organized” and simply “students’ lack of time because of significant academic and employment demands and their perceived command of the English language” have posed challenges in the way that international students are included and engaged in the local community.<sup>6</sup> Without negating the potential impact of such factors on social inclusion, many surveyed young women stated they felt explicitly discriminated against and that the government wasn’t doing enough to address this discrimination or other problems they were experiencing as international students.

Quotes from the respondents’ answers provide clear insight into the respondents’ feelings:

*“People look down on us. Don’t get jobs even if have the abilities to do it.”*

*“People are racist – no job because of skin colour – loneliness – no money – no food.”*

*“They don’t care much as far as foreign currency is coming in the country.”*

*“If you are a citizen they are acted upon really good and if you are not you have to chase them.”*

*“They are looked [after] by the Government depending [if] they are PR holders or citizens, not much if [they] are international students.”*

*“Importance should be given to everyone whether she is an international student, PR holder or citizen.”*

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<sup>6</sup> Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce Report, 22 December 2008, p.7 & 14



*We went on a research trip to the Anglicare organisation. On our arrival there, several homeless people were having their daily breakfast. At some moment I heard “We don’t want black people here”. We were so surprised and frustrated.*

– Jumila, 28, Mauritius.

*I did try and get help in one particular incident where my co-worker used to pass racist comment like calling us yellow or black, so when I took it to the management I was told he was indispensable*

- Angela, 26, Indian.

*I envy western people, they can go to our countries and they’d still get a job.*

– Lily, 31, Taiwan.

## 2.4 Mental Health

While the vast majority of international students in Melbourne report to be satisfied with their studies overall, the VIRWC was surprised to find out that such high percentages of female students had experienced negative feelings during their stay in Australia. As the table from WIRE below shows:

- Over 50 percent of the WIRE survey respondents had felt isolated and/or lonely
- Over 40 percent of the WIRE respondents had felt ashamed and/or depressed and/or powerless.
- Almost 50 percent of the WIRE respondents had felt unsafe and/or fearful and/or afraid and/or anxious
- Almost 50 percent of WIRE respondents had felt angry and/or unfair and/or upset

A worrying trend among young female students in effect seems to be the experience of negative feelings that, in addition to the usual experience of acculturative stress experienced by international students, if left unaddressed may lead to deeper issues with mental health.

The study of Indian/Sri Lankan female students has found that the most commonly used service was the health services.

*I became depressed in the past that was impact my diet and I was drinking every day.*

– Dylan, 24, China.

*I felt lonely, homesick and missed my parents so much. I lost 10 kgs here. I cried a lot at night.*

– Jayalakshmi, 25, India.



## 2.5 Services

The issues and concerns of international students are numerous and diverse. Access to information and support services is thus crucial for ensuring that international students in Australia have a successful student experience and that Australia continues to attract foreign students in the future.

It was, however, apparent from all the four surveys that international students were not accessing support services at their colleges or in the community in a manner and extent that would address their needs. For instance, 95 percent of the WIRE survey respondents stated that they never accessed community support services in Australia.

The reason that the majority of WIRE respondents cited for not using any of the available support services in Australia was being unaware of such services or how to contact them. Others found it problematic to access services only in English or they felt uncomfortable discussing their personal issues with 'strangers' of completely different cultural backgrounds.<sup>7</sup>

Culture plays a big role in the reluctance of female international students in speaking out their problems and issues they encounter. The study of Chinese students has strongly demonstrated this. Chinese women would not discuss their private matters in exception to friends and family.<sup>8</sup>

The study of Indian/Sri Lankan female students has shown a remarkable cynicism among students about their status as not being PR holders or citizens being the reason why they do not get the services they need. The surveyed women were also largely unaware of community organisations, including any Indian or Sri Lankan ones, and the types of assistance and support these organisations could provide to people in their position. While a large number of the women said that they would be interested in such organisations, they also identified numerous barriers that

*I remember when I was sick and I went in emergency department. My condition was very bad but no staff member was giving attention to me. But an Aboriginal person starts fight to the receptionist for me.*

– Amandeep,  
29, India.

<sup>7</sup> Please see the WIRE survey responses on the issue of support services, Appendix D.

<sup>8</sup> Please see the Chinese female international students' survey for more details, Appendix B.



prevented them from actively pursuing this interest. These barriers included lack of time and money, language barriers, transport issues and childcare to name but a few.<sup>9</sup>

In a piece of additional research undertaken by the VIRWC, the VIRWC found that of a total of 16 education providers serving international students, only 4 of 6 universities provided most of the 19 services needed by students, while the services provided by TAFE institutions were more basic, if satisfactory. The private colleges, on the other hand, were somewhat limited in their facilities and services.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

International education involves many stories of difficult experiences and difficult lives with little backup or support.

