THE COMMUNITY SAFETY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN MELBOURNE: A SCOPING STUDY

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Acknowledgements and foreword

This report is the outcome of extensive collaboration by many researchers, community and industry stakeholders, students and colleagues both within and external to Victoria University (VU). The project was conceived by ICEPA Director, Professor Hurriyet Babacan and commissioned by Professor Linda Rosenman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Region. The research team was led by Professor Babacan who was responsible for the conceptual development of the project, all aspects of the project implementation and played a key role articulating the theoretical approach to the study. The key author and project coordinator was Joanne Pyke, Senior Researcher at ICEPA who also implemented the survey, undertook many of the stakeholder interviews and was responsible for the analysis of much of the data. Joanne also integrated all of the contributions from each collaborating researcher to ensure the integration of the final report. Alex Bhathal was researcher to the project who was responsible for much of the background research, media analysis and data collection. Dr Gurjeet Gill managed the ethics approval processes, contributed to the community safety dimensions of the analysis and contributed to data collection and analysis. Associate Professor Santina Bertone developed the initial survey design, participated in project planning and data collection as well as bringing her expertise in migration policy to the theoretical literature review and broader analysis of the research findings. Associate Professor Michele Grossman also contributed to the project planning, implementation and to the report. In particular, Michele undertook the interviews with Victoria Police officers, analysed this data and contributed the police comments to the findings and the recommendations. The project was also supported by researchers who undertook many of the student interviews including Sue Mate, Lisa Farrance, Dr Siva Krishnan and Dr Devaki Monani. Dr Graham Hepworth from the Statistical Consulting Centre at the University of Melbourne undertook detailed survey data analysis and statistical testing. Professor Jill Astbury also contributed to this analysis and played a leadership role in the final stages of project completion. Jim Buckell, Communications Officer at Victoria University's Government Liaison Unit, has also played a key role in ensuring the dissemination of the research findings and managing liaison with the media.

The project commenced in June 2009 out of serious concern about increasing incidence of violent crimes against international students and the public debate that ensued. The concern was that important and complex issues about community safety, racism and education and training systems were in many instances, being reduced to a reactive and polarised debate about the causes of violence in the community. A key aim of the project was to gather evidence on community safety issues experienced by international students, to contribute to a greater understanding of how to maximise international student safety and the development of effective policy responses. To this end, we drew on the views and experiences of more than 1,050 students and 29 stakeholders from government, peak education and training associations, community organisations, service providers and Victoria Police. We thank each of those who contributed to the research.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 'Community Safety of International Students in Melbourne: a Scoping Study' was designed and implemented by the Institute for Community, Ethnicity and Policy Alternatives (ICEPA), a key research institute of Victoria University (VU). The need for the research arose from concern about the increasing incidence of violence against international students, particularly those of Indian background, and the polarised and often heated public debate about whether or not the violence was racially or opportunistically motivated.

This research was funded by VU and undertaken between June and November 2009 by a VU research team comprising Professor Hurriyet Babacan, Ms Joanne Pyke, Ms Alex Bhathal, Dr Gurjeet Gill, Associate Professor Michele Grossman and Associate Professor Santina Bertone. Our findings are informed by evidence gathered using four research methods including a media analysis and an on-line student survey of 1,013 students (515 international students and 498 domestic students). The three largest groups of international student respondents were from South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) (25%) followed by students from South East Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia) and the Pacific (12%) and North Asia (China, Mongolia, Korea, Japan, Taiwan) (10%). Other methods included in-depth, and face-to-face interviews with 35 international students and in-depth interviews with 29 key stakeholders. Stakeholders included representatives of government, education and training associations, community service providers, the Consul Generals in Victoria of India and China, members of Victoria Police and student associations.

The aims of the research were:

- To investigate perceptions and experiences concerning the safety of international students enrolled in public and private education institutions in Melbourne
- To gauge the motivating factors in crime against international students, to understand its impacts and explore the extent to which crimes were primarily racist, opportunistic, or involved a combination of these factors
- To examine the policy responses of key stakeholders including educational institutions, both public and private; police; public transport authorities and other key government and non-government agencies
- To document ideas, strategies and responses that will improve international student safety in Melbourne
- To identify areas in which further research can contribute greater knowledge and policy directions for enhancing international student safety in the community

Because this was a scoping study, we do not claim to have arrived at definitive conclusions or that the research findings can be generalised beyond the time and place in which the research was conducted. Rather, the aim was to identify issues of strategic significance and to highlight future research, policy and planning priorities. At the same time, the research incorporates a thorough analysis of the views and opinions of substantial numbers of people, all with experience and an interest in ensuring the safety of international students in Australia generally, and in Melbourne in particular.

The research was limited by a number of factors. A key limitation arose from the timing of the project, with most data collection taking place during the mid-year break in July 2009, thus restricting access to the full population of students. Another important limitation was that the survey was not administered to a representative sample of the student population and the respondents to the in depth interviews were self-selected. Therefore the research findings cannot be extrapolated to the population as a whole. The research was also conducted at a time of high levels of media coverage of attacks on international students, which appeared to have informed the perceptions of safety of both students and stakeholders. For example, many open-ended comments were prefaced by references to the media, such as, 'it would appear from the media that …', indicating the extent to which media coverage has influenced perceptions of safety and ideas about those who are at risk. A further limitation was that important contextual data about the ethnicity of the victims of crime and details about where international students live is either not publicly available or is not consistently collected. As such, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the extent to which international students generally, and Indian students in particular, are victims of violence compared with the Australian born population. This lack of data is identified as an important issue in itself and one identified priority is to address this gap in order to more effectively plan and implement strategies to tackle issues that impact on international student community safety.

Due to these limitations, we do not claim to have arrived at definitive conclusions or that the research findings can be generalised. Rather, the aim was to identify issues of strategic significance and to highlight future research, policy and planning priorities. At the same time, the research incorporates a thorough analysis of the views and opinions of substantial numbers of people, all with experience and an interest in ensuring the safety of international students.

Key findings – community safety issues

- The vast majority (82%) of students surveyed, both international and domestic, felt Melbourne overall was a safe place to live; believed they lived in a safe part of Melbourne (81%); felt safe at their workplace (93%) and, felt safe when attending college or university (92%).
- Differences did exist, however, between the two student groups. Fewer international students (78%) agreed Melbourne was a safe place to live than local students (86%) and were more likely to report that when safety is threatened, there is a racial, religious or cultural element to that threat (50% vs 17%).

- More than half of international students surveyed (57%) said they found Australia was less safe than they had expected.
- Fifty per cent (201 students out of 403) of international students who reported perceived threats to their safety believed these threats had a racial, religious or cultural dimension, compared with 17% of domestic students.
- Nearly half of all the international students surveyed (49%) believed international students were unsafe compared with 34% domestic students. The odds of international students having this belief were 1.8 times greater than those of domestic students.
- There is a discrepancy between the views of stakeholders and international students on the community safety of international students. The majority of stakeholders believed that most violence against international students was opportunistic rather than racist in motivation. In contrast, in the survey results and interviews with international students, while threats to safety were understood as having multiple causes, racism was the cause most commonly identified.
- The vast majority of students surveyed feel safe in their place of employment, with 95% of domestic and 90% of international students reporting feeling safe while at work. Compared with domestic students, however, international students were twice as likely to report feeling unsafe at work (10% international/5% domestic). This gap between international and domestic student responses continues in relation to experiencing verbal abuse (58% international/44% domestic), being physically attacked (11% international/7.5% domestic) and being robbed (10% international/5% domestic). These results expose some general issues about community safety for all students with domestic students reporting high levels of safety risk in many categories. At the same time, it appears that safety risks are significantly greater for international students.

Key findings -threats to safety

- A key theme expressed by all respondents was that issues relating to violence against international students are complex. This is due to the diversity of the international student body as each individual experiences different risk factors according to a range of factors including gender, religion, class, educational institution, age and English language skills. Nevertheless, interview and survey data indicates that violence motivated by racism is perceived by a significant proportion of international students as a pervasive element in the cocktail of factors that produce risks to their safety.
- Both international and domestic students and stakeholders said that the key threats to safety included a combination of four main environmental factors, including higher risk of violence at night, being on public transport or in public spaces, particular localities that are unsafe and the use of alcohol and drugs.
- International students are exposed to environmental safety risk factors to a greater extent than domestic students due to a number of social-economic factors including: insufficient affordable housing, with current housing often located in areas considered less safe; their need to work in casual and precarious employment, often at night; their relative lack of private transport options and the relative absence of family and social networks. All research respondents believe that socio-economic factors make a key contribution to the conditions of safety for international students.
- There was a widely held perception by student survey respondents that those whose appearance least resembles the white, Anglo-Celtic majority are at greater risk. International students were much more likely to identify racial appearance as a safety risk factor compared with domestic students (61% compared with 39%).
- A majority of Victoria Police interviewees felt the boundary lines between 'opportunistic' and 'racist' motives in a number of recent assaults against international students are not always as clear cut as current debate might suggest. Most police could think of particular incidents in which both opportunism and racism were combined. Some police officers felt that racism, while it might not always be a primary motivation for crimes against the person in relation to international students, was sometimes a clear secondary element used to further humiliate or weaken the resistance of victims during the course of a robbery or an assault.
- Perpetrators of violence are understood to be groups of young, less educated and alienated men. This view was common across all stakeholders and student respondents to this study.

Key findings – impacts of threats to safety

- Both domestic and international students say they have adjusted their behaviour in response to perceived risks. These behaviours include self-imposed limitations on travel and night-time activities. For example, 53% of international student survey respondents say they do not travel at night as a measure to protect their safety. The major theme of comments made by all students was in relation to implementing prevention strategies such as travelling in groups, letting people know where you are going and being vigilant about surrounding environments.
- Media analysis revealed that the polarisation of views about the reasons for the attacks on international students has reflected and compounded a divide in public opinion in Australia on issues of community safety and racism. Moreover, public statements minimising or appearing to deny the role of racism have heightened tensions as reflected in student protests and in international and local ethnic community media coverage expressing concern about the safety of international students in Australia.

- A number of international students interviewed and surveyed in this research reported being unsupported by bystanders when they were being attacked. Such reports reinforce the notion that Melbourne is an uncaring place. This is a response that arises when there are low levels of trust or belonging, both key elements of social life in safe communities.
- There is a gap between what some international students expect of the police and what police themselves understand their role to be. Some international students said they did not feel the police were helpful or effective enough, and some also felt that some police at times displayed ethnic or racial bias. However, some police are concerned that their efforts to support international student victims of violent crime are not always accepted or welcome, and they are also concerned that lack of familiarity by international students with Australia's legal system may be contributing to frustrations with police and the justice system more generally when student safety is at risk.
- The findings also indicated that international student interviewees highlighted the concerns for their safety expressed by parents, family and friends overseas. Media coverage, particularly in India, but in other countries as well, has created awareness of the violence and contributed to concern about the safety of international students in Australia.

Implications of key findings

Overall, the findings from this research show that the threats to safety experienced by international students have individual, community and international repercussions. The findings also highlight the extent to which international student safety is linked to broader environmental risk factors and systemic problems with public transport, housing and employment conditions. Findings also highlight that racism or cross-cultural misunderstanding is one pervasive element in a mix of interrelated factors. The circumstances of international students are diverse, but in general, they are particularly exposed to these threats to safety, with the relative absence of local family support, limited understanding of, or access to services and relatively limited options in terms of transport, housing and employment. Minimisation or denial of the relationship between these systemic problems and racism can entrench rather than redress the vulnerability and marginalisation of international students. The general response has been to encourage international students to change their behaviour to stay safe. While most students and stakeholders, and many in the general community, would agree that each of us bears some responsibility in looking out for our own safety and minimising risks where possible, the evidence from this study suggests that there is considerable scope to minimise existing threats to the community safety of international students.

HOW CAN THIS RESEARCH BE USED TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY SAFETY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?

This study canvasses and acknowledges the many policy and program responses by all stakeholders in addressing international student safety over the period in which this research has been conducted. We also reiterate that this is a scoping study that does not claim to have definitive answers to the complex issues we have considered in this exploratory research. At the same time, this research has generated some important insights about international student safety and we identify priorities and actions that we believe are important in addressing the issue of risks to international student safety.

Name and address racism

Evidence from both the student survey and international student interviews show that a large proportion of international students identify that there is a racial, cultural or religious element to threats to safety. Furthermore, both students and stakeholders suggest that there is a need to name and identify racism in all of its manifestations. This means acknowledging that racism exists and is at least one element of safety concerns. We also argue that there is also an ethical imperative to do this given that international students have been encouraged by government and the education and training sector to come to study in Australia and that their contribution to the Australian economy, particularly in Victoria, is so significant. We suggest that the Federal and Victorian governments in particular, but also those authorities and organisations that contribute to the broader community safety landscape in Melbourne specifically and Australia more generally, need to position themselves as advocates for the elimination of racism. Acknowledging and acting on racism has a variety of meanings for different sectors. At a minimum, it means recognising that international students have particular needs and experiences that need to be acknowledged and addressed. The following section elaborates on how this applies to various sectors.

Education and training providers

The key implication of naming racism in the provision of education and training services is greater recognition that the needs of international students are different from domestic students. Two key priorities we identify for education and training institutions are that:

- As part of their planning processes, educational institutions can ensure comprehensive and regular monitoring and understanding of student characteristics, needs and experiences. This monitoring could include factors such as ethnicity, race and gender and the broader characteristics that impact on individual safety such as mode of travel and type of accommodation and employment. Findings would ideally inform continuous review and development of services, infrastructure and strategic planning to maximise student safety.
- Changes to the use of funding by education and training providers could be considered so that reinvestment of international student fees into support services for international students is a central component of institutional budgeting processes. Such reinvestment could be used in part to fund the monitoring of international student needs and experiences above, and in part to provide support in relation to housing, employment, transport and greater awareness of and support for enhancing community safety for all international students regardless of background or length of stay in Australia.

Victoria Police

- We acknowledge and support police recognition of the need for further research to improve and increase the evidence base to

enable a greater understanding of offender patterns, profiles and motivations surrounding assaults and violent robberies targeting international students. This includes the capacity for improved data capture to produce more finely-grained information about offenders as well as victims. Such data would significantly enhance the capacity of the police to develop and share more precisely informed strategies for risk assessment and crime reduction and prevention, thereby contributing to enhanced community safety for international students.

- The proactive community policing measures implemented by Victoria Police also align with priorities we identify through this research. Such measures have already proved effective in enhancing good communication and consultation between the police and members of the community from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and can be continued and strengthened. These include: police-community consultations on safety and violence; working with education and service providers to enhance situational awareness about staying safe in public places; the cooperative development of strategies for auditing and addressing high risk and 'hot spot' places and behaviours that threaten safety in local areas; and, enhanced cross-cultural training for operational police.

- A further important strategy could be to consult with community leaders and associations from countries with the largest groups of international students, particularly India and China. Such consultation could inform research on how best to address barriers facing students when contacting or engaging with police as well as how to better support international students who are victims of crime.

- We also identify the need for well-articulated local and national strategies in consultation with community organisations and State and Federal governments to assess risks for international student safety, educate international students about how the police and justice systems operate in Australia, and how international students can access these systems and exercise their rights.

- The need for a complaints mechanism that is accessible by and specific to the needs of international students was identified. It is also important that the information about its processes is widely communicated to the international student population through a range of networks and providers.

- There is also potential to review current approaches to cross-cultural training for operational police to enhance their capacity to promote positive engagement with international students and to respond effectively to the needs and experiences of international student victims of violent assault and other threats to community safety and wellbeing.

Government Agencies

- The capacity for planning could be enhanced by an expanded evidence base about the community safety of international students. Building on the learnings from this research, a fruitful strategy would be the implementation of a national survey to further investigate the findings of the current study with a representative sample of students coupled with consultation with education providers and stakeholders in every state and territory. Such a study would be usefully augmented by the expansion of Australian Bureau of Statistics census data to include international students from their first year of residence in Australia.

- We suggest the need for the implementation of a national inquiry to review progress against recommendations of the 1991 National Inquiry into Racist Violence to more clearly identify the racist dimensions of threats to community safety, including the safety of international students, and to inform future responses to ensure this threat to community safety is eliminated.

- While there are many important policy and program developments underway in relation to improving international student safety, all stakeholders emphasise the importance that these efforts engage all stakeholders and that they be coordinated and rapid in implementation. This includes involvement across government sectors, community services, education providers and community representatives at both a state and national commonwealth level.

- Given the importance of public transport as a safety risk factor, it is suggested that there be investigation of the frequency and patterns of threats to community safety on and around public transport and in public spaces as part of a coordinated, whole of government response, based on the high levels of use of both public transport and public spaces by international students in particular.

- The review and enhancement of communication and information for students both pre and post arrival in Australia could address many issues identified through this research. It is proposed that a key emphasis could be on providing information that creates realistic expectations and understandings for international students about the opportunities and challenges of studying and living in Australian communities, particularly in major capital cities, with regard to community safety and support.

Other sectors

- This research identifies that the employment conditions of international students is one element that could be improved to enhance community safety. There is potential to investigate employment opportunities available for international students as well as risks of exploitation. While survey results showed that 90% of international students feel safe at work, this evidence also indicates that a proportion (10%) identify feeling unsafe at work. Detailed research is required to understand the extent to which international students are exposed to safety risks at work.

- Our research has raised the possibility that established ethnic communities could improve their support for international students. We suggest research be undertaken to investigate the potential for and strategies necessary for ethnic communities to play a greater role in the support of international students and the benefits and problems presented by this approach.

Conclusions

This research addressed four key questions about the safety of international students: the perceived causes of violence against international students; the actual experiences of international students regarding their safety; the impacts of violence; and, what can be done to ensure the safety of international students. Our research was informed by an understanding that these questions and their responses are framed by their social, historic and economic contexts and that the recent increase in violence against students is an outcome of broader social problems and conditions. At the same time, we acknowledge the situational nature of attacks against international students and the limitations in making definitive claims about singular causes of violence. Overall, the intention of this research is to make a contribution to better understanding and address the threats and risks to which international students are exposed. In doing so, we urge that future efforts to enhance international student safety efforts and responses are coordinated, collaborative and implemented across the government, community, education and industry sectors which all have a role to play in ensuring community safety.

An important objective of our research was to investigate the polarisation of views about the causes of violence against international students that has led to a simplified public debate that explains the crimes as an outcome either of racism or opportunism. Such polarisation has the effect of disguising the full complexity of any incident of violence where it is entirely possible that amongst other factors, both racism and opportunism can be present at the same time in particular incidents of violence and assault. Our central argument is that racism is often one element of violent crimes and is symptomatic of a broader social landscape that is shaped by racial and ethnic tensions within some sectors of the community. We support this argument by drawing on the evidence gathered through this research. We argue that to ignore the role of racism runs the risk of failing to identify a key dimension of community safety and that denial serves to entrench rather than address problems with racist dimensions.

In a globalised world, the movements and proximity of people from many diverse cultural backgrounds present continuing challenges of living and working with difference. The globally mobile are the workforce of the future. While Australia generally, and Victoria in particular, is a culturally diverse society, with successful models of multiculturalism, the attacks on international students indicate that we cannot be complacent. Addressing safety issues for international students is a matter of human rights that goes to the heart of the question of how we deal with and value difference and diversity in the fabric of our society.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

'The continued assaults in our community question our collective commitment and capacity to create and maintain the tolerant and inclusive society extolled in the recruitment brochures. . . (Davis 2009).

As the number of international students in Australia has grown rapidly in recent years, their safety and wellbeing have been the focus of increasing attention. There have been allegations of exploitation by employers, by migration agents and by poor quality and in some cases, fraudulent private education providers (Trounson 2009). International students have been targeted in racial violence in South Australia and Newcastle; they have died in murders, drownings and in fires in unsafe accommodation (Smith 2009). Growing concern and media attention on threats to international student safety in Australia peaked in May this year when a series of brutal and highly publicised violent attacks occurred against Indian international students in Melbourne. Indian media coverage highlighted the racist nature of the attacks and as interest in the attacks gained increasing international media attention, the safety of international students in Australia has taken on the nature of a foreign policy crisis for this country (Sheridan 2009), which threaten the nation's third largest export industry. While the question of international student safety and the public debate about the nature of crime against international students now rank high on the public agenda, the issue has many dimensions, in particular those relating to human rights.

It is in this context that Victoria University (VU) has commissioned this scoping research to investigate the safety and wellbeing of international students in metropolitan Melbourne. VU has sought to take a proactive and culturally sensitive approach to the safety of its student body and other key stakeholders and aims to contribute to the formulation of effective policy and strategies in this area.

In the absence of reliable data about the extent and nature of crime against international students and in the absence of even basic demographic information such as the geographical distribution of residence in Melbourne for international students, there is an urgent need to investigate these attacks so that police, public transport providers, government departments and education institutions can respond appropriately and on the basis of sound evidence about the incidence, nature and motivating factors in the attacks.

The aims and objectives of our research were determined by its key goal, which is to provide an evidence base to inform policy on international student safety. It is hoped that this will assist in formulating strategies to eliminate threats to international student safety in Melbourne and to improve responses and services to support the community safety and wellbeing of international students.

The study sought to achieve this research goal through:

1. Exploring the perceptions and experiences of safety of international students enrolled in public and private education institutions in metropolitan Melbourne, in order to:

a. gauge the motivating factors in crime against international students, in particular, the extent to which incidents are racist or opportunistic in nature;

b. understand the impacts of crime against international students and the effects and implications of existing responses to it by government authorities, services and education providers.

2. Examining policies and responses of key stakeholders including educational institutions, both public and private; police; public transport authorities; key government and non-government agencies;

3. Documenting ideas about strategies and responses to improve international student safety from international and domestic students in metropolitan Melbourne; key stakeholders including education providers, relevant government and non-government agencies; Melbourne-based representatives of the Governments of India and China and representatives from Indian and Chinese ethnic organisations and from student bodies. As a scoping study, the intent is not to undertake an exhaustive coverage of all responses, but to highlight key issues for further consideration.

The research design adopted for this study accommodates the complexity and multi-factorial nature of international student safety and its threats, by implementing a four-stage methodology which encompasses both quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches to ensure that we gain information about the scope and extent, but also about the nature and implications of threats to international student safety. Again, we make no claims that the research reaches conclusive findings that are representative of the experience of all students. Rather, the aim is to explore student experiences at one snapshot in time to reveal broader issues and questions for further and strategic planning.

This report presents the outcomes of the research in the following five sections. Section Two starts by tracing the issues of violence against international students highlighting and discussing the available data on incidents of violence. Importantly, we also identify the gaps in data on violent crimes and the limitations in tracing the extent to which we can accurately map differences between crimes against international students and those that impact on the broader population. We go on to describe the scale and characteristics of the international student growth and how this growth has been supported by broader Australian economic reform. More specifically, we discuss reforms to the education and training system that have led to the development of a mass post-compulsory education and training system since the late 1980s which has been subsidised heavily by international student enrolments. The entry of

international students has also been supported by immigration policy that has shifted towards supporting skilled migrant entry to address skills gaps and to support economic growth. Much of the international student entry is now from India and China – a significant departure from earlier migration patterns which encouraged entry primarily from Europe. These policy developments are common to other OECD countries with which Australia competes for its share of international student enrolments. They are, however, the platform for the progressive and exponential growth of international student enrolments in Australia in recent decades which is highly significant in terms of the ethnic and cultural fabric of Melbourne's population. Finally, we discuss how issues of international student safety have been treated by the media which has generated a widespread and polarised public debate about the meanings and causes of violence against international students. As we identify through media analysis, much of this debate is polarised about the extent to which crimes against students are motivated by racism or by opportunism. This is a central area of investigation of this study. We also identify the seriousness by which government and other stakeholders invested in international student safety have responded to the issues and we outline key responses by government, the education and training sector, the police and other student associations. These responses have been rapid, expansive and in continuous development.

Section Three reviews the literature that is relevant to understanding and explaining international student safety issues. First, we discuss the literature related to the concept of community safety which is concerned with understanding safety within its social and economic context as well as its relationship to wellbeing and the rights of individuals to carry out their lives free from fear of violence, attack or harassment. We also overview theories of race, ethnicity and racism and canvass the literature that explains processes that produce social inequalities based on race and the implications of this for social inclusion and wellbeing. We explore the literature that investigates the links between racism and fear and how this operates to define social marginalisation on the basis of race. We also explore the research on 'hate crime' and racial incidents and how incidents of crime are embedded in social power relations. A key thread of this literature is in understanding the extent to which violent crimes are commonly perpetrated by those from dominant cultures who are themselves marginalised. An emphasis of this research is to understand the broader social dynamics that produce such marginalisation and racial tensions and racially based conflict that emerges within different contexts and circumstances. We go on to canvass legal measures in place aimed at the elimination of racism and the promotion of equal opportunity. We highlight the limitations of such legislation due to its complaints-based nature and the problems in addressing the full manifestations of racism. We go on to explore theories of 'racism denial' which explore why racism is so difficult to pin down. Theories of race denial understand racism as being as much about a failure to identify the centrality of race and identity to identity and social relations as it is about manifestations of direct discrimination. The outcome is inaction and systems that are constructed around the needs of dominant groups rather than those who are defined as 'other'. We go on to discuss the research that identifies the impacts of racism and how this affects behaviour and an individual's sense of belonging. Such impacts are multiple and contradictory but include responses such as anger, self blame, contempt, depression, behavioural problems, amongst others. Importantly, racism does impact on individual wellbeing – how it manifests is dependent on a range of circumstances. We go on to canvass the research on the international student experience with a particular focus on community safety. This is a relatively unexplored area. However there are a number of recent and emerging studies that seek to understand the rationale for international student decision making about the extent to which student expectations are met, constraints and barriers in undertaking study in Australia, student perceptions of the quality and experience of education, as well as student wellbeing (City of Melbourne 2008; ACPET 2009; Universities Australia 2009a). Importantly, these studies highlight the differences between international students and domestic students and conclude that they have different needs and outcomes.

Combined, this literature explains our approach to this study and provides a means by which to explore and explain community safety issues for international students in Melbourne. Key assumptions that we bring to this research are that the community safety of international students needs to be understood within the broader public policy, social, economic and historical context. Importantly, they enter an education system that is reliant on international student fees to sustain itself, and within the context of patterns of migration that have effectively sustained a collective identity of Australia as 'white'. While the Australian government, and the educational institutions on which the onus of responsibility rests, have enthusiastically sought international student enrolments from Asian populations, their arrival represents a major departure from the dominantly white population that successive Australian governments have sought to preserve. The potential for ruptures this might cause, in terms of racial tension, has been largely unexplored. This is, at least in part, due to processes that serve to deny the centrality of race and racism as forces that shape Australian society. Also central is the situational nature of crime and the multiple circumstances that produce violence in any one place. At one level, each incident of crime is a singular case with its own circumstances. Meaningful analysis, however, requires attention to the ethnic dimensions of crime as well as the diversity of factors that shape risk including gender, class and the broader social and economic context.

These assumptions shape our research design and we implement a mix of methods in order to gain both extensive and intensive insights into issues of community safety for international students. These methods are described in Section Four and include an on-line student survey, interviews with 35 international students and interviews with 29 stakeholders identified as having a role to play in responding to community safety issues for students. The methods employed, their limitations and the results are described in detail. Section Five reports in turn on the findings form each of the methods which we report on in relation to four key questions that guide this research in relation to the nature of community safety issues for international students, the causes of violence against international students, the impacts of community safety issues and what should be done to protect community safety.

Some key findings include the following

- More than half of the international students both surveyed and interviewed international students report experiencing threats to safety that range from verbal abuse to violent attack;
- Half of all threats to safety were identified by international students as including a racist element evidenced by racist verbal abuse;
- The dominant view of stakeholders is that attacks against international students are primarily opportunistic in motivation;
- The majority of international students surveyed say that Melbourne is less safe than they expected;
- International students are more likely than domestic students to say they take measures to protect their own safety, particularly in relation to avoiding travelling at night;
- Most stakeholders believe that international students should be supported in taking measures to protect their own safety by avoiding unsafe situations and engaging in behaviours that might provoke dangerous situations;
- Student respondents widely report difficulties in avoiding situations that might threaten safety due to the need to use public transport and at times considered unsafe, due to employment and/or time-tabling;
- Safety is most at threat using public transport at night, in particular in the CBD and some metropolitan areas and suburbs, and when drugs and alcohol are involved;
- Socio-economic factors such as housing shortages mean that many international students have to live long distances from educational institutions, lack transport options, and are vulnerable to unsafe or precarious employment are key factors in international student safety;
- Due to a lack of family and social networks and supports, international students are more reliant on police protection but are often reluctant to report threats to safety to police and commonly report a fear of talking to the police on the basis that they believe that they have no rights as non-citizens or that they think that they won't be taken seriously. Some international students report a lack of confidence in assessing unsafe situations or having the language to describe and report threats to safety;
- Some students who have been victims of violence report that they received little assistance from bystanders, that the police response was inadequate and that they believe there was a primary racist motivation to the attacks;
- Indian and Chinese students are widely identified as being less safe than other international students and international students are identified as being less safe than domestic students.

These and other findings are reported in detail in Section Five. In Section Six, we discuss the implication of the findings and draw on the broader research to inform an argument about future directions in maximising international student safety. In particular, we discuss the complexity of the issues and the extent to which international student safety is dependent on a range of factors but that some students face greater risks than others. Factors that contribute to risk include race and ethnicity and our findings show that there is a widely held understanding that the extent to which any one student is different from the Anglo-Celtic norm does increase the risk of being a victim of violence. Skin colour and religion were two key factors that were agreed across the research respondents. These factors alone are not explanatory, however, and other factors such as class, gender, course of study, mode of travel, place of residence, age and so on all combine to shape the extent to which any one individual is safe. Socio-economic conditions are also of key importance and international students are particularly vulnerable because of broader social pressures due to their predominant reliance on public transport, and their need for affordable accommodation and part-time employment. Partly due to a rapidly increasing population in Melbourne, international students are particularly affected by housing shortages, strains on public transport and labour market conditions that mean that available employment is in relatively unsafe occupations such as taxi-driving and service industries that involve shift-work at night. These conditions combined serve to make them 'soft targets' for perpetrators of crime.

A key point of discussion is the striking differences in opinion between those involved in policy, planning and the delivery of education and training services and international students. A dominant view of stakeholders is that international students are no more or less safe than domestic students and that crimes against international students are primarily opportunistic. Not all, but most international students, on the basis of experience, identify racism as one of the most important elements motivating violent crime and they report experiences of racist treatment. Much of the treatment described does not constitute crime but includes such events as being called racially abusive names or being treated badly on the basis of race. On the basis of this evidence, and the broader research in the area, we argue that there is a need to recognise the role of racism in issues of community safety for international student safety. Most importantly, it is essential to recognise that the needs and experiences of international students are different from the domestic student experience and this is not adequately recognised by those who provide educational services or by the systems that support international students during their course of study.

The polarised debate between racism versus opportunism as a cause of violence is unhelpful in revealing the complexities of the international student experience. Our evidence, which is supported by the broader literature, shows that racism is one of many dimensions in the community safety context. Denial of this serves to contribute to inaction and, in this context, places the onus on international students rather than the perpetrators of crime or a critical examination of the broader social and economic context. The outcome is government inaction and the potential to exacerbate issues of racism and violence. The stronger position, we argue, is to identify and name racism as one key factor thereby contributing to the image of Australia as a country serious about the elimination of racism and the protection of community safety for all. We agree with the Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Glyn Davis (2009), that there is an ethical obligation, given our reliance on the international student industry, to take safety issues very seriously and to address all dimensions of the issues at hand.

We conclude with a series of broad recommendations that relate to educational providers, government, the police and other sectors. A key emphasis is on generating a better evidence base about the characteristics and experiences of international students, improved coordination across government, sectors, authorities and communities and better communication mechanisms between all stakeholders. Centrally, we argue for the need that diverse needs of international students are understood as central to the post-compulsory education and training system rather than peripheral as has been the case to date.

SECTION 2: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This Section provides a discussion and overview of the context in which the issues relating to international student safety are considered. First, we discuss the nature of the issues that relate to international student safety and discuss the available data on incidents of violence and importantly, the gaps in knowledge in this area. We then provide an overview of the media response and public debate over these issues. Third, we give a profile of the scale and characteristics of the international student body in Australia at the time this research has been undertaken. We then set the policy context that has generated the conditions in which international students arrive and stay in Australia. In this Section, we concentrate on the extent to which attracting international students as fee paying customers of education and training services has been a key strategy in education reform measures over recent decades, which has had the aim of expanding education and training and establishing this as an export industry. We also discuss the immigration policy context which determines the conditions under which international students enter and reside within Australia. Finally, we discuss the responses by government and community to issues raised. Combined, this background sets the scene for the issues relating to community safety for international students. The following Section starts by describing international student safety issues and the availability, or lack, of data on violent incidents.

2.2 Violent crimes against international students

In recent years, a number of highly publicised deaths and tragedies, and an escalation in incidents of violence involving international students, have triggered increasing concern about the safety and security of international students in Australia (Smith 2009). Incidents have included:

...racial violence against international students in South Australia in 2006, organised racial targeting in Newcastle in 2004, a large string of violent attacks in Melbourne in 2007, the exposure of many deaths of international students in Sydney in 2008 and the drowning and house fire deaths of students in Victoria in 2008 (Smith 2009).

Within Melbourne, there has been concern within the Indian community and amongst student groups for approximately five years about an increase in violent crime against international students (Rost 2009).

While these events have been commented on widely by the media, a lack of available data on the ethnicity of victims in Australia makes it impossible to accurately estimate the number of crimes against international students which are known to police (Mukherjee 2002). Data on the ethnic appearance of victims of crime is actually collected by police in Victoria and NSW. However, it is not published, partly due to the random nature of its collection (Rao 2009). There is also evidence of the likelihood of high rates of underreporting of crime by international students (Topsfield 2009; Ramachandran 2009b).

At the same time, it is possible to glean information about the rate and nature of crime against international students through media reports. In 2008, there were five high profile violent crimes against academics and students, one of whom was from China and four who are of Indian background. One of the attacks against a visiting Chinese academic, Dr Zhongiun Cao, that occurred in January, 2008, was fatal. The other assaults resulted in near death and serious injury including stab wounds, loss of eye sight and brain injury (Chopra 2009; Nanda 2009; Wade & Das 2009; Millar & Doherty 2009d).

In 2009, there have been 20 violent crimes against students of Indian background, some of whom are Australian citizens. There are also at least five violent incidents in the past two years against Chinese and Asian students. Four victims died as a result of these attacks (Lawrence 2008; Cardy 2009; Denholm 2009; Ramachandran 2009c).

Victoria Police have made two statements during 2009 releasing statistics on crime against Indians. In the first statement, police estimated that around 30% of robbery victims in Region 2, Division 1 (comprising the domestic government areas (LGAs) of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton and Wyndham in Melbourne's west) 'are of Indian appearance' (Victoria Police 2009c). This was in the context of a general increase in robberies in the western suburbs, from 417 in the 2006-7 financial year to 530 in 2007-8 (Victoria Police 2009b).

The second statement, by Chief Commissioner Simon Overland on 2nd June, 2009, released state-wide data showing that in the 2007-8 financial year, '1,447 people of Indian origin were victims of crimes against the person such as robberies and assaults, an increase from 1,082 the previous year'. This figure represents 3.9% of the total 36,765 victims of crime against the person recorded for 2007-8 and the statement compared the Indian figure with that recorded for 'Caucasians' of 24,260 victims (Victoria Police 2009b).

Estimates have been made by others with a concern about issues of violence against Indians. In early June 2009, an Indian community leader in Sydney, Dr Yadh Singh, estimated that there have been more than 100 attacks on Indian students in the past year and twenty in the month from April to May this year, most of which were not reported to police (Ramachandran 2009b). The Federation of Indian Students of Australia (FISA), which established a hotline for victims of crime in 2006, has been widely quoted as estimating that around 70 physical assaults against Indian students have occurred in the past year in Melbourne (BBC News 2009; The Age 2009).

Apart from victimisation in violent offences, there are other concerns about threats to the safety of international students, including exposure to exploitation and dangerous conditions in workplaces and sub-standard accommodation (Johnston 2008; Das 2008b). Also, the incidence of fatal accidents and suicide amongst international students is a growing concern.

In a report in May 2008, the Herald Sun stated that seventeen international students had died in Victoria in the previous year 'from boarding house fires, murders, car crashes and drownings.' (Herald Sun 2008a). Five international students died in two separate cases in 2008 when their overcrowded accommodation burnt down (Dunn & Higginbottom 2008b; Archer 2009).

An Age report found that 54 international students had died in the year between November 2007 and November 2008, including 'several suicides', in comparison with a response by the government in Parliament in February 2009 which stated that 51 students had died and that there were no suicides (Johnston & Wade 2009).

In the twelve months to May 2008, FISA reported that there had been 13 suicides by international students from India (Herald Sun 2008a). There have been two reported suicides by Indian students in Sydney (Indian Express 2009c). In addition, during 2008 and 2009 in Melbourne, there have been three reported cases of suicide by young men from India, two current students and one who had just gained permanent residency of Australia. Parents and relatives of the two are calling for further investigation. Each of these young men died after being hit by trains (Hodge 2009a).

Combined, these incidents raise concerns about the international student vulnerability and the risk factors generated by the conditions in which they undertake study while in Australia.

2.3 The media response and public debate

Media coverage of attacks on international, particularly Indian, students in Australia has played a major role in both creating and framing debate on issues of safety. In Australia, a protest by Indian students in late May was followed by increased media coverage of attacks on Indian students nationally (SBS 2009). Internationally this year, as coverage spread from India to the BBC and on to other international news services, ensuring wide global coverage, the attacks on Indian students have shaped into a 'foreign policy crisis for Australia' (Sheridan 2009). It is also arguable that the media have played a role in prompting, if not determining the nature of some responses by the Australian and Victorian governments.

The issues have attracted international coverage and the Indian media have focused on the racial nature of the attacks (Press Trust of India 2009; Sheridan 2009). This attention has been accompanied by protests against Australia, including some where effigies of Prime Minister Rudd have been burnt (Malkin 2009). The publicity has extended to Europe with attacks on Indian students and allegations of fraud and corruption and exploitation of Indian students by 'unscrupulous' education providers being the subject of a BBC news feature in September (Bryant 2009). The UK Telegraph also ran a story on the June protests by Indian students in Sydney (Malkin 2009). In the USA in July, the Wall Street Journal ran a story on the attacks and on the Indian responses, as well as covering the visit of a delegation of Australian education authorities to India (Gokhale 2009).

The level of general community interest in the issue in Australia is indicated by the numbers of online comments which some media articles have attracted, including an ABC news article entitled 'It's racism: Indian media seizes on student scam report', which had 135 comments posted (Sara 2009) and an article on protests by Indian students in the Sydney suburb of Harris Park which had 209 comments (Dale 2009).

Analysis of media content shows an increasing rate of reportage on violence against international students during the past six months, across both Australian and Asian print media outlets. In the Australian print media, 30% of articles mentioning international students in this period of 2009 relate to violence – double the proportion in coverage for the past ten years. In the Asian print media one third of articles in the first six months of 2009 relate to violence, compared with ten percent in the preceding ten years.

In this period, proportionately more articles in Asian publications mention racism as a possible cause of violence against international students than within the Australian media. In comparison, only 151 articles in the Australian print media mention racism as a cause of violence against international students, while in the Asian print media, 252 articles do so.

Of stories relating to violence against international students in the Australian press, 88 mention opportunism, including drug use of perpetrators as being a contributing factor. In the Asian press, 97 mention opportunism, including drug use as a contributing factor. Of stories relating to violence against international students in the Australian press in the first six months of 2009, 241 mention safety while in the Asian press, 414 do so.

Overall, the media response has given air to a public debate about the nature of crime against international students in Melbourne and the extent to which the crimes are racially motivated as opposed to opportunism (Johnston and Ham 2009; Sheridan 2009; Rost 2009). By opportunism, we mean that international students are simply victims of broader social trends in violence and that the victims have essentially been in 'the wrong place at the wrong time' and would be a victim irrespective of their race or ethnicity with the primary motivation being petty crime or theft. There is evidence to support both views. This evidence can be derived from the accounts of victims and through current police crime statistics which data show a general trend towards violent street crime in Melbourne and an over-representation amongst offenders from areas of socio-economic disadvantage (Victoria Police 2009c).

