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Project Title:

Leaving no parent behind: International student & newly arrived academic staff parents negotiating migration, parenthood, study & work in Australia

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LEAVING NO PARENT BEHIND

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ABSTRACT

International students are often considered as a homogenous group of individuals studying in other countries other than their home countries, obscuring underlying differences that shape their experiences of international education. Such differences include social dynamics such as gender and associated parenthood. There are relatively few studies that dissect the experiences of international students who are also parents and are faced with choices and decisions that require them to balance their migration, and study goals with family goals and responsibilities. There are also fewer studies that go beyond the single, deficit view of international students as difficult and passive victims of the challenges they experience, to explore their coping mechanisms that could be built on to support the students. This project utilised individual and group conversations with international student parents to explore their experiences in managing migration, parenthood and study in a new country of Australia. It aimed to explore the gender-related obstacles experienced, the coping mechanisms as well as international student parents' experiences with current institutional supports provided. The findings demonstrate how the international student parents strive but struggle to meet obligations that come with their intersecting identities as students, parents, spouses, employees. The strives and struggles of international student parents have been discussed under themes of intersecting study-family experiences, academic experiences, financial experiences, accommodation, health problems, different types of stress, information support, and experiences with international office. Their coping mechanisms as well as student's recommendations around accommodation, childcare access and support, diverse international office, and culturally appropriate counselling and mental health support, are explored.

Research shows that international education and migration remains key source of skilled migrants in Australia, supporting over 250,000 jobs in the country. Therefore, this study also explored experiences of newly arrived or international academic staff who are parents. Like international student parents, their struggles as academics, parents, spouses, employees, in institutions where family and its associated workload are invisible, are explored. Migration results in loss of or disruption of research networks at such a crucial time where research workload has to be earned by the academics, resulting into research workload poverty. Coping mechanisms as well as recommendations around mentoring, voice to senate, deliberate funding, childcare support, flexibility at work, and family workload recognition are explored.

BACKGROUND

International students are often treated and supported as a homogeneous group with little consideration of gender equity (Nguyen & Pennycook, 2018). The needs of international student parents remain hidden. In the current covid-19 pandemic, International students have been disproportionately affected (Ross, 2020) yet a gendered analysis of the impact of the pandemic shows women have been predominantly impacted because the pandemic has exacerbated existing gender inequalities (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2020). Research shows that most postgraduate students in Australia who are female are likely to have children with almost half of births occurring while women are enrolled in graduate school (Kuperberg, 2009). For student parents, negotiating family and study can be overwhelming, filled with feelings of guilt and tensions of managing family relationships. For international student parents whose experiences are often shaped by intersectionality of migration, study, work, and parenthood are not well explored with existing studies focusing on documenting experiences of Australian postgraduate student parents (Kuperberg, 2009). I agree with the critique that Nguyen and Pennycook (2019) have provided about the current research as predominantly focused on the difficulties faced by international students where negative discourses and a deficit view of international students as difficult to teach because they lack English proficiency, an isolated and lonely group that does not belong, and passive victims of the challenges being experienced, has been presented. While it is important to understand the difficulties international students face, it is equally vital that we explore the coping mechanisms of international students, exploring their agency but also broader social-cultural systems (if any) that have helped the students in overcoming the barriers experienced. Most international students end up seeking permanent residency or temporary working permits to stay and work in Australia. It is therefore imperative that we explore the experiences of international staff parents particularly in Academia. Experiences of newly arrived international academic staff parents remain largely under-explored as existing research has focused on the experiences of sessional academic staff (Kanitkar, Breault-Hood, Mears & Gray, 2020). Green & Myatt, (2011) focused on narratives of eight new international academic staff documenting their stories and struggles in preparing, arriving and re-establishing themselves in a new environment. However, Green & Myatt say little if anything about the unique experiences of new international academic staff who are parents in a new university, in a new country. Newly arrived academic staff also face intersections of balancing work, parenthood, in a new country, warranting the need to document the gender-related obstacles they experience, and the coping mechanisms utilized to overcome (or not) these needs.

Project Aims

In this project, we aimed to:

1) To explore experiences of international students and newly arrived academic staff parents negotiating migration, parenthood, work, and study.
2) To develop understanding of the coping mechanisms adopted by international students and academic staff parents in managing the multiple responsibilities of parenthood, work, and education.

3) To explore how international student and academic staff parents experience the current gender practices, supports, and gender policies in Australian universities.
4) To co-design and recommend gender equality and institutional changes that universities can adopt to provide a gender-inclusive environment for international parents

LITERATURE REVIEW

International education in Australia

Australia is the fifth destination for international students after the U.S., U.K., China, and Canada (Chowdhury, 2021). The international student population in Australia has increased steadily from 2013 until 2020 when the world was plunged into a pandemic. However, Chowdhury (2021) and Ross (2020) highlight that international education is the fourth biggest export after iron ore, coal, and gas in Australia. Furthermore, international education is a key source of skilled migrants in Australia and supports over 250,000 jobs in the country (Chowdhury, 2021). This implies that people who come as international students go on to seek permanent residency and work permits to stay and work in Australia before and or after completing their studies.

Educational experiences are crucial to the realisation of a country's economic targets and retention of students. As such matters surrounding international education have become of great importance and sparked researcher interest. Concerns of international student experiences given factors such as multiculturalism and diversity have received the most attention. Such factors are believed to influence global competences, intellectual development, leadership skills, and internationalisation of higher education institutions (Peter et al., 2016; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). It is critical for institutions and governments to meet student expectations and ensure positive experiences to improve student retention, engagement, transformative learning, institutional reputation (Bowden et al., 2021), and future enrolments (Lee, 2010).

International Students experiences reported

International student experiences emerge through pre-arrival, on-arrival, learning, living, and support service experiences (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Kelo et al., 2010; Perez-Encinas & Rodriguez-Pomeda, 2018). Pre- and on-arrival experiences are related to information provision, welcome, airport pick-ups, living arrangements, opening bank accounts, and general on-campus orientation activities (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Perez-Encinas & Rodriguez-Pomeda, 2018). Learning experiences are drawn from language support, interaction with academic support, and the quality of lectures (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Perez-Encinas & Rodriguez-Pomeda, 2018). Living and support experiences are associated with adaptation, transition, coping, interaction, and assimilation to the host country's culture and it is considered the responsibility of the student to make the necessary adjustments (Lee, 2010). It is important however to consider both the student's and the institution's efforts towards escaping these huddles and creating positive experiences that support academic achievements. In this literature review, we trace the current understanding of international students' experiences and institutional support. This review recognises three dimensions of

experiences depicted in previous studies, i.e., *education*, *sociocultural*, *psychological*, and *practical* experiences, and *international student support*.

Education experiences

These have been explored as learning experiences (Ammigan & Jones, 2018) or educational stressors (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Education experiences are based on the learning infrastructure, teaching methods, quality of lectures, academic staff expertise, library facilities, and learning support provided by the institution (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Perez-Encinas & Rodriguez-Pomeda, 2018). Educational experiences are not entirely about the learning material and facilities provided but also the ongoing transformation of an individual. For instance, the educational experiences of postgraduate students are felt as they transform from dependent students to independent scholars through situated learning, professor mentorship, and triple learning (Palmer, 2016). Situated learning occurs as students actively engage in doing, undoing, and redoing learning activities with the academic community while triple learning occurs as students engage with several languages, cultures, and subcultures in the academic community (Palmer, 2016).

Educational experiences are also felt in the form of academic stress, which is believed to intensify for international students since they encounter other stressing factors associated with change of environment and unfamiliar culture (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Academic stress emanates through second language anxiety, a mismatch in academic expectations, the unfamiliar teaching styles, engagement with subject content (Heng, 2019; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). For instance, study material related to historical events, socio-political institutions, and religion are initially challenging to Chinese international students studying humanities or social sciences (Heng, 2019). Among other factors such as perceived discrimination, loneliness and homesickness, financial needs, and technology use, language proficiency appears the single most important factor in students' academic success (Banjong, 2015; Karuppan & Barari, 2010).

Sociocultural Experiences

Sociocultural needs are of great importance to majority of international students throughout their study (Bartram, 2007). Such needs relate to adjustment and integration with the local student community (Ding, 2016; Matthews et al., 2019; Sawir et al., 2008) as well as their adaptation to the cultural diversity or multi-ethnicity in many academic institutions. Sociocultural experiences in many studies have been strongly associated with sociocultural adaptation/adjustment (O'Reilly et al., 2010; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Searle, 1991), social integration (Bartram, 2007; Merola et al., 2019), and cultural diversity (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010).

Sociocultural Integration

Although educational institutions are considered the best places to foster sociocultural integration (Kaufmann, 2021), integrating into local student communities is one of the most concerning sociocultural experiences among international students (Ding, 2016). Sociocultural integration is often influenced by length of stay in the country, ethnicity, and

social networks, language proficiency, etc (Nakhaie, 2020). In Australia, three quarters of international students are able to connect with other students and develop personal friendships (Matthews et al., 2019); but still many have also reported difficulties of socialising with locals (Townsend & Jun Poh, 2008) or making friends cross-culturally (Sawir et al., 2008).

For international students, integrating can be social or academic, and thus Merola et al. (2019) argue that these two must be examined separately. Social integration relates to the quality and quantity of social interaction and social networks while academic integration relates to one's learning experiences (Merola et al., 2019). Academic integration seems to have a greater impact on student satisfaction than social integration (Merola et al., 2019); however, poor social integration potentially impedes academic progress (Bartram, 2007). Students feel that universities should place greater emphasis on programs that promote sociocultural integration (Bartram, 2007). Things like active use of social networking sites increase social support from one's home and host country, which in turn fosters academic integration (Pang, 2020). Extracurricular activities and socialising events are a great way to promote social integration (Heng, 2019). Inclusive and multiculturalist communities provide a supportive ground for the integration of newcomers (Kaufmann, 2021), because such communities are quick to accept ethnic diversity (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010). Also, institutional programs to support language proficiency and cultural literacy are crucial (Lim, 2021).

Adaptation or Adjustment Difficulties

Cross-cultural adaptation or adjustment difficulties are common challenges among international students (Ding, 2016; Lim, 2021). Adaptation, also known as adjustment (O'Reilly et al., 2010), is one's psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with the host culture (psychological) and their ability to interact with the people of that culture (sociocultural) (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Often, studies have used cultural learning and social identification theories to conceptualise and investigate cross-cultural adaptation of international students. Ward and Kennedy (1999) argue that cross-cultural adaptation involves psychological adjustment (emotional/affective) and sociocultural (behavioural) influences. Psychological adjustment is explained by one's personality, coping mechanisms, life experiences, and the social support received. Sociocultural adjustment is explained by cultural learning and the acquisition of social skills.

Lack of institutional support intensifies adaptation challenges (Bittencourt et al., 2021). Higher levels of historical heterogeneity or cultural diversity in the host country contribute to successful adaptation beyond one's personality and cultural background (Huff et al., 2021). Also, active use of social networking sites stimulates social support from the host communities, which in turn improves one's psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Pang, 2020).

Cultural diversity and Culture Shock

Undoubtedly, culture diversity is also an issue confronted by international students due to the differences in religion, race, and nationality among student communities and the host country

at large. While diversity is often associated with ethnic heterogeneity, other factors such as age, gender, personality, and ideologies are worth considering. Popular destinations for international students, such as the U.S., U.K., and Australia, are culturally diverse. Educational institutions are recognising the growing diversity in classrooms and student groups and are devising ways to use it to their advantage. However, issues of cultural diversity or historical heterogeneity of the host country are less investigated in explaining international student experiences and educational success.

Cultural diversity breeds cultural insensitivities and cultural intelligence but may as well increase cultural shock, difficulties of cultural adaptation, and discourage social integration. Culture shock is a common experience reported among immigrants and international students (Gebregergis, 2018). Culture shock occurs when individuals experience unfamiliar environments, events, or unexpected circumstances (Pedersen, 1995). Greater culture shock causes stress (Gebregergis, 2018) and impedes the psychological and sociocultural adaptation of international students

Practical problems

Besides the education and sociocultural journeys, students are faced with some practical needs that are deemed necessary to enable them to settle in the new country and the institution. Practical problems reported in extant literature can be categorised into two themes. Relocation arrangements and financial needs.

Relocation, Accommodation, Orientation, and the Like

Transitioning to a new environment calls for preparation, including the finances needed and accommodation arrangements. Also, changing of environment for the student's family including spouse and children is equally important, but often overlooked. When it comes to spouses, gender-role orientation and work-family values become issues and a source of culture shock (De Verthelyi, 1995). They also face the lack of professional activity and loss of identity which then affect their self-esteem (De Verthelyi, 1995). Some universities provide pre-arrival information to students to guide their decisions and preparation for relocation to the host country. However, often such information is general in nature and fails to meet the needs of their unique circumstances and in the worst scenarios students don't receive any information at all (Kelo et al., 2010). Kelo et al. also found that many students complained about pre-arrival experiences because the information they received was poor and inadequate.

Relocation arrangements including accommodation and registration are a significant issue in one's pre-arrival stage and students have indicated that finding where to live is the most concerning issue beyond visa and registration (Kelo et al., 2010). Kelo et al. continue to explain that students would like to know the different types of accommodation, the costs, security and safety, distance from the university, and how to secure those places. Clear information sources and information on accommodation are crucial in enabling smooth relocation for international students (Bartram, 2008). In some countries such as China more

than 30% of students were dissatisfied with relocation experiences as they were not picked from the airport, not assisted in opening bank accounts, or finding a place to rent (Ding, 2016).

Financial difficulties

International student financial concerns are associated with difficulties with living and college expenses, affordability of college and living expenses, financial security (Lee, 2010). In Australia, for instance, there are mainly four sources of funding that are utilised by international students to meet their tuition and living expenses: financial support from one's own government, scholarships in Australia offered by the Australian government or the host university, student loans for overseas students offered by some university, and in most cases students would have to combine multiple sources to meet their financial burden (Do, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these financial concerns coupled with health, safety, and immigration issues (Chirikov & Soria, 2020). Financial challenges are highly correlated with student success just as language proficiency, loneliness, and homesickness (Banjong, 2015). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, international students' financial hardships increased drastically to the extent that many struggled to achieve basic needs such as accommodation and food due to job loss (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020).

Psychological distress

Immigrant populations are overwhelmingly resilient; however, due to pre-immigration issues and the uncertainty involved in moving to a new country could weigh heavily on an individual (Kaufmann, 2021). Efforts towards social integration could alleviate psychological distress among immigrants (Kaufmann, 2021).

Loneliness

Loneliness is predominantly common among international students in Australia (Sawir et al., 2008), the U.S., China, and probably other countries. In Australia, loneliness and isolation are commonly experienced in the early months of one's study (Sawir et al., 2008). Even social support often sought from families back home does not necessarily deter the bouts of homesickness and loneliness (Bartram, 2012). Moreover, when international students hold on to support networks from their home country, they are slow to socially adjust (Bartram, 2012). International students experience different kinds of loneliness including personal loneliness, social loneliness, and cultural loneliness (Sawir et al., 2008). The latter is triggered by the absence of preferred cultural and linguistic environment; and can still affect students regardless of the personal and social support received. Personal or emotional loneliness occurs due to lack of intimate ties such as those with spouse, parent, or child; while social loneliness occurs due to lack social ties with people that one shares similar interests, views, and opinions.

Stress & Perceived Discrimination

Many studies reviewed here have noted that when international students move to the host country, they experience new cultures, places, academic responsibilities, unfamiliar social

life, loneliness, and many other challenges which result in stress making them depressed and anxious. Their stress levels could vary because of gender, age, length of stay in the country, social support, language proficiency, and race/ethnicity (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Gebregergis, 2018; Saravanan et al., 2019; Sümer et al., 2008; Yu et al., 2014).

Perceived discrimination "is an individual's perception that he or she is treated differently or unfairly because of that person's membership" (Jamaludin et al., 2018, p. 935). Commonly, discrimination is more pronounced in educational institutions and workplaces (Lim, 2021), and that is probably why international students experience higher levels of discrimination than local students (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Race or ethnicity appear(s) is considered the single most driving component of discrimination among international students in the U.S (Lee, 2010; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Discrimination among immigrant youth occurs commonly on the basis of race, but also nationality, religion, immigration status, language, non-western name, neighbourhood, and socioeconomic status (Kaufmann, 2021). Discrimination increases one's sense of loneliness, discourages social integration, educational success, and upward social mobility (Karuppan & Barari, 2010; Kaufmann, 2021; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Notably, discrimination is noticed later after the student has lived in the country; therefore, new students may not notice this (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

PREDOMINANT INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES

- DEMOGRAPHICS AND OTHERS FACTORS — 10%
- RELOCATION & OTHER PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS — 8%
- PERCEIVED DISCRIMINARION — 9%
- DEPRESSION & ANXIETY — 3%
- CULTURE SHOCK — 6%
- SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT & ADAPTATION — 9%
- SOCIAL INTEGRATION — 7%
- EDUCATIONAL & PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCES — 14%
- FINANCES — 11%
- LONELINESS & HOMESICKNESS — 10%
- LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY — 14%
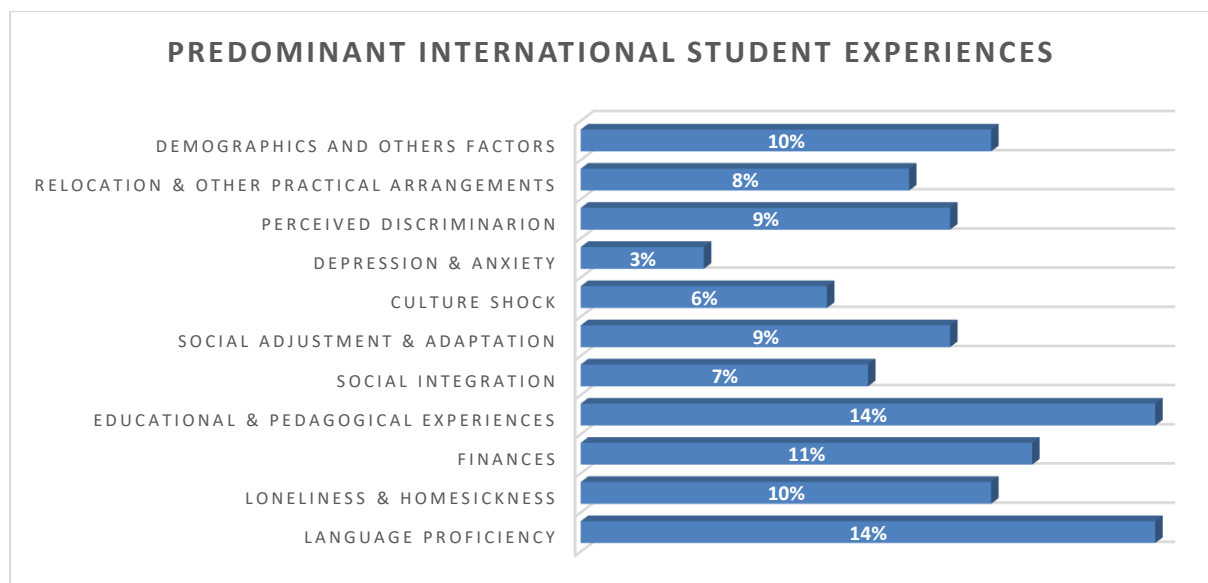
Figure 1. Commonly Reported International Student Experiences

Figure 1 summarises the predominant student experiences in the studies discussed in this report. Students are mostly concerned about; (1) language proficiency, support, and learning; and educational and pedagogical experiences. On the latter, studies have reported student engagement with the content, lecturers, and fellow students. Besides these two experiences, students often report their financial experiences indicating that sponsored students are fewer financial hardships than self-sponsored students. Self-sponsored students often get the much-needed finances from home countries rather than the host country. Loneliness and homesickness, perceived discrimination, social adjustment and adaption are other commonly reported experiences among international students. Importantly, student experiences often vary based on demographics, specifically, age, gender, race, years of living in the host

country, travel experience, field of study, level of study, and marital status. Other factors that matter include social support, coping strategies, self-determination, information and orientation, health and security concerns, and immigration issues.

International Student Support: Programs and Services

Some studies have surveyed how satisfied international students are with the services provided on arrival including registration, orientation, campus tours, course introduction, findings a place to rent, and airport pick-ups. In China, about 15% of international students were very satisfied with these services and less than 50% are satisfied with any of these services (Ding, 2016). Students from different nationalities have different levels of satisfaction; for instance, Indian students were more satisfied than their Chinese and South Korean counterparts studying in the U.K, the U.S., and Australia (Merola et al., 2019). Besides the variations in the level of satisfaction, we have seen that some governments refuse to support international students even in times of global misfortune (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020). In other cases, the support provided is poor, inadequate, or not provided at all (Kelo et al., 2010). However, (Banjong, 2015) argues that if international students were offered sufficient support and encouraged to utilise it through different centres, their academic performance would increase by 27%.

Support at different stages and by different entities

Given some concerns about student satisfaction with support they receive and the continuing negative student experiences, studies have examined student support needs and priorities pre-arrival, on arrival and throughout their study (Bartram, 2008, 2012; Kelo et al., 2010). There are typically three support mechanisms needed by international students, i.e., *academic* support, *practical* support, and *sociocultural* support (Bartram, 2008). And, these support mechanisms should be provided at different stages of study including *pre-arrival*, *on arrival*, and *during* one's study period (Kelo et al., 2010). Also, such support can be provided at *national* level, *institutional* level, and/or *individual* level (Kelo et al., 2010). At the institutional level, universities can provide useful resources such as "international centre, writing centre, counselling centre, and student success centre" to support the academic, practical, and sociocultural needs of international students (Banjong, 2015).

At the national level, home and host governments offer financial aid and loans through scholarships (Do, 2017) and students would expect some level of support in event of national or global disasters and emergencies (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020). Ammigan and Jones (2018) studied student satisfaction experiences in three countries – the U.K., the U.S., and Australia. They noted that students were least satisfied with the support services in all three countries. Students were more satisfied with the arrival and learning experiences. At the individual level, we are looking at enabling peer support through social groups, social networks, tutoring and mentoring (Bartram, 2008; Sümer et al., 2008).