Despite the many problems identified, the women in the study are often optimistic, mostly not cynical, and relatively satisfied with their life in Australia. These are attitudinal assets, not to mention the skills they bring, in a country that is in need of resilience, respect and tolerance.

This research indicated the women’s wide range of economic, social, and welfare needs which require combined efforts from various institutions in Victoria. It must be noted, however, that a gender focus is necessary for any support program that will be developed for them.

For its part, the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Coalition has already begun developing an Advice, Referral, Information, and Education Service (ARIES) for Migrant and Refugee Women at the Queen Victoria Women’s Centre. This service will assist women who are not entitled to specialist services because they are not permanent residents of Australia, i.e. *international students* and those who come under fiancé/spouse and skilled migration.

*In Canberra, my Indian flatmate committed suicide. She lost her baby and felt so hopeless. Firstly, it was totally bad dream for me. I was thankful that I went through that because my religiosity strengthened.*

- Xiao, 21, China,

*In the beginning I hope to solve the issue of how I enter [to] the mainstream society and I gave up at last.*

- Karen, 40, China.

<sup>9</sup> Please see the Indian/Sri Lankan female international students’ survey, Appendix C.

<sup>10</sup> Please see the survey of services provided by a sample of education providers, Appendix E.



ARIES has been identified as a clear gap in the provision of culturally-sensitive information and support programs for migrant and refugee women. This service will include holding information forums, practical speech development and job-hunting workshops and other capacity-building activities for women at the QVWC. It will also offer to hold cross-cultural training to teaching and non-teaching staff of private training colleges at a fee.

At the policy level, the VIRWC will continue to give voice to female international students using this Report. Two community arts projects are also under way to raise community awareness about the plight of the students using multimedia and theatre forums.

*I think the bad experiences here made me stronger. I am now able to talk back and see people in the eye when I know that I'm doing the right thing. I am now able to stand my ground and find my own solutions. But regarding my point of view about the future and after I came to Australia, I became more doubtful. I was pretty sure I had a bright future back in my country and when I came here, it all turned blurry.*

– Donna, 23,  
Philippines.

## APPENDIX A

### In-depth Survey of Female International Students

There were 17 individuals who participated in the survey. Most of them arrived in Australia in 2008. The average age surveyed was around 25 years old; the youngest female interviewee was 21 and the oldest was 40. Nine of the interviewees were single and the rest were married. Three of the married interviewees have at least one child and five have none and the remaining was single. A total of 6 participants were from India, 3 from China, both 2 from Sri Lanka and Mauritius and each from Colombia, Nepal, Taiwan and the Philippines. Among all the interviewees, one was taking up Hospitality Management and another one is doing an MBA. The rest were all in Community Welfare / Development field.

**1. Before you came what did you expect Australia would be like? Has your experience fitted your expectations? What has surprised you?**

71 percent of the interviewees have not met their expectations with regards to living in Australia. Expectations include better living conditions from own home country, friendly, passionate and modern society, the best environment for students to live and learn, achievable and easy living and gaining new experience in a land of opportunities. 29 percent on the other hand had their expectations met. The things they found surprising is meeting and blending with people, the random weather and poor medical services among others.

**2. What have been your main problems in Australia? What has been your biggest problem?**

The most outstanding problem faced by international students was finding a job and building a career, followed by blending with the mainstream and making friends as well as accommodation. Also mentioned were language barrier, high standard of living, depression, prompt medical attention, immigration issues, school concerns, less working hours, the Australian weather, stress and discrimination.

**3. Are Australians welcoming of international students?**

59 percent agreed that Australia is a welcoming country for international students. 35 percent had a negative response while 6 percent was not sure.



#### **4. Do you have any problems that are not yet solved?**

82 percent which consists of 14 interviewees still has pending problems such as applying for permanent residency, blending in, joblessness, satisfaction, accommodation, language barrier and managing finances. The remaining 3 or 18 percent are not facing any problems.

#### **5. When you had bad experiences and negative feelings did you get help? Who from?**

59 percent of the interviewees were able to seek help from friends, family, sometimes strangers, community groups and teachers. The remaining 41 percent, on the other hand, have either not encountered any bad experiences and negative feelings or did not get help from others.

#### **6. What sort of feelings did you have?**

29 percent of interviewees had positive feelings and 71 percent expressed negative feelings like loneliness, helplessness, disappointment, frustration, rejection, reluctance, contempt and even considering going back to home country.

#### **7. How have the feelings impacted on your health and well-being, or on your general attitude to life?**

59 percent of the respondents said it had a negative impact, i.e. low concentration, tiredness and stressed out. 29 percent had it on a positive way and 12 percent expressed that it had no impact.

### **Melbourne is seen as a tolerant and multicultural place.**

#### **1. Do you feel that this has been the case? If no, please describe your experience.**

94 percent interviewees felt this had been the case. 6 percent did not think that Melbourne is a tolerant and multicultural place.

