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## Migratory Stress of Bangladeshi International Students in Canadian Postsecondary Institutions

Rifatur Rahim

*Development Studies, York University*

**ABSTRACT:** *Bangladeshi international students in Canada have strong academic and economic potential but lack proper social integration, which exacerbates their psychosocial challenges. This study aimed to explore their psychosocial difficulties to identify and address those issues. A qualitative study was conducted with 10 female and male students to examine their social, economic, and personal challenges. This study found that international students go through migratory stress, which comprises various internal and external stressors such as second language anxiety, self-imposed isolation, homesickness, insufficient financial preparation, discrimination, safety concerns, lack of employment opportunities, and unsuitable weather. This study's findings highlight the need for better social integration, employment opportunities, and mental health support for the students so they can better assimilate into Canadian society.*

**Keywords:** acculturation, Bangladesh, Canadian institutions, international students, migratory stress, Ontario

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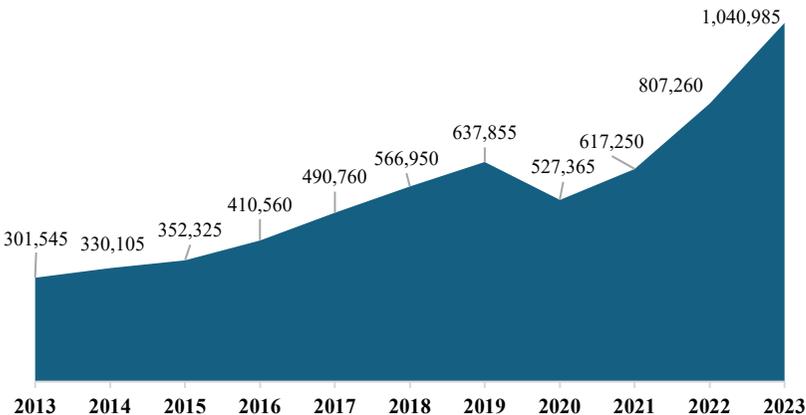
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## INTRODUCTION

International students in Canada are highly sought after by universities and governments worldwide for their economic and academic contributions, yet they remain a neglected and marginalized group who often lack sufficient policy and state support (Montison & Caneo, 2023; Zhou, Liu, & Rideout, 2017). This mismatch can lead to various social, economic, and psychological challenges that international students face while studying abroad. However, international students are not a homogeneous group but a diverse one, with different intersecting identities such as race, nationality, gender, class, religion, and so on. Among this diverse group are Bangladeshi international students, a South Asian cohort, who have their own nuanced and intricate challenges. Bangladeshi international students in Canada are one of the expanding groups who exhibit strong academic and economic potential but lack social integration (Agrawal, 2012). Bangladeshi students are also a burgeoning population that has garnered little attention in academia or the policy sector. That is why the central question guiding this research would be, what psychosocial challenges do Bangladeshi international students face while studying in Ontario universities and colleges?

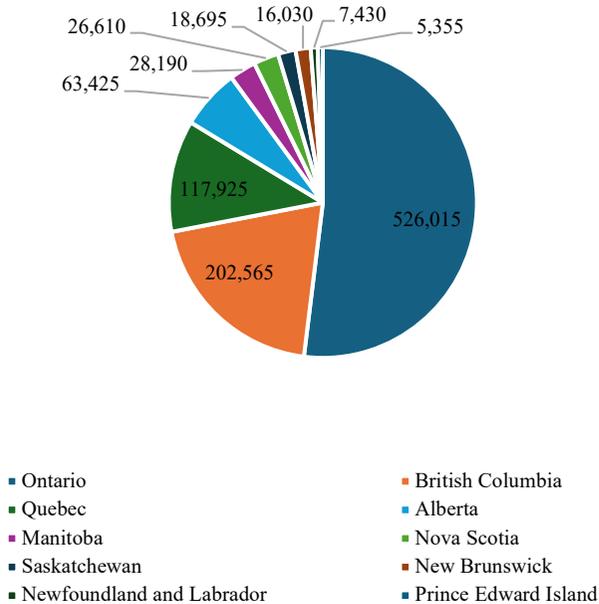
Canada is currently the third most popular destination for international students after the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively (Institute of International Education, 2023). International students are present in all levels of education, with the most significant number generally enrolled in post-secondary levels (Government of Canada, 2010). The total number of students has tripled within the last decade, as around 1,040,985 students came to Canada in 2023 (see Figure 1). Around 15,820 Bangladeshi students came to Canada in 2023 with a 29.1% year-over-year increase (IRCC, 2023).