Academic support

Academic support through scholarships and student loans have long been in existence and have played a crucial role in alleviating financial-related stress among international students.

Scholarship students have reported no financial difficulties during their study (Kılınç et al., 2020). Students have indicated the need for financial advice (Bartram, 2008) as many often turn to counselling services (Banjong, 2015). Pedagogical support is required to facilitate language proficiency and improved writing skills, ensuring quality lectures, content, and teaching methods, teachers sufficient understanding of diversity among international students, assessment guidance, personal tutoring, and creation of a supportive learning environment (Banjong, 2015; Bartram, 2008; Ding, 2016).

Practical support

Financial support. Financial assistance programs are undoubtedly of great importance to an international student's financial security. Kılınç et al. (2020) found that scholarship students reported financial satisfaction and that this was sufficient to cover their academic, social, and travel needs. Financial support could alleviate acculturative stress among international students (Gebregergis, 2018). However, in Australia, the government failed to realise the contribution of international students amidst their financial hardship and denied extending financial support during the COVID-19 pandemic (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020). In doing so, the Australian government overlooked the risk of increased mental health among these students, increased risk of exploitation, and homelessness (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020). Unfortunately, much as supporting these students would benefit not only the students but also the Australian education sector, international students in Australia are treated as cash cow and this view was cemented by the government's response during the pandemic (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020). In response to the Federal government's refusal to support international students, some state governments, for example the Victorian government, and institutions stepped-in to assist (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020).

Other under-recognised support needs – such as childcare. Family problems impede students from coping and recovering from depression (Saravanan et al., 2019). Unfortunately, family problems are largely ignored among studies on international student experiences.

Sociocultural support

Student counselling services. Student counselling services are a coping resource (Sümer et al., 2008) but often underutilized. It is unknown if such services have programs designed to meet the heterogeneity of international student, for example, programs for students who also double as parents. Such services could alleviate psychological distress such as depression and anxiety, which are two common complaints among international students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Sümer et al., 2008). Such psychological distress is also associated with parenthood indicating that the severity of these issues could be worse among international student who are also parents. Gebregergis (2018) found that marital status influences acculturative stress among international students, which affects their health and wellbeing. Unmarried students experience lower acculturative stress than married students (Yu et al., 2014). It is important for counselling centres to assign bilingual and international counsellors to work with students with low language proficiency (Sümer et al., 2008).

Social support groups. Social connectedness and social support are core to students' coping, acculturation, and psychological adjustment (Bender et al., 2019; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Social support can come in different types – i.e., subjective, objective, and mixed – and sources – i.e., host, conational, international, and mixed (Bender et al., 2019). Subjective support is a better enabler of students' psychological adjustment than objective support while mixed sources of social support are better than support from conational or international students alone (Bender et al., 2019).

In an Australian study, Sawir et al. (2008) found that majority of international students turn to social networks of friends in Australia and families in their home countries to cope with the loneliness. Higher levels of social connectedness and social support are associated with lower levels of acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Even more specifically, social support is a strong predictor of depression and anxiety among international students (Sümer et al., 2008), which implies that social support groups could play a pivotal role. In the U.S., some universities have implemented support groups/programs such as host family to help international students adjust to their new environment (Sümer et al., 2008). They have also implemented peer programs in which they match an American student with an international student, or an experienced international student with a new international student to promote interaction and build social networks (Sümer et al., 2008). Conational groups may also be useful because they allow contestation and cultural negotiations rather than not necessarily impede one's adjustment as earlier believed (Bittencourt et al., 2021). Using support groups to talk about one's challenges, keep one busy, or indulge in physical exercise helps to reduce homesickness and depression (Saravanan et al., 2019).

Students' satisfaction with support services and the Research gap

Unfortunately, international student satisfaction with support services is still rated lowest in Australia, the UK, and the US (Ammigan & Jones, 2018). Students' arrival, living, learning, and support service experiences significantly affect the students' overall experience with the university (Ammigan & Jones, 2018). There could be several factors that account for the lack of international student satisfaction or negative experiences. For instance, international students are often considered as a homogenous group of individuals studying in other countries rather than in their home countries. However, international students have underlying differences, conflicting expectations, and contrasting representations that shape their experiences and (dis)satisfaction (Baxter, 2019). Such differences are associated with ethnicity, culture, hosting country, and other social dynamics such as gender. Kelo et al. (2010) found that 76% of non-European students reported that they received general information before arrival but would rather have received information tailored to their specific country or unique circumstances. Other matters, such as study-life balance given the unignorable responsibilities such as parenthood, are also underappreciated. There are relatively few studies that dissect the experiences of international students who are also parents and are faced with choices and decisions that require them to balance their study goals with family goals and responsibilities. This may reflect a group of students whose

experiences and support needs are often overlooked and thus left behind. Support needs and priorities among underrepresented students differ (Bartram, 2008; Baxter, 2019); and issues such as parenthood could be strong influencers.

While we examine the experiences and needs of international students, we must recognise the heterogenous nature of these experiences (Heng, 2019), particularly, by exploring understudied student cohorts – such as married students or students with children (Sümer et al., 2008). Homogenising international student experiences overlooks diversity, over-generalises, and produces a reductive approach to addressing their needs. Chowdhury (2021) calls for a proactive, flexible, and innovative marketing approach, sound and timely policies, and diversification.

METHODS

This research project was implemented in three phases. Phase 1 and 2 focused on international student parents while phase 3 focused on newly arrived academic staff parents.

Phase 1: Individual conversations with international student parents

This phase involved international student parents participating in individual conversations with the researcher. I had individual conversations with 10 international student parents. International student parents were asked to share their lived experiences of managing migration, study, and parenthood, the gender-related obstacles experienced as well as their coping mechanisms. They were asked about their experiences with support services and policies at their universities. The conversations went for an average of 1-1.5 hours. They were conducted online via zoom and were all recorded, given consent from the participants.

Phase 2: Group conversations with international student parents

Phase 2 involved the international student parents who had taken part in individual conversations engaging in a group conversation. The group conversation was a follow-up to the individual interviews. Preliminary findings from the individual interviews were presented to the international student parents in a group and further discussions followed particularly in-depth conversations about what kind of institutional changes and other support initiatives could be put in place to address the needs/obstacles international students experience as they juggle migration, work, study and parenthood in a new country. Instead of the researcher coming up with her own recommendations, this Group conversation phase provided a collective voice to international student parents to come up with recommendations on what institutions need to do to support international student parents. The group conversation took approximately 2 hours. It took place online via Zoom and was recorded, given consent from the participants.

Phase 3: Individual conversations with newly arrived international academic staff parents

Phase 3 involved individual conversations with newly arrived academic staff parents. While the plan was to recruit 10 participants, it was challenging to access this number and only five academic staff parents managed to participate in the research. Four of these staff were from Western Sydney University while one was recruited from outside at another university in Australia. Informal and formal measures of recruitment were adopted including posting flyers on academic staff forums including Yammer and Engaged parents Network page. With the support from the Gender equity fund team, emails were circulated to other forums where academic staff parents were suspected including Equity and Diversity Working party, HDR student lists. Snowball approach was also used where the participants interviewed were asked to recommend other potential participants, they thought could meet the criteria. While the Human resource department had expressed willingness to circulate the recruitment flyer with information about the study to all newly recruited academic staff, they later withdrew this commitment which became very challenging to access staff. While there was a plan to hold group conversations with this group of participants, this was not possible due to the busy

nature of the academic staff parents as well as the limitation of the one-year time frame for the whole project. However, the individual conversations were informative and sought an in-depth story of what it is like to be a newly arrived academic staff parent juggling migration, work, and parenthood in a new country. The individual conversations took approximately 1.5-2hours and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data and the findings section of the report is structured around themes and categories inducted from the data. The findings cannot be generalized due to the limitation of sample size but the stories and lived experiences of the 15 participants of this study provide very useful insights into what it is like to be an international student parent or newly arrived academic staff parent in a university in Australia. The recommendations, if addressed, can contribute to achieving gender equity and leaving no parents behind in Australia.

Ethical considerations

International student parents were highly suspicious and hesitant to participate in this research for fear that their information could be shared with the universities and later with the immigration office which could jeopardise their visa and stay in Australia. However, I reassured the participants that confidentiality and anonymity will be respected in this project. Thus, care has been taken to de-identify and exclude information that I think could identify the participants and pseudonyms have been used to protect confidentiality and anonymity of participants. For example, information about the specific programme students are pursuing, country of origin, school, although provided to the researcher, has been omitted from the report. Where there is potentially identifying information given by the participant in the verbatim quotes, I have replaced it with XX in an endeavour to ensure anonymity. Verbal consent was obtained from the participants before individual and group conversations began. Participants were also reimbursed with a 50-dollar e-gift voucher. This research project got ethical clearance from Western Sydney University ethics committee (H 14341).

FINDINGS

This section reports the experiences of international students who are parents and how they cope with the challenges faced. We also report their experiences with gender practices and policies in Australia, and later recommend gender equality and institutional changes that universities can adopt to provide a supportive environment for international parents. 10 international student parents were involved in this study. They are African, Asian and Middle Eastern Backgrounds. Specifically, they come from Jordan, Nigeria, Botswana, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Uganda, Kenya and Iran. Five were on student sponsorship/scholarship and at PhD level, while the other five were at master's level and self-sponsored. Two were men while 8 were women. 8 migrated with their nuclear family to Australia while 2 had to make the painful decision to leave their family overseas because they could not afford family-related relocation costs like family insurance, family tickets, and later cover school fees related and living expenses for the family here in Australia.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES: NEGOTIATING STUDY, WORK, AND PARENTHOOD

International student parents have intersecting identities. They are not just students, they are community members, they are parents and employees; therefore, their experiences revolve around multiple responsibilities including academic, financial, family, accommodation, health, and work among others. This section elaborates student experiences from several positions of responsibility and difficult decision making. Figure 2 below presents the experiences reported and the number of the references to each experience. Family related experiences were the most reported followed by financial, accommodation, and new environment related experiences. Language and loneliness were the least reported experiences, contradicting some of the literature that emphasises language barrier as the major issue.
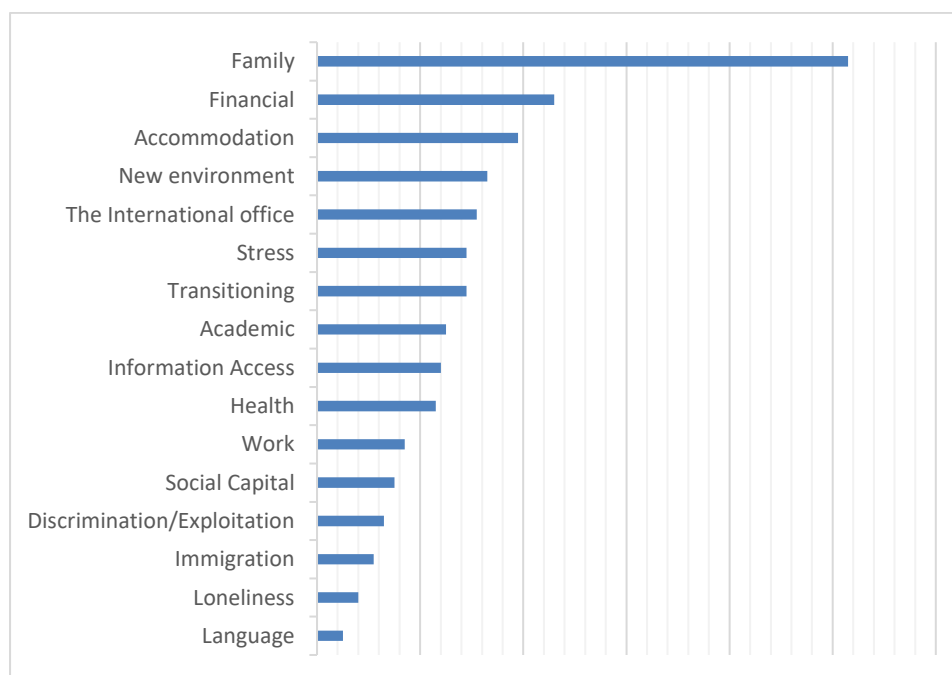
Figure 2. Experiences of International Students who are Parents

Intersecting Study–Family Experiences

The international student parents have a close family, i.e., spouse and children, whom they travelled with to the country of study or left behind in the home country. Either way, family responsibilities still stand and are part of the student's education goals and journey. Family related experiences were the most reported as shown in Figure 2, but these were the most ignored in previous studies.

No Consideration for Student-Parents

Student's Family Responsibilities are invisible. International student parents decried a lack of consideration of their family responsibilities that interfere/intersect with their academic responsibilities. The undermining of the student's family responsibilities results in HEIs treating student-parents the same as those without children, resulting in unmet needs. Only academic outputs are considered but the family-related struggles that impact the academic output are unseen, leaving student parents to feel unsupported. A participant mentioned that:

> *"As a woman with a kid, I live a different life from those without or a man who has no [family] responsibility. For me, I have to cook, I have to think for my son, I have to think about how I care for family members, and I also have to … nobody will care about the situation I'm going through to write the thesis. They will only look at my writing and won't care how much struggle I have gone through" (Dipti).*

Student parents did not feel their needs were recognised and supported by the institutions they were in. When their parenthood responsibilities interfered with their study and financial obligations, even when they explained, they were met with warnings.

> *"No. I won't say that we've been able to get any support. Personally, I haven't received any support from [institution name] … because of children, you're not able to attend classes or sometimes even telling them that you are not able to submit your assignments on time. And this has been the reason, but no support, because at the end of it all, you'll receive those emails, the warning emails about your attendance and about your lateness, especially being behind paying your school fees." (Ella).*

No/minimal childcare services at the university: The invisibility of student-family responsibilities is partly manifested through a lack of childcare support for international student parents. Some students would love to take their child with them to the university but very few universities provide on-campus childcare services. A place that could hold a child through the student's class hours would be useful. In some cases, a student may take the child to the university only if the child is old enough not to make noise. Some participants explained as follows.

"I can imagine sometimes when you have to fit into that small classroom 40 students and imagining bringing your baby to class where you have to sit with your baby in class. So, for my kids and my young one, it was just maybe two months or three months …you cannot go to class with your baby…" (Ella).

"I'm the only one with the child in my group. I'm the only older one senior citizen. No one has a child. Okay. And I think there's another thing I find like when we go on campus in person, there should be some services for people like me so that they can bring their kids. They can leave there until they attend the classes" (Jasmine).

International student parents and their children are left behind by the government that does not extend childcare support.

"And it was really hard. But when it comes to your child, you don't have any support in childcare from government for international students. So that actually plays a big role, too" (Jasmine).

Loss of Family Structure up on relocation

Multiple roles destabilise family structure. Up on migration, students take up multiple responsibilities of caring, studying and working. As such, some students find that they fail to live in a well-structured family arrangement, one that engages in the usual activities that other families do. The mounting study commitments erode normal family structure and routine and may take some time to build a relatively stable pattern of life. A participant explained that:

"I plan my job around the fact that I have children I have to run around with this and that, I have to cook and do this and that I get here I realise that my life is not structured anymore, you know … before then there was the structure that is put in place but the fact that I have family chores I have a job a job as well to factor into all this. The lack of structure as well can be something that throws you off completely and it may take time to try and you know settle to a pattern of life…" (Genius)

Family lives on Two Continents. While many students move with their partners and children to the country of study, many others make a difficult decision to leave their family in their home country. The two international student parents who had left their families overseas were forced to because they could not afford health insurance for the whole family. They were afraid of the school fees required for the child, and the lack of support in Australia, while for others the spouse has a job in the home country, which they cannot throw away based on the uncertainties of migrating to a new country. The difficult decision of leaving family overseas meant that they lived their lives on two continents. They had to be present for their families overseas but also fulfil their student-related duties in Australia. The life on two continents was described as painful, overwhelming, stressful, full of sleepless nights as the parents juggled the time differences between the two continents to keep in touch with family.

"People were telling me about preschool, Kindy. I got lost. That time I decided to send my son back home with my husband ... they said I had to apply to the NSW department to find out if I will get free education or not and at that time my husband's leave was over, so he had to go back ... My husband wouldn't stay because he has a job in [student's home country name], but I thought I would stay with my son but because I couldn't get school admission and they were not giving me proper information. I applied to the authority, but I got the letter that you can admit your son to the school without any payment, but my husband's flight was on Sunday. When I went to the school on Friday, they said we have to interview you first then we will decide. So, we came to the decision okay it would be better to return my son to XX" (Dipti).

"We have to consider what we can afford and what we cannot afford so having to now separate from my family who have been so much a part of my everyday life was...Very tough very very difficult [name]. If things if I have to do it again, I would find ways of getting at least one of them [children] here." (Genius)

"That is probably one of the most difficult decisions I ever took, because it meant that I had to leave my family back home and sacrifice to come and do a PhD. It is a very difficult decision up to today. I wonder what I was thinking ... in fact, is not just difficult. Is it painful? Because every time, every time I think about it, it just comes down to my children." (Old G).

Children Coping Problems

In many cases, support mechanisms for international students are targeted to the student but not the accompanying family members, particularly, the children. Some participants reported children coping problems including lots of crying, anxiety, and other mental issues created by separation from a parent or life in unfamiliar environment.

"My son had some coping problems he had some anxiety because the first seven months he lived without me and his father because I had a domestic worker in XX, but she just couldn't manage, and my husband sent him to my in-laws. so, he lived without his parents. when I came back with him, he just started crying because he lost his attachment to the father ... he was crying a lot. He wanted to return to XX." (Dipti)

"The student counselling should be for students and their partners as well and their families and their children as well, because children also have mental health issues." (Isha)

"It was disaster. You could see. I mean, the whole room detoxed. He's frustrated. He needs attention because the thing is, my husband, he does a night shift. He works at night. So, he sleeps in the morning. So, I have to make sure he's not making any kind of trouble for him just because he needs sleep, too. So, I'm just taking care of him and doing other things, too. I don't know. It's really difficult when it comes to, life, with a child." (Jasmine)

Study–Family Balance: torn between being a student and parent

Students often strive to balance their student requirements with family responsibilities. One participant mentioned how they wouldn't want to compromise being a good researcher because they are more committed to their family. Another participant indicates that the study placements make it difficult to fulfill their family duties. International student parents said they feel torn between the two roles, being a student and a parent and it is a difficult state to be in. Some participants explained that,

> *"The feminine role is built in our attitude. As a woman, we think we should cook for our family to make them happy, but I don't want to compromise being a good researcher." (Dipti)*

> *"So, I found it really challenging because you have to go for placement for five days. You have to meet all the number of required hours for the placement, and at the same time, you have to take care of your baby." (Ella)*

> *"When my daughter came, the complications are overlapping each other. Like if you want to send them to, if you both want to work, you have to send them to day care or you have to juggle between family work and also study…you can't reduce your study load from one point to another point." (Isha)*

> *"And it was just difficult, like when you're breastfeeding, and you just stay awake and at night you're just doing assignment. I remember I used to just carry him until 3:00am, like, I'm feeding him. I'm doing my assignment." (Jasmine)*

> *"But the fact that the mere fact that you cannot contribute as much as used to your children are not with you. You can't offer them what you want to do. And at the same time, you're being pushed to limits by supervisors who are not that supportive and probably be a little bit abusive … You're pulled on two different sides." (Old G)*

Meeting Gender Roles

There are some students who feel they ought to fulfill their role as a wife or husband regardless of their study schedule. The female students feel that as a mother they ought to take care of the child and house chores. The male students feel they ought to provide for their family on top of their class activities; therefore, they must find work and provide for the family. The female students feel they must spare time for the family roles. Either way, it gets overwhelming for the international student parents. The gender role definitions are often based on one's national cultural background. They explained that,

> *"In my country, All the responsibility for the kids goes to the woman and the woman should sacrifice their life! you know why you are going overseas for a Ph.D. why don't you stay in XX … The feminine role is built in our attitude. As a woman, we think we should cook for our family to make them happy…" (Dipti)*

"You know being a woman you cannot except like you're going out to do like mowing these physical jobs like construction of course some women do that when you do not have any choice but for myself, I found it really hard." (Ella)

"Sometimes, unfortunately, with the family, being family I just feel the pressing need to be there for them. Sometimes it's at the expense of your own emotions but you know that mothers always have to contend with, even when you are away from home even when you are studying you still have to do that." (Genius)

"But I think we come from a background from Asians, are male dominated society, and males are still seen as the main breadwinners of the family. And we carry that here as well. And wherever we go, it could change in the next coming generation. But it hasn't changed in our brains yet. We carry that here as well. And we have that." (Isha)

"Australia, we have different culture. In comparison with my country. In my country, moms spend lots of time in kitchen to prepare the fresh and healthy food for their families. Okay, that's why I learned from my mother from my mother-in-law, and it is a part of my personality that I have to prepare something for my family. And so, I have lots of things to consider that they are not important for others and even they can't understand them." (Layliee)

Caring for the Child

The students' experiences regarding caring for the child were categorised into three, meeting their needs, leaving them by themselves, and home schooling due to COVID.

Meeting the child's basic needs. Regardless of the student's study schedule, the needs of the child still stand and must be met. Students are juggling between meeting their study activities and the also the child's needs such as feeding, play, parents' attention, medical appointments, schooling, etc., and usually, there is no one to step in and help as the international student parents are far away from their extended family and support network from overseas. These responsibilities dig into the student's study schedule, but they are often overlooked. For instance, some participants explained that,

So having a baby comes with a lot of challenges. Like sometimes you have to attend the appointments, sometimes hospital appointments for the baby. Sometimes you don't have anyone to step in to help you take care of your baby." (Ella)

"Sometimes he would drive me I would be feeding my child in a car then I'll leave the child and go for class and then sometimes will call me baby's crying I'll run out then go for (laughter)Thank God for this lockdown the lockdown was my testimony oh this lockdown was best for me because without this lockdown it would have been tough." (Mariam)

Leaving Children by themselves. The lack of affordable childcare services and the lack of family in the host country has driven students to leave children by themselves if one of them

is a bit older, say ten years or more. This is a difficult decision, but some are focused to take it because they cannot go with the child to the university since there are no childcare services and the fact that childcare services are expensive for international students.

