

International students as young migrant workers in South Australia: The role of the University in occupational health and safety awareness and education

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Declaration

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Abstract

Problem Statement

Despite the possibility of major under-reporting, young workers are over-represented in injury statistics. Among this group are international students, who constitute a significant and rising proportion of young workers in part-time, casual or seasonal jobs. International students may be at greater risk for occupational injury than their domestic peers because of cultural issues, language barriers, financial pressures and the nature of the work available to them. Thus, they represent a vulnerable segment of the workforce. There is a need to better understand their risk profile and develop evidence-based interventions to reduce risk.

Gap Analysis

There is a substantial body of literature on young workers, including migrant workers. However, limited research has been conducted regarding international students as a vulnerable subpopulation in the Australian workplace context. Furthermore, the role of the university as a potential (or actual) provider of occupational health and safety (OHS) awareness and education for international students has been poorly explored.

Purpose Statement

The ultimate goal of this research is to reduce accident and injuries among international students as young migrant workers. The aims are to explore their work experiences while studying at university, and understand their perspectives on OHS, including the role of the university in occupational illness and injury prevention.

Research Questions

Two broad two research questions are proposed:

1. What are the work health and safety experiences of international students as young migrant workers?
2. What is the role of the university in terms of OHS awareness raising and education among international student employees?

Methodology

Four complementary approaches were employed to answer the research questions. These comprised two statistical reviews and two empirical studies in a parallel mixed methods research design.

1. Statistical reviews:

- a. *Injury claims experience from South Australian Workers Compensation data (2004-2013)*. For the purpose of this statistical review, an international student was defined as a worker between the ages of 15-24 years who was non-Australian born and of non-English speaking background.
- b. *Working experience from the 2013 University of Adelaide International Student Barometer (ISB) Survey*. The survey is run on a regular basis to gauge perceptions and to improve services for enrolled international students.

2. Empirical studies

- a. *An online questionnaire survey of international students at the University of Adelaide*. This was designed to explore working experiences, injury experiences and work-study interference.

- b. *A qualitative focus group study of international students at the University of Adelaide.* This explored the perceived current practice of OHS education in the University and its potential injury-preventive role for work outside of the University.

Main Findings

Statistical reviews of workers compensation data and ISB survey data

Young workers were more likely to experience serious injuries if they were: Non-Australian born, Odds Ratio (OR) = 1.20 (CI: 1.07-1.35); Non-English speaking background (NESB), OR= 1.38 (CI: 1.09-1.76); Older young workers (20-24 yr old), OR =1.38 (1.29-1.47); Female, OR =1.51 (1.41-1.61); Outdoor workers OR= 1.87 (1.73-2.02). These data are consistent with international students being at greater risk compared to local young workers.

The majority of participants in the ISB 2013 survey (n=656) reported that they were being underpaid. Male students were more likely to be in paid employment compared to females, who were more likely to be in a voluntary job. In addition, this study found a gap between male and female overseas students concerning their average income.

Online survey of international students

This study (n=466) found international students worked in part-time jobs (55.3%), casual (39.2%) and seasonal employment (5.4%). The majority were engaged in restaurants (42.1%), supermarkets or grocery stores (21.1%) and in cleaning jobs (12.6%). Sixty percent reported that they did not receive any OHS training before commencing the work and 10% reported that they had experienced an injury in an Australian workplace. Of those with OHS training, 43% experienced

injury after the training. About 65% of students felt that work adversely impacted on study, with tiredness being the main form of interference.

Injury experience and perceptions of work-study interference were modelled with logistic regression. Significant predictors of injury were working 20 hours or more per week, adjusted odds ratio (AOR) = 2.20 (CI: 1.03-4.71); lack of confidence in discussing OHS issues, AOR = 2.17 (CI: 1.13-4.16); a perception of unfair wages or feeling exploited, AOR = 2.42 (CI: 1.24-4.71); and being a second year student in either undergraduate or postgraduate programs, AOR = 2.69 (CI: 1.04-6.96). For work-study interference, the corresponding variables were working 20 hours or more per week, OR=1.91 (CI: 1.08-3.41); a perception of unfair wages, OR=1.89 (CI: 1.31-2.75); being a second year student, OR= 1.80 (CI: 1.02-3.18); being a holder of a partial scholarship, OR=1.98 (CI: 1.14-3.43); and lack of confidence in discussing OHS issues, OR=2.05 (CI: 1.41-2.99).