**Figure 1**  
*Number of study permit holders with a valid permit in Canada from 2013 to 2023*



In 2022, international students contributed \$37.3 billion to economic activities, translating into a \$30.9 billion contribution to Canada’s gross domestic product (GDP). This spending supported the equivalent of 246,310 jobs in Canada and contributed around \$7.4 billion in tax revenue (Government of Canada, 2022). The government of Canada (2022) also reported that the yearly economic contribution of international students to the Canadian economy was greater than that of auto parts, lumber, or aircraft exports. Furthermore, the government highlighted international graduates as a source of key talent to help support Canada’s future economic growth (Government of Canada, 2022). Overall, international students in Canada are economically, socially, and fiscally important. This increasing importance of international students can also be attributed to Canada’s declining population, labor shortage, and decreasing provincial funding for universities and colleges (CBC, 2024).

**Figure 2**  
***Distribution of International Students across Canada in 2023***



The distribution of international students currently residing in Canada is not equal, as students from some areas of the world are greater in numbers (e.g., South and East Asia). In contrast, other regions are underrepresented (e.g., Latin America). More than half of the top 15 countries sending students to Canada are in Asia (e.g., India, China, Korea), and around half of those students come from different South Asian regions (e.g., Bangladesh, Nepal). In 2023, approximately one million international students came to Canada, with 60% originating from South Asian countries, including India, Bangladesh, and Nepal (IRCC, 2023).

During the 1980s and 90s, Chinese and East Asian students were the largest student group in Canada; however, in recent decades, an increasing number of students from South Asia (particularly India) have been migrating due to a shift in geopolitical landscapes and immigration policies (Anderson, 2024). Canada's increasing South Asian international population and recent policy shifts call for a better understanding of the impact, importance, and challenges of South Asian students.

The distribution of international students living in different Canadian provinces is scattered, with more than half residing in Ontario, the country's largest province. Furthermore, Ontario also has the most post-secondary institutions and a diverse population, which attracts a lot of international students (ICEF Monitor, 2024) (see Figure 2). International students have spent around 2 billion dollars in the province of Ontario in 2022 (Government of Canada, 2022).

All of this data emphasizes the importance of international students to the Canadian and Ontario economy and their society. However, beginning in 2024, the Canadian government decided to “stabilize growth and decrease the number of new international student permits” to almost one-third of the previous year due to a lack of “housing, health care, and other services” (IRCC, 2024). This new policy not only imposed severe uncertainties for the future of international students but also created openings for discrimination, inequalities, and marginalization. Therefore, this study enquires about the psychosocial challenges of Bangladeshi international students studying in post-secondary institutions in Ontario, Canada.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation was employed to understand the psychosocial challenges of Bangladeshi international students. The following section will discuss this framework along with the theoretical and academic debates surrounding internationalization, as well as the social and financial challenges faced by international students in Canada.