> "Sometimes even them [friends] because their kid was a bit elderly around 9 years at least when they have food in the house because sometimes, they were leaving the kids by themselves, and they have to go to work." (Ella)

> "And because the kid had been taught how to at least when food is there, the boy can just warm it up. And it's so nine years, at least. So, what we did was to also take our baby so that he can stay with our friend's son, the end of the line. So that's how we survive." (Ella)

Home-schooling during COVID. When the pandemic introduced online class and home-schooling options. While due to lockdown, the student parents could stay with their children at home, it was also another challenge added to international students' long list of activities. Now, the students had to create time to participate in the children's learning activities. Since there was a stop on physical class, students could not create sufficient time to engage in their own studies. Before, they would take the children to school and use that time to complete their assignments.

> "So, like when we talk about home learning for the young children or for the young ones. So instead of going to school now, they've changed to online learning whereby you, as a parent has to be there to get your child every time, we cannot just leave maybe a six-year-old child by themselves in this online learning. Also, they have specific time for that. So, you have to be there also, as a parent and imagining sometimes you find even like going to school would even give you at least some time to juggle other things while the child is away because it's like you paid for school fees for them to relieve you some of that work." (Ella)

> "But now, when they introduce home learning because living in a hot spot area, the schools were closed for some time. So having to be there for your child also for that period when they are home schooling and just being home. So, it really impacts you, especially as a parent, because I have to be there." (Isha)

Making Sacrifices to Support Each Other

The family members of the student make sacrifices to support the person's academic goals. Such sacrifices include jobs, social life, and some years of the child's education. Such sacrifices contribute to one's guilt feelings and pressure to deliver outcomes. In some cases, the student also sacrifices their happiness to support the family through the study period. Some participants mentioned that,

"Now my husband has resigned from his job, so he is here. For doing this Ph.D., my husband has sacrificed his job. My son has had a great impact because of the separation because of the anxiety. Now we are settling here and at the end of the Ph.D. I want to return to XX. Now, what will my husband do because it will be hard for him to get another job? The culture is different, the job requirements are different in Australia. The age factor. It will be hard to get a job again because my husband was doing a first-class job getting transport facilities, car facilities. He has sacrificed his excellent job for my Ph.D. and am thinking sometimes am thinking I can't do the Ph.D.". So that's a lot of pressure and when I think from my husband's perspective, he has sacrificed his job and what can I do? ... My son sacrificed an educational year from his life for me because I didn't have anything to do." (Dipti)

"You know I finished Uni within a year I get married within a year we had our first baby so my life has been revolving around my family and then you know how many years later 22 years later you have to separate from your family because like I said when my husband came for his studies I left my job and I came over for support." (Genius)

"Sometimes I sacrifice my happiness? I want to make sure I'm financially secure in the future. I want to make sure my son is getting proper health. I want my son to be happy with me. I want my husband to be happy ... Yeah, sometimes you may want to be selfish but I'm not that kind of person. If I could think about myself alone, I would be the happiest woman in this world, but I can't." (Dipti).

Negative Self-Evaluations or Self-Criticism

With the multiple responsibilities faced by international students, they somewhat evaluate whether/if they are actually meeting the duties and responsibilities they face. Such evaluations involve sometimes guilty feelings that they are not doing what they ought to do, they are not making enough time for the family or themselves, and the possibility that they are ageing and running out of time to make a family.

Feeling guilty. Given their parental duties, which are undermined by study activities, students feel guilty that they are not doing enough for their spouses and children. They feel guilty that they are not offering the support that's needed. The guilty feelings torture and stress them daily. Jasmine and Old G mentioned that,

"Every time he says one thing 50 times, I'm not blaming him as a mother. I'm just sharing my experience. Sometimes I feel guilty. I cannot give my time to him like that's needed. But I try my best. I can accommodate him. But sometimes he gets frustrated and it's totally fine…" (Jasmine)

"But you also consider yourself. And so, the fatherly duty seems to have dwindled. As, because of the, of course, I came to do, I cannot do it so well because I feel I don't give enough. And that also trickles down to the marital issues, marital issues coming, because of that. It is a very difficult thing, I think

that those are the main ones, really … You have to take in a certain way in your presence now that you are away. Your contribution is less. Now that that in itself is a bit of a torture." (Old G)

"And I can't place it on my wife entirely because she's already there with the children being the best, the best she can. But at the same time. You have supervisors that, very, very difficult, … getting a little stressed, OK, not even a little, but a lot of stress. But the fact that you cannot contribute as much as used to, your children are not with you. You can't offer them what you want to." (Old G)

No Self and Family Time and marital issues. Like all families, they must make time for family bonding activities, but this is a challenge for international student-parents, which leads to misunderstandings or arguments. Some students feel they are running out of time to achieve desired family goals and often feel they are not doing enough, what they should, or have not met their expectations, especially making time for the family. Some feel they have neglected their family in favour of studying. However, they have reported that they find no self-time as well. Jennifer and Jasmine experienced this and explained that:

"You are tired you just come back from work you are looking after the kids and you have to do kitchen things too at the same time and when obviously if husband and wife, they are busy in such a routine they don't have time for each other most of time there are arguments that you did this, you not doing enough…" (Jennifer)

"It's very hard. I mean, even you cannot pretend even you want to pretend you cannot. You can't. Like I mean, your brain is here. And it's just, I mean, you're thinking about 10 things in the next hour. Absolutely no time for yourself." (Jennifer).

"Because my husband is only at home on Saturday. He has Saturday off and Saturday. I have classes. So, it's like he's just when are you going to finish? Let's talk. Let's just Cook together. Kind of things … So, they both just wait for me just to come. Mommy, are you free? Mommy, are you free? Even mommy, are you free? No, I'm not free." (Jasmine)

Age-related pressure and gender roles. Because the course takes a couple of years to be completed, some students are concerned that they are losing time for family growth. These time concerns are associated with making a family such as getting pregnant and having more children or getting a job. A participant, Dipti, expressed her concerns about age and family growth.

"Age is an issue for pregnancy, and I don't want to leave my son alone. I want my son to have someone with whom he can share everything. That is why I got pregnant and now I have to make sure the baby is healthy but also study…" (Dipti)

Academic or Study Experiences

Academic experiences were analysed based on the students' experiences towards achieving their study or academic goals. These experiences are mainly about lack of time to study, engagement with academic supervisors, struggle to accomplish study activities, and planning for further education.

Struggle to accomplish Academic Activities

Placements are the most challenging. Students reported that the placement, if part of one's course, is the most difficult part for a student who is also a parent. The number of days or hours that they are expected to complete in a place are usually more than the time that they can afford to offer in a single study period. Placements are not only time challenging but also expensive due to transport charges and increase need for childcare services, yet no payments are offered. Three participants have experienced this and explained that,

> *"Having to go for placement for five days. And you have that limited time to finish this placement. You've been given around four months, and you need to finish that placement. So, I found it really challenging because you have to go for placement for five days. You have to meet all the number of required hours for the placement, and at the same time, you have to take care of your baby." (Ella)*

> *"I remember in the placement; it was so difficult. I used to work in extra hours just to feel that ethically. Like, you have done your work, your task because it's really difficult when you have a child just to do the things just to meet the deadlines. But thank God, 'am, my supervisor. They both were really good. They supported me." (Jasmine)*

> *"You know my placement was the most challenging that is when I started putting my child five days in childcare previously, I would have said 2/3 days but now that placement and the Uni wasn't even considerate, they sent me to a very far distance in my first placement I would travel 1 hour thirty minutes ... I was still breastfeeding so I would wake up at 5 and jump onto the bus ... and knowing it was free ahhhh that was more painful ... Oh my God! with a lot of expenses your morale just dies ... Placement time is the most stressful time for international students being a mother or a parent because the liability is high, and the income is very low thank God for this 20% reduction in hours, it actually helped." (Mariam)*

Ella called for more home-based study plans for students with family responsibility. Ella explained the inflexibility of study hours citing that a work placement runs from 9am through to 5pm, which is not suitable for school pick-up.

> *"I felt bad that they used to pick on me, but I only felt that I wish there was a way in which being a parent they can't even consider, like going for placement. Like sometimes we can be even allowed to work from home, do the placement from home sometimes because I ended up even one time asking if it's possible, I*

do my placement at least some days from home. But it wasn't. I think both because you realize that with even organization [name] cannot organize something your place of placement cannot. It must fit into the time that the organization also works. And with doing placement, you're starting from 9 to 4 or 5. I wish both can be able to understand on humanitarian point of view. Like. They might be getting students who are parents and work out on how they can support them well, while on placement." (Ella)

One participant, however, added that placement builds one's confidence and readiness to integrate into the Australia work system and community. On this, the participant explained that:

"I was working with the police in my first placement I had a lot of training a lot of experience meeting other people, [it] truly gave me confidence in my social life, like in my corporate life. It really built my confidence although it was free, but I learnt a lot." (Mariam)

Continuous distraction from studies. Participants mentioned that being parents there is a lot of distraction from study activities because often they have to take care of the child and pay attention to the family needs as well. For instance, during the lockdown such students would not complete an online class without interruption from the child. Some would avoid talking during a zoom section in fear of waking the baby. Some participants mentioned that:

"I'm getting like, during the class, first I'm getting from the stage [class], like, 20 or 50 times, like, every day. Give me this. Give me this. I don't know. They have two stomachs. One is for main meal, one for snack. That doesn't, like after ten minutes, give me something to eat. Okay, Mommy, let's play something new. So that's why I put my camera off because you have to get up every time. And I remember he's jumping on the bed, like, twice and coming in, like, turn it off. Turn it off, like, distraction." (Jasmine)

"I have to do my university homework my son he cannot let me do the assignment I say what can I do sit in sitting room you cannot say stop watching TV." (Jennifer)

Slow academic progress. The academic progress of students who are also parents is often slower than other students because they often lag behind in accomplishing assignment and other study activities such as placements. They often apply for deadline extension, reduced placement hours, or even call off the semester. The application for extensions can be stressing as they have to first justify their family-study-work-circumstances, a process that is triggering. In some cases, the student misses out on some study activities, such as the orientation activities or workshops, as they explained below:

"But the thing is, you find that you're lagging behind, even in submission of your assignments, you don't even have time to have your own personal time to study and even going for those placements and also for your own online classes

... at the end of it all, you'll receive those emails, the warning emails about your attendance and about your lateness." (Ella)

"... in the beginning they said no it was quite hard for me [to take time off] when I requested them and they just told me to talk to my supervisor and I personally went there and requested talked to my supervisor she said okay that she can discuss with my faculty they discuss among themselves so I was given a permission for freezing my semester." (Jennifer)

"I had to write lots of emails ...In fact, he or she gave me she said unlimited time and said but don't allow the school to close before you submitted." (Mariam)

"Me and my husband we didn't go to the orientation. Because we have, we have babies, so we didn't, we didn't like, okay, we're gonna need it like, you know, yeah, just thinking of the other academic stuff, you know?" (Emily)

Engaging with abusive supervisors

While some supervisors may be supportive there are some whom students find to be non-supportive and abusive. A participant experienced abuse from the supervisory team as they failed to understand the student's parental responsibilities intersecting with study responsibilities. Such abuse involved threats of making the student fail, not signing off the thesis, and use of abusive-racist language. The student explained as follows.

"And at the same time, you're being pushed to limits by supervisors who are not that supportive and probably be a little bit abusive. In fact, they are abusive, and they use tough language, after unacceptable language. I may use if I may say that, yeah, you see this discouraging. You're pulled on two different sides". I talked to my supervisor, my principal supervisor, and I explained the issues that I was going through as a person. It was pretty rough when it came to the way he used to talk, he was abusive, sometimes in a bad way. And I had to go through that even when I explained that I had these issues at home. He seemed to understand, but his actions were not matched by what I thought he understood" ... there was a lot of abuse that went on around the time. So, I was really going into a depression and wanted to return home." (Old G)

These abusive encounters were leading to feelings of depression, discouragement, and loss morale that the student felt like returning to their home country.

Time is never enough.

Student who are parents are caught between multiple responsibilities that they barely have enough time for studies, parenting, or work. Many reported that they find the course duration to be short, so they apply for extensions, usually 6 months. They also noted that the assignment deadline come in too soon before they have had enough time to complete, so they ask for deadline extensions, which is then determined by the subject facilitators. Some participants stated that,

"I'm pretty sure I can say in my assignments, I cannot even give 50%. I remember like this time with the project. I just did that in few hours. Yes, it was the last time they changed everything. I was in that grief, oh God. I have spent so much time on that. But now I'm happy. Like I did that because trauma informed practice, It's really good. I can use it for my future too. But yes, I can't. I cannot give even 50% because my sister works from home too. My younger sister. We live together. So, she finishes her work around 7:30 and then she takes care so far. Then I have like 2 hours just to do my assignment. But then she has to sleep. It's just like I get just a few hours because you need to concentrate [but] you just can't because it's just at the background mom! Mom! all the time." (Jasmine)*

Desire for Excellence and Further Education

Like other students, student-parents also work to excel and hope for further studies after their current course. To international studies excellence is important because one is paying a lot of money or is working towards a scholarship for the next course. These hopes are frustrated by the experiences mentioned above and other challenges not related to academics. Some have explained that:

"Some of the domestics [students] don't give a damn, they don't care. I've interviewed a lot of them they're like I just want to pass but I have the mentality of excellence I don't like average yes because I was an excellent student at my undergrad like I don't understand why I should be getting a C in something I put an effort for an A … I don't know that people's own thought pattern, but I like to be excellent whenever I write. but if I'm not excellent please let me see the reason why I'm not doing well." (Mariam)

"So, the question was how I keep going. The thing is I just love learning new things. I'm not the person, like, oh, that's it. It's finished. The things I want to do. My PhD, too, I want to maybe I apply for master research because after this student visa. So, I guess it's my passion of learning, like, new things. I don't want to just I completed this degree and that's it…" (Jasmine)

Financial Experiences

Financial experiences are related to the costs of study and taking care of the family. These can be categorized into access to financial support, managing the financial pressure, and the pressure at the end of the scholarship.

Accessing Financial Support

No relocation support. Students mentioned that relocating to Australia for their studies is very expensive, yet no relocation support is provided. Relocation costs often include immigration costs, insurance costs, travel and accommodation on arrival. To meet such costs,

the student takes up a loan from an institution in their home country. Unfortunately, the loan repayments add to the student's financial burden after they have commenced with their studies. A participant explained that,

> *"I got a loan in my country before coming to Australia because of the plane fare because I didn't get settlement fees from university. I have a scholarship but still, I was thinking about you know managing the money because when I came to Australia I spent a lot of money, I got some loan, now its thinking about repayment of that loan ..." (Dipti)*

Difficulty accessing financial support from home country. Participants mentioned some difficulties in accessing financial support from their home country. Due to the differences in the economic development of countries and currencies, the finances needed to meet a student's needs in Australia would result in a lot of money when converted into their country's currency. It becomes impossible to raise the much-needed support from home. The situation was further worsened by the pandemic. On this, the participants said,

> *"I never spend a single cent because I'm just thinking about what if something happened, I need the money it's really hard for me to get money from XX. it would be 62 or 65xx [country's currency]. that's a lot of money and I really want to save the money." (Dipti)*

> *"Lack of payment of school fees, sometimes because of COVID was impacted and you cannot receive any support from back home, especially with the payment of school fees, because it was really impactful." (Ella)*

Expensive Day-care Services

Day-care services were the most reported challenge experienced in the financial related experiences. For many, they must use these services if they are to create sufficient study time; however, there are two experiences associated with day-care. First, participants indicated that they found it very expensive to sign a child into a day-care facility, and secondly, there are no day-care facilities provide in or around the university. International student parents and their children feel are left behind unsupported as they cannot access childcare subsidy from government that is meant for only permanent residents and citizens' children. On their experiences with day-care, the participants explained as follows.

> *"I cannot even talk about the day-care like taking your kid for like day-care or something like that because it was really really expensive you cannot even afford so that is how we survived and until we found some of our friends who are in other suburbs we used to take our kid to our friends were free you take your kid there to stay with them ... TAFE is really good because they have, like, a day-care program where people can bring their kids and live while they're in class. But it is really expensive for international students. That's what I realized, because TAFE really like within TAFE in Ultimo, they have, like, a teacher program. People bring in their kids. They go to class when they finish their*

classes. You come and take your people. It was very expensive for international students, but it is very expensive but it is there." (Ella)

"Don't even go there, A lot? Being a temporary visa, childcare is a huge thing. I'm paying half of my salary for childcare. So, imagine you have, like, 20 hours of working hours and you have to study and work and so that you have to send your child to the childcare. You're not making any money there. You might be in debt to make that childcare because there's no childcare subsidy but temporary visa holders." (Isha)

"He [son] has to join pre-school he cannot how can I send him I don't have resources even my university fees there and our daily things the kitchen groceries, household items and all of that I have to pay for them so how can I pay 100bks a day if you want to send him to pre-school for the public you have to pay 120bks,130bks like that even for the cheapest you can't afford. This is time my son can't learn from society is missing I have to go for work. I mean the difference between the people living here residence and not residents only the people who are international we are suffering." (Jennifer)

"And the Uni childcare is so expensive, I don't know why I think they should have international student for cheaper rates and out of all the childcare that I check Uni at Western Sydney childcare is so expensive. like I'm wondering maybe they give lectures I don't know but I feel for international students up something everyone thinks the same." (Mariam)

Unusually High Expenses. Students face a lot of financial pressure as they strive to pay their tuition fees and take care of their family in a country that presents unusually high expenses compared to what would normally be incurred in the home country. The cost of living in Australia was described as much higher than that in their home countries. The financial pressure is not any different for those who did not come with their family. Some students have to send money back home to care for their spouses and children. The costs incurred on arrival are quite high until one settles down and finds a job. The spouses have to work much harder to raise the money. Some participants shared the following experiences.

"Yeah. finally, he was able to come here but I still have to spend a lot of money on the quarantine. we spent 8 to $10,000 together with the flight cost and hotel cost and everything." (Dipti).

"Here, the standards of living obviously are not as in my country here where living is expensive, I mean really expensive above all the tuition fee you are paying at the university I think they should be funds to support the students oh okay ... Oh, my goodness 3000-4000$ when you arrive here to spend in one week ... the system is totally different from that in our country. so, taxi they take like 200 bucks from the airport to here. I never had the idea of about catching a train." (Jennifer)

"It was terrible. Just with, with one income, and, and it, it wasn't just the expenses of our life, we needed to pay our rent, our daily life has lots of expenses. And yet, we experience a very, very critical situation in terms of financial problem ... It was terrible situation in terms of in terms of financial situation and financial pressure. Yeah. And what Fortunately, my husband worked a lot and even now." (Layliee)

"Well, yes. Being a father? They are financial difficulties. I'm in Australia. I have to send money, me, my young ones, my wife and I have to take care of myself as well. Rent in Australia to Australians may look little to XX it is huge, especially if you're taking care of a group outside Australia back home, if I was alone, that would have been different." (Old G)

Paying Tuition Fees for Two. No scholarship students experience financial pressure because they are constantly worried about paying their tuition fees, staying in the university, and therefore meeting their visa conditions. The situation is worsened by the fact that they also have to pay money for childcare and in some cases the fees for children in primary school. For international student parents at master's level, their children going to primary schools have to pay the public-school international fees of over $6-8000 a year, which doubles their financial pressure. Participants mentioned that:

"And especially even if the baby now started going to school. That's where real trouble comes in, because you're paying your school fees at the same time, you're paying school fees for your child because there's no difference between College school fees and even your school going primary or like your younger one five-year-old going to school almost the same." (Dipti)

"I start the second master, which was Master research in XX. I needed to complete that master in two years as well. And so, as an international student, I didn't have any, any scholarship and I needed to pay my tuition fees. So, I paid four years, tuition fees and, and an even I paid to education and Communication Department of Australia for my son Studying in a public school, because the sub class of our visa didn't support any scholarship in Australia. It was very, very difficult for us because we just had one breadwinner in our, in our family. Yeah, and my husband needed to support us because we needed to pay around 45000 per Year." (Layliee).

Raising Money for Health Insurance. While health insurance, i.e., overseas student health cover (OSHC), are low for single students, they are much higher for students with families. Participants mentioned that they face a difficult time raising the money for insurance, yet it must be paid for the student visa to be granted.

"It was so much. How much did we even have? Because ... we paid over 11 or 12,000 for Medicare [insurance] or whatever we even had to pay ... A lot of money was going into it [insurance]." (Mariam)

> *"No, I got the opportunity from university to cover the insurance. I asked my supervisor that it's really hard for me to cover the insurance $70,000 for family and my supervisor said OK I'm looking at that the university give me the support and that was a lot of support for me at that time." (Dipti)*

Scholarship amount vs the bills

The scholarship amount given was described as insufficient to cover all the bills student parents have to foot. Also, as students wind-up their studies they must plan for a future without financial support for the scholarship. At this point, students are rethinking their budgets and finding ways to increase their income and manage expenses. Some start looking for jobs at this point, which adds to the financial challenges already faced during the course of their study. A participant explained that.

> *"I can't even have a coffee from a coffee shop, uhm you know because I'm thinking about the money. I spend on the electricity bill, mobile bill, internet, house rent, then how much is left?! ... Uhm, if I enjoy a coffee at the restaurant if I enjoy food at the restaurant because sometimes it's not possible to cook at home but if I have lunch from a shop, it's really hard. What is the strategy that I use? I never enjoy a cup of coffee from outside. I may enjoy a coffee with one of my supervisors or my friends, but I never spend a single cent because I'm just thinking about you something happened, I need the money" (Dipti)... I have to make sure I have funds because my scholarship will end in March. So that's a lot of pressure." (Dipti)*

Accommodation

Accommodation for students who are parents is just not as easily found as that for single students. The options are limited and the expenses much higher. Student accommodation experiences were divided into finding suitable accommodation, accommodation discrimination, misleading information on accommodation, raising initial accommodation expenses, knowing what to do finding accommodation, and sharing accommodation.

Finding suitable accommodation is difficult

Students expressed trouble finding accommodation suitable for a family and also finding such suitable accommodation near the university.