Focus group discussions

This study (3 groups, n=21) found that international students had multiple reasons to work while studying, and it was not all about earning money. Improving their English, adapting to Australian culture and making friends were cited as other reasons to work.

There were mixed experiences relating to work-study interference. Some participants revealed that they had experienced negative impacts of long working hours on study. However, other students argued that there was reduced impact when the jobs were flexible, were undertaken in a vacation period, on the weekends, or when the working hours did not exceed 20 hours a week.

Similarly, there were mixed views regarding OHS. Some participants were not concerned about the risks, even if they understood the hazard.

Student perspectives on OHS training and education tended to be shaped by their experiences and study backgrounds. With regard to the current University of Adelaide practices on OHS education, it was found that there was a different emphasis between the schools of engineering and social sciences. The participants recalled OHS information and education being provided but felt that this tended to focus on student security and safety around the University environment. Participants felt that there was little or no consideration of work outside of the University. Some suggested that the institutional concern about students' working life should be raised from "zero" to "hero". The University should better prepare international students to work in the community as part of its social responsibility and duty of care. The role of the University was to provide generic or basic knowledge such as workers' rights and responsibilities. However, this could never replace specific on-the-job training provided by employers.

Novelty and Implications

This research is the first to explore the combination of international students' working experiences, injury experiences, work-study interference and perspectives on the role of the University in preventing injuries in students' working life.

The findings from statistical reviews and the online survey provide new evidence about international student vulnerabilities in the workplace. When these findings were integrated with the qualitative data, a conceptual framework for the prevention of injury was derived, identifying the University as a key stakeholder.

Finally, the research provides new evidence for improving the effectiveness of OHS education for international students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

On the basis of this research, it is clear that international students have multiple vulnerabilities and that there are particular risk factors for occupational injury and work-study interference. Students expressed the view that the University should do more to support their work activity while studying. It is highly likely that the findings from the University of Adelaide can be generalised to other universities. Universities are effectively sponsors of students into the local community, but have a limited awareness of their contribution to the local workforce. As such, there is a social responsibility which extends beyond academic and social support to encompass work life. A better understanding of work arrangements may also improve academic performance.

A series of recommendations are made for the universities, OHS regulators, ISB providers and future researchers. These include:

- better preparation of international students for integration into workplaces;
- regulation of the hours of work and the prevention of exploitation;
- continued use of the ISB as one means of monitoring student work experience, and benchmarking across universities and states;
- a longitudinal study of international students; and
- exploring the perceptions of academics and university administrators to complement the findings from students.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	v
Table of Contents	xi
List of Figures	xx
List of Tables	xxv
Abbreviations	xxvii
Thesis Overview	xxix
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research background.....	1
1.1.1 The benefits of international education engagement.....	1
1.1.2 Who are international students?	3
1.1.3 The legislative frameworks and responsibilities of the education providers..	8
1.1.3.1 International students’ employment rights	11
1.1.3.2 The responsibilities of the University as education provider	11
1.2 Research aim and objectives.....	13
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.1 Introduction.....	14
2.2 Methods	15
2.3 Migrant Workers’ Health and Safety.....	16
2.4 Young Workers’ Health and Safety.....	24
2.5 International Students as a Working Population	30
2.6 Overlapping vulnerabilities as migrant workers as well as young workers	35
2.7 Gap Analysis and Research Questions	37
2.7.1 Broad research questions.....	38
2.7.2 Specific research questions.....	39
2.8 Research Design and Methodology	39
CHAPTER 3. STATISTICAL REVIEWS	42
3.1 Introduction.....	42