### Internationalization of International Students

Extant literature on the issues of international students in Canada is robust in addressing social and economic challenges (Gupta & Gomez, 2023; Govi, Liu & Tian, 2023; Kim, Buckner & Montsion, 2023), but sparse in understanding their personal and psychological issues. A large body of work on the challenges of international students in Canada focuses on the internationalization process and their experiences with the post-secondary education system in the country (Chen, 2008). Internationalization denotes “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004). However, historically, the Canadian government at both provincial and federal levels has opted for its self-interest rather than the well-being of the students (McCartney, 2021), which translates into policy centered around increasing profits, expanding their market share, and

recuperating the gradual reduction of provincial funding due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent economic recession. This neoliberal restructuring and privatization model has fostered the marketization of education, increased tuition fees for students, deregulated degree-granting institutions, and intensified market competition to maximize profits (Montison & Caneo, 2023; Taskoh, 2020). This process of internationalization of students points towards the deep-rooted agenda of profit-seeking behavior and capitalizing on the tuition fees of international students, which are around three times higher than their domestic counterparts, and without regulations on how much it can be increased yearly (Madgett & Bélanger, 2008). However, this increased market competitive mentality is not equally applicable to all international students, as it primarily targets Asian students who hold the most significant monetary promise for Canada's academic institutions and economy (Liu, 2016). In line with the neoliberal pressures from the provincial government and the marketization of education, Asian international students are often reduced to their economic contribution and seen as "cash cows," which does not serve the students' best interests (Zhou, Liu & Rideout, 2017). However, most studies on internationalization focus on broader agendas of globalization and capitalism, reducing students to a monolithic unit.

Furthermore, education is only one part of the lives of these students as they navigate their social and personal experiences, which are also informed by the internationalization process. The need to contextualize the idea of "international students" has been challenged from ideological and categorical perspectives (Kenyon et al., 2012). However, the gap in the literature remains, which this study aimed to address.

### **Mismatch of Financial Expectations**

Besides the homogenizing discourse of internationalization, international students can also be workers who actively contribute to the Canadian labor market and economy. This contribution is not without challenges, as their struggles with higher tuition fees, difficulties in finding affordable and adequate housing, unavailability of employment, and international currency fluctuations are well-documented (Calder et al., 2023). Interestingly, even with these issues, there is a prevalent stereotype of international students as "ideal immigrants," which creates the narrative of them as well-educated and hardworking yet relatively cheap labor (Desai-Trilokekar et al., 2016). These stereotypes negatively impact the financial well-being of the students, which is linked to their broader psychosocial challenges. International students have reportedly been exploited for work, and in severe cases, this has led to their deaths because of using opioids to stay awake at work for longer hours (Bolger, 2023). Experts have also highlighted a disconnect between Ontario employers and governmental policies in prioritizing profits over the needs of the students (Scott et al., 2015; Arthur & Flynn, 2013). Recently, international students have faced even more uncertainties after the 2020 pandemic due to a lack of social connections, the hybridization of the education system, and the unavailability of employment (Firang, 2020; Matsumoto & Viczko, 2023; Zabin, 2022). While previous studies have highlighted different financial

struggles of international students, there is a gap in the current understanding of these issues post-pandemic, during an economic recession, and amidst changing Canadian immigration policies.

### **Discrimination and Lack of Social Integration**

Literature on the social experiences of international students primarily highlights their challenges in integrating into a new society, as well as various structural discriminations and barriers (Buckner, Knight-Grofe, & Eden, 2023; Ge, Brown, & Durst, 2019; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). As international students in Canada migrate from all around the world, but mainly from Asian regions, cultural shock and assimilation challenges have always impacted their experiences (Austin, 2007). Social isolation due to language barriers has also been highlighted by various studies as a significant challenge to this process (Scott et al., 2015; Zhang & Beck, 2014). International students face discrimination, such as racism and racial microaggressions, which are latent forms of prejudice that international students encounter in their daily lives (Poolokasingham et al., 2014). These can manifest in the academic setting, making students feel invalidated by professors and the academe (Houshmand et al., 2014), which negatively affects their academic performance and overall well-being (Samuel, 2004). However, students also try to address these issues through new identity formation, cultural negotiations (Luft et al., 2023), and multicultural socialization (Poteet & Gomez, 2015). The impact of these strategies and negotiations to address their challenges is still underexplored.