Family suitable accommodation. With an accompanying family, the students often look for accommodation that is spacious enough to fit in, and they are also looking for accommodation that is in a good environment for the children, for instance, to play because it is part of their developmental need. In some accommodation, they are asked to keep the children quiet, which is not exactly possible. Therefore, they can't use shared accommodation in hostels like single students do. The accommodation has to be found within the quickest time possible if you have children that need to go to primary school. The rush to find accommodation, for an address, and also find a school in the area was described as a crisis.

Student parents are being ripped off, like Layliee who had to pay a 6-months' rent to get the address for her child to go to school.

> *"For to be settled after six days since I needed to provide a home address to the school that my son needs to be enrolled. We rented a house, which was a terrible one and even we paid six months rent to Yes. Oh my god. Yes. Yes. To convince the homeowner that's to rent his or her property to us. Yeah, and we rent that property for six months, but after four months we moved from that property, and even we paid for six months, but yeah, we are we faced with a terrible situation in that whole house because lots of mould was grown or was grown up on the wall, it was terrible. It was terrible. And that's why we moved from that property to other one." (Layliee)*

> *For Isha and his wife, they moved two houses on the day they arrived and lost all their bond:*

> *"And it was a struggle to find a place to stay with, having somebody to look after, like my wife. If it was somebody who is 19 or 20 years old, who is living alone, that could be different to find a shared accommodation or a hostel or student accommodation. But with family, I had to make sure we were in the right environment to be able to communicate and look for a place where more xx are to buy things that we eat and look for a place which is safe to go out and work as well ... And we didn't know what to do. And then gumtree again. And then we found a place we could go and see that in person. Since we were here and we found a place about 15 minutes' walk from [the] Station. And we both went and saw the place. We liked the people. And then it was a difficult decision for us to go and talk to the person to take out the luggage as well. They were angry. They were shouting or you cheated as you just going away, you put your luggage and you look for another place ... Okay. And then we track the luggage back downstairs and went to the Harris Park station and went to Westfield again. So, it was within a day we moved two places." (Isha)*

> *For Jennifer and Miriam, she and her family cannot afford to rent a home of their own which has forced them to in shared accommodation. The experience in shared accommodation is unfavourable for her study and is dangerous to her child's mental health and development.*

> *"I am living in a shared home because I can't afford a home but it is affecting my kids health. You cannot stop a kid from playing, talking, he is a kid I mean a kid is a kid still when we arrived we had a private accommodation [paying]320 but 150 excluding bills in the same time for my pregnancy and all this time am living in a room I have to do my university homework my son he cannot let me do the assignment, I say what can I do, in sitting room you cannot tell a resident to stop watching TV because it is shared, we are paying and they are paying so you manage about my accommodation and living." (Jennifer)*

> *"So, when I heard we have to live in a shared apartment with like shared kitchen, sharing bathroom with someone I was like oh man! Like Jesus…" (Mariam).*

Accommodation near the university is rare and expensive. Students would prefer to stay close to the university but they have found that most accommodations nearby are not suitable for families but single students, which becomes a challenge and thus they find accommodation in suburbs that are further away from the university. Otherwise, usable accommodation close to the university is noted as very expensive and unaffordable for international students. Some participants explained that:

> *"And even our family as a parent. I mean my husband and I and I have some limitation to choose a property because we needed to find a property nearby to the to the university to support our son. And, and so that that's why we had lots of limitation. property we move to other suburbs. We have to we had to leave to suburbs near to XX." (Layliee)*

> *We had to move out of Airbnb because it was so expensive … And then the university wanted him to live in in a campus yes but when we looked at our finances, it was so expensive … campus accommodation was very expensive." (Mariam)*

Discrimination against Students with Family

When looking for accommodation, students with families are discriminated in favour of those without children. Some have reported that they wanted students to stay in separate rooms individually, which was not possible for married students with children.

> *"Okay, for example, that situation I needed to, to rent a place very close to the university, for example, university house would be very great for international students, even for someone who are married and have a child or children...but then it wasn't any room for us to live in university house as a family. Yeah, what happened there. Hello, [name] has a home, but it is just appropriate for single." (Layliee)*

> *"We realized they didn't allow couples. I'm sure because we had our reasons for not staying in the Uni [but] I remember it was not only about the cost, … they wanted individuals." (Mariam)*

Misleading Information on Accommodation Apps

Raising accommodation costs for new arrivals is an issue as they are asked to pay several months ahead of their stay because they don't have rental references or a rental ledger when they apply for a place. Because they don't know and have no rental history some new students end up in unfit house, for instances, apartments with mould or non-functioning appliances. Unfortunately, they pay and when they leave some after moving in, they are not refunded, then they have to pay for a new place. To find accommodation students rely on

publicly available applications such as gumtree; but sometimes the information provided therein is not true. The posting provides fake pictures about the size and location of the accommodation. Sometimes the students are convinced by the pictures, and they pay quickly because they are in desperate need of a place to settle down. In some cases, the house appliances are not operating as advertised and the students doesn't know that they should do a thorough inspection. They sign contracts only to find that the appliances are not working and when they terminate the contract, they lose the payment and bond made. A participant shared that,

> "We went to a place. It was a very small place, and they put fake pictures on gumtree. And we went there and it was a shock for us ... The room was like four by four. We didn't know what to do and what we did. We had paid them the money already." (Isha)

> "it was like a little bit hard ... when we were trying to find like an apartment to rent and then we catch like that's a good apartment like you know we because we didn't know we have to check for example the Air condition AC, the electricity, we got to the apartment, they told us everything is okay they give us you know it gives us like report it shows air-conditioning is working for example, like a dishwasher working and then when we signed the contract to start living at this apartment, we found no the AC, no, it doesn't work and you know like it's kind of misleading you know and we were trying to please fix it, fix it, and the end because they told us no this is a big issue we can't fix it, oh my god yeah and it was summer very hot for my baby, you know, and they can see the allergy like because of the sun and then me and my husband decide to break the contract ... we had to pay another $400 for the new place on the same day ... That is like first day in the country in which you convert money back to home [currency]. That's, like, huge. That could be like one-month wages for somebody working as normal labour." (Emily)

Not Knowing what to do finding accommodation

Many students don't know the procedure of getting accommodation and no information is provided prior to arrival. Participants mentioned that the universities do not provide sufficient information or support on finding accommodation for those who have just arrived. While finding accommodation some lost their initial deposit, other were made to pay six months upfront, and others did not know what they need to look at when inspecting the house. If information was provided, students would feel more confident about finding the right accommodation, get it done faster, avoid unnecessary expenses, and rip-offs from fraudulent individuals. Before coming to Australia, some search on Google and use social media to get information on how to find accommodation but these sites have not been helpful. Participants explained that,

> "Oh boy, we finally moved to another apartment. First thing I did an inspection on the AC you know, to make sure it works, you know? based things like that. This is my advice for international students. Make sure everything's in the

apartment is working. Yes. Get on the AC, the dishwasher everything. No money before signing the contract like no, because I don't, I don't want to say like be despairing about the Chinese real estate because they were Chinese. But yeah. Like, in general. Make sure like you know, that like before the signed contract. This is a this is the hot thing." (Emily)

"So, it was a struggle. And University has not supported us in terms of if you're coming from XX, these are the places most XX [ethnic background] are. These are the places you could get a lot of information about XX community, or these are the student groups XX community has. These are the people from Asian community. This kind of information could have built a lot of more confidence in us before moving, but that will not happen. So, we have to do our own research and find out what's happening. And social media doesn't help." (Isha)

"No. yah, before coming here. Back home when we were in xx, like in Google. Where to find accommodation, how to find accommodation then these are the places where you can share, find, share, accommodation and things. So that's how we did." (Isha).

Shared Accommodation is Impossible

Often shared accommodation is the best option for students on arrival; however, when a student has family then shared accommodation is inconvenient and nearly impossible to live in. Such accommodations create two challenges, lack of enough space for the family and lack of space for the child's needs such as play, toilet training, meals on time, etc. Some tried it but failed to stay and left for more appropriate spaces but that comes with a higher financial cost which they may not have at that point since they have no jobs yet or the scholarship stipend has not yet been paid.

"You can't say am managing I try to put my son in bed on time I can't leave the room for a silent corner there is no silent corner in the house so if am in kitchen am thinking about my studies if am in my studies am thinking about my cooking, but when I want to cook, all stoves are occupied… sometimes there is laundry just next to the bathrooms and my son I like mum I want to go to the toilet am like no you have to wait, for it was a bit challenging toilet training in a shared accommodation." (Jennifer)

"Every time I want to make my XX meal because we came with some food stuff, You just see everyone opening the windows open the windows. You ask them my friend why open window, there are like I don't like the smell. Oh, my goodness! So now I have to wait for them to finish and go before I cook, like it was not funny." (Mariam)

Health Problems

Being a student, immigrant, spouse, and parent all at once is overwhelming and has been associated with health-related concerns. Health related experiences have been divided into

feeling depressed, lack of sleep (insomnia), mental health concerns, and pregnancy health problems.

"*It was just too much*": Feeling or Getting Depressed

Some students reported that they felt depressed at some point during their studies. The overwhelming journey from pre-arrival, on-arrival, and during the study is coupled with multiple roles and responsibilities. Students have reported that they get frustrated at some point. For some, the pain of leaving their family back in their home country is almost unbearable. The lack of friends in the host country is coupled with family responsibility such that students feel like they have no one to talk to. For instance, Mariam, Old G, Jennifer mentioned that:

> "Yeah, like I went through a depression like I was depressed because one I had no friends, two the time difference was just so much 10 hours away for home each time I wanted to talk to my parents or my siblings, they're sleeping like I could I didn't know who to connect with, no friends so as you know I didn't know where to pour my frustration on just me myself, so I started isolating, [I] isolated myself depressed of being a good wife a good mother in a foreign land it was just too much too much." (Mariam)

> "It was too much for me I went into depression I wasn't eating I wasn't doing anything. I don't know it was someone in class. One of the days I put on my video she sent me a message you like you don't look good, you don't look happy, what's happening? like see just let me be, he said, it's a sign of depression you need to come out okay where are you I'm coming to your house to pick you." (Mariam)

> "I left when these were very little. And I did not because my last born was just making two, well, no, she was six. So, it just it was just so painful, leaving them, particularly at the airport saying bye … and then we're not going to see you for a long time. The pain is always there during the day. In the night, it is worse and especially in the beginning where you, you, you had to do things that I used to do home for the children, in the night, and they could not do them anymore. And you would get up in the night and try and do the things. Then I realized I'm in Australia, so the pain was there. It almost threw me into some form of depression. And because of the few people I met around, I managed to keep going. But the pain is still there, not being there to see them grow." (Old G)

> "To some people pregnancy is just a worry but to me it was very hard nausea, depression and I had to do the assignments and to study to be a mother, so it was a combination of good, bad and depression I mean it was a mixture of flour like what is gonna happen." (Jennifer)

Lack of Sleep or Insomnia

Students also reported a lack of sleep especially in the first months of arrival. The lack of sleep is said to be caused by isolation and loneliness, separation from family, lack of familiar roles, or academic demands. For any of such reasons, students stay awake through the night and become less functional during the day. Jennifer and Mariam have to spend sleepless nights to do assessments. Night-time, after baby has slept is the only time to work on assignments.

> *"Can't you see my dark circles eyes. It means no sleep at all five to six hours … No sleep at all because even my GP asked me I started to take my vitamins and some staff its kind nothing until you take proper sleep." (Jennifer)*

> *"She was just so active strong if I got my laptop she is all over like and I wasn't sleeping cause night was my study time so I used to sleep 4 am cause I have to do a lot of writing in the night 100 the day dedicated to her and sometimes you have to read some articles to be able to read and gather references in your writing so I would use any time she is sleeping and use the night to write again my husband would have been a very good support but he was also very busy in his PhD." (Mariam)*

Mental health Concerns but No Access to affordable mental health sessions

Students reported that they are concerned about their mental health because they are faced with many responsibilities, they get overwhelmed and frustrated but they have no counselling services to get them through these situations. They reported that counselling services are very expensive and the OSHC does not cater for these services. A participant who experienced this explained that,

> *"I was just thinking, like, I want to share a few things regarding mental health. Too many of the students. I'll tell you one story. One of my, I won't to reveal her name. She's one of my cousins here. She's going through a hard time. I talk to her all the time. I try my best to provide her counselling. So, I'm the only one She talks to. So, I said, why don't you just go for anything kind of professional, like when you know some person, you don't take them seriously. That's why I think you should go for counselling. Some, like, professional psychiatrists, because she's in that state … I'm not saying they should go to university, but they need kind of insurance [for mental health]. Yeah. And if it's really serious, there should be some external context. But again, thing comes here like, it's expensive. Our insurance doesn't cover that." (Jasmine)*

> *"Like, if I'm telling you my story, you could say, like, I have gone through rollercoaster mental health breakdowns, physical and all you can say like, this person needs help. But the thing is like I was thinking, we are doing massive social work. We now know how to manage these things. I really think about*

people who are not in this mental health and wellbeing field, from accounting, engineering or other fields, like how they manage it." (Jasmine)

Pregnancy Illness and Studying

Students also reported some difficult experiences faced when they get pregnant during the duration of their study. For some students, they are concerned about their age and the fact that they may not get pregnant if they wait too long. Pregnancy comes with some illnesses often reported such as nausea and depression. Students must cope with these illnesses and must complete the assignments. Unfortunately, the OSHC does not cover C-section delivery, so students are often worried about this cost. Those who reported pregnancy-study experiences explained as follows,

> *I remember I was desperate because I had a kind of traumatic birth, like labour and all and C section, emergency section. So, my body. The doctor said, you can't just go straight away." (Jasmine)*

Jasmine needed to hand in assignments due after her traumatic birth. Without help with the baby, she had to continue doing the assignments and attending online classes while carrying her heavy baby on her laps. The sitting impacted her spine:

> *"And then I went to my chiropractor. He actually unlocked my spine at that time. I was like, that from here to there because I was just carrying him. And my son is really heavy. He's a very big boy He's a big boy." (Jasmine)*

Unlike Jasmine, Jennifer felt she could not go on any longer:

> *"So ahm… after my c-section then I went back to university I was dragging my feet since it was c-section the worse side is our insurance couldn't cover that they said that if it was a normal delivery, it would be for free but with the c-section we had to it required a lot of scans, daily check-ups so whatever my husband was earning was all spent…It's very hard for me but after that once I finished my semester, I requested to the university that because of my health conditions that I can't continue my studies." (Jennifer)*

Stress

International students reported stress triggered by several situations arising from the multiple responsibilities ranging from migrating, studying, parenting, and the pandemic. From the experiences shared we categorized stress into emotional stress, culture stress, financial stress, information stress, parental stress, study stress, and COVID stress.

Emotional Stress

Emotional stress was the most experienced and reported stress among participants. This stress comes from certain situations associated with the student's family in the home country. Sometimes they are faced with situations in the host country that they could never have imagined. Many have not envisioned the potential differences and are hence taken by surprise. Some students reported moments when they would simply cry for the lack of

options and not knowing how to get out of the situation, they are in. Many reported the lack of support in the host country increased their emotional stress. Participants described their emotional stress as

> "I just cry of course, I'm a human. And my capacity is very limited and sometimes I'm exhausted. I'm nervous. I'm sad." (Layliee)

> "It was difficult, just crying because I don't have family here. Yes, my sister is there, but they can't just take care of your child, like, 24 hours. I remember I used to cry like, every night when it's over and you don't get any kind of support … This is a soul less country. Nobody really cares about yourself, not a government, not a university. You are just there. You're spending money. Nobody really cares. Even if you die. That was really distressing to just hear that from other people." (Jasmine)

> "So especially when the doctors said I was to go through a c-section due to the condition of the baby so it was really very difficult for me I was crying and alone I had to sign papers I called my mum and told her signing off my life my husband came he was also crying that no one is here we are coming from a loving and caring family so were really sorry for that time." (Jennifer)

> "So, when I explained about the family issue and what I was going through to this, Tim, I broke down. And they understood these were ladies' ladies. I find that when I explain certain things to ladies, they tend to understand more than men, men tend to brush things away, very weak. But these ladies understood what I was saying." (Old G)

Financial stress

Earlier we reported students' financial experiences, which are associated with accommodation costs, health insurance, day-care service expenses, and tuition fees. Students reported that the financial pressure that arises from their financial needs is quite unbearable and causes a lot of stress on the family. Students explained how support from the university and supervisors can alleviate such stress. participants, Layliee and Dipti, reflected on this as follows.

> "I have lots of things that should I do, and they stopped my studying, because of some financial issue or pressure. I have to follow them and yes, it is. Um. It has lots of stress." (Layliee)

> "Yeah, it [insurance payment by Uni] helped me a lot because it was going to be a lot of stress, I was wondering how I would cover how can I manage this big amount and I couldn't enjoy the meals. I was lucky one of my friends said why don't you ask your supervisor. they are really very helpful and really happy I have such an excellent supervisor. they asked me do I need any help? can we help you then I say that I have been stressed because of that money. after the

meeting I found out that the Uni contacted me, they ask for my details and offered the cover." (Dipti)

Information stress

Students have also mentioned stress created by the lack of access to the much-needed information. In the earlier sections, we reported how students find it difficult to access useful information on accommodation or schooling arrangements for their children. Because the universities do not provide sufficient information prior to arrival or on-arrival it is challenging for students to navigate a new environment. The stress is also caused because without information they are not able to quickly decide on how to progress. From the experiences shared, a student mentioned that,

> *"I started looking at different department websites and that was very stressful because I was wondering what would happen if I had to pay and I came to know there is a system for the children as well to get admission." (Dipti)*

Parental Stress

Students reported that as parents they must take care of their children, but they also have to study. It becomes stressful when they need someone to leave their child with while they go to the university. They rely on friends to babysit but they are sometimes also busy. In many cases, the partner is working tirelessly to meet the financial expenses and therefore, he/she is not always available to babysit. Students are often caught between babysitting and studying.

> *"You're taking your baby in a new environment. And I'm thinking also about how it impacts on my mind, like my wellbeing, that stress of having to go through all the hardships of you being a mom because you have to play all the roles. Okay, your partner is here, or your husband is here. He has to go to work, for you, to eat. For you, to pay rent." (Ella)*

> *"I had lots of stress because it's based on the Australian Government policy I wasn't allowed to live my son alone and I need to ask some of my close friends to take care of my son because I'm not at home it was very difficult to ask them because it you know, they were very busy and even they had lots of other responsibilities on their private life and in at same time, they, they wanted to support me to this critical situation." (Layliee)*

Study stress

Students reported stressful factors related to their studies and this is because everything they do revolves around this. Study issues reported include balancing placement requirements with family roles such as taking and picking kids from school. Sometimes it is the distance between home, school, and work placement. Some participants reported getting frustrated, orientations being difficult, and not understanding the feedback provided. Some participants reported that,

> *"I think it was this whole one-year course I don't know practice I don't know what the course was I don't remember but each time I write I wasn't understanding the feedback I was getting I wasn't understanding like no feedback and it's just no feedback and I knew the effort I put in and if I get like a direction for what I've done at least you help me here but I wasn't on that course we did lots of lots and lots of writing I was frustrated… was too stressful and then I had a child I was just two months when I was starting breastfeeding like just everywhere." (Mariam)*

COVID-related stress

Among other stressful factors was the COVID, which changed many things for many people. For international students in COVID introduced communication difficulties, worries of getting sick on foreign country and the fact that no support would be provided to students, for example, in Australia, and also the loss of family members and friend in one's home country. Dipti explained this situation as follows.

> *"I haven't communicated with them because I didn't need much support at that time but when I came back to Australia after my fieldwork with my son and COVID hit I felt very stressed at that time. I felt really stressed at the time because if I got sick what would happen? Who would look after me and my son? If I got affected my son would also be affected. I didn't know what the government would do at that time. I was really stressed at that time because many people in XX were affected by COVID one of my friends died. my husband is a banker and he had to go every day to the bank to work. so, I was really feeling stressed. I thought maybe something would happen at that time I felt like it would not be possible to meet again. (Dipti)*

Facing a new cultural environment

There is a fear of facing a new environment as students settle with their family in the host country. In this category we identified issues such as dealing with differences in lifestyles, culture, feeling lost or uncomfortable, not knowing what it's like and facing reality checks, and the newness of the environment.

Cross-country differences

Students reported experiencing differences including food culture, job requirements, and lifestyles, which made social adjustments more difficult than anticipated. These differences were reported in comparison to one's country of origin and was reported to trigger some feelings of loneliness among some participants.

> *"The culture is different; the job requirements are different in Australia … I miss the vegetables and foods because I don't like the foods and vegetables here yeah and also, I keep thinking we're spending all the money on the House rent so yeah … Then I got to know that for childcare I had to pay $100 or $10 per hour.*

That made me really sad when I realized that life in Australia is quite different from XX." (Dipti)

"Yeah, we have to also look for what to eat like and then I didn't really understand the food I was like I don't understand the food I saw was leaf, leaf and noodles oh my goodness! We didn't know where to eat like we started going to different restaurants." (Mariam)

Cultural differences

Participants reported that cultural differences are quite significant which causes stress. Some culture issues are associated with gender roles, for example, what a woman/man should or shouldn't do, as Dipti explained. Cultural differences pose communication difficulties as the student support offices fail to understand the student's situation and reaction to what they are going though, as Genius explained. Other participants explained that the definition of family in Australia differs from what one would refer to as family.

"So, the first 2 weeks amm were tormenting you know because of the passing away of my nephew amm you and I would appreciate that in the African context your sister's child is your child ... Yah it [the counselling] was through the university and they did what they could yah that's all I can say. I can say they did what they could given their understanding which is so different from my understanding of the grief that I was in because their understanding is that it is my nephew you know it is my sister's child" (Genius)

"Actually, we belong to a system where its extended family I mean there many people looking after you in this condition our culture is different so when we arrived here the culture difference the isolation time no one could take good care of you only your husband he could work long hours it was my decision to come to Australia and adopt new culture ... If you look at this culture, this government, this university, and the environment they give is totally different" (Jennifer)

"Yes, exactly. Exactly. Did you know English, Australia, we have different culture? In comparison with my country. In my country, moms spend lots of time in kitchen to prepare the fresh and healthy food for their families. Okay, that's why I learned from my mother from my mother-in-law, and it is a part of my personality that I have to prepare something for my family. And so, I have lots of things to consider that they are not important for others and even they can't they can't understand them. Okay, if I explain my problem for example, for example, my pressure for example for an Australian woman, I think they can't understand me." (Layliee)

There are tensions around gender roles especially with female students judging themselves as not fulfilling the culturally assigned roles of caring for their spouses and children.

