



## CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN STUDENTS IN INDIAN UNIVERSITIES: A STUDY OF LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY, PUNJAB

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### Abstract

The experiences of international women's students in Indian universities can be challenging, with various socio-cultural and academic factors impacting their academic and personal lives. This paper examines the challenges faced by female students and their experiences at Lovely Professional University (LPU) in India and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. The research examines the experiences of female international students and how they adapt to the challenges of living and studying in a foreign country. In this research, the semi-structured interview is used to collect qualitative data from fifty international women students currently studying at LPU in different branches. The women surveyed are from Zimbabwe, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. The data reveals that international women's students face numerous challenges, including cultural differences, language barriers, academic pressures, social isolation, discrimination, harassment, financial issues, and safety concerns. These challenges impact their academic performance, personal physical and mental health, and social lives. The study suggests that providing academic support and resources, creating a supportive and inclusive campus culture, and addressing social and personal challenges can help female students succeed academically and personally. The study also found that social support from friends and teachers was important for the academic and social adjustment of international women students at LPU. The study finds that female international students experience different levels of adjustment in various areas and recommends ways in which universities can better support their adjustment and success. The research also provides valuable visions for universities seeking to create a welcoming and helpful environment for international women students and highlights the importance of addressing the inimitable needs and experiences of this population.

**Keywords:** International Women, Cultural differences, Psychological issues, Social challenges

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## INTRODUCTION

The term “International Student” denotes to those students who have migrated from their own nation to study abroad or other any other country than their own country. During their studying at abroad they are lacking a sense of belongingness and feel like they are not part of that society and culture. Being a male student and being a female student in a stranger nation always have different social, cultural and psychological perspectives. Given the diverse range of challenges they face, international students' adjustment to their new lives abroad can be a dynamic and intricate process. Female international students, in particular, must negotiate multiple aspects of their selves as non-native students and as women in a society with different gender customs than their home countries. Being a female international student complements to the pressures of being an international student, as female students have been reported to acclimatise to host cultures more difficult than male students. Scholars are also of the view that female foreign graduate students often reported higher social, psychological, and academic challenges than did their male counterparts in research about social support for graduate international students. The majority of the international female students have trouble in working on a positive social identity because the dominant society tends to view their prominence on interpersonal harmony as being submissive and a sign of inability. Their cultural background is an additional limitation on their identity development. It is also found that female graduate students get less provision from their academic departments and families than did their male counterpart. When female graduate students progress through the graduate programme, they must begin seeking for social circles, the ideal faculty advisor, and the ideal career connections. International graduate females meet additional difficulties beyond those common to graduate students, such as linguistic, cultural, educational, and academic difficulties.

International women who come to India for schooling also encounter particular difficulties. They frequently encounter linguistic and cultural difficulties, which can make it challenging for them to assimilate into Indian society. Additionally, because of their race, ethnicity, or nationality, they could experience discrimination and harassment. Additionally, women from particular nations or backgrounds could experience more discrimination and scrutiny. We are all aware that studying abroad is difficult and challenging because international students experience cultural shock, language barriers, difficulties adjusting to new customs and values, feelings of depression

and anxiety, homesickness, differences in the educational system, and the loss of their existing social network.

Some scholars had stated that challenges which are faced by international students includes racial discrimination, changes in their life status, climatic conditions and food differences, language, accommodation, separation from home, dietary restrictions, money, diminished social discrimination, and discrepancy in educational systems. In some scholarly reviews the majority of international students have to deal with dominant challenges such as language barriers and culture gaps. International students are at risk of developing mental health problems due to the loss of support systems and acculturation stress. The same problem was mentioned by other scholars that students become prone to mental health problems such as depression, psychosomatic complaints, anxiety, and paranoid reactions. The difficulties they face that contribute to this mental health risk are highlighted as language difficulties, culture shock, difficulties in negotiating day-to-day social activities, racial and ethnic discrimination, and a lack of physical activities. This leads international student, on their return home, to find themselves feeling frustrated because of the vast differences between their overseas training and the reality of their home countries. Many researchers have indicated that the challenges for international students may differ from region to region depending on the country where they are pursuing their education. There are many challenges that international students face when studying abroad. Studying at home is very easy compared to going abroad and starting a career. To get better economic opportunities, students from some foreign countries get diplomas, postgraduate degrees, or research degrees. Students from all over the world face challenges for many reasons.