### **Acculturation and Cross-cultural Adaptation**

The theory of cross-cultural adaptation and particularly “acculturation” is one of the most widely employed theories for understanding the psychosocial challenges of migrants, refugees (Kuo, 2014; Phillimore, 2011), and international students (Ma et al., 2020; Saha & Uddin, 2014; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2007). Acculturation refers to the psychological and behavioral transformations individuals experience due to interactions among diverse cultural groups (Berry, 1997). Based on the acculturation models by Berry (1997, 2006) and Ward et al. (2001), it is reasonable to expect that an international student may also encounter a range of life changes due to being in a new culture. These changes can become stressors or “hassles,” as termed in the Safdar et al. (2003) model, if an international student appraises them as a difficulty. Language, educational stressors (such as academic pressure and anxiety), sociocultural stressors (such as lack of support or isolation), discrimination, and practical stressors (such as financial struggles) are some of the most common aspects of international students’ acculturation process (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Acculturation and mental stress can also manifest differently among students according to their gender (Tang & Dion, 1999). However, there are currently no study that analyzes the impact of acculturation or migratory stress on Bangladeshi international students.

This research focuses on Bangladeshi international students because this diaspora in Canada has the highest rate among the South Asian countries that pursue education and know an official language, but they have a very low likelihood of moving to a higher income level (Agrawal, 2012). The data on the financial state of Bangladeshi students or how the demography has changed over time is not available. However, research indicates that the current group of international students is more educated than their earlier cohorts (Sondhi, 2019). Bangladeshi diaspora in Canada has also succeeded through individual immigrant entrepreneurship, albeit towards the lower end of the economy (Rahman, 2018). Moreover, many Bangladeshi international students have reported unsuccessful assimilation into the Canadian culture as they are usually ill-prepared for cultural adaptation due to concerns about employment, academics, and financial affordability (Saha & Uddin, 2014). Given all the arguments surrounding the challenges of international students in Canada, it is also important to gather empirical evidence, which the next section will discuss.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the psychosocial issues of Bangladeshi international students studying in Ontario, Canada. Firstly, I employed a qualitative approach that allowed for the detailed and in-depth exploration of the participants' different perspectives on specific topics (Guion et al., 2011). Secondly, qualitative research allowed me to explore the meanings, definitions, and characteristics of the students' challenges, thereby bringing forward their often-marginalized voices (Berg, 2001). Lastly, the value-laden nature of this study allowed me to consider my participants' individual experiences and perceptions within the scope of this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection as they provide a deeper understanding of personal experiences of a social phenomenon (Gill et al., 2008), which aligns with the objectives of this study. All the interviews were conducted virtually via the Zoom videoconferencing platform. Online interviews allowed me to reach participants who were geographically dispersed within Ontario and increased the diversity of the participants. The snowball sampling method was used to recruit participants for this study. This method is used to recruit hard-to-reach participants who may be geographically dispersed but are also suitable for accessing the everyday, mundane, and mainstream aspects of life (Parker et al., 2019). Ten participants - five female and five male Bangladeshi international students from different institutions and academic years - were interviewed for this research to ensure a balanced understanding of their experiences (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

Sl.	Age	Gender	Institution	Program	Major	Employment
RR1	21	Female	York University	Undergraduate	Mechanical Engineering	No
RR2	20	Female	Wilfrid Laurier University	Undergraduate	Psychology	No
RR3	27	Female	University of Windsor	Graduate	Computer Sciences	Yes
RR4	28	Female	University of Windsor	Undergraduate	Economics	Yes
RR5	27	Female	University of Toronto	Undergraduate	Molecular Genetics	Yes
RR6	28	Male	Seneca Polytechnic	Grad. Certificate	Supply Chain Management	No
RR7	21	Male	University of Waterloo	Undergraduate	Computer Engineering	No
RR8	27	Male	Carleton University	Graduate	Technology Innovation Management	Yes
RR9	27	Male	Trent University	Graduate	Master of Management	Yes
RR10	28	Male	Trent University	Post-Grad. Certificate	Financial Analytics	Yes