"So, for my husband, I'm not good wife. Because, obviously, we cannot give the time to each other like that. And, and the culture we belong. The society there is you can say men are always speedier. You know, you serve your husband like I like, and you can take King. So, when he's home, you have to ask Do you want some water? Yes. No, no, I'm like, I'm living in this country. I don't know when he came. And when he left. I know." (Jennifer)

"You know marriage in XX we have this inclination to marriage, and you must follow your husband everywhere ... And you know this XX culture you have to take care of the home, you have to feed you have to take care of your husband you're like you know you're doing everything at a point me and my husband had to sit down like I'm sorry we are no more in XX if I'm doing the dishes please do the cooking if am doing the shopping just we just have to do things together there's nothing like servant wife and King husband like it doesn't happen here, like you have to have to just share the jobs. (Mariam)

Culture shock

Culture shock is a common experience among international students and immigrants in many countries and has been reported in earlier studies. What is unique among international students who double as parents is that such experience also affects their family as well. Some participants mentioned that culture shock affects the children as they are also expected to go to school and integrate with other children. Culture shock was mainly associated with the expenses required, i.e., differences in currency value and the lifestyle in the destination country.

"As much as I talk about being expensive. And also, I realized that you bring your baby, especially you haven't been here for that long. That culture shock not only for me but also for the baby when you even though, like, I'm just imagining if I was to afford that childcare payment, the fee that I had to pay. So, one thing I was also worried about was about that culture shock for my child and just putting myself aside because I know I was being impacted, but I'm just thinking about the younger one." (Ella)

"And that's, because I stayed overseas for a period of time previously, it was not very scary for me, but somebody like my wife who came with me and having that facing that situation on her first day. That was a big culture shock." (Isha)

"First, I went for the orientation but when I looked around, I was like, man like I'm different. everyone just talking to themselves set up like alright, I have to be strong. say this to everybody have their friend whatever. I was just alone." (Mariam)

Insufficient information support

Participants reported a lack of information to guide them through the different stages including pre-arrival, on-arrival, and post-arrival or transitioning period. Information support

concerns can be categorised into the following: sharing generic information, a lack of in advance information (pre-arrival), a lack of situation specific information, e.g., on accommodation or childcare and education, the lack of physical contact, information ambiguity, and lack of tutorials on using institutional portal.

Not enough information in advance.

Participants reported a lack of information access in advance prior to arrival in the country. They explained that in advance information would be useful for pre-departure preparation. However, many searched institutional websites but failed to find such information that could prepare them.

> *"Why wait like you have to come orientation day to know all the information okay send it to email ... yes before arriving for example, you know, especially if they give information like not about there is a domain there is real estate website or like this stuff or like special accommodation for students going to be nice."* *(Emily)*

> *"Yeah, I think they, before coming here they should elaborate everything because students don't really know what is gonna happen to them." (Jennifer)*

> *"Yeah. I'll tell you actually. The first year I went out I wasn't really happy when I got here, I saw that there were very few blacks when we arrived, we didn't know any person we had no prior information we had no one here trying to give us information about things like accommodation." (Mariam).*

Lack of need-specific information

Students often search for information related to specific needs, particularly, about finding accommodation and arranging childcare and education. In their experience, such information is not provided by the institution's support services for example:

No information on accommodation. Some participants, such as Emily and Isha, explained that they were not aware of the accommodation options available and the process of obtaining accommodation in Australia. Accessing such information could have improved one's confidence during the transition, according to Isha. Also, participants explained that they had to find this information on their own through student groups and communities. Unfortunately, social media didn't assist in student's information needs.

> *"We didn't we didn't know about that [Uni accommodation]. Yes. We didn't ... I wish we had this on information like you know in front of us like for example through email, like you know." (Emily)*

> *"So, it was a struggle. And University has not supported us in terms of if you're coming from [ethnic background], these are the places most xx [ethnic background] are. These are the places you could get a lot of information about xx community. These are the people from Asian community. This kind of information could have built a lot of more confidence in us before moving, but*

that did not happen. So, we have to do our own research and find out what's happening. And social media doesn't help." (Isha).

No information on child education. Like accommodation, it is very important for students to have access to information about childcare and education; however, such information was also not available. The lack of such information influences the student's family-related decisions, such as sending the child back to one's home country or staying with them in Australia. Participants mentioned that such information is critical and should be provided along with the offer of placement or enrolment letter.

> *"I was listening to different people, different things … I didn't know whether my son would get free education or not. I started looking at different department websites and that was very stressful because I was wondering what would happen if I had to pay and I came to know there is a system for the children as well to get admission. People were telling me about preschool, Kindy. I just got lost [I did not understand}. That time I decided to send my son back home with my husband. "If it [child education] was mentioned in my offer letter; they should write something because its free for the international students this information could be very helpful." (Dipti)*

No guidance on using the university portal

Some participants mentioned that they experience some challenges in accessing the institution portal to access learning resources and content, such as assessment, unit guides, and feedback. There were two experiences associated with this, first, the lack of knowledge on where and how to access the support needs, and second, the lack of confidence in accessing the availed support due to the fear of language fluency.

> *"Some students don't even know how to access the portal when they come in first, how to access the portal to see where the assessments are submitted or where they can see the feedback or what happens when we have to access the unit guides and things like that. There are many students who miss that initial orientation, for example, me, I missed the initial orientation. I didn't know how to access the [university name] portal. I had no idea I had to go to student central and sit with somebody and do that because I was confident enough to go and talk to somebody very fluently in English." (Isha)*

The International Office

The international student's office is designed to offer support and assistance that could allow smooth transition and integration of international students; however, this study suggested a number of negative experiences such as failure to offer support, irrelevant content, lack of diversity, lack of culturally tailored counselling programs, lack of staff-student connection, lack of trust, and sometimes rude officers.

Failing to reach out and assist students

One of the major loopholes experienced with the international office was the failure to reach out to students to create awareness of its existence and the kind of support it could offer to students. Some participants mentioned that the international student office failed to guide them to solve the challenges they were facing. Others have mentioned that they spent four years studying and did not know about the international office in their institution. Experiences with the international student offices have been regarded as, not a good experience by Jasmine, a waste of time by Jennifer, and no support at all by Genius and Jennifer. Some participants feel that the international student office should be obvious, i.e., should endeavour to make itself known by reaching out to international students

Jasmine felt tossed between student central and international office and at the end, her issues was not resolved:

> "Yeah. I remember. Like they mixed my name with some other students. I was just calling you just call student services. And when I called student services, I had some problems. They said, call international office. And I remember everyone was struggling with the enrolment. There were some problems. And we were struggling with the information with international student Services were saying, Go to international office. They can give you, provide some information. I never had a good experience with them. Yes, they are there. But from our personal experience, even my sister mentioned that they have the worst student central because they do not solve things." (Jasmine)

For Jennifer who was struggling to find affordable accommodation, needed support with childcare, to be able to do her assignments and pay tuition in time, she offered 'unhelpful' help or therapy of just talking about her problems that needed material or financial support:

> "This will be quite funny. I was like, I went to that office because they make the office like it's for the, for the issues and problems for the international students. Yes. So I've been there one or two times and I thought it's wastage of my time. And yeah, I went there, you know what they did? Are you depressive, you have a lot of tensions, depression, okay? We arrange someone psychiatrist, kind of psychiatrist who will or some counsellor he will consult with you, and you can elaborate on your things like what kind of depression you are passing through. Yeah. So, there should be some results, something you can see. In conclusion, you are going every day you are talking, like coming back. Very, very no outcome. Are you supporting me by money? Are you giving me some scholarship? Are you supporting me financially? Are you giving me some accommodation? No, nothing. So what I'm doing, talking that's all?" (Jennifer)

For Genius and Mariam, international office is just not known to the beneficiaries it is supposed to support. Insufficient effort has been made to connect with the students:

> "I felt that they support as an international office has never been felt throughout my study here as an international study, so I do not know if it was just that they

did not need to reach out to me just what was happening I do not know ... To international students otherwise if their international students if they do not reach out to us as international students." (Genius)

"They should actually make that office very obvious for people to know because sometimes I didn't know about it until I pushed myself to know because someone told me they had it at their university I was like oooh so why doesn't my university have it so I kept asking and asking and asking so that is how I got to know or maybe I was just favoured who knows I feel like they should make that section obvious where they can help you." (Mariam)

"Yah I for my period of study having been here for 4 years I did not even know there was an international office until my, I think it was towards the end of last year when they were saying to me that my studies are coming to an end in March so I do not even know what they do and I felt that they support as an international office has never been felt through tout my study here as an international study so I do not know if it was just that they did not need to reach out to me just what was happening I do not know. I have been dealing with the credit office and yah the faculty and the graduate office and of course my department but international office I do not know what they do. So am not very sure if they serve the purpose." (Genius)

Workshop: Time Constraints and content is not useful

The international student's office has endeavoured to organise workshops for international students but in their experience, they are constrained by time and therefore unable to engage in such workshops. Alternatively, a one-on-one arrangement could be more suitable. Also, some participants mentioned that they felt the content shared and discussed in these workshops was irrelevant or failed to meet their utmost needs. Possibly, the office should conduct a thorough needs assessment to organise more productive workshops that also address the peculiar needs of international students who are parents.

"Like we have this virtual shop. We have this virtual workshop. We're not interested in those things. We are not interested in dancing, singing and all you need something ... That's what I'm saying. We get emails, but they should be like topic like, we are talking about this thing. They never give us topic. We have a meeting. We are discussing what you are discussing. I mean, if it's related to me, I will make sure I'll just get that time." (Jasmine)

A lack of diversity in the student's office

While the international student office is designed to engage with students from diverse backgrounds, the students felt that these offices do not meet such diversity. A participant, Isha, noted that the international student office, student welfare office, and student counselling were not diverse enough in their staff structure so as to create an environment for international students to feel comfortable to interact and express their needs and feel understood or empathised with. There is lack of diversity in terms of colour and culture:

> *"It makes a huge difference to endorse people from different backgrounds. Diversifying the workforce within the University, especially the professional staff or the admin staff, now will be good. All that international office, student welfare, student counselling, student central. I don't know but It's very hard to express. It is like one of those things. You don't know it until you feel it. I was in the queue waiting for somebody at the student central to see me, if everybody sitting behind those computers are white, I suddenly feel conscious about my surroundings. That am I behaving, okay? Am I fitting in the environment? Am I talking in the way that they understand, or somebody is going to judge me with my accent? Or am I wearing the right clothes? And I suddenly become aware of the surroundings and environment."* (Isha)

Dipti wished she could find someone to speak with in her own language to express better her feelings:

> *"I was just looking is anyone speaking XX [student's language] so that I could communicate with them because I was feeling very lonely. All day I couldn't speak XX and the time difference in XX because my husband was at work I couldn't speak, and I found it really hard 'cause I wanted to speak in my language to express my feelings."* (Dipti)

> *"This person I approached him and said are you a XX [student's ethnic background] and he said yes and when I try, he was my own tribe, plus my own dialect so I went into speaking I was so happy."* (Mariam)

Student counselling is not culturally tailored

The institutions offer a range of counselling services, but the students felt that these counselling services were not culturally tailored to meet their diverse cultural values and perspectives. Some participants explained that when they interacted with the officers, they didn't feel understood because the counsellors were from a different cultural background. Therefore, they felt that the counselling provided was general and unaware of cultural dynamics, not culturally tailored. Therefore, some participants mentioned that they couldn't relate well with the counsellor or support officer. There is a general feeling that a support officer or counsellor from a western background would not fully understand the concerns and challenges of international students, say from Africa or Asia. Genius explains the counselling she was given did not reflect or 'talk to' her cultural understanding of family, grief and bereavement she was experiencing at the time:

> *"Yah I felt it [counselling] was general and I could not complain I appreciated they tried but they did not meet my needs, it did not talk to me because of especially their interpretation of family as opposed to my interpretation of family ... so I think it would be different honestly to try and expect them to tailor make solutions for us because we are so diverse we come from so many continents we come from so many countries but I think they can still take an effort they can still make an effort to try and understand the African or Asian*

background in general usually I have come to appreciate that those of us from the two continents we kind of have similarities." (Genius)

Isha would love to see black and brown faces but most importantly mental health champions able to provide culturally appropriate mental health support. A diverse team that students can relate to, trust, connect with, feel welcome and belonging:

"Yeah, As I'm saying, I think the student counselling team, there should be engagement officer within the counselling team. Maybe who goes and does presentations in each class for ten minutes during the semester? Or maybe there should be mental health Champions within the school of international students. And there should be more black and brown people within the counselling team, not all white people sitting there and making decisions for us." (Isha)

"But if you bring a middle-aged woman or a middle-aged white man from Blue Mountains, which is white dominated background, sitting in the counsellor team and asking international students to go and talk to them, they can't relate to them. I can't give an excuse. They can't relate to them ... Yes, they won't understand you what? The struggle, honestly. So, having more faces and more diversity would actually help students to relate with this team. It will help build that trust, the trust, the connection, the relationship, which are all very important for the students to be able to seek help." (Isha)

No officer-student connection

Sometimes student support offices sent out some emails of support to international students in general. These general emails need to be followed up with a human face because they get missed, especially by students coming from backgrounds where face-to-face is valued and where students are also trying to absorb so many changes in their socio-cultural, economic and academic lives.

"It was strange in a way that the information given by the University was clear in terms of where to go for what? But there was no face or person attached to it. If you know what I mean. It was a very mechanical, robotic generic emails. People send out mass communication emails. People send out which people tend to ignore. Because when you are starting in a University, you get hundreds of emails about different services. We don't get to pay a lot of attention towards them. Nobody cares about those generic emails. Absolutely Nobody cares. Some students don't even know how to access the portal." (Isha)

"Bulk emails are not perceived as enough support for international student parents who have specific or unique needs stemming from their intersecting identities as parents, students, spouses, migrants, employees. They are seen as just a formality, showing that there is something being done. But from universities, specifically, someone like me, like with the child. I don't think there's something really specific service. Like, we never get any kind of support.

I don't know. It's just an email. It's just in email if you need us. Yeah, just kind of formality kind of things." (Jasmine)

No one to trust

Participants also reported that they did not trust the institution nor the officers in the international student office. They also did not feel confident to interact with the officers, an experience that some participants described as strange and scary. The lack of trust was related to the fear of being reported to the unit coordinators and the immigration department, which could then affect their visa. Participants also reported that they do not trust the institution because they fear they will not maintain confidentiality of the information they share with them. Students need re-assurance that mental health related information shared with international and student welfare office will not be shared with immigration to jeopardise their visa:

> *"Like, you don't know who to trust and who to not trust. So, the trust factor is a big thing. Trust and confidence are a big thing for us [international students] … if I want to go talk to a counsellor within the University, I always have that back in my mind about, oh, if I say to counsellor that I'm working on a cash to raise tuition, childcare fees, will they inform the University? And then University will talk to the immigration office and tell them that I'm working on cash and my visa will be cancelled or what? So, I don't want to go to the counsellor at all. I just stay home. You speak to 100 international students, 98.9% would say that I don't want to go to a counsellor because they will tell my unit coordinator or that will impact my visa. If not 100 99 people will say that, trust me. I have been interacting with lot of students and there was no student that I came across who said, the student counsellor, we help you go there nobody turns towards them. Why? Because we have not built that trust about the counselling team. There's a huge gap." (Isha)*

Jasmine agrees with Isha that trust needs to be built for international students to take up counselling and support services the university is providing:

> *"You need to build that trust with international students so that they can come to you if they really need that… That's what I'm saying. Like, there's no trust, like we are here, You never know that thing could be used against you. Like if you just share your mental health with them. Definitely. There's no trust in university welfare. That's the thing we will disclose. I guess they do that. I'm pretty sure because they are in mental health. They do confidentiality included and everything. But still, I don't know there's some kind of mentality in international students. We don't feel confident we don't trust in university." (Jasmine)*

During this research, we experienced this lack of trust in people working for the university, we approached over 60 international students but many kept on declining to

participate in the research because of fear that they might share information with the university that can be used against them especially in immigration office.

Rudeness

In a few cases, a participant mentioned that they experienced rudeness from some officers in the international student's office. This experience was not commonly shared by other participants though. Jasmine mentioned that:

> *"And when you call them, they are just I don't want to use that word. They're very rude."* (Jasmine)

Immigration Concerns & being a student parent

Immigration concerns and worries was another key experience shared by many of the participants. Immigration related concerns revolved around seeking permanent residence, meeting visa conditions for international students, and the fear of being reported to the immigration department.

Meeting visa conditions and restrictions for international students

Participants reported that amidst the multiple roles of balancing study, work, and family, they are required, as part of their visa condition, to attend at least 80% of their classes regardless of whether you have children or not. Ella reported that they are expected to provide a reason for missing a class. Similarly, Isha explained that unlike for domestic students who are allowed to reduce their study load, if an international student reduces their study load then that could affect their visa.

> *"When you come with your where you have to take this responsibility of making sure that your child is well and you're also going to school because of the visa issues, you can't miss your classes ... And the thing is, also, being an international student, it doesn't matter whether you have a young one or you are a mother or whatever. You have to keep the position of the visa attending the classes. Sometimes you cannot even give a reason. You miss classes and you need to give a reason as to why you miss those classes."* (Ella)

> *"If you are an international student because you're on an international student visa will be affected if you reduce your study load drastically. But that is not the case for domestic students. That's a big gap. Domestic students can reduce their study load to even two units per semester if their family circumstances have changed, which is not the case for the international students. The visa will be impacted by that as well."* (Isha)

Seeking permanent residence

At some point in the student's journey there is a consideration to apply for permanent residence not just in the country of study but in other countries such as Canada. This time is stressful for the student parents. The insecurity and uncertainty due to temporary residence has to be juggled together with study and parenthood. Students have to weigh their options

based on their education, work, and partner-based opportunities. Sometimes, the choices on which country to seek permanent residence are different between the student and their partner.

> "I don't want to do anything. I forgot to mention. I applied for Canada based on my experience. Like, I could get a permanent residence in Canada. You are in that state. I decided to go back in my country. My husband said, I don't want to go back. You are in that fiction. I said, I don't want to leave here… let's move somewhere else. And then Corona came and they're not doing any application from, like, overseas immigration." (Jasmine)

> "But now age was on my side yeah I had a very good undergrad result first to get a permanent residence then we have to use you [student parent] to apply for PR. Then I think you really have to apply to go do the Masters on like I'm not gonna do any masters this country I just want to work yeah by this time when he said this I was already pregnant. (Mariam)

Work

Discrimination, exploitation and career-downgrade

Participants talked of the discrimination and exploitation they experience when looking for work and when at work simply because of their temporary visa status. With temporary visa, they are unable to find meaningful employment. Their spouses too face discrimination and exploitation. Employees systematically exploit the students and their partners claiming their qualifications and experience overseas are not recognised here in Australia. Hence students struggle to find meaningful work. They describe a career-downgrade the students and spouses go through here in Australia as they scramble for manual-jobs below their qualifications and underutilising their skills and knowledge.

> "Yeah, my husband is very, very, very smart man. And very, very hardworking man and he's, he's a computer engineer. And he had a company when we were living in our country and his company was a was information communication technology company. It was very well-known company. But when we left our country and move to Australia. He applied for any IT positions, but because of our student visa no body, trust him and because Our visa shocked them especially our temporary person here and that's why he couldn't find any relevant job." (Laylie)

> My husband was doing a first-class job getting transport facilities, car facilities. He has sacrificed his excellent job for my Ph.D.….he is working in a store…" (Dipti)

> "We did not have a job because the first 2 weeks it was not really easy because my husband had to go you know find manual jobs whatever the job he can get so that you know we are able to at least get something to keep us going." (Ella)

Ella resorted to doing a short course in aged care and disability as she was told that is the work where she can be accepted:

> *"Yah and then I realized that I also could not go to work because of our young one so I had to be there for our baby and as time goes by we had to find a way in which we can so we were introduced to this going for enrolling for certificates in individual support and aged care at least so that we can get because those were the first jobs we were told we can do you know being an international student those were the available jobs and especially for us you know being a woman you cannot except like you're going out to do like mowing this physical jobs like construction of course some women do that when you do not have any choice but for myself I found it really hard." (Ella)*

Isha describes the discrimination his wife experienced as some employees denied her work on the basis that she will be pregnant soon:

> *"And when you see women with full working rights, they come with these Tags of, oh, you can become pregnant at any time, or you might want to go back to your home countries to visit your family anytime. So, you are not a reliable worker … All the employees are equal and things like that. But if I'm Indian, and if I'm going and working under the Indian boss, then the dynamics change. There is more discrimination there. The culture comes into play, and they would treat me like I'm working back home, like the authoritarian shouting and all this happens." (Isha)*

Unfulfilled job promises

Although not mentioned by many, a participant Old G, mentioned experiences with unfulfilled job promises. Old G's experience was indicative of the possibility that some students are promised certain jobs before accepting the study and arriving in the country.