Evidence for racism as a motivating factor is available through the accounts of victims. In many incidents, victims stated that they were racially abused while being assaulted with no robbery associated with the crime (Dunn 2008a; Edwards 2009; Sheridan 2009; Wade & Das 2009). In contrast, evidence that attacks are not primarily racial in motivation is found in police crimes data which shows an increased trend towards violent street crime in general across metropolitan Melbourne (Victoria Police 2009b). Across Victoria, crime data for the 2008-9 financial year shows that the numbers of assaults rose by 7.4% while there was a 9% increase in homicides. There was also a 92% rise in violent behaviour in public offences (Victoria Police 2009b). In the divisional data which includes Melbourne's central business district (CBD), the trend towards increasingly violent street crime is apparent in the number of assaults for 2008-9, which rose by 13.2% from 2007-8 and in the number of homicides, up 150% from 2007-8. In addition, across the Melbourne LGA data, there was a 690% increase in public behaviour

offences (Victoria Police 2009c). Evidence about the structural causes of crime can also be found in police crime data which show a strong relationship between youth, socio-economic disadvantage and violent street crime for offences committed in Melbourne's CBD (Millar 2009e). Half the violent crimes in Melbourne's CBD between 2003 and 2008 were committed by people from disadvantaged suburbs in Melbourne's north and west and these suburbs were overrepresented in offences at a rate of 86% above the mean (Millar 2009c).

The public debate about the extent to which crimes are motivated by racism or opportunism was prompted by public comments made by Victoria Police representatives in early 2009 making the claim that crimes against international students were believed to be 'opportunistic' and committed by perpetrators looking for 'soft targets' (Johnston & Ham 2009). This perspective provoked a series of counter comment and actions from other Indian community stakeholders and organisations for lacking in sensitivity and as tantamount to denying that there are racist elements within the community (Johnston and Ham 2009). Combined with incidents of on-going violence and the increasing polarisation of the debate about racism, a number of highly published actions have taken place, initiated by various Indian community associations. These include, an overnight protest by Indian taxi drivers that shut down a major intersection in Melbourne's CBD (Dobbin 2008), an organised protest outside the Sunshine Police Station (Battersby 2008) and a march of thousands of Indian students through the centre of the Melbourne CBD. Two protests were also staged in Sydney in June 2009 as well as a self-organised safety campaign at St Albans train station in Melbourne to protect Indian students (Cooper 2009).

An important dimension of the debate is the extent to which the issues have generated division within the Indian community. Students and their representatives, particularly from FISA have consistently expressed a lack of faith in police action and responses. They have objected to comments made by the Victorian police leadership characterising Indian students as 'passive, vulnerable and soft targets' which they believe have contributed to the further vulnerability of Indian students (Thaindian 2009). FISA has also consistently emphasised that racism is an important motivating factor in attacks on Indian students and in their treatment as a whole in Australia (Herald Sun 2008a; Wade and Das 2009).

In contrast, other Indian community leaders have expressed their disagreement with portrayals of Australia as racist (Ramachandran 2009). Dr Yadh Singh, who heads the Sydney Indian Consulate's committee on Indian student concerns agreed with police understandings of the attacks: "Most of the attacks are what we call 'opportunistic attacks'" and also endorsed the characterization of Indian students as 'easy targets for various reasons' (Indian Express 2009b). Ravi Bhatia, the Indian born CEO of the telecommunications corporation Primus has attributed the violence to a 'small minority' and called on Indian students to allow Australian authorities 'time to address grievances' (Indian Express 2009b).

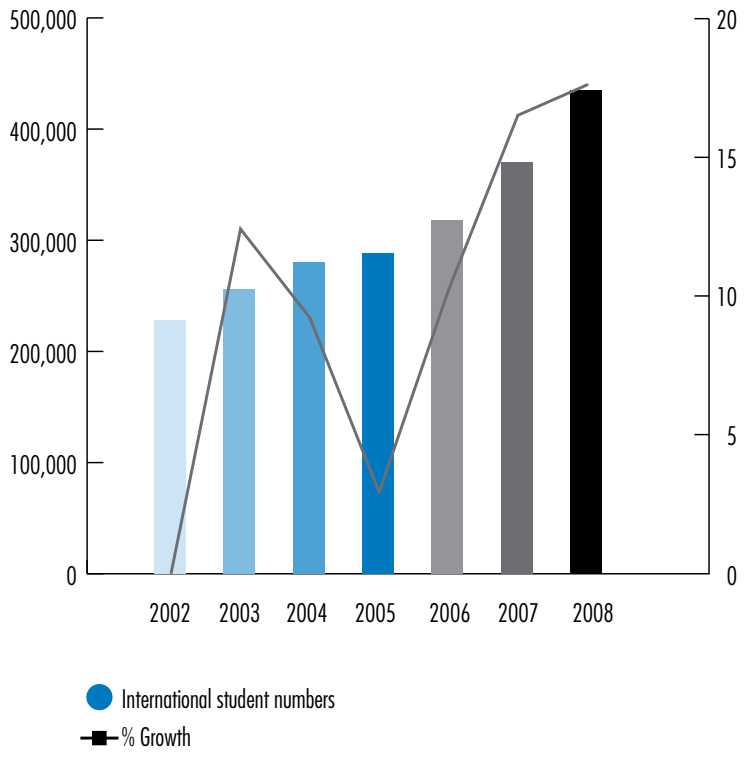

Chart 2.1 Growth in international student numbers in Australia, 2002 – 2008
Source: AEI 2007 and 2009a

There have also been responses from the governments of India and China, with in relation to the issues promoting official visits from both countries and a number of public statements. For example, in May 2009, Indian Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna made the statement that he was 'appalled' by the violence against Indian students.

Further, his intention to visit Australia was to: '… impress upon the Australian authorities that such attacks should not be permitted and that it is their responsibility to ensure the wellbeing and security of our students studying in Australia' (Wade and Das 2009). Similar statements were issued from Chinese government representatives in Australia around the same period, with a request in early June to the Australian government from Consul Liu Jin to 'provide better protection to international students from China and other countries and ensure their legitimate rights in Australia' (Gilmore & Millar 2009).

Combined, the media treatment of the issues has been extensive, generating debate and contention across the broader community and especially within the Indian community in Australia, about the nature and implications of the issues of violence against international students but also about student welfare more broadly. It has prompted a range of policy responses which we discuss in greater detail later in this Section. Before identifying these reactions, however, we next describe the characteristics of the international student population in Australia and metropolitan Melbourne. Here we demonstrate the significance of the international education industry to Australia as a whole and significance of international students as an increasing presence within Melbourne's population.

2.4 International students in Australia and Melbourne

In 2008, there were 435,263 international students living in Australia (AEI 2009d). International student enrolments in Australia account for 18% of all tertiary enrolments. This is the highest proportion amongst any of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations (OECD 2008: 348). In 2006, Australia ranked fifth amongst OECD recipients of international higher education students, after the US, UK, Germany and France (OECD 2009). International education now ranks as Australia's third largest export industry, generating $14.2 billion in export income for Australia in 2007-8 (AEI 2008a).

Policy shifts in Australia's approach to international education commenced in the late 1980s and coincided with the global growth of international education. This has resulted in enrolments of international students in Australia increasing very rapidly in recent years (AEI 2007). In the three years to 2008, the number of international students in Australia rose 36.7% from 317,909 in 2006 to 435,263 in 2008 (Access Economics 2009). As Chart 2.1 shows, this growth has been fluctuating but continuous.

Global trends are for continuing strong demand for international education, from 2,173 million students in 2005 to 3,720 million in 2025 (Banks, Olsen et al. 2007; OECD 2009). Within Australia, demand is also predicted to see continuing growth in the sector, but at a smaller rate than over the past decade, from 163,345 students in 2005 to 290,848 in 2025 (Banks, Olsen and Pearce 2007: 26).

	International student numbers		Percentage distribution of international students by sector				
Nationality		**Average age**	**Higher Education**	**VET**	**ELICOS**	**Schools**	**Other**
China	96,753	22.2					
ndia	75,390						
Republic of Korea	28,296	24.3	19.2%	25.5%	36.2%	15.6%	3.5%
Malaysia	19,620	22.9	75.4%	14.2%	2.5%	3.4%	4.4%
Thailand	16,454	26.7	20.9%	36.5%	38.4%	2.9%	1.2%
Hong Kong	14,697	21.7	49.4%	24.0%	9.6%	7.7%	9.2%
Nepal	13,499	24.0	20.0%	67.2%	12.1%	0.1%	0.5%
Indonesia	13,235	22.8	47.9%	31.2%	13.7%	2.5%	4.7%
Vietnam	12,313	22.0	25.2%	21.1%	37.5%	13.1%	3.1%
Brazil	11,875	25.7	4.1%	34.2%	58.9%	1.7%	1.2%
Other nationalities	133,131	25.1	35.7%	26.4%	21.1%	3.2%	13.7%
Total	**435,263**	**23.8**	**35.1%**	**30.1%**	**22.9%**	**5.7%**	**6.2%**

Figure 2.1: International students in Australia 2008 – top ten countries of origin
Source: Reproduced from AEI (2009a).

Asia is the dominant market for Australian international education services: the top five countries of origin for international students in Australia are currently China, India, Republic of Korea, Malaysia and Hong Kong: nine of the top ten countries of origin are located in Asia (AEI 2009a). The current average age of international students in Australia is 23.8 years (AEI 2009a). There are more male than female students (55.7% to 44.3%), due to the preponderance of male student enrolments from South Asian countries, including 'India (75.5% of students were male), Nepal (71.3%), Sri Lanka (66.7%) and Bangladesh (84.4%) and Pakistan (92.3%)' (AEI 2009a).

International students are enrolled in a range of institutions and education and training providers across Australia, including 39 universities, 68 Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges and 1066 private registered training organisations (RTOs) (DEEWR 2009). Enrolments of international students fall into four main sectors: Higher Education, where university and non-university higher education institutions award degree or diploma qualifications; Vocational Education and Training (VET) where a range of TAFE Institutes and private RTOs offer vocational and industry training through certificate and diploma qualifications within the Australian Quality Training Framework; primary and secondary schools and English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS). The VET and Higher Education sectors combined take the vast majority (72.1%) of international student enrolments across Australia (AEI 2009c) as illustrated in Chart 2.2 below.

The VET and ELICOS sectors have experienced rapid growth in recent years, with VET enrolments increasing by 46% in 2008 and as at June 2009, outstripping Higher Education sector enrolments for the first time (AEI 2009a). This growth has largely been driven by students from Nepal and India with a 139 and 94% increase in enrolments respectively during 2008 (AEI 2009a). ELICOS sector enrolments increased by 23.4% in 2008 to 125,727. Again, enrolments of Indian students featured strongly in this growth, increasing 75.2% from 2007 (AEI 2009f).

2.5 Administration and regulation of international education in Australia

International education in Australia operates within a complex administrative and regulatory framework, comprising both federal and state government regulatory bodies and legislation. The overall regulatory framework is provided by the Commonwealth Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 and regulations adopted in 2001, the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) and the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students, all administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

The National Code of Practice, revised in 2007, requires providers of education services to international students to comply with 15 standards designed to protect the consumer rights and welfare of international students, including providing adequate orientation to enable students to adjust to life in Australia, information on health, emergencies, accommodation and legal services, access to support services and a clear complaints and appeals process (DEST 2007). Providers of education services to international students must be registered on CRICOS, with approvals and auditing managed through the state regulatory bodies. In Victoria's case, the regulatory body is the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).Since 1990, all international students in Australia have paid the full cost of their education, unless they

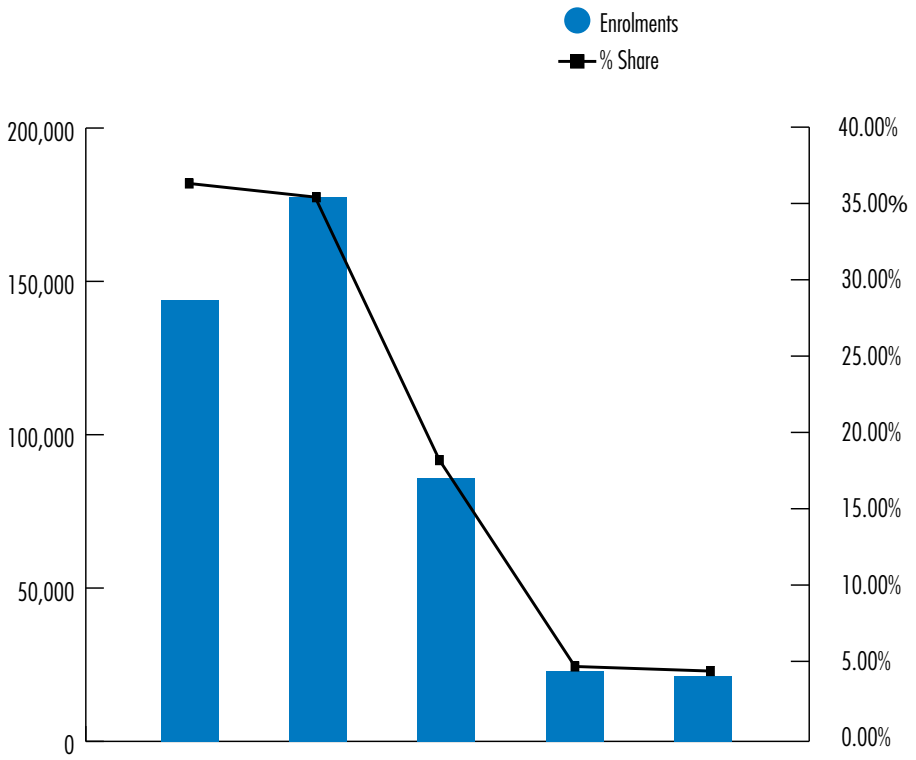

Chart 2.2: International student enrolments by sector, June 2009.
Source: AEI 2009b.

are in receipt of government or institutional scholarships (Australian Government 2008: 90). While there are complexities in estimating the average cost of education, Access Economics (2009) estimates that in the 2007/08 financial year, 370,238 international students spent approximately $6.5 million dollars on education including education fees, which equates to approximately $17,500 per student. This figure is not inclusive of all moneys spent in Australia on living and other costs necessary for sustenance while studying.

Student distribution by state

The total distribution of international students across Australia roughly mirrors that of the total Australian population. However, for some nationalities this is not the case and three nationalities have a distribution across Australia that varies significantly from the typical pattern:

- Almost half of all Indian students are studying in Victoria, which takes fewer students overall than NSW and only 24.8% of Indian students are studying in NSW;
- 68.5% of students from Nepal are studying in NSW;
- 62% of students from Thailand are studying in NSW (AEI 2009e).

For other nationalities, such as China, the distribution is roughly in line with the total Australian population as shown by Figure 2.2 below.

International students in Victoria

The number of international students in Victoria has grown significantly in recent years. There were 144,034 student enrolments in Victoria to June 2009 (AEI 2009e), compared with 74,208 in 2002 (AEI 2002), an increase of 112% over seven years (Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD 2008a: 7). International education is now Victoria's largest export, generating $4.45 billion in revenue in 2007-8 (ABS 2008).

Following the national distribution of international students across education sectors, international student enrolments in Victoria are largely in the higher education and VET sectors. There are 48 education institutes and organisations registered to deliver Higher Education courses to international students in Victoria, including nine Victorian based

Nationality	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Total	%
China	48,031	34,357	11,926	8,537	5,149	1,165	83	2,607	111,855	23.9
	42.9%	30.7%	10.6%	7.6%	4.6%	1.04%	0.07%	2.3%		
India	22,227	42,573	14,191	5,059	4,810	168	89	448	89,564	19.2
	24.8%	47.5%	15.8%	5.6%	5.3%	0.2%	0.09%	0.5%		
Korea, Republic of (South)	12,728	4,731	6,481	1,416	1,372	338	13	447	27,526	5.9
	46.2%	17.1%	23.5%	5.1%	4.9%	1.2%	0.04%	1.6%		
Malaysia	3,297	7,533	2,035	2,189	3,632	665	15	473	19,839	4.2
	3,297	37.9%	10.25%	11.0%	18.3%	3.3%	0.07%	2.4%		
Nepal	12,954	3,605	1,394	384	479	23	55	24	18,918	4.0
	68.5%	19.0%	7.3%	2.0%	2.5%	0.12%	0.3%	0.13%		
Thailand	11,550	3,640	1,737	298	923	165	49	189	18,551	3.7
	62.2%	19.6%	9.3%	1.6%	4.9%	0.9%	0.3%	1.02%		
Viet Nam	5,588	7,354	1,357	1,005	1,090	114	27	373	16,908	3.61
	33.0%	43.5%	8.02%	5.9%	6.4%	0.7%	0.16%	2.2%		
Indonesia	6,276	4,443	626	298	1,448	19	85	190	13,385	2.9
	46.9%	33.1%	4.6%	2.2%	10.8%	0.14%	0.6%	1.4%		
Brazil	5,956	693	3,610	82	1,460	12	6	17	11,836	2.5
	50.3%	5.9%	30.5%	0.7%	12.3%	0.1%	0.05%	0.14%		
Hong Kong	3,804	3,154	1,662	1,124	1,110	108	7	245	11,214	2.4
	33.9%	28.1%	14.8%	10.0%	9.9%	0.96%	0.06%	2.2%		
Other nationalities	45,030	31,951	27,644	4,838	14,709	1,107	231	2,301	127,811	27.3
	25.4%	25.0%	21.6%	3.8%	11.5%	0.9%	0.2%	1.8%		
Total	**177,441**	**144,034**	**72,663**	**25,230**	**36,182**	**3,883**	**660**	**7,314**	**467,407**	**100**

Figure 2.2: Top 10 nationalities of student enrolments by State/Territory, year-to-date June 2009 – percentage distribution across Australian states and territories
Adapted from AEI 2009e.

universities, five TAFE institutes, 30 private provider organisations and 4 interstate universities (VRQA 2008). There are currently 1,307 RTOs operating in Victoria (NTIS 2009). At the end of June 2008, 195 of these RTOs were delivering courses to international students, comprising 14 TAFE institutes and 181 private provider organisations (VRQA, 2008).

Within Victoria, India is the most common country of origin of international students, accounting for 42,573 enrolments in the year to date, while 34,357 enrolments are of students from China (AEI 2009e). Sixty-six per cent of Indian students are currently enrolled in VET sector courses with the vast majority of these enrolments in private colleges (AEI 2009e).

DEEWR data on international students at 28 Victorian Higher Education providers shows a split of 52.5 percent male and 47.5 percent female students (DEEWR 2009) and most of the top 10 countries of origin for international students in Victoria showed fairly even distribution of male and female students in national AEI data (AEI 2009a). However Victoria's high numbers of Indian students (75.5 percent male) and the fact that Nepal (71.3 percent male) and Sri Lanka (66.7 percent male) are also amongst Victoria's top 10 countries of origin mean that the numbers of male students are approximately 60 percent to 40 percent (AEI 2009a).

Statistical data on the locality of residence for international students in Victoria is lacking. Census data covers only people who have resided in Australia for more than 12 months at time of collection and does not provide information on international student status (ABS 2009). While information on suburb of residence is kept by educational institutions, this is not publicly accessible. From the geographic distribution of post-secondary education providers in Victoria, it can be assumed that most international students in Victoria reside within the Melbourne metropolitan area. Thirty-two per cent of providers are located within Melbourne's CBD; a further 59% are within metropolitan Melbourne; 5% are located in towns in regional Victoria and 4% are located in far regional Victoria (DIIRD 2008: 25).

The Victorian Government Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce estimated that approximately four to five thousand international students reside in regional Victoria, including students studying at Monash University's Gippsland campus, Latrobe University's campuses in Albury-Wodonga and Bendigo, at the University of Ballarat, at Deakin University and Gordon Institute of TAFE in Geelong and Warrnambool (DIIRD 2008). In addition, a number of private RTOs are located in regional Victoria.

It can be estimated that approximately 137,000 of Victoria's 144,034 international students are living in the metropolitan Melbourne area, concentrated in suburbs around universities and TAFE colleges (Archer 2009). The City of Melbourne is the only local Council which publishes estimates of its resident and non-resident populations of international students. There are 11,600 international post-secondary students living in Melbourne's CBD, Southbank, Carlton and Parkville, mainly from Malaysia, China, Indonesia, Singapore and Hong Kong and with an average age of between 20 and 24 years (Melbourne City Research 2008). Other LGAs with large numbers of international students include:

- City of Casey in Melbourne's south-east, home to Chisholm College of TAFE's Berwick and Cranbourne campuses;
- Brimbank City Council in Melbourne's outer north-west, home to Victoria University campuses in Sunshine and St Albans;
- Darebin City Council in Melbourne's northern suburbs, home to Latrobe university's Bundoora campus and Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE;
- City of Greater Dandenong in Melbourne's south eastern suburbs;
- Moreland and Hume City Councils in Melbourne's north-western suburbs;
- Monash City Council, home to Monash university and Chadstone campus Holmesglen TAFE;
- City of Whittlesea, where RMIT Bundoora campus is located;
- Whitehorse City Council, home to Box Hill College of TAFE and Deakin University;
- Wyndham City Council in Melbourne's outer western suburbs.

Overall, the international student population in Melbourne represents a significant growing population group within the Metropolitan area. The presence of Indian students, enrolled with RTOs is a particular phenomenon for Melbourne and is an important backdrop for understanding issues of community safety. This growth also needs to be understood in the context of an education and training sector that has been active in promoting the entrance of international students as one key plank within macroeconomic policy designed to better position Australia globally. This is also reflected in a changing migration policy context with Australia only in recent decades shifted from a primarily 'white Australia' to one that has greater alignment with the Asia Pacific region of which Australia is part. These macro policy shifts are not without their tensions which are discussed in the following section.

2.6 Education and training reform and immigration policy

The Australian education and training sector has a long history of being inclusive of international students and as Megaritty (2007: 39) highlights, it was the post-WW2 period that ushered in the entrance of increasing numbers of international students, primarily from Asia. By the late 1960s, there were approximately 10,000 private overseas students enrolled in education institutions who studied under very similar conditions to domestic students. International students paid tuition fees that covered 10% of the total cost of a higher education degree with the balance being paid by the State. In government policy terms, this subsidisation was largely regarded as an investment in diplomatic relations with the Asia Pacific region (Megaritty 2007: 40). These conditions improved for international students under the Whitlam government in the 1970s when higher education became free for international students as it did for domestic students. Under the Fraser government from 1975 to 1983, alongside the agenda to curtail public spending on higher education, the major policy issue in relation to international students was to address concerns about such students using

higher education as a means of 'backdoor migration'. Several measures were introduced to curtail this. One very effective measure introduced in 1979 was to compel private overseas students to return home for two years before being able to apply for immigration to Australia. The second was the introduction of the Overseas Student Charge (OSC), which was implemented in 1980 and required students to pay an up-front fee before being issued with a student visa.

Until the mid-1980s, international student participation was largely viewed, in Commonwealth policy terms, through the lens of migration and international relations policy. This was in the context of an understanding that the provision of higher education was a responsibility of the state as an investment in the public good (Gare 2006). Throughout the 1980s, however, in the line with the rising global dominance of neo-liberal economics, the provision of post-compulsory education shifted radically and rapidly towards being considered a private responsibility. One consequence was the introduction of a 'user-pays' system of delivery (Thornton 2005). Through the Dawkins education reforms, implemented in 1988 under the Hawke/Keating government, the establishment of a higher education industry governed by the rules of the free market began.

The Dawkins reforms signified a fundamental shift in the role of higher education and were a key plank in the Hawke/Keating government's macro economic reform agenda (Dawkins 1987). The aim was to ensure that the national skills base, or the stock of human capital, was geared to supply Australian industry with the skills necessary to compete in a globalised knowledge economy (Marginson & Considine 2000). A key feature was the doubling of the number of universities from 19 to 38 (Marginson & Considine 2000). Students were effectively redefined as 'consumers' and student fees were introduced as the first step in reducing university reliance on government funding (Thornton 2007). Similarly, academics were in turn, redefined as 'producers'. In the higher education sector, this shift forced academics away from working within a collegiate framework concerned with the broader goal of generating and transferring knowledge, to being competitors for research funds and student enrolments. This has contributed to a decline in academic employment conditions in areas of workloads, work intensity, and complexity. Academics are progressively required to 'do more with less' in this competitive environment (Anderson, Johnson et al. 2002; Coates, Goedegebuure et al. 2008). The internationalisation of research, curriculum and student enrolments has been one of the elements that have contributed to workloads, which is an important consideration in the context in which international students participate in education in Australia.

Essentially, universities were redefined from being concerned with the provision of education as a public good into bodies required to contribute to economic growth and supply qualified labour to industry within a knowledge economy (Gare 2006). The reforms involved expansion, restructure, increased accountability to government and decreased dependence on government funding as the main source of funding (Marginson & Considine 2000). While successive governments have implemented their own reform plans, it was the neo-liberal directions set in train in 1988 that have continued to shape the ways in which higher education is conceived, governed and delivered. Opening up higher education to fee paying international students has been a central strategy in reducing higher education institution dependence on government funding. Universities now fiercely compete for their market share of international student enrolments.

As part of this same macro-economic reform agenda, there was a similar expansion across the vocational education and training (VET) sector. This sector provides post-compulsory education and training services. TAFE and other government providers make up the largest group of providers in this sector (78.8%) followed by community education providers (9.9%) and other RTOs (10.9%) (Access Economics 2009: 23). As Anderson (2005) describes, key features of VET policy reform since the late 1980s have been to serve the needs and interests of industry via the creation of a national, industry-based training system which is aligned to national and industry-determined competency standards. Through the 1990s, under the Howard coalition government, the pace of this neoliberal reform was accelerated through the development of, 'a more open and competitive training market which is client driven and responsive to the needs of business and industry.' (Kemp 1997) This led to both expansion of the sector and decline in government regulation. Similar to in higher education, VET providers have been encouraged to generate more revenue from industry and individual fee-paying clients, including international students. As discussed earlier, the growth in enrolments from this group has been exponential in recent years, outpacing the growth in higher education enrolments.

The combination of expansion of the post-compulsory education and training sector, the reduction of proportionate government funding in relation to the size of the sector and 'corporatisation' of institutional governance, has generated some serious tensions on a range of dimensions. Central to considerations of international student safety, is that the pressures to attract fee-paying international students have been extraneous to the central policy reform objectives. As Anderson (2005) explores, the focus of VET reform was on the development of a national training market to serve the needs of domestic business and industry. This generates tensions by overlooking the growing economic significance of global markets and the extent to which the lines between the domestic and global market are becoming blurred. On a similar theme, Forbes-Mewtt et al. (2007) discuss the extent to which the international student body in universities is reliant on a strong and cohesive local system of education. They point to a range of evidence that indicates a pattern of exclusion of international students from planning and services. One issue explored is the extent that many international students face a risk of financial hardship and of not recouping the financial outlay required to live and study in a foreign land – a risk, they claim, that has been ignored by government. In a related study, Marginson and Eijkman (2007) analyse the financial and organisational impacts of international student fees on three Australian universities. In the context of declining government contributions, international student fees are employed in ways that are essential to institutional survival, rather than for educational innovation or an expansion in support services for international students (Marginson and Eijkman 2007: 6). One important implication is that international student fees effectively subsidise domestic student places and fund infrastructure development.

This inconsistency between international student enrolments, and policy directions designed for a national, rather than international education and training system, underpins the perception of international students as 'cash cows' (Rout 2008). The deregulation and expansion of the education and training system has also occurred in parallel with changes to immigration policy that have facilitated and managed the entrance of fee-paying international students into Australian education institutions.

The growth of international student arrivals in Australia is a form of mass migration which is by no means a recent phenomenon. Since the arrival of the first fleet in 1788, Australia has been a land of immigrants. Through immigration (both forced, as expatriated convicts, and free) the British colonised a land which had been held for millennia by ancient indigenous tribes. The key difference is, however, that until the early 1950s, this immigration was predominantly White and European, with Britain as the major source country. The Irish and Scots made up a significant number of British settler arrivals. Non-British sources also featured in this immigration history, particularly during the gold rushes in the 1850s, when significant numbers of Chinese and continental Europeans came to try their fortunes. Other groups, such as Afghans, Pacific Islanders, Jews, Italians, Syrians and Lebanese, also came in small numbers over the mid to late 19th century and made their mark on Australian society. However, the introduction of anti-Chinese legislation during the last decade of the nineteenth century and subsequent exclusion of Asiatics from naturalisation, ensured that entry and full participation were effectively barred to non-Europeans (Mansouri & Bagdas 2002). The White Australia policy, which effectively prevented the entry of non-White immigrants, became crystallised in legislation soon after federation in 1901, and was not disbanded until the early 1970s. As such, the history of immigration to Australia has been largely based on the dominance of British and to a lesser extent, white European migration. It has also been a very carefully controlled and centrally administered policy, helped by Australia's geographic isolation as an island continent in the South.

This approach began to change quite radically after the Second World War, with the commencement of a mass immigration program that for the first time, admitted large numbers of non-British migrants (displaced Eastern European refugees). The 'populate or perish' policy led to a major expansion in immigration intakes which, despite peaks and troughs associated with economic cycles, have continued to this day. A wide range of source countries were tapped, initially those in Southern Europe (1950s-70s), then with the abandonment of White Australia, Indochina (early 1970s to 1990s), Latin America, the Middle East, Asia (South Asia, Eastern and Southern Asia, North Asia) and finally, Africa. New Zealand continues to be another major source country.

From a focus on numbers and family migration, immigration policy shifted in the late 1980s to a focus on skills. The skilled component of the immigration program continued to grow in size and importance as the Australian economy diversified into services and the policy emphasis shifted to creating a world competitive knowledge-based economy. Australia joined the Western immigrant-receiving nations (such as Canada, UK and the USA) in vying for the most skilled and employable immigrants, to fill skill gaps and promote innovation and technological development. This competition continues in the quest to attract the 'best and brightest' international students (Ruby 2009).

A complex points-based selection test was used in Australia (similar to that in Canada) to select immigrants who were young, well educated and spoke fluent English, with further preference given to immigrants meeting the skills set out in the Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL). In 1999, the immigration policy was further altered to enable substantial onshore as well as offshore migration flows (Hawthorne 2005). This was introduced by allowing onshore international students to apply for permanent residency after the completion of their courses. By 2005, Hawthorne notes that former international students with an Australian degree made up more than half of all economic migrants, particularly those from China and India (Hawthorn 2005: 1). At the same time, a growing number of skilled temporary migrant workers were entering the country through sponsorships by employers.

It is in this context that we must view the relatively recent phenomenon of large-scale student immigration from India and other parts of South Asia, and from the Asian region generally. These immigrants join a highly diverse, multicultural society of 21 million, 44% of whom were born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas. However, it is a country that has seen a relative upsurge in cultural diversity in only 60 years, is dominated by British laws and institutions, and is still grappling with the after effects of a White Australia policy and the need to reconcile with its indigenous people. While the official policy of multiculturalism has been successful in supporting diverse cultures and languages, it has not transformed the major character or institutions of the country (Jayasuriya 2003). This is an important consideration in issues of community safety for international students.

At the same time, there has been continuous change in the visa conditions to manage the entrance of international students. As discussed earlier, there has been a clear shift from post WW2 where international students were freely allowed entrance as part of a broader international relations gesture, to the early 1980s where there were attempts to control entrance of international students as a 'back-door' to permanent settlement (Megarrity 2007). More recently, student visas have been more closely aligned with economic imperatives generated by national skill shortages as well as the 'user-pays' system of education and training. In essence, international students have somewhat represented a strategy of 'killing two birds with one stone'. International students pay as individuals for their education and their chance of gaining permanent residency in Australia is enhanced if they earn qualifications in areas of identified skill shortage. The following section describes student visa conditions in place during 2009.

Student Visas

Student visas are issued by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). International students must be accepted into an approved course of study in Australia before applying for a Student Visa from their country of origin. Student Visas are issued across seven Visa Subclasses: Independent English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS); Schools; Vocational Education and Training; Higher Education; Postgraduate Research; Non-award and AusAID or Defence (DIAC 2009a).

Applicants for student visas must provide a range of evidence to DIAC, including English language abilities, possession of sufficient funds to cover costs of living in Australia (currently estimated at $12,000 per annum), travel and tuition fees and capacity to support any accompanying family members (DIAC 2009d). The evidence required differs according to 'assessment levels' assigned to nations across each education sector on the basis of DIAC's assessment of 'immigration risk', determined from indicators including year by year compliance with visa conditions of previous cohorts from each nation and visa subclass (DIAC 2009a). Assessment Levels (AL) range from AL 1, representing 'lowest immigration risk' to AL 5, representing the highest (DIAC 2009a). Students from AL 2 countries must show proof of funds to cover 12 months in Australia; AL 3 countries must show funds to cover 24 months and AL 4 countries must show funds to cover 36 months (DIAC 2009c). Currently, the vast majority of OECD nations are ranked as AL 1 across all Student Visa subclasses (DIAC 2009d). For the top ten countries of origin amongst Student Visa holders in Australia, only Malaysia and Hong Kong are ranked as AL 1 across all visa subclasses, while Korea, Thailand and Brazil have a mix of AL 1 and 2 rankings. Indonesia is ranked 2 across all visa subclasses. Vietnam and Nepal have a similar mix of AL 3 and 4 rankings, with Nepal ranked as AL 4 in the VET subclass. The two most common countries of origin for Student Visa holders, China and India, have a mix of AL 3 and 4 rankings (DIAC 2009d).

In 2001, immigration regulations changed to allow former student visa holders to remain in Australia while applying for permanent residency, as long as they did so within six months of course completion. Since that time, there has been strong growth in numbers of international students applying for permanent residency within the skilled migration intake (Birrell, Hawthorne et al. 2006). Analysis shows that much of the rapid recent growth in VET sector international student enrolments is driven by Indian students who enrol in Australian courses with the aim of applying for permanent residency through gaining qualifications in trades listed on DIAC's Migrant Occupations in Demand List (Baas 2006; Birrell and Perry 2009)

In 2007-8, 21,421 international students gained permanent residency of Australia, a slight decrease from the preceding year, but an overall increase of almost 20% from 2005-6 (Access Economics 2009: 18). In 2007-8, there were 370,238 international students in Australia (AEI 2009a). The 21,421 students who were granted permanent residency in 2007-8 represent 5.8% of that cohort. These increases are illustrated in Chart 2.3 below, however, it should be noted that there is currently a decline due to a tightening in immigration policies since December 2008. The first aspect of measures was the introduction of the 'critical skills list' (CSL) which now has priority over the 'migrant occupations in demand list' which provided bonus migration points for specific skills. The new list is focused largely on degree qualifications in the health sciences and engineering and a few specialised trades (Trounson 2009). Over the same period, there has been a 'crack down' on the application of Indian student visas due to widespread reports of fraud. Visa approvals have consequently plummeted to 6,804 in the 2009 September quarter compared to compared with 17,237 in the previous quarter (Trounson 2009). Such decline in student numbers supports current fears of a decline in international student enrolments as an outcome of both changing policy and bad publicity in Australia.

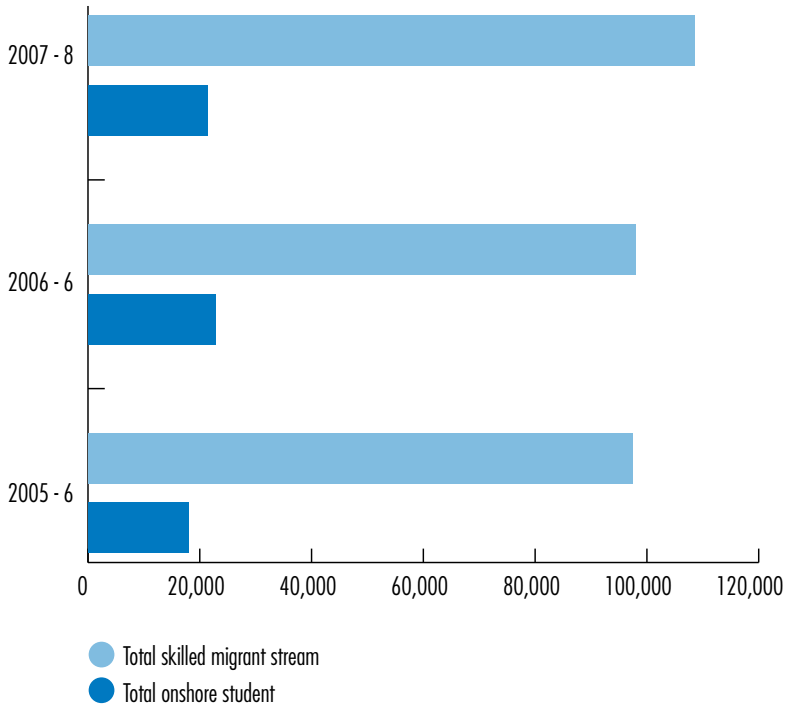

Chart 2.3: Onshore student visa holders to skilled migrant pathways, 2005 – 2008
Source: Access Economics 2009

Overall, student visa conditions are linked closely to economic policy and the entrance of international students has been one major boon to domestic economic development. International students enter Australia on the condition of self-sufficiency and their arrival is understood as generating significant economic benefits (Ruby 2009). Effectively, if they meet the conditions of entrance, can be self-sufficient while completing a course of study, and can be of further service to the growth of Australia's knowledge economy, they can probably stay. Given the economic and social significance of the arrival of international students in Australia, the issues surrounding international student immigration have prompted a range of responses from government and community.

2.7 Responses to the issues by government and community

There have been a range of initiatives designed to promote the safety of international students, most announced since the safety issues gained a high public profile this year, while some were already in motion. This section provides an overview of the actions taken by both government and non-government organisations and groups, as well the responses to this action or perceived inaction.

Victorian government responses

The Victorian government has responded in a variety of ways to the concerns about increasing violence against international students expressed by ethnic communities and international students' representative groups, over a period of about two years. Responses to the problem of crime against international students have occurred alongside strengthening the regulation of private RTOs and attempts to identify those failing to comply with standards. The VRQA is currently conducting an audit of 41 providers (Healy & Trounson 2009).

In September 2008, the Victorian Government established an Overseas Student Experience Taskforce, briefed to investigate experiences of adult international students in the areas of accommodation, safety and welfare, social inclusion and access to information (DIIRD 2008). The Taskforce received 75 submissions from a variety of education providers, peak bodies, local governments, government departments, the regulatory body, Australian Council of Private Employment and Training (ACPET), and individuals (DIIRD 2008: 23). The Report, tabled in Parliament in December 2008, will advise the development of a revised international education strategy for the post-secondary sectors in Victoria. Although it concluded that the 'experience of overseas students in Victoria is a positive one', the Taskforce's report recognised that media coverage and public concern about international student safety could have a deterrent effect on prospective students (DIIRD 2008: 9).

The Taskforce attributed 'many' issues around international student safety to Victoria's 'very strong population growth' and recent high intakes of international students, especially in the VET sector, and noted that concerns about international student safety are common to other states in Australia (DIIRD 2008: 9). The Report's recommendations in the area of safety included (DIIRD 2008: 13 – 15):

- A 'mandatory orientation process' in which students would view a safety DVD, similar to that produced during a Victoria Police partnership project on international student safety with Victoria University;
- The constant delivery and reinforcement of safety information, including personal safety and awareness of localities, use of public transport, emergency services, water and recreational safety in bush and beach areas, 'free access' to complaints and emergency authorities, and the rights of international students;
- Promotion of stronger relationships between international students and authorities, including Victoria Police, Lifesaving Victoria, education providers, DIAC and regulatory bodies, to encourage students to access assistance or advice when necessary.
- Changes to the National Code of Practice to increase orientation to two weeks, to ensure time for experience-based inductions to safety and familiarisation with living conditions.

The Taskforce also addressed ways to improve social inclusion outcomes for international students, including the option of requiring education providers to allocate a percentage of tuition fees to social inclusion activities and having 'active promotion of social inclusion' as a registration requirement on CRICOS (DIIRD 2008: 13 – 15).