#### **2. Do you feel your multicultural background has negatively affected your chances in life? In what way?**

65 percent said that their multicultural background had not affected their chances in life in a negative way. 29 percent feel that their language, culture, and physical appearance had negatively affected their chances in life.



## Summary

The survey shows that female international students who arrived in Australia for the last 8 years have not met their expectations of their vision of the Australian living. The problems encountered range from following a career path or getting a job to medical attention all the way down to physical and emotional stress. Despite the barriers, international students still remain positive about Australia. With the help of friends, families and community groups, the negative feelings are tamed down to a minimum if not totally eradicated. The impact however to their health and well-being as well as their general attitude to life turned more towards the detrimental side.

In nutshell, almost all surveyed female international students see Melbourne as a tolerant and a multicultural community. They believe that having a totally different upbringing such as language, culture and appearance does not have much of a negative impact on their chances in life here in Australia.



## APPENDIX B

# Survey of Chinese Female International Students

The following report is written according to a survey of 21 Chinese female students who voiced their most common concerns and worries.

### Age Range

18-20	5
21-22	10
23-24	4
Unknown	2

### Length of Stay

Less than a year	2
1 year	3
2 years	8
3 years	3
4 years	5

### Communication/Language

Communication is of dire importance to everyone; communication is the universal method of helping one to adapt to a new society. Many of these young women have outlined that communication and language remained as their most concerned area. From the survey, students listed the following communication related issues:

- Unable to visit doctors or dentists as some expressed they were unable to articulate symptoms/illnesses
- Most respondents were Mandarin-speaking origins; many Chinese doctors cannot speak the same dialect with proficiency
- Unable to communicate with student agencies, organizations or welfare groups concerning employment or personal issues

The inability to communicate causes fear, insecurity and compels one to be isolated.

## Welfare Services

### Services provided by colleges

None	13
One	4
Two	3
Three	1

Sixty-two percent of the respondents revealed that they did not have welfare centres to which they may refer in case of personal problems. Welfare services are provided in universities or colleges for students to utilize. Of the 8 people stating to have welfare services, 6 rated them as mediocre in services and resourcefulness; 2 stated they were not useful. These services are designed to assist students in circumstances such as

- Employment
- Housing
- Work placements
- Personal issues

Of the students who were aware of these services, 7 of the 8 students commented that the services and resourcefulness of the agencies were at a satisfactory level while 1 commented it was not useful. These responses are crucial as it highlights the issue that colleges do not provide accessible information about these services.

When asked if these students were aware of any Chinese community services, none of the students who were interviewed had knowledge of Chinese support services in the wider community.

From these studies, it brings to our attention that some students do not have adequate assistance provided for them. It is vital to consider should they encounter unexpected situations, which are beyond their control; it would be difficult to begin searching for relevant communities or welfare services for assistance.



## Provision of work placements

All students stated that their colleges or universities do not provide work placements for them. Placements allow students not only to gain experience in their fields of study but also to learn and adapt to the different working environment and conditions. Moreover, placements are to reduce their anxieties about working with those who are culturally different to them. Students may not know of directories or references for them to seek employment and without these experiences it will pose a hindrance to their chances of finding employment in future.

## Employment

Employment is the most pressing issue for most students. 10 respondents stated the following barriers to employment:

- Difficulty in seeking employment agencies
- Lack of help in finding jobs
- Work placements do not provide adequate or sufficient skills to prepare them for future work places
- Lack of connections
- References for resumes
- Students with no Permanent Residency have the likelihood of not being employed

Students also felt when submitting their resumes to employers, many do not receive responses and they feel insecure and dubious of future employment opportunities. Employment is vital for students. Employment provides students the opportunity to adapt and learn about the different cultural environment and people and to further equip them with sufficient skills for future work places. Furthermore, students require income to pay expenses such as rent, university and daily needs.

## Housing

Housing is another pressing issue expressed by 10 students; they expressed that some Chinese landlords raise prices of rent higher than the expected price. Some expressed it was difficult to find rent as they were unable to easily find renting agencies to assist them. It is of dire importance that students find shelter in order to render their stay comfortable and secure.

## Case Study



Two students have been interviewed about their experiences while being in Australia; they mentioned and discussed some of the difficulties that still remain for international students.

### Respondent 1

V has been in Australia for two years and she is currently studying Community Welfare in College Y. V lives by herself without family or relatives but she depends on friends for help. She works as a part-time retailer, which is sufficient to cover all her expenses such as accommodation, food and other personal needs. V commented that her college provides sufficient and useful information about welfare services and it is easy to access and find. She has recalled she was able to seek counselling assistance without difficulties as the college has a designated location for students who needed personal assistance. Generally she finds Australia as a sociable and affable place yet at the same time she believed that discrimination is still a lingering issue. Some people are still unfriendly towards international students because of their racial background and sometimes there are misunderstandings that foreign cultures pose as threats to mainstream Australian society.