> *"Knowing that at least with a Ph.D., I won't have to, I may earn something small. Before I came, I discussed with my supervisor in an interview. And the principal supervisor and he told me that there was an opportunity for a job in the hospital. In clinical research? Of course, in knew there was going to be a job u would be paid, and when I came, I knew I was going to support the family because of the payment, regardless of the scholarship. When I came, I knew would get money. He didn't pay me. I wasn't paid. So, this is so it's so it's that bad … crooked promises. I worked. I saw patients. I saw but it was free at the end of the day, realized it was free …" (Old G)*

COPING MECHANISMS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WHO ARE PARENTS

Counselling

Counselling is often recognized as a coping mechanism for acculturative stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, which are widely reported in studies on international students (Sandhu, 1994). In our study, participants reported that they sometimes resorted to counselling for

assistance. Some challenges were reported however such as the lack of counselling programs suitable for culturally diverse groups. Another challenge noted here was that the counselling offered by the university is only for students, therefore, the partner is not assisted. In other cases, some students said they were not aware that the institution provided counselling services for students. Below are how the participants explained this:

> *"I haven't communicated with them because I didn't need much support at that time but when I came back to Australia after my fieldwork with my son and COVID hit I felt very stressed at that time I go to counselling support from Uni … I got counselling from western Sydney university … They wanted to but they first counselled me. How to manage stress, time, and how I can deal with my son." (Dipti)*

> *"Yes I am actually getting to that, so I go to then tell my supervisor you know after I think I landed I cannot remember the exact day that I landed but I think 2 days later I managed to meet up with my supervisor but I let him know that I have a situation and ammm he advised me to go for counselling so he directed me to the counselling centre and I did make appointments to be counselled and I went through counselling for a month. I think for no it was 6 weeks I went for counselling for 6 weeks and home how managed to go through the semester and at the end of the semester I managed to go home." (Genius)*

> *"For student counselling, it's only for students. Students, partners or family members cannot access help … So, for example, if your partner has a problem or want to talk to somebody regarding their mental health, you have to pay externally and add that financial distress to you and go ask for help. They can make a simple gesture. That okay. The student counselling is for students and their partners as well and their families and their children as well." (Isha)*

> *"There is a group at the university that does counselling. I did not use that group because I had access to counsellors elsewhere. The use of the counsellors out of the university was, by default, because I walked into a friendship. And with this, this friendship was people were already counsellors and religious leaders. And that was early in my Ph.D. So, by the time the problems brewed up, I had, I hadn't yet. I mean, I had already met these people … I didn't really think about the University counsellors once I met these people [religious leaders and counsellors] and I discussed my issues. I don't think about the other people. Although they were told to me much later. I knew they were there, but I didn't even think about going to them." (Old G).*

Positive thinking

For many of the participants, positive thinking has been a good coping mechanism, for instance, considering the benefits for the kids such as attending good schools – Ella referred to such benefit as a "very big win" for the kids and it thus "worth the patience and struggle". For others it is about returning to their family in the home country with the achievement that

keeps them motivated. Our study shows that positive thinking is also associated with determination, accomplishment, motivation, and hope. Participants expressed their ways of positive thinking as follows; Hope to return home, doing what you can, and adopting a positive mindset.

> *"That's why I try to I try to control my stress with lots of hope, and positive thinking. And yeah ... You have to you have to, you have to create a calm and peaceful situation for your family and for yourself. When you my family enjoy from their life, I will enjoy from the enjoyment. It is very important for me; I don't know how much is true or not, but it is. for me. It works. ... And they knew me that Okay, guys, you can't talk about everything with [name] just talked about the positive things about herself, not someone else ... we talk about different singers, our movies and even we talk about some of our friends about I mean about the positive things not the negative one about and yet we remind each other that oh, this is a beautiful behaviour and we have to follow such a kind of behaviour to improve the quality of our life." (Layliee)*

> *"So, one thing I would say for sure is that having Kids. Although it's been really hard. But you can see there's been child, especially when there is change your child goes to school. I haven't actually talked about my own growth. I've been able to go to school and I can't even compare, like where I am now with where I was before, even back before I came. So, I feel like the journey might really not really be easy, but it's worth the patience and struggle, because actually, this is a very big win, especially for the kids. And we as parents too. And we actually know that it's not easy moving from your home country to a new place." (Ella)*

> *"What keeps me going dear charlotte is the fact that I want to go back home to my family that is what sometimes am sleeping and then I wake up am like wow am seeing myself getting down the plane at the airport at home then am like I jump out of my bed so what keeps me going is the factor that the need to be with my family having lost 4 years of everybody moving in a certain direction in their lives." (Genius)*

> *"Yeah, and sometimes people come in with a mindset that although it's a prejudice that people come with that a lot of white people are racists it's not true cause you don't know them if you give them a reason to like you, they like you if you give them a reason not to like you, they don't like you ... You just have to be nice and put away all bias but if I came in with a mindset like white people are.... I won't speak to anyone I didn't care like despite what was happening in that house people didn't want to come out while I was cooking when I cook and see them at the dinning, I would bring out all the food and be like oooh lets taste African food and then somehow, I started making friends ... They [people of a different race] started eating the food they were running away from they started liking it I didn't care what they said." (Mariam)*

Determination and complementation

Some participants indicated that they coped because they were complemented on their achievement or were driven by the determination to succeed.

> *"Aaammmh actually when I moved here to the Australia, I was like aaah my family was am going for the higher education obviously everyone was quite impressed so you are going to spend a lot of money and you are going to get better opportunities you will find obviously was am finished I will go back so I don't want to skip into half way this things cause as I told you I will go back cause if I skip half way I will lose my money I will lose my time so that is why am still motivated I have to finish this and go back there will be some nice words for me not like oooh she is looser."* (Jenifer)

> *"I definitely looking forward to getting back and of course completion of my studies there is nothing as good as completing something you started. I do not like leaving anything midway done or whatever, but you complete so I need to finish and that is what I keeps me going to say I am now closer to the finish than when I started."* (Genius)

Spirituality or Faith in God

Spirituality has been recognized before as a coping mechanism in health, but while the driving factors are less unknown the benefits are visible including creating a sense of purpose, increasing one's motivation, and self-actualisation of hope (Kelly, 2004). Spirituality is "the desire to identify some meaning and purpose in our lives and existence that will assist us in generating motivation or purpose, which will lead to a sense of fulfilment" McSherry (2000) cited in (Kelly, 2004, p. 162). We found that some students are motivated by their faith in God. Through religion, they engage in prayer individually or with others and place their faith in God that their challenges will be managed and that they will settle down in the future. Similarly, Chai (2009) investigated the religion/spirituality as a coping mechanism among international students and concluded that it alleviates stress, especially among the Asian students. In this study, an international student from Africa also turns to prayer to cope with the trials of being a student parent. They said:

> *"Well, a lot of prayer. Just chatting, someone tells you, let's take a walk. It's quite a few things. And you sit somewhere and see what you think God would do and things like that. And at the same time. Someone takes you away, take you away from the topics that are disturbing, you think of completely different biblical topics. You go into a discussion that sounds academic or argumentative, but I think something that keeps you going. At least, it gets you away from the university academic issues you are complaining about."* (Old G)

Engaging in self-care

Self-care is crucial for health and wellbeing. Some participants focus on self-care as a means to alleviate stress, anxiety, and any depressive symptoms. Our study shows that there is some level of self-care efficacy among students who mentioned it. They intentionally engage in

self-care awareness programs aimed at managing mental health. They teach a family how to take care of themselves too.

> "And trust me, everyone is suffering in silence and everyone not just me or XX. I think the good thing is we're doing Masters. So, we know how to manage that, like official work. So, I guess we get that kind of strategy just to do self-care and all ... Another thing is my son. It might sound kind of silly, but about, like, I can't do it anymore. Then I thought, I don't want to show my son this me. I want to show him what we could do. So, I just make sure, like, I teach himself care every time ... This is the best thing I learned from my social work, like as a social worker. Self-care. Then I thought, if I can learn in this age, like, start them younger, I just teach himself care so that in future, his mental health should be. If I can't advocate for my family, you should start from your family ... Now we are aware about self-care. We do it. I always think, like, how do they just deal with that?" (Jasmine)

> "I told the lecturer you can't frustrate me like this is too much and I can't keep writing less and you can't do this and then one of the classes was about selfcare and I had to speak like I think I'm going to speak now and then when I shared my story almost thirty people in the class started sending me private messages ooh [name] your strong your this from all these hahahahaha I'm sure my research changed after this story ... I keep getting calls and account numbers and everything but one thing I learnt like during our last course we were talking about selfcare sorry it was in supervision in placement." (Mariam)

Social support

Social support has for decades been recommended as a mechanism for coping among international student and immigrant groups (Bender et al., 2019; Yeh & Inose, 2003), which was also noted in our findings. As Bender et al. (2019) noted, social support can come from different sources and our study indicated that students who are also parents seek support from individuals and agencies. Individual based support systems include spousal support, family support, friends support, supervisor support, and neighbours' support. Support from established entities, agencies, or communities, include, government support, religious institutions, international student community, and the international student office.

Individual or Community based support systems

Friends and Family support is offered through activities such as babysitting, providing short-term stay on arrival, and engaging in different topics besides the challenges that someone is facing in that moment. Some participants reported that they were lucky enough to have someone back home to support them whenever they faced financial difficulties.

> "When you went for classes for you to attend the classes you have your baby with you and you cannot attend the class because the rule is like you're not allowed you cannot go to class with your kid at least I would imagine so leaving your kid behind was really a problem so you would have to maybe sometimes

find a friend who can come in to help you or, I cannot even talk about the day care like taking your kid for like day care or something like that because it was really expensive you cannot even afford so that is how we survived and until we found some of our friends who are in other suburbs we used to take our kid to our friends were free you take your kid there to stay with them." (Ella)

"Because my sister was here. I just came straight away to her home. So, I didn't get any difficulty to just find accommodation at all because she had everything. The only thing I remember it was cold here. And it was summer in xx [student's hoke country name]. Was there a certain change in the weather? It was kind of weird. That's the only thing I remember when I just arrived here in Australia." (Jasmine)

"First of all, we stayed with a friend and then started looking for an apartment. Eventually, we got an apartment at a cheap rate." (Dipti)

"So, it was good to be able to have an assured place like have a roof over your head when you arrive in a place where you do not know where to go that was quite appreciated that I had somewhere to stay for the very first 2 weeks." (Genius)

Husbands/wives as Angels: Spousal support

Spousal support is significant for international students who are parents. Our study shows that spousal support is a mechanism for hope, motivation, financial assistance, encouragement.

"What I will say I'm very lucky because my husband was really supportive from the very beginning, he was inspiring me to sit for the IELTS exam and do the Ph.D. from overseas and not in [student's home country's name] that was good support on my part. in most cases, the husband does no one take the responsibility for the kids and his wife will get the Ph.D. and he has to sacrifice the family. But I'm lucky from that point of view because I was supported by my husband and he's my best friend and my life." (Dipti)

"*And what most things are is the I have a very, very good husband. He's very supportive and majority of time when I crash, he helps me and give my hands and try to lift me off. It really works … Yeah. Okay. In terms of in terms of financial pressure, always, always. He, he tells me later on, don't worry about the financial situation, believe me, I will support you and our son. And do you know that sometimes he has problem, but he doesn't express his bad situation or trouble situation for me, because he knows I have lots of stress in my life big in life, and then it hit me, he doesn't open up the extra problem for me. And as always, I trust him because, because he, he showed me he is enough strong to deal with, to deal with critical situation in his professional life." (Layliee)*

Joining associations groups of people from one's home country helps to offer support, alleviate homesickness, and give advice. Participants who used this mechanism explained that:

> *"Yeah, we have our XX [student's home country's] association. So, the name is XX. So, the head office is located here in Canberra ... I would say that we also got a lot of support because whenever you're struggling, they had, like a food package where they pack food in boxes, like not too much, just at least to keep you going. Maybe bread and milk in here and just drop in your address ... I feel like they can because fast. It is like these associations are registered and most of them I think they get support from the government. But, I think they are registered under social Services. I don't know how it works that we don't receive like people do. But they only come in when there's real hardship, because most of maybe when someone is really sick, they always come in and help with covid. I might not say that. I might say that they don't really. I didn't see that. But they're always there to help. When someone is really sick and they need help, they've always come in to help." (Ella)*

Support from Agencies

Support agencies include the government, religious institutions, and the international student office. Such institutions offer information, financial, and counselling support.

> *"Another support I think that we received was during that time when they [government] were able to help the migrant. I think there's some money that they were able to help her. Allow you to withdraw your access. Okay. I feel like that was a great support and also losing our jobs ... Yes. That was great support from the government [allowing access to superannuation] And also losing out jobs, when we lost our jobs like, you cannot go to work, there's money also that you get through your place of work. Maybe you're not able to attend school because you have to attend to work because of going to school or having this difficulty during this covid." (Ella)*

> *"The church environment the community also helped because some people from the church started calling started coming over because some period I wasn't eating and I was breastfeeding and you know you have to feed to be able to breastfeed a baby was always crying I do not know how to handle the mother which parts was a strange thing No mom to help me I was doing it Oh, then we remember you have deadlines ... I researched about my church before coming so when I was here, I just looked for them and joined we just joined the church because for me as a Christian for us we knew that one place that could help us would be our church because we didn't know anybody so when we went there, we meet some people in fact during my pregnancy I was actually working because of my church community I worked as a support worker till 9 months and the lady said [name] you are very heavy stop coming hahaha!" (Mariam)*

"The use of the counsellors out of the university was, by default, because I walked into a friendship. And with this, this friendship was people were already counsellors and religious leaders. And that was early in my Ph.D. So, by the time the problems brewed up, I had, I hadn't yet. I mean, I had already met these people ... I didn't really think about the University counsellors once I met these people [religious leaders and counsellors] and I discussed my issues. I don't think about the other people. Although they were told to me much later. I knew they were there, but I didn't even think about going to them." (Old G)

Workload management

Some participants indicated that reducing one's study workload, if possible, is the best way they were able to cope.

"I had to talk to my supervisor and email my [student's institution name] supervisor about it. All the hardships that I was going through, and that's when they decided to reduce the number of hours after several attempts to let them know ... So, they reduced my hours of placement by 100 hours so that I only did 400 in my last placement ... With the responsibility that international students who are parents have, at least they can work around like having that flexibility of reducing the number of days that we go for placement, maybe to three days or rather than having to go for placement for all five days." (Ella)

"And there was one more option that we saw that you can't reduce your study load from one point to another point." (Isha)

"Last week I finished my placement like I did reduction. I just finished it earlier." (Jasmine)

"Yes, it's very hard for me but after that once I finished my semester, I requested to the university that because of my health conditions that I can't continue my studies and I want to freeze my semester aah my second semester. so, after my pregnancy was with the second semester and they got me the opportunity to freeze in the third semester. Then I took a break to understand my son And I spent one and a half years with my son and when I saw that it was feasible to stay with his dad at home, then I re-joined the university, and this is my last semester now." (Jennifer)

"No, I did second placement I applied for 20% reduction in hours and immediately I got it." (Mariam)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PARENTS

In a focus group discussion that provided a collective voice of the 10 international student parents in this study, the following recommendations were agreed on as changes universities can put in place to respond to the obstacle's student parents highlighted in this research

University accommodation for couples and international student parents

The first 3 months were mentioned as the most challenging and stressful for international student parents. The first stressing issue was the exclusion from university accommodation for couples or students with children. The university for example in Western's village can only allow couples if they rent rooms individually. This was also the same issue with students at UNSW. University accommodation is the most convenient and accessible for international students who have children as this can allow them to have easy access to services including libraries, childcare etc.

Participants recommended that universities should think of providing accommodation for the first 3 months to allow the student parents to settle in, understand the housing market and then look for accommodation outside the university to allow other international student parents to use the rental spaces. If possible, accommodation should be subsidized as the student parents have not worked and have used their resources to pay for air tickets, insurance, care for their families. Providing university accommodation at the start will save international student parents the stress, the money lost in Air B&B, shared accommodation, expensive hotels, etc

Student mentoring pre and post-arrival

Participants recommended that the university can recruit international student volunteers/mentors who can be paid a small amount of money to guide international student parents with issues of daily life like finding accommodation, paying for insurance, childcare, primary school, accessing food and own community/cultural networks. Masters in Social Work Qualifying (MSWQ) at Western has a student peer mentoring programme (although focused on academic support) can be copied and expanded to include mentoring pre-and post-arrival. Student mentors have to be informed about issues of settling in Australia so that they are able to guide the new students.

Childcare grants for international student parents

The initiative by the university to provide carer's grants to HDR student parents (HDR carer's Bursary 2021) was a great initiative that international student parents recommended could be extended to all international student parents and post-covid-19 pandemic. The inequalities related to caring existed before and were only exacerbated by the pandemic, hence post-pandemic, the support is still needed for student parents to meet their study expectations. The obstacle of childcare was noted as the most pressing for international student parents given that they have to pay a full fee childcare cost without any subsidy from the government which is available to only permanent residents and citizens.

To support those international student parents especially HDR or doctoral candidates who have their families overseas, this carer's grant could be used to buy a ticket to fly back overseas to check on the family for these students. Re-uniting with family is very important for improving the mental wellbeing of the students which will allow them to focus on their studies again when they return from overseas.

University-hourly-based subsidized creche/childcare programme

The participants recommended that space can be created at the university where students can book and access hourly-based and subsidized childcare at those times the students will be coming for lectures at university. Students can subscribe to this programme. Those student members can book 1+ hours and they can travel with their children, drop them off, and pick them up from the creche after their class. A one-stop-centre at the university where students can go for class and access childcare can save students the time lost and inconvenience caused as they travel to access childcare in places different from where they are going for classes or university-related activities like workshops.

A diverse international student office, student central, and student welfare office

Participants recommended that the offices that international students interface with should be diversified in terms of staffing to represent the diversity of the students being supported. Using the words of participants "black and brown faces", international students from different continents should be included in these offices so that students can see themselves represented. The students need diversity of staff they can feel relate to and understand their challenges as international students. Universities could recruit from the student alumni some of the international students with lived experience who will be able to understand the strives and struggles of the international students. Emphasis was also put on the need for training of staffs in international, student central, student welfare offices to respond better, in culturally-age-appropriate ways of addressing peculiar needs of international students who are parents.

Culturally and age-appropriate counselling and mental health support

The study findings showed that international student parents do resort to counselling as a coping mechanism but there is an urgent need for culturally and age-appropriate appropriate counselling and mental health support services for international student parents. Participants described the current counselling as being overly generalized, detached or not speaking to some of the needs and diverse cultural definitions of issues like grief and bereavement, and concepts like family. For international students, family for example goes beyond the western nuclear-biological-family definition to include the extended family and also people one may not have blood relationships with but who have been part of the families of international students. Counsellors need to facilitate an environment where the students are asked questions about their own definitions of family, loss, bereavement and what works for them. Counselling also should not be one-size-fits-all but should be age-appropriate to address the diverse needs of young or older international students. Parenthood adds another complex layer of needs, emotions, stress, depression, as explored extensively earlier in the report. The stressors associated with intersecting identities of being a parent, student, employee, spouse and the impact on study, life, marriage, finances, etc are all nuances that need to be addressed when supporting international students who are parents. Where possible, student parents would appreciate services where they can also speak in their own local languages to express their feelings. The need for training for support officers and continuous research was recommended so that students do not continue to describe seeking professional support as 'a wastage of time'.

Regular and face-to-face contact with the international student office

International office needs to reach out to international students in a humane way that students can connect with. This requires going beyond generalized emails sent to everybody, staff need to organize occasional events where they meet face-to-face and keep up-to-date with the international students they support. The emails sent in the first weeks of starting studies can often be missed as the students are trying to absorb so many things and hence the office needs to get in touch some point during and not at the end of studies. International office should in itself take responsibility to ensure that the international students' settlement experiences are positive as well as helping them find their way around university systems and how they operate. The international and student welfare, student central has to work on the issue of trust. The support offices need to communicate, perhaps through a statement on the website that they are committed to respecting confidentiality of the information shared and that that information will not be shared with immigration office, especially mental health-related information.

HDR-related recommendations: Realistic parent-friendly Length of PhD studies

Participants recommended tailoring the length of PhD to recognise the impact that caring responsibilities can have on the time, and attention that an international student who is a parent is putting in their studies besides their family responsibilities too. The length of 3 years is tailored to a young-free international student. Six more months would indicate that the university recognizes the unique struggles that parenting adds to academic struggles, hence the minimum period for a student with a family should be 31/2 years, with the flexibility of up to 4 years, without the student having to struggle to apply for an extension.

Realistic scholarship amount

The PhD students on scholarship recommended the need for university to increase on the amount of stipend given to cover some of the costs associated with being and international student with children and family to support. The costs are exacerbated when it comes to renting, childcare costs, primary-school costs, extra-curricular activities for the children, supporting family back home, in addition to the academic related expenses like buying a computer, internet access etc. The amount (average 25,000 per annum) being paid is insufficient to cover all these everyday expenses which leave international student parents struggling financially and psychologically. If a more realistic scholarship amount is provided by the university, some of it would go to supporting international parents especially those with their families overseas to purchase tickets to go and check on them. At the moment, some students are having to look up for their own funds to go back overseas and this is adding to the financial pressure which impacts the academic outcomes for the students, especially HDR students.

Recognise parenting and caring responsibility as a basis to request automatic extensions on assessments

International student parents, far away from their extended family and social support networks overseas, are full-time carers for their young children and families here in Australia and overseas. This full-time caring responsibility causes them disadvantage in their study and work. They recommended that caring for young children should be recognized in the definition of who a carer is to allow international student parents to access a one-week automatic extension on their assessments. This would require Western Sydney University for example extending its definition of carers beyond the confines of what is included in the Carer Recognition Act 2010 which only recognizes care for a person with disability, medical condition, mental illness, and frail and aged.

The university should begin to collect information about student parents so that it can address their needs better and reduce on the invisibility of this group of students. When students apply to join, they can in put their information in the carer verification forms where they indicate their status as parents with caring responsibilities. This certificate or verification form can then be used as evidence to seek for additional support. Each student parent should be allowed a chance to do this application and verification as part of the university process rather than waiting for when they are in crisis.

Information dissemination about the services and support available for student parents.

There is a need for packaged information to be shared with international student parents about the existing services to support student parents at the university. Although for example, Western Sydney University has breast/bottle feeding rooms where student parents can go to feed their children in private, the international students did not know that such a service existed for them to use. Information could also be shared about existing community-based and faith-based associations that the student can connect to people with shared faith, language, culture, particularly when settling in.