Previous studies have highlighted how gender creates significant differences in psychosocial challenges for international students (Anderson, 2020), but few have directly addressed this issue. All the interviews were between 45 and 80 minutes in length. Data saturation occurred around the seventh and eighth interviews, but the rest were conducted to ensure an equal gender division between the participants. Similar responses were echoed, as participants shared their psychosocial challenges within the research guidelines. Furthermore, the participants were also close in age and had lived in Canada for around a year to 5 years, which created similarities in their responses. After each interview, only the audio recordings were saved and uploaded to the Microsoft Word Processor (version 2021) for auto data transcription. After auto-data transcription was done, the data was cleaned of technical errors. Intelligent verbatim transcription, which edits the irrelevant fillers, was employed for better understandability and encoding.

**Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data collected during the fieldwork. Since this study aimed to explore the psychosocial challenges faced by international students, understanding the commonalities, differences, and correlations in their experiences is vital. This is the primary reason for employing thematic analysis, as it identifies, analyzes, and reports repeated patterns to create

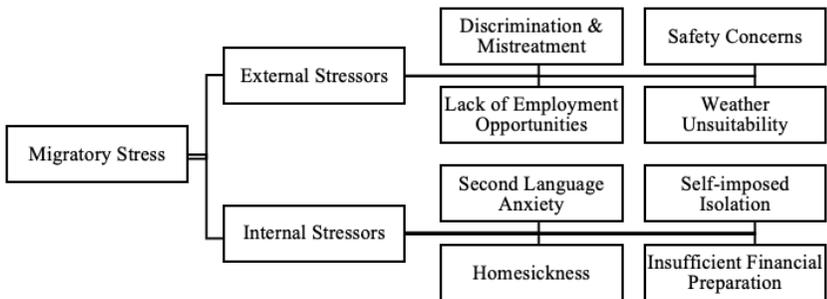
correlations and comparisons (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, thematic analysis provides a flexible approach while ensuring credibility, rigor, and trustworthiness (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). After completing the interviews, all transcripts were analyzed using NVivo (version 15) qualitative data analysis software to ensure proper sorting, organizing, and systematization, thereby ensuring reliability and rigor (Nowell et al., 2017). The inductive coding method was used to generate codes from the interviews. Inductive coding was employed to precisely capture the lived experiences of the participants while accurately representing their opinions and realities (Chandra & Shang, 2019). The thematic analysis acknowledges that researchers are an intrinsic part of the data analysis process and value their contribution to the process rather than considering them outsiders (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). A code-code procedure was employed to ensure rigor and credibility, and the researcher rechecked the codes three times before ending the process. This study has received ethics review and approval from the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board.

## FINDINGS

Findings from this study suggest that Bangladeshi international students experience migratory stress, which is comprised of different external and internal stressors (see Figure 3). Different stressors, either concurrently or sometimes independently, increase the student's migratory stress, which then impacts that student's assimilation within Canadian society.

**Figure 3**

### *External and Internal Stressors of Migratory Stress*



### **External Stressors**

All participants are Bangladeshi students living in Ontario who have faced various external stressors, which increased their migratory stress. External stressors within the scope of this study were defined as more structural factors, and participants had little to no control over them. These stressors can be broadly categorized into four groups, i.e., discrimination and mistreatment, safety concerns, lack of employment opportunities, and weather unsuitability.

### ***Discrimination & Mistreatment***

Participants reported facing various discriminatory circumstances, such as racism, sexism, or a combination of those issues that different studies have previously reported (Buckner, Knight-Grofe & Eden, 2023; Ge, Brown & Durst, 2019; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). One participant stated the following:

*“As an international student, I would say there is racism, but no one agrees that it is there... they were looking down on me because I have brown skin. They think they are superior to us because we’re just “Indians.” (a 21-year-old female undergraduate student)*

This not only highlights the racialization of the students but also the stereotyping and prejudice. Female students face a form of racism that is laden with sexist and misogynistic traits due to their gender. These discriminations, along with other social factors, can manifest as various safety concerns that contribute to their migratory stress.