V also mentioned it was difficult, at first, to find employment because of her status as an international student. However, she said she considered herself fortunate as she had friends who had connections with some work places. V finds her work place as an agreeable environment as her employer and other employees were friendly and welcoming. Conversely, she discusses that not all students were as fortunate as her in finding jobs; some may not have friends or relatives who have the right connections to employers. She felt that it would be difficult for postgraduates to find permanent jobs because of the English language requirements.

Lastly, V voiced her concerns about Chinese women's reluctance in speaking out their problems and issues they encounter. This reluctance to talk is related to cultural reasons, as the Chinese would not discuss their private matters in exception to friends and family. When asked how these matters should be resolved, V suggested that welfare agencies or colleges can set up groups and meetings for Chinese students only in order for them to meet new people and to



be acquainted with others. She further suggested that Chinese students would be more comfortable and open to other Chinese students.

As V had mentioned that students find it easier to relate issues to friends, this can be a way to help students to build up their confidence in speaking out and to reduce stress. Furthermore, she pointed out that students might be more comfortable when speaking their problems with other students, as they understand one another's situation more than others. Another issue with students not preferring to attend welfare support groups is because they believe they have not the sufficient English level to communicate and articulate their problems.

## **Respondent 2**

Student X has spent four years in Australia; she also studies Community Welfare in College Z. Like the first respondent, she does not have any family or relatives in Australia. She finds that Australia is a friendly country and she has not personally experienced any forms of discrimination. At first, X felt nervous because of the different environment and most of all, she felt her English skill level was not sufficient to communicate or understand others. She recalled her experience of her first Math Methods class in high school in Canberra where she did not understand the teacher's words. When asked about the welfare services, she commented that she is aware of them yet she preferred to speak about her problems with close friends.

Like student V, finding a part-time employment was difficult because she was not a permanent resident. However, she has friends who has close relations with employers therefore securing employment was easy. Once again, X pointed out that others might not be so fortunate if they do not have the right connections. She is most concerned that it is difficult for Chinese women to find jobs even if they have adequate skills suited for particular areas; she believed this is because of the difficulty in attaining a Permanent Residency. Secondly, X noted that Chinese women are hesitant when asked if there are any issues they have encountered. X stated that it is a part of their culture of not speaking out their personal matters with those who they are not familiar. Some of them will not join groups, as they prefer to seek help and counselling from friends and families.

## APPENDIX C

### Survey of Indian & Sri Lankan female international students

The survey was completed by 22 female international students from Indian and Sri Lankan backgrounds. The following is a breakdown and analysis of the findings.

#### Personal Details

Country of Origin	No. of Respondents
India	20
Sri Lanka	2

Languages Spoken	No. of Respondents
English	22
Hindi	17
Punjabi	15
Singhalese	2
Gujarati	1
A combination of 3 above languages (most commonly English, Hindi and Punjabi)	14

Age Range	No. of Respondents
20 – 24 years	12
25 – 29 years	6
30 or more years	2
Age unknown	2

Marriage Status	No. of Respondents
Married	15
Single	7



<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>
No children	21
1 child	1

<b>Length of Time Spent in Australia</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>
Less than a year	9
About a year	9
About 2 years	3
About 3 years	1

**Educational Details**

**How did you choose the college and the course you are currently enrolled in?**

Through an agent / consultant	13
Through family / friends	5
Newspaper	1
Internet	1
Info event / seminar	1
Unknown	1

**Is your course recognised on the Australian Skilled Migrant List?**

Yes	19
No	-
I don't know	3

**Is your school recognised in delivering the course you are currently enrolled in?**

Yes	20
No	-
I don't know	2

**Does your school have welfare services for international students, e.g. health, counselling or visa services to help out with your everyday life?**

Yes	13
No	5
I don't know	4



The most commonly used service was the health service, but visa consultation and study related counselling service were also identified.

**How does your college inform you about any events or changes in immigration laws?**

Notice boards	8
Seminars and meetings	6
Through the principal	3
Through phone, email or text message	3
Through specialised agents / counsellors	2
Unknown	3

**Does your college provide you with a work placement?**

Yes	18 + 1 fairly certain that 'yes'
No	-
I don't know / Unknown	3

**Are you employed at the moment?**

Yes	12
No	8
Unknown	2

Those employed listed such sectors and employers as hospitality (4), aged care (2), childcare (1), marketing (1), World Trade Centre (1), and Douglas Site Services (1).

One respondent who has failed to find employment felt that this was due to her not having an Australian accent and not being white and therefore unable to 'attract Aussies'.