In 2009, as the issue gained prominence within Australia and in India, the Premier's Department has implemented a range of other activities. On 12th July, Brumby led a Harmony Walk in the city, reaffirming Victoria's commitment to multiculturalism and in September visited India with Victorian Minister for Skills and Training, Jacinta Allan. Other program and legislative responses were announced during this visit and include:

- a 24-hour care service for international students providing advice and referrals on accommodation and legal issues and counselling;
- $47 million police for 120 additional police members to undertake patrol work;
- additional police powers to conduct weapon searches and issue on-the-spot fines for disorderly conduct;
- $30 million for 50 additional transit police on Victoria's public transport services; (AAP 2009).

In addition, Victorian Attorney General Rob Hulls has introduced the Sentencing Amendment Bill, which will require judges to consider motivation by prejudice or hatred for particular social or ethnic groups when sentencing offenders (Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary Documents 2009). The Bill aims to:

> *. . .promote protection of groups of people with common characteristics such as . . . religious affiliation, racial or cultural origin, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, age, impairment (within the meaning of the Equal Opportunity Act 1995) or homelessness (Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary Documents 2009).*

Victoria Police responses

In June 2009, Chief Commissioner Simon Overland stated that Victoria Police had been concerned for more than 18 months about a rising trend in robberies and assaults against Indian students (Victoria Police 2009a). In line with this acknowledgement, there has been a range of strategies implemented by Victoria Police since 2008 in response to attacks on international students. These have ranged from community policing initiatives, including resourcing a Police Reference Group, running student education campaigns in partnership with educational institutes and training volunteers for a dedicated hotline for Indian victims of crime, through to operational initiatives such as increased patrols and visibility campaigns (Victoria Police 2009a). Importantly, the Police Indian Western Region Reference Group was established early in 2009 following an organised protest at Sunshine Police Station about perceived police inaction and tardiness in responding to attacks on Indians (Millar 2009c). The reference group includes local government, Indian student associations, education providers from the region, Indian media representatives, the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) and the group has met regularly. Arising from the Group's recommendations, an information and advice hotline was launched in May 2009, with training provided by Victoria Police members (Victoria Police 2009d). This group has since been suspended and replaced by the International Reference Group to commence in early 2010.

The police have also implemented a range of operational responses. In May, Victoria Police announced that the doubling of the Embona Robbery taskforce and targeted patrols in the western suburbs had resulted in the arrests of 27 offenders on robbery related offences (Victoria Police 2009d). Further, a high visibility policing campaign targeting railway stations in Melbourne's northern, western and south-eastern suburbs where attacks had been frequent (Rennie 2009; Victoria Police 2009b) was implemented. Police foot patrols were undertaken at Clayton, Dandenong, St Albans, Sunshine and Thomastown railway stations, assisted by mounted police, police helicopters, dog squads and increased surveillance (Rennie 2009). These were followed a fortnight later by another round of 'saturation' patrols of Footscray, St Albans and Sunshine stations in Melbourne's western suburbs which resulted in 16 arrests (Victoria Police 2009c). Victoria Police has also announced plans to expand its numbers of police members acting as Multicultural Liaison Officers, to supplement the existing 100 who include five Hindi speakers (Indian Express 2009c).

Initiatives by other Victorian organisations

After the deaths of a number of international students in fires, including three Indian students who died in January 2008 while sharing the one room in Footscray (Medew, Perkins et al. 2008), the Australian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) conducted a national study to assess fire safety understanding amongst international students. The results of the survey of 1,619 international and domestic students across Australia found that while 83% of international students had smoke alarms fitted in their residences, only 44% knew how to test them. Fifty per cent of international student respondents did not know how to use fire safety equipment such as blankets, extinguishers etc and 18% were unaware of Australia's 000 emergency number (AFAC 2009). Outcomes of the investigation included the creation of the FireAway Program, a fire safety education program designed for international students. The report's other recommendations included enhanced communication between building inspecting authorities; granting safety enforcement powers to fire brigade staff; clarifying state government legislation; enforcing stricter penalties on non-complying property owners and implementing a high-risk accommodation identification program (AFAC 2009).

An International Student Legal Advice Clinic was established at the Western Suburbs Legal Service, to offer legal advice and assistance to international students across Melbourne. The Clinic is staffed by volunteers who speak Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Tamil (Indus Age 2009).

Australian Parliament

On 17th June, a Senate Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students was announced, initially called for by the Australian Greens (Australian Greens 2009; Das & Collins 2009). The Inquiry, due to report in November 2009, has received 119 submissions. Focusing on the provision of information and advice and delivery of services and support to international students, the Inquiry will investigate the 'roles and responsibilities' of education service providers, education and migration agents, and state and federal governments, including 'relevant departments and embassies'. It will recommend benchmarks and quality controls for international education services in Australia. The Inquiry will particularly focus on student safety, accommodation, social inclusion, 'student visa requirements, adequate international student supports and advocacy, employment rights and protections from exploitation, and appropriate pathways to permanency' (Parliament of Australia 2009).

Australian government responses

Federal government responses to the issue of international student safety have coincided with broader changes to the regulation of Australia's VET and higher education systems, including their international education components. Some of these changes arose after the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education, headed by Professor Denise Bradley. These include the proposed establishment in 2010 of a new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) as the primary registration and quality assurance body for higher education in Australia and the $3.5 billion federal Study in Australia 2010 strategy. The latter was launched by the Deputy Prime Minister in March to promote international education in Australia (Gillard 2009d). The government's responses to violence against international students have also coincided with State and Federal government initiatives to tackle allegations of fraud and inadequate regulation within Australia's international education industry.

Federal government responses have involved the DEEWR, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), DIAC and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as key actors. Responses include consultation with international student representatives and fast-tracking a planned review of the ESOS Act. In addition to these strategies, there have been visits by Australian government officials and politicians to India, including a delegation in early July (COAG 2009) and a visit by Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard to India in early September 2009, where the attacks and Australian government response were discussed with the Indian government (Gillard 2009).

International Students Taskforce and national International Student Strategy

The Taskforce, comprised of officials from DFAT, DEEWR and DIAC, was established by Prime Minister Rudd in early June to oversee Australia's responses to attacks on Indian students (Banham & Gilmore 2009). The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) will receive reports from the Taskforce and the International Students Roundtable, which will inform the development of a national International Student Strategy by June 2010 (COAG 2009).

This Strategy, which will sit alongside the ESOS legislative framework, aims to 'promote a broader vision of international education', emphasising its benefits to Australia and students' countries of origin (COAG 2009). The Strategy will work on increasing the level of engagement between international students and the broader Australian community; improve the provision of information about Australia and cultural experiences available to international students; and clarify the coordination of international education and migration policies (COAG 2009). In a recent media release, the Deputy Prime Minister added that the Strategy will 'improve the safety of students through State and Territory police services' and 'ensure the quality of education providers' (Gillard 2009a).

ESOS Act Review

In July, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Julia Gillard brought forward a planned review of the Education Services for Overseas Students Act. The review will investigate how to best support and protect the interests of international students in choosing and purchasing education services in Australia, to ensure quality of education and the effective regulation and sustainability of Australia's international education industry (Australian Government 2009).

International Students Roundtable

On May 28th 2009, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Julia Gillard announced that she would convene a roundtable with invited international student representatives to discuss issues including accommodation, safety and welfare (Smith 2009). Thirty-one student participants, reflecting the diversity of nationalities amongst international students in Australia, met in mid September to express their ideas and experiences and three students were selected to present a communiqué of Roundtable concerns. This communiqué included feedback on the adequacy of pre-arrival information, course quality, transport concessions and accommodation. It went to the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) meeting in Brisbane on September 28th (Tomazin & Harrison 2009). An 'International Student Hotline' was also established by DEEWR earlier this year, although the effectiveness of this initiative on student safety has been subject to critique due to its terms of establishment and limited scope (AEI 2009g).

Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) initiatives

DIAC, through its Diverse Australia Program (DAP) has in recent years funded two different projects at the University of Newcastle which sought to address racism against international students (DIAC 2009e). In response to events this year, DIAC has been involved in two major social inclusion programs. In June, Darebin City Council received a $50,000 grant from DAP for its Fair Go for Overseas Students project, which amongst other aims, focuses on inclusion within the Darebin community (Darebin City Council 2009). DIAC is currently developing a national partnership project with a major tertiary education provider aimed at encouraging the engagement of international students with the broader community (DIAC 2009e).

Universities Australia (UA) response

Universities Australia, the representative body for 38 Australian universities, announced a 10 point Action Plan for International Student Safety and a review of its earlier code and guidelines for international student education on 9th June. The Action Plan emphasises safety as a primary and fundamental requirement for students ((Universities Australia 2009b). Recommendations in the Action Plan include:

- increased police and security presence 'in locations where international students study, work, travel and live' and complaints bodies to manage 'concerns over inaction';
- the need for improved information and reporting processes around student safety in countries of origin and Australia;
- the immediate introduction of concessionary rate travel for international students and improvement of safety and conditions on public transport;
- the suggestion of a financial levy similar to the Education Investment Fund to fund student infrastructure, especially adequate and affordable accommodation;
- enhanced 'integration' between domestic and international students on campuses;
- improved on-campus student support services via the passage of the Student Services and Amenities Bill (Commonwealth) then before Parliament; and
- collaborative programs between Australian and overseas governments and agencies to 'promote a greater understanding of international cultures and languages in Australia' (UA 2009b)

Later comments by Professor Daryl Le Grew, leading the UA response on international student safety, stressed the need for the Australian government to reinvest in the international education sector. He also recommended relaxation of the 20 hour per week restriction on student work (Healy & Trounson 2009).

National Union of Students (NUS) response

In its report, International Students' Security and Safety Needs in Australia, the NUS makes 12 recommendations for action by state and federal government departments (Smith 2009). The recommendations include:

- Professional development for police departments in each State and Territory, including cultural awareness and education about particular issues facing international students, i.e. visa conditions;
- Improved public transport safety, including staffing stations;
- Compulsory safety orientation for international students;
- Funding for student safety centres, providing information, advocacy and social support;
- Increased funding for employment rights services;
- Relaxation of Student Visa conditions on working rights;
- Provision of affordable accommodation by education providers;
- Increased funding for accommodation and housing services;
- A public awareness campaign highlighting the broader social and cultural contributions of international students to Australia;
- Introduction of transport concessions for international students, to match those available to domestic students.
- Change to the ESOS Act to incorporate the NUS recommendations.
- Comprehensive consultation with international students in all sectors, following the International Students Roundtable.

The report pointedly highlights that the first ten recommendations have all been made by previous government inquiries into the international education sector and imposes a deadline for action of 30th September (Smith 2009).

Local government initiatives

In Victoria, two local Councils, both with large numbers of international students residing or studying within their LGA boundaries, have invested significant resources in developing programs specific to the safety and security needs of international students. After a forum on international student safety raised a range of concerns in November 2008, Darebin City Council has developed a series of initiatives as part of its Overseas Student Strategy to address safety and social inclusion. The Fair Go for Overseas Students Project has surveyed international students and conducted focus groups to determine needs. The Council has set up an Overseas Student Advisory Committee to consult with Council officers and Councillors about the needs of international students. In addition, the Council has sought expressions of interest from Darebin residents to provide home stay accommodation for international students through a newly established Boarders without Borders program (Darebin City Council 2009).

The City of Melbourne (COM) has conducted a bi-annual survey, including questions on safety and wellbeing, of international students living and studying within its LGA since 2006 (COM 2008). This year it has also established a 'lounge' space for international students, located in Bourke Street in the CBD. This facility opens three nights a week, providing a recreational space, access to advice, information and support services and cost price meals (COM 2009b). The International Student Welcome Booth was staffed at Melbourne Airport during midyear intake weeks through the Office of Knowledge Capital program, established to promote Melbourne as a preferred education destination (COM 2009b). The International Student City Ambassador Program is training international students to participate as volunteer guides to the city (COM 2009b).

2.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this section is to provide the context for this study. First, the impetus for the study is the marked increase in the incidence of violence against international students predominantly affecting Indian students. These cases have sparked considerable media attention, both in Australia and internationally, resulting in wide debate over the cause of violence and its implications. Central to the debate is the extent to which the violence is motivated by racism as opposed to opportunism. There is evidence for both, however, and there are considerable gaps in information by which to more accurately analyse these trends.

The implications of the violence have ramifications beyond the individuals affected, especially given the growing significance of the international student population. This is an Australia-wide phenomenon, although Melbourne is an important destination particularly for Indian students. The growth in international student numbers is a key economic development strategy. It is one that has been central to the design of post-compulsory education and training reform implemented in recent decades. The recruitment of students from the Asia-Pacific region, however, has particular implications given Australia's immigration policy history which has been largely dominated by white European settlement. The large-scale immigration of students from across Asia, but India and China in particular, is a significant departure from Australia's prior immigration patterns.

International student visa conditions require a range of compliance conditions. In particular, international students must demonstrate the capacity to support themselves financially and pay full fees for their education program. At the same time, there are limitations on the capacity to work. For many, this is a pathway to permanent residence in Australia if they can match the skills requirements established at a Commonwealth level.

The benefits of international students to the economy are multiple through the generation of an international education industry as well as supporting the stock of human capital necessary for the development of the Australian knowledge economy. The controversy sparked by violence against international students has serious social, economic and political ramifications. The attractiveness of Australia as a destination for study is cast into doubt. This has potential impacts on Australia's share of international enrolments – an impact that could be highly costly.

Community safety for international students is a theme that, to date is under-researched. One aim of this research is to contribute to addressing this gap. Before doing so, we refer to the existing literature in the area and clarify some central terms and concepts that shape our understanding of what community safety means and how concepts of race and racism are constructed. This is the focus of the following section.

SECTION 3: LITERATURE

3.1 Introduction

This project draws on a several bodies of related literature that inform our understanding of the issues relating to violence against international students. We are first informed by a broad understanding of community safety, as it relates to concepts of wellbeing and the rights of all individuals to carry out their lives free from fear of violence, attack or harassment. Equally, we are informed by theories of race, ethnicity and racism, which assist in explaining how and why inequalities on the basis of race arise and the implications of these for social inclusion and wellbeing. An understanding of this body of literature is essential to a deeper analysis of community safety entitlements and the experiences of international students. This is especially so given the significant proportion of international students within the Victorian community and their importance for the economy. In this light, we review the literature on the experiences of international students for what it says about the relationship between community safety and student choices, experiences and outcomes. As highlighted, while the economics of international students has received extensive attention, research about the actual experience of community safety remains relatively unexplored. The following section starts with an exploration of the literature that informs concepts of community safety.

3.2 Community safety

This section starts by clarifying the use of the term community safety and the relationship between community structures, race and crime. We then investigate the relevance of community safety for international students by discussing issues around safety that extend beyond the direct consequences of incidents of violence. We go on to explore the issues around international student welfare and student safety and discuss alternative responses to the problem.

In common with broader social science debates and developments, the concept of community safety is one that has emerged largely in critique of the narrow scope the dominant term 'crime prevention', with its central focus on policing and events that constitute a breach of law. The use of the term 'community' builds on the idea that crime, and the policing implications of crime, are shaped by a broader set of social, economic and environmental conditions including geographical location, ethnicity, religious orientation, common interests and so on. Within this landscape, the operations of community both shape and are shaped by broader conditions, and levels of safety are one indicator of the broader wellbeing of a given community. While the concept of community is highly contested within the literature, in talking about 'community', we primarily refer to the connections between people. As Cohen (1985: 10) describes, community refers to 'a group or category of people, who have something in common with each other, which distinguishes them in a significant way from other groups ... and is a point of reference for their social identity'.

The concept of community safety is an emerging concept that is growing in usage and gained initial traction in the UK during the 1990s (Crawford 1998). In 1991, the Morgan Report by the Home Office in Britain acknowledged 'community safety' as a much wider concept than crime prevention. The report acknowledges that the term 'crime prevention' is narrowly interpreted and gives the impression that it is the sole responsibility of the police. In contrast, the term 'community safety' can be interpreted more widely to obtain community support to tackle the issues of crime (Home Office 1997). The use of the term community safety shifted the emphasis from an understanding of crime on the basis of situational issues to a broader social discourse. This has had policy implications, with a shift towards the management of safety issues through multiagency partnerships that are coordinated by local authorities (Hill & Write 2003).

The notion of community safety includes feeling safe in both public and private spheres. It is also closely connected to concepts of health and the state of wellbeing and quality of life that allows individuals to pursue personal, social and business goals, without the fear of crime and/or prejudice and harm of any sort (Wiseman, Langworthy et al. 2006). Theories of social disorganisation are also important for making the links between strong networks of social relationships and the prevention of crime and delinquency (Bursik & Grasmick 1993). This notion suggests that members of a community play a key role in ensuring safety by realising common values and maintaining effective social control on crime (Sampson & Groves 1989). The social disorganisation framework also identified key social and economic factors that contribute to a higher rate of crime and delinquency. These are residential instability due to changing population of an area (Bursik 1988); ethnic diversity leading to a lack of effective communication due to differences in customs and a lack of shared experiences, breeding fear and mistrust (Sampson and Groves 1989); family disruption and unshared parenting interfering with parents' ability to supervise children (Sampson 1985); and communities with a low economic status and poverty having a higher rate of delinquency (Warner & Pierce 1993). More recently it has been suggested that neighbourhoods with low levels of interaction and trust coupled with high levels of disorder tend to have a higher rate of crime (Snell 2001). There is also a link between variation in structural factors, such as residential and social stability, economic change and social interactions and variation in crime (Simcha-Fagon & Schwartz 1986).

Likewise, there is a direct correlation between socially cohesive communities and a reduced crime rate. (Bursik & Grasmick 1993; Sampson, Raudenbush et al. 1997). An Australian study by Carcach and Huntley (2002) found, for example, that participation in local organisations increased opportunities for social interaction among locals which in turn, enhanced residents' ability to work together and find solutions to local problems, and allowed informal control to reduce local crime and increase the community's ability to improve public safety. Hope (2001) proposes that community safety be conceptualised as a social framework with the intent to reduce crime and promote safety rather than a set of practices to reduce criminal behaviour.

Community structures, ethnicity and crime

In contrast to dominant views of criminology that tend to differentiate non-offenders from offenders, explanations at community level tend to focus on the connection between the characteristics of communities and rates of crime (Bursik 1988). Research from macro-social perspectives suggest that the incapacity of a community structure to realise the common values of its members and maintain effective control may lead to social disorganisation. Along a similar theme, research undertaken by Land et.al (1990) identify the strong relationships between resource deprivation, family dissolution, and urbanisation with homicide rates in both cities and metropolitan areas. Sampson and Wilson (1995) conclude that both structural and cultural aspects - factors such as ecological concentration of ghetto poverty, racial segregation, residential mobility and population turnover, family disruption, and the dimension of local social organisation – are affected by macro level public policies with regard to housing, services and employment.

More recent research on crime, from a micro-sociological perspective, has focused on social processes such as discrimination and oppression, socialisation and so on, drawing attention to the role of police and the justice system and the overrepresentation of racialised minority in prisons. One important perspective on this is the idea of race as a social construct rather than a physical, objective reality (Barak, Leighton et al. 2006). In a related theme, others contend that the relationship between race and crime is a result of unnecessary surveillance and control of minority groups and the presence of racism in the justice system, rather than it being an outcome of any causal relationship between race and crime. Racialised minority groups are often amongst society's most socially and economically marginalised (Fleras & Elliott 2006; Hackler 2006). It is the process of marginalisation that is related to crime and, once labelled as 'criminals', racialised minorities have few economic, social and political options for recourse (Hackler 2006). Racialisation of minorities tends to affect social interaction between dominant and minority groups, and when cultures clash, the dominant group remains powerful (Hackler 2006). Further, when labelled as criminals and inferior, the racialised minorities may come to internalise these beliefs.

There has been longstanding concern about the involvement of migrant communities in crime, both in Australia and internationally (Hazlehurst 1988; Baur 2006). Earlier studies on ethnicity and crime in Australia concentrated on the extent of involvement in crime amongst migrant communities. The findings of most of these studies were that offending and imprisonment rates are lower amongst the total migrant population in Australia than amongst the Australian-born population (Hazlehurst 1987; Mukherjee 2002; Baur 2006: 4) and that crime amongst migrant communities may be better explained by socio-demographic disadvantage than by migrant status alone (Mukherjee 1999; Baur 2006). More recently, there has been a greater focus on migrant communities as victims of crime with a handful of studies investigating victimisation or experience of prejudice, racial vilification and abuse amongst ethnic minorities (VMC 2000; Taylor 2002; HREOC 2004a; Johnston 2008).

Research into the victimisation of migrant communities in Australia is very limited. There is quantitative data available from four different random surveys on crime victimisation: the Australian component of the International Crime Victimisation Survey (ICVS) conducted during 2004; two ABS surveys, the Crime and Safety Survey 2005 and the Women's Safety Survey 1996 (ABS 2006; 1996); and the Queensland Crime Victims Survey conducted in 1991 (Queensland Crime Commission et al 1991). There is also data available from a survey of 825 people, conducted in 2001 in Sydney, investigating the interrelationship between youth, ethnicity and crime (Collins 2000), and from a study of experiences and perceptions of crime and safety amongst non-English speaking communities in three local government areas in Victoria (VMC 2000).

There is also some data, albeit limited and mainly qualitative, on race related crime against ethnic minorities in Australia. This data points to the fact that racism and prejudice against religious and ethnic groups is a motivating factor in some crime in Australia, although evidence on its extent and rate is only available through the quantitative data collected by the ICVS (2004). Qualitative data on race related crime is available from two studies, the National Inquiry into Racism conducted during 1989 (HREOC 1991) and the HREOC national study of Arab and Muslim.

Data from the four crime victimisation surveys was collected using different methodologies and sampling techniques and cannot be cross-compared. However, each of the surveys distinguished between respondents born in Australia and those born in other countries, and the data from the ICVS and two ABS surveys shows that first generation migrants experience less crime against the person than Australian born respondents (Baur 2006). The Crime and Safety survey found that victimisation rates for robbery and assault were higher for people born in Australia than overseas (ABS 2005: 6-7). The Women's Safety survey found that women born overseas were less likely to be victims of physical or sexual violence than women born in Australia and that women born in non-English speaking countries were less likely than those born in English speaking countries to be victims of physical violence (ABS 1996: 17).

The ICVS survey found that a sample population of first and second generation migrants from Vietnam and Middle Eastern countries reported lower rates of victimisation for crimes against the person and theft over a five year period than the general population sample (which included other migrants to Australia) (Johnston 2005). The only crime for which the Vietnamese and Middle Eastern born sample groups reported higher levels of victimisation than the general population sample was for motor vehicle theft (Johnston 2005). The ICVS survey also found that amongst the Vietnamese and Middle Eastern sample population, second generation migrants born in Australia experienced higher levels of crime against the person than first generational migrants (Johnston 2005: 3).

In Australia there have been various periods during which young 'ethnic gangs' of South-East Asian background were described as the cause of much crime (Poynting 2002). Similarly in Sydney, during 1998, police targeted youth of Arabic ethnic background (Colins, Noble et al. 2000), and some residences were perceived as drug houses and associated with 'Asian gangs' (Cornford 2001: 4). This belief was so real that the then NSW premier Carr suggested that the business of car 'rebirthing' was undertaken by Lebanese gangs in the Lakemba area (Humpharies & Marsh 1998: 1). Further, Mick Palmer (retired Police Commissioner of ACT) linked the use of small weapons (knives and guns) in crime

with 'Lebaneseness' or 'Asianness' (Mercer 2001). Although racial profiling tends to happen on a regular basis, its frequency and intensity is increased when certain events trigger moral panic in a society, even globally. This was one such outcome of the terrorist attacks on New York on September 11. Ethnic profiling includes such practices as: police questioning individuals about their ethnicity and targeting them because of their appearance (Poynting 2002); media targeting individuals because they fit a certain profile or they belong to a certain heritage (Collins 2006); and authorities (especially at airports) isolating certain individuals for special body searches and passport checks.

Concepts of community are applied in this study to respond to a key question that arises from the recent attacks on Indian students. That is, what alternative frame of reference can be applied in contrast to the recent polarisation in public discussion over the extent to which the attacks have been either racially motivated or opportunistic? To respond to this question, it is also necessary to be explicit about understandings of race, racism, and how this applies to recent waves of international student arrivals. The following section elaborates on this.

Community safety and policing

In recent years, the philosophy of policing has evolved to emphasise partnerships between the police and the community. This has been aimed at enhancing police-public relations and solving contemporary community problems related to crime, fear of crime, social and physical disorder, and neighbourhood decline. Community policing works with the notion that increased police presence in the community, coupled with cooperation from community members with the intent to enhance community life, will result in reductions in crime (Cordner 1997; Zhao, Scheider et al. 2002). According to Roh and Oliver (2005) one of the most important strategies of community policing for crime prevention is the enhancement of environmental quality in a neighbourhood and the improvement of social and physical incivilities. In this way, members of the community are satisfied with their perceived quality of life and thereby less concerned about community problems. This also lends itself to improved social interaction amongst community members, improving trust, cohesion, and resources for collective action (social capital) in the community (Carcach & Huntley 2002).

Proactive community policing programs not only increase the number of contacts between the police and the community but also expose the police to public scrutiny and raised community expectations. Research also indicates that personal contact with the police is the main determining factor in the public's general satisfaction with police services (Cheurprakobkit 2000). Public trust in police is an important element of contemporary policing and is known to enhance police effectiveness and the legitimacy of police actions (Lyons 2002; Sunshine & Tyler 2003). When there is trust in the police there is greater degree of public co-operation. The benefits of community policing have been identified from experiences in the Sydney suburb of Woolloomooloo between 2001-2004. These include:

- stronger acceptance of, and participation by the community in policing services;
- a community more willing to share information and experiences with local police;
- a policing service more attuned to community expectations;
- police less likely to focus indiscriminately on youth;
- improved investigation efficiency;
- a police-community relationship with the resilience to endure challenging or confronting events;
- genuine focus on interagency cooperation at practitioner level;
- police confident in developing solutions to crime and disorder that are not necessarily legalistic in nature (Darcy 2005: 153).

Trust cannot be assumed and is often fragile to build. Trust in police is important, as the position of police with respect to the ordinary citizen is one of power and control. The absence of trust can make certain segments of the population more vulnerable to the police; it can affect the methods used in policing. Goldsmith (2005: 445) states that 'Where there is limited or no policing by consent, policing is likely to take more arbitrary and violent forms, further damaging public trust. Moreover, it is known that under conditions of socio-economic inequality, public trust in police tends to be problematic (Reisig, McCluskey et al. 2004: 456). Goldsmith points to a range of reasons why publics do not put their trust in the police, including incompetence, indifference, extortion, petty corruption, intimidation and excessive force. He also points to discriminatory attitudes held by police toward particular groups of people as a cause for distrust. Studies from around the world indicate that ethnic and racialised minority groups tend to believe there is racial profiling and bias in policing (Van Swaaningen 2005; Weitzer & Tuch 2005).

Policing reform is a much debated area. The policing policies are often determined at a state or national level, while crime and policing incidents take place at a local level. Concerns with crime levels have increasingly captured media attention and are election issues. One of the areas of development in recent years, as part of community oriented policing at the local level, is 'reassurance policing'. This form of policing arose to address the gap between public perceptions of rising crime and the falling crime rate. The three key elements of this approach to this form of policing are:

- the presence of visible, accessible and locally known authority figures in neighbourhoods, in particular police officers and police community support officers;
- community involvement in the process of identifying priorities and taking action to tackle them; and
- targeted policing activity and problem-solving to tackle crimes and disorders which matter most to local neighbourhoods (Tuffin, Morris et al. 2006).

The overall aim of such policing interventions is to reduce fear of crime and improve the sense of safety; reduce anti-social behaviour and improve quality of life; increase public satisfaction with and confidence in, the police; and improve social capacity.

Additionally, there has been small amount of work undertaken for policing for multicultural societies. For example, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) established the position of High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). The HCNM developed a series of recommendations for policing for multi-ethnic societies. They concluded that good policing in multi-ethnic societies is dependent on the establishment of a relationship of trust and confidence, built on regular communication and practical co-operation, between the police and minority groups. The benefits of this approach are pointed out:

> *The minorities benefit from policing which is more sensitive to their concerns and more responsive to their requirements for personal protection and access to justice. The police benefit from greater effectiveness, since good communication and co-operation are keys to effective policing in any community. The state benefits both from the integration of minorities and from the greater effectiveness of it's policing. (HCNM 2006: 3).*

A total of 23 recommendations are made for policing multi-ethnic societies under 6 broad themes: general principles; recruitment and representation; training and professional development; engaging with ethnic communities; operational practices and prevention and management of conflict (HCNM 2006).

During the 1990s, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the National Inquiry into Racist Violence drew increased public attention to the issue of police attitudes towards and treatment of social and cultural minorities in Australia, including pre-eminently, Aboriginal Australians. Following this, there was a spate of studies investigating the relationship between police and migrant communities in Australia, and between police and young people, including from migrant communities (Chan 1997: 2). The studies centred on the phenomenon and processes of 'police racism', where police authorities stigmatise, harass, criminalise or otherwise discriminate against certain social groups on the basis of' appearance, cultural attributes or country of origin 'through the use of their special powers' (Castles 1992). Chan emphasises that expressions of police racism will vary according to circumstances and social contexts and that police racism is apparent in a range of police practices and attitudes. These include 'insensitivity to language and cultural differences', 'prejudice and stereotyping', cases of 'abuse of power and excessive use of force' and the phenomenon of 'over-policing', where certain sections of the broader community. In the Australian context it is particularly Aborigines, but also low income young men and young people from migrant communities, who are targeted for police intervention, either in the degree of resources allocated or in the nature of police practices and responses (Chan 1997: 17-27).

A number of studies conducted after the turn of the century, whilst not focused on policing, have found evidence of continuing patterns of discriminatory policing. The Sydney survey on crime and community safety conducted in 2004 amongst migrant communities found that two-thirds of young respondents perceived police as targeting young people from certain ethnic backgrounds. The backgrounds which were most commonly specified as targeted by police were 'Lebanese, Middle Eastern or Arabic'; 'Asian, Chinese or Vietnamese' and 'Pacific Islander or Tongan' (Collins 2006: 12). The HREOC National Consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians also heard of 'substantial numbers' of cases of police prejudice in the form of unfair targeting and harassment (HREOC 2004a: 66-67). The Victorian study, Multicultural Perspectives of Crime and Safety uncovered cases where whole ethnic communities in certain localities felt they had been unfairly targeted and harassed by police and felt that on the basis of past inaction by police in response to calls for assistance from members of ethnic communities, the police would be unlikely to assist in future (VMC 2000).

The need to reflect upon policing, for a multicultural society, was recognised through the establishment of the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau (now Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency). This work led to the endorsement of a framework to support culturally appropriate policing at the national Commissioner's Conference in 1993. The commitment to policing in a multicultural Australia was encapsulated into six nationally endorsed principles:

1. Cross-cultural awareness training and development should be fully integrated into police education.
2. Community understanding of police services and practices should be enhanced through communication strategies that maximise the benefits of multilingualism and reduce stereotyping and racist connotations.
3. Media relations should avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes of ethnic communities.
4. Recruitment should reflect the composition of the community as closely as possible.
5. Partnerships should be developed with the community through consultation and liaison.
6. All forms of racism, prejudice, and bigotry are professionally unacceptable and every effort should be made to combat these behaviours (National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau (NPEAB) 2000).

The capacity of police to engage and work within cross cultural situations was identified. A Strategic Framework was developed for Australian police organisations to promote a culturally competent organisational environment. This framework provided the benefits of culturally competent policing. Numerous initiatives for multicultural policing are undertaken across Australia. A cursory glance indicates that these are ad-hoc and not on-going. There is no evidence of a systematic implementation of these frameworks across the police systems in Australia and no evidence of evaluation of effectiveness was found in the literature review.

3.3 Ethnicity and 'race'

Changes in the global economy have led to different types of movements: movements of ideologies, finance, media, technology and people (Appadurai 1990) . Movements of people, although more regulated than the flow of capital, have become more accelerated with globalisation. This has resulted in a diversity of 'ethnic mixes' in many

countries of the world (Castles 2000). Migration has an impact on both the countries of origin and countries of destination. Migration produces plural identities that can include contested identities particularly in the face of inequalities (Back & Solomos 2000).

Social conflict based on ethnic/racial identities is a global phenomenon and ethnicity has proved to be a much more robust element of social reality than previously thought (Parker & Aggleton 1999). Ethnicity is a fundamental, ascriptive and immutable feature of a person's identity and provides 'a sense of common origin, common beliefs and values, a common sense of survival' (De Vos & Romanucci-Ross 1975). The ethnic identity of a group consists of their subjective symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups and these can be imposed from outside or embraced from within. Elements of identification include food, dance, and styles of clothing, religion, language, aesthetic traditions and social communion. Often there is a search for or reference to historical and genetic origins of people. Ethnic identity is described as a person's attitudes concerning the relationship between themself and an ethnic group with which they are associated and involves beliefs about one's obligations to the group, the acceptance of behavioural prescriptions arising from membership in the group, feelings about belonging to the group and about participating in formal and informal institutions and activities (Smolicz 1981). Ethnic identity is a 'two pronged' concept, including ideas of self-definition as well as how people are perceived by others. Wallerstein (1975) points to the formation of 'ethnic' as a matter of social definition, an interplay of the self-definition of members and the definition of other groups.

Sociological theories of identity and ethnicity point out that individual identities are both simultaneously socially constructed and constructed by the individual. This is not to deny the existence of. Factors such as culture, language and history are important to identity construction, but even these exist within a broader social, economic, political and institutional framework. Also, these frameworks are not fixed entities, but are dynamic and changing landscapes based on social struggles (Bottomley, de Lepervanche et al. 1991; Woodward 1997). Okamura points to a useful concept of situational identity. This means that individual or group identity takes on fluidity and varies in accordance with social relations, contexts and social structures (Okamura 1981). In the context of societies with migration programs, ethnicity is concerned with identity rather than solely with cultural practice and traditions. People are able to choose the identity that best suits them (Waters 1990). Discussions of ethnicity have, thus, moved from an attempt to measure or quantify just 'how ethnic' a group is to what may be termed 'the politics of representation'. The focus on issues of representation allows us, ' to see culture not as a zone of shared meanings but as a zone of disagreement and contest' (Verdery 1994). This enables us to see ethnic identity as a political process which involves negotiation, social conflict and mediation.

Contemporary social psychology takes the view, that the categorisation of persons into their respective social groups, and stereotyping of them on the basis of group membership, is central and fundamental to human cognitive processing. Social categorisations are primarily based on salient and identifiable features of a person such as their age, gender, race, ethnicity and social status. Stereotypes are generalised descriptions of a group or person that emerge from this categorisation process. It has been argued that categorisation and stereotyping are adaptive and simplify the complexity of the social world, helping orient individuals to the realities of life (Hamilton & Sherman 1994). 'Sense making' is an important element, as it is at the heart of prejudice and discrimination (Angelico 1989). Popular, lay understandings of events and experiences determine perceptions. Lay understandings are important because, really, they are shared cultural understandings and are individual and collective attempts to make sense of events (Fletcher 1995). In any given situation, our sense of self and meanings associated with perceptions, hinge on a psychologically salient basis of self-conception. The principle that governs social identity is that people need to engage in social categorisation and to make sense of and reduce anxiety about themselves and others (Sedikides & Brewer 2001). People use limited perceptual clues such as what someone looks like, how they speak, or their attitudes to categorise others. When the schematic information fits, then the information people hold or perceive about others satisfactorily accounts for similarities or differences and explains people's behaviour and the way people treat others.

Lay understandings and sense making are at the core of public support for and identification with Pauline Hanson (a populist politician with anti-immigrant views) who is represented as speaking for the 'silent majority' and the 'ordinary battlers' (Rothwell 1997). The roots of prejudice and discrimination can be found in particular kinds of sense making explanations that are supported by reference to in-groups and out-groups, racial and cultural difference and perceived injustice (Vaughan & Hogg 2002). Lerner (1980) argued that our need for a coherent world leads us to illusions about justice and that it is easier to blame a group which is less powerful and influential than one's own. This makes it appear as if justice issues are being tackled although what is actually happening is victim blaming. Scapegoating is a substitute for tackling issues of power and privilege that are at the heart of injustices in any society (Lerner 1980).

Ideas of 'race' have shaped social and political relations world-wide for centuries. Racism is pervasive, permeating the fabric of everyday life. Defining racism is not easy. Racism is not just prejudice or the result of some psychological disorder, but is best understood as a relationship of dominance and subordination. That is, racism is not a moral failing or the result of ignorance. Racism exists as much in our established and respected institutions (the ways things are and should be done) as in the hearts and minds of those who work in institutional settings. It involves a description of processes and acts (Essed 1991; Hollinsworth 2006). The following definition of racism highlights the complex dimensions of the phenomenon:

> *Racism is a form of privilege or oppression resulting from a societal system in which people are divided into 'races', with power unevenly distributed (or produced) based on these classifications. Classifications are socially constructed and are based on perceived biological, cultural, religious or other differences, which are reflected in and reinforced through attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, laws, norms and practices (VicHealth 2007).*

Racism defines the way in which social relations between people or society are structured. It operates through a range of personal, relational, systemic and institutional practices that serve to devalue, exclude, oppress or exploit people. It is an act of power and is a tool for maintaining privilege. It is important to note that racism is not just about acts of discrimination. Racism can be defined as actions or inactions by persons, institutions or societies that create or preserve unequal conditions and relationships between groups. This process is referred to as racialisation. Racialisation can be defined as a way in which social relations between people or society have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics so as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities (Miles 1989). Differences are 'explained' in terms of such 'essential' or inherent characteristics. Such essentialist explanations often use 'commonsense' or supposedly 'natural' understandings and are used as a basis of social exclusion. Dunn, Klocker and Salabay (2007) outline racialisation as the process by which groups are identified, given stereotypical characteristics and coerced into specific living conditions.

The contemporary public discourse of racism posits it as offending modern sensibilities, contrary to the notions of fairness and egalitarianism. Blatant forms of racism have become less socially acceptable and are legislated against in many countries. In turn, racism has become more subtle. Although 'race and racism' are value-laden notions and appear contrary to democratic societal values, racism can still be articulated without denouncing democratic principles, through transformation into more 'legitimate' and contemporary concerns (McCulloch 2006). Societal messages are perpetuated through coded public discourses on immigration, multiculturalism, refugees and citizenship (Henry, Tator et al. 2000), forming subtle and less direct forms of 'new racisms'. Given that inferiority based on physical markers has long been considered the clearest expression of racism, the avoidance of it indicates a marked change in formal discourse, hence the description 'new racisms'. These 'new' formal expressions of racism are markedly different from the 'old-fashioned' expressions because they are subtle rather than blatant, and covert rather than overt. Others point out that in common with old racisms, the new racisms maintain the relationship of power based on constructing 'others' as different in order to exclude, ignore or exploit them (Dunn, Forrest et al. 2004; Dunn, Klocker et al. 2007; Babacan & Gopalkrishnan 2008). The power to represent others, to negatively evaluate others and to make these representations and evaluations prevail in public domains are still key features of new racisms.

Racial violence and fear

Life in industrialised Western countries has been safer than ever before and yet fear continues to be a potent force in the political, social, cultural and psychological aspects of human existence (Donovan 2003). Some of these fears have included health related fears such as SARS, Avian Flu, Swine Flu etc. Other forms of fear are connected to intangible enemies related to the 'war on terror' and 'wars on drugs' coupled with crime rates. On the social and economic fronts there has been fear of asylum seekers swamping the shores of the nation or immigrants taking jobs.

Fear can be seen from multiple perspectives. One view is that fear is a primordial instinct in response to immediate threat, or a set of anxieties that are the emotions and feelings felt when faced with potential or perceived threat. Another perspective on fear is as a political philosophy. This standpoint views political fear as a people's felt apprehension of some harm to their collective wellbeing, whether it is a fear of terrorism or crime, moral decay or the intimidatory power wielded by individuals, groups, and governments over other individuals, groups and societies (Robin 2004). The distinction between private fear and political fear is that the former is an artefact of our own psychology and experience and has little impact beyond ourselves, while the latter arises from conflicts within and between societies. At the political level, fear is a powerful factor in the acquisition, as well as in the sustenance of power. People's fears determine how they view the world and take action based on that view. The civic and domestic space becomes charged with moral and aesthetic order, based on imagined or real fears (Babacan 2006).

