

The Realities of International Students: Evidenced Challenges

A report by One Voice Canada

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Executive Summary

International education is very lucrative for Canada; but there is a social cost associated with the profits being made off of international students. One Voice Canada's report on *The Realities for International Students: Evidenced Challenges* raises concern of the problems arising from Canada's international student program among Indian international students.

India is one of the largest source countries for international students. A significant proportion of Indian students are coming from the state of Punjab. A study in Punjab indicates a sizeable proportion of prospective international students from the State are from low-and modest-income families. The motivation for these families to have their child pursue an expensive Canadian education is to improve the family's economic situation.

Canadian postsecondary schools pay a commission to foreign consultants for every student they recruit. In Punjab, this economic model has given birth to an industry catering to youth wanting to obtain a study visa and settle in Canada. The promotion of a Canadian education as a means to obtain permanent residency is so effective that many families are taking loans to send their children to Canada.

In Canada, business and public finance interests have become dependent on international education. The number of immigration consultants has almost doubled across the country in the 2010's decade. There are also a considerable number of private colleges catering to international students. Revenues from international students have allowed the BC and Ontario government to decrease their proportion of revenue for post-secondary schools.

The perspective and experiences of international students are important to consider given the many burdens they face in Canada. The greatest being their financial burden due to the exorbitant tuition fees coupled with the cost of housing in major urban markets. A recent survey found 9 in 10 international students surveyed are concerned about their expenses.

To manage this financial burden many international students are working illegally. This has put them in a vulnerable position and many are victims of labour exploitation, and, exploitation of international students has become prevalent in communities across Canada. The economic dependency of female international students is especially unsettling as it makes them vulnerable to sexual violence.

Being an international student in Canada is also having an impact on the mental well being of many Indian international students. International student suicides have become a disturbing trend in Canada. This mirrors the international suicide problem for the last decade in Australia. The economic impact of COVID-19 seems to have only exacerbated these problems.

Governments are aware of the discussed issues. Government studies have identified shortcomings of the international student program and the vulnerability of international students. However, there have been no publicized reforms that address the underlying problem causes.

To improve the integrity of the international student program, and the welfare of international students, One Voice recommends to:

1. Conduct a comprehensive evaluative study of the international student program, examining the period between 2014 and 2020, and implement reforms to make the program designed to meet skilled labour market needs.
2. Regulate and reduce tuition fees for international students.
3. Increase funding and training for specialized services within post-secondary international student offices.

In closing, it is difficult to foresee these issues mitigating in the absence of any reforms that address the identified problem causes.