



The Mental Health of First Generation and International Asian female students at UBC

C. Schreiber, K. Dolatyar, J. Lai, A. MacKenzie

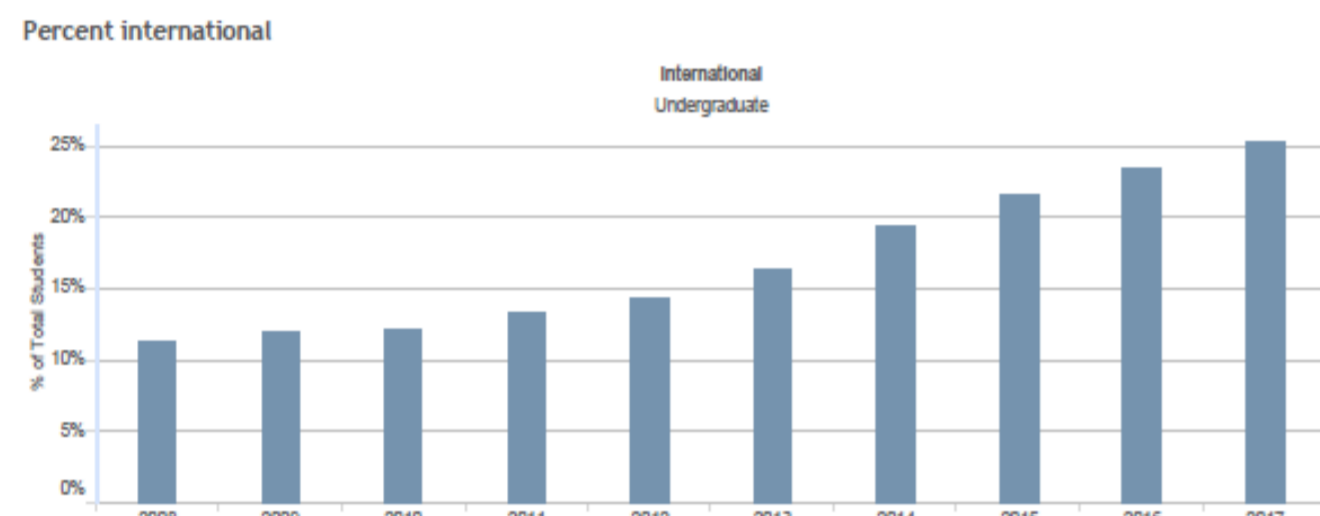
Professor: Dr. Andrea Bundon Project Partner: SEEDS and UBC Recreation

Group #16

Introduction

Statistically, first generation Asian female students at UBC have the lowest participation rate in UBC REC facilities, activities, and physical activity. The current literature states, that a combination of novel conditions, language barriers, and lifestyle/cultural divergence decreases participation in physical activity, and strains the mental health of international and first-generation students.

It is known that staying physically active has a strong correlation with reduced mental stress (Hamer, Stamatakis, and Steptoe, 2009). Therefore, this research project conducted semi-structured interviews with participants that fit this demographic to explore the precursors behind this existing problem and how the lack of participation affects the mental health and wellbeing of the participants.



Citizenship Country (UK)	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
China	672	761	858	1,019	1,324	1,784	2,513	3,196	3,823	4,406
China, Hong Kong Special A.	131	137	141	147	158	157	229	245	269	290
India	64	99	110	126	151	200	242	383	513	726
Indonesia	151	126	123	124	127	158	183	199	209	216
Iran	38	34	34	26	37	35	30	29	39	44
Japan	267	250	254	243	222	280	296	310	310	326
Mexico	97	167	144	134	108	107	112	124	155	157
Republic of Korea	430	473	479	527	489	429	426	430	413	436
United Kingdom of Great Brit.	123	121	139	147	156	185	226	243	226	228
United States of America	776	828	783	747	738	750	826	883	972	1,083

("Demographics Overview | Planning and Institutional Research", 2018).

Purpose

The objective of this project was to examine the mental health of first generation Asian female students at the University of British Columbia, and the various determinants to physical activity this demographic faces

Project Design

In this project we interviewed six female participants of Chinese descent and utilized semi-structured interviews combined with thematic analysis to gain a critical understanding of how mental health may be a barrier to or be improved by recreational physical activity, and participation on campus, analyzing the unique patterns and themes that come about from the input of these participants. We interviewed six female participants of Chinese descent.

Discussion:

In the end, the results gathered three overarching findings: 1) The perception of mental/physical health compared to academics, 2) Varying perceptions of the mental health initiatives of UBC, and 3) The effect of school related workload and other determinants to mental/physical health.

Theme 1:

The perception of mental/physical health compared to academics

- We found a clear prioritization of academic success, over other important domains such as physical and mental well being.
- Furthermore, it is suggested that a hyper-academic environment may facilitate an unbalanced school focused lifestyle, thus diminishing the mental health and physical health of these participants.

Participant Quote: "Health is really important. But as experience has shown me I probably value school over health."

Participant Quote: "[playing sports]... doesn't really get you good grades."

Theme 2:

Varying perceptions of the mental health initiatives of UBC

- A lack of knowledge and understanding of the mental health initiatives offered at UBC significantly affect the mental health of first generation Asian female students.
- A clear conclusion on the effectiveness of the mental health programs at UBC could not be made given the varying opinions on said programs.

Participant Quote: "I think they definitely have been reaching out a lot but I think it's more a matter of those participants or those people who are getting interacted with have to respond."

Participant Quote: "When people are in trouble or [facing] challenges, that's when they are not able to seek help and I feel like UBC's way of just giving you a link and some phone numbers is not efficient enough. It's not enough. It's like protocol, like every school has to have that."