Fear is an effective way of drawing people together as an in-group that can then work towards a common goal. Scholarship in this field suggests that the more we are aware of our mortality, the more likely we are to invest in a social group, to defend its beliefs, values and practices, one's own cultural worldview and self-esteem as well develop an overall increase in habitual patterns of thought (Magee & Kalyanaraman 2009). Even where political actions may not have popular support, fear can be used to push these actions through. Some of the research in the field demonstrates that fear-arousing communication can be selectively used by political leaders, especially in times of increased political uncertainty, conflict and declining support for the government and its policies (De Castella, McGarty et al. 2009).

The link between racism and fear is articulated in the global literature. When fear acts as a cohesive force that brings together members of the in-group (Furedi 1997), especially if they form a powerful majority, it can marginalise other individuals and groups in society. Further, the dominant group, while fearing the others, can depersonalise them and act in a way towards other humans that they would not normally (Furedi 2005).

Political fear can work in two ways. In the first, leaders define the object of the fear, who or what we are to be afraid of. In this way, opinion-makers can use either genuine or not-so-genuine concerns as a tool to sway public opinion towards a particular political agenda. The second kind of fear arises from the social, political and economic hierarchies that divide people and is used to ensure that that one retains or increases its power in society (Robin 2004). Recent examples of the use of such fear in Australia include debates on immigration, asylum seekers and international students.

The politics of fear also works well within markets. Media corporations make money through improved ratings and consequent improved advertising revenue, when moral panic or fear is widespread (Kellner 2007). To bring together all these aspects of political fear, Gopalkrishnan (2007) uses the term Infeartainment to represent the use of political fear by the powerful to contain the population while also providing them with entertainment as a form of distraction. It involves a set of processes set within a narrative framework and ensures compliance while also identifying visible targets to focus fear on. Infeartainment relies on misdirection as a tool to be used on behalf of the powerful in society and provides the moral framework within which the use of political and social control can be justified (Gopalkrishnan 2007). Infeartainment is more akin to a meta narrative that provides an easily understood version of increasingly complex situations and ideas. This narrative is generally built around black and white concepts of 'Good and Evil' accompanied by group building ideas of 'Us and Them', or 'Civilisation and the Savage'. These stories can be seen manifest in the rise of Hansonism in Australia and the rise of extreme nationalist movements in other parts of the world (Waymer 2009).

Wieviorka (1995) argues that the rise of modern racism is linked to the decomposition of national industrial societies with high levels of unemployment, industrial restructuring and reduction in welfare support. Over the last 20 years, Australia has witnessed greater de-regulation, privatisation and incremental moves to diminish the safety net systems and the government's role in provision of certain community services. These moves have been accompanied by a philosophical shift from a rights based system to that of mutual obligation (Gopalkrishnan 2007). In the last decade in Australia, there has also been a political retreat from multiculturalism. The Howard government's public discussion around the war in Iraq and its asylum and counter terrorism policies were intertwined with issues concerning Australia's national identity and Australian values. This thereby encouraged and reinforced discourses on Australian patriotism, alongside an attempt to promote a homogenous national identity around which certain groups are united and certain other groups, such as Muslims, Arabs and asylum seekers, are excluded as the 'other'. The new forms of patriotism are racialised and clearly mark boundaries of inclusion and exclusion so that immigrant groups and communities are differentiated as a threat to the cultural homogeneity of the dominant Anglo-Celtic community. Whereas the threats to Australia's social cohesion were, at one time, Asian and indigenous people, in the post-2000 period, the Arab and Muslim communities have been added to this list (Dunn, Forrest et al. 2004). This shift clearly demonstrates that the nation-state is a major contributor to the manufacture of the nation's identity and the 'other' of this identity (Brett 2004).

Racism operates at various levels and its language, logic and expression shifts over time. The nature and intensity of racism varies, reminding us of the various degrees of racist violence. While rioting racist mobs have been rare in Australia, the racism of invasion and colonisation did continue, and massacres of Aboriginal people were perpetrated until as late as the 1920s. Racism against foreigners also took place in the nineteenth century with violent anti-Chinese riots on the gold-fields, as well as a riot, fights, a mortal shooting and arson over the immigration of Afghan cameleers and their families. Another event was the anti-immigrant 'race riots' that took place in Kalgoorlie, in 1934, when workers reacted against some mining companies' policy of only employing immigrant labour from southern Europe. Nonetheless, there has not been anything comparable since the advent of multiculturalism in the early 1970s, and Australia has one of the largest immigration programmes per capita of population anywhere in the world (Poynting & Noble 2004; Collins 2007).

While Australia has not experienced racist violence to the degree of the USA or UK, there is evidence to indicate that racialised violence is taking place. In 1989 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Race Discrimination Commissioner documented the extent and forms of racially motivated violence towards Aboriginal people, non-English speaking background groups and others whose ethnicity, religion or politics marked them as 'racially other'. The National Inquiry into Racist Violence (NIRV) report defined racist violence as including 'verbal and non-verbal intimidation, harassment and incitement to racial hatred as well as physical violence against people and property' (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 1991). The NIRV faced major difficulties in determining whether, and to what degree, a particular incident was racially motivated (HREOC 1991: 15-20). Victims often alleged a racial motivation, while perpetrators and police often deny or downplay racism, giving more commonplace explanations or excuses. Allowing for these problems of identification, the Inquiry found that generally Australia had comparatively low levels of racist violence (HREOC 1991).

The Inquiry examined the actions of racist groups and found that such organised racist groups were relatively small and could be dealt with by police for their criminal actions. While the criminality of extremist groups may attract police attention, routine forms of racist violence often remain an official non-issue (HREOC 1991: 155). However, the inquiry found that in some cases the police were not even adequately equipped to cope with racial violence:

> *Reporting incidents to police was predictably difficult, time-consuming, humiliating and frustrating. More times than not, the victim reporting the matter became the accused. Police had little appropriate education to cope with the problem and more often found the ideology of the [perpetrators] more compatible with their own (submission quoted in HREOC, 1991: 194-195).*

In 2004 HREOC documented increases in the full range of racial and religious hostility towards Arab and Muslim Australians from September 11. The degree of racially motivated violence was reported by Commissioner Bill Jonas:

What we heard was often disturbing. Participants identifiable as Arab or Muslim by their dress, language, name or appearance told of having been abused, threatened, spat on, assailed with eggs, bottles, cans and rocks, punched and even bitten. Drivers have been run off the road and pedestrians run down on footpaths and in car parks. People reported being fired from their jobs or refused employment or promotions because of their race or religion. Children have been bullied in school yards. Women have been stalked, abused and assaulted in shopping centres. Private homes, places of worship and schools were vandalized and

burned. 'Terrorist' 'Dirty Arab' 'Murderer' 'Bloody Muslim' 'Raghead' 'Bin Laden' 'Illegal immigrant' 'Black c..t' are just some of the labels and profanities that we were told have been used against Arabs and Muslims in public places. Arab and Muslim Australians were told to 'Go back to your own country', even those whose families have been in Australia for many generations(Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 2004)

On 11 December 2005, images from Australia portrayed an ugly picture of a violent, frenzied mob of 5,000 'white' Australians, fuelled by alcohol, attacking people of 'Middle Eastern appearance' that they could find near Sydney's Cronulla beach. This event was dubbed in the media as the 'Cronulla riots'. The immediate causes of the event were analysed and included alcohol, youth culture, gender issues and beach culture (Collins, 2007, Poynting and Noble 2004). However the deep rooted causes of racial violence is linked up with the discourses of racism and what is termed as 'permission to hate' by the state and social institutions. Such 'permission' is granted by states by declining to act against it. The state's officers also provide a model for hate crimes by practising racial discrimination and violence on the state's behalf (Perry, as cited in (Poynting 2006)). Poynting further adds that:

> *If the state assaults, harasses and vilifies Muslims as the enemy in the war on terror and thereby terrorises whole communities, then perhaps white-thinking citizens feel justified in personally attacking this enemy wherever they might encounter it. (88)*

In an examination of Islamaphobia, Dunn et al (2007) identify the processes leading to racist violence through three data sets. First, the authors argue that public opinion surveys reveal the extent of Islamaphobia in Australia and the links between threat perception and constructions of 'alien-ness' and 'Otherness'. The second data set is from a content analysis of the racialised pathologies of Muslims and their spaces. The third is from an examination of the undercurrents of Islamaphobia and national cultural selectivity in responding to asylum seekers. They conclude that negative media treatment is strongly linked to antipathetic government dispositions that have material impacts upon Australian Muslims. It sponsors a more widespread Islamaphobia, (mis) informs opposition to mosque development, aids ever more restrictive asylum seeker policies, and lies behind arson attacks and racist violence (Dunn, Klocker et al. 2007).

After September 11, the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW (CRC) set up a hotline to receive calls relating to racially motivated attacks. Analysis of these calls found that in the two months after the attack, 248 reports were made to the hotline. Out of the 248 reports, 320 incidents had occurred and 42 of these (13.2 per cent) involved a physical assault, with thirty of these occurring in a public space (Dreher 2005).

The incidents of racial violence are often dismissed as singular events committed by a small number of extreme elements of society. While this may be true, the relationship between those who commit such acts and others in society are well articulated in the following words from Hage:

> *Violent racists are always a tiny minority. However, their breathing space is determined by the degree of 'ordinary' non-violent racism a government and culture allow to flourish within it (Hage 2002).*

The use of extremism as the measure of racism is often used to allow the 'reasonably prejudiced' to distance themselves from the racism of the 'unreasonably prejudiced' as the 'real' racists are seen as those who engage in violence (Billig, Condor et al. 1988). The identification of 'real' racism opens the way for the expression of negative views as 'not' racism (van Dijk 2000).

Hate crime and racial incidents

There has been increased reporting of racial vilification and many new stories of physical violence directed against the person and property of those classified as the 'other'. White and Perrone (2001: 163) point out that the 'other' has been further entrenched with outsider status, and fear and loathing promoted as part of the mainstream of media and political debate. The seeds of social division, sown through years of economic disparity and institutionalised social discrimination, have re-emerged in the form of great fissures in the multicultural fabric. They conclude that 'For many, the reality of life in contemporary Australia is shaped by what can only be described as a climate of hate' (White & Perrone 2001: 163). Walters (2006) similarly argues that racial tension has increased since September 11. This is often referred to as 'hate crime' defined as:

> *A 'hate crime', synonymous with 'bias crime', is a prejudice-based criminal offence motivated by the victim's membership within a particular social group. This could include, but may not be limited to, crimes motivated by the victim's real or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin or sexual orientation. (Byers 1999)*

Bias, loathing and prejudice are key features of hate crime. Lawrence notes that group membership of a particular group (or perceptions of such membership) becomes a prime reason for the violence experienced by the victim (Lawrence 1999).

The (threat of) violence in which victims are 'selected' not in their capacities as individuals, but as representatives of imagined minority communities based on phonotypical characteristics, and/or religious, national or cultural origin.

A number of assumptions are often made about the nature of 'hate crime'. It is assumed that violence is directed against minorities with the perpetrators being drawn from the majority, particularly Anglo-Australian, communities. While there is evidence to support these contentions, there are paradoxes and complexities that need to be further unpacked (Cunneen, Fraser et al. 1997 ; White & Perrone 2001). The variability of racist attitudes and behaviour means that hate crimes cannot be explained as an outcome of a clear causal relationship between a single set of criteria and a racist incident. Hate crimes are more than the acts of mean-spirited bigots. Such violence is embedded in the structural and cultural context within which groups interact and does not operate in a social or cultural vacuum (Perry 2002: 163).

The ICVS provides the only quantitative data about the prevalence of racially motivated crime in Australia. The ICVS survey investigated the racial motivation behind reported incidents of assaults and threats, through the question: Do you feel you were assaulted or threatened because of your skin colour, ethnicity, race or religion? Amongst the Middle Eastern and Vietnamese sample population, forty-two per cent of assault or threat incidents were thought to be racially motivated. This contrasts with a figure of ten per cent of incidents thought to be racially motivated by the general survey population (Johnston 2005: 4). However, of the general population sample respondents who thought incidents were racially motivated, 14 per cent were from Asia or Africa, 30 per cent were from other overseas countries and 20 per cent were from non-English speaking countries (Johnston 2005: 4). Fifty-five per cent of racially motivated incidents reported by the general population sample were committed by strangers. Within the Middle Eastern and Vietnamese sample, 79 per cent of racially motivated incidents were committed by strangers (Johnston 2005: 4).

Drawing on literature from the UK, USA and Australia, White and Perrone (2001) point out the tendency for bias-motivated offences to fall predominantly within a handful of categories, namely: vandalism, assaults and threats (often accompanied by racist language). The effects of such attacks are profound. The individualised pain and trauma that characteristically accompanies traditional forms of street crime is further exacerbated by the collective basis of the crime. Not only is the individual stigmatised on the basis of their social group membership, but, by logical extension, the social group is emotionally harmed. Further, hate crime attacks are more likely to involve physical harm but the harm is also likely to be of greater severity (Levin 1992-1993; Levin & McDevitt 1993).

Scholars note that group solidarity and mutual protection become important in hate based crime. For example, Mason's (2005) research into racial violence in the UK points to how much this type of abuse is carried out in groups, indicating that encouragement by peers is integral to the carrying out of racially motivated crime. The relationship between the perpetrator and the community in which they live is therefore intrinsic to their willingness to act violently. White and Perrone (2001: 165) also note that hate crimes tend to be carried out by young males in a group setting. 'Young men who have been socialised to be aggressive and to find violent solutions to their problems may end their search for power by physically attacking others who, themselves, lack the power to retaliate' (Levin & McDevitt 1993: 71).

Stressing the importance of 'power' relations, Anthias (2007) also explores the complex considerations embedded in everyday relations of knowledge, access, information and choice. She points out that underclass 'white' youths, as individuals, may have neither access to jobs or positions of power. Indeed they may be excluded from access to these, through their position in class relations and through class and gender discourses about competencies in a society in the throes of economic recession and cultural crisis. The violence may indeed be symbolic of the very little power they still have manifested in their concern with territory, which may be a mode of contesting the threat to their own ethnicity. Working class white youth may redefine themselves as a collective, claiming a greater share of the scarce resources of the working class urban areas they inhabit. The collapse of employment structures and other infrastructures for young men may be part of the reason for some of the racial violence (Anthias 2007). At the same time, there are differences within this group and Levin and McDevitt (1993) identify three different typologies of hate crime perpetrators including: the thrill seeker; the reactive offender; and, the mission offender. Each of which describe different motivations for crime ranging from an 'adrenalin rush', to unambiguous racial hatred.

Criminal justice issues

Data relating to racially and religiously motivated incidents is also collected by the Australian Federal Police and the state based police services. However, such data is also unlikely to reflect the true nature and extent of racist incidents as there is under-reporting of such incidents. The European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EMCRX 2005: 59) point out that victims may not report racially and religiously motivated crimes to police for the following reasons:

- Given that victims often experience repeat 'petty' victimisation (vandalism, name calling, bullying), there may be some uncertainty about whether a 'crime' has taken place and, if so, whether it should be reported;
- Belief that the police and other criminal justice agencies are either unable or unwilling to investigate the crime and/or apprehend the offender/s;
- Distrust of criminal justice agencies as 'institutionally racist'; and,
- Fear of reprisal from racist offenders/community at large.

Furthermore, numerous authors comment that racially and religiously motivated crimes frequently go unreported because of the difficulties associated with identifying the perpetrators of such crimes (Browning & Jakubowicz 2004; Bromberg & Klein 2005). It is estimated 90 per cent of racially and religiously motivated incidents go unreported, an observation that has been noted as applicable to the victims of all types of abuse (Bromberg & Klein 2005: 6).

Moreover, the police data on racially motivated crime is linked with the extent to which individual police officers recognise and record the racial or religious motivations behind such incidents. The likelihood of Australian police officers failing to record the racial or religious motivations behind such incidents was highlighted by the National Survey of Police and Ethnic Issues (1997: 21; NPAB & AIJA 1997: 21), which found that 28% of the survey's 1,518 respondents were unaware of the existence of racial vilification legislation, with half of new recruits in this category. Also identified through this report was the need for Australian police officers to consistently record the racial or religious motivations behind racial incidents – highlighted by different bodies, such as the Australian Human Rights Commission, Islamic Women's Welfare Association and NSW Ethnic Communities Council.

Further to this, the EMCRX (2005) explains that official criminal justice data on the nature and extent of racist violence is limited by a number of factors, namely:

- Official data on racist crime and violence is limited by legal definitions and interpretations of the law. As a result it is unable to capture the full range of victimisation experiences;
- Changes to legal definitions and counting procedures mean that data is often incomparable over time; therefore, crime trends are difficult to determine; and,
- As the law and crime counting procedures are formulated differently in different jurisdictions, at both a national and cross-national level, truly comparable data cannot be established. (58)

Legal measures

Australia's anti-discrimination legislation is linked to our ratification in 1975 of the United Nations 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The key Australian legislation is the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) passed in 1975. The RDA was the federal government's first anti-discrimination legislation based on the principle that all people have the same freedoms and human rights regardless of their race, colour, ancestry, and/or country of origin. The RDA is also supported by state-based anti-racism and/or equal opportunity legislation in all states. Furthermore, ACT and Victoria have a Charter of Human Rights which promotes basic human rights, including the right to be free from discrimination and racism.

Essentially, the RDA prohibits racial discrimination, that is, treating someone less favourably because of their race, colour, ethnic or national origin. Discrimination is prohibited for: employment, land, housing and accommodation, provision of goods and services, education, access to public places and facilities and advertising and recruitment. A clear limitation of the RDA is that while public situations are covered, private or personal settings are not.

As noted above, the RDA deals with the problem of defining race by listing many similar concepts of group identity that could motivate discriminatory behaviour. Of particular concern however, given the rise in racism directed at groups on religious grounds, is the failure of the RDA to specifically prohibit discrimination or vilification based on religion. This is a serious omission given the increasingly important issue of racial vilification or language that reviles or abuses a person or group on racial grounds. Related issues are racial harassment, incitement to racist violence and racial hatred. Debates about legal prohibitions on racial vilification raise complex questions of freedom of expression and the difficult to define distinction between legitimate political comment, satire and artistic expression on the one hand, and unreasonable or unacceptable group defamation or vilification on the other (McNamara 2002; Hollinsworth 2006).

Attempts to introduce racial vilification legislation have been thwarted by complexity and inconsistency between various states and the Commonwealth. The first state to prohibit racial vilification was NSW with the passing in 1989 of Racial Vilification amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW). The Act defined racial vilification as incitement, by a public act, of hatred, serious contempt, or severe ridicule of a person, or group, on the grounds of their race (New South Wales Government 1977). In 1991 the ACT Discrimination Act 1991 followed the NSW model. Similarly, the Qld Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 outlawed incitement to both racial and religious hatred, and in 2001 an amendment made racial and religious vilification unlawful (Queensland Government 1991). The SA Racial Vilification Act 1996 also followed the NSW terms although the Attorney General must consent to any proceedings. The Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 made racial and religious vilification unlawful and made criminal its most serious forms (O'Neill, O'Neill et al. 2004).

The 1991 National Inquiry into Racist Violence (NIRV) recommended amendments to the RDA and the Commonwealth Crimes Act to cover racist violence and harassment, and incitement to racist violence and racial hatred. The NIRV Report also recommended that harsher criminal penalties apply where there was a racist motivation in an act of violence or intimidation. Furthermore, it urged that laws cover advocates and people whose religion had come to act as a marker of race or ethnicity, as with Muslims in Australia (HREOC, 1991: 301-302). These recommendations were extensively debated in the media and Federal Parliament with many attacking the proposals as against free speech (Keeley, 1995).

In December 1992, the ALP introduced the RDA Amendment Bill that proposed to make racist violence a criminal offence and racial vilification unlawful. This Bill lapsed with the calling of the March 1993 election. After extensive consultations in 1993-94, the Racial Hatred Act (RHA) was finally passed in October 1995 (McNamara 2002: 40-49). The RHA inserted amendments into the RDA, which made unlawful, public acts which are reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate a person or group of people, where the act is done because of the race, colour or national or ethnic origin of the person or group (McNamara, 2002: 50-109).

A major inconsistency in legal coverage in state based legislation is that none of the criminal offences of assault, grievous bodily harm, wounding, affray or riot contain a motivation component, meaning that at this point in time, the criminal law almost completely ignores an offender's racial motivation. This is a serious omission in relation to the prevention of racially motivated violence.

Walters (2006) argues that the events in Cronulla should have acted as a wakeup call to legislatures who have traditionally resisted calls to introduce hate crime laws. He posits that current criminal laws are failing to protect victims and fairly punish perpetrators of this highly consequential crime. Thus, if minority communities are to gain confidence in the criminal justice system the criminal law must be changed to protect them. Walters (2006) makes a further important point that racist violence is complex and that there are multiple social, economic and political forces which must also be changed if the law is to have its greatest success. The goal of social integration demands a cross-disciplinary approach. Disintegrated changes in the law, media, parenting or education will not bring about the necessary changes in themselves.

The Victorian Government announced on 24 July 2009 it would legislate later that year to ensure sentencing laws take into account crimes motivated by hate or prejudice. Deputy Premier and Attorney-General Rob Hulls said that the Government had now received advice from the

Sentencing Advisory Council on amending the Sentencing Act. The Council has suggested explicit legislative recognition that courts, in sentencing, have regard to whether the offence was motivated by hate for or prejudice against a particular group of people with common characteristics. It has also suggested courts will be able to impose more severe sentences for offences motivated by hatred (Government of Victoria 2009).

There is much criticism in relation to the efficacy of current legal measures to end racial discrimination. For example, Gaze (2005) concludes that the absence of successful racial discrimination claims under the RDA and the general inability of racial discrimination cases to meet the requisite onus of proof is suggestive that:

> *Racial subordination is an ordinary, normal part of our social landscape and that as a result, racial discrimination and particularly racially discriminatory basis for acting, is difficult for the courts to recognise….*

Anti-discrimination laws are intended to provide redress for individuals and groups in specific situations. They do not address key systemic issues of discrimination and racism. However, addressing prejudice and racism requires tackling systematic and structural disadvantage (Collins 2003; Babacan, Babacan et al. 2009). An additional problem is that the onus of proof falls largely on the victim of racism. Given that in many cases it is difficult for the complainant to produce direct evidence, then the only recourse a complainant has is to produce inferences from the facts surrounding the case. However, despite acknowledgement of the systemic nature of racism, in Australia in particular, the courts have been hesitant to draw inferences about racial discrimination or racism (Hunyor 2003). These difficulties in addressing issues related to racism are underpinned by social discourses that disguise the extent to which racism manifests within the community through processes that a growing body of literature names as 'racism denial'.

Denial of racism

> *There are two subjects that we are never permitted to discuss with any seriousness: race and religion (Vidal 2002)*

Discussion of racism is a confronting subject and there is a tendency to avoid it. Experiences of racism are often denied, silenced, dismissed or minimised in what is referred to as 'racism and the conspiracy of silence' (Sue 2005). There is even an attempt to curtail its discussion in some community, policy and academic settings. The tendency of governments to respond to the issues of racism by taking a 'soft approach' that attempts to focus on the positive dimensions of an issue, only serves to compound issues of racism by submerging the hard evidence required to work on the issues. This process is further reinforced by the fact that only a small percentage of racist incidents are reported to the official structures that exist to deal formally with them.

By racism denial we refer to the widespread belief that racism is no longer a feature of modern social relations, which is articulated through commonly expressed views such as; 'racism was in the past', 'it only exists in a minority of the population' or 'we need to focus on what unites us and our commonalities' (Babacan 2008). Such beliefs and views are generated through discourse or, as van Dijk (2000) puts it, '…they are expressed, enacted and confirmed by text and talk, such as everyday conversations, board meetings, job interviews, policies, laws, parliamentary debates'.

While race denial may appear to be less harmful than the very clear effects inflicted by 'old racisms' such as slavery or race segregation, its power lies in normalising and sanitising dominant belief systems while excluding and marginalising the beliefs and views of those defined as 'other', including complaints. Statements such as 'I'm not racist but…' render racism invisible and render racist behaviour legitimate. Such statements position perpetrators outside the boundaries of racism, while still expressing derogatory views about particular groups and assuming a power to define who belongs and who doesn't within a given community or society according to racial and cultural characteristics. As such, the effects of race denial are harmful and serve to reinforce patterns of inclusion and exclusion, dominance and subordination (van Dijk 2000). It is also noted that racism privileges or discriminates against a group based on the most superficial of criteria but it has the most pernicious quality of resilience and respectability constructed through public discourses of the media, politicians and others in which racism denial plays a central role (Ismail 2007).

Jacques notes that dominant groups, individuals and nations are never honest about racism in a society and rarely admit to their own racism. Denial of racism is almost universal and the reasons are manifold. Firstly, the dominant group has a huge vested interest in its own privilege and is often oblivious to its own prejudices. It will regard its racist attitudes as nothing more than 'common sense' explanations of social conditions (Jacques 2003). By attributing racism to a small minority, the dominant group/individual can define themselves as non-racist. Racism is often covered up or downplayed as something else less deliberate or oppressive, such as cultural misunderstanding by those who are not subject to its violence and belittling. This racism denial is associated with the 'new racism', as it enables people to deny being racists by contrasting it with 'old-fashioned racism'. New racism appropriates values or principles such as the work ethic, lifestyle, gender relations and self-reliance to argue for 'racist' and discriminatory practices. Negative attitudes and behaviour are justified by arguments minority groups transgress central values and norms (Babacan & Babacan 2006). As such, the effects of racism denial are harmful and serve to reinforce patterns of inclusion and exclusion, dominance and subordination. Denial of racism can also send a clear message that racist behaviours are permissible and will not be met with sanctions (Hollinsworth 2006).

Riggs (2005) identifies that there is 'a collective psychical nature of racism' rather than an individual one. This means that at an unconscious level individuals of the 'dominant society' have already invested in racism. In multicultural societies, the hierarchy of the ladders of race relations is also established so that the dominant society is not only white but can also include more established ethnic communities. When an incidence of racism is voiced there is an implication for the individual. An outcome is that those individuals may resist as they have difficulty in accepting that they have invested in racism, are beneficiaries of it and need to be accountable (Riggs 2005).

Quantifying the relationships between racism denial and social outcomes is allusive. Racism denial is not easily measured on a clear and quantifiable spectrum between racist and non-racist. Rather, race denial is often seen as common sense, benign in its intent and is shaped by context. There is no simple expression of racism denial, but rather, a combination of often contradictory practices, expressions and beliefs that play out differently, with different effects in different contexts. Similarly, there is no clear division between those who are included and excluded within and between groups. By this, we mean that there are racial divisions and racist behaviours expressed within non-white populations as well as in dominant and white population groups. As such, it is impossible to identify clear and direct relationships between racist discourse and specific social outcomes.

Impacts of racism

Racism is known to have negative impacts on targets. Harrell points out that 'racism can traumatize, hurt, humiliate, enrage, confuse, and ultimately prevent optimal growth and functioning of individuals and communities' (Harrell 2000). Fozdar and Torezani (2008) argue that experiences of discrimination produce low levels of wellbeing, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, or worse, actual anxiety or stress, leading to negative physical, psychological, social, functional, and spiritual health. The relationship between race, ethnicity and health status is well documented with studies on life expectancy, infant mortality rates, mortality and morbidity rates indicating significant health disparities across different population groups (Krieger 2000). Victims of racism and discrimination are more likely to have respiratory illness, hypertension, a long-term limiting illness, anxiety, depression, and psychosis (Karlsen & Nazroo 2004). MacKenzie (2003) also points to a growing body of literature on the link between perceived racial discrimination and both physical and psychological ill health. He points out that this has broader social costs, such as reduced productivity and long-term costs to the health system. These mental health consequences of racial discrimination are significant and global. For example in 2003, a review of international studies showed a positive association between perceived discrimination and levels of mental illness in 38 of the 47 studies examined (VicHealth 2006).

Responses to racism by minorities are contextual and arise from a variety of life experiences of individuals (Derald, Capolidupo et al. 2007). A particular incident may not have occurred for the first time. What may appear as a random event to a member of the dominant culture is a familiar and repeated experience for the person from minority culture. People from dominant cultures, while making appraisals about whether a situation or event was racist do not share these multiple experiences, and they evaluate either the incident or their own behaviours in the moment through a singular event (Dovidio & Gaertner 2000). Thus, they fail to see a pattern of bias and can easily deny any form of racism or discrimination (Sue 2005). Further, literature identifies that victims of racism are not only blamed for problems such as inequality, unemployment and alcoholism, but are also constructed as the cause of the majority group's racism. Often, not only is the racism denied, but people who are targets of racism are blamed for overreacting to a particular event, incident or person.

Reactions and responses to racism may be cognitive, affective (emotional) or behavioural and can come in active or passive forms. Responses can be inner or outer directed (Harrell 2000). Drawing from a wide range of literature Paradies (2006) outlines a number of responses to racism including:

- Hypervigilance, in which an individual devotes an extreme amount of cognitive effort to determining whether or not racism occurred, thus creating additional stress for him/herself above and beyond the effects of racism itself;
- Denial of racism and self-blame (active responses), and resigned acceptance (passive response) are cognitive responses that attempt to avoid the need to deal with racism at all;
- Empowered responses occur when a human actor who experiences racism projects inferiority onto the perpetrator and feels contempt, amusement and/or sorrow/sympathy for him/her whilst disempowered responses include emotions such as anger, annoyance or frustration;
- Inner-directed disempowered affective responses can be either active (e.g. shame, self-hatred, humiliation, anxiety, fear) or passive (e.g. powerlessness, hopelessness, confusion, depression);
- Inner-directed emotion-focused responses include contemplative/relaxing techniques such as praying and meditation while outer-directed responses include the problem-focused approach of confronting perpetrator(s) as well as the emotion-focused approach of establishing and/or utilizing social support and writing, drawing, singing or painting about, or otherwise expressing, racism experiences;
- Over- and under-achievement/striving is the tendency to work extremely hard and with great pressure to disprove stereotypes of laziness and inability (over-achievement) and race causes self-stigmatisation and reduced performance in an activity, experience or situation (under achievement);
- Maladaptive behavioural responses include alienation from other racial group members and risk taking/self-harming activities;
- 'Passing' is a problem-focused response available to some people in some contexts, in which one's racial identity is either not deployed or is denied in order to avoid racism; and,
- Behavioural responses to racism include avoiding situations where racism is likely to occur as well as strategic decisions not to respond to racist experiences in order to 'protect one's time, energy, sanity and bodily integrity and enable one to 'fight those battles that are worth fighting'.

Additionally, writings on racism point out that while experience of racism is important, there is also the vicarious nature of racism. This is the cognition of racism from the experiences of other minority groups, from the media and other sources (Essed 1991). Coupled with self experience, some individuals may anticipate racism even when it is not there and therefore be anxious about social contact (Mellor 2004).

An important objective of this research is to explore the extent to which incidents of violence are motivated by racism as opposed to opportunism. This is done in part to contribute to what is a polarised debate about the issues that are ultimately unhelpful in a deepened understanding of the complexities of both racism, which we understand as embedded in social relations, and wellbeing, which is contingent on community safety. A review of the literature in relation to international student experience, however, shows that there is similarly little attention to how issues of racism and wellbeing intersect to shape the experiences of international students in Australia. The following section now gives an overview of the literature relating to the experiences of international students.

3.4 Experiences of international students – the literature

International students have a variety of dreams, expectations, fears, concerns, frustrations, disappointments and successes. Their lives are complex, sometimes difficult and combine a range of educational, psychological and social experiences. International students are on sojourn and in transit. They arrive with a variety of expectations from a variety of sources. Their initial period of contact will significantly affect their perceptions. Friendship and hospitality offered to them will engender positive experiences, perceptions and memories; discrimination, isolation and dislike will create long term negative perceptions (Butcher & McGrath 2004: 541-542).

As discussed throughout, international students are of enormous importance to the education sector and the economy of many Western countries including Australia, bringing significant income through fees, other expenditure and creating employment (Marginson and McBurnie 2004; Deumert et al. 2005). Their significance is also part of a broader globalisation context with exponential interconnectivity and mobility of people around the world (Beck 2000). As the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) points out, international education in Australia, is not a cottage industry but a vast, diverse and vital export industry bringing new capital into every state economy, significantly impacting upon each state's prosperity and therefore that of Australia (ACPET 2009: 4). Commenting from the New Zealand experience, Butcher and McGrath (2004) point out that the phenomenal increase in international students in the twenty-first century has simultaneously, at least anecdotally, saved institutions from bankruptcy, while putting increasing strain on student support services. It has also diversified and injected significant revenue into communities and cities. As such, understanding the motivations and experiences of international students assumes critical importance as a field of social investigation.

Expectations and Factors Influencing Decisions about Study Choice

Studies from Australia and overseas reveal that there are multiple factors influencing a student's choice to study in a particular country. Yao and Bai (2008), for example, point out that the motivation for a student, for example, travelling from Norway to study in Australia is not necessarily the same as for a student from China. One issue is economic supply factors in countries such as in China, where the economy is undergoing a period of enormous growth and foreign companies are making significant investment in the country. This, in turn, is opening up opportunities for Chinese people in the emerging global economy. Many Chinese companies are also investing overseas. The demand for qualified graduates has outstripped the supply in China (Yao and Bai 2008:25). Contrasting the driving factors for other students, Yao and Bai (2008) posit that for students from Europe and the USA, the factors of influence are also global but, different to Asian students. For the former, affluence and the ability to spend makes overseas study an attractive opportunity. For students of non-English speaking backgrounds, the importance of having an English language degree gives such degrees a competitive advantage in an increasingly English-language dominant world. There are numerous factors which affect student choice of destination, including price and living costs, travel distance, student security, language, degree quality, graduate opportunities and migration potential (Deumert et al. 2005). For student choice, apart from the world market in elite universities such as Harvard, Stanford and Oxford, 'national brand' carries more weight than 'institutional brand' (Deumert et al. 2005: 333).

Butcher and McGrath (2004) note that some students travel to New Zealand because it is cheap and easy, however, most go for more complex reasons. Some choose to go to New Zealand to study because they will attain a Western degree and the ability to speak English, but most go to New Zealand with more varied expectations. The expectations of students were most often not met as per the following table collated by Lewis and Butcher (2003):

Table 3.1: Expectations and experiences of Asian students in New Zealand

% Experienced	Expectation	% Expected
Understand New Zealand English	80	57
Express myself effectively in English	77	40
Get Good Grades	87	28
Form friendships with New Zealanders	91	41
Enjoy socialising with New Zealanders	82	52
Understand NZ social customs	82	34
Be accepted by New Zealanders	72	37
Maintain a positive outlook	88	69
Feel stressed	31	49
Have enough money	62	51
Have no problems with my living arrangements	59	70

Source: Lewis and Butcher (2003), as cited in Butcher McGrath (2008:542)

While not directly comparable, a related study was undertaken by the City of Melbourne in 2008 and students were asked to rate 25 factors which may have influenced their choice to study in Melbourne on a 5-point scale, where 1 = No influence, 2 = Low influence, 3 = Moderate influence, 4 = High influence, and 5 = Very high influence. The tables below list the highest and lowest ranked influences, based on mean score:

The academic reputations and the information about the Universities were equally important as safe place to live and quality of lifestyle and culture. The opportunity for employment beyond study is one of top five in this study, indicating the importance of economic considerations.

ACPET (2009), based on a study of 4500 students, argues that the better quality of education is the main motivation for considering study overseas. Other motivators for study include improvement of career prospects and improvement of English language skills. A significant finding by ACPET is that the decision taking by prospective students is based on a specific course of study with less than 20 per cent of students choosing their study destination first. A study conducted by the City of Melbourne, comprising mainly higher education students, found that close to half (49%) of the international students surveyed indicated that they were most likely to look for a job in Melbourne after completing their current course of study. Twenty-one per cent of respondents indicated they would most likely return to their home country while 18% indicated they were most likely to enrol for further studies in Melbourne (2008:12).

There has been considerable controversy about international student motivations being linked to immigration, with concerns expressed that many are influenced by opportunity to gain permanent residence, rather than study. The evidence is mixed. For example, ACPET points out that despite widespread publicity of the intentions of South Asian students to seek residency following their studies, this is not indicated in the early stages of decision making, suggesting that residency decision making follows the study decision and a period of time 'in country'. This finding was confirmed in a higher education study of mainly Chinese students by Yao and Bai (2008) who concluded that contrary to public belief, the international students were not motivated by immigration policy to come to study in Australia. In fact, only 17.6 % of them came here because of permanent residency policy, and one-third of the international students who are studying here indicated that they will return to their home countries after graduation. In contrast, Jackling (2007) showed that 84% of the international students, in a sample from an accounting course at one university, intended to seek permanent residency (PR) in Australia and viewed the study of accounting as a means of helping them meet the requirements for PR status. Although most indicated that they intended to seek employment in the accounting field upon graduation, the feedback from employers suggests that generally international accounting graduates are not sufficiently 'work ready' to be considered for graduate employment.

As noted above, the evidence for a connection between international student motivation to study abroad and plans to gain residency is contradictory and inconclusive. What is conclusive is that motivations, just as the make-up of the international student body itself, are highly varied.

Table 3.2: Highest rated factors influencing international students' decision to study in Melbourne

5 highest rated factors	Mean
The academic reputation of my current educational institution	3.8
A safe place to live	3.7
Information about universities in Melbourne	3.6
Lifestyle and culture	3.6
Job opportunity after graduation	3.5

Source: City of Melbourne, 2008

Table 3.3: Lowest rated factors influencing international students' decision to study in Melbourne

5 lowest rated factors	Mean
My course is not presented in another Australian city	2.2
Active and diverse nightlife (e.g. clubs, pubs)	2.4
Opportunity to participate in sporting events and activities	2.5
A scholarship or other financial support to study in Melbourne	2.6
My course is not presented in my home country	2.6

Source: City of Melbourne, 2008

Integration and social needs

International students arriving in Australia live in the community and have social needs, just as any other students do. There is a strong correlation between successful education outcomes and the social needs of students (Butcher and McGrath 2008). Despite an expanding global market in higher education, there have been significant gaps in the governance of international students' rights, which have created difficulties in meeting these social needs. Deumert et al. (2005: 329-330) state that:

> *As well as being educational service beneficiaries, cross-border students are migrants, workers, consumers and human beings. A broader view of students, as individuals deserving of 'social and economic security', is superior to that which treats them as social protection subjects. This lack of coordination results in the failure of social and economic institutions to recognize the multiple vulnerabilities of international students, constructing them mainly as consumers rather than individuals with a variety of social and economic rights.*

A number of papers point to this problem. The key issues raised include language acquisition and proficiency, social isolation and loneliness, inadequate finances and incomes, labour market and workplace discrimination, and experiences in relation to personal safety (Mazzarol, Soutar et al. 2001). Some of the critical social needs are discussed below.

Accommodation: International students represent a cohort of students who make demands on the housing market for rental accommodation. However, the housing market in Australia is stretched and the availability of affordable and quality housing is limited (Fincher, Carter et al. 2009). Yao and Bai (2008), in their case study of Bendigo, concluded that the main attraction to that city for international students is the low cost of living and a good environment. This study shows that they spent substantially less on accommodation when compared with the typical accommodation costs in major cities in Australia. In a study conducted by the City of Melbourne in 2008, international students rated accommodation, cost of living and cost of public transport as the worst aspect of studying and living in Melbourne. The study demonstrated that accommodation was a major problem for students, both in ease of finding accommodation but also in affordability (CoM 2008: 10).

Employment and Exploitation: The international students come from varied financial situations. Many come without adequate funds to support themselves and sometimes accrue debt in their country of origin (Butcher and McGrath 2004). Many are forced to seek employment shortly after arrival. Nyland et al (2009) argue that a much greater proportion of international students participate in the labour market than earlier research has indicated. One-third of interviewees revealed paid employment as their main source of income, while 57% indicated they were employed at the time of interview (sample size 200). The authors also identify that in 58% of the cases, the remuneration given to students was below legal pay levels. The study indicates that international students have fewer employment options and tend to be crowded into a narrower range of jobs.