Through this research project, we conducted several interviews with international students studying at Lovely Professional University to find out the main and common challenges they face here.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores the international student experience at the University of Toledo, where international students make up approximately 10% of the student body. It focuses on the challenges that international students face, including adapting to a new culture, English language difficulties, financial difficulties and being misunderstood by the wider university community. Suggestions for improvement include initiatives to raise the profile of international students, increase financial aid and

scholarships, and create opportunities for international students to study English. (Sherry, M., Thomas, P. & Chui, W.H. 2010)

International students make a valuable educational and economic contribution to higher education institutions in English-speaking countries. For these benefits to continue, universities need to be more aware of the adjustment problems these students face and implement appropriate support services. This review identifies factors that influence the adjustment and academic success of international students. Adjustment difficulties are mainly related to English language proficiency and culture. Success is influenced by English language proficiency, academic ability, and educational achievement. Understanding international issues of student adjustment has global implications for intercultural education. Successful support measures are reviewed and discussed for practice. (MS Andrade 2006)

The paper examines the impact of the academic culture of a country on the academic performance of international students. The focus is on Indian international students studying business courses at regional universities in Australia, as 61% of students are international and the majority are from India. The article describes an experimental study that uses a narrative research approach to better understand the academic culture of international students. Three main academic cultural gaps were identified from the students' narratives: (1) studying for a year with a half-year curriculum; (2) lack of understanding of the writing task; and (3) lack of familiarity with the Australian accent. This paper shows that the main source of difficulties of international students is related to the need to learn the academic culture of their institution and to learn the new academic culture of their institution. they travel across country borders to study. (Nayak & Venkatraman - Vol. 4, No. 2 (2010)) Being away from home is a major stressor for students in general and international students in particular, negatively affecting their psychological health and academic performance. The present study is reviewed compared the incidence and results of homesickness in a sample of international students from India attending a US university and a control group of first-year American students. The results show that homesickness is more common in the Indian sample. For Indian students, anxiety and depression were positively related to homesickness, while financial aid, academic burden, and intention to seek employment in the US after graduation were negatively related. Length of residence in the US, discrimination, and level of contact with American students were also found to be significant predictors of homelessness.

For American students, the number of siblings and financial support appear as the main factors that negatively affect homelessness. (Karin Tochkov September 2010)

Despite the focus of the gender perspective in migration research, very little effort has been made to investigate the migration of international students based on gender. This article raises three questions about Indian students studying abroad. Are there gender differences in their interests? How do you negotiate your sex life while abroad? Is the return to India shaped by sex? Online surveys with Indian students studying abroad (n = 157) and in-depth interviews with Indian students in Toronto (n = 22) Students in New Delhi (n = 21) and parents of foreign students (n = 22) conceptually, this paper is based on the framework of 'geographies of power' and student migration as a process subject to 'matrices of misunderstanding'. We found the least gender-related differences in motivation to study abroad, except for male students who were drawn from a wider background. However, male and female Indian students abroad face challenges in fulfilling their gender identity. Indian patrilineal families put more pressure on men to return; women face great challenges when they return. (Gunjan Sondhi & Russell King, May 2017)

This article contributes to the debate on international student mobility and the globalisation of higher education by attending to the issue of Indian international students in Australian universities. Based on the high-quality material produced by postgraduate studies, it explores the practical, economic, emotional and social pathways that support each other during education. The main argument is to develop an important mutual support mechanism that makes international studies possible for Indian international students. This worrisome practice highlights the need to move away from approaches that portray international students as neoliberal subjects or vulnerable groups in need of intervention. It also refers to the tendency to see the state of higher education as entirely neoliberal. Instead, they highlight the importance of the concept At the same time, it cannot be defined as neoliberal, showing a logical production in higher education such as interaction and mutual resistance among international student groups. (University of Australia Dr. Albert, 2002)

A study examines the attitudes of non-European female international postgraduate students towards their correctional experiences while studying at an urban research university, and determines the strategies they use to cope with their difficulties. Data collection included focus group interviews about why they chose to pursue graduate studies at

university; their experience; the most difficult correction problem; how they deal with their problems; and what the university can do to help with this problem. Common themes that emerged from the data were decision making, language, discrimination, ignorance, coping strategies, and future recommendations. Many women have come to the United States to the point where their needs cannot be met by local opportunities. Challenges students face include lack of English, discrimination, and Americans' lack of knowledge about other cultures and countries. Participants tackle the challenge by identifying which system works best for them and then use it to solve their situation. Students hope the institute helps ease the adjustment by focusing on interaction between American and international students, a forum for international students to share experiences, and teachers' understanding of the limitations of international students. (Fatimah Nasreen, 2019)