**Have you ever been faced with any form of abuse in the workplace?**

Yes	1 + 1 (witnessed abuse at work)
No	18
Unknown	2

The only two cases of abuse included a respondent witnessing a colleague being abused by a supervisor who did not respect the person's temporary eye problem and her consequent inability to work near smoke, and an alleged racial



bullying of a respondent who had worked as a waitress. She wrote: *‘The only time I worked as a waitress, I have been bullied on my race and people just assume [that] because I’m dark I’m Indian not Sri Lankan.’*

All the respondents, apart from one, had not sought or needed to seek help for abuse. The above abused Sri Lankan waitress said the following: *‘Where? I don’t know how. There is nowhere in Australia where I can go seek help if I am being racially abused.’*

In the case where the person had sought help, she had advised her work colleague about her work rights after which the colleague was ready to sue the supervisor. The case was solved when the supervisor apologised.

## PERCEIVED CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

### What issues do you feel Indian and Sri Lankan women face in Victoria?

(Un)employment / financial difficulties:	12
Discrimination / racism:	7
Domestic violence:	4
Language / communication problems:	4
Lack of support / difficulty accessing support:	3
Cultural differences:	2
Accommodation:	2
Issues with family / children:	2
Health (including mental health):	1
Illiteracy / lack of skills:	1
Permanent residency (PR):	1
Sexual differences:	1

### How are these issues acted upon by the government?

Very well	-
Well / moderately well	1 (‘at least it’s tried to help’)
Not well / not well at all	8
I don’t know / Unknown	9



Asked if they thought the Government was doing anything to address these issues, only one respondent said that the Government had at least tried to help (even if it still had a long way to go). 9 respondents either did not know or wanted to provide answers for the question, while 8 answered very negatively to the question. The remaining answers appeared to be of more normative nature, including suggestions that the Government should help students to form secure places to meet (e.g. student/community groups), community groups for specific ethnic groups, different rules and laws for groups from different backgrounds, and seminars about the country’s law, especially regarding women’s issues. The answers also indicated that there was a perception that international students did not receive the same attention as Australian permanent residents or citizens.

Some of the quotes provided additional insight into the respondents’ feelings:

*‘They don’t care much as far as foreign currency is coming in the country.’*

*‘No steps have been taken to help international students.’*

*‘Government really does not do much for the international students.’*

*‘No action taken by the Government’*

*‘If you are a citizen they are acted upon really good and if you are not you have to chase them’*

*‘By their laws according to their problems’*

*‘They are looked [after] by the Government depending [if] they are PR holders or citizens, not much if [they] are international students’*

**How do community organisations help Indian and Sri Lankan women who experience these issues?**

Barriers as obstacles	3
Not receiving equal help	2
I don’t know	4
Unknown	5



Asked about the utility of community organisations, the respondents had diverging opinions. While some respondents (4) did not know about the services that community organisations could provide or did not provide an answer to the question (5), others thought that language and cultural barriers were an obstacle (3) or that they were not receiving the same level of help as some other groups of people (2). The respondents were aware that community organisations provided help in such areas as employment, accommodation, and various specialised services to fulfil both short and long term needs.

Some of the quotes provided additional insight into the respondents' feelings:

*'Maybe they do provide counselling but I would not go'*

*'They do help but not as with the citizens'*

*'They help but language and cultural differences prevail'*

*'They help but not us'*

*'They do help with referral but if they are not funded – what can they do?'*

*'Importance should be given to everyone whether she is an international student, PR holder or citizen'*

*'Better way is to solve the problem through government (organisations) and follow the rules'*

**What are some Indian and Sri Lankan Organisations that you know about in Victoria?**

I don't know / Unknown	19
Yes, I know some	3

Asked about their knowledge of any Indian or Sri Lankan organisations in Victoria, 19 respondents answered negatively to the question or didn't know, while the remaining (3) cited such organisations as Queen Victoria Women's Centre, National Council of Women of Victoria, YWCA, some Sikhism organisations, and FIWAA. None of the international students were members of any such organisations.





**Would you consider joining an Indian or Sri Lankan women’s group which addresses your issues?**

Yes	15
No / Unknown	7

Asked about reasons behind joining such organisation, the respondents cited helping others (especially others from the same background) (6), to get help for oneself and talk about issues (7), being part of a network and taking part in activities (3), and to volunteer (1). A respondent who answered negatively to the previous question said that being part of such an organisation would make no difference to anything.

**What activities would you like to do in a women’s group?**

The following were examples of activities respondents were interested in:

Group discussions & sharing of ideas (e.g. around food)
Activities to unwind and help others with their issues
Gym, dancing, dieting, cooking
Games, talks, sharing of issues
Talks and entertainment
Entertainment (e.g. dance and music)
English language classes
Personal development
Informative sessions
Computer skills
Women’s health
Communication skills
Childcare/playgroup
Talks and seminars
Legal information (e.g. women’s rights) with specialised lawyers



### What training would you like to get from the group?

Computer skills	14
Vocational skills	12
Leadership and empowerment	8
English classes	8
Other	2 (e.g. personal development, IELTS training, cooking, improving creativity & dressing sense)

