

# International Students and Mental Health

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## Background

**Research question:** “What are international students’ perceptions about utilizing mental health and well-being services?”

The importance of this question is to understand the barriers and challenges of accessing mental health and well-being services. Past research has highlighted a lack of awareness, and access to supportive services (Kim et al., 2020). This research question helps to explore the gaps, educate, experiences, and international students' preferences of mental health and well-being services. It reveals what further improvements could be made towards mental health and well-being services to meet their needs.

## Methods

**Methodology:** The anonymous online survey was conducted through Microsoft Forms. Non-probability sampling was used to recruit respondents.

**Tools:** The survey included 12 questions, and 5 demographic questions. The questions referred to the type of issues international students faced, and their experiences utilizing current mental health and well-being services. Additionally, it is to understand what further improvements could be made towards the services to meet their needs.

**Participants and recruitment:** The respondents were recruited through flyers, emails, and social media. There were 30 international students between the ages 18 to 30 years old. The majority were college students.

**Data analysis:** The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics presented through tables. The open-ended responses were organized and counted into different categories.

**Ethical considerations:** The survey was password protected on Microsoft Forms, and respondents were informed about the limits of confidentiality. The survey was anonymous ensuring IP addresses were not collected. The data was not collected on any personal device. After 2 years, the data will be deleted.

## Key Findings

- Background:**
- Majority of respondents were between 18 to 30 years old.
  - 19 (63%) identified as female, 11 (37%) identified as males.
  - 19 (63%) identified to be from India.
  - 26 (87%) responded to have a diploma.
- Results:**
- 33% (n=15) respondents were found to have financial difficulties accessing mental health and well-being services in Canada.
  - Majority of students (87%, n=26) responded that they had not accessed mental health services in Canada.
  - 49% (n=19) respondents wanted improvements on awareness on mental health services offered.

Barriers and Challenges In Canada	n	%
Financial Challenges	18	22%
Loneliness	18	22%
Housing	11	13%
Other	10	12%
Culture Shock	8	10%
Transportation	7	8%
Accessing services	6	7%
Healthcare	5	6%
Total	83	100%

- Open-ended responses:**
- Five respondents wanted improvements to college services in relation to mental health.
- “I believe every college/university/programs should provide free counselling or therapy services to the students. Some institution might have but students are not aware of it.”*
- Three respondents expressed the need to be more understood and heard.
- “I think college needs to consider more about the difficulties which international students face. We are newcomers, so we have more difficulties in studying and living in here. Everyday is a challenge. If the professors try to understand our difficulties, our college life would be less stressful.”*

## Discussion

Similar to past studies (Iftikhar et al., 2022) this study identified many issues that impacted international students and their utilization of mental health services.

The study explored gaps and root of cause leading to these challenges such as; preferences of utilizing in-person counselling or therapy services, not knowing the types of services offered at the college, and high costs to use the services.

The similarities from both the past research and this research revealed a lack of awareness and accessibility to services.

## Implications for policy and/or practice

- Further research needs to be practiced through online anonymous surveys for better results and finding gaps.
- Improvements on educating, access to services, and affordable daily living.
- Evaluate services by considering the issues of accessibility, language barrier, lack of awareness, and affordability to meet the needs of international students.
- The policy should have colleges decrease tuition fees. This includes the provincial government to help with affordable daily living for international students.

## References

Iftikhar, S., Perceval, G., Fu, Y., Zhou, Chuan., Yongguo, Cao. (2022). Prevalence of mental health problems among stranded international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *BMC Psychology*, 10(0), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-022-00917-2>

Kim, J., & Park, S. H. (2021). Stress-Related Growth Associated With Acculturation and Mental Health Among International Students. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 0(0), 1-24. <https://doi-org.library.sheridanc.on.ca/10.1177/0022167820979654>