Existing literature concludes that international students need to interact with domestic and same-country peers and university staff to feel connected to the campus community (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Ward et al., 2001). Qualitative research by Trice (2004) evaluated the impact of university staff on the academic and personal challenges experienced by international students and the impact of those experiences on academic outcomes. International students who do not have a sense of belonging experience anxiety, lack of friendship, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and depression (Williams & Johnson, 2011). Considering the challenges that international students face in every aspect of life, Aina et al. (2015) concluded that with appropriate support from US universities, international students can gain a sense of belonging. These results also apply to international students studying in the UK

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the challenges women student faced in the lovely professional university
- To identify the various issues of women student facing in the lovely professional university

### METHOD

The qualitative research approach was used to examine the experiences of international female students at Lovely Professional University. More specifically, the purposive sampling method was used. In qualitative research, a non-probability sampling method called "purposive sampling" is used to pick participants based on predetermined standards or traits. Purposive sampling is the decisive selection of study participants who fulfil the eligibility requirements in order to provide a

sample that is as representative as possible of the population of interest.

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured individual interview is a research method used to gather information by engaging in a one-on-one conversation with a participant. It follows a set of predetermined open-ended questions or topics but allows the interviewer to explore other relevant themes or issues that may arise during the discourse. This method offers flexibility and can lead to a deeper understanding of the participant's perceptions, experiences, and opinions. The inclusion criteria for selecting the participants were that they should be female international students studying in LPU, facing academic, social, cultural, or language barriers, and be willing to participate in the study. The aim was to gather in-depth information about the challenges faced by international women while studying at LPU.

Semi-structured individual interviews are a beneficial method for discovering the challenges faced by international women studying at LPU. The data collected from the interviews provided valuable insights into the barriers and challenges that international women face.

Ethical considerations were taken into account during the research process. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interview.

Participants' identities are kept confidential.

### PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION

The participants were 50 international female students currently studying at LPU. They belong to three different countries. 20 participants are from Zimbabwe, 18 from Bangladesh, and 12 from Bhutan. Their age ranges from 20-24 years.

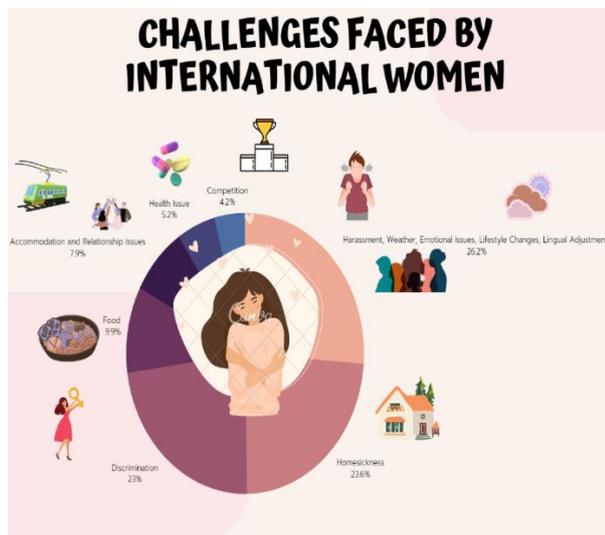
### RESULT

As charted in the literature review section, much of the contemporary literature relating to international students is inclined to highpoint their challenges and barriers. Thus, at the start of the study, we estimated that the participants would focus their reflections mainly on the difficulties of being international female graduate students. The same was the result of the research. Most participants talked about the challenges and difficulties they face in their day-to-day lives as an international student. But some students also talked about the positive aspects of their lives that they have developed as international students.

### DISCUSSION

This paper deals with the challenges faced by international women in Indian universities. The

research was conducted on 50 international women studying in a university in different courses. From the research, it was found that more than 90 percent of women studying in Indian universities face lots of challenges and live with many difficulties.