3.2	Analysis of workers' compensation dataset for young workers in South Australia from 2004 to 2013: Descriptive and analytical statistics of selected variables for young migrant workers	42
3.2.1	Introduction	42
3.2.1.1	Why serious injury?.....	43
3.2.2	Methods.....	45
3.2.2.1	Data collection.....	45
3.2.2.2	Data analysis.....	46
3.2.2.3	Data cleaning.....	46
3.2.2.4	Coding	47
3.2.3	Results	47
3.2.3.1	Descriptive analysis.....	47
3.2.3.1.1	Time trends of all compensation claims between 2004 and 2013: comparison between serious claims and non-serious claims.....	47
3.2.3.1.2	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on selected variables directed at young migrant workers' characteristics	49
3.2.3.1.3	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on nation of birth	49
3.2.3.1.4	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on language background.....	51
3.2.3.1.5	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on age.....	53
3.2.3.1.6	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on gender	55
3.2.3.1.7	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on working experiences	57

3.2.3.1.8	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on time of injury	59
3.2.3.1.9	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on employer size	61
3.2.3.1.10	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on industry sector.....	63
3.2.3.1.11	The comparison of time trends between all claims, serious claims and the proportion of serious claims out of all claims based on exempt type.....	65
3.2.3.2	Multivariate Analysis	68
3.2.3.3	Summary of study findings.....	70
3.3	International Student Barometer (ISB) 2013: Exploring international students' working hours and rates of payment	71
3.3.1	Introduction	71
3.3.2	What is the ISB?.....	72
3.3.3	ISB 2013 Relevance and the Research Questions	72
3.3.4	Methods.....	76
3.3.4.1	Study population.....	76
3.3.4.2	Data collection and analysis	77
3.3.5	Results	78
3.3.5.1	Working hours for paid employment.....	78
3.3.5.1.1	Working hours for paid employment based on gender	80
3.3.5.1.2	Working hours for employment: a voluntary job.....	83
3.3.5.1.3	Working hours for voluntary jobs based on gender	85
3.3.5.2	Students' rate of payment	87
3.3.6	Summary of study findings	90
3.3.6.1	Working hours	90
3.3.6.2	Rates of payment	90
3.3.6.3	Type of employment.....	90
3.4	Discussion.....	91
3.5	Strengths and limitations	93

3.5.1	Statistical review of workers' compensation data	93
3.5.2	Statistical review of ISB survey 2013 data.....	94
3.6	Conclusions	94
CHAPTER 4. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ONLINE SURVEY		96
4.1	Introduction.....	96
4.2	Study rationale and research questions.....	96
4.3	Methods	98
4.3.1	Study population and sample.....	98
4.3.2	Data collection and analysis	99
4.4	Results	102
4.4.1	The characteristics of respondents (univariate descriptive statistics).....	102
4.4.1.1	International student demographics.....	102
4.4.1.2	International students' academic backgrounds.....	105
4.4.1.3	International students' reasons for working	107
4.4.1.4	International students' working experiences	109
4.4.1.5	International students' OHS training experiences	116
4.4.1.6	International students' injury experiences	121
4.4.1.7	International students' perception of work-study interference	126
4.4.1.8	International students' perception of the role of the university in OHS education	128
4.4.2	Factors associated with international students' health and safety and interference with study (Bivariate analysis).....	131
4.4.3	Important predictive factors (Multivariate analysis)	135
4.4.4	Summary of the study findings.....	136
4.5	Discussion.....	137
4.5.1	Reasons to work and positive ramifications	138
4.5.2	International students' working experiences	139
4.5.3	No OHS training or yes but yet ineffective	140
4.5.4	Injury experiences	141
4.5.4.1	Kinds of injuries	142
4.5.4.2	The risk factors of injury experiences and work-study interference	143
4.5.4.2.1	Predictive factors of international students' injury experiences	143

4.5.4.2.2 Predictive factors of international students' work-study interference	146
4.6 Strengths and limitations	147
4.7 Conclusions	148
CHAPTER 5. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN OHS AWARENESS AND EDUCATION	149
5.1 Introduction.....	149
5.2 Background to qualitative study	149
5.2.1 Being an insider researcher	149
5.2.2 The birth of research questions.....	151
5.3 Methods	152
5.3.1 Ethical considerations.....	152
5.3.2 Selection criteria.....	154
5.3.3 Recruitment procedure	154
5.3.4 Developing Focus Group Schedule.....	155
5.3.5 Participants	155
5.3.6 Data collection procedures	155
5.3.7 Data analysis.....	156
5.4 Results	157
5.4.1 Reasons to work	158
5.4.1.1 High living cost in Australia.....	158
5.4.1.2 Family reasons.....	159
5.4.1.3 Improving English	160
5.4.1.4 Understanding Australian culture and making friends	161
5.4.2 Conflict between working and academic performance	161
5.4.2.1 Conflict exists	162
5.4.2.2 No conflict.....	163
5.4.2.3 Prioritizing study over working.....	165
5.4.3 The impact of paid employment on health and safety issues	166
5.4.3.1 Only a few students were concerned about the risks	166
5.4.3.2 Some students were not concerned about the risks and performed risk- taking behaviour.....	167