### What issues would you like to discuss in this group?

Education, training or employment	14
Domestic violence	12
Health issues	10
Family and parenting issues	9
Sexual abuse	7
Other	2 (racism)

### What do you think are the barriers that prevent women from joining group activities?

Lack of time	16
Lack of money	10
Language barriers	9
Transport issues	8
Lack of childcare	3
No place to meet	3
Other	2 (husband & family responsibilities)

### How often would you like a meeting to be conducted with the group?

Monthly	11
Fortnightly	8

### What timing would be suitable for you?

Evenings	9
Afternoons	5
Mornings	4





**How would you like to be informed about the group’s meetings and activities?**

Email	14
Phone	6
Post	1

**How can VIRWC assist your group to operate effectively and meet the groups’ needs?**

Raising awareness about issues	12
Connecting with other groups	10
Getting funding for the group	8
Publicity for the group	7
Leadership training	6
Lobbying the Government	6

**Are there any issues that have not been mentioned above that you would like to address?**

The following were examples of issues respondents wished to mention:

Financial support for resource centre relevant to international women
Not enough communication between Australians and new people
Equal attention and respect to all women in Australia, whether they are international students, permanent residents or citizens
There should be no discrimination between local and international students
Increasing working hours, concession on transport, community groups for international students
We should establish special organisations for international students

## APPENDIX D

# Survey Conducted by WIRE

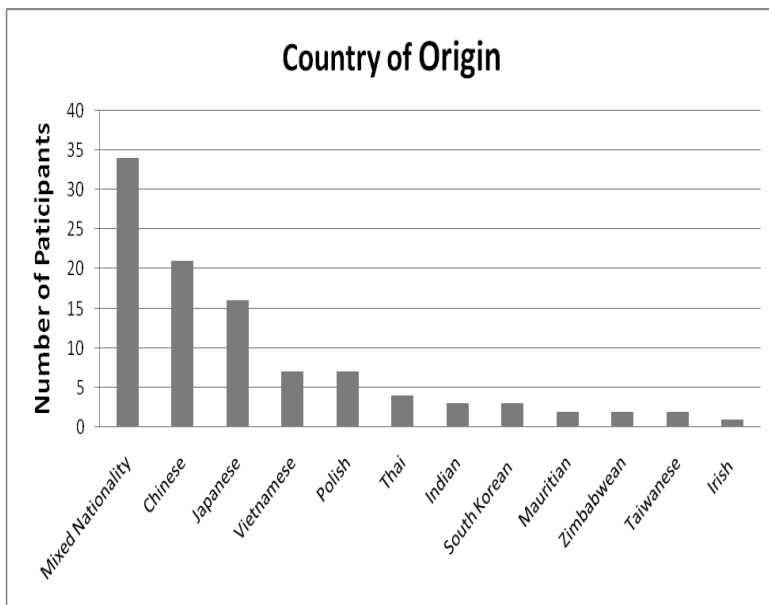
## Introduction

International students in universities tend to get better services as proven by some studies already conducted. It is the students who are enrolled in the TAFE colleges and private education providers that remain unnoticed and suffer the most. The information in this survey reveals the core issues faced by 102 female international students of private education providers, English Language and TAFE schools based in the City of Melbourne.

## Country of Origin

Nationality	No.
Mixed Nationality	34
Chinese	21
Japanese	16
Vietnamese	7
Polish	7
Thai	4
Indian	3
South Korean	3
Mauritian	2
Zimbabwean	2
Taiwanese	2
Irish	1

The mixed nationality includes students from Denmark, Indonesia, Philippines, Somalia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Spain, Cambodia, Saudi Arabia, Britain and Israel.



Most respondents are from China, Japan, Poland and Vietnam. The Indian students in the TAFE sector and English courses are also there but as the data was not complete, they have not been included in the survey. Indians and Chinese students made the highest chunk of international students staying in Melbourne.

## Age

Age Group	No.
20 and below	10
21 - 24	47
25 - 35	28
36 and above	11
Unknown	2

The majority of the students are very young adults: 48% are in the age of 25-35 and 29% are the age of 21-24, which make 75% of the surveyed population to be of the age within the range of 21 to 35. Students of below twenty and above 36 are equal as they contribute 10-11% of the total population surveyed, while 2% didn't reveal their age.