- According to the research, most international women prefer to stay out of campus. During individual interviews, 88% of women gave the same reasons for living in PG: affordability and cooking of food they want. They also narrated how their landlords charge them more and always ask for extra money in the name of security fees and never return it and also scold them for no reason (this issue is not faced by all but only a few international students face this). 12% of the students prefer hostels due to security reasons.
- 90% of women come from well-educated backgrounds and their parents are graduated and some doing higher jobs in various fields.
- Further, the research conducted also tells that these women experienced weather changes which lead to certain health issues. They feel the weather to be extremely hot in summer and freezing cold in winter. They said that they get severe sunburn and colds and coughs are common in winter. 3 percent of women also said that they can not bear the dust which causes several types of dust and skin allergies.
- Indian food is liked by all the international people as our food is enriched with natural spices and herbs. According to the surveyed population, they feel Indian food to be spicy and full of spices (masalas).
- Language problems are also common in international women. Nowadays English is the language known by most people which makes it easier for them to communicate but still, they are not able to understand the local languages and

feel difficult to communicate with local people. 96% of surveyed women are not able to understand the local language and they also said that their way of speaking has changed over time. They also shared that they feel that people make fun of them in their languages which they cannot understand and they feel humiliated.

- Lifestyle changes are easily visible in international women. Out of 50 women, 2 have said that India has them more religious and they feel peace in religious places. While the others showed no major changes in their lifestyle other than dressing. 10 percent of women complained about changes in their sleeping patterns. They told that as they belong to different time zones so it is difficult for them to regulate their sleep and adjust to new timings.
- Living away from home makes everyone homesick. Everyone loves to stay at home with their loved ones and spend time with them. To these international women, distance affects them a lot as they miss their homes and loved ones. According to them, once you are away from home you become so busy in your life that you are not able to even call them once a day. And they also said that they often feel homesick and stressed.
- 74% of women said that they feel at home here and that their classmates and friends also help them a lot. They get to talk to their families and loved ones and do not face relationship issues. Distance also creates relationship problems. Some students feel alone and aloof as they are away from their loved ones and families.
- As most of the women surveyed are from African countries, they are discriminated against based on their color and dressing style. They said that people consider them prostitutes and always behave in a very bad way. In some places, they are served later as Indians are served first on a priority basis just because they are not from this country. More than 80% of international women said that they are being discriminated against based on their culture and country.
- Other half of surveyed women are from Bangladesh and Bhutan, they said that they are also discriminated against due to their country and culture. One student said, "Once I was told that I cannot study in such a big university because I came from a small country". They said that people mock us because of the way we dress and the way we look.
- Managing expenses is also a whole deal of a problem for international women. They also go through loads of financial issues. They find it hard to manage their expenses. Sometimes they

are not able to use UPI payment methods due to international cards and have to go everywhere with cash in their pockets. As many students get their monthly allowance from their families, they face several issues in receiving money. Sometimes they overspend and are not able to manage their money. Few of them find food to be expensive and gave it as a reason for their financial issues.

- Harassment is one of the biggest challenges that international women face. They are harassed because they are different. The level of harassment is extreme with international women as told by these surveyed women. 94% of women said that they have been harassed in one way or the other. They described in detail the incidents that happened to them and are very heinous. People won't spare even a single chance to bother women and don't let them live peacefully.
- Mental health is the most important aspect of today's life. If a person has proper mental peace and is stress-free then only he or she is able to do his day-to-day activities at a normal pace. All these challenges and problems faced by international women cause a lot of stress and disruption of their mental health which poses several big health hazards.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as we have discussed above that there are international women students from different continents we have students from the Asian continent, we have students from Europe and we have students from the African continent. The majority of these students are from the African continent and they come from different countries. These students are facing different challenges according to their way of experiencing life here in India. Some students have been facing sexual harassment and this has brought a challenge for all the African students because some students from Africa have earned a living by becoming ladies of the night but some, especially from the southern part of Africa, have never experienced that kind of life so it is hard to tell that these are the ones who have been doing the ladies of the night and they all end up being recognized as the same. Some female international students have been learning how Indians make business and how they are maximizing their profits and especially the Tanzanians who have started small businesses like restaurants but the challenges they are facing are that they cannot cook Indian food so they might get low profits because they only get customers from African students only. The Bhutanese students also face a challenge some students make a mockery of

their way of dressing which makes them out of place and it also goes against their culture. African students they racist they are not treated as the other students. Some face a challenge in language some lecturers would sometimes teach in Hindi which is a challenge to international women students they would actually find it hard to understand the topic. A majority of African students face the challenge of financial issues. It is stressful and it also gives depression to these international students because the quality of education here in India as an international student is very expensive these students get depressed because they get blocked and lose their attendance if their attendance does not reach 75% at the end of the semester they get detained after they have to apply a backlog and each every module costs \$200 USD come to think if a student is said to apply 6 modules then that student has to pay a backlog of \$1200 USD and the parent has to pay fees for next semester within limited days failure to pay on the mentioned day there will be more charges. So these are the challenges and the experience that international women students have been facing in Indian Universities.

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