In a study by City of Melbourne (2008), concerns about finding employment, and the perception of low wages of work undertaken by international students was cited. In another study, students were asked, 'Have you ever experienced problems at work, such as abuse or exploitation?', to which 21% of those who had worked said 'yes' (Deumert, Marginson et al. 2005: 341)(. The identified problems at work included such factors as exploitative rates of pay, excessive hours or other unreasonable demands, difficulties in performing the expected functions without proper training, and/or instances of sexual or other forms of harassment (especially for female students).

Any discussion about skilled migration, diverse workforces, temporary visitors and international students often stirs up heated debate in the Australia. The argument that international students are taking local jobs is a popular one. Particular employer bodies note the skill and unskilled labour shortages. For example, touching on issues of perception as it relates to employment ACPET (ACPET 2009: 11) states:

> *The consequent growth in the international student cohort has resulted in large numbers of international students exercising their work rights frequently in highly visible occupations. This may give rise to public perceptions of international students 'taking Australian jobs'. ACPET is sceptical of this view and argues that much work is done by international students that is unpopular even in a softening domestic labour market.*

In other words, there is little evidence to support the controversial argument that a rise in international student immigration has the

potential to reduce available jobs for those who reside in Australia on a more permanent basis.

Social Participation and Support: Research shows that international students prefer close friendship with co-nationals (Ward 2001). At the same time, it shows that international students who befriend members of the host culture ultimately have a more fulfilling and enriching overseas student experience. Berno and Ward (2002) found that a significant proportion of overseas students feel ambivalent about their relations with host nationals and that many perceive discrimination. Conversely, a study conducted by the City of Melbourne (2008) indicated that 72% of international students surveyed have had the chance to meet local Australian students, and 56% of students reported they had had the opportunity to experience Australian culture. A large majority also felt that people living in Melbourne were accepting of people from other cultures and religions (87% and 91% respectively) (8). However, in the same study respondents voiced their desire for greater interaction opportunities (through activities and events) with local Australian students, which would could enhance relationships between international and domestic students, and help international students to better feel a part of the Melbourne community. Some respondents commented on a lack of social activities in general, particularly after hours when many shops and entertainment outlets are closed. Respondents were asked whether they had accessed any of 16 support services and whether each had met their needs. Only three-quarters of respondents said that they had actually used any of the listed services. Only four were significantly accessed: immigration services (51%), accommodation services (48%), general health services (44%), and employment services (42%) (CoM 2008:8). Still, only half of respondents accessed even these services. In another study, 60% of students expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation (Deumert et al. 2005: 339) both in personal and institutional situations.

Community safety

There is a plethora of research on the economics of the education market, marketing initiatives for international students and internationalisation efforts of education providers. There is very little research on international student safety. Universities Australia (2009a) emphasise that reforms and initiatives should be based on better evidence and research, something which is conspicuously under-provided in this area. This includes issues of basic official data on student safety (subject to considerations of privacy and non-discrimination). They argue that as a minimum, there must be a regular, authoritative and independent assembly of official data, plus survey work to gather student opinion, both local and international, on the student experience. This should include data and opinion on safety and welfare matters, both during and after completion of studies. The section below draws upon the little evidence that has been found in scholarship from Australia and around the world.

Student safety is recognised as a first and foundation component of the student experience (Universities Australia 2009). Student experience and safety concerns is not limited to life within education institutions and on campus. Community attitudes and off-campus life greatly influence student experience, student outcomes and social integration, as well as safety. Butcher and McGrath (2009) point out that there is increasing resentment amongst local communities, against the sheer numbers of students and at the perceived connection between this and buoyed property markets in many major cities. Tenants say they do not want to share a property with English language schools. Further, some see diversification of New Zealand's culture through international student immigration as creating a threatening sub-culture. Universities Australia (2009) points out that international students can face higher safety and security hazards than their domestic student peers due to different knowledge sets, particular living and travel arrangements and community attitudes (6), such as those just described.

The City of Melbourne (2008) showed that, in terms of general wellbeing, 84% of international students rated their general physical health as 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent', and 69% of them reported being 'happy' or 'very happy' with their life as a whole since arriving in Melbourne (with a significant 21% not being happy) (8). Safety considerations and quality of life were among the top five reasons why students chose Melbourne as a destination as seen in the above tables. Safety was among the top five reasons why students would consider remaining in Melbourne beyond their studies. The researchers asked students to rate how safe they felt in the city, in their local area, in their educational institution and on public transport, both during the day and after dark. International students reported generally feeling safer during the day compared to after dark. The study concluded, based on mean scores, that respondents felt most safe in their educational institution during the day and least safe on public transport after dark. Respondents were also asked whether they had experienced any of a list of incidents which may have caused them to feel unsafe during their stay in Melbourne. Being approached by beggars topped the list of incidents, with close to half the survey respondents (49%) having experienced this, followed by verbal assault (37%) and feeling intimidated without actually being confronted (23%) by observing incidents (e.g. drunken brawls). Theft was experienced by 13% of respondents. Around 20% of comments received related to verbal assault, with a majority of respondents being on the receiving end of indecent language (most commonly related to remarks on culture and ethnicity), often by intoxicated individuals. On the other hand, almost third of the respondents (33%) reported not having experienced any of the incidents listed.

A majority of survey respondents reported an incident to others, with friends topping the list (54%), followed by a family member (27%) and the Victoria Police (20%). Thirty-seven per cent of respondents who experienced one or more of the incidents listed did not report the incident. The reasons for not reporting included: the event was minor or trivial; they were unsure or did not know what to do about reporting an incident; not wanting to cause themselves unnecessary inconvenience by going through the reporting process; being unable to identify a perpetrator; not having sufficient evidence or witnesses to report an incident; fear of getting into trouble for reporting an incident; not wanting to create any potential immigration or residency problems for themselves by reporting the incident. Issues were also raised about Victoria Police. The report states:

Another minor theme (12% of comments) emerged around international students' perceptions of Victoria Police. Respondents made various comments indicating a perceived lack of follow-up on reported incidents in their (or their friends') previous dealings with the police. Some respondents suggested that the police may not be able to influence the outcome of the situation or take the matter any further, and others perceived a lack of concern for their situation by police, particularly because of their status as international students (CoM, 2008:14).

Issues of racial discrimination are sensitive and are often not documented. They are a key consideration in student safety. Fifty per cent of respondents to the Deumert et al. (2005) study identified 'bad treatment' based on racial discrimination. Work and experiences in trying to obtain accommodation in the private rental market were the two main sites of discrimination. Less discrimination was experienced on campus. Pointing to issues of discrimination and racial/ethnic differences Kuh (1990: 93), states that 'realization of the pluralism imperative is the most significant challenge ever faced by higher education' (93). Hanassab (2006) points to the complexity of racial discrimination. He reminds us that international students coming from different regions experience discrimination in various degrees. His research from the USA indicates that international students from the regions of the Middle East and Africa experience more discrimination than do students from other regions. The results also indicate that international students experience more discrimination off-campus than they do on-campus. Similarly, Lee and Rice (2007), in another study of the USA, conclude that a range of international student problems suggest 'neo-racism' (the new racism discussed earlier) as a cause. They identify how the forms of neo racism range from perceptions of unfairness and inhospitality, to cultural intolerance and confrontation. The sites of these problems are found in campus social interactions, interactions with faculty and administration, denial of funding or job opportunities, and in off-campus interactions such as housing and shopping. It is impossible to know how much what is reported here is actual discrimination, that is, exclusion based on citizenship status, language, or race, and how much is misperception, but it is clear that there is a divide in the experiences of white international students and those of colour. Students from Asia, India, Latin America, and the Middle East reported considerable discrimination while students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand did not report any direct negative experiences related to their race or culture.

Student safety is an important consideration in choice of place of study. This was demonstrated in a study of Chinese students, which concluded that a safe environment was the most significant predictor of intentions to choose Australia over competitor nations (Mazzarol, Soutar et al. 2001). In a further study, Mazzarol and Souter (2002) identify safe environment (low crime) and low racial discrimination as among the top nine considerations for selecting host country for students from Taiwan, India, China and Indonesia. Thus there are commercial imperatives for ensuring student safety as well as human rights considerations.

Recognising this, ACPET notes that anxiety among international students is common. Evidence indicates that 95% of international students experience levels of anxiety above the general host country population, which presents significant implications for host countries, support services and providers (ACPET 2009: 6). ACPET has concluded that:

- Students from societies with higher levels of social control, or with a history of family support and leadership do not view Australia as a safe place;
- It is uncertain the extent to which Australian domestic social support and management, such as police and government information services, are prepared to handle requirements from a large population group of international students;
- Critical incidents lack the quick response, coordination and management required to assist the student/s and manage the risk to Australia's reputation;
- Australian public transport, especially rail, warrants special consideration for safety intervention.

Yao and Bai (2008) point out that Australia is competing in a global education market against countries such as the USA, Canada and the UK. In order to sustain the current level of international students they make the pertinent point that:

… we must understand what brings them here in the first place. We must improve the infrastructures for entertainment, shopping facilities, housing supports and public bus and train services or we run the risk of diminishing economic effects with possible declining numbers of international students coming to the region. It is important to help the newly arrived students to save costs on accommodation, food and local transportation while, at the same time, assist the second and third year students in local/overseas educational travelling plans (as this is) vital to their learning and to maximise the economic impacts these international students can bring to us (261).

3.5 How the literature shapes this research

The purpose of this section has been to provide an overview and discussion of the bodies of literature that inform our approach to this study. First, we clarified our use of the term, 'community safety', drawing from literature that is critical of the perspective that only specific incidents of crime and violence are of interest, and are largely a matter of police concern. Our perspective is broader than this, recognising that incidents of violence can be seen as one outcome of a broader community safety context that is shaped by environmental, social and economic conditions. It is also closely connected to communities and community cohesion, patterns of inclusion/exclusion and wellbeing. Our view is that, in order to understand the more serious issue of violence, which was the initial catalyst for this research, it is necessary to investigate the broader context. In this light, violent crimes are of serious concern, but are nevertheless one end of a spectrum of issues impacting upon individual freedoms to live, work and study without fear.

We went on to discuss theories of ethnicity and race, their resilience in shaping identity, characterising global migration flows, and their importance in explaining social conflicts. We discussed how racism operates to define social relations between people and discussed its role in generating durable social structures that generate processes of racialisation. These processes are, in part, fuelled by fear, which powerfully underpins violence and conflict – processes in which social

institutions including the media, government and education are complicit, through practices that define patterns of dominance and marginalisation based on race. At a local level, the outcomes often take the form of 'hate crimes', often perpetrated by those within the dominant group who are excluded and marginalised themselves.

While there is a legislative framework in place, aimed at eliminating discrimination and racial violence, there are considerable gaps and limitations in the scope of the legal framework in generating real social change. Key limitations include its impotence in preventing discrimination in the private sphere, lack of coordination across the States and Federally, and the neglect of discrimination on religious grounds. The complaints based processes on which legislation is based also discourages reporting of racially motivated incidents, due in part to a lack of formal consideration of motivation as a cause. It also fails to generate the kind of coordination across social institutions that is required in order to tackle racism in all of its hues, from relatively minor incidents of 'coldness' in social interactions to violent attacks on the basis of race.

Racism has a material effect at a range of levels. From an individual level, where those who suffer discrimination experience stress and anxiety, to a broader social level, where poorer health outcomes, social stratification and the intermittent explosion of racial tensions are seen, like that which occurred in the Cronulla Riots (Clements 2006). However, the development of a widespread understanding of the centrality of racism is thwarted, due to powerful social trends that in effect serve to deny that racism exists. An emerging literature that explores 'the denial of racism', theorises that there is a deep social discomfort with naming and discussing racism. This denial is powerful in protecting dominant interests and social hierarchies structured along racial lines.

The complexities of race and ethnicity, and their relationships with community safety, remain relatively under-researched in relation to international students. This represents a serious gap, particularly given significance of international students, both in terms of the economic benefits derived from international students but also in terms of longer term international relations, domestic social cohesion and the general contribution international students make to any host nation. Given that Australia competes with other OECD countries for a share of international enrolments, there is a need for a more nuanced approach to supporting infrastructure development to enhance the international student experience, as well as to promote community safety. Existing research suggests that conditions of study are particularly 'out of step' with the cultural expectations of dominant groups of international students in Australia and increased investment is required.

Combined, this literature informs our approach to this study. As discussed in Section 2, international students enter Australia in a particularly vulnerable position given their absence of citizenship, predominately youthful profile, and their lack of community and familial networks and supports. The assumptions that we bring to this research are that the community safety of international students needs to be understood within the broader public policy, social, economic and historical context. Importantly, they enter an education system that is reliant on international student fees to sustain itself, and within the context of patterns of migration that have effectively sustained a collective identity of Australia as 'white'. While the Australian government, and the educational institutions on which the onus of responsibility rests, have enthusiastically sought after international student enrolments from Asian populations, their arrival represents a major departure from the dominantly white population that successive Australian governments have sought to preserve. The potential for ruptures this might cause, in terms of racial tension, has been largely unexplored. This is, at least in part, due to processes that serve to deny the centrality of race and racism as forces that shape Australian society.

In this light, the methodological approach to this study is very broad, recognising that issues of violence against international students cannot be seen in isolation. To this end, the study adopts a mixed method design, with the intention of capturing the range of perspectives across the multiple stakeholders who both impact on, and are impacted by, violence against international students. The following section elaborates.

This section describes the range of methods that were implemented to achieve the five research aims of this study, as outlined in the Introduction. . First, we describe the rationale behind the study's overall research design. Then we detail each of the methods implemented to gather evidence to investigate the key questions posed by this research. Finally, we discuss the constraints of the methods employed and limitations of the outcomes.

SECTION 4: RESEARCH METHOD

4.1 Research Design, methods and limitations

The study draws employs a mix of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Quantitative methods were employed to generate extensive data about the nature, experiences and implications of community safety concerns across a broad student population within metropolitan Melbourne. Qualitative methods were used to gain richer insight into perceptions of safety and of crime and how they are experienced through interviews with key stakeholders and with a diversity of international students.

Common across the study's methodologies, the intention has been to gather evidence to inform a rich understanding of the issues surrounding international student safety, including the nature of threats to international student safety, the extent to which crimes, especially assaults, against international students are racially motivated or opportunistic, policy responses and initiatives and ideas of students and other key stakeholders about what should be done to protect international student safety in future. Specifically, the methods employed included a literature review and media analysis, interviews with international students, interviews with other key stakeholders and an on-line survey of students, both local and international, about their experiences of and ideas about community safety. The survey and interviews were implemented within the guidelines established by Victoria University's (VU's) research ethics standards and the methodology and ethics processes were approved by the VU Human Research Ethics Committee prior to the study's commencement.

Literature Review and Media Analysis

A systematic review of relevant academic literature was undertaken to identify key themes in topics relevant to our research, including inter alia international student safety, community safety and policing, migration, ethnicity and race and opportunity versus racism as motivating factors in crime. Alongside this review, we analysed the content of relevant documents from national and international media outlets, migrant community media in Melbourne and Australia, especially Chinese and Indian media outlets and the policy documents and media releases, public addresses and websites of key stakeholders. We traced the progression of formal and informal public debates and political commentary through 'new media' sources such as internet commentary on official media news sites and through blogs of key players, including international student organisations and individuals. Through this content analysis, we were able to capture perspectives and trends as events unfolded and follow the progression of dialogue on international students in Australia.

To establish the global and Australian social and policy contexts within which Australia's international education sector operates, we examined statistical data and policies for information on trends and responses from Australian government sources including the ABS, AEI, DIAC, NTIS and internationally, from OECD data on education-related global immigration and services. To gain information on the policy contexts and challenges pertaining to international students in Australia and in Victoria, we analysed numerous policy documents and data from Australian and Victorian government departments, including primarily DEEWR and AEI, ACPET and the Victorian DIIRD and VRQA. In particular, we drew on the 2008 review of Australian Higher Education (the Bradley Report) and the 2008 Victorian Government Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce. We also drew on reports from non-government sources such as Federation of Indian Students of Australia (FISA), Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia (FECCA) in conducting the content analysis.

Table 4.1 Distribution of interview participants according to sector and gender.

	Chinese		Indian		Others		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Higher Ed/TAFE	3	3	3	2	4	3	18
Private RTOs	2	2	3	3	3	4	17
Subtotal	5	5	6	5	7	7	35

International student interviews:

As detailed in Table 4.1 below, 35 international students, aged 18 and over, who were undertaking studies in Australian education institutes located in metropolitan Melbourne during the research project took part in the study. In order to compare experiences across groups of students from different national backgrounds, three different groupings of students were invited to participate. The goal was to interview ten students from India, ten students from China and ten students from a range of other countries. The rationale for this configuration was first, that recent highly publicised incidents of violence had mainly occurred against Indian students. Second, students from India and China are overwhelmingly dominant amongst international student enrolments in Victoria with 42,573 and 34,357 enrolments respectively for 2009 (AEI 2009e). Given the comparable size in numbers of students from India and China along with a relative absence of media attention on safety concerns of Chinese students in Melbourne, it was considered important to compare the two populations of students.

The inclusion of 'other' internationals was intended to broaden the scope of the interview findings to enable comparisons to be made across the three groups and to identify differences and commonalities in experiences of community safety. Countries of origin within this group were from South America and Europe, but mainly included other Asian nations, in keeping with the dominance of Asia as the key market for international education in Australia.. It was also seen to be necessary to ensure a cross-section of representation by gender given the gendered character of safety issues (Walklate 2004). Similarly, it was necessary to ensure a mix of representation of students from the Higher Ed/TAFE sector and from private RTOs. Table 4.1 shows that the composition of the student interview group was successful in meeting these aims.

The participants were recruited through snowball sampling technique with the initial sample obtained through the assistance of relevant student associations and academic institutions. Student associations and academic institutions were contacted by the research team and requested to inform students of the study through their own systems. Interested students were asked to contact a member of the research team via phone/email if they wished to take part in the research project. Upon being contacted by interested students further information about the study and interview process was provided verbally and a detailed written description of the research and interview process were emailed to the potential participant, along with a consent form. If the student agreed to participate, a suitable time and place for the interview was determined between a research team member and student. Participants signed their consent to take part in the study before interviews commenced. The interviews lasted for up to one hour and conversations were taped, transcribed and analysed using NVIVO, software designed for the analysis of qualitative data.

The interview questions were designed to explore the four key areas of investigation for the study: student understandings, including expectations and perceptions, of their safety in Melbourne; their experiences of violence or abuse, including witnessing or being the victim of attacks and their understanding of the extent to which crime is motivated by racism or opportunism; the implications of these perceptions and experiences for students' safety and wellbeing and their ideas about what should be done to further protect international student safety.

The interview schedule is included as Attachment 1. The interviews were structured in an open-ended format around the four key themes, avoiding the constraints of closed questions and allowing for narrative consistency and for interviewees to convey their own experiences and perceptions (Elliott 2005). The interviews were conducted by one male and two female research assistants recruited from post-graduate students enrolled at VU and experienced in the conduct of interviews and qualitative data analysis. The interviewers were extensively briefed in relation to the project, in interview techniques designed to encourage interviewees to expand upon the key themes of the interviews based on their personal experience and perceptions and in the ethics and confidentiality requirements of the process, including the availability of follow-up counselling for interviewees who required assistance or appeared traumatised by their experiences.

While the student interviews were completed successfully, with representation from across the intended groups of students and with positive feedback from participants, there were a number of constraints that need to be considered in reflecting on the findings. The main problem arose due to the timing of the research; the data collection period coincided with the mid-year break in June and July. This meant that finding students to participate was difficult, and particularly so for international students who tend to travel or work during this break.

Cross-cultural communication was another challenge in the research, especially regarding differing cultural approaches to sharing information and opinions in interviews, exacerbated by the sensitivity and current high political profile of the issues under enquiry. In a few cases, Chinese student interviewees displayed discernible discomfort about voicing their opinions on the nature of safety issues, given the current media focus on violence against Indian students. This reluctance may have been exacerbated by the fact that other Australia/Chinese international relations issues were receiving media attention at the time.

A further limitation to consider is the extent to which the interviewees were self-selected due to personal experiences of violence and/or their perceptions of threats to safety. As we discuss in the findings section, a high proportion of the interviewees had been victims of, or had close connection with someone who had experienced violence; their interest in participating in the study may have arisen because of the perceived opportunity to express their views on a matter of relevance and importance in their lives. While this, in itself, does not detract from the findings, it is possible that there is an over-representation of those who have been victims of crime compared with the actual incidence of crime across the international student population. Overall, however, the student interviews were successfully conducted within the intended methodological framework and with consideration of ethical concerns at all times.

Student survey

An on-line survey of students was conducted with the intention of capturing data from a wide cross-section of the international student population in Melbourne about understandings and perceptions of safety, experiences of crime, details about incidents where safety was threatened, implications of these perceptions and experiences for international student safety and views on how to achieve better safety outcomes for international students.

The questionnaire, a copy of which is included as Attachment 2, included a mix of 24 closed and open-ended questions designed to gain information in line with the aims of the study. The survey questions were formulated by the research team and set up within 'Survey Monkey', an on-line survey tool. Questions were piloted amongst project team members and broader ICEPA student and associate networks and refined over a process of three 'test runs'.

Over an eight week period from June to August 2009, the survey was distributed via email through the student services divisions of a number of public and private educational institutes who were contacted via email at a senior management level. Due to varied university and private RTO policies in relation to the distribution of surveys to student bodies, permission to circulate was not granted across all the educational institutes approached. Those that were able to distribute the survey included VU, University of Ballarat, NMIT, RMIT, University of Melbourne, LaTrobe University (via an international student newsletter) and a number of private RTOs, including the large provider Cambridge Institute of Technology (CIT), Holmes Institute, and a smaller provider, the Australian Learning Training and Education Centre (ALTEC). Confidential responses were received and analysed on-line via the Survey Monkey web-site. A total of 1,013 respondents started the survey with 895 completing all questions. Section 5 of this report provides a detailed discussion of the attributes of the respondents and survey findings.

A clear limitation of the survey arises from its on-line distribution; it is not possible to estimate the response rate from amongst those students who received the survey link. Given the size of the student population in Victoria (144,034), the response rate of around 1,000 appears very low. As with the student interview process, the timing of the research was also a key factor affecting response rates to the survey, which was disseminated during the mid-semester break mainly through notification to student email lists at each of the participating educational institutions. The relatively poor response rate from private RTO students is most likely to be related to a comment received from the private RTOs that there is limited use of email by students undertaking certificate level courses and many are unaware that they have student email accounts with their institutes. Responses from private RTOs were achieved through follow up with individual institute managers and staff who re-sent messages requesting students to respond and in some cases, delivered the survey link to students during class.

While these limitations are clear the findings are worthy of consideration given that the survey has gathered responses from a substantial number of students. Given the scoping nature of our research, the survey process has yielded both important findings as well as important learning about strategies in surveying this particular population group.

Stakeholder interviews

The final major method implemented by the study was interviews with stakeholders identified as having an interest in or knowledge about the safety of international students. Stakeholders included representatives from the Victorian Government, peak bodies in the education sector, the Melbourne-based Consul Generals of India and China, Indian and Chinese migrant community organisations and student associations and to gain further insight into the causes of attacks on international students, youth services providers in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Interviewees included the following representatives from across key sectors with key roles to play in international student safety.

Education sector and student association representatives from:

- The Australia Council of Private Education and Training
- Victorian TAFE International (VTI)
- International students services management at a TAFE institution
- Campus Manager of a private vocational education and training provider
- International student representative on a University Council
- Chairperson of an Indian student service centre
- The Chinese Scholars Association
- The Advisory Committee, FISA

Government representatives:

- One MP, of the Government of Victoria
- Indian Consul General, Melbourne
- Chinese Vice-Consul General for Education

Community and service provider representatives:

- Chairperson of a Western Region community service organisation
- The Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria (FIAV)
- Two representatives from the Indian International Student Advisory Centre (IISAC)
- Community Legal Education Worker, Legal Service in the Western Suburbs

Victoria Police representatives (de-identified in accordance with the Victoria Police Research Access Agreement)

- Inspector within a relevant district for the study
- Senior Officer (rank de-identified) within Embona Armed Robbery Taskforce
- Superintendent within a relevant region for the study
- Commander within a relevant region for the study

- Assistant Commissioners (2) with relevant portfolio or region responsibilities
- Manager of a Victoria Police Advisory Unit in a portfolio relevant to study

This group of Victoria Police stakeholders included 5 males and 2 females. The self-described cultural background of these Officers was predominantly Anglo-Celtic/Australian with one non-Australian background identified.

Youth Services providers:

- Youth Worker, Maribyrnong City Council
- Two youth development officers from Melbourne City Mission
- Two Youth Development Officers, Wyndham City Council
- Centre for Multicultural Youth

Stakeholders were identified on the basis of their involvement with international student safety and additionally in some cases because of their role in the public debate about violence against Indian students. A further important consideration in selecting stakeholders for interview was the need to ensure adequate representation across the various sectors and to include a range of interviewees, from student and community organisations to government representatives with high level authority. Given the ethical restrictions involved in gaining direct information on the causes and nature of violence affecting international students, including the characteristics of perpetrators, this became an additional important sub-task for the stakeholder interviews, achieved by interviewing youth services providers in Melbourne's western suburbs, where a number of highly publicised attacks have occurred in the past year.

As with the format for the student interviews, the stakeholder interviews included as Attachment 3, were open-ended. The stakeholder interviews were focused on gaining interviewees' perceptions and views of four key areas of inquiry:

- What are the safety issues affecting international students and are these different to domestic students in Australia? Are there students from particular countries who are less safe than others?
- Why does crime and violence against international students occur?
- To what extent is crime against international students motivated by racism or opportunism?
- What needs to be done to prevent violence against international students and who is responsible?

These questions were core to the interviews. They were supplemented by prompt questions determined by the position of the interviewee and the scope of their interest and knowledge.

While the stakeholder interview sample was clearly inclusive of organisations and communities with a key interest in and important knowledge of international student safety and while the interviews were conducted successfully, the scope of the interviews was limited by several factors. These included gaps in the representation of a full range of interested parties, due to the highly politicised nature of international student safety and the media attention it was garnering at the time of the research. For example, an interview with representatives from DEEWR was sought, however, the research team were unable to arrange an interview time within the period in which the research was being undertaken. In addition, opinions expressed by some stakeholder interviewees, especially those representing governments or industry sectors were often cautious and limited due to the perceived ramifications of making comments that would attract further media attention. One interviewee declined to make any comment in relation to a number of questions with the stated reason that, '… the issues are too complex'.

Particularly evident in the stakeholder interview findings is that each stakeholder had only a partial perspective on the issues involved and that much of the information gained from stakeholders was purely speculative and opinion based; there is an evident lack of data, including demographic information and crime statistics, on which to base opinions about the safety concerns of international students. This limitation highlights the need for more comprehensive and better quality data collection on the characteristics of international students in Australia as well as on the ethnic origin and occupations of victims of reported crime. This issue is discussed in greater detail in the discussion of findings but the overall outcome is that each of the stakeholders provided a limited perspective on the broader issues of community safety for international students. This information can be drawn together with data gained from the student interviews, the survey and literature and media analyses to identify gaps and needs for further research.

4.2 Conclusion

The key consideration in formulating the research design for this scoping study was to select and implement methodologies that would maximise validity and reliability within the constraints in which it was undertaken. The selection of methodologies was also dependent on the study's aims and objectives. Despite the limitations mentioned above, it is felt that the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches enabled us to capture, with reasonable accuracy, the depth and breadth of views of international and domestic students as well as key stakeholders on issues relating to international student safety in Melbourne.

The information gained through our research methodologies has yielded important findings and evidence in relation to the objectives of the study, namely to explore international students' experiences of safety and wellbeing in metropolitan Melbourne; to study students' experiences and understandings of crime especially in order to gauge the extent of racially motivated or opportunistic crime with a particular focus on the experiences of students from India and China; to gather information from students, education institutions and student bodies on students' expectations of safety in Australia; to examine policies and responses of key stakeholders including police, public transport authorities, key government and non-government agencies, public and private education providers and student recruitment agencies. The following section goes on to analyse and discuss the findings of each of the methods.

SECTION 5: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This section summarises and discusses in turn the key findings from the international student survey, the stakeholder interviews and the international student interviews and concludes by highlighting key findings based on the combined results for further discussion in Section 6. We start by presenting the results of the on-line student survey results which yielded a total of 1,013 respondents. First, we describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents. We then go on to discuss the findings that relate to the questions asked about perceptions and experiences of safety in Melbourne.

5.2 Survey Results

More women than men responded to the survey with 571 (56.6%) female respondents compared to 437 (43.4%) male. Nine hundred and ninety-nine respondents identified their country of birth. As Chart 1 shows, Australia and India had the largest number of respondents, with equal numbers born in each country. For ease of representation, country of birth was reclassified into eight world regions as illustrated in Chart 5.1.

The majority of survey respondents were international students with 520 students (52.6%) identifying as such. Respondents were also primarily in the age groups of 19-25 and 26 – 35 years as shown below.

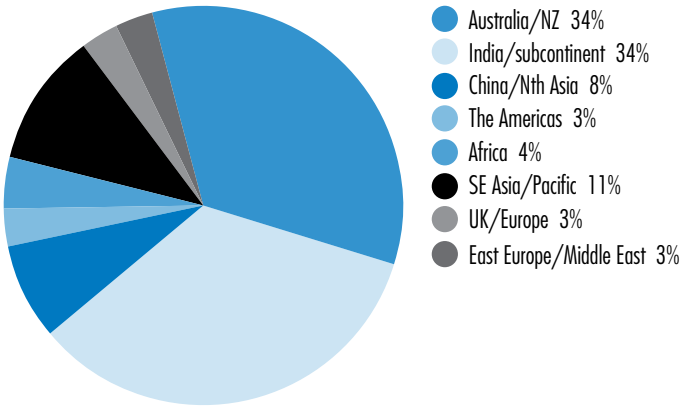

Chart 5.1: Country of birth of survey respondents

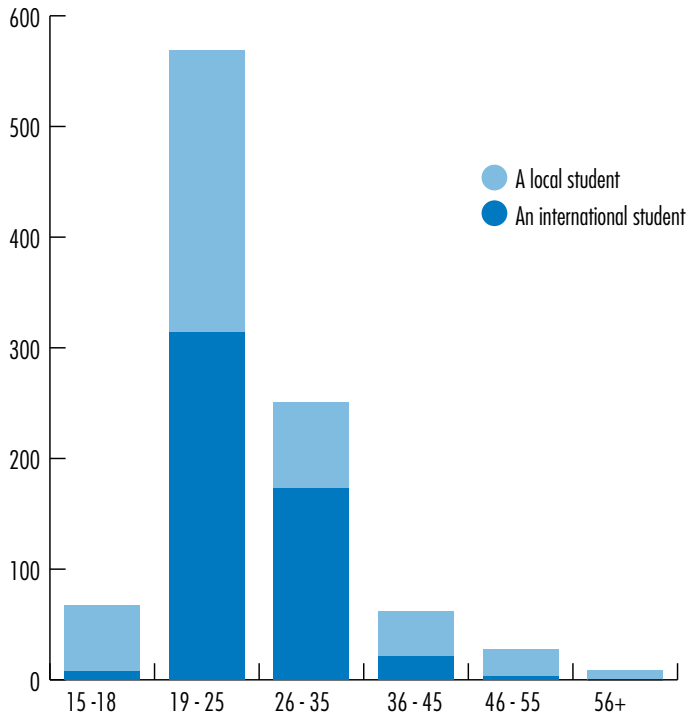

Chart 5.2: International/domestic students by age groupLanguages

Languages

Most of the respondents were multi-lingual. Almost 70 per cent of respondents spoke two or more languages with 12.7 per cent speaking four or more languages. The majority, however, identified English as their first language with 500 out of the 995 respondents who completed this question reporting this. The second largest group of 200 respondents were those who identified an Indian language, such as Hindi, Punjabi, or an Indian regional language such as Nepali or Sinhala as their first language. Ninety-six respondents spoke a Chinese language which was identified as Chinese, Cantonese or Mandarin followed by a group of 77 who identified a South East/other Asian or Pacific language such as Thai, Vietnamese, Korean or Pidgin as their first language. The least identified first languages other than English included European languages (66 respondents), African languages (13) and Arabic or regional languages (22).

International/local students by institution

Chart 5.3 below shows respondents by their status as international or local students and by institution. The majority of respondents were from VU, reflecting the support received internally for the project through prompt distribution of the survey across the VU student body. As discussed in Section 4, one of the limitations, reflected in the survey response rates, was that this support was not readily received from other institutions. Responses from students enrolled at RMIT, NMIT, CIT and ALTEC are relatively evenly spread with 44 to 80 responses from each. There are also 73 responses that have been classified as 'other' which includes institutions, such as the University of Canberra, where there was only one respondent. The 'other' category also includes unclear responses. For example, a number of respondents replied to this question by identifying the course they were studying, such as 'accounting' or 'hairdressing' rather than naming the institution at which they were enrolled.

Student experiences of safety

This section describes and discusses the series of survey questions asked in relation to perceptions and experiences of community safety in Melbourne. This set of questions was directed at understanding perceptions, experiences and responses to issues of community safety, including threats to safety. The following section reports the findings of a question that asked students to 'agree' or 'disagree' in response to a range of statements about community safety in Melbourne.

Feelings and perceptions of community safety in Melbourne

Chart 5.4 below compares the responses of international students with domestic students in relation to feelings of safety at: their educational institution; workplace; place of residence; and, when using public transport. The question also includes the response to the statement, 'I feel that Melbourne is a safe place to live'. One response about safety at 'college or university' shows that both international students and domestic students are the same with 8% of both groups feeling equally unsafe. On every other measure, however, international students feel less safe than do domestic students.

These findings reveal a number of important community safety issues that warrant further investigation. First, 8% of international students and domestic students disagree with the statement that they feel safe when attending college or university. Compared to other findings, this is a relatively low proportion of students who feel unsafe. At the same time, it suggests that there is room for improvement and a need to identify and act on why approximately 1 in 12 students say they don't feel safe. The results in relation to perceptions of workplace safety show a statistically significant difference between perceptions of international students and domestic students with twice as many international students (10% compared to 5%) disagreeing with the statement, 'I feel safe at my workplace'. The odds ratio for this is 1.99 or that

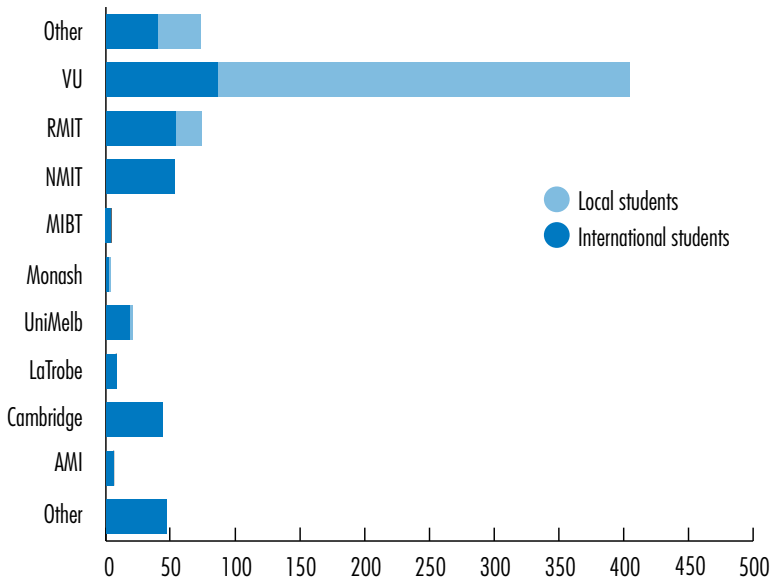

Chart 5.3: International/local students by institution

international students are almost twice as likely to feel unsafe in the workplace than domestic students.

Slightly more international students did not agree that 'I live in a safe part of Melbourne' (20% compared with 17%) but this difference was not statistically significant, although it does suggest that both groups have safety concerns. An even greater shared issue for both groups is about the use of public transport with 31.5% of domestic students and 36% of international students who disagree with the statement, 'I feel safe when using public transport'. The responses in relation to whether students regard Melbourne as a safe place to live, reveals the most dramatic difference between international students and domestic students. Almost one quarter (22%) of international student respondents compared to 14% of domestic students disagree with the statement the 'Melbourne is a safe place to live'. This finding shows an odds ratio of 1.72 with the odds of an international student disagreeing with the statement 'I feel that Melbourne is a safe place to live' being 1.72 times greater than a domestic student.

The survey also invited students to make comments in relation to their perceptions of safety; 144 comments were received. Findings from these open-ended responses are outlined below, classified within themes, and further separated into comments received by international students and by domestic students.

Domestic students – perceptions of safety

Sixty-six local students made comments in relation to their perceived safety as students in Melbourne. These comments can be categorised into five broad areas. The majority of these comments fell into two relatively polarised camps, with equal numbers of 28 respondents expressing opposing opinions. The first of these was that Melbourne is generally safe but it is necessary to take precautions. A typical comment was,

> *'. . .'depends what time I'm catching public transport as to how safe I feel. I feel significantly less safe after dark.'*

The other major opinion expressed by domestic students was the view that Melbourne is unsafe and/or something should be done to fix this. These comments were often focused on particular localities including Footscray, St Albans and that public transport is unsafe. There were numerous comments about the need for increased security and/or the need for time-tabling to minimise the risk of needing to travel at night. Several people identified themselves as having been witness to, or victims of theft or violence. One student called for the stronger criminal penalties to deter would-be offenders. While these comments were diverse, one example was,

> *'. . .travelling to uni is scary- there are not enough security measures in place to protect / look after students especially at night. Footscray is very intimidating.'*

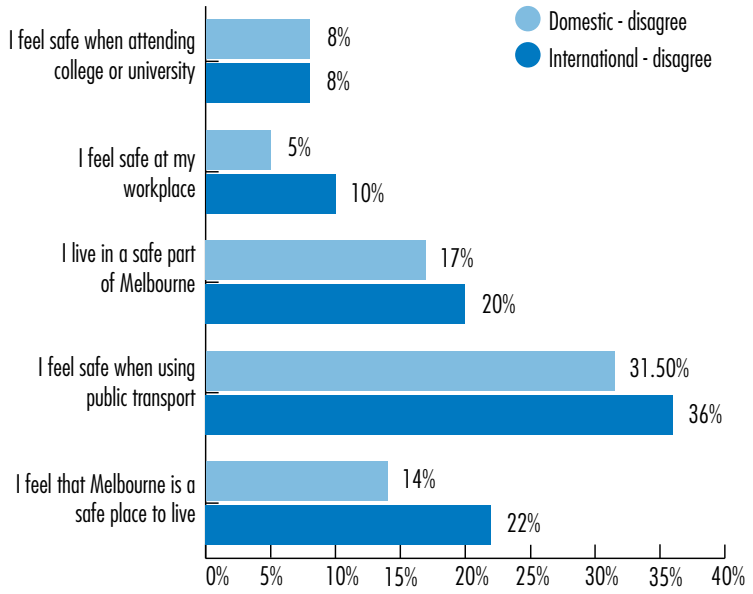

Chart 5.4: International students compared with domestic student perceptions of safety in Melbourne.

A smaller group of comments (7) were made to the effect of, 'I feel safe because …' Reasons for feeling safe included having private transport, being white and Australian, having a secure office to work from and having a time-table that allowed for safety by avoiding night travel. These comments did, however, express concern for others, or about broader social trends that were seen to impact on levels of safety.

Another five respondents made comments to the effect that Melbourne is actually very safe compared to most cities internationally with similar sized population.

Five 'other' comments were related to either not feeling they could make an assessment about safety or that they live in rural areas and were therefore unaffected. One comment suggested that it was international students who were responsible for the decline in community safety.

International student comments – perceptions of safety

There was considerable overlap between comments made by international students and those made by domestic Australian students. Out of sixty-five comments from international students, eight said that they feel safe in Melbourne or that Melbourne is as safe as can be expected for an international, multicultural city. Twenty-three said that Melbourne is unsafe sometimes, with most pointing to train travel at night, or particular places such as Footscray, and to a lesser extent, St Albans and the CBD as being unsafe. In contrast to comments made by local students however, references to alcohol and drugs as threats to safety featured more strongly in comments by international students. Eighteen international students made stronger comments about the fact that they feel unsafe because of alcohol and drug use in public places and that something should be done about it.

