

# International Student Safety from Crime

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Research Brief prepared by Dr Helen Forbes-Mewett  
School of Social Sciences, Monash University



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This four-year study was based on 150 in-depth interviews conducted between 2010-2013 with international students and key informants in Australia, the UK and the US. Importantly, interviewees indicated that most international students do not fall victim to crime. Nonetheless, international students were identified overwhelming as a vulnerable group, generally more vulnerable than local students and the local population. The data also indicates that international students were much more likely to be a victim of crime rather than a perpetrator of crime. Furthermore, visible and violent crimes against international students in public spaces were believed to be the exception rather than the norm, particularly in Australia. Crimes of violence against female international students in private settings were thought to be far more common than violent crimes in public spaces in all three countries. However, these gender-based crimes tended to be over shadowed by the attention given to overt violence. Another extremely common form of crime was minor theft from international students.

There were similarities and differences associated with the problem of international students and crime across Australia, the UK and the US. Crime committed against international students was not unique to Australia. Tragic incidences occurred across the three nations and the circumstances need to be considered within their varying contexts.

A major finding was that Australia differs markedly from the UK and the US in terms of the support structures provided for students in general. International students in the US and UK were provided for in the same manner as domestic students as both groups tend to live away from the family home. International students in Australia appear to be in greater need of support because Australia is not traditionally accustomed to providing living away from home supports because most domestic students do not move away from home to study. Despite this, international students in the US and UK indicated greater levels of risk compared with international students in Australia. Students in Australia indicated that they generally felt safe but they were unsure of ways to remain safe.

In order to build on the recent increase in international students choosing to study in Australia it would be sensible to provide greater support structures, including safety

education programs within course frameworks to ensure the students receive the information. The study suggests that students need continuing education/reminders that their experience is a combination of opportunity and risk.

The issue of crime and safety was not concealed in the US or the UK and in the US students appreciated the frequent crime reports made available by their institutions. Almost all 150 interviewees in the study agreed that the responsibility for the safety of international students rests with host and home governments, education institutions and the students and their families. That is, it is a shared responsibility. It appears that in Australia there is less exposure to violent crime and so when it does occur it makes greater waves than would be the case in the US and UK where it is not particularly unusual.

### **Publications from the study**

#### **1. *International Students and Crime*** (Forbes-Mewett et al. 2015)

Published in 2015 by Palgrave Macmillan – this book provides a comparative view of the issue of international students and crime across Australia, the UK and the US. The book, based on interviews with 150 key informers including international students, analyses an issue of major international concern that impacts on lucrative international student markets, international relations, host countries' reputations as tolerant and safe, as well as the security of international students and the public. While crimes against and by international students have attracted a deal of media attention and discussion internationally, there is little research that systematically describes, analyses and reflects on this phenomenon. The book analyses a spectrum of crime from petty theft to kidnapping and murder, presenting vital knowledge about international students as victims and perpetrators of crime in the US, UK and Australia. Examining the different approaches to student safety in host countries, the book considers the ways in which governments; higher education providers and police approach and implement their responsibilities for international student safety.

#### **2. *International Students and Gender-Based Violence*** (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch 2016)

Published in the journal, *Violence Against Women*, 22(3): 344-365. This paper presents the perceptions of the research participants from Australia and the US who suggest that violence against female international students is hidden and much more common than the visible and violent attacks against male international students that we read and hear of in

the media. The problem of violence against female international students is often related to living away from family support, poor housing options, exploitation in the workplace, unfamiliarity with local communities and what is considered unlawful behaviour, and pressure to succeed with their educational pursuits. It seems that many cases go unreported and even those that seek help do not pursue redress for fear of visa implications and being returned to their home country. Issues of shame also play a major role. These factors mean female international students may be particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence. The paper considers US responses to the problem and suggests that Australia follow their lead with progressive and preventative support programs specifically designed to educate female students to reduce the chance they would fall victim to gender-based violence.

### 3. ***The neighbourhood context of crime against international students*** (Forbes-Mewett & Wickes)

This forthcoming paper discusses the problem of international students living in areas that provide accommodation at the lower end of the housing market. The paper focuses on the problem of crime committed against Indian students in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. It presents views on the circumstances of the victims and the perpetrators of violent crime committed against primarily Indian students. The paper suggests that a lack of available and affordable housing in Australia has meant these students have congregated to live in areas where there is insufficient infrastructure to adequately provide for them and existing populations. These areas are also home to disadvantaged youth who may see international students as privileged in terms of possessions and opportunities. The paper also suggests that the violence against Indian students should not be attributed to one group but rather it is a youth problem generally related to people from disadvantaged backgrounds.