### ***Safety Concerns***

Participants widely agreed that they initially perceived Canada as a safe country. However, after coming here, they had complicated experiences that eventually changed their opinion, which is being debated within the current literature (Costello, 2016). One participant shared their experience in the following manner,

*“When I was entering my home, he started mumbling. He (a stranger) was trying to say something, but his words were very rude and arrogant... I got really scared; I thought he could harm me or something else.” (a 21-year-old male undergraduate student)*

### ***Lack of Employment Opportunities***

Almost all the participants talked about the difficulty of finding employment opportunities in Canada as international students. For international students seeking to support themselves in Canada while pursuing their degrees, the problem is exacerbated by regulations restricting the kinds of jobs they can accept and the number of hours they can work. There was an expectation among the participants that they could get jobs easily after coming here, which was not the reality. One participant shared the following thoughts,

*“One of my first expectations was that it was going to be easy to get a job since it’s a very big country and there are not enough people here... but it’s very, very hard to get a very stable job or hold on to a job.” (a 20-year-old female undergraduate student)*

### ***Weather Unsuitability***

Bangladesh and Canada have very different weather and climates, as the former is tropical, and the latter is continental. This adversely impacted the students and their mental health as they struggled to cope. While all the

participants were aware of Canada's extreme temperatures, experiencing them personally was difficult for almost all of them. Nearly none of the participants anticipated the impact of weather on their mental health and well-being. One participant said,

*"We have never seen snow before. My first winter was -48°C... five months plus of long winter nights were terrible. Not seeing the sunlight was very depressing because we are not used to this." (a 28-year-old male graduate student)*

### **Internal Stressors**

The internal stressors related to migratory stress for Bangladeshi international students were primarily characterized as more personal factors, over which they had some control or could find ways to cope. These internal stressors included second language anxiety, self-imposed isolation, homesickness, and inadequate financial preparation.

### ***Second Language Anxiety***

Second or sometimes third language anxiety for international students in Canada is a well-documented issue that hampers their social connections and assimilation (Gupta & Gomez, 2023; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Atri & Sharma, 2006). Language comprehension and communicative skills in a different socio-cultural context were some of the most significant internal stressors of Bangladeshi international students. One participant opined the following:

*"Language is obviously critical because, with the Bengali people, I can easily express my feelings... I think it's just common human nature to connect with people from the same culture and language." (a 21-year-old male undergraduate student)*

Due to language anxiety, some participants would feel disconnected from their surroundings or sometimes shut down to new experiences or conversing with new people. One of the participants also described it as a shock by stating the following:

*"...culture shock would be speaking at my workplace. I wouldn't talk at all because I was so scared to talk to people in the beginning. I was scared to talk and explore things with people." (RR4, a 28-year-old female graduate student)*

### ***Self-imposed Isolation***

Almost all the participants discussed the importance and challenges of connecting with people in their surroundings, whether in academia, their workplace, or daily life.

*“It’s very hard to bond with people here (Canada) or make an actual genuine connection. I have always prioritized genuine connections in my life over a lot of other things. So, not having that is definitely putting a toll on my mental health.” (a 20-year-old female undergraduate student)*

However, approaches to building these connections are not the same for all participants. Some have failed to build relationships with people outside of their ethno-national groups. In contrast, others have isolated themselves due to personal choice, discrimination, or their lifestyle.

### **Homesickness**

Homesickness among participants is rooted in the familial, social, and cultural differences between Bangladesh and Canada. Previous studies have emphasized that the loss of family, culture, and homeland presents a significant challenge for international students (Govi, Liu, & Tian, 2023), particularly for Asian students due to their familial and communal norms (Ma et al., 2020).