The major difference between domestic and international student respondents was in relation to comments about experiences of racism and the threat of being a target due to nationality and/or appearance. Seven international students made comments about this. One person had been the victim of violence, another claimed that Indians are under threat and three commented on being the recipients of verbal abuse. One person commented that teachers discriminate and patronise international students and another commented that Melbourne is surprisingly tolerant of international students with the exception of a few 'young blokes' who don't like immigrants.

Five 'other' comments were also made by international students. Two people were concerned that, while they basically feel safe, safety standards are declining rapidly. Two others said it was difficult to feel safe when there were such strong warnings about the dangers of travel at night. Another raised the lack of transport concessions for international students which contributed to safety issues, forcing people to walk.

Overall, the major safety concerns expressed by both international and local students related to use of public transport at night, particularly trains which are perceived as being clearly unsafe by students across both cohorts. A second commonly expressed concern across both groups was related to particular localities which are perceived as being unsafe. For example, one respondent thought that it would be self evident to comment, 'I LIVE IN FOOTSCRAY'.

Experiences of safety issues

Respondents were asked to identify the nature and frequency of their experiences of threats to safety in public spaces. The types of threats included 'verbal abuse', 'verbal threats', 'physical intimidation', physical attack', 'having something robbed that you were carrying such as a wallet or phone' and, 'general rudeness'. Respondents were asked to identify whether they had experienced such issues 'never', 'once', 'several times' or 'more than three times'. These results were cross tabulated by international students and domestic students and for the purpose of

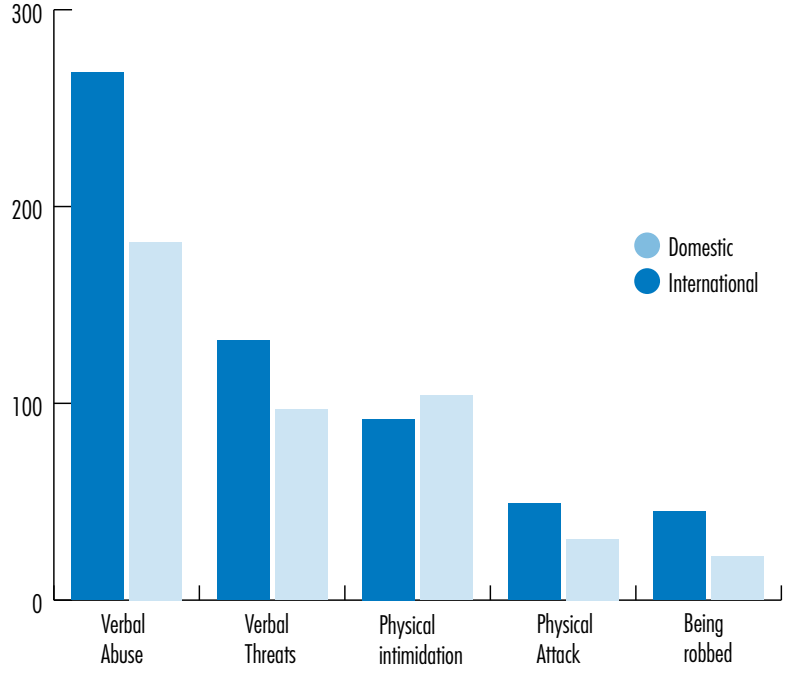

Chart 5.5: Frequency of different safety threats reported by international and domestic students.

analysis, all responses were also collapsed within two categories of those who 'never' experienced a threat to safety and into those who 'at least once' or more had experienced such a threat to safety. This was done in order to more clearly identify any differences between domestic and international student experiences. A total of 856 people responded to this question and the results are summarised in Chart 5.5 below.

Chart 5.5 shows that there are statistically significant differences between the reported experiences of international and domestic students. Compared with domestic students, international students were significantly more likely to feel unsafe at work (10% vs 5%), to report being verbally abused (58% vs 44%) to report being physically attacked (11% vs 7.5%) and to report being robbed (10% vs 5%). 'Physical intimidation' was the only safety threat experienced reported slightly more often by domestic students compared with international students (25% vs 20%). These results expose some general issues about community safety for all students with domestic students reporting high levels of safety risk in many categories. At the same time, it appears that safety risks are significantly greater for international students.

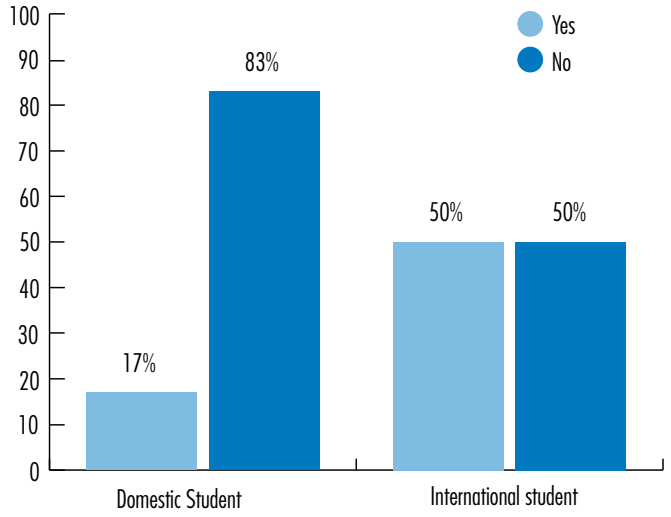

Chart 5.6 Racial, cultural or religious elements of threats to safety by local or international student status

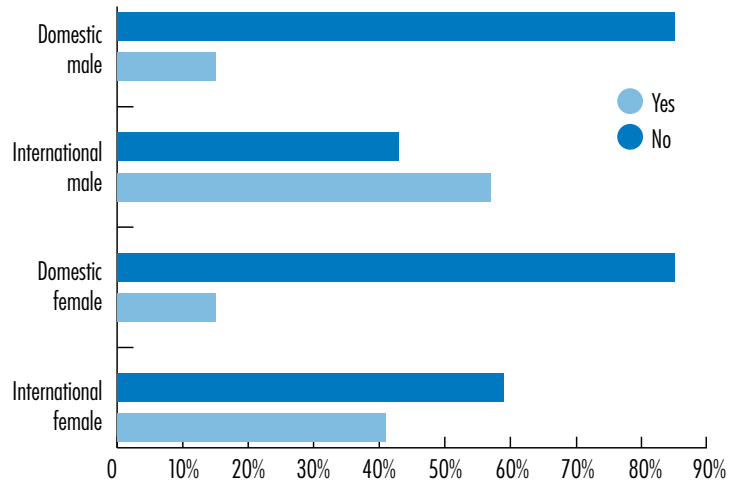

Chart 5.7 Racial, cultural or religious elements of threats to safety by gender and international or domestic student status.

Racial, cultural or religious elements to threats to safety

A total of 403 all international student respondents (78%) reported that they had experienced some form of threat to safety (See Chart 5.5 for details).

Of particular interest to this study is the extent to which these experiences include a racial element. In more than one third (35%) of all of the identified incidents, respondents reported a racial element to the incidents. There was a significant difference between the responses of domestic and international students; while almost 17 per cent of local students said that this was the case in their experience, almost one half (49.9%) of international students said that there was a racial, religious or cultural element to the incidents that they experienced as Chart 5.6 shows.

These results indicate that half of all international students who have experienced threats to safety identify a racial, cultural or religious element to this threat. This result shows that there is an extremely large difference between domestic and international students with the odds that international students experience a racial religious or cultural element to the violence is 4.88 times greater than that faced by domestic students. The results also show that the experience of international students is gendered with the male international students being much more likely to report racist, religious or cultural threats to safety (57%) compared to female international students (41%).

Qualitative responses

Two hundred and twenty-nine out of the total 734 students who responded to Question 12 provided a description of the incidents they had identified in Question 10. There are some limitations to these descriptions, however, as many responses did not actually describe the situation but instead, made general comments about safety issues. Nevertheless, it is useful to describe the range of comments and this section summarises the key themes in these responses. First, we discuss the responses of international students before discussing those of domestic students.

Description of incidents – international students

The incidents experienced by international students fell into four broad categories. The main category was those incidents that were specifically racist in character. Other incidents, including those that had elements of religious prejudice as well as those that were sexist in character, overlap with racism. Two other categories of incident include 'general rudeness and indifference' and finally there were a group of general comments that did not cleanly connect with the other themes.

Incidents that are specifically racist - Of the 170 comments by international students about racist incidents they had experienced, the vast majority (at least 80 per cent) were identified as such because they included directly racist behaviors such as name calling combined with general rudeness, abuse or attack. The most common instances of directly racist behaviour cited were being taunted and called names: 'Go back to where you come from'; 'go home curry muncher' or similar expressions were directed at seventeen of the respondents.

Twenty-four of these comments about directly racist behaviour described racist abuse targeted at respondents who are or who are perceived to be, Indian. Eleven of the comments were about being abused for being, or perceived to be, Chinese. Eight comments described racial abuse towards Asians and four comments referred to hatred of 'blacks'. Three people described incidents experienced because they were perceived to be Muslims or from the Middle East.

The type of incidents described in this category including being called bad or racist names. For example one respondent said he had been told to '…go back to the jungle', because he was black. Others described experiencing extreme rudeness that was clearly racist in its motivation. One respondent described an incident when she was at work,

> *… When teenagers and a lady came on two separate occasions for shopping and I asked to show their bags because it's just normal store procedures - on both occasions they swore at me "fucking Indians" and said "we are not stealing anything".*

Two comments were about being abused because they were not speaking English on public transport. '… once I was talking in Spanish with a friend and one Australian guy close to us was very upset and angry because we weren't speaking English ...'

Six frightening incidents were described, incidents which were exacerbated by the perpetrators being drunk. For example,

> *Four drunk, well groomed males verbally abused me on the Williamstown line. They said bad words about my religion, turban, country and … more. One of them stood up and hit my head in the moving train. I was shaking and felt shattered. Now I am used to occasional taunts and verbal abuse [directed at] me.*

Four respondents talked about how they were targets of racism but that they were not the nationality that the abusers thought they were. For example, '… once they yelled at me to go back home, to any Arabic country, but I'm Chilean.' Another example came from a Pakistani who was typically assumed to be Indian. A further comment came from a student from the USA who said that American students experienced racism and were blamed for US foreign policy. She said that this was getting better now that President Obama is in office. As discussed above, this category of explicit racism overlaps with comments that were as much to do with religion as they were with race.

Racism and religion: Twelve respondents identified religion as being the factor that provoked incidents. Five people commented on how they had been subject to taunts about being Muslim and they believed that there is much hatred towards Muslims in the community. Three other female respondents identified being abused for wearing a head scarf, '…I have had my hijab pulled off and bad names called to me. It was really shocking.' One person identified being taunted and discriminated against for being Jewish.

Racism and sexism: A number of female respondents mentioned instances of sexism combined with racism; in eight comments, it was difficult to identify whether the incident was primarily racist or sexist in nature. For example, one comment was that 'one person called me names such as 'ching-chong'. One time was sexual also.'

Unclear incidents: Twenty-three comments were made by international students about incidents that were not serious but disturbing and it was unclear as to whether there was an element of racism. These comments included instances where people were not served in shops properly or where bus drivers were rude and other incidents which respondents suspected were underpinned by racism but were not sure. For example, one respondent commented, '… it's not serious, just a feeling that those people who cannot speak English that well can be looked down on by some others …'. Others made more abbreviated comments like, 'it's just a facial expression'. Another identified being patronized by lecturers as a form of racism. Overall, these experiences ranged widely, from those that were about feelings of being uncomfortable due to race to cases of violence. It is significant that 201 international students who responded to this survey could identify a racist incident. Also of interest are the differences between comments made by domestic students and international students. The following section describes these.

Description of incidents – domestic students: The responses of domestic students about racially motivated incidents were in part determined by the ethnic or cultural backgrounds of these students, who comprise a highly ethnically diverse cohort. Some domestic students, of migrant backgrounds, reported similar racist incidents to those cited by international students. Others commented that they were victims of racism for their whiteness or blamed other ethnic groupings as being

the perpetrators of racist violence. Some domestic students blamed international students for, in effect, 'stirring up trouble'. The following section describes and discusses the open-ended comments received from 59 domestic students who described an incident motivated by racism. In a number of instances, these responses are expressions of racism in themselves.

Racist incidents: Fifteen comments were made by domestic students about witnessing or being a victim of racist behaviors. One described how his friend was mocked for being Chinese. Another talked about being verbally attacked for being black. One student from an Iraqi background said that he is often accused of being a terrorist. A student of Serbian background said that 'not many people like Serbians – they think we are violent and out to rip people off.' Other similar comments were made by respondents who are Lebanese, Vietnamese, Sudanese, Japanese or a 'wog' (self-described).

Racism/sexism: A further three respondents talked about experiencing sexual harassment but that there was a cultural or racist element to the harassment.

Racism/religion: Nine domestic students commented that they were verbally attacked and/or harassed for their religion. Two female students commented on being shouted at or insulted for wearing a head scarf. For example, ' I know what you cover under your veil … I know that from your skin colour.'

General indifference: In common with the international students, eight comments were made about the general and implicit nature of racism. The suggestion was that international students are subject to indifference or rudeness.

Racism is multicultural/against whites: A group of comments blamed other identified groups for racism. Three comments stated that Aboriginal people were racist. A further three comments were directed at Indian students and stated that the recent demonstration staged in the city by Indian student groups had been frightening to non-Indians. Another said that the '… rudeness of ethnic groups' is a problem. Three respondents said that they had been abused for being white. Another said that, because she is white, she feels safe. One threatening comment was made suggesting that international students should go home: '… u should be scared coz u r not in ur country and any thing can happen to u now. u bloody people just keep coming ...'

General comments: A range of general comments were made, including about the need to ignore racism as it 'happens everywhere'. Others said it is 'hard to tell' whether racism underlies crime and abusive behaviour; that racism is difficult to identify. Some students commented that they believe racism affects other groups but because of their status as white Australians, they don't experience racist behavior.

In conclusion, two-hundred and twenty-nine comments were received from students, describing their experiences of behaviors that were motivated by racism. The discussion above attempted to categorize and summarise the main themes expressed by respondents. The survey was also interested in identifying where the incidents reported in the survey occurred in order to ascertain whether certain localities are more unsafe than others. The following section describes the results of this question.

Where threats to safety occur

The survey included a question about where threats to safety occur. A range of options were provided including that of identifying a location as 'other'. Localities where student safety is most threatened were in the street and on public transport, followed by shops and shopping centres. Chart 5.8 shows the findings from these questions.

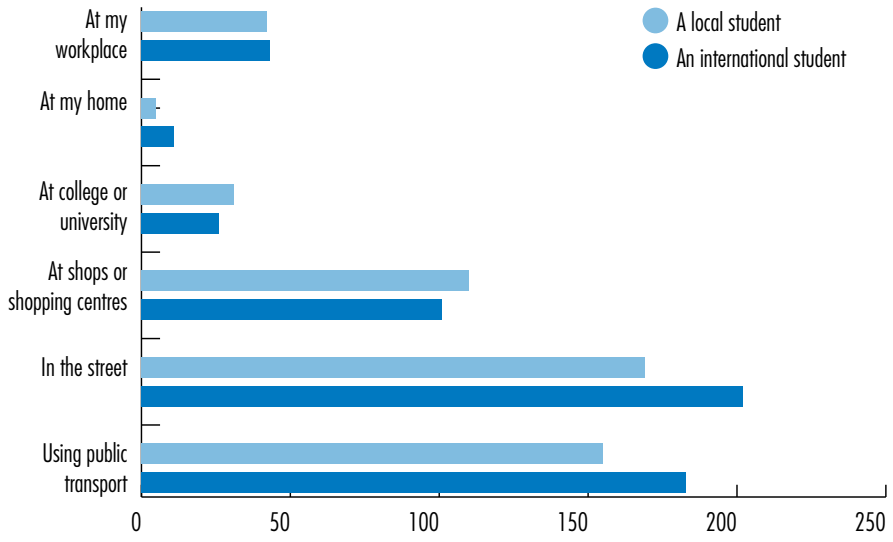

Chart 5.8 International or domestic students by places where safety is threatened

The results of this question show that localities where safety is threatened were also very similar for domestic and international students. 'In the street', and public transport were the places where threats to safety were most likely to occur. Shops or shopping centres, however, were also identified as places where threats to safety occur by more than 20 per cent of all respondents. Threats to safety at the workplace are also of concern, despite the relatively low numbers who identified this as a problem area.

Reporting of incidents

The survey also asked a series of questions in relation to reporting safety issues. Questions included whether or not incidents were reported, whom the incidents were reported to and if incidents were not reported, why not? This section discusses the findings of this question.

Did you report the incident to anyone? Six hundred and thirty-four students responded to this question. Only 13.4 per cent (85) respondents said that, 'yes', they did report the incident and 86.6 per cent said that 'no' they did not.

Who did you report the incident to? Eighty-three per cent (71) who said they reported an incident answered this question. The largest group of 43 said they reported the incident to the police, 20 reported the incident to a teacher or lecturer, 14 reported it to a member of the community or church, 6 reported to a health service provider and 4 reported to a student union.

If not why not? The survey also asked respondents to identify why they did not report an incident, within a range of options. Chart 5.9 below illustrates the responses to these questions.

As Chart 5.9 shows, there were some clear differences between local and international student responses, with international students being much less likely to report incidents across all major reasons. One hundred and eighty-three respondents, however, identified another reason and provided explanations which are discussed immediately below.

'Other' reasons for not reporting – international students: Responses from international students about 'other' reasons for not reporting fell largely into three categories. The first and major reason identified was that 'it wasn't serious enough' or the belief that the incident was not illegal, just rude and insulting. Thirty-four out of 58 international student respondents gave a reason to this effect. Another three respondents within this general category commented that they were disappointed but accepting of the fact that some people in the community are rude and/or drunks and they behave badly. 'You just have to accept it' was a comment that exemplified this view. The second reason, identified by a further four respondents, was that they basically 'dealt with it'. One respondent commented, 'I taught the punks a lesson and they backed off. No worries.'

Seventeen out of the 58, however, made comments about not reporting because they believed that they have no rights as international students,

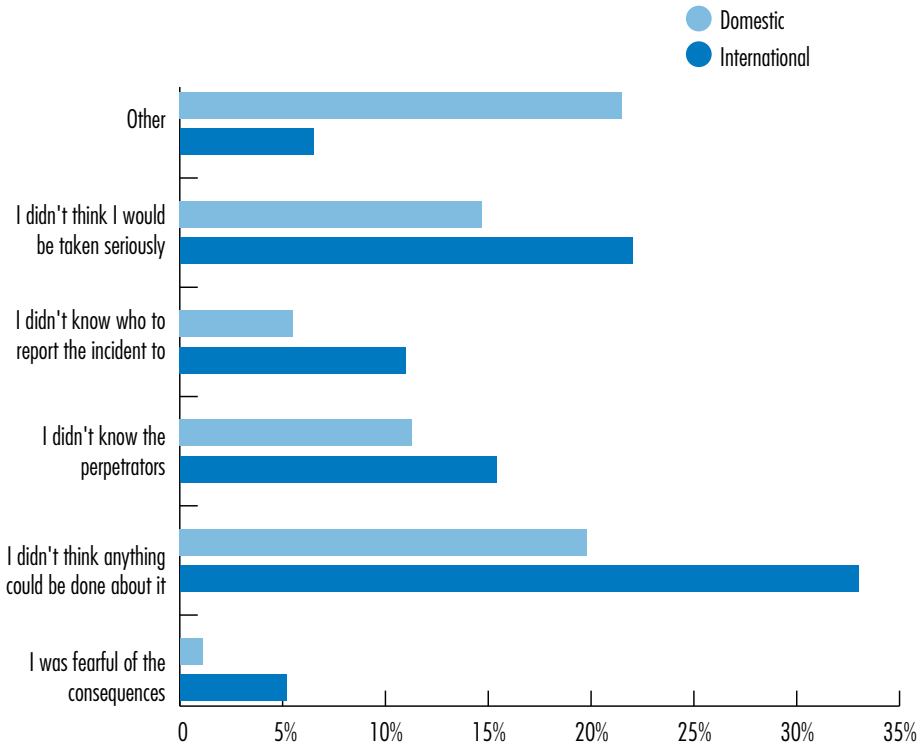

Chart 5.9: Reasons for not reporting incidents threatening to safety

that they did not want to make trouble or that they didn't want to make the problem worse. As one respondent said, 'I felt that as I am not in my country, I have to face a bit of such behaviour and nothing could be done about it'. Within the same category, there were several who also expressed a lack of faith that the police would do anything to protect them, or that they were fearful of the police. 'I did not think anything can be done. I was a bit scared to go to the police', was one comment. Perhaps of greatest concern were comments made by three respondents about not reporting because they didn't think they could explain what the incident was about in a manner that would be taken seriously.

'Other' reasons for not reporting – local students: There was a great deal of commonality between domestic and international students in response to this question. Of 121 respondents, 99 made comments to the effect of 'it was no big deal', or 'it didn't faze me too much'. Another four respondents commented that they could deal with the incident themselves, 'I can handle it'. A third category of 12 expressed that they just accepted that there are groups in the community who are going to behave badly; for these people, the incident wasn't personal and while significant enough to describe it as an 'incident', there was acceptance that this was a 'normal' experience. This view was represented in the comment '… it wasn't personal; the people were drug addicts or vagrants'.

Where responses from domestic students varied from internationals was the very small numbers of domestic respondents (six out of 121) who made any remarks about lack of faith in complaints or justice systems or about fear of police. One person said, 'the local police are a joke' and that they are '… lazy and non responsive to the needs of the community'. More broadly, these comments were related to the belief that 'no one cares …'

Overall, across all the survey respondents, a very low proportion reported incidents when they believed their safety was threatened. Only 85 people of the 622 who said they experienced some kind of incident reported to anyone. For most respondents lack of reporting was because they didn't think that anything could be done about the incident or that it was 'not serious'.

What respondents do to protect their safety

The survey included a series of questions about how people respond to or manage situations where they believe their safety is at threat. This section reports on the results of these questions. More than 687 respondents (80 per cent) said that they used their mobile phone if their safety was threatened. Only 1.1 per cent said that they did not have a mobile phone and 18.7% said, 'no', they did not use their mobile phone.

Who do you call? Respondents were also asked to identify who they call if they believe their safety is threatened. Chart 5.10 below shows the responses to this and the differences between the responses of international and domestic students.

Chart 5.10 below shows the difference in responses between international and domestic students in relation to the first person they would call. In the absence of family networks, international students clearly rely on authorities and other official sources of support and on friends, whereas local students rely on parents and other family members before using formal channels for protection.

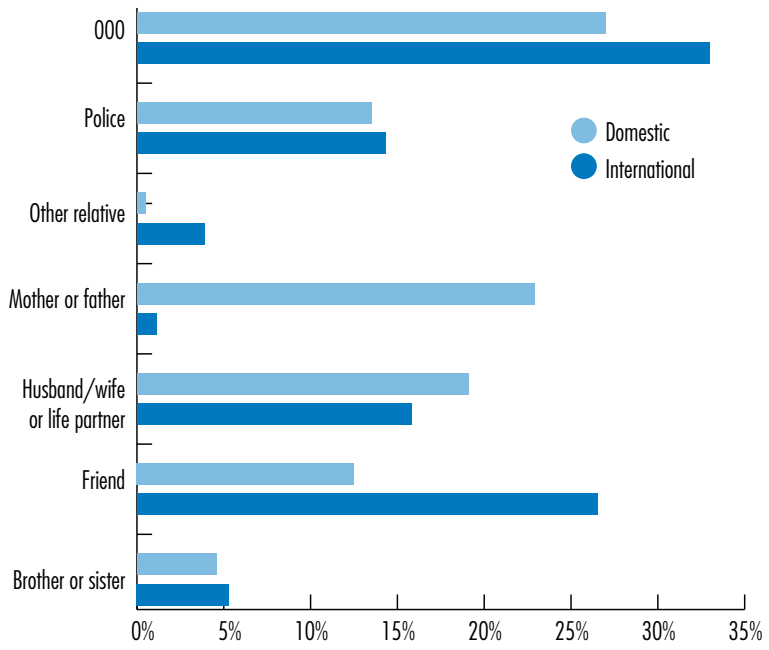

Chart 5.10 Response by international and domestic students about who they would call first if they are at risk.

Other strategies

The survey also asked respondents to identify the strategies that they employ to protect their own safety. A range of options were identified as illustrated in Chart 5.11 below.

Chart 5.11 below shows that there are a number of 'common sense' strategies students employ to protect their safety. The major strategies identified by all respondents were to 'stay away from dark streets', 'avoid travelling at night', and the positive strategies of 'travelling in company' and 'keeping valuables concealed'. Interestingly, international students much less frequently reported that they 'avoid public transport', reflecting the relative lack of access to private or other transport options.

International student comments

Seventy-eight respondents made 'other' comments about self-protection. Within this group, 28 international students identified other strategies or made comments about keeping safe. Four people talked about self-protection strategies including carrying a personal alarm, carrying perfume, pepper spray or 'looking [as] intimidating as possible'. The most expansive of these comments included:

My schedule and commitments require that I often travel at night, alone, on public transport. I've learned how to be careful and not call attention to myself. I also often try to disguise that I'm a female by wearing a hooded sweatshirt or whatever; I don't listen to music or anything after dark; if there is a supermarket or convenience store nearby I wait inside for trains/trams/buses; I always carry my mobile phone and a whistle; and I'm learning taekwondo to learn self defence.

The second group of responses included comments about how to 'stay low'. Eight people talked about avoiding eye contact, keeping to themselves and not answering back if people make rude comments. One person said 'I keep quiet and pretend that I don't understand what they say'.

The third group of ten comments was about other strategies, such as being generally alert, using taxis, always travelling in the first carriage on a train or getting lifts from friends if respondents had to be out at night. A final group of five respondents talked about their lack of choice in having to use public transport and being in unsafe places. Two further respondents said that they felt safe and had no issues.

Domestic student comments

The 49 comments made by domestic students were very similar in character to those from international students. Seven people talked about implementing self-defence strategies such as, 'carrying keys in my hand ready to defend myself'. A further group of six said that they tried not to be noticed and employed such tactics as to, 'avoid eye contact with people and walk with confidence'. The largest group of comments were about prevention strategies such as travelling in groups, letting people know where you are going and being vigilant about surrounding environments.

The main difference between domestic and international student comments was apparent in options for private transport and perceived levels of safety. Two people said that they only drive when travelling at night. Seven people said that they don't take any precautions because they feel safe.

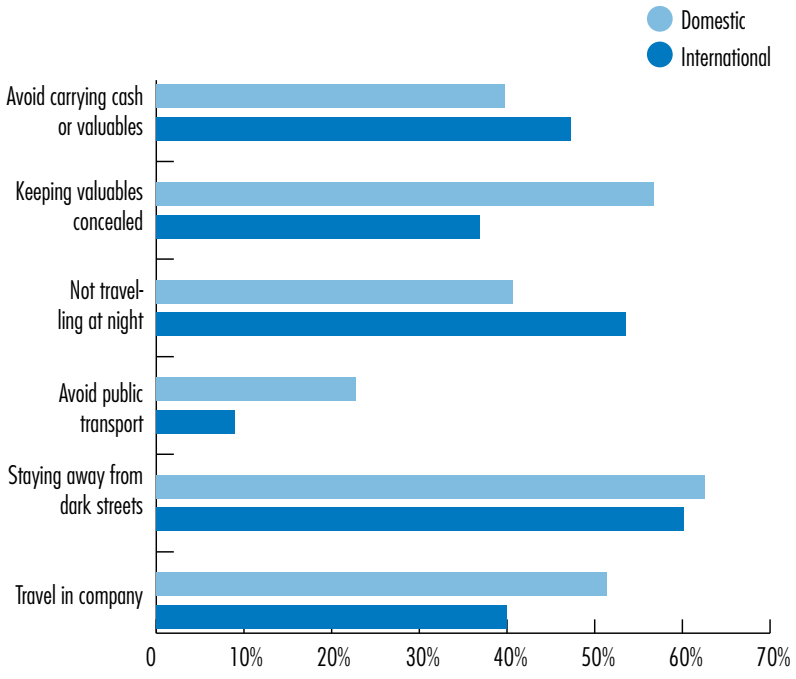

Chart 5.11 Strategies used to protect safety in public spaces

'I don't feel unsafe really – I wouldn't start counting my money on the train I suppose, but apart from that, I don't feel I have to do anything.

Perceptions of safety

As Attachment 2 shows, the survey asked a series of questions about perceptions of safety and the findings of these are discussed in this section.

Pre and post arrival expectations of safety: One of the objectives of the survey was to capture international students' expectations about safety prior to arrival in Australia and how these perceptions had changed since arrival. Two questions were asked. First, students were asked about their expectations prior to coming to Australia. The second question was about their current perceptions of safety and whether or not these had changed. The results of these questions show that international students expectations of safety were largely not met. Most international students (98.4%) either expected Australia to be safe (69.1%) or 'expected Australia to be as safe as my home country' (29.4%). Only 6 international students (1.3%) said that they 'expected Australia to be unsafe'. In contrast, current perceptions of safety were considerably down-graded. The majority of students (56.6%) of students said that 'Australia is less safe than I expected'. These results show clearly that for this group of respondents, there is a considerable gap between expectations of safety in Australia and their post-arrival experience.

Perceptions of safety of different groups

The second set of questions relating to perceptions of safety aimed to assess differences in relative perceived safety between groups of students. Most respondents think that students generally are safe. Seven hundred (81%) of the survey's respondents thought that students generally were 'very safe', 'safe' or 'somewhat safe'. Most, however, thought that domestic students were safer than international students. While 765 (89%) believed that local students were 'very safe', 'safe' or 'somewhat safe', only 436 (50%) thought the same applied for international students. The findings from this set of questions show another disjunction in opinion in that domestic students think that international students are safer than international students think they are. Chart 5.12 below shows the perceptions of safety of international students comparing both international and international student perceptions.

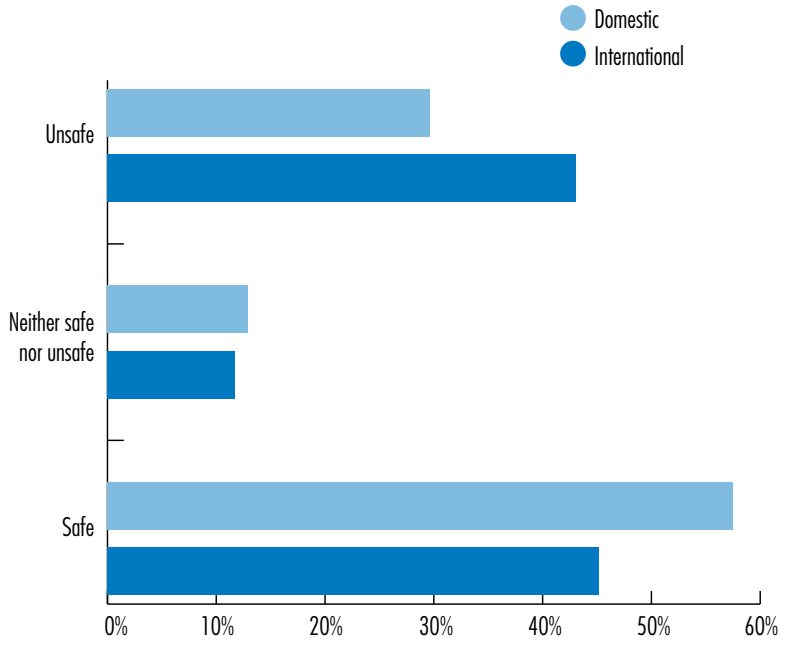

Chart 5.12: Perceived safety of international students by international and domestic student response.

Who is least safe?

Respondents were also asked to specify which group or groups they believed were less safe. The following discussion categorises and describes the key responses to this question, starting with comments from the 250 international students who responded to this question.

International Student Opinions

Chinese or Asian students – Only twelve international students identified Chinese students or Chinese and Asian students as being specifically less safe than other groups.

Indian students and students from the subcontinent – The majority of international student respondents (92) specifically identified Indians as being the least safe, although a proportion singled out Indians as well as people who appear to be Indian, such as Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan students.

Indians and Chinese students – The next largest group of respondents (33) within the international student group said that it was both Indian and Chinese students who are least safe, although there were some within this category who also said that it was Indians and Asians who are least safe.

Muslim students – Twenty six international students identified Muslim students as being less safe. This included comments like 'Indian Muslims', 'Middle East and Indians,' 'Indian and African' with reference made to being Muslim.

Non-white students or anyone who looks particularly different – Fifteen international students identified 'brown coloured people' or 'anyone who is not Australian looking' as being least safe. More generally, the comments were that 'looking different' made students less safe.

All international students and other comments – Four respondents said that all international students are less safe. There were also a number of other comments such as two people who said that local students are more at risk, or those who identified combinations of ethnicities and countries of origin such as the respondent who said that 'Maoris, Koreans and Muslims' were least safe.

Domestic student opinions about who is least safe

There were 173 domestic student responses to this question, and the range was similar to the international student responses. Only two domestic students believed that Chinese students were more at risk, while 92 said that Indians or those from the Indian region are most at risk. Nineteen domestic respondents thought that both Indian and Chinese students are most at risk and 21 believed that it was students who appeared most different or dark skinned who are at risk. Seven people said that all international students are at risk because their behaviours and circumstances make them vulnerable. A final group of 29 comments identified a range of people including Muslims, Africans, Saudi Arabians, people from the Western suburbs and women as being the most vulnerable. A further three people said that they 'don't know'.

One of the main differences in domestic student and international student responses was that domestic students were more likely to comment on why they believed that some groups are less safe than others. A number of comments were made by domestic students about the seriousness of risks to international student safety and the need for action. At the same time, a small but notable number of domestic student respondents (5) used this question to make clearly racist comments, of the type in the following statement:

> *'Indians, they are rude, make people angry, then they get the old fisticuffs. When they learn to respect local culture, they will get respect in return.*

Another notable aspect of responses from both groups to this question was the large number of comments relating to media coverage of attacks on Indian students. Many comments were prefaced by references to the media, such as, 'it would appear from the media that …', indicating the extent to which media coverage has influenced perceptions of safety and ideas about those who are at risk.

Further insights were gained from the final, open-ended survey question which asked respondents to make 'other comments'. The findings of this are discussed below.

General Comments

General comments about the community safety of international students were received from 315 respondents. Of these comments, 190 were received from international students and 125 came from domestic students. This section describes the key responses by theme starting below with those received from international students.

Comments from international students

Five main themes were identified within the responses of international students. These include:

- General expressions of anger, frustration or fear about the safety of international students;
- Suggestions and/or appeals about what should be done to protect international student safety;
- Comments about the media and its role in generating fear;
- Expressions of appreciation of being in Melbourne and appeals for international students to look after their own safety and have realistic expectations;
- Comments about the concurrence between problems facing international students and broader community issues.

This section discusses and describes the responses received within each of these themes.

Anger, frustration or fear: This was the largest theme within the international student responses with 50 out of 190 people making strongly expressed comments about racism, government neglect, their fears or experiences of safety and general appeals for change or in appreciation of this survey.

Fifteen of these respondents made comments about the racism they experience or see operating in Australia. Some of these comments expressed disbelief and shock about the extent of racism in Australia, stating that this did not match their expectations prior to arrival. 'I'm struggling to understand why Australia is quite a racist country', was one comment. Similar comments were about being a coloured person, '… it is difficult to be a brown person in Melbourne.' Others named particular groups, such as the 15-25 year age group as being particularly discriminatory while two respondents said that their educational institution showed a lack of respect for different cultures. One of the more strongly expressed comments was,

> *'I think that since we do not belong here in Australia, we are subject to threats of all kind … international students are really not safe at all … this is very stressful and hard to cope with.*

A second, smaller category of responses within this theme comprised expressions of anger about paying large fees to study in Australia and not getting anything in return. Within this group, frustration was expressed that no-one cares about international students and that, in effect, the Australian government just wants to take the money and run. Clearly, this group feel unappreciated and disrespected for their role in boosting the local economy and they wish to see someone suffer for this neglect.

> *'F.. you … for taking my money and giving nothing in return! I will bad mouth in Europe – don't you worry about that!'* was a typical comment within this theme.

A third category of 12 responses here included expressions of fear and/or descriptions of the experiences of either the respondent or of friends who had been victims of violence or abuse: 'It is very frightening to be out sometimes. Now it is so we expect something to happen even when nothing is happening.' Or 'this is a real problem – my friend was hit once for no reason. Combined, these responses expressed strong perceptions of danger and of being at risk. A final group of fourteen international student respondents made general appeals to 'fix the problem' or expressed thanks for the survey in the hope that something might happen to change things for the better. 'Do something, plzzzzzzzzzzzzzz' encapsulated this set of comments.

Combined, the fifty international students who made general comments expressed strong emotion, either anger, fear or frustration, about the status of international students in Australia and their perceptions of safety.

Strategies to improve safety: The largest number of comments from international students was about strategies to improve safety. There were 83 out of 190 comments within this category and within these, there were five sub-themes. These included pleas for expanded and/or more effective policing and law reform and/or enforcement, for action by educational institutions, for general acknowledgement and action within Australia on racist attitudes and behaviours, for support and information for international students and general improvements in community safety, particularly in relation to public transport.

Thirty-one comments were made about the need for better policing. These included the need for more police generally, for a police presence on public transport, for improvements in police responses and for greater efforts in encouraging students to report crime. Other comments were about the need for stricter law enforcement and more strategic patrolling of places perceived to be dangerous.

Sixteen comments were suggestions about strategies that should be implemented by educational institutions. Many of these comments related to changing time-tables so that students were not forced to travel at unsafe times. One person suggested that there should be a 'network system'. Others asked for more visible security, particularly at campuses where people feel unsafe such as at Footscray. Others asked for more opportunities to meet with local students and 'be friends'.

A third set of comments related to the need to address racism. Fifteen comments took up this theme with appeals to government to identify and address racist attitudes. One person said that international students should be forewarned that Australia is a racist country. Others considered that educational institutions are responsible for ensuring improved relations and understanding amongst their culturally diverse student bodies.

Seven people made suggestions about the need to better inform and educate international students about safety and appropriate behaviour in Australia. One person suggested that there is a need to equip students with the language necessary for self-protection, a comment made from her own experience of sexual harassment:

> *I felt frightened ... when a … man touched my thigh. … I realised it was a sexual harassment (these words I learnt after it happened) I jumped and tried to warn him, however, because of my frighteness, I forgot how to say such words in English. I don`t think I have time to struggle such words when I`m really in danger, I hope school/uni could provide sample sentences for international students who are freshmen, not only like "sexual harassment is unlawful".*

A final set of fourteen comments within this theme was about general community safety, primarily relating to public transport and the use of public transport at night. Several people talked about the need for better street lighting; others wanted enhanced security on trains and at train stations. One person commented on the need for workplace reform to protect student rights and safety in employment. 'Transport is a big problem' was a statement that encapsulates the feelings of most within this category.

The discussion above describes the suggestions made for change by 83 international students. Improved policing, more services from educational institutions, addressing racism and improving the safety of public transport are key themes.

Media is the problem: Only four international student respondents made explicit comments here about the role of media in relation to community safety, but we note these here given the extent to which this issue was mentioned in responses to previous questions. The comments about media in the general responses were contradictory, however. One comment was that there has not been enough coverage of crimes against international students in the Australian media, in effect, that there has been a 'cover up'. Two other comments suggested that the media has

blown the issues out of proportion. Another said that the media coverage actually generates further issues, spreading a message that 'international students are easy picks.'

What do you expect – it goes both ways! – Another important theme apparent in 34 comments was about the need for international students to adjust their expectations and/or to take action to better protect themselves. Fourteen comments within this category expressed opinions to the effect of 'what do you expect in a big city?' and stressed the need for international students to take better care. In a related theme, another group of nine comments expressed the need for international students to 'make an effort' to engage with the local community and that there was room for international students to 'improve their manners'. The sentiment expressed here was that 'it works both ways' and that while there are rude locals, there are many international students who don't do enough to fit in.

The final group of comments within this theme were expressions about how good Melbourne is, at least compared to other international cities. 'I like it here so no comment. I love Melbourne'.