NEWLY ARRIVED ACADEMIC STAFF PARENTS NEGOTIATING WORK AND PARENTHOOD

In this section of the report, I share experiences and stories of what it is like for newly arrived academic staff parents arriving to work at universities in Australia. Four of the participants were academic staff parents at Western Sydney University while one was at a university in Victoria. Their real names are not used to protect their confidentiality, and where they have used identifying information about their country, cultural or racial background, I have marked it with XX in an attempt to protect their anonymity. All the five academic staff self-reported

to have arrived in Australia not more than 8 years ago. Two identified as male, sharing their experiences and challenges as husbands and fathers. The remaining 3 were female and hence shared their stories as mothers and wives. Two were of African background, one European, while two were of Asian cultural background. Their cultural background shaped their experiences and expectations around their roles as parents and spouses.

The three had come as PhD international students and later found employment and sought permanent residence in Australia. This group of former international students shared experiences and obstacles that are similar to those shared in the earlier section on international student parents' experiences. The remaining two of the newly arrived academic staff parents were outsourced from their countries, and they migrated to Australia to take up their academic jobs. All the five staff have very young children with ages ranging from 1-10 years. Unlike some of the international student parents who left their families overseas, the five staff parents travelled with their nuclear families upon relocation to Australia. Upon migration, the staff parents talked about what they found as supportive policies and practices. Then they also talked about the unsupportive policies, practices and obstacles experienced, and recommendations on what universities can do to support better newly arrived academic staff parents managing migration, parenthood, work, in a new country.

University policies and support initiatives that worked at the relocation stage

Newly arrived academic staff parents talked about the university policies and support that worked for them in juggling migration, parenting and work. At the time of migration, the university policy and practice is to pay a relocation package that includes an air ticket for the whole family, funds for finding accommodation in the first three months. The university also covered insurance for the family, which also facilitated smooth relocation for the newly arrived academic staff parents.

> "The university, in terms of transitioning, made a provision for, I think, about $6000 at a time for relocation allowance. They paid for our flights, all of us, and then paid for our initial accommodation…" (Patrick)

> "The university was very supportive at the beginning with covering relocation costs, and, uh and then we found accommodation very close to the campus so I could walk to campus, and we also had an early learning centre on campus. That was fantastic." (Betty)

While participants found that the university was supportive to them as a family at the time of relocation, after stepping foot in the university, the family became invisible and they started to be looked at as individuals, which also meant that they did not feel supported in their different intersecting roles of being academics, who are spouses and also parents. The obstacles experienced are discussed next.

Obstacles Experienced by Newly Arrived Academic Staff Parents

The invisibility of family to the university

Once recruited to the university, the academic staff parents talked of how their families suddenly become invisible to the university. The staff parents are looked at as individuals expected to deliver outcomes irrespective of their family responsibilities. The moment of arrival, orientation is focused on only university work, and all the other areas that impact the individual's work like family, relocation, and settlement are ignored. The university does not count or show interest in knowing the *person-in-their-environment*, understanding their needs, and ways it can support them.

> *"First of all, I must acknowledge the generosity of the university in terms of relocation package. It is fairly okay. But the key issue now is when the person arrives, you know it's not enough just to make money available for someone to relocate as a young academic with family and everything. The orientation is more about introducing you to the work ahead of you but its not just about the work ahead of you, it's about how everything else works together for you. There is no specific moment to get to know you more and help you." (Patrick)*

With the university counting only the individual in its system, the workload related to the other systems that the individual interacts with become invisible too.

'Ghost' workload: Invisibility of family-related workload in academia

Workload related to the full-time parenthood and family responsibilities for newly arrived academic staff parents is still invisible or unrecognised in the university. Academic staff parents with younger families lose time in their everyday caring responsibilities. The day of this academic starts with waking the children up, taking baths, cooking and packing lunch, and dropping and picking up the children from school or day care. Staff are sometimes called up in the middle of the day to pick up children that may fall sick at school or day care. Then staff have to allocate time for after-school activities. All these responsibilities take time off from doing university-related workloads and impact performance. The one-size-fits-all individualised approach by the university means that the unique challenges of newly arrived academic staff parents are not taken into consideration by the university.

> *"There are different categories of professionals within the university, many of them whose children are grown, they are adults, and they are doing their own thing. That person is different from us who have a young family. But we are treated the same way anyway. You know, there is no specific arrangement for us yet with younger families comes greater responsibilities. But the university sees me more as an individual that has to produce an outcome. But the context within which I produce the outcome is not so much, uh, considered, you know, because I mean, so look at my context, and I'm sure the context of so many other people, I am a family man with a lot of children considering Australian standard, I am also, uh, have a partner, I have a relationship. So all these are keen on me as a lecturer, full time lecturer with heavy teaching requirements. But my responsiveness to things of university, you know, it would mean*

that I have to sacrifice some aspect of my life to be able to meet the requirements of the university. And clearly, there is no way you can sacrifice university demands for private or personal issues." (Patrick)

Academic staff parents who have an additional workload of parenthood and family responsibilities are treated like every other staff when it comes to seeking promotions or research workload recognition and allocation at the university. The metrics have no consideration for the family workload. Instead, staff must tick all the other recognised metrics or performance indicators and they have found it overwhelming to the extent of burning out as Yaw explained:

"I'm teaching and I've been assigned students, and they expect me also to publish, because if in a particular year I don't publish, they'll declare me research inactive. And in that case, they are going to add more to teach, so I have to make sure every year I come out with a publication you. So for me, for there is a lot to be done. And I don't know whether it's the same in every university. Yeah, I nearly got a burnout last semester because it was too much for me. In fact, they don't consider that, I don't think they consider the fact that you have a family. There is an impact on your promotion. You see, if you don't publish, there are metrics you need to satisfy, if you are not able to satisfy all the components of the metrics, you can't get a promotion. That means when it comes to leadership, maybe you are not leading in any area, when it comes to publication, you are not publishing, so how do you get promotion? The promotion form or whatever metrics have nothing to do with your family work, it does not take it into consideration." (Yaw)

The time cost of looking after children who get sick most of the time impacts the performance, and health of the parents, but this is yet to be recognised:

"I came with two kids who were 20 months old each and so, having a full-time job, means I still woke up in the middle of the night, a couple of times to feed them and still had to get ready to work. And this was so whenever they were sick, and two toddlers get sick all the time." (Betty)

You are an academic, father/mother, husband/wife!: juggling intersecting multiple identities amidst new cultural expectations

Newly arrived academic staff parents talked of the intersecting identities and the attached multiple workloads that they have to juggle in their lives which impacts their performance in some of the fields. They have a workload as academics engaged in teaching, research and community engagement. In addition to the academic workload, they are parents, requiring them to perform parent-related tasks like dropping and picking up children from school, paying their school dues, taking children to after-school activities, and helping children with their homework activities, to mention a few. In addition, as spouses, the parents also have responsibilities and workloads towards their partners to maintain meaningful relationships in marriage. The intersecting workloads are all demanding at the same time and therefore some of the areas particularly personal and professional development, and family, are sacrificed.

"I am a full-time lecturer, I am a father, and then I am a husband. Because one, of course, I cannot compromise on my required work at the university, such as teaching, which is mainly teaching because that is being seen everything now and then. Of course, in terms of governance, it's being seen every day, so you can manage it. What you can sacrifice for everything else is your personal development, your research, your publication, those works. So for the past three years, those have really suffered because combining family life, combining relationship and all this really doesn't gel properly. So one of those things has to suffer. So I've seen more that it's my personal development, my research, that have suffered, uh, and now I'm trying to pick up from the pieces. I started working things out. You know. Um, Then do I have support? Do I feel that I have support? No I don't." (Patrick)

Lily in addition to being a parent, an academic, and a wife, she is also a student almost completing her PhD

"Like I have to manage as a person, as a mom, as a student, as a professional, it's not that you're just here doing your PhD. You're also having a family." (Lily)

Academic staff parents juggle to spare time to take their children to extracurricular activities in addition to their jobs and career and it is a struggle.

"Children who are being raised in this environment, they do a lot of things, like swimming lessons. My daughter was part of Australian Girls Choir. You have to take her for rehearsal every Saturday and even today, after picking them from school at five o'clock, I need to take them to swimming lessons, you know, You know, in Australia, the Children choose by themselves. They choose what they want to do. Right now, she says she also wants to do gymnastics. So you put all of these things in your timetable. Yeah, And make sure you are able to blend it well so that it doesn't affect your job or your career." (Yaw)

As part of the juggling, parents talked of the complexity of trying to figure out where to leave the children to attend university or externally organised events like conferences, training which are all very important for academics' performance. as Betty narrated:

"It is always a logistically nearly impossible and financially draining process. And so that's something that people don't recognise that attending conferences or even that's the other thing socialising with your colleagues, even in Sydney. How do you do that? What do you do with your kids? Um, and it has become even more so in the pandemic. So I haven't been out for 2.5 years. I haven't been out. I haven't had social life for more than two years now, and it has a significant psychological impact, uh, tremendous impact on your mental health. When I was in XX, and I wanted to attend like a conference, I would get the kids, drop them off in my home country, travel and attend the conference and then come and pick them up, but can you do it now?" (Betty)

Juggling work and parenthood, in a new country, for some staff parents has involved a **cultural shift** in terms of gender roles and expectations. Both men and women are engaged in caring for children and some of the men have had to shift to doing domestic chores like cooking to be able to support their wives. This is a shift from the traditional gender role distribution some were used to. Some of the parents have been challenged about these role changes within their networks, adding to the staff's worries.

> *"Some XX friends visited me when they came home. My wife was breastfeeding, and I was in the kitchen cooking, and they got surprised. How come your wife is around and you are cooking? This is the second time we are seeing you doing this. Then one, one, one, of the visited Her name is xx. She said, I will not allow my husband to cook. Mhm, I will not! That worried me because I wanted to make life easier for both of us."* (Yaw)

> *"He [husband] is more like a XX man who focused on things outside the family. So he didn't have much to do with looking after a child. I was the only one doing that and that was a big challenge at the beginning, but gradually I just pick up things here and there." (Lily)*

The result from trying to juggle the intersecting roles of academic, parent, partner/spouse has meant no sleep, no social life, and no work-life balance for the staff parents.

> *"I've come to realise that if I'm going to be successful, then I must be ready to work deep in the night and also work over the weekends. So it's like, I don't have social life. I don't have in the extra-curricula activities. So on Sunday, right after church, I put on my computer. You see me working on Saturdays, too, I work, and just yesterday I was telling my wife I need to be paid more because I work more than eight hours after working in the office. When I come home, put on my computer before you realise it's 1. 30 AM and the time moves very fast and you still be working. As I speak to you now, um, there are papers that are back for review that I need to work on. But I've just put it aside and make sure I prepare for this semester week If I say this semester work. Uh, what I mean is preparing the units' outline, uh, also preparing my new site. I don't know how to use the blackboard. And it takes time. All these things, it takes time. You make sure you update the references…always my wife teases me that, uh, since we came here, I've never taken her on a holiday before. Uh, I'm married to my computer every day. Yeah, for the Children. Um, I don't want them to get bad memory about their childhood…And I used to call home, uh, sometime back very often, but this time I don't because I really don't have the time. So the last time I spoke to my mom, she said, it's a long time." (Yaw)*

Juggling migration, work, parenthood, in a new country is coming at the expense of social life, marriage, family in Australia and overseas, and work-life balance.

Financial pressure/loss and reliance on a single income

Financial pressure comes from relocation which for some of the participants results in reliance on one income. Usually, the partner resigns their job to join the other in relocating to Australia. Upon arrival in Australia, some partners sacrifice their work and career to assist with caring for children and family.

> *"My husband had to, you know, resigned from his job and came over for my sake. So we became a single-income family all of a sudden. So for me, the first five years were very tough, the financial cut was really great because I suffered a great loss of income when I decided to come to Western So, um, the impact, you know, it went beyond the five years' time frame…My husband didn't work for two years, and there was a big sacrifice for him. My husband takes care of the kids … 24/7. He's our driver. I'll, Sheriff, I'll cook everything." (Crystal)*

For Crystal, the husband stayed home to care for the kids while for Patrick, the wife had to stay home to care for their eight months baby and whole family

> *"My wife was a banker in XX [country' name], you know, but when we came, for two years, all that she did was to stay at home to keep the kids. my wife was just at home keeping the young baby and then, of course, keeping all of us giving us food and everything."* (Patrick)

The financial loss and reliance on one income are exacerbated by the many child-and family-related expenses unique to migrant academic parents.

Financial stress: Salary vs expenses related to being a migrant parent

Newly arrived academic staff parents highlighted that the salary paid to them does not take into consideration the additional or unique expenses being a parent in a new country brings. The parents have to pay relocation-related costs. Upon arrival, they pay for renting a big house that can fit a family. Shared accommodation is not suitable for families with young children. There are child-related expenses like school fees and childcare costs. This salary is most of the time insufficient and results in financial pressure for the academic staff parents. While overseas, because of access to family support and help with the children, the staff talked of their ability to engage in alternative income-generating activities to supplement their salary. However, with the lack of family support and the high cost of child and out-of-school care, the staff parents have to rely on only their salaries which is insufficient to cater for all the costs.

> *"At the end of it all, you work, use your salary to pay for the expenses and you are left with like 200 dollars. And academics. I mean, you don't really have a lot of room to be able to do other things to earn other money, because I mean, of course not now back in XX, that was easy to do. But here it's like it's all Your whole life has been brought over by the university, you know, So you just can't make moves."* (Patrick)

Relocation means the staff are far away from family like grandparents who could help care for their children. Thus, some academic staff go as far as hiring live-in nannies or baby-

sitters, before and after school care costs, to support them to work and care for the family at the same time, which strains them financially

> *"In the first year, I had to hire a live-in Nanny, someone who could live with us and that was the reason why I could cope."* (Betty)

Demands/pressure from supporting family back home

When one migrates to a new country, the responsibilities to support their extended family and community overseas do not stop. Newly arrived academic staff parents are expected as they settle in to continue sending remittances back home to support their family and community. They are distressed if they do not support their extended family and community. The phone calls and messages requesting for support with medical expenses for example, school fees, and burial expenses, among others, add to the financial pressure already experienced from trying to manage family-related living expenses in Australia. The salary paid to staff parents is overwhelmed by the expenses of caring for family in Australia and overseas.

> *"Even though we are here as a nuclear family, as XX [ethnic background], we also have a bigger responsibility back home, you know. So one of the impacts of this is that it appears to people back home that you have forgotten them. Yes, you don't care…But I mean, as an XX [ethnic background] is difficult to forget that. So the reminders you keep getting from your people, your family, is that feeling of you're rejecting them because now you've gone abroad and so you don't really care about what happens to us here. So also meeting that demand. It's a bit of stress, not just a nuclear family here. Of course the main and the obvious support to provide back home is more about ... It's more about somebody calling you over a hospital [bill], somebody calling you over of school fees for their child. Somebody calling you over something Some funeral contribution… And clearly this system also has made a lot of impact on our spending."* (Patrick)

Expenditure on extended family and community back home is combined with highly expensive childcare here in Australia.

Childcare

The parents talked of their struggles to access childcare for their children which would free them to focus on university-related work. Childcare is unaffordable. Those staff parents that started as international students, excluded from childcare subsidy because of their visa status, recalled affording to pay for childcare for only a few days a week, and combined with other expenses, the stipend given was simply not enough. This situation has still not changed. As lecturers, they earn a salary, but which is overwhelmed by other bills that they have to cover, including additional child-related cocurricular activities.

> *"When my daughter was in the childcare, I had to pay, like, really high amount of money. Maybe 100 and $20 a day for the day-care. So all the scholarship went towards, to the childcare centre, and it wasn't enough. So I said, if I don't have a husband over here, I would be like, I couldn't do this [PhD]."* (Lily)

"I supported the family. Everything, uh, from my scholarship, you know, and my first child didn't have child support because of my visa. My visa was 574. I took 574 Yes, subclass 574. Yeah. Before then those students who went one month before me they were given some support to childcare. But when I went to Centrelink the law had been changed that if you're a student, you could not get child support. So I didn't get any support, So I had to pay out of my pocket from the little stipend I was collecting from the university. So my child she was attending three times a week because I couldn't afford throughout the week. Out of the 25000 scholarship they used to give us, I paid my rent, for the child, the childcare from that same money, and I'll be left with like $50." (Yaw)

The staff talked of still struggling to access childcare which results in exclusion or non-attendance of those events organised by the university. The university organises some events in the evenings or weekends when the parents cannot access the day-care or afterschool care during these after-working hours of the centres. To attend such events involve a financial strain.

"Attending orientation day or any big events that Western Sydney organises, they are in the evenings and the weekends. And there I can't do that without a significant impact on our family life I don't have another parent or I don't have the grandparents or their friends. And there is no one, just me. So there's no one to replace me here. And so if I do an orientation on a Saturday afternoon, I would have to have someone babysitting my Children. Um, and because I'm only using public transport, uh, it'll be probably eight hours. Yeah, because it's one or two hours to get there may be orientation is a few hours of 6 to 8 hours of baby-sitting. That's 100 and $60 minimum. Obviously, I can take my kids to school care after school care, But that finishes at six. So what happens if it's an evening? Um, kind of obligation or kind of event? the craziness of multiple campuses. I didn't know how bad that was. I thought I'm just going to be based on one campus and I'll be fine. But there was an expectation of mobility that you attend workshops, face to face." (Betty)

Impact of COVID

The pandemic has exacerbated the workload for staff parents with caring responsibilities. In addition to all the existing workloads, parents added home-schooling and 24 hours caring for children, yet the paid work-related workloads and expectations remained unchanged

"During the pandemic when with the home schooling, uh, my line manager said, Well, just do your best, okay? I did my best for sure, but that was 16 hours a day home schooling and teaching home schooling and teaching. Uh, it's just mentally, physically draining. You know, All the symptoms are physically anyway, so and they said, Oh, do your best. But, um, then it comes to the allocation of research allocation. They're not gonna say Oh, you did your best, which is zero. You didn't write anything. I haven't written anything. In 2020. I didn't write anything in 2021. Why my mind was somewhere else. But maybe when it comes to the workload allocation, my research load will be zero. Because of that I haven't published. I haven't put anything in, my research load

will be zero. They understood verbally, they showed compassion and empathy. But that's not in my, um, promotional package." (Betty)

"I think before the pandemic, I was managing. Okay, like, um, so everything I could them put them into different priority lists, and I can do it. But the pandemic actually, um, cost a lot more than people can see because my daughter was at home and in kindergarten, and the schoolwork is quite demanding. I have basically had to teach her and organise her schedule and also because we are in the lockdown, so we are not going out or anything. So that's like, basically the whole time spending with her. I'm not complaining, like being spending the time with her. I love that. And also I got to know her, like she to see how much she is growing and learning. I love that, but it's that I did not have the ability to step out, maybe for two hours a day. And also some quiet time to work on my study. So basically, I have to, I got up at, like, four a.m. to do my own work before she gets up and I start her day. But still, I feel like the quality of my work wasn't great. Like that was not something I was aiming for. So I think that costs a lot of, like, mental kind of pressure, um, anxiety." (Lily)

The university needs to put in place measures that can support staff parents to recover from the career and mental disruption of the pandemic in the post-pandemic era.

Managing marriage-related workload

Newly arrived academic staff parents were concerned about the impact juggling work, family, and migration was having on their marriages and relationship with their wives/husbands. The relationship gets strained as there is a lack of adequate time to spend with the partner due to the demands of teaching, research, child-caring responsibilities. The partners tend to be neglected in all this and the neglect intersects with the financial pressure, and work-related pressure to negatively impact marriage relationships and mental wellbeing. Some of their marriages have ended up in divorce.

"I think that one other thing was that, um the balancing family, work, and everything, personal development, you know, had an effect on my marriage. My relationship. Okay, you know, so children are there. But you also have a partner. You have a wife. So the relationship between the two of you has to also be harmonised. But if there's a contest where, uh, you have to because you have to do school stuff. You have several scripts to mark, so all the times you are always here and there, you are never around and you do this and it's been a lot of a lot of issues, you know. I have colleagues who came here as husband and wife with kids, but and we came almost at the same time, but they are divorced, okay, they are divorced because the dynamics, you know, the pressure…" (Patrick)

Migration and loss of research network

Migration results in disruption or even total loss of the research network that the staff parents have in their countries of origin. The research networks need to be maintained through active engagement with them in writing or even face-to-face meetings. However, given that the staff

parents have to juggle teaching and research and parenthood in a new country, the logistics and insufficient time for 'servicing' the international networks, particularly in the first five years of relocation make it difficult to maintain quality networks

> *"When I think about my career, um, obviously, those first years were focusing on getting my teaching done. Really getting into the world of education, University, my responsibilities towards my students. Um, and so the research wasn't I still was trying really hard, but the other constraint, um, is that, um I didn't have a research network. My research network was in XX [country name of participant]. Um, and I basically left them behind. And I think that it, um you know, it's interesting with the university, they value international connections highly. So they really appreciate, uh, international networking. Um, but it's not so easy to maintain that, um, at a distance. Uh, and I think that for me, that was a struggle. So, um, like, collaborations on research, project or writing together, it has become more and more difficult and more distant. So maybe in the first year, they were still remembering me. Maybe the second year we could still, kind of. But then it kind of dies down. If you're not seen, then you've been forgotten. And that's how it works. I think that's how it works. You have to be visible. Um, and so my response to that my strategy was to actually go back every single year to attend a conference in XX [country of participant] and to actually meet in person and face to face and network as much as possible. But that came with its own challenges. Because that means that I travel with two small children. And what do I do with them? What do I do with them whilst I'm attending a conference?. Where do I hide them?"* (Betty)

Joining the new research networks becomes hard for staff parents who are discriminated against because of their parenthood status. Staff talked of being excluded from the cliques or networks because they are viewed to lack enough time to contribute to the group work because of parenting workload.

> *"And the other thing that I noticed I mean, it didn't happen to me because I just suck it up and just move on. I noticed something about another academic's life. So when they realised that she's a parent, you know they limit her in terms of handling greater responsibilities. They cut her off. Don't invite her for research. Participation. They don't even consider her for governance roles. They don't involve her in any research proposal, because, you know, they will be too caught up with the parenting role."* (Chrystal)

Migration impacts staff parents' research network which negatively impacts their ability to get research projects and grant applications going. This impacts on their progress career-wise and gets in the way of their promotions.