5.4.3.3	Injury experiences	168
5.4.4	International students' perception of OHS education.....	169
5.4.4.1	OHS as a broad and boring term	169
5.4.4.2	OHS as a compulsory and requirement matter	169
5.4.4.3	OHS as hazard and risk awareness	170
5.4.4.4	OHS as a standard operating procedure.....	171
5.4.5	The current practices of OHS education within the University.....	172
5.4.5.1	OHS Induction.....	172
5.4.5.2	OHS lecture	173
5.4.5.3	OHS video on the University website (MyUni)	174
5.4.5.4	Different emphasis of OHS education in engineering and non- scientific areas.....	175
5.4.6	The relevance of the current practices to the workplaces.....	176
5.4.7	International students' perspective of OHS curriculum	177
5.4.7.1	OHS education as a part of induction or orientation program.....	177
5.4.7.2	OHS education as a compulsory course	179
5.4.7.3	OHS education as an optional course	180
5.4.7.4	Providing a certificate for completing OHS training.....	181
5.4.8	International students' perspectives on whether the University is concerned about OHS education.....	182
5.4.8.1	"Zero" concerned.....	182
5.4.8.2	So, what is the University concerned about?.....	184
5.4.8.3	The university discourages international students from having part time jobs.....	185
5.4.8.4	Be responsible for your own risks	186
5.4.8.5	Illegal working, being vulnerable and needing a "hero"	187
5.4.9	International students' perspective of the role of the University in teaching OHS.....	189
5.4.9.1	Teaching about rights and responsibilities	189
5.4.9.2	Teaching about hazards and risks in the workplace	190
5.4.9.3	Teaching OHS basic knowledge.....	190
5.4.9.4	Provide safety training for international student employees	191
5.4.10	Suggestions for improvement.....	192
5.4.10.1	OHS training needs to be more practical, fun, attractive and simple	193

5.4.10.2	OHS tutorial using peer shared experiences	193
5.4.10.3	OHS email for reminder	194
5.4.10.4	OHS week, Hub Centre and noticeboard	194
5.4.10.5	OHS unit to handle H&S issues	195
5.4.10.6	Conduct a survey to address students' needs	196
5.4.11	Summary of the study findings.....	197
5.5	Discussion.....	198
5.5.1	What should be done for improvement?	201
5.6	Strengths and limitations	202
5.7	Conclusions	204
CHAPTER 6. GENERAL DISCUSSION.....		205
6.1	Introduction: novelty of the research	205
6.2	Key findings in the context of existing literature	206
6.2.1	Statistical reviews.....	206
6.2.1.1	Workers' compensation dataset analysis.....	206
6.2.1.1.1	Time trends and likely claims behaviour	206
6.2.1.1.2	International student demographic variables as risk factors for serious injury	207
6.2.1.2	International Student Barometer (ISB) 2013 data analysis	208
6.2.2	Online survey	208
6.2.2.1	Reasons to work	209
6.2.2.2	International students' working experiences	209
6.2.2.3	OHS training experiences.....	210
6.2.2.4	Conflict between working and academic performance	211
6.2.2.5	Predictive factors of injury experiences	211
6.2.3	Focus group discussions	213
6.2.3.1	Reasons to work	213
6.2.3.2	Conflict between working and academic performance	213
6.2.3.3	Hazards and risks perception.....	214
6.2.3.4	Current practices of OHS education and its relevance to the workplace	214
6.2.3.5	Support to integrate OHS into the University's curriculum	215
6.2.3.6	The role of the University in OHS education	216
6.2.3.7	Suggestions for improvement.....	216