Broader community issues: The final theme apparent in responses from international students was related to broader community safety issues. Fourteen people made comments within this theme that made connections between international student safety and broader issues of safety in Melbourne, including the influence of drugs and alcohol, suburbs which were unsafe such as Footscray, the presence of homeless people and increasingly violent youth cultures.

Comments from domestic students

There were 125 comments made by local students which differed significantly from those made by international students. There were two discernible themes within the comments. The first was related to opinion about the nature of community safety issues for international students, expressions of which can be broadly divided between those who thought that violence against students is opportunistic in cause and those who believed that the violence is motivated by racism. A second sub-theme was apparent in explicitly racist comments. Other major categories of comment were about strategies that should be implemented to address issues related to community safety for international students and the role of the media in sensationalising the issues.

Opportunism: Twenty-nine comments were made that can be broadly understood as being an expression of the belief that violence against international students is largely an outcome of the fact that they are 'easy targets', that they 'bring it on themselves' by their behaviour, or the belief that international students are no more or less safe than others in the community. The following comment broadly encapsulates this view.

> *I think that this big fuss about Indian students being attacked is as culture centred as it is being made out as. I think you will find that foreign students in particular Indian students spend an increased amount of time in situations that could be conceived as putting themselves at risk for example spending late hours at uni walking home or to transport in the dark, which would put any one at risk. So I think rather than looking at race as the common denominator for the attacks I would suggest look at the person's activities, etc.*

Another thread of commentary was about the relationship between racism and sexism. The view, typified by the comment below, was that women are victims of violence and that the gendered nature of victimisation is more important than international student status:

> *I think it's wrong to isolate it as general safety concerns for international students. I have spent years being harassed both sexually and verbally by taxi drivers from Middle Eastern countries. Many women I know in Melbourne have suffered the same.*

Not all respondents thought that the violence was purely opportunistic, but some students felt that racial motivation should not be seen as a general explanation for crime against international students. To focus on the racist element of crime was seen as an over-simplification of the issues:

> *While some attacks may be racially motivated, I believe the majority of these attacks may be falsely linked to racism.*

Racism: Slightly fewer comments (25) expressed the view that the violence against international students is connected to racism, that Australia is a racist society, and that it is a poor state of affairs that the Australian government markets education to international students without the support systems to ensure their safety. Some within this group made a plea to the government to ensure that 'something is done' to fix the safety problems facing international students. For example, 'International students should not have to go through this, it is a very crucial act and should be taken SERIOUSLY'. Others made appeals to the Australian government to protect human rights, to damn racist trends in Australia and to talk about the enormous benefits international students bring to the intellectual and cultural life of Australia.

Comments expressing racism: A small group of eight comments included seriously explicit expressions of racism which are important to note. Several of these were expressions of resentment that attention to the problems of international students detracted from the needs of domestic students. One person, strangely, said that '… as an Anglo-Aussie, it sounds awful, but I feel safer knowing that people from other backgrounds are being targeted'. Three of the comments were highly inflammatory, making explicitly derogatory comments about Indians. One person commented that '… the Indians deserve it'.

Overall, the majority view expressed by domestic student respondents was that violence against international students is an outcome of opportunism rather than racism.

Strategies for improving international student safety

The second major theme in domestic student responses was about what should be done to improve the safety of international students. Forty-two comments of this nature were made which include the following ideas.

Address racism and welcome students: Eleven respondents proposed a need for greater efforts to promote the benefits of multiculturalism and to address racism and discrimination. Two comments were about educating the general Australian community and a further two were about promoting anti-racism amongst young people and within schools. Others talked about the need to celebrate all cultures, to welcome international students with adequate services and to implement serious measures to ensure that the experience of all international students is rewarding. Another domestic respondent wanted a greater focus on addressing racist crimes and one person admonished the government for failing to promote a stronger culture of anti-racism in Australia.

International students need to be better prepared/the onus is on them: A larger group of sixteen respondents made comments about the need for international students to take more responsibility for their own safety, to arrive in Australia better prepared, and more fluent in English, and to learn and adopt the local cultural norms as a measure to stay safe. Comments were made about behaviours of international students that offend locals and 'stir trouble'. These include conspicuously carrying valuables, talking loudly on public transport or being 'cocky' or 'arrogant'. One person said that Indians are less safe because of their 'bad manners'. Another said that it was because of their 'victim mentality'. One sentiment expressed within these responses was that 'They need to understand our culture as we do theirs when we visit their country'.

Better policing and law enforcement: Five comments were made about the need for better policing in 'trouble spots', the need for stronger law enforcement in relation to the perpetrators of crime and a greater police presence in general.

Education services and security: Six comments were made about the need for improved security on educational institution campuses, including better transport and a greater presence of security staff. The need for accommodation closer to campuses was highlighted by three people who attributed the security risk to the need to travel at unsafe times.

Safer public transport: Four comments were made about the need to improve the safety of public transport for all students through measures such as having conductors, greater police presence or more public transport near educational institutions.

The media and broader community issues: A final set of comments about community safety related to the role of the media and to broader community safety in Melbourne. Six comments were made about the role the media had played in sensationalising the issues, focussing on negative rather than positive events and experiences or generally 'blowing the issues out of proportion'. Two people talked about the need for a better evidence base on which to respond to the issues and one comment described the response to attacks on international students as a 'knee-jerk reaction'.

A final group of comments related to a general decline in community safety for various reasons, including because of gangs and broader social disconnection. One person made a particularly strong appeal to fix issues across the board in relation to safety.

> *It's not just international students it's everyone – the safety of students isn't high. Fix it.... the last thing I want to see on the news is some poor Indian kid being bashed to death by some racist Nazi, philistine bogans.*

Conclusion on domestic comments

The comments received from 125 domestic students in relation to international student safety were distinctly different from those received by international students. Amongst the domestic student respondents, there was a clear polarisation of opinion between those respondents who believe that international student safety is threatened by a racist local culture and by lack of support, transport and housing infrastructure and services and those who believe that attacks and violence against international students are opportunistic in nature and that the onus is on international students to better prepare and protect themselves and adjust to 'our' culture. There was a similar polarisation of opinion about what needs to be done. Roughly half of the expressed views focused on the need to better welcome, celebrate, support and protect international students. The contrasting responses were about how international students can better adapt to the local culture, improve their behaviour and protect their own safety. Again, some distinctly racist views were expressed within this latter group of comments, particularly against Indian students. The plea to 'deport those stinkin, smelly black nigger pigs!' was perhaps the worst of these comments.

Conclusions on the student survey

This section has reported on the findings of the survey on international student safety and analysis of the responses received by 1,013 international and domestic students. While the survey has clear limitations, as discussed in the methodology section, we regard that the voices of more than 1,000 students can provide useful insight into the perceptions and experiences of students in relation to international student safety in Melbourne. There is also useful insight to be gained in comparing the perceptions and experiences of domestic and international student respondents, which in some cases were markedly different. The survey achieved substantial representation of views from Indian and other international students and from across the private, TAFE and university sectors of the education system.

Some clear trends and concerns emerge from these findings that are discussed in greater detail in Section 6. These are: that international students commonly experience threats to their safety that have a racist motivation; that their expectations about safety in Melbourne are not met; and that many international students experience fear, particularly in relation to travel. It is also evident that there are clear differences in perceptions of safety between domestic and international students and that amongst domestic students, there is a polarisation of opinion about the nature of threats to international student safety and about what should be done to improve the safety of international students in Melbourne. The survey also captured some serious expressions of racism by domestic students, which in itself is an important observation.

These survey findings are later analysed in line with other findings generated by interviews with stakeholders and with international students, as described in Section 4. The following section reports on the findings from the stakeholder interviews.

5.3 Findings from stakeholder interviews

This section summarises the findings of the interviews with stakeholders. A total of 29 interviews were conducted with representatives from:

- The Victorian Government and Consul Generals of India and China in Melbourne;
- Peak educational associations and educational institutions including university, TAFE and private providers;
- Victoria Police members;
- Student unions and associations and ethnic community organisations;
- Youth service providers and community associations from the western suburbs of Melbourne.

This section of the report summarises and describes the findings according to key themes. As a means of clarifying the data, this section is organised around the four broad questions addressed in the interviews. These include:

- What are the safety issues affecting international students and are these different to those affecting students generally? Are there students from particular countries who are less safe than others?
- Why does violence against international students occur?
- To what extent is crime against international students motivated by racism as opposed to opportunism?
- What needs to be done to prevent future violence against international students and who is responsible?

The findings are presented within these four key questions. First, the findings are summarised within themes that then shape a broader discussion on the spectrum of views expressed through the interviews.

Discussion of safety issues for international students

Across the discussion about perceived safety issues facing international students, four main themes can be identified. While there is some overlap between the themes, they can be broadly divided according to the following categories of opinion which shape the discussion and analysis of the findings:

- International students are no more or less safe than anyone else in the community;
- International students are less safe due to structural issues such as housing affordability and financial constraints which lead to a concentration of international students in parts of Melbourne that are less safe and to employment in occupations that exposes them to higher levels of risk to their safety;
- International students are less safe due to their lack of local knowledge, lack of situational awareness, youth and lack of information;
- Safety risks increase in line with ethnic and racial differences.

International students are no more or less safe than anyone else in the community: Six of the fourteen interviewees expressed the view that international students are no more or less safe than others in the community. This view was aligned with the belief that Melbourne is generally a safe place and that incidents of violence against students had been sensationalised in the media. Two interviewees believed that, given the growing numbers of international students, it was a statistical probability that there would be an increase in the numbers of violent incidents affecting that population in line with rates of violence in the broader population. What made attacks on international students more visible was increasing media attention and the increased likelihood that international students would report incidents of violence.

> *We have had assaults happen to our students, we have 6,000 students, and that's in Melbourne alone, we've always had attacks on our students. I've been 10 years in this industry and it's always been around but it's the awareness of it happening. … I think two things have happened, one is that students are now more likely to report when something has happened than before, which is a good thing. Secondly, because there were a few attacks which gained a lot of media attention…*

More broadly, the view was that Melbourne is generally safe but that the individuals in each case of violence were '… in the wrong place at the wrong time.' A concern that was more broadly expressed, however, was that the media attention has sensationalised the issue and that media coverage has contributed to creating a misleading impression about that rate of attacks against international students, out of proportion with the actual incidence of violence.

> *I have to say I don't have any knowledge or understanding that the attacks on students of any sort are greater than attacks on anybody else in the community. Having said that, we do hear a bit about it, in the press you know, recently. So I do think that [the issues have been] sensationalised, I just think for every student that might have been bashed, there's probably five other drunks coming out of King Street nightclubs that got bashed as well. So my feeling is that without the data I can't say that the problem is – well I can't even say it's a problem if you know what I mean.*

The general view was that media reports of incidents of violence are often misleading and generate unnecessary fear when the risks of attack or robbery are actually relatively low. In effect, four of the interviewees believed that the issues of safety for international students have been

blown out of proportion and that there is no evidence to suggest that international students are more or less safe than the general community.

International students are less safe due to socio-economic issues: Thirteen of the interviewees, including a majority of interviewees from Victoria Police, believed that international students were made more vulnerable than the general population due to broader socio-economic issues and that not all international students faced the same level of threat to their safety. Four inter-related issues included:

- the shortage of, and high cost of, rental accommodation that forces international students to live in areas that are less safe with lower levels of policing;
- the need to work in jobs that require shift work or unsafe working conditions such as taxi driving; and
- the need to use public transport in unsafe areas at unsafe times due to lack of access to private transport options; and
- the perceived exploitation of some international students by unscrupulous landlords and employers that causes these students to take greater risks with their safety in order to reduce the financial constraints of maintaining work, study and living arrangements.

The high cost of accommodation and the shortage of rental accommodation in Melbourne is a major issue that was identified as affecting international students. This forces international students to seek accommodation in outlying areas where rent is more affordable, in housing that might not be acceptable to the established population. International students in this situation spend more time on public transport as well as having to live in areas that are characterised as poor and marginalised. Housing in the western region of Melbourne was highlighted by two of the interviewees as being risky, although housing in outlying areas in the northern and south eastern regions of Melbourne were also mentioned:

> *So suddenly the numbers have gone up, currently you've got 45,000 Indians in Victoria, the majority lives in the western suburbs or northern suburbs, because the houses are run down. You and me may not rent those houses, but the poor students, they don't know. They come here to work, study, they just quickly come there, put the pillow down, sleep and go back to work. So the concentration is in these areas, the offenders, they are always there, in every country they are there.*

One of the associated risks identified by two of the interviewees was the lower concentration of policing combined with the traditional dominance of Anglo-Australians in these areas:

My understanding is that people who haven't had a lot of exposure from different cultural backgrounds and very much more in the outer suburbs area, I've also heard that's a link to lower policing areas. The CBD is so heavily policed these days, if anything happened the police would be there very quickly. I think the outer suburbs communities know that where there are less resources things can happen and people often get away with it a bit more.

However, the police saw the issue of suburban concentration slightly differently, placing more emphasis on the situational context of when and how students are out in public in various suburbs rather than on locale or suburban concentration alone:

> *I really think that having access to a vehicle is one of the key factors…. [As is taking] the last train on your own, [walking around] battler-type suburbs …Walk[ing] home on your own....*

As one senior officer noted:

> *Most of our assaults have occurred where the student goes to university during the day, has a job that keeps them at work quite late, they then catch transport home quite late; they're safe until they come off the station, that's when they're walking from the station to their accommodation, wherever that may be, that the assaults appear to be occurring.*

A related risk stems from international students' vulnerability to exploitation by unscrupulous landlords or migration agents who overcharge for sub-standard accommodation, therefore magnifying the need to work longer hours and travel long distances.

> *Again, their housing; they are open to exploitation by rogue landlords because they don't have much money, they're not aware or not able to access the same kind of support networks that Australians are, so that makes them vulnerable to landlords who want to put 12 of them in a bedroom and charge them exorbitant rent.*

Another closely related set of factors were identified by stakeholders, including that such housing is located near train lines or public transport routes that are less safe and that international students are travelling at unsafe times, due to the type of employment necessary in order for them to survive in Melbourne. Much of this employment in itself is risky and exploitative. All these factors combine to increase the risk of crime victimisation:

> *…these people will get low paid jobs, they don't have much money, which means they end up working the jobs that Australians don't want to do, they end up working night shifts in supermarkets, being taxi drivers, doing all these things, which means they have to catch public transport home late at night. Their residence is fairly spread around Melbourne but they end up living in areas of higher crime.*

An important and inter-related issue raised by one interviewee is the relationship between social exclusion and having limited housing options. The view was that existing housing shortages in Melbourne meant that students are more likely to be co-located with others from their home country, thereby limiting opportunities to learn about and be involved with the local Australian community. This has implications for the general student experience, but it also has safety implications due to international students' restricted access to the additional resources that increased social capital might bring:

> *What's happening is they tend to stay with and live with people from not just the same state, but the same village. They're not mixing outside, they have very little knowledge of what life is really like in Australia. They've been misled about what was going to happen when they got here.*

Financial vulnerability, the pressures this imposes and the risks it creates for international students was a key theme for all stakeholders from Victoria Police. One interviewee from this stakeholder group expressed concern that while visa systems were in place that requires international students to deposit sufficient funds in Australia to support them during their studies, there is no guarantee that those funds will not either be returned home or repaid immediately if they were obtained as a loan to meet the visa requirements:

> *Anecdotally, we hear that it's all too common that as soon as [the students] get here, they actually send that [money] back. … If it was loaned…understandably, there would be some pressure [to return those funds quickly]*

Overall, a major theme across the interviews was that the safety problems facing international students have to be seen in their socio-economic context. Being an international student alone does not increase risks to safety. The important factors are access to social and financial resources. Those people who are low on both financial and social capital are more vulnerable due to limited accommodation, transport and employment options. In other words, the narrower the options, the greater there is a greater risk of exploitation and violence. As one interviewee from Victoria Police put it:

> *Without [enough money to live on], they're stuck; they're in a very difficult situation. It means that they become desperate for money. Through that desperation they become vulnerable to exploitation, and that is the most critical link in all of this for international students.*

International students are less safe due to lack of local knowledge, youth and lack of information.

A closely related and often overlapping theme with the socio-economic and structural risk factors discussed above was that international students are less safe than others due to their status as newcomers, their relative naivety and youth and their limited information and knowledge about what it means to live in Melbourne. A key factor identified by stakeholders was the difference between students used to life in a large, cosmopolitan city and those who came from rural or regional backgrounds.

The vulnerability of young people was particularly highlighted by interviewees who were engaged in youth services. Young people generally were identified as being at greater risk of crime due to their stage of transition to adult life and their greater public visibility, behaviours and patterns of employment, transport, study and housing. Ethnic and racial difference was also seen as a safety risk factor, with those most different from an Anglo-Celtic norm identified as being the most vulnerable. For international students, the dangerous implications of difference are exacerbated in part by their status as the new 'outsiders' to the existing local and often multi-ethnic youth cultures in the areas where international students are now living. One youth worker compared the presence of new international students to the migration of wildebeest in East Africa, where those who are vulnerable are invariably attacked by 'opportunistic' larger animals. This was considered by the interviewee to be an accurate analogy for new and young international students who wander onto the 'turf' of more established youth cultures. Indian students were highlighted as particularly vulnerable due to the perception by local young people that they are wealthy and will carry cash and expensive electronic equipment:

> *And now I'm telling you right now first hand that a couple of the kids that I know working on the ground with kids for seven years and a couple of the kids who have been involved in things like street fights and all that, they know this for a fact that Indian students are getting attacked because of material possession that they have. Indian students, usually students carry a laptop in your bag, now someone stole a laptop, if someone grabbed your laptop and with an expensive laptop $1,000 and they sold it for $300, that's good money for them. So things like that.*

More generally, a number of the interviewees pointed to the fact that most international students are simply naïve young people who are particularly vulnerable when they arrive in Australia due to their inexperience settling in a new country without their families close by. Those students who were inexperienced in living in large cities were seen to be particularly at risk. As one interviewee put it,

> *'… I don't know how they would cope in New Delhi let alone coming fresh from the village to Melbourne …'*

Lack of situational awareness in and about living in Melbourne on the part of international students was seen as a highly relevant factor for Victoria Police members in particular. This in turn is linked, as other interviewees have noted above, with the contrasting backgrounds of some international students who may come from rural areas in their home countries into a relatively dense metropolitan environment and as a result are less familiar with the environmental risks that can characterise densely populated urban settings. As one officer noted:

> *I think probably through lack of knowledge, and in some cases naiveté… they tend to expose themselves to risks in a different way to people who are locals. I think they're less safe because they actually put themselves in situations where they're likely to come across danger [through lack of situational awareness]. …*

A critically important theme that parallels the issue of what international students lack when they arrive in Australia by way of local knowledge, situational awareness and accurate information, however, is what frameworks and understandings of safety and risk they do have and bring with them from their own local backgrounds and experience. A key theme emerging across interviews with Victoria Police members is the need to develop a greater understanding of how international students from different cultural backgrounds evaluate what it means to feel safe, and how important cultural frames of reference around what constitutes safety, or lack of safety, in environmental terms may be to enhanced strategies for community safety for international students when they come to study and live in Australia. As one officer observed:

> *I guess what I think is when they're in their own culture they know how to deal with their own culture... So when they are home and they know how to deal with their own environment, they come over here and it would be like....it's just this wonderful country and surely nothing bad will happen to me here. ... So I think they do let their guard down from this*

unrealistic expectation that...very little crime happens here [relative to their home country].

Another police member noted,

If you come from an environment where – well, actually, I was going to say it's about....the general basics of how to look after yourself [in an environment like Melbourne] and some may not have had that, they may not have needed it back in their own country. I don't know what their environment [back home], you know....

Lack of, or misleading, pre-arrival information about life in Australia was also seen as a major contributing factor to international student safety issues. There were various views expressed about why this was the case. One interviewee expressed the view that official Australian information is not simple or accessible enough, making it relatively easy for migration agents and education providers to distribute information that appears to be official. To illustrate, she cited a conversation with Indian students who were convinced that a web site operated by one private college was actually the official Australian government web-site about study in Australia. A Victoria Police interviewee made a similar point:

They don't have awareness about our cultural norms, or safety information, and that's one of the biggest things, I think, that on a state and federal level, we've got to get it right. My opinion is that the information they need over there has got to be absolutely crystal clear about what it's like to live here.

Misleading, inadequate or insufficient information was widely identified as having serious implications for international student safety. Most commonly, students were widely perceived as being unprepared for the actual costs of living in Melbourne and without adequate money to maintain themselves. This leaves individuals vulnerable to exploitation in employment and housing, which as discussed above, places students in vulnerable and stressful situations:

One of the things I find is the lack of information. The agents, misleading these kids. They're coming with big expectations. For example, … in the small towns, the agents are saying 'your son will be earning two hundred dollars a week', which is equivalent to 7,000 rupees. So … 7,000 rupees, it's big money. But with two hundred dollars, you can't even buy anything, can't live comfortably.

I think the naiveté [around community safety issues] starts back [in the home country], in particular with the Indian students, where they are told things that are just not true. …. But the ideas have been put into their head in India, that money is easy over here. And of course you come here and that's not the reality. … So when they came here and found that the course was not in a magnificent Hyatt Hotel but in some grubby little room behind somewhere else, when the course didn't live up to expectations, a number of students said that they would turn up and there'd be no lecturers. Some of the stories are horrific. (Victoria Police interviewee)

The need for more reliable, accessible and relevant information about the realities of living and studying in Australia was an important theme expressed across interviewees in relation to safety. Interviewees believed this information should cover the costs and logistics of accessing housing, employment, transport, and services in Melbourne and detailed information about Australian culture, The belief was that students arrive ill-equipped and with overly optimistic expectations and that accurate and realistic information is required both pre and post arrival in Australia. Without this, students are more vulnerable than if they were 'forewarned'.

Overall, the fact that young people generally are vulnerable is seen as a major contributing safety concern. A combination of youth, inexperience and misinformation was seen to make international students at particular risk of being victims of crime.

Safety risks increase in line with ethnic and racial differences

All of the interviewees discussed their understanding of the extent to which crimes are motivated by racism as opposed to opportunism, in line with a key question in our research design; these findings are discussed later in this section. Interviewees were also asked whether they believed that students from some countries were more or less safe than others. The dominant opinion was that all international students are generally less safe than others due to a range of factors discussed above including their limited housing and accommodation options, use of public transport and working conditions. Six interviewees however, identified safety risks as directly related to ethnic or racial appearance and/or being from India or China.

One of the youth services providers believed that racism is endemic in Australia and that there is a direct causal relationship between ethnic difference and risk of attack:

'… we work with mainly young people from different cultural backgrounds (who) are always a victim of racism and being attacked on some level, I think (this is) quite rife unfortunately in our community.'

Another view expressed was that Indian students were particularly at risk for reasons that mostly to do with the recent growth in their numbers, their visibility and tendency to work and travel at unsafe times, a view that was generally supported by Victoria Police interviewees as well. A connection was made with racism, though this was in the sense that it is a cultural tradition in Australia to 'pick on' the latest group of arrivals:

'… we've always had a bit of a leaning in this country to pick on the latest arrivals – that's always happened, … to pick on the person who is different, who looks different and it doesn't have to be racial or religious it could be, you know, the one who has got freckles and red hair or it could be the one who walks with a limp or it could be – you know there's always been, particularly with young kids and teenagers, a capacity to pick on someone who is just different.'

Across the interviewees, five believed that Indians, or people who appear Indian, were at greater safety risk than others. Only one interviewee mentioned that Chinese students along with Indian students were particularly vulnerable. Overall, most interviewees stated that they lacked evidence or were unable to generalise about the extent to which risks to safety were related to nationality or ethnic background. As discussed above, most believed that Melbourne is in general relatively safe, and that while international students are potentially more vulnerable than

most students, this is due to a combination of broader socio-economic and structural issues alongside their relative youth and their lack of access to important local knowledge. One of the major areas of focus within the interviews was on understanding the causes of violence against international students. The following section goes on to discuss these findings.

What are the reasons for violence?

This section of the report discusses the responses of interviewees to another set of questions in our research, related to the reasons for and causes of violence against international students. As above, we start by discussing three key themes that emerged from the interviews. These included:

- Student naivety and behaviours;
- Socio-economic conditions;
- Systemic and institutional issues.

Student naivety and behaviours – One of the key themes expressed in relation to the causes of violence was student behaviour and the extent to which this made international students vulnerable. A little more than half of the total number of stakeholder interviewees believed that naïve; situationally driven and/or risky behaviours were an important explanatory factor for international students becoming a victim of violence. However, interviewees varied as to whether they saw student behaviours as the main reason for attacks or whether this was one element amongst a broader set of causes. For at least three of the interviewees, the perception was that international students could easily avoid violence if they behaved differently. For each of these interviewees, the inference was that, to a point, it was natural to be at risk when arriving in a new city because of a lack of knowledge about areas or actions that are safe or unsafe.

A number of behaviours were specified by interviewees contributing to the risk that students would become victims of violence. The main behaviour identified was the belief that international students and Indian students in particular, carried valuables such as laptops, mobile phones and cash with them in public places. This made them desirable targets for groups of young perpetrators. The other main problem identified was use of public transport at unsafe times, combined with lack of situational awareness in those circumstances:

> *We've conducted surveillance and we've had detectives in plainclothes watching people come off train stations, and watching who goes where – it's generally [international students] that are acting the most zsituationally unaware and leaving themselves more vulnerable than anyone else. (Victoria Police interviewee)*

Speaking languages other than English in public places was also identified as a risky behaviour, as was the use of public phones late at night. One interviewee suggested that students would be safer if they made greater efforts to integrate with the general community. Another interviewee felt that Indian students should 'hit the gym' as youth gangs perceived them as easy physical targets. Another interviewee believed that Indian students skimped on spending money for safe accommodation in preference to spending money on alcohol.

Combined, at least half of the interviewees identified student behaviour as an important contributing, if not the primary explanatory factor in attacks against Indian students. The main response within this theme was the general view that many students put themselves in 'the wrong place at the wrong time'. Opinions varied about other behavioural factors, ranging from lack of cultural awareness, to language differences to the fact that international students were simply young, naïve and inexperienced.

Again, however, the police view of this varied significantly in some respects. While all police interviewed felt that international students themselves definitely had a role in taking responsibility for and enhancing their own safety in the community, this was linked in turn to the overall responsibility that we have collectively as a community – of which international students are a part – for trying to increase and ensure safety in general, and reducing where possible the risks to personal safety where this is within the control of an individual or smaller group of people.

However, in contrast to some of the views expressed by some stakeholders above, no police officers expressed the view that international students themselves were to blame for being assaulted or victimised, although they did see some behavioural elements – open display of iPods, laptops, and mobiles, for example – and situational factors – late night travel, risky jobs and accommodation settings – as contributing elements in making international students more vulnerable to victimisation.

An important additional point raised by more than half the police interviewees was the issue of offender behaviour rather than international student behaviour in thinking about international students as targets for robbery and assault, particularly Indian students. The general view was that young male offenders who might be seeking to establish or enhance their street reputation or credibility saw Indian students as 'easy' or 'soft' targets because of their reputation for not fighting back – what one officer referred to as a 'pacifistic' orientation by virtue of cultural background. In this view, what becomes a high-risk proposition for an international student is actually a relatively low-risk proposition for young offenders looking to 'make their chops' through assaults on relatively unthreatening victims. As one officer put it:

> *I think the Indian cohort is particularly vulnerable because they're flavour of the month, so to speak. There has been clearly an emerging trend where they are being targeted, and there's no doubt in my mind that part of that is racial. I think it probably started out as property-based crime with certain elements, and then [offenders] have realised, 'Hang on, this is so easy it's actually a bit of sport', it's probably then transitioned from property-based crime to assault-based crime, where they take the property as an afterthought. The primary motivator for the offence is probably to humiliate them and assault them, and they take the property as a further humiliation.*

[It also] gives an opportunity for some of the weaker elements in the [offender] group to grandstand and use force with a minimal threat of force being used back on them. ... They use that in order to gain some notoriety or status amongst their peers.

Socio-economic conditions

While there was considerable overlap within views that identified student behaviour as the cause of violence against international students, a second major set of beliefs expressed by interviewees related to broader socio-economic conditions that combined to make international students vulnerable to being victims of violence. This perspective follows from views expressed in the earlier discussion about the overall nature of safety issues; that the combined impact of lower income, lack of local networks and support, housing stress, employment in precarious and/or risky jobs, age, and cultural difference, mean that international students are at higher risk of becoming victims of attack or violence.

> *I think what has happened in recent times is that with increasing numbers of students, pressures not only from students but pressures from the community in general for rental accommodation has pushed people, including such students, into outer suburbs which means they're more likely to be on trains, they're more likely to be on trains at night or whatever it might be, so that's probably, it's those social factors that have probably contributed rather than it having anything particularly to do specifically to students.*

For three of the interviewees, such conditions were also linked to an analysis of how racial divisions are structurally embedded in Australian society. Individuals are seen to be positioned within the local social and economic hierarchy by virtue of the combined influence of ethnicity, class and gender. As one interviewee put it,

> *I don't think there's anything subtle about the structural racism we're seeing. It certainly doesn't escape my attention that every time I get into a taxi an Indian student happens to be driving it and every time I go to a 7/11 it happens to be an Indian student there at two o'clock in the morning, there's nothing subtle about that great material edifice that the international student gets inserted into and that whole thing is really problematic to my mind.*

There are important similarities between the view that socio-economic conditions are the primary cause of international student vulnerability and the view that it is linked closely to racism; these similarities are discussed later in this section. Closely connected to this theme was the belief expressed by five interviewees that there is an increasing trend towards violence and theft by young, disengaged men in metropolitan Melbourne, which is exacerbated by increased drug and alcohol use. Youth 'gangs' or individuals are identified as living in areas that are characterised by lower income and education, the very areas where many international students are forced to live due to the shortage of affordable housing in Melbourne's inner and middle suburbs:

> *They (international students) are travelling potentially on lines that have always been railway lines that are … less safe and they're living in communities because it's more affordable where you've got a whole bunch of young people with not a whole lot of activity that is very positive and therefore are going to look to activities that are less than positive and that's an issue. Then we also have this methodology of getting people together by SMSing your contacts and coming together and then having a few beers – it doesn't matter that you're 15, having a few drinks and then deciding to have some fun and fun is assaulting someone.*

Interviewees had different perspectives on this issue. For two interviewees, disengaged youth were seen as causing violence against international students. For others, the incidence of violent crime by young males was symptomatic of broader socio-economic issues that combined to threaten the safety of international students. For others, and youth services providers were particularly of this opinion, the role of 'youth gangs' has been overplayed by the media and constitutes another form of 'blaming the victim' that obfuscates the real socio-economic causes of violence and crime in Melbourne, including entrenched disadvantage and marginalisation of low income and unemployed young people. .

In summary, eight of the interviewees believed there was a clear connection between social and economic structural disadvantage and poverty and international student vulnerability to violence. This view was also closely linked to the third clear theme emerging from interviewees' responses, which sees institutional systems and arrangements as contributing to student vulnerability.

Systems and institutional problems

The third major theme in relation to causes of violence against international students relates to institutional and systemic factors. By this, we refer to the institutional arrangements, systems and structures which determine the conditions in which international students live and study in Australia. These include Australia's education system, the public transport system in Victoria, Australia's migration system including student visa conditions and the regulation and operation of migration agents, police operations, health and welfare services, labour market operations and other rules, regulations and systems that govern how international students access resources. The role of the media was also highlighted as playing an important role in influencing actual violence and/or perceptions and especially fears about safety in Melbourne. Half of the non-Victoria Police interviewees pointed to at least one of these issues. Specifically, they include:

Inadequate policing and legal system:

- The perceived need for police in general to become more cross-culturally competent
- Police are perceived as unresponsive to the specific needs and circumstances of international students
- There is a perception that penalties are inadequate for perpetrators of violence against international students

Market orientation of the education system:

- International students are misled and ill informed on arrival due to unscrupulous practices of migration agents
- There are many 'dodgy' private RTOs which overcharge for bad quality education
- Students are often referred by migration agents to unscrupulous landlords to poor quality, over-priced housing

Employment:

- Due to a tight employment market and the constraints of full time study, students are increasingly forced into exploitative and/or dangerous employment at unsociable and unsafe hours

Lack of services:

- Lack of access and/or awareness of services including health, housing, community, transport services
- Lack of access to transport concessions
- Poor integration of services, particularly for victims of crime
- Cross-culturally incompetent and/or patronising service provision
- Government neglect of infrastructure to support international students

Visa regulations:

- The twenty hour per week limit on employment places students in a position of accepting unregulated and exploitative employment
- Students live in fear of deportation if they break visa regulations

Public transport:

- Public transport is unsafe
- Expensive due to lack of access to transport concessions

Media:

- Sensationalised reporting of violence encourages criminals and generates often unnecessary fear amongst international students

Overall, at least half of the non-Victoria Police interviewees identified at least one significant systemic failure to satisfactorily ensure the safety of international students. These issues were linked with recommendations and suggestions about how various systems should be reviewed and changed, which are discussed later in this section.

For Victoria Police members, by contrast, the three main institutional and systemic issues highlighted during interviews were in relation to education providers, government agencies and state/federal coordination, and migration agents.

Education providers, private and public:

- Lack of coordinated approach to providing international students with up to date, realistic and relevant information about community and personal safety in Australian urban contexts;
- Lack of responsibility on the part of education providers to provide any information on community safety; however, universities were generally seen as better at this than either TAFES or private providers.
- Issues around quality control and monitoring of relationship between Australian education providers and their overseas or local migration agents and recruiters – identified by a number of police as the main source of misleading and inaccurate information to potential international students coming to Australia.
- Admissions standards: two officers stressed the problems that can be created by low educational admissions standards, particularly for private education providers, which means that some international students are entering Australia without the educational background that can equip them to cope with a relatively complex and demanding urban environment in which they struggle to cope.
- Over-reliance by some education providers on police only to educate international students about community safety – this was seen as a shared responsibility that needed multiple points of reinforcement throughout the students' stay in Australia.

Government agencies

- Lack of coordinated strategic national approach across states and between state and federal governments to share data, information and strategies around how to deal with sharp increases in international student numbers and to engage in joint risk assessment exercises that could anticipate problems rather than merely reacting to them once they occur;
- Lack of government monitoring of deposited funds required as a visa condition to support international students for the duration of their studies in Australia – this was identified by one officer as a key issue since once the money is deposited there is no monitoring to ensure it is not then sent back home or repaid as a loan (see above);
- The relative ease with which study in Australia currently leads to permanent residency and, in the view of some police interviewees, is being used solely for the purpose of gaining residency rather than for genuine study aims and goals;
- The need for improved data capture systems within Victoria Police itself to provide an effective and accurate evidence base from which to mount policy, strategic and operational initiatives around international student safety, rather than having the agenda driven by the media and anecdotally based reporting and perceptions.

Role of migration agents and recruiters

- Misleading, inaccurate, and/or poor-quality information being provided to students in home country before they arrive;
- Too much power concentrated in hands of some migration agents with respect to visas and related procedures for entry;
- Exploitive practices of some migration agents here in Australia who engage in unscrupulous activities with respect to providing sub-standard housing and employment for international students once they arrive in Australia.
- Limited understanding of some migration agents and recruiters about the importance of preparing students from non-urban backgrounds for life in a major metropolitan setting such as Melbourne.

Racism versus Opportunism

The third key area of inquiry in the stakeholder interviews was the extent to which violence against international students was racist or opportunistic in nature, a polarised configuration which as discussed earlier, has dominated public discourse on international student safety. One of the specific questions asked of interviewees was about their understanding of the extent to which violence against students was motivated by racism as opposed to being opportunistic in intent. By racism, we refer to students being targeted or attacked due to their appearance, as being from a particular national or racial background. Opportunism refers to crimes being committed because the opportunity was there rather than because of any racist motivation. The responses to this question can broadly be identified within three categories of understanding crime against international students: that it is motivated by or is an outcome of racism; that it has elements of both racism and opportunism; and that it is not racist. We draw these three clear distinctions for the purpose of analysis; the views expressed could probably more accurately be described as ranging on a spectrum, from the view that racism has nothing to do with crimes against international students to one that sees racism as one of the central features of social organisation which determines a lot of outcomes including who is victimised by crime and who is not. Given that one respondent did not respond to this question, the following discussion explores the range of opinion expressed by nineteen of the twenty interviewees.

Not Racist – Slightly more than half of all stakeholder interviewees (17 out of 29) were either very or relatively clear that crimes against international students were not primarily motivated by racism. Eleven of the interviewees were definite in this view and cited other factors that were more important, including that the victims were targeted because of their youth, because of opportunity, a perception that they were unlikely or unable to defend themselves or because they took situational or other risks that made them vulnerable. For several interviewees, the fact that the perpetrators themselves are from diverse ethnic backgrounds was the evidence that the attacks could not be racist. The reason cited for the prevalence of attacks on Indian students was that they look weak and vulnerable or that they make themselves targets by carrying valuables. Another interviewee was firm in the opinion that the violence was between young people, 'kids', who could be from any cultural background. Three interviewees were similarly firm in the view that the idea that the violence was motivated by racism was a media construction and one ultimately damaging in its portrayal of Australia as a racist society. However, several police officers said they felt that race or ethnic considerations played a part in the attacks for at least some offenders, although all but one (cited above) felt that racial motives were a minor rather than primary factor in the assaults, with the major motivator being opportunistic crime for the purpose of material gain.

Many of those who rejected the idea that the violence was racist in motivation believed that its cause was theft by those looking for money for drugs. Given this motivation, race was seen as having little bearing on whether or not an individual is likely to be a victim:

> *The first thing we have to identify is what creates opportunities. Is it a person's race that is a contributing . . . factor in the opportunity? For example, someone sees an Indian walking on the street and says, now that's an opportunity! Now, I'm a criminal and I'm thinking, 'I need a hundred dollars today, the first person who comes off the train station, I'm going to hit them'. But then I see ten people walking and . . . there's also an Indian, walking, so I say, 'leave the nine, let me hit ten'. So they were going to do a crime, irrespective. If there was no Indian there, they would have ended up hitting someone else.*

However, this was not the view of police, who had a different understanding of how 'target selection' of victims for assault or robbery works from the perspective of offenders. The primary motive for robberies and assaults against international students, and particularly Indian students, in the view of police, revolved around several factors already canvassed above – the perception by offenders that Indian students are a 'soft' target, that they pose little threat to the safety of the offender, that they are more likely to be carrying goods or cash that are worth robbing or assaulting for, and that they are more frequently in situations of higher risk and vulnerability for a range of socio-economic reasons that are also discussed above. Given a scenario in which a choice between two potential victims needed to be made quickly, said one police officer, the offender was likely to assess the smaller, weaker or less likely to retaliate of the two and make their selection on the basis of least risk for the offender:

> *In their own personal belief, they're targeting Indian victims as possibly safe targets, instead of targeting [other nationalities], who generally have a bigger stature and physical build, and probably more likely to be able to defend themselves.*

This also raises the issue of gender, and in particular why the victims of such robberies and assaults seem to be almost exclusively male. One police officer expressed concern that for gender-specific and culture-specific reasons, assaults against female international students may be under-reported. Another officer felt that within the 'code of conduct' for young male offenders – who are the major perpetrators of robberies and assaults against international students – it was still seen as dishonourable or likely to reduce the offender's status and reputation if the victim was female rather than male.

Another view expressed as evidence that the attacks are not motivated by racism was that the incidence of violence against international students was to be expected given the increase in their numbers; that logically, there will be a proportionate increase in the numbers of cases of violence, in line with the broader population. As one private training provider commented,

> *I remember when we passed 3,600 students and I said, one day in every ten years in your life, something really, really bad is going to happen to you. Well, we've got 3,600 students, so it's happening to one of them every day. Just statistically, that's going to happen.*

A few responses amongst those who did not believe racism was a primary cause were actually cases of 'it's not racism but …' and cited examples of racist elements in crimes that contradicted the view that the crimes were not racist. For example, one of the student association representatives commented that while he didn't believe racism was the issue, his impression was that tensions are generated by the rapidly increasing numbers of international students who are perceived as placing pressure on employment opportunities and services. While denying the role of racism, this interviewee identifies how racism actually operates through resentment and fear.

Another contradictory view was expressed by two interviewees who stated that racism was a not a contributing factor but at the same time, acknowledged racism as a part of Australian culture, albeit a social trait shared with other countries. One possible interpretation of these views is that racism is to be expected and that to this degree, it is acceptable.

