

# Comparing the Psychological Well-being of International and Domestic Students

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## Abstract

Post-secondary students are an at-risk category in need of immediate assistance as previous research indicates that they experience high levels of both stress and negative emotions in addition to having poor physical and mental well-being. As such, many institutions now focus on addressing the needs of their students to better assist, support and improve their psychological well-being. Considering that international students make up a significant and growing portion of the McMaster community, it is crucial to provide adequate support to better address the needs of this student population. Thus, the intention of this paper is to explore and compare the psychological well-being of international students and domestic students. We focused on three different dimensions of psychological well-being as they pertain to each participant: help-seeking behaviour, social support, and relatedness. Domestic and international students have different lived experiences which may influence these dimensions, consequently impacting their psychological well-being in distinct ways.

Gaining a more comprehensive understanding of this comparison allows for greater acknowledgement and a wider range of perspectives to be considered when analyzing the psychological well-being of university-level students. This may help influence or shape university policies to improve the support it provides to both international and domestic students along the three dimensions discussed. Our primary research is still in progress, however, we hope to identify the level of psychological well-being experienced by international and domestic students and analyze the different factors that may have an effect on discrepancies or similarities that may arise.

We used the quantitative research methodological approach of an anonymous online survey on the MREB-approved platform, LimeSurvey. The survey was made up of 30 questions in different formats – open-ended and close-ended. We recruited our target population for this research - international and domestic undergraduate students studying at McMaster University who are 18 years of age or older - via social media posts and physical flyers. A pre-approved list of MSU student-led clubs was contacted about sharing our research with the members.

Additionally, physical flyers were posted on pre-approved areas around McMaster University buildings to attempt to attract those individuals who may not have any club involvement as well.

While both domestic and international students have unique lived experiences and circumstances that might impact their life satisfaction and psychological well-being differently, international students tend to experience additional stressors such as increased barriers in accessing mental health resources related to cultural differences and stigma. By examining undergraduate students' well-being on three dimensions, we expect to be able to identify the role that social support systems and a sense of connectedness to the

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McMaster community play in the psychological well-being of international and domestic students.