6.3	Strengths and limitations of the research.....	217
6.3.1	Statistical reviews (Workers' compensation dataset and ISB survey)	217
6.3.2	Online survey	218
6.3.3	Focus Group Discussion.....	221
6.4	Summary of the research findings	221
6.5	Towards conceptual frameworks.....	223
6.5.1	Development of a conceptual framework of international students' vulnerabilities in the Australian workplaces	223
6.5.1.1	Identifying relevant literature	223
6.5.1.2	Integrating the literature and the research findings	225
6.5.2	Integrated conceptual framework of effective OHS education for international students to reduce vulnerability and to improve adaptation to the workplace	227
6.5.2.1	Stating objectives.....	230
6.5.2.2	Selection of content	230
6.5.2.3	Organising learning experiences (selection of method)	231
6.5.2.4	Evaluation (assessment)	232
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS		233
7.1	Conclusions	233
7.1.1	Time trends and risk of serious injury among young migrant workers.....	233
7.1.2	International students' reasons to work, working experiences and injury experiences	234
7.1.3	The predictive factors of injury experiences and work-study interferences.....	235
7.1.4	The current practices of OHS education and the role of the University.....	235
7.2	Recommendations.....	237
7.2.1	Future researchers.....	237
7.2.2	University	238
7.2.3	Government	239
7.2.4	I-Graduate.....	240
References		241
List of Appendices		253
Appendix 1. Coding variables of workers' compensation data set analysis 2004-2013		254

Appendix 2. The ISB survey 2013 questions.....	255
Appendix 3. Ethics approval	264
Appendix 4. Online survey invitation via International Students Centre (ISC) office	266
Appendix 5. Online survey information sheet and consent form	267
Appendix 6. Online survey questionnaire.....	269
Appendix 7. Online survey questionnaire flowchart	273
Appendix 8. FGD flyer.....	279
Appendix 9. FGD participant information sheet	280
Appendix 10. FGD consent form	282
Appendix 11. FGD questions.....	283
Appendix 12. Conceptual model and self-measure of occupational health and safety vulnerability.....	284

List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Australia’s export income from education services 2010-2014 (Department of Education and Training, 2015a)	2
Figure 1.2. International student numbers by top 10 nationalities from 2002 to 2014 in Australia (Department of Education and Training, 2015b)	5
Figure 1.3. International student enrolments in Australian higher education from 1998 to 2013 (Norton, 2014).....	6
Figure 1.4. Change in international student enrolments 2002-2008(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009)	7
Figure 1.5. International students’ commencement in Australia and South Australia from 2009 to 2014 (Study Adelaide, 2014).....	7
Figure 2.1. Process of selection of articles of the review.....	16
Figure 2.2. Fatality rate of US workers by nativity, 1996-2001(Loh and Richardson, 2004)	22
Figure 2.3. Young workers serious claims by age group and year (Jahan et al., 2010).....	30
Figure 2.4. International students as young migrant workers’ overlapping vulnerabilities	37
Figure 3.1. Time trend of all compensation claims based on serious and non- serious injury among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	48
Figure 3.2. Time trend of all compensation claims based on nation of birth among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	50
Figure 3.3. Time trend of serious injury claims based on nation of birth among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	50
Figure 3.4. The proportion of serious injury claims from all claims based on nation of birth among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	51
Figure 3.5. Time trends of all compensation claims based on language background among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	52
Figure 3.6. Time trends of serious injury claims based on language background among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	52
Figure 3.7. The proportion of serious injury claims out of all claims based on language background among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	53

Figure 3.8. Time trends of all compensation claims based on age group among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	54
Figure 3.9. Time trends of serious injury claims based on age group among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	54
Figure 3.10. The proportion of serious injury claims out of all claims based on age group among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013.....	55
Figure 3.11. Time trends of all compensation claims based on gender among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013.....	56
Figure 3.12. Time trends of serious injury claims based on gender among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	56
Figure 3.13. The proportion of serious injury claims out of all claims based on gender among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	57
Figure 3.14. Time trends of all compensation claims based on working experience among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	58
Figure 3.15. Time trends of serious injury claims based on working experience among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	58
Figure 3.16. The proportion of serious injury claims out of all claims based on working experience among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	59
Figure 3.17. Time trends of all compensation claims based on time of injury among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	60
Figure 3.18. Time trends of serious injury claims based on time of injury among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	60
Figure 3.19. The proportion of serious injury claims out of all claims based on time of injury among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	61
Figure 3.20. Time trends of all compensation claims based on employer size among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	62
Figure 3.21. Time trends of serious injury claims based on employer size among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	62
Figure 3.22. The proportion of serious injury claims out of all claims based on employer size among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013.....	63
Figure 3.23. Time trends of all compensation claims based on industry sector among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	64