Theme 3:

The effect of school related workload and other determinants to mental/physical health

- The large workloads that this demographic manages, notably from their school/coursework limits their ability to partake in physical activity and improve their mental health.
- With greater workload comes less time available to partake in recreational, social, physical or mentally relaxing activities limiting the opportunity to improve ones well being.
- This problem is exacerbated among students that live off campus due to their commute times.

Participant Quote: "I don't really have time to exercise, even though I really want to exercise..... But now I just don't really have the time for it, even though I really want to do it, I just can't really find the time."

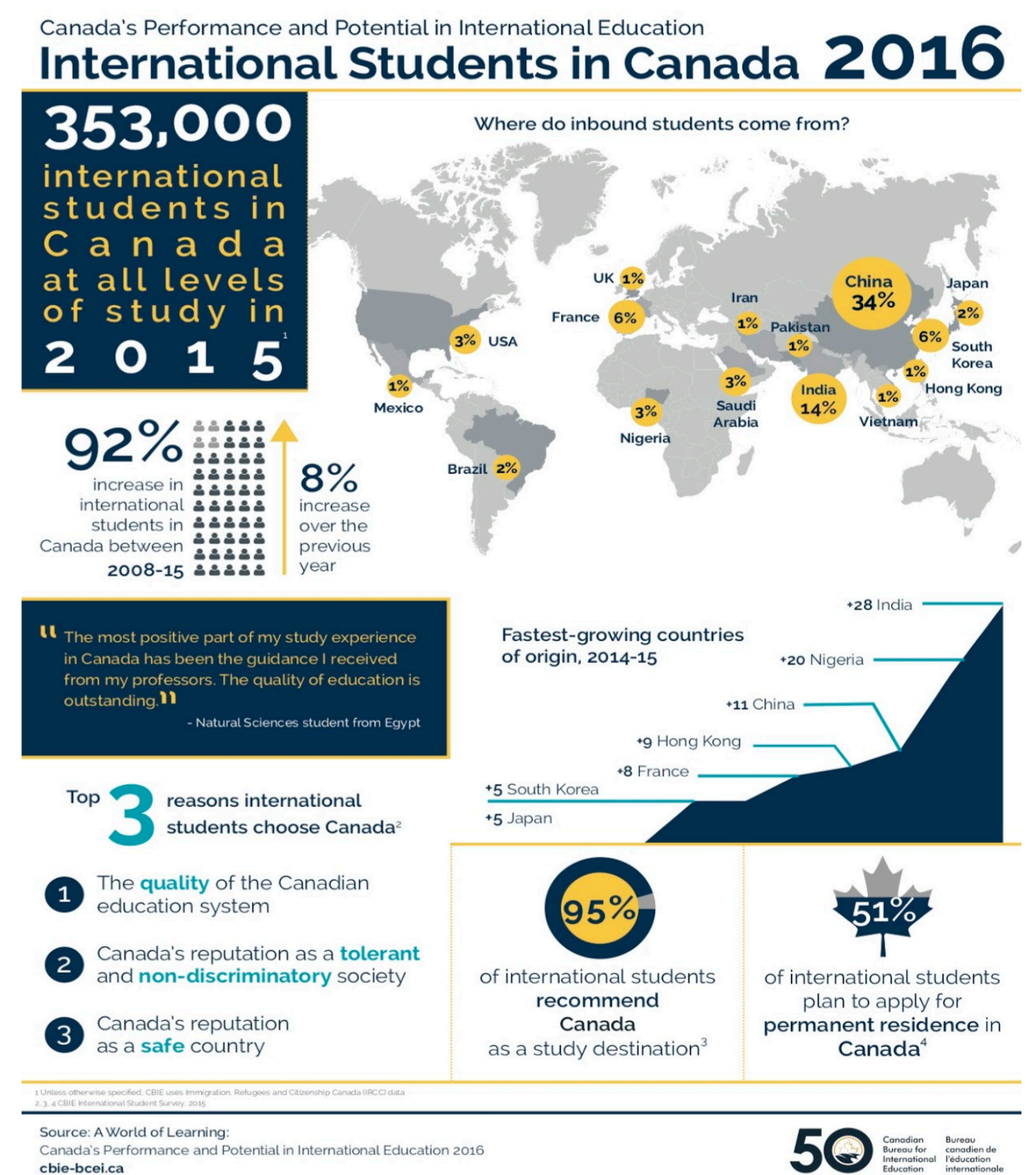
Participant Quote: "[I] would [only] travel back to campus.... for studying, [and] classes"

Recommendations

We believe UBC REC and the greater UBC community can improve the mental health of first generation female Asian students, and the greater student population through a number of changes. Some recommendations that could be implemented include:

- Increase the opportunity of exercise on campus, alongside further incentivisation of these activities.
- Subsidize cost of facilities and programs, such as the on campus gym memberships to compete with the convenience factor many off campus students battle.
- Focus on social media outreach to tackle the common problems that students express as the precursors of not staying physically active.
- Increase accessibility and use of recreational facilities such as gymnasiums and studios that are situated in student residences.
- Allowing students to use facilities during off time hours through their student cards.

Additional recommendations are available via the final report.



References

Demographics Overview | Planning and Institutional Research. (2018). *Pair.ubc.ca*. Retrieved 12 February 2018, from <http://pair.ubc.ca/student-demographics/demographics/>

Facts and Figures - CBIE. (2018). *CBIE*. Retrieved 9 February 2018, from <http://cbie.ca/media/facts-and-figures/>

Hamer, M., Stamatakis, E., & Steptoe, A. (2009). Dose-response relationship between physical activity and mental health: The scottish health survey. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 43(14), 1111-1114.