

ADJUSTMENTS AND ATTITUDES OF INDIAN STUDENTS IN CANADA

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Summary

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This is a study of the social, emotional, academic and financial problems experienced by Indian students studying in Canadian Universities, and the effect these have on their adjustment and attitudes to Canada.

It analyses the attitudes and problems of the upper, middle and lower social classes; and examines the significance of age, food habits, personality traits and place of residence in influencing adjustment and attitudes.

Report

The problem researched is to find out the adjustment and attitudes of Indian students in Canada and to collect information about their academic, social and personal problems and their expectations before they came to Canada.

Twenty-one member institutions of the National Conference of Canadian Universities and Colleges (NCCUC) were selected for the study. Five hundred questionnaires were sent to the Indian students on these campuses (37 per cent of the total Indian student population in Canada). Sixty-seven per cent of the questionnaires were received from the students. Of these, only 59 per cent of the questionnaires were complete enough to justify coding and analysis.

The first questionnaire sent to the Indian students was a "pre-coded" one and thus the responses were limited. To overcome the limitations of the "pre-coded" questionnaire used in the extensive survey, a supplementary questionnaire with "open-ended" questions were sent to 120 Indian students. Ninety per cent of the supplementary questionnaires were returned to the researcher after completion.

Later, the researcher visited 13 Canadian University campuses and interviewed 142 Indian students (10 per cent of the total Indian student population in Canada) to elaborate on the conditions of the students in Canada. The interviews consisted of "open-ended" questions to obtain qualitative information about the Indian students.

Further, the objective of the study was to test some socio-psychological hypotheses developed on the basis of the previous study conducted by the researcher. The hypotheses were:

1. There is a significant relationship between the "self-concept", and adjustment and attitudes of Indian students. Students

coming from lower socio-economic (middle and lower social class) levels would experience greater difficulties in adjusting and profiting from their study abroad.

2. Students coming from a rural background would find more difficulties in adjustment than students with an urban background

Some of the results of the study are cited here.

Emotional Difficulties

Indian students in Canada experienced many problems. They had difficulties in finding accommodation. They had financial troubles. They had to make many social and economic adjustments and a majority experienced emotional difficulties. They were likely to be homesick and lonely and sexually frustrated.

Students from all age-groups experienced emotional difficulties in the sample, but according to the data, emotional difficulties increased as the age of the students increased and tapered off only in the early thirties.

It was found that age was directly related to the adjustment of students in this country. A high percentage of students belonging to the age group up to 25 years were more highly adjusted than the students who were 26 years or more. A larger number of these older students were married and came to this country leaving behind their wives, husbands and children. This situation put greater emotional strain on these students. Three per cent of upper, 16 per cent of middle and 32 per cent of lower class students mentioned that "separation from wife/husband/children" were the reasons for their dissatisfaction in this country.

Financial Problems

A minority of Indian students reported that they have "great or very great" financial difficulties. The number of students who came to this country on their own was negligible compared to the students who came here with some type of financial assistance. A greater number of sponsored students mentioned that financial assistance should be increased to meet the rising cost of living in Canada. Many students coming to Canada with the notion that it was easy to get part-time jobs while they study here, found the reverse true.

It was observed among students with severe financial strain, a greater percentage of them from upper and lower classes had better adjustment than the middle class students. Many lower class students came from poor families and thus learnt to handle their finances more efficiently.

Academic Problems

A small number of Indian students mentioned academic difficulties in Canada. For the most part, these students reported difficulties in the use of language - oral and written, in student-teacher relationship, and the lack of recognition for Indian degrees.

The main difficulty was experienced in the use of the English language, in academic seminars and discussions, and in the writing of essays and papers. For those students who experienced difficulties in studies, oral expression was the most obvious.

A greater percentage of Indian students reported having difficulties in communicating with Canadian professors. The Indian tradition which holds that the teacher is superior and that the students should look to him for advice and direction misled students to expect similar relationships with Canadian professors. They were made particularly uneasy by the professors' readiness to leave them to their own initiative.

Fifty-two per cent of the Indian students complained that Canadian universities did not recognize their Indian degrees and thus they had to waste one or more years repeating the same courses they had already completed in India. They felt that it was discrimination on the part of Canadian university authorities towards foreign-earned qualifications.

Duration of stay and academic difficulties

Only a small percentage of both graduate and undergraduate students experienced serious academic difficulties during their stay in this country. Most of these students experienced these problems in the second and third years. And, there was a decrease in the percentage of students who experienced high academic difficulties after the third year. At this period, most of the students had completed their course work and were engaged in writing theses or doing research to complete the degree requirements.

Attitudes related to Canada and their own conditions in this country

A high percentage of students from upper, middle and lower classes had favourable attitudes related to their own situations in this country. It is interesting to see that a greater number of middle and lower class students had more favourable attitudes towards Canada and their own situations in this country than did upper class students.

Social Life in Canada

Many students mentioned difficulties in securing housing and cited colour discrimination and high rent as major reasons.

In connection with housing, jobs and dating, the students mentioned colour discrimination. They were disappointed to find greater colour discrimination in this country than they had expected and saw it as a social threat. As a result, many of them tended to avoid meeting Canadian people and shy away from social activities. Most of these students lived with students from their own countries and created small enclaves in which they could find friendliness and security.

Visit to families

More upper and middle class students visited families in this country than did lower class students. The upper class students visited a greater number of families, both Canadian and Indian, and they had closer acquaintance with these families than did students from middle and lower classes.

More lower class students (68 per cent) experienced difficulties in making friends with Canadians than upper class (57 per cent) or middle class (57 per cent) students. The most frequently mentioned reasons for their difficulties were differences in the ways of thinking, pressure of work and the some-what withdrawn and introverted nature of Canadians. Students

from all classes mentioned cultural reasons as the main hindrance to making friends.

Relations with the opposite sex

Students from all the classes experienced difficulties with persons of the opposite sex in this country mainly because of their unfamiliarity with Canadian culture and their own rigid cultural conditioning. Some students believed that Canadian girls did not go out with them because of colour discrimination.

Leisure-time activities

Such factors as cultural differences, pressure of academic work, colour discrimination and the short period of stay seriously limited the students' social lives.

Characteristics of Canadians and Indians

A greater percentage of upper, middle and lower class students rated Canadian higher than Indian in "social" behaviour and strength and activity, whereas Indian was rated higher than Canadian in "individual" behaviour.

Socio-economic level

It was found that the socio-economic level of the students was a main factor in their adjustment in Canada. The researcher noted a direct relationship between adjustment and socio-economic level of students in this country. Those students who came from upper class families adjusted better than those students who belonged to the middle and lower classes. Students from the upper socio-economic level had some background of western manners and customs and were better prepared for the differences of western life.