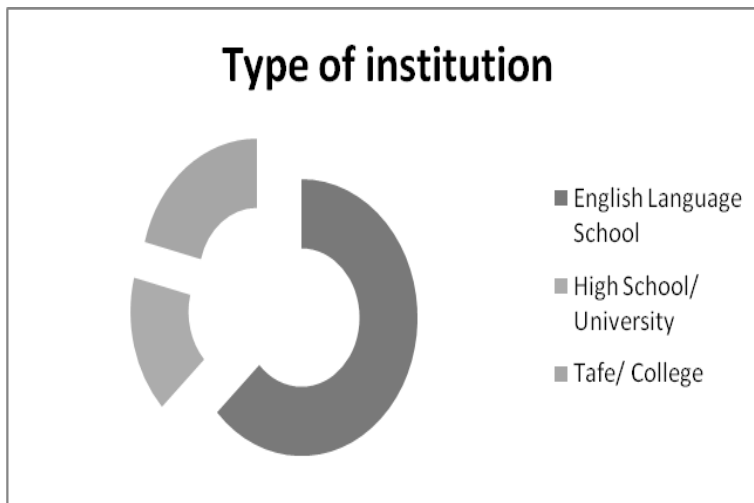
## Duration of Time Spent in Australia

Years	No.
Below 1	68
1	20
2	4
3	3
4	0
5 and above	1

The student population shows a pattern of very new people arriving in Melbourne. More than 85% of the students have been in Australia for less than one year which explains that most of them is naïve to the foreign environment and vulnerable to many things.

## Education

Type of Institution they are enrolled in:



Most of the students surveyed were in the English language schools, confirming the language difficulty faced by international students while staying in Australia.

## Degree of Difficulty Experienced With English

Frequency of Difficulty	No.
Almost every day	7
Sometimes	31
Rarely	31
None	0
No Reply	28

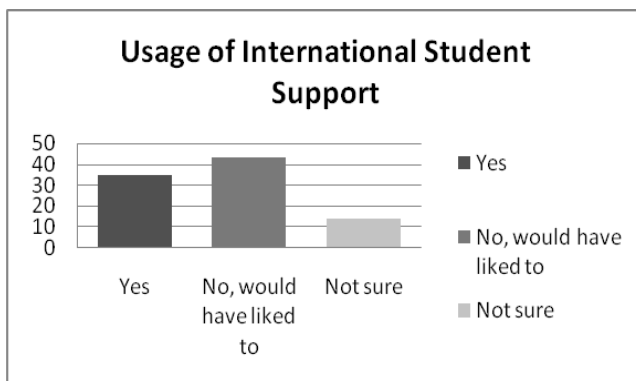
## Problems in Studies Other Than English

1. Long University hours
2. Very expensive
3. Lack of time management skills
4. No computer skills, difficulty in making assignments
5. Study seems boring because of lack of understanding.

## Does your institution offer international student support?

Yes	59
No	3
Not sure	34

33% of international students surveyed were not even aware whether their institution provides them with any kind of student support. 3 of them said there is no such support while 6 of them didn't reply to the question.



We can see here that majority of the students would like to use the support services, and some are not sure how to use and where to go. So it is a matter of importance that students should be made aware of such services and these services should be easily accessible to them.



## What Kind of Student Support Services Do You Want to Have at Your Institution?

- 1) Academic and English language support
- 2) Accommodation support
- 3) Concession tickets
- 4) Job finding
- 5) References for the job and accommodation
- 6) Medical support
- 7) Knowledge of student rights/ immigration rules
- 8) Tour of the city
- 9) Get together to make friends
- 10) Psychology support

### Overall Happiness with Studies

Happy	72
Unhappy	17
No Reply	13

In spite of the problems students faced, 70% of the students are satisfied with their studies.

### Accommodation

Type of Accommodation	No.
House with Relatives	14
Sharing House/ Home stay	29
Private Flat	18
Share Flat/ Student Accommodation.	17
Other	3
No Answer	21

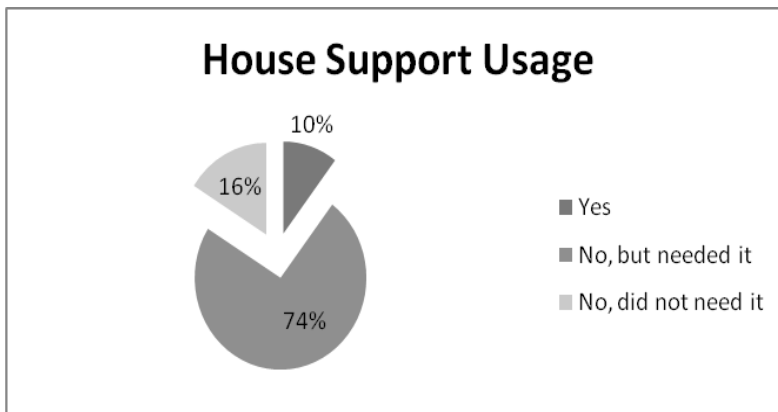
House Related Problems	No.
Yes	19
No	76
No Reply	7

## Details of Problems Faced

- 1) Bond money not returned by the agent/roommate
- 2) House not clean
- 3) Noisy
- 4) Owner gave a hard time.
- 5) Owner did not get the problems fixed in the house.
- 6) Too many people sharing the place

## Ever Used Housing Support?


Usage	No.
Yes	9
No, but needed it	64
No reply	28
No, did not need it	14



74% wanted the housing related support but they were not able to use it.