Figure 3.24. Time trends of serious injury claims based on industry sector among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	64
Figure 3.25. The proportion of serious injury claims out of all claims based on sector of industry among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013 ..	65
Figure 3.26. Time trends of all compensation claims based on exempt type among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	66
Figure 3.27. Time trends of serious injury claims based on exempt type among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	67
Figure 3.28. The proportion of serious injury claims from all claims based on exempt type among young workers in SA from 2004 to 2013	67
Figure 3.29. The distribution of the ISB survey respondents based on age and gender	77
Figure 4.1. The distribution of respondents by age.....	102
Figure 4.2. The proportion of respondents by gender	103
Figure 4.3. The proportion of respondents by marital status	103
Figure 4.4. The proportion of respondents by number of children	104
Figure 4.5. The proportion of respondents who have family members living in Adelaide	104
Figure 4.6. The distribution of respondents by 10 biggest countries of origin ...	105
Figure 4.7. The proportion of respondents by faculties	106
Figure 4.8. The proportion of respondents by year of study	106
Figure 4.9. The proportion of respondents by study program	107
Figure 4.10. The proportion of respondents by financial support.....	107
Figure 4.11. International students' reasons to work (multiple responses)	108
Figure 4.12. The proportion of respondents by job status	109
Figure 4.13. The proportion of respondents by number of jobs	109
Figure 4.14. The percentage of respondents by industry sector (multiple responses)	110
Figure 4.15. The proportion of respondents by working condition	111
Figure 4.16The proportion of respondents by perception of wages fairness	111

Figure 4.17. The distribution of respondents by rate of payment	112
Figure 4.18. The proportion of respondents by know about award wage structure and minimum rate of pay	113
Figure 4.19. The distribution of respondents by number of working hours per week	114
Figure 4.20. The distribution of respondents by working length (months)	115
Figure 4.21. The proportion of respondents working under supervision.....	116
Figure 4.22. The proportion of respondents who have had some OHS training.	116
Figure 4.23. The percentage of respondents who had OHS training experiences by location of training (multiple responses).....	117
Figure 4.24. The distribution of respondents who had OHS training by length of training (hours).....	118
Figure 4.25. The proportion of respondents who had OHS training by training mode	118
Figure 4.26. The percentage of respondents who had OHS training by format of the training (multiple responses)	119
Figure 4.27. The proportion of respondents who had OHS training by assessed on the training.....	120
Figure 4.28. The proportion of respondents who had OHS training by perception of the training	120
Figure 4.29. The proportion of respondents according to level of confidence to discuss OHS issues with lecturer, or other relevant person	121
Figure 4.30. The percentage of respondents by perception of the existence of hazards/risks in their workplace (not mutually exclusive).....	122
Figure 4.31. The proportion of respondents by injury experiences and time of injury before and after OHS training.....	122
Figure 4.32. The proportion of respondents who had injury experiences by injury frequencies	123
Figure 4.33. The proportion of respondents by who had injury experiences by kind of injuries (multiple responses)	123
Figure 4.34. The proportion of respondents who had injury experiences by actions taken after injuries	124