*“After I came to Canada, the first problem I felt was that I was very homesick. I’m really alone here because I don’t have any relatives around me... So, I felt really homesick.” (a 21-year-old undergraduate male student)*

### **Insufficient Financial Preparation**

Financial preparation for studying and living in a more expensive country than their country of origin is always a challenge for international students. Even though most expenses are known to students before their arrival, they are usually estimates, and their lived realities are quite different. The recent global recession has impacted the financial preparation of students. One participant shared,

*“...it’s even harder to do it when they’re not with you because you’re in a different country, and the money is coming from another country. There’s also the currency discrepancy. Because they’re earning in a way that your spending is not going to compare.” (a 20-year-old female undergraduate student)*

While the lack of employment opportunities in Canada was an external stressor, insufficient financial preparation was an internal stressor that the participants faced. Although both of these challenges were financial, employment opportunities are more structural, and participants’ financial struggles are described as internalized challenges. Studies have shown that international students in Canada face housing, employment, and monetary challenges after they arrive due to a lack of information and a mismatch of expectations (Calder et al., 2023).

## DISCUSSION

Conflicting values, misaligned expectations, and different educational structures create socio-cultural demands that international students cannot always fulfill. Many international students come from different socio-cultural backgrounds and have to align or negotiate within the host country's social, cultural, and institutional structures. Previous studies have found that Asian international students may be more prone to this stress due to additional stressors of family expectations and limited coping capabilities (Ma et al., 2020). The empirical findings of this study suggest that many Bangladeshi students have faced migratory stress. Some of the primary reasons for Bangladeshi international students' migratory stress include external stressors such as discrimination and safety concerns, and internal stressors such as self-imposed isolation and mismatches in financial preparation.

The narrative of international students as “cash cows” providing direct financial injections for cash-strapped higher-level institutions is pervasive in Ontario (Zhou, Liu & Rideout, 2017). They are portrayed as “ideal immigrants” who will provide short-term labor for the Canadian economy. This narrative is enticing for both the government and the international students (Scott et al., 2015). However, this study's findings suggest that these assumptions are primarily inaccurate or over-generalized. International students were coming to Canadian universities but struggling financially with tuition, housing costs, and daily necessities (Calder et al., 2016), a far cry from the institutional and provincial narrative. This reality is reflected in this study, where many Bangladeshi international students were financially ill-prepared for their higher academic institutions and life in Canada. International students usually support themselves through part-time jobs, a labor activity that also helps the Canadian and provincial economies (Calder et al., 2016). In recent times, however, students have been unable to support themselves as there has been a lack of employment opportunities, which leaves students with few to no options (Dayal, 2025). Participants in this study have highlighted this challenge as they struggled to find jobs. Most of the study participants were sponsored by their families to study in Canada, but a feeling of guilt associated with unemployment directly contributed to their migratory stress. This guilt is complex for Bangladeshi international students, as their financial expectations did not match their opportunities. The participants did not explicitly state that their families expected them to get jobs to support themselves. However, there is an implied expectation among the students to be employed due to monetary reasons, which contributes to their guilt vis-à-vis migratory stress.

Discrimination against international students is a well-documented challenge that occurs due to their racialization (Poolokasingham et al., 2014), social isolation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011), and lack of support systems (Giamos et al., 2017). Discrimination and mistreatment of international students range from racial microaggressions (Houshmand et al., 2014) to physical harm and severe safety concerns (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Participants of this study have faced

racial discrimination and mistreatment, but generally outside of their educational institutions and in the form of unwanted attention, verbal abuse, and a lack of safety in public places. Discriminatory behavior and negligence towards international students also discourage them from making friends with locals and properly assimilating into the Canadian culture (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000). This pattern is present in Bangladeshi students, but there is a cultural barrier that they adhere to. For instance, participants shared that despite being friends with people from different cultures on campus, they would only socialize with people from Bangladesh, India, or South Asia due to their shared ethnocultural background. Students who have tried to mix with students or people from entirely different cultural and national backgrounds have found it challenging to maintain long-term relationships. Language anxiety plays an important role in the self-imposed isolation of the students, where they prefer to be by themselves as they are not satisfied with their communication skills. Other studies have highlighted the isolating nature of language anxiety among international students (Scott et al., 2015; Zhang & Beck, 2014).