## Employment

Job Situation	No.
Working Paid Job	27
No, Job but Seeking	33
Do Not Want to Work	36



## **Type of Jobs**

1. Waitress
2. Kitchen Hand
3. Car Wash
4. Security
5. Call Centre
6. Personal Care Assistant
7. Cleaner
8. Baby Sitter
9. Store Assistant

## **Difficulties Faced at Work Place**

- 1) Language problems
- 2) Racism
- 3) Lack of hours
- 4) Minimal wages
- 5) Not paid in time
- 6) Cancellation of shifts without prior notice
- 7) Get forced to work more

## **How Do You Overcome Your Problems at Work?**

1. Majority of them said “just let go”, as we do not want to lose the job.
2. Spoke to the friends other than work
3. Spoke to the owner or manager or supervisor
4. Didn't tell anyone.
5. No one to support us, if we lose the job.

## **Problems in Finding Jobs**

84% did not reply to the question asked. 16 of them said they found difficulty, while 14 said they did not.

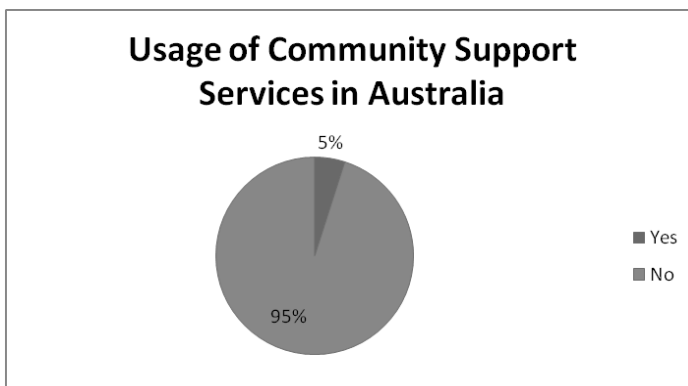
## Why Did You Choose Australia?

- 1) Easy to get into universities
- 2) Cheaper than other western countries
- 3) Wanted to study overseas
- 4) Beautiful country
- 5) Nice weather
- 6) Was told it's easy life there
- 7) Safe
- 8) Reputable

## Who You Feel Comfortable Discussing Personal Feelings with

Comfortable With	No.
Family	41
Friends in home country	37
Friends in Australia	47
Staff at school/uni	81
Australian community workers	88
Community workers speaking your language/from you culture	87

## Have You Used Community Support Services in Australia When Needed?



It's very evident only 5 % of the surveyed population used community support services in Australia.



## Reasons for Not Using Community Support Services in Australia

Reason	No.
Did not need them	29
Unaware of them and how to contact them	53
They are provided in English only	15
They are provided for Australians, not for me	11
Uncomfortable discussing personal details with strangers, they won't understand	13
Uncomfortable discussing personal details with Australians, they won't understand	7
Community services seem too much for my problems	13

## Do you plan to stay in Australia after completing your studies?

Decision	No.
Yes	31
Maybe	24
No	37

## Overall Happy With Life in Australia

Decision	No.
Yes	79
No	23



## APPENDIX E

### Services provided by Universities and Institutions to International Students

In a survey of 16 education providers conducted by the VIRWC, the VIRWC finds that 4 of 6 universities have adequate services provided for students, while TAFE Institutions are satisfactory and private institutions are somewhat limited in their facilities.

The table below shows the results the VIRWC has obtained, showing the most common services provided to the least.

Orientation	88%
Counsellors	81%
Career Development and Support	75%
International Student Advisor	63%
Student Association	56%
Airport Pickup	56%
Accommodation	56%
English Language Programs	50%
Academic Support	50%
Sporting Clubs/Committees	44%
Social Programs	44%
Student Visa Assistance	38%
Disability Services	31%
Scholarship	31%
Legal Aid	25%
Financial Aid	25%
Prayer Room	25%
Childcare/family services	25%
Health Services	25%

The VIRWC believes that it is vital for universities and institutions to further concentrate on facilities such as English programs, health, financial and legal aid.



English is a dire necessity; some students may struggle with English and this may have other implications. Language is the tool for communication and for everyone to convey their needs and feelings. It is important to ensure students are equipped with sufficient language skills to communicate their problems to agencies for assistance. On the other hand, if language skills are not adequate, this can potentially decrease students' confidence in interacting with people around them, or any agencies which can help them. Students may feel alienated and insecure as a result of feeling that nobody can understand them.

Legal, financial and health services are lacking in the universities, TAFE and private training colleges surveyed. Students require these services to help them in personal difficulties. Students may not be aware of other agencies thus their place of study is their primary source for assistance. Should students encounter issues that may affect their personal wellbeing, they can immediately seek consultation. Moreover, many students are in the process of adapting and learning about Australian society and students will need references to help them to familiarize themselves.





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