Figure 4.35. The proportion of respondents who had injury experiences by reporting injury to supervisor or company	124
Figure 4.36. The proportion of respondents by experience to witness a workplace accident while working in Australia.....	125
Figure 4.37. The percentage of respondents by discrimination, intimidation and exploitation experiences (multiple responses)	125
Figure 4.38. The proportion of respondents who feel that work interferes with study	126
Figure 4.39. The percentage of respondents who felt that work interferes with study by form of interference with study (multiple responses).....	127
Figure 4.40. The proportion respondents who felt stress due to having a paid job while studying	127
Figure 4.41. The proportion of respondents by perception of the responsible party for OHS awareness raising and education.....	128
Figure 4.42. The proportion of respondents who think that OHS has been included in the University study	129
Figure 4.43. The percentage of respondents who think that OHS has been included in the university study by kind of OHS information was provided in the University (multiple responses).....	129
Figure 4.44. The proportion of respondents by think that the University needs to do more.....	130
Figure 4.45. The percentage of respondents by suggested programs for OHS education (multiple responses).....	130
Figure 6.1. Overlapping OHS vulnerabilities among young immigrant workers in small construction firms (NIOSH and ASSE, 2015).....	225
Figure 6.2. Integrated conceptual framework of overlapping layers of vulnerabilities among international students in the workplace	226
Figure 6.3. Integrated conceptual framework for effective OHS education for international student workers	229

List of Tables

Table 2.1. Keyword used to identify relevant articles	15
Table 2.2. Migrant Workers' Health and Safety	17
Table. 2.3 Standardised mortality ratio* (SMR) for overseas-born persons and language group, by duration of residence	23
Table 2.4. Young Workers Health and Safety	24
Table 2.5. International Students as a Working Population.....	31
Table 3.1. Logistic regression predicting likelihood of serious injury claims among young workers from 2004-2013 in SA.....	68
Table 3.2. International students' working hours per week for paid jobs in the sector of employment directly related to field of study	78
Table 3.3. International students' working hours per week for paid work in a sector of employment not directly related to field of study	79
Table 3.4. International students' working hours for paid jobs per week based on gender in a sector of employment directly related to field of study.....	80
Table 3.5. International students' working hours for paid jobs per week based on gender in a sector of employment not directly related to field of study	82
Table 3.6 International students' working hours per week for voluntary jobs in the sector of employment directly related to field of study	83
Table 3.7. International students' working hours per week for voluntary jobs in a sector of employment not directly related to field of study	84
Table 3.8. International students' working hours for voluntary jobs per week based on gender in the sector of employment directly related to field of study.....	85
Table 3.9. International students' working hours for voluntary jobs per week based on gender in the sector of employment not directly related to field of study.....	86
Table 3.10. International students' rate of payment 2013.....	87
Table 3.11. International students' rates of payment in Australian dollar based on gender	89

Table 4.1. The percentage of rate of pay based on age (Fair Work Commission, 2014).....	113
Table 4.2. Bivariate and multivariate analysis; Factors associated with international students' health and safety and interferences with study	132
Table 6.1. OHS experience and perceptions among incoming undergraduate students: A comparison of four Australian universities	219
Table 6.2. International students' profiles in the University of Adelaide and in Australia	220
Table 6.3. International student workers' conditions of vulnerability	222

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEI	Australian Education International
ASSE	American Society for Safety Engineers
AOR	Adjusted Odds Ratio
CI	Confidence Interval
CRICOS	Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students
DECS	Department for Education and Children Services
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EEWR	Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
ESB	English Speaking Background
ESOS	Education Services for Overseas Students
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISS	International Student Survey
IBP	Integrated Bridging Program
ISB	International Student Barometer

ISC	International Student Centre
IWH	Institute of Work and Health, Canada
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NIOSH	U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
OHS&W	Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare
OHSW	Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare
OR	Odds Ratio
RQ	Research question
SA	South Australia
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SWSA	SafeWork SA
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TOOCS	Type of Occurrence Classification System
UK	United Kingdom
UKCISA	United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United State of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHO	World Health Organisation

Thesis Overview

Research Title:

International students as young migrant workers in South Australia: The role of the University in OHS awareness and education

Research aim

This research employs a mixed method approach to understand work health and safety experiences among international students as young migrant workers in South Australia (SA) and to identify the role the university potentially plays in providing effective occupational health and safety (OHS) awareness and education for international students.

Thesis outline

For the first part of this research, a literature review was conducted to identify research gaps and develop the research questions. Following the literature review, three studies were carried out to answer the research questions.

The first study was a pair of statistical reviews using secondary data analysis. The first dataset was a ten-year period of the Workers' compensation data from SafeWork SA (SWSA) from 2004-2013 to explore young migrant workers' (non-Australian born) serious injury experiences in South Australia. The second dataset is the International Student Barometer (ISB) 2013 data to describe information regarding international students' working experiences focusing on working hours and rate of payment.