Historically, more male international students have enrolled in postsecondary institutions in Canada than their female counterparts, with 195,357 male and 175,449 female students enrolled in 2023 (Statistics Canada, 2024). This is reflected among South Asian students, and it marginalizes female students from the onset. Furthermore, female students adhere to sociocultural and patriarchal norms more than male students, and female students are more susceptible to domination, isolation, and, in some cases, violence and harassment (Alqudayri & Gounko, 2018; Liu, 2017). Authors have highlighted the tendency of “ignorance of gender” within the dominant discourse, where gender discrimination and challenges are woven within the intersections of race, class, religion, and students’ migratory status (Liu, 2017). Therefore, gender is not always apparent or at the forefront as a signifier of discrimination. One of the significant experiential differences between Bangladeshi female and male students was the challenges of unwanted attention from strangers, leading to verbal or sexual harassment. 3 out of 5 female participants mentioned unwanted attention from male strangers, which led to their verbal or sexual harassment. Another male participant mentioned one of his female Bangladeshi friends getting harassed at work, which led to her resignation. Sexual harassment and violence against international female students remain one of the more prevalent gendered challenges (Todorova et al., 2022). Both Bangladeshi female and male students talked about gender discrimination in comparison to their experiences in Bangladesh, which I think had a substantial impact on their perception. To elaborate, gender discrimination in Bangladesh is high while women’s agency is restricted (Ferdaush & Rahman, 2011). Many female participants mentioned that Canada is safer than Bangladesh despite various challenges. Many participants had plans to stay in Canada after their studies. Therefore, they were also more willing to negotiate with these challenges. Lastly, one of the most interesting findings of this study is that female and male students were performing similar gender roles, which would be labeled as “feminine work” in Bangladesh. For instance, male students cooked food, did laundry, and cleaned their homes, which women in Bangladesh traditionally

perform. Some male students have expressed this experience positively, thinking of themselves as more self-sufficient than before and not feeling any prejudice associated with doing this work. However, this did add to their internal stressor of homesickness, which impacted their overall well-being. No studies are currently available that highlight the role adjustment of male international students or migrants, but this can be a future avenue of research.

## CONCLUSION

Qualitative research and subsequent findings of this study suggest that international students go through “migratory stress,” which hampers their social and personal lives, as well as their mental health. Migratory stress primarily occurs due to various internal and external stressors. Internal stressors are factors that are more inward and personal, such as second language anxiety, self-imposed isolation, homesickness, and insufficient financial preparation. External stressors are more linked to structural issues such as discrimination, safety concerns, lack of employment opportunities, and weather unsuitability. The aim and scope of this research do not allow for much generalizability; however, the findings of this study can be a starting point for understanding the current challenges of Asian and South Asian international students in Canada. Some of the most potential beneficiaries are Bangladeshi international students and other international student groups who face similar challenges but cannot raise their concerns due to sociocultural barriers, self-isolating tendencies, and stigma. Research focusing on international students’ well-being and mental health needs could be studied further to provide the necessary support this silent yet vulnerable group needs. Gender dynamics and shifting roles of male and female students were briefly explored in this research, but further studies could highlight these issues and promote a better understanding of those challenges. Lastly, migratory stress among international students is a cross-cutting challenge that impedes their life in different ways, which should be discussed more often and highlighted in both policy prescriptions and academia.

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None

Some sections, with minimal or no editing

Some sections, with extensive editing

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Entire work, with extensive editing

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*Author bio*

**RIFATUR RAHIM** is a master’s student in the Department of Development Studies at York University. His previous bachelor’s and master’s degrees were from the Department of Women and Gender Studies at the University of Dhaka.

*Rahim*

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His research interests include international student migration, Bangladeshi diaspora, and gender. Email: [rifatur.rahim@gmail.com](mailto:rifatur.rahim@gmail.com)

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