> *"In order to get promoted, it has to be based on my work done for Western. But [with relocation] I lost my digital footprint. I lost my network. I couldn't get research going right, because we are new. They only tell you, you know, you go to network and*

increase your visibility, then you can get research, but they don't tell you how. They leave it to you to do it." (Chrystal)

There is limited support with staff being told to 'do their best' when they highlight the difficulty of juggling relocation, parenting, teaching and research-intersecting workloads.

> *"'Do your best' is the slogan that is used when we discuss these challenges. But I guess doing our best is not going to be, you know, in our promotional documents, is it, um so it will have to be superhuman to actually go beyond the doing your best and really do what we need to do."* (Betty)

The disruption and loss of the research network is worsened by a lack of access to timely mentors.

Lack of connection to well-established research mentors

Also, staff parents highlighted that the lack of timely and meaningful mentorship in the first five years makes it even more difficult for staff parents to penetrate research networks in Australia and to engage in research projects necessary for career progression and work satisfaction.

> *"And the research mentoring thing is just on paper. I got a research mentor. A few years later, I send my CV to the research mentor. But I think the experience I was hoping someone can bring me into that existing research so that I can get myself acquainted with local networks of Australian academics and researchers. And then from there, you know, I build my portfolio on my own. But they left me to try to juggle on my own, trying to get myself, sell myself to the local community. I mean, nobody would know me, right? It's so big. And you know Uni can be very squeaky because on the website, in policy, wherever, you will definitely see some form of mentorship programme but effective implementation is a big question. What mentoring activities actually take place. There's something that you know that we don't have data on right. We don't know if it takes place or not. They tell the people who are lacking in research Portfolio to go and join others but what they don't tell you is people don't want to jeopardise the success rate of getting a grant. They would rather get someone they know or they have been working with for a long time. So there are cliques and how do you get in when you are new."* (Chrystal)

Research workload poverty

Migration, parenting, and teaching workload negatively impact the percentage load the newly arrived academic staff parents can be allocated for their research. The teaching load is high

> *"So, because in our school of XX, you got to earn your research workload, my teaching load goes up. So there's no minimum research load given. Yeah, because teaching is so heavy, I am new. You know, I'm still juggling domestic affairs. Nobody knows me. I can't do research in that sense. Yeah, I get stuck in teaching. I just feel*

like that put me even back, even more back, put me back into a research poverty line." (Chrystal)

The relocation to a new country, coupled with caring for children, organising their education, teaching workload, all intersect to reduce on the ability of newly arrived staff to engage in research and publications. Failure to research and publish results in more workload in teaching and further less research and publication, which now becomes a cycle, with a cumulative effect that becomes long-term in the staff's career.

> *"Because my kids were so small, then the relocation was just on the top. Because whilst I was pregnant and whilst I was with, like the kids were at 12 months old, I didn't publish. I was managing [kids] as a young, as a single parent. Uh, so I think it's a culminating impact of, you know, parenting, the relocation into a new overseas context. That the research side naturally goes down. And so, um, And then, uh, the knock-on effect. So if you don't publish, you don't have a research contract. That is accumulative effect is long-term. So you end up getting worse and worse and worse every year. Um, and it's really hard to pick up. And I would say that my experience not just the new arrival, but with relocation from overseas, it takes much longer than a simple change of jobs within the country. So to recover from the career break that children bring and overseas relocation, the combination of Children and overseas relocation brings, it's not a few years, I would say a five-plus, uh, from my experience, it's a 5 years plus recovery process, if at all. And I had a few years that were really difficult because of my children because they had issues with school. So I was actually taking stress relief."* (Betty)

Without research publications, there is no promotion and career progression for the newly arrived academic staff parents.

> *"The knock-on effect is long-term. A career blockage, a career stall, like, um, and also regression. I have a feeling of regression so that my opportunities before children, before the combination of children and overseas relocation were better. Uh, and that's really scary when I think about my life. the overseas relocation is a big culture shock, even though I knew Australia before and I have been mobile, so I've been travelling. But maybe moving with young kids, um, is a trauma. It's not the same as moving, um independently."* (Betty)

Lack of deliberate funding for newly arrived academic parents with young families

The staff parents were concerned about the lack of deliberate funding to support staff with young families to fulfill, particularly their research, publications and grant writing obligations. The available funding takes into consideration disadvantage in general and it is not clear to what extent child-caring and parenthood disadvantage is taken into consideration during the assessment of applications.

"You know, I really don't see um, so much support from the university happening. But I know that if someone is playing an academic role, let's say I am an academic course advisor, the school says that because you are an academic course advisor and because you'll be spending a little bit more time on governance issues, we're giving you $2,500 to help your research. You can use that money to pay for someone's time, pay a research assistant to do some data collection for you, to do some literature set for you so that that's done taken care of. Now when you apply for university-based Grant, even external grants, government university-based grants, I think there's some this section on, something that talks about whether you feel disadvantaged, in any way that has to be taken into account. Okay. So yes, there is this position there, but again, still, the grants remain very competitive. So even though I said that, yeah, my context, I feel a bit disadvantaged as a young parent… so I am behind in terms of papers, in terms of research grants, and so this is my context. But clearly, whether those are taken into account in making decisions, it's another thing." (Patrick)

COPING MECHANISMS NEWLY ARRIVED ACADEMIC STAFF PARENTS

Newly arrived academic staff parents were asked if they are coping and what is helping them cope with their situation of migration, parenthood, and working. Some staff were upfront that they do not feel that they are coping at all as they are experiencing burnout, loss of social life, no family time, sleeplessness, and poor mental health, among others. Some of the staff talked of some of the coping mechanisms that are helping them negotiate their never-ending struggles. They shared that these could be some of the mechanisms that could also be built on by universities seeking to support the staff through ways staff have found to work for them. Some of the coping mechanisms like faith and spirituality, community-based associations, are related to some mentioned by international student parents which emphasises their importance in contexts of migration to a new country.

Faith and spirituality

Staff parents talked of faith and spirituality being a source of support and coping for them. Based on their different faith and religion, staff sought out for congregations or communities of similar faith which became a support network in the new country. A network that provided some practical material support needed in settling in but that also nourished their faith and beliefs. Staff talked of for example looking for churches and going to pray every Sunday. Church is a space where the staff can meet others that speak their own languages and profess similar beliefs and values. Some got 'counsellors' from church who helped them during the times their marriages were having problems.

"Faith has placed an important, uh, role in my life. I grew up as a Christian, and that has lived in me. And there are certain values that we hold, you know, And that has stayed with us throughout and coming here, and one of the fastest connections we made were connections with the church. And so this church did not only serve because it's not without problems and issues, but it did not only serve us as a place of

comfort and a place of, um, inspiration that, you know, that at least you're looking forward to the next Sunday that you're going to meet people that look like you, A lot of people that speak your language, you know? So you you look forward to Sunday meetings. But they also church members and church leaders also have provided a lot of, uh, support in terms of visiting you as a new, as a newbie. They visit, you know, they bring you things. We think that you might need this and they bring you and your family and they organised a dinner programme and say, We think you guys are new. You want to come around to be great for the kids, you know, they organise them out in the ring, a van, they pick you all you go. So out of that, you've got some bonded and connected. And of course, that that kept us together." (Patrick)

Church provides a different environment from the academic one where staff meet or connect with different people and engage in spiritual activities like singing

"For me I think church also helps me to cope. You know, as I told you, I don't have any social life because of academic work. But once, once every Sunday, I go to church. Yes, and that's a different environment. I talk with different people, It's nowhere to go and crack the brain, uh, singing, those things that can refresh you. Yeah. so it's also a coping mechanism for me." (Yaw)

Staff look up and surrender to the supernatural being to address the issues in their lives.

"And for me also because I love to read and speak about God. It's kind of a check on me that look, no matter what is happening in my relationship and needs to look up to God and hold on to the scriptures that support my value." (Patrick)

Social media

Newly arrived academic staff parents turn to social media to keep in touch with their families overseas and for updates about issues in their countries:

"Yes, social media, I go on Facebook. I get to know what is happening back in my country. You get to know what is going on. So when you happen to speak to them occasionally, they will tell you, you are not here but yet you know more than we do. I tell me that's the power of social media." (Yaw)

Country or tribal-based associations

Newly arrived academic staff parents talked of joining community associations of people from their own home countries, tribes, people who speak the same language, etc. Through the associations, staff can begin to grow their network in Australia. Community members in these associations visit the staff, they orient them to the Australian system and culture. The associations provide opportunities to stay in touch with their culture too for example speaking a mother tongue as Patrick explained.

"In the wider community we have our country association. We also have the tribal one, so in these associations you get someone you can comfortably speak your

language or mother tongue with. Its fun. And you depend on that so that when you feel stressed, you want to just speak and complain in your language." (Patrick)

The staff parents talked of connecting to these associations through word of mouth or reference from someone, as some of the associations do not have well-established online websites where they can be searched by staff. Perhaps universities can try to develop linkages and support these community associations to allow easier connection for their academic staff when they arrive.

Family as a coping mechanism

Caring for family is straining but it is also a social and mental health support system for staff parents who are isolated from other staff, practically excluded from university events due to child care issues and far away from overseas networks. The children are entertaining and hence a disruption from the stressors of work. Children especially those of school-going age challenge and keep parents uptodate through their inquisitive nature. They start a conversation where there may be none

> *"Sometimes you'll be quiet, right? Then your child will just walk up to you. Why are you so quiet all day? Right, then it tends to laughter. Then generate some conversation, and, uh, it changes the atmosphere, sometimes they let you forget your problems. When they are around you, it helps you to, uh they are priceless. You can't put a value on them, because sometimes I learn from my little kid, You know, she comes from school and challenge me on something out there. You see that. My teacher told me it's like this. Then maybe I'll google it. Then I'll find out she is correct. some of them are funny, you laugh, then you forget about some of the stress you brought from work."* (Yaw)

Is anybody dying if this work remains undone? SURVIVAL strategy

Some of the parents talked of trying to put their mental health as a priority which meant leaving some work at home undone. They accepted that it is difficult and sometimes impossible to do all the parenthood, academic work, and domestic work the staff have to do. This acceptance made them categorise and prioritise the work that is urgent and that which can wait.

"I think I was surviving for some time. Like so basically, no, not basically, gradually, I just did develop this strategy, like Okay, household task once a week. So, it's OK. The houses, the mess, nobody is going to die. If I don't clean my house every day because when my daughter was little, I basically at least mop the floor like, three times a day, because that's like I feel like because I need to keep the house clean for the newborn, right. But gradually, she's growing up. I feel like Okay, I don't need to do that every day or three times a day, so it reduced from three times a day to, uh, to one time a day, once a week. So I feel like that's okay. It's manageable. She's healthy. Everybody's happy. It makes me happier as well. Um, that's the household one. Another strategy to dealing with all the emotional stuff with family stuff is that I just give myself, like, a few seconds before, like, I deal with them, OK? Is anybody dying? No, that's okay. Is anybody starving? No, that's OK. Is anybody If this thing

can wait until tomorrow is somebody dying? No, that's okay. So it becomes, like, this kind of assessment process for me to do that in my brain. Okay, Nobody's dying." (Lily)

For Lily, the wake-up call to prioritise mental health came after they lost a friend to work-related mental exhaustion.

> *"We, my husband and I, have a close friend at the university. He passed away because he, like, he worked too hard. And then the exhaustion caused his death. So that was quite a like a wake up call. He had a family, two children and they lived in XX."* (Lily)

RECOMMENDATIONS: NEWLY ARRIVED ACADEMIC STAFF PARENTS

Connection to mentors and research network in the first five years

Newly arrived academic staff parents narrated how migration results in disruption and even loss of research networks in the countries they originated from yet they are still unfamiliar or get locked out of the existing cliques within the research networks in Australia. They recommended that in the first five years upon arrival, the university should ensure that the newly arrived academic staff parents have access to a well-established, committed mentor who will introduce the staff parents to research networks here in Australia as well as orient them to the research process and opportunities for grant applications. This mentor should ensure the staff parents are part of grant applications which if successful would increase the chances of the staff parents applying for grants on their own. Research mentors can also emphasize the importance of the research component that often gets overshadowed by teaching and parenting workload in the first years yet one cannot be promoted or progress career-wise without it. University should make it clear that part of mentoring role should be to include the newly arrived academic staff parent as a collaborator or investigator in the research projects to give them a head start when looking for their own individual projects.

> *"So unless the school states that new arrivals should be in enculturated or included in one of the existing projects, you know, when they are connected with a research mentor, unless you put that in and make it a clear part of the mentoring responsibilities that it is to bring one new arrival into a research project as a collaborator. the first research mentor that I got she is very well established. I do feel like I could contribute based on my past research projects, but she wouldn't let me in because she has her cliques. She wants [me] to work for her."* (Crystal)

Active voice/platform for newly arrived academic staff parents

Staff recommended that there is a need for a voice or platform for staff parents relocating from overseas to alert the university about the obstacles they are experiencing and how they can be supported by the university. The university showed more interest in international staff parents pre-arrival, especially through its relocation package policies but the support dwindled when the staff arrived in Australia. There is a need for a platform where views can be shared and fed back into the senate to support better newly-arrived academic staff parents.

Issues that newly arrived academic staff parents experience are equity and discrimination issues that must be addressed by the university just like other equity groups are being given a platform. Newly arrived academic staff parents could also have a formal place at the table in the Equity and Diversity Working Parties.

> *"There is a network for early career and mid-career, uh, female academics, but I don't think it's just about women. I think it's when you talk about parents relocating from overseas. There is an effort. There is a social network where we can have active, like sharing of views, having some sort of a platform, maybe some sort of a working group that contributes to, uh, reports back to the Senate. Uh, something like that. More visibility, more voice to the people with the unique challenges… Our mobility comes at a price we pay and okay, they [university] pay for the relocation costs. But I think that if I was brought here to become an academic, why am I not supported in becoming a high profile academic like how they brought me here? Because I've got capacity. So how can Why don't I get the support to get those capacities to the maximum?"* (Betty)

The concern university shows for other equity groups should be also extended to newly arrived academic staff parents with children as the issues they are experiencing are equity issues.

> *"So just the same way they [university] give attention to other groups like the LGBT community, Uh, they should also give some time for our community. Right. Maybe in a year, we meet, we have a discussion, right? You receive feedback from different parents, right? You know what is going on in our lives, so every policy that you bring will reflect that. What you [researcher] are doing is important work, at the end of the day, the reports that you produce, are going to reflect some of the sentiments of some of us. Uh, you see, so if they are able to do something like that, some workshop for families to put across some of their issues within the university environment or the academic environment, I think it will help so that policies within the universities will reflect our needs."* (Yaw)

Buddy system/informal group for newly arrived Academic staff parents

Staff parents recommended that an informal buddy system or group of newly arrived academic staff parents should be established for collective support. In this group, face-to-face networking and story-sharing sessions should be organised. This should be a closed-knit group where the parents know each other and feel safe to care and share experiences with each other.   Such a group could also include discussions about practical things like accessing the cheapest and nearest transportation, childcare, etc, which are vital for newly arrived academic staff parents.

> *"Buddy system…it's like matchmaking. I just wonder whether, you know, like a blog, a close group, helps where we share our stories you get. That means that people in a closed group you find your own affinity group and you learn from it, isn't it? It's like if you have cancer, you have a cancer support group. You have to overcome treatment, etcetera. That may help."* (Chrystal)

Deliberate grant funding for newly arrived academic staff parents with young families.

Staff parents recommended that the university should put in place deliberate funding measures to support academics with young families. This funding should be separate from the general funding grants that claim to take into consideration 'disadvantage' yet it is not clear how this is done. Deliberate grants for newly arrived academic staff parents recognise the toll that a combination of migration, parenting, academic work, in a completely new environment, can have on staff's time allocated to research, publications, and grant writing. The grants given could be used to assist in a literature review, research assistance, project execution, among others, boosting newly arrived academic staff's research outputs.

> *"A deliberate funding system that targets young academics with young families. You have to give them a bit of, uh, um boost. Yeah, I just heard. The NSW government says that you are giving $500 child. Uh, you know, for child, for childcare, whatever. That might be. So that's the government that has recognised how family life is standing in the way in this time and the need for an extra support. So there's this deliberate targeting families with Children. Okay. Yeah. So clearly if there could be a more deliberate action for young academics with families. Look, you have kids, you are young. Now there's this fund is still competitive. Apply to it. But it will take this into account, knowing your condition. By that, we can give you these resources to support you pick up. I mean, to make out for the areas that you are losing on."* (Patrick)

Flexibility at work

Newly arrived academic staff parents talked of how flexibility as academics facilitates them to cope with the multiple demanding workloads of being parents, lecturers, partners, in a new country. The flexibility means that they can work whenever time is available including working in awkward hours, outside the 9-5pm routine. The staff tend to work at night hours when the children have been put to sleep. Some resort to working during weekends jeopardizing family time. Although there is this flexibility and the pressure to get things done, staff are forced to sacrifice their families and sleeping time which impacts their mental health. This implies that flexibility at work needs to be combined with other support mechanisms to assist academic staff parents to do their work without sacrificing their mental health and families' time. For example flexibility combined with grants to cover child care and after-school care costs for the staff parents to allow time to focus on research and publications could provide that meaningful support the staff need.

> *"There's a little bit of flexibility as an academic in general. Every academic enjoys flexibility. So with that flexibility, which means that you can connect between family and work easily."* (Yaw)

Child care support

Newly arrived academic staff parents recommended that there should be university support for the staff to access childcare for their children. Childcare costs are a financial strain on the staff already struggling with other costs related to migration and the cost of living in

Australia. If university can step in to provide grants to be used to cover childcare costs, families would relocate with less strain on their wellbeing and would satisfactorily do the work of the university. Newly arrived academic staff parents would also love to be part of university-organised events if the university can support them financially to cover the costs of childcare or provide on-site childcare during these events. Failure to attend the events results in isolation and exclusion of academic staff parents. Failure to attend external events like conferences results in career stall and lost opportunities for the staff. This cost to staff and the university can be mitigated if some form of financial support is provided to cover babysitting costs, especially for migrant staff far away from their grandparents and other social networks.

> *"I think it would be really useful to actually recognise the challenges with, um, childcare. When the organised events in the evenings and at the weekends and support parents who need childcare because they don't have the family, the relationships, the grandparents, the family friends, they don't have those, um And so, uh, then there would be financial constraints with regards to it, or even logistically, not possible to it. And those if they are, they are happy to, uh, you know, if the if the kids are in in some sort of a childcare arrangement that is not available at the weekends, it's not available after six in the evening. So how do we then manage? We can't manage. There's no other way other than a nanny coming in for $20 or 25 per hour. Um, there is no more other options. So maybe financial support for those who can't have any other childcare arrangements."* (Betty)

Staff recommended that the parent grant or bursary of $3000 which was given to HDR students who are parents could be extended to academic staff parents post-pandemic. The grant made a difference to Lily when she accessed it and used it to pay for after-school care costs for her daughter and focused on her PhD writing without any disruptions from the child.

> *"So what the uni did last year was it gave, what's that called parents bursaries or something like that? I apply for that and I got around $3000. I think it was for all HDR students who are parents. Basically, um, that's out of the lockdown. So I spent the money on after-school care for my daughter. Um, so after the lockdown, at least I could get some, like, really quality time to work on my writing, so that was really great. Um, yeah, Um, but over here, everything is quite expensive."* (Lily)

A special grant targeted at covering childcare costs will allow more time for academic staff parents to do their research, publications and writing, areas that tend to lag behind when the staff have to juggle intersecting workloads.

Workload recognition and elevation for staff parents

Staff parents recommended that the university needs to make visible and recognise the family-related workload they juggle in addition to teaching and research-related workload. The pandemic worsened the workload as staff had to allocate more time to care and home school children during the lock-down. The impact of this disruption on newly-arrived academic staff parents' research, and publications, in particular will be felt post-pandemic

and long-term. To allow staff parents recover from the career disruption, a 5% workload allocation or elevation for staff parents to allow them time to restart their research activities

> "*I know, I know in Australia, Um, even though the public universities like XX they got support from the government, yet they are expected to make profit. They run it like business. Right. Having said that, you also need motivated work staff, who have job satisfaction, to increase their output, Right? Because if you don't support me and at the end of the semester, when it comes to students' evaluation, It tells you something; that I'm not putting in my best. if you want to If you want me to put in my best, then my family commitment too should be taken into consideration. What I simply mean by taking into consideration means maybe giving me some hours, right? Give me some hours so that my workload will reflect my real workload. For instance. I'm not saying you should do it across the board, right. For instance, someone who has one child, right, may have different workload. Someone who has two Children will have different work based on the family commitments. Someone who has 3, 4 right. We will need the support of universities to be able to increase our output and publish quality papers and in reputable journals because it takes a lot of time to do that.*" (Yaw)

Adding some hours or percentage workload to research workload accumulated by the newly arrived academic staff member could be a hand-up to engaging in more research and recognition of the time lost in parenthood, as Betty explains:

> "*So let's say, if my research road becomes zero, then they pull it up slightly, so it's not zero, recognising that a bit of research allocation is needed to restart research… So maybe the restart could be promoted and supported and encouraged through some extra workload dedicated to that. because there are lots of parents at Western Sydney Uni So, um, and a lot of parents really managed well because they have their social network. They have their family. They were born here. They were raised here. They have a network, Um, that is always available to them but a parent relocating from overseas? It's not for the first two years. It's actually probably a generational issue.*" (Betty)

Supporting parents in juggling migration, work, parenthood has benefits that transcend work-related circles. The support to parents is a pro-active way of preventing social problems that come from a traumatic childhood. Support to parents is a primary prevention of domestic and family violence that comes as a result of strain, stress of intersecting workloads on the family.

> "*They [universities] have to be quite responsive to how much we're putting in our family work domestically. You know, how much we put in, has societal implications. Some of these things, if I don't perform my role very well or at all, it is going to increase the social problems. Mhm. You know? Yes. Because we're going to raise bad children who are going to be a burden on society.*" (Yaw)

To support newly-arrived academic staff with children means that the university needs to count them and make their families visible in the university. Their families and caring load should not be left behind.

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