The second study was an online survey to explore international students' working experiences and its association with health and safety issues and work-study interference.

The third study utilised a qualitative approach. Focus group discussions were conducted to explore international students' perspective of the role of the university in terms of raising OHS awareness and education.

The last part of this research comprised general discussion and conclusions and recommendations. This part outlines two conceptual frameworks (the layers of international students' vulnerabilities; and effective OHS education for international students in the university sector), future research needs and recommendation for improvement flowing from the research. The detail of each chapter is as follows:

Chapter 1. Introduction

This chapter provides an explanation of what of this research has concerned with, the research background such as the benefits of international students engagement, international student profiles, the legislative frameworks of education provided for international students' health and safety welfare, international students' rights to work and the research aim and objectives.

Chapter 2. Literature review

This chapter provides the review of the literature to identify the research gaps and research questions development. This includes a review of migrant workers health and safety, young workers health and safety and international students as a working population.

Chapter 3. Statistical reviews (Study 1)

The chapter provides an analysis of the South Australian workers' compensation dataset between 2004 and 2013. The focus was on young workers, those who were migrants and those who first language was not English. The

analysis entails investigation of time trends, injury profiles, risk factors and the relative proportion of serious claims against total claims.

Turning specifically to international students, the International Student Barometer (ISB) 2013 data was explored focusing on international students' working hours and rate of payments.

Chapter 4. International student online survey (Study 2)

This chapter profiles the characteristics of international student workers by demographics, academic backgrounds, working experiences, OHS training experiences, injury experiences, work-study interference and their perception of the role of the University in OHS education.

Bivariate and multivariate analysis were conducted to identify the risk factors and important predictive factors for the outcome variables; students' health and safety issues and work-study interference.

Chapter 5. International students' perspective on the role of the university in OHS awareness and education (Study 3)

This chapter presents international students' perceptions of the concept of OHS education and training in the University. Furthermore, the current practices of OHS education, materials and curriculum and the role of the university in terms of OHS awareness raising and education together with recommendations to the University to improve the situation were explored.

Chapter 6. General discussion

This chapter critically assesses the previous studies related to serious injury profile of young non-Australian born workers, international students' working experiences and injury experiences, the factors associated with health and safety

issues and work-study interference and international students' perspectives on the role of the University in OHS awareness and education. This chapter also discusses the importance of the findings in comparison with other research. Furthermore, the chapter proposes the development of a conceptual framework of young migrant workers vulnerability. And lastly, this chapter develops a conceptual framework for effective OHS education for international students in the University sector based on the research findings and other literature.

Chapter 7. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter concludes all study findings and provides suggestions for future research needs together with recommendations to improve work health and safety among international students in the workplace.

Thesis Layout

CHAPTERS	DETAILS	OUTCOMES
Thesis overview	→ Thesis organization	→ Guiding readers to understand research structure and research focus areas of this thesis
Chapter 1 Introduction	→ The nature of international students as working population	→ Providing an account of the benefits of international education engagement, the responsibilities of education providers, and the rights of international students to work
Chapter 2 Literature review	→ Research context and research significance	→ Identification of research gaps and research questions
Chapter 3 Statistical reviews	→ The situation of young migrant workers' health and safety in SA and international students' in paid job	→ Producing a statistical analysis on injury among young migrant workers in SA and a descriptive analysis of international students' working hours and rates of payment
Chapter 4 International student online survey	→ International students' working experiences, OHS training, health and safety issues, and work-study interference	→ Identification of predictive factors associated with international students' injury experiences and work-study interference due to having a paid employment
Chapter 5 International students' perspective on the role of the university in OHS awareness and education	→ International students' perspective on OHS education and their perception of the role of the university in OHS education	→ Identification of international students' story about the current practices of OHS education and their perception of the role of the university in OHS education
Chapter 6 General discussion	→ Main findings of the studies in the context of existing literature	→ Presenting reflections of the studies significance and providing conceptual frameworks
Chapter 7 Conclusions and recommendations	→ Conclusions of the research findings and opportunities	→ Providing recommendations for development and further research directions

Research framework