> *'… we've always had a bit of a leaning in this country to pick on the latest arrivals – that's always happened.'*

Overall, the view that the violence against international students is motivated by opportunism as opposed to racism was the dominant view expressed by the interviewees.

Both opportunism and racism – Five interviewees expressed the broad view that it was too simplistic to identify crimes against international students as being either purely opportunistic or racist in their motivation. One youth service provider based this on her experience working with multicultural young people, who she believed were always more likely to be targets of racist behaviour or victimisation. Two police officers also felt it was more realistic to see the interplay of opportunism and racism at work in the attacks and scenarios they were familiar with. As one officer noted:

> *The chances are – well, two people can walk out of the train station, and one is a white Caucasian, and the other one looks like they're from the sub-continent, and they're both similar size, similar weight, similar age, the chances are the person from the sub-continent will be targeted.*

Similarly, another youth services worker believed that, while it was possible that certain crimes could be either purely opportunistic or racist in motivation, usually both elements are at play. As an example, he said,

> *… There's a combination of the two factors. I think this is probably a good example: … two gentlemen pulling up in a car in a neighbourhood that I don't think they were familiar with, with a group of other young men standing around and one in particular, young man, who picked a fight or started attacking both of these young men and this was, once again I don't know whether it was necessarily motivated around trying to rob these gentlemen but more around having that real status and being one the big boys on the block who is very territorial in that respect. I think that, for me, it's an example of the combination of the two because I'm not 100% sure that if these two guys that came into the neighbourhood were Anglo, whether it necessarily would have turned out the same way.*

A third interviewee similarly pointed to the complexity of the issues, citing the extent to which racism occurs both within and between ethnic groups. This complexity is increased by the various meanings that are applied to racism and that usage of the term is often contradictory, referring to very different ideas and concepts. This interviewee was clear, however, about the role of the government in exacerbating racism and the racist implications of the attacks, through 'race denial'. This was seen to have particular impacts on Indian people or people of Indian appearance, due to their lower status in the eyes of Government compared with people from China:

> *We should have not been talking about racism, we should have been talking about it as a street crime, but by them confronting this issue head on and saying 'it's not racism, it's not racism', they have made it more racist. … Instead of saying 'there's no racism in Australia, we are the purest and the brightest country on earth', if they would have said 'well let's investigate if they were racist incidents; racism is here and in every other country as well.' If on the first day they had said 'let's work together and investigate it', it would have died down. …*

In summary, three interviewees stressed the complexity of factors in crime against international students and that racism was an important dimension. Racism is not the only explanatory factor, however, and care is required in understanding the complexity of the issues related to violent attacks.

The crimes are racially motivated – Four of the interviewees were clear that racism was the motivation for the crimes. For each of these interviewees, the common understanding was that racism is structurally embedded in society and that race is one of the important factors that determines the position, including subordination, of individuals and groups within social hierarchies. International students were particularly affected by racism given their lack of social supports, local knowledge and age. The outcomes were identified as racist given the negative outcomes for students.

> *… it is race-based in that people will exploit international students because they're not Australians, they don't have as much knowledge and so they're open to exploitation. … [I]t may not be considered racist in that it's not someone running up on a train and yelling out terrible things and bashing somebody but it is definitely true that these students, because they're of a different race and they are foreigners are more open to things like workplace exploitation, they're open to being on minimum wages, cash in hand in unsafe places. To me, those things are just as much a crime as when someone is mugging someone.*

A similar view was that denial of racism disguised the racial character of crimes against international students:

> *But I guess over and above that I don't think that we should undersell the way that race operates on the streets between people and the way that the visibility of certain racial groups increases the likelihood that there is that vitriol reaction against them on the street so that person is black or non white and therefore they're vulnerable and therefore they're a target for violence, I think that's something that can't be denied and that's really present.*

In summary, four of the interviewees identified racism as underpinning the attacks on Indian students. The understanding of racism expressed by these interviewees, however, was that racism is a dimension of social organisation that makes some groups more vulnerable than others. Social divisions on race determine how individuals are positioned within social hierarchies rather than racism simply being an expression of overt hatred on the basis of race.

What should be done to prevent violence against international students?

One of the important objectives of the stakeholder interviews was to identify ideas about what strategies to protect international student safety and prevent future incidents of violence. This section groups and discusses the strategies identified by interviewees as necessary to protect international student safety. These suggestions largely flowed from the perspective and position of each interviewee. Those who understood the issues as largely being about individual students 'keeping themselves safe' for example, were focused on implementing strategies such as improving the accuracy of pre-arrival information and arming students with strategies to avoid harm. In turn, those who had understood the issues as being an outcome of social and economic systems and structures emphasised the regulatory role of government and education providers and the need for improved support services for international students. Given the contested understandings of the issues amongst interviewees, a number of suggested strategies were in contradiction. For example, those directly engaged in education and training delivery typically believed that greater regulation of the education and training sector would be counterproductive. In contrast, those engaged in student advocacy and the police believed that greater regulation is essential. Despite these contradictions, there was also complementarity in proposals. The following section goes on to group the suggestions.

Strategies to equip individual students to protect safety

- More accurate information for students about the realities and costs of life in Australia to be delivered and reinforced at multiple points of contact both pre- and post-arrival. This includes about how to travel safely, how to develop and maintain greater situational awareness, and how to protect themselves.
- Greater education about the different roles of police in Australia from that of police in the home country of various cohorts of international students, and clearer understanding of what police can't do as well as what they can do to assist students in being and feeling safer in Australia.
- Ensure that students are making informed choices about studying in Australia.
- Ensure that official information is more readily available and accessible.
- Students need to assimilate with the general community.
- Better community networking and support systems to provide students with more social capital once they arrive in Australia.

General community campaigns and responsibilities

- Education in schools to increase awareness about racism and the causes of conflict and violence. This suggestion was made on the understanding that the issues of violence was strongly connected to broader racist attitudes held within the community and that there is a need for greater education through the school systems on the nature and implications of racism.
- Better communication between Indian students and the established Indian community in Australia. The local Indian community have a greater role to play in supporting the Indian international student body.
- Opportunities for engagement of international students with local community networks and activities should be supported and promoted.

Education and training providers

- Establish mechanisms for mentoring international students throughout their stay.
- Greater student consultation with students about their needs and concerns.
- Provide student welfare teams to support people in crisis.
- Course design that ensures integration with industry that creates opportunities for employment that is undertaken during normal working hours.

Police (suggestions from non-police interviewees)

- Review and enhance cross-cultural training for police. Police were identified as being inadequate and unresponsive in their approaches to cultural difference.
- Police need better resources to deal with a multicultural society.
- Increased action and response to crimes against international students.
- Greater contact between the police and international students. Chinese students are particularly fearful of police and strategies are needed to open up communications.

Police (suggestions from Victoria Police interviewees)

- Improved data capture on levels of detail relating to crimes against the person involving international students in order to tailor strategies more effectively amongst student communities and also the general community.
- Strategic and coordinated national approach between states on data-sharing and risk assessment for international student safety.
- Pro-active approaches and campaigns on community safety for those new to Melbourne, building on initiatives already underway at local, regional and state levels.
- Enhancing operational police capacity for positive engagement with international students as part of broader community engagement/ pro-active policing strategies.

Government

- Greater sophistication in the regulation of private training providers. Minimise the administrative burden but increase the effectiveness by ensuring that audits are effective in raising training quality standards. Another suggestion however was that there should be no more regulation as the sector is over-regulated already.
- Tighter regulation of unscrupulous migration agents.
- Develop a coordinated response to the issues of international student safety that includes all of the players including the providers, police, student associations, community organisations and other relevant services – avoid 'knee-jerk reactions'.
- Better coordination between government departments in relation to international student intake, policy and services. In a similar vein, eliminate duplication of services and develop mechanisms for integrated and centralised planning to address the concerns and needs of international students and problems within the Australian international education sector.
- Regulate unscrupulous migration agents.
- Implement an effective complaints system that ensures that international student complaints are heard and addressed. Another similar suggestion was to implement complaints and warranty system supported by a register of education agents.
- Improve safety of public transport.
- Greater consultation with students on the development of policy and services.
- Re-invest in supporting international students – at least 5 percent of total revenue received.
- Explicitly name and address racism with the intent of developing a more sophisticated approach to issues related to racism in the formation of policy and response to safety issues.
- The Victorian government needs to act faster on identified concerns and problems, including the implementation of the student safety plan.
- Extend public transport concessions to international students.
- Expand legal clinics to better respond to the needs of international students, to address issues arising from endemic structural problems related to housing, visa conditions and so on.
- Review the visa conditions of international students in relation to the 20 hour limit on employment.
- Increased auditing of private colleges and overseas agents to prevent the exploitation of international students.
- Improve access to government services such as legal aid and housing.
- Address housing shortages and sub-standard accommodation and support cheaper and increased availability of student housing.

Research

- Gather thorough evidence about the severity of crime against international students and on the nature of the student experience.
- Further research on offender motivations and perceptions towards international students as victims/targets of robbery and assault – a gap in knowledge in this area has been identified by police.
- Greater understanding and research on what helps international students be and stay safe, not just on what puts them at risk – a cultural dividend not deficit model of approaching this issue. What are some international students doing right/better around community safety that all international students could learn from?
- Identify, document and promote best practice in supporting international students

Media

- Ensure that there is a more balanced representation of the reality of international student experience to represent the majority who are primarily happy with their experience in Australia.
- Ensure that media understand their role in helping create more victims, rather than fewer, through imbalanced and sensationalist reporting that singles out particular ethnic or cultural groups as perceived 'soft targets' or 'easy marks'.

Other or general proposals

- The Indian government needs to play a role in the solutions.
- Address the fear of crime.
- Accept that a proportion of people will be victims of crime.
- Do nothing - wait for the process of integration to occur.

Conclusions

The purpose of this section has been to summarise and explain the findings generated by interviews with stakeholders in the issues related to the safety of international students in Melbourne. In order to explain these, we have consolidated and summarised the findings into four key areas of investigation. We then discussed and explained the views and perspectives expressed and concluded with a series of proposals and recommendations that were identified by the stakeholders as necessary to enhance the safety of international students.

Overall, it is evident that perspectives on the issues involved are contrasting and often in conflict. Each interviewee's perspective is shaped by their role within the system, their knowledge of the issues and their interests in the outcomes. Combined, it is clear that most stakeholders have only a necessarily partial perspective on the issues involved and in general, there is a lack of an evidence base on which to respond. The intent of this section has been to identify the range of opinion, the gaps in knowledge and to demonstrate the range of possibilities seen as necessary to improve the safety of international students in Melbourne.

The following section reports on the final set of data generated through the interviews with international students.

5.4 Findings from student interviews

This section of the report summarises and describes the findings of 35 in-depth interviews with international students across metropolitan Melbourne. As described in the methodology section, these interviews were conducted with 18 students at higher education institutes (universities and TAFE colleges) and 17 students at private registered training organisations.

This analysis is based on four broad areas of investigation addressed in the interviews:

- The responding student's expectations and perceptions about his/her safety in Melbourne.
- The student's experiences of violence or abuse, including witnessing or being the victim of attacks.
- The implications of these perceptions and experiences for the student's sense of safety and wellbeing.
- The student's views about useful policy responses to prevent violence against international students'.

The findings are analysed in relation to each of these questions and the following section starts by discussing findings in relation to student expectations and perceptions of safety in Melbourne.

5.3.1 Expectations and perceptions of safety in Melbourne

A number of key themes were identified in relation to students' perceptions of safety, how these perceptions were informed prior to arrival and how they had changed after living in Melbourne.

Expectations of safety

Throughout the interviews, students discussed how their expectations of safety in Melbourne were informed. Major influences identified by interviewees included web-based marketing, information gleaned from friends and networks already in Australia and media coverage. Web-based marketing was influential for several respondents who were inspired by the wholesome and clean image of Australia promoted through various web-sites: 'Before you come to Australia, a lot of marketing say okay… Australia's going to be good environment for studying … like not polluted, clean air, you have open space and … friendly people.' (Thai student)

More commonly, perceptions were shaped by knowing of others who were either studying in or had returned from Australia. Predominantly, contact with others shaped the view that Australia is generally a safe place. As one student commented:

> *'I did not expect is to be worse here because I know there are loads of international students. I have a friend in Perth and Tasmania and they tell me it is perfect there.' (Mauritian male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

The third influence identified in terms of shaping student expectations of safety is media coverage, particularly in relation to raising awareness of attacks on international students. Students were mixed about their views on the effects of media reporting of violence. Some were cynical and distrustful about media reports, expressing views that 'the media is exaggerating things' and 'I don't trust the media totally.'

Another view expressed by several students was that that media coverage plays an important role in improving safety of international students through raising awareness of attacks. One of these students was the victim of a severe assault a few years ago, which received limited print media coverage. This student believed that the recent heightened media scrutiny of violence against international students has increased awareness amongst international students and in Australia generally about the risks facing international students and hence raised their levels of safety in Australia.

These three influences combined, of marketing information, friends and networks forming knowledge of other international student experiences and heightened media coverage contributed to the views of most interviewees (24 out of 35), who expected that they would be safe on arrival in Australia. The remaining interviewees were divided between those who had not thought about their safety and those who had formed the expectation that they needed to be careful. Of those who expected

to be safe, most interviewees (12 out of the 24) had revised their view after arrival and believed that Melbourne is not as safe as they expected.

These views and changing perceptions about safety are not clear-cut but are tempered by a range of factors and considerations. One of the major influences is comparisons made with the conditions and circumstances in students' home countries. Other interviewees reflected on the extent to which they are responsible for their own safety. Across the interviewees, however, there were some widely identified threats to safety that included:

- Alcohol and drug use in the community (18 interviewees);
- Public transport is a place where intimidating and/or potentially dangerous interactions can occur; often involving groups of alcohol-affected young people (24 interviewees);
- Melbourne is less safe at night (15 interviewees);
- Some geographic locations and suburbs in Melbourne are less safe.

The section below discusses these key influences and perceptions about safety threats.

Comparisons of safety with the home country

A number of students made explicit comparisons between the safety of their countries of origin and Australia. Most of these were favourable to Australia. For example,

> *I feel really safe. In my culture, so big the difference, how is Colombia and how is Australia. … In Colombia I have been thieved like 8 or 11 times, … that kind of violence I didn't see here. (Columbian male private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Similar comments came from other students from Pakistan, Italy and India. Other interviewees, including students from Japan, Belgium, Iran and India had contrasting views, that Melbourne is not as safe as their city or country of origin. These comments generally, were about Melbourne, its size and speed, rather than being a generalised view about Australia. For example, one student commented that,

> *… everything here is very fast. People here don't care about anyone. People run all around, they just think of themselves. Even if any person falls on the road, they just think about their time. They don't care if a person is hurt. And that's not in my city. They are ready to help anyone and everyone. Even if the person is unknown to them. That's the basic difference of my city and Melbourne. (North Indian male private provider student, 30 – 34 yo)*

Personal responsibility for safety

There was an emphasis amongst many of the interviewees on the need for students to have regard for their personal safety. As one student said, 'If you are prepared to take care of yourself it [Melbourne] is a safe place to come.' Others talked about employing specific strategies such as sitting in the first carriage of the train, avoiding travelling at night, being particularly vigilant when using public transport, or making sure to travel with friends. One student said that they feel safe because of these precautions,

> *Actually for me it is quite safe … because I prevent myself from going out in the late night. If I am going out in the night I would be more careful. ... Not going to place where there is nobody there. Like you know … a place very dark or unsafe. I would like to go to a place where there is camera. (Chinese male university student 20 – 24 yo)*

Each of the precautions identified were responses to some commonly perceived threats to safety issues identified above.

Key threats to safety

As discussed above, there is common agreement amongst the interviewees about the factors that threaten safety. These factors are not mutually exclusive and include alcohol and drug use, public transport, night time and particular places that are unsafe.

Alcohol and drug use, especially by young people in the central business district, play a major role in reducing safety in public places in Melbourne alcohol and drug use and featured strongly in interviewees' perceptions of their safety. There was a common perception that because of alcohol and drug use, Melbourne can be volatile and unpredictably violent, or at the very least, intimidating. There were many comments made to this effect. Some examples include,

> *I think at night sometimes it is not very safe because some people after they drink beer and they lose their mind. (Chinese male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

> *I witnessed some people who were drunk or standing at the station … Australians are scary when they are drunk. They just shout and shout to people. Maybe they don't really know who they are. But they just shouted and just speak very loudly and it makes me little bit scared. Especially drunkards. (Chinese male university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Public transport is also a place where intimidating or potentially dangerous interactions can occur and this featured even more strongly than alcohol in affecting interviewees' feelings about their safety. The following comment was typical of interviewees' perceptions about the lack of safety on public transport:

> *… the experience I have in using public transport … in Melbourne, I've found that sometimes, when you get on the train, I think that's scary part for me. Because if you travel at night, sometime you have only one or two people, yeah, only in the train. … Even during the day … if you've got a group of big young people … and sometime they just speak very loud. … Sometime you just feel a little bit scared, you know. So sometime I just rather change the carriage. (Thai female university student, 30 – 34 yo)*

Concerns about public transport often combined with concerns about other factors, including alcohol and drug use, perceptions that groups of young people can be threatening or violent and beliefs that personal safety is far more at risk at night than during the day in Melbourne.

When I finish work at 10pm or 11pm, people already had beer and sometimes people shouting or screaming on the train I sometimes get scared. Sometimes I saw young boys punching each other for fun. … sometimes people get on the train and they are a bit scary. (Japanese female private provider student, 30 – 34 yo)

The majority of interviewees believed that Melbourne is far less safe at night, a view typified by the following comments:

During the day, it's about as safe as in China, but there many shops open 24 hours, so not safe to travel at night in Australia. (Hong Kong/Chinese female private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

I think in the night time it is better stay at home. Especially in city. Not safe. People drink and use drugs and in the night time, they play together one group and everyone drink too much and they attack people. (Chinese male private provider student, under 19 yo)

A smaller proportion of interviewees also expressed the view that there are particular locations or suburbs across Melbourne that are particularly unsafe.

There are some suburbs which are really safe and some very dangerous, like Footscray and Blackburn I have heard are dangerous. (Hungarian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)

I used to study in … Smith Street Collingwood.. … that is a quite dangerous place. Some people they, um… take drugs. And some people they just ask for money, all the time. (Chinese female TAFE student, 25 – 29 yo)

For some interviewees, perceptions about the safety of suburbs were linked to the cost of rent, with cheaper suburbs felt to be less safe. Areas in the western, northern and south eastern suburbs were all mentioned with King St. in the CBD being the most commonly identified 'hot spot'.

I am scared to move to cheaper areas like Springvale because it is better to pay a bit more to be safe. (Pakistani female private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

King Street is not very good area, it's not very, um… safe street. Because once my friend live in King Street… and … there are many bars and some drunk people especially on Friday night and Saturday night. He's a boy and… he still think about sometimes unsafe at night. (Chinese female university student, 20 – 24 yo)

Four students stated their belief that areas with high levels of cultural diversity and large numbers of international students and migrants were safest. These students named a range of geographic locations including Footscray, Blackburn, Dandenong and the Melbourne metropolitan area as a whole. In contrast, three students, two from China and one from Malaysia, expressed the view that areas with large migrant populations are less safe:

We have thought about that most of the local people [Anglo Australians] live there then it is a safer place. If the residents are from different places then I don't think that is a good place. I rent a house myself, when I chose an area I ask 'what is this place that most of the residents are from?' If most of the residents are local I think it is safer, but if most Vietnam or other places I think it is not safe. (Chinese female private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

The general perception amongst those interviewees who mentioned their suburb of residence was that it was safe. This included students who felt safe in their suburb of residence, despite knowing that others perceived the area to be unsafe:

There are people outside of Footscray that think it is violent and that there are druggies, but when they ask me I say I have not faced any of these problems, maybe they do not know how to avoid problem areas. (Bangladeshi male university student, 40 – 44 yo)

Unsurprisingly, one of the major influences on perceptions of safety was whether or not the interviewee had been a victim of violence, or had a friend who had been a victim. The following section discusses interviewee comments about their experiences of violence or abuse.

Experiences of violence or abuse

A core question for investigation in the interviews was in relation to students' experiences of violence or abuse in Melbourne. These questions included whether interviewees had witnessed or been the victim of attacks or assaults. Students were then asked a series of questions to gain their views about the underlying causes of or motivations for violence against international students, including whether students from certain countries of origin or ethnic backgrounds are at particular risk and their ideas about who the perpetrators are.

Discussion of experiences of violence or abuse – personal witness or victimhood

The majority of the 35 interviewees, 20 (57 %) had either witnessed or personally experienced an assault or robbery, or were close to another international student who had been seriously assaulted or robbed. Nine interviewees (25 %) had personal experience of being physically assaulted, six of these seriously. Two of these students were also robbed. Another eight interviewees reported that they had been verbally abused for being of Asian or Indian appearance. Of the nine interviewees who had been physically assaulted only three reported having experienced verbal abuse during the attacks. Of these, two had experienced only minor physical assaults. Four interviewees had personal experience of having items stolen from them, two of whom were robbed and were physically assaulted during the robbery. Thirteen interviewees reported that friends, and in one case a relative, had suffered physical attacks. Amongst these were two serious attacks which had caused permanent injury, both on students from India[2].

Every interviewee reported having some awareness of attacks against international students. In the case of those 15 students who reported having no personal knowledge of violence or abuse, information had been gained from media reports or by word of mouth.

[2]There is no overlap between these two cases and those of interviewees from this study.

Country of origin, gender and experience of violence or abuse

Of the 20 students who had witnessed or personally experienced an assault or robbery or who were close to another international student who had been seriously assaulted, seven were from India and another three were from Bangladesh. Four were from China. Of the nine students who reported having been physically assaulted, all except one from Thailand were male. They came from a range of countries, including India (three), Bangladesh (two), China (one), Thailand (one), Iran (one) and Columbia (one). Of the six interviewees who were seriously assaulted, all were male. Three were from India, one from Bangladesh, one from Iran and one from China. The four of these interviewees who were hospitalised following the attacks were from India (two), Iran and Bangladesh. Two of those hospitalised have sustained serious permanent injury; both of these interviewees are from north India.

The 15 students who reported having no personal knowledge of violence or abuse against international students were from a range of countries. Of the eight students who reported having been verbally abused for being of Asian or Indian appearance or for being migrants, five were female. In terms of country of origin and appearance, three were of East Asian appearance, from Thailand, South Korea and China, while five were of Indian appearance, one from Mauritius, two from Bangladesh and two female students were from India. A further interviewee reported being having been verbally abused by police officers who shouted 'bloody overseas students' at him and another victim after they had sought police assistance.

The type of educational institution of the nine interviewees who had been victims of physical abuse was fairly evenly split; five were studying at universities and four at private provider institutes. This even distribution continued when this group of nine was reduced to those six interviewees who had been victims of serious physical assaults, with three based at universities and three at private provider institutes.

The serious attacks

Of the six interviewees who suffered serious physical attacks, four were hospitalised. Two interviewees have sustained serious permanent injury from their attacks, one an acquired brain injury and one permanent sensory loss. All of these incidents happened in public places and three of them occurred at train stations. All but one of these attacks, an assault/robbery which occurred at a bus stop during the day, were committed by a group of perpetrators acting together. The time of incidents varied. Two attacks with very serious implications for the victims occurred late at night. One of these incidents is described below.

> *It was a Friday and it was near about 11 pm. … I just came to city and I was parking my car … and somebody … attacked me with an iron rod on my head. … [t]here was no argument nothing. ... From … behind someone came and bashed me. … I fell unconscious and … I think they came and they just kept bashing on my head … when I opened my eyes, I came to know that somebody is still bashing me. … When I came back to consciousness I found myself in the hospital. … (North Indian male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Two incidents involving violence and robbery, but with different circumstances and severity, occurred during the day. The less serious assault occurred at a bus stop:

> *One day, maybe two months ago, I went to shop at Highpoint Shopping Centre. I came out and was waiting for the bus. … And then an Aussie … came to me. I'm enjoying my music, listen to my iPod … and he said to me 'what are you laughing at?' I just said 'what?' He punched me … in my left face … and after that I fall down. My mobile phone is dropped … and he pick up my mobile phone and ran away. After that… the first time I asked for help but the first guy he passed away … walk away. He didn't help me. He didn't saw happen, I just ask him, 'can you help me sir', just that and I'm crying because I have never suffered this before, and he look at me and just go away. (Chinese male university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

A further two incidents occurred in the early evening. One of these incidents resulted in serious permanent injury:

> *Me and my friend went to Sunshine station to pick his wife and some of the hooligans aged 15 or 20 they came and asked me for a dollar. I said no, I don't have. I showed my trouser's pocket also and they bashed me. … My nostril bone was broken, my orbital bone was broken and I lost vision in my right eye. (North Indian male private provider student, 30 – 34 yo)*

All the incidents of severe violence occurred while the victims were in the course of undertaking daily activities which would be considered low-risk. Slightly more respondents experienced verbal abuse which was largely racist in nature. The following section elaborates.

Experiences of verbal abuse

Eight interviewees reported that they had been verbally abused for being of Asian or Indian appearance or for being migrants. The following comment was typical of those abused for their ethnic appearance.

> *I was waiting for the train, and … he said 'too many Chinese, too many Vietnamese', like that… at the station. And my boyfriend … one day he was finished his work … at night and he said there were some people drunk and they say some bad words to them… swearing and 'go back to your country' something like that. (Chinese female TAFE student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Other interviewees cited cases of more generalised verbal comments about migrant status:

> *There was this girl who was crossing and a car was coming from the other side. ... So, she was crossing and they came screeching. And she did not know what to do. So she was standing in the middle of the road. And then they screamed at her … 'f… off you immigrant' and things like that. (North Indian female university student, 25 – 29 yo)*

One victim of a violent physical attack mentioned that he was verbally abused during the attack.

There were four of them one was saying bad words and stupid things, the other two holding and the other was like bashing me. (Bangladeshi male university student, 20 – 24 yo)

Workplace violence

Only one interviewee reported having been assaulted or abused at work, however, he did not report the incident, due to fear of losing his job:

> *One time I was working and I mistake with something and one of my boss came and push me (emphasis) in front of all my people [workmates]. But he, ah, push me really hard, push me and offend me like 'fuck you' and 'you are like idiot'. And I was really scared, because that man looks really, really aggressive and push me really hard ... . And nobody say nothing! Like, my friends [also international students] do nothing because maybe they feel like scared to loss their work if they say something. But ah, it was a pretty bad situation and they, nobody say nothing. … But that was really bad situation. … I wanted to report that but um … I didn't because I was working with them for, like, really good money. (Columbian male private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Common themes in experiences of violence or abuse

Two of the most common themes apparent in interviewees' accounts of violence or abuse were that violent and threatening incidents often occur on or near public transport and that incidents occur after requests for cigarettes. Eight interviewees also spoke of their concern that onlookers or bystanders failed to intervene to prevent incidents or assist victims. Another common element in all but two of the attacks referred to by interviewees was that the perpetrators acted as a group.

Fifteen interviewees talked about witnessing or personally experiencing violent or threatening situations on public transport. Some of these incidents involved actual physical attacks:

> *At the train stop I saw bad incidents. It was a couple of guys asking a guy for a smoke. He said he doesn't have one and he does not want to give one to them. They started abusing him and following him. They got angry and pushed him down and started kicking him. I thought this could happen to me as well. I think this person was from an Asian background. The people attacking were locals … they were making racist comments. (South Indian male university student, 19 yo)*

Other interviewees spoke of feeling intimidated or threatened by behaviour on public transport:

> *I was on a train and there was a bunch of young boys that were drunk or possibly on drugs and they were shouting out abuse against everyone, all kinds of categories [nationalities]. … Young 18-20 year olds, aggressive and threatening, mostly boys, but some girls giggling. … I was very scared and I felt a bit ashamed about being scared, because there were lots of people on the train. (North Indian female university student, 35 – 39 yo)*

For some students from South or East Asian countries, their fear was compounded by being uncertain of how to respond in such cases, exemplified in the following account:

> *Three years ago I was waiting for my friend... at the Sunshine bus stop … at a time like 4 o'clock, and a group of young people, they run toward the bus stop and they bash each other, like 10 or 15 of them, such a big group. And I was frightened and people, you know, they just said 'that's OK, its common here'. I said 'what?!' (Thai female university student, 30 – 34 yo)*

Ten interviewees specifically mentioned that threatening or violent situations occurred after requests for cigarettes. All of these cases occurred in public places and in five of the cases cited, extreme physical violence followed a refusal of a request for a cigarette:

> *Some people are in hospital in a critical state – an automotive student is now in hospital, he was attacked in the Dandenong station. They said please give me cigarette; he said I do not have cigarette. He is now in a critical state in the hospital. (North Indian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Eight interviewees mentioned the failure of onlookers to intervene to stop violence, either in attacks against them or in incidents they had heard of through friends. For each of these students this failure exacerbated their fear of violence in Melbourne.

> *… no-one try to stop them, although those people have friends next to them, they didn't stop the fight. Like, they were pretty happy to just watch it. That was pretty scary because, I mean, [in] any country people go out and enjoy, but that's not something you see. (Turkish female university student, 25 – 29 yo)*

In one case, the driver of a tram in which violence was occurring failed to intervene and was believed by the interviewee recounting the incident to have assisted the perpetrator by opening the tram doors.

> *Sometimes you just can't rely on the driver of the public transportation. … Last year … I got on the tram. …There was a guy, get out from the car, and get on the tram, and then bash, you know, in that tram [a group of young African male passengers who had yelled at him]. ... And then the next traffic light, he followed, and he start yelling and the group, ok, yelling back from the tram. … He threw … this big … piece of metal through the door, through the window. … There was two ... young Chinese sit there and they just scream, 'wow! We better, you know, get off or what'. … The tram driver he didn't say anything! ... He stopped at the tram at the traffic light but he opened, you know, the tram door – that is the point! ... The driver, … he just sit, still. That's, you know, the scary incident that I experienced. (Thai female university student, 30 – 34 yo)*

Overall, the experiences of violence experienced reported by interviewees include some of the key elements that were identified earlier as threatening to safety. Violence on public transport or in shopping centres features clearly as a risk factor. The victims of attack were predominantly male while more women interviewees had experienced verbal abuse. The incidents reported by students are seemingly unprovoked and the implications are often very serious. While the racist motivation of the attacks and/or abuse was not central to all of the incidents described, it was certainly an element of most of the incidents cited by interviewees. The fear generated by the incidents was exacerbated in many cases because of limited understanding of the local norms in relation to protecting others in danger and what to expect in terms of action against violence when it occurs. Many interviewees here expressed bemusement or in some cases, disappointment or anger, about what to expect when situations they perceive as unsafe occur.

Views about causes of violence and abuse

The interviews explored student views on the causes and motivations of the violence which are described and analysed in this section. One of the central areas of investigation was around the extent to which violence occurs as a result of racism as opposed to being opportunistic, that is, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. What is immediately evident from the interviews, however, is the complexity of issues that contribute to the violence experienced by international students; a wide range of contrasting views were expressed by the interviewees. Just over half the interviewees (18) attributed violence against international students to more than one factor.

The following nine broad reasons were given for violence and attacks on international students:

- Race of victims or racism (11 references);
- Alcohol (seven);
- Drug addiction (one);
- Robbery – money (three);
- The particular vulnerability of international students (32 references in total), due to a range of factors:
- being unaware of or unable to access the necessary help and information to stay safe, due to language problems and lack of social networks (five);
- lack of protective local knowledge, including of Australian social mores (three);
- being unable to take action due to perceived implications for visa status or because of lack of awareness of rights and thus perceived as easy targets by perpetrators (eight);
- belief that international students are wealthy (three);
- working late at night (three);
- resentment amongst the broader community due to perceptions that international students are taking jobs or opportunities (five);
- lack of community acceptance (three);
- Shortcomings of international students, including lack of cultural awareness, naivety or in one comment, rudeness (four).
- Cyclical social pattern in Australia and overseas of targeting newly arrived migrant groups (four);
- Bad luck (three);
- Geography – particular suburbs more dangerous (two).

Racism and the vulnerability of students from certain countries or ethnic backgrounds

Fourteen interviewees identified that students of certain countries or ethnicities were most at risk of violence or abuse. Most of these interviewees (11) attributed this vulnerability primarily to racism rather than other causes. Of the eleven interviewees who mentioned racism as a cause of violence, seven believed that Indians were most vulnerable. Four of the interviewees who felt Indians were most vulnerable were from India, and one each was from Bangladesh, China and Pakistan. The following comment about the targeting of Indians was typical:

> *S: It's particularly international students – Indian students. I can say they especially go for Indian students because all the attacks of which I've heard, all the time, the Indian students are involved in these attacks. So I would say the Indian students are at risk, not the Chinese or some others. . . .*
>
> *I: Why do you think it occurs, the violence?*
>
> *S: It is 'cos of racism. (North Indian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

One of the interviewees who stated that Indians are most vulnerable further specified that Sikhs are being easy targets due to being easily identifiable:

> *You know by looks they can easily recognise you know that they are Sardars [common Indian term for Sikh men] you know or Sikhs. Even the Singhs [name shared by all Sikh males and some other non-Sikh ethnicities] they can easily recognise and they become victims of these things easily. (North Indian male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Two other students who had mentioned that Indians were particularly targeted attributed the violence primarily to the victims' skin colour with one interviewee commenting about the vulnerability of 'dark skinned' people:

> *I think with dark skin. More than, for example, Asian people or like from Japanese, China, Vietnamese, yeah. . . . I think... it's strange, but ah, for example, I know people from Colombia that is really racist with, like, Indian people. And they say, for example, 'ah, they speak so loud' and 'they is, male, is strong', you know and 'they are, like, disorganised', 'they don't respect'. So it's like, really racist things, like, don't have really good justify. . . . So, I don't know ... I think it's a question of colour, more than other things. (Columbian male private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Two interviewees, both from China, felt that Chinese or 'Asian' background students were most at risk, primarily due to the perception that Chinese students are easy targets:

> *I think he just want to make trouble with me. It is obvious. It is just because I am international student, because I'm Chinese. . ... Because my friends also suffer from this. [Friends from] . . . China . . .the girls and the boys. My friends tell me if you bought a car, you should buy . . . baseball sticks. I think . . . I don't want to do that. (Chinese male university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

The discussion above describes views that view violence as affecting some groups more than others, Indians in particular, but Chinese and Asian students were also identified as being vulnerable to violence. These views were linked to opinions that racism is a major contributing factor to violence against international students.

Of all the causes of violence against international students identified by interviewees, racism was the single most commonly mentioned factor, cited by 11 interviewees. The role of racism as a key motivating factor, however, was complex; perceptions varied according to the experiences and circumstances of the interviewees. For example, the six interviewees who had been victims of serious physical assaults differed in their views about the cause of the attacks on them. The two who had been robbed and were not hospitalised after the attacks expressed beliefs that they were targeted due to perpetrators' perceptions of their vulnerability as international people from Asia, rather than due to their specific cultural and ethnic background. As one of these victims of a joint robbery and assault put it:

> *I think that the target is not … they … don't see student or not. They see an international person and if they seem to be a targeted one that's how the attack happens. … They see the Asians, if you are weak and you cannot get over them [retaliate] then they take your belongings … . (South Indian university student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Of the other four students who suffered serious physical harm from their assaults, one believed that robbery was the primary motivation, but felt that his treatment by police and hospital staff evidenced racism. The other three expressed ongoing uncertainty and doubt about the cause of the violence, or saw it as multi-faceted:

> *It is not about international students, if it is an Indian they go to the next level. I think at that moment it strikes in their mind and why I have no answer to that question, I have never found and answered. (Bangladeshi male university student, 20 –24 yo)*

In the final analysis however, these three victims of severe assaults have considered that their attacks could possibly be attributed to racism.

> *… I don't know, they just wanted to attack me. At first they talked about the cigarette. They were just violent but part a racial attack too. I would say if a white guy would walk past I think they would just say bad stuff or something they would not touch you. But because they had someone different they touched me and bashed. … Because I do look like an Indian, they may have been more interested in touching me. Because they thought I look like an Indian they took the privilege. (Bangladeshi male university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Of those interviewees who attributed racist motivation to violence, these views were largely tentative and, from their perspective, it was difficult to explain or attribute clear causes. There were also three interviewees who were clear that racism is not a problem in Australia. Within this group of three, one was from Malaysia, one from South India and one from Hungary. As one interviewee said,

> *… from my experience and contact with all the Australians … my feeling is that you guys are not really, like, racist or what. … I seriously don't feel anything different. … For Chinese, we are treated, it's the same. I got quite a lots of Aussie friends back my undergrad years. So I don't feel the difference. (Malaysian Chinese male university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

The connection with racism as the motivating factor in violent attacks was also evident in interviewee responses about who the perpetrators of violence are. While the motivations combine with other factors including poverty, alcohol and social marginalization, there is a clear view expressed by at least half of the interviewees that there is an element of racist motivation in violence against international students. Six interviewees expressed the view that perpetrators of violence against international students are of Anglo Australian background and territorialism was a central motivation for violence:

> *Australian people. Local Australian, not Chinese or Indian, white people. … Maybe they think that they come from the other country, different culture. They don't like us. That is the reason. They don't like us living here. Because they think this is white people's place, not the other county people's. (Chinese male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

One of these students referred to the perpetrators of crime as Anglo Australians in passing, while considering the interplay of factors in crime against international students:

> *But Australians or Caucasians might think that we may not go and report about such incidents. It becomes more easier. They tend to think if I do this to an international student, if I have this comfort that there is minimal chance that they might go and report. It becomes easier for them. (North Indian female university student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Other interviewees were less convinced that it was only Anglo Australians who are the perpetrators; they identified other, relatively new arrivals to Australia. For example, one victim of an attack spoke of his belief, based on his own experience, that migrant young people are the main perpetrators:

> *I have been mugged by migrants, Lebanese mainly. When I see all those incidents in the past few months, since many Australians are not involved in that, I would say the migrant community are the ones who mainly attack. … (Indian male university student, 25 – 29 yo)*

A clear view was that, whether or not the perpetrators were identified as Anglo Australians or other migrant groups, the role of difference is seen as important.

> *Maybe some bad guys are trying to turn into [target] different races. They are trying to start [target] international students who are studying here or they think that may be international students do not belong here. Or they think that the society is being ruined by or interrupted by international students. (Chinese male university student, 25 – 29 yo)*

A further six interviewees described perpetrators as uneducated and 'bullies'. A related, but contradictory view was that violence against newly arrived migrants is an established social pattern. Four interviewees, one each from India, Italy, Hungary and South Korea, considered that violence against newly arrived migrant groups is historically established in Australia and around the world. For one Italian student, whose comments were more specifically about Australian social traditions, this was the primary factor in current attacks on Indian students:

> *Because you in Australia, what I learnt, always in a society there is always a target.… This moment probably Indian student. In other times,*

they were Italian, if you think probably about 40 years ago Italian and Greek were the target. Then they change and they think the target were Chinese. Now Indian. Probably next year French. (Italian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)

This was a view that was raised in the stakeholder interviews as well and one that deserves further attention. There is an element of acceptance of what is racist behaviour as 'normal practice'.

Although racism was the single most commonly mentioned cause of crime against international students, a larger number of interviewees felt that international students as a group are at particular risk due to a range of other divergent factors that contribute to the particular vulnerability of international students.

Vulnerability of international students

For 17 interviewees, the particular vulnerability of international students as a group was a primary motivating factor in crime against them. However, this vulnerability and its causes were multifaceted. Sixteen of the 17 interviewees who believed that international students as a group are at greater risk of crime attributed their vulnerability to more than one factor. There was considerable overlap with the findings from the student survey and factors identified included:

- Lack of local knowledge and experience. For some this was connected to the multiculturalism of Melbourne and that many international students are unfamiliar with multicultural environments;
- Language differences;
- Structural factors, including visa conditions and competition for jobs;
- Lack of social networks.

The reasons for these perceptions are explained in turn as follows.

Lack of local knowledge and experience

Five interviewees mentioned that international students are more vulnerable to crime because they are unaware of how to access help and information. For three of these interviewees, an important contributing factor in international students' vulnerability is lack of protective local knowledge. The following comment was illustrative of this view:

But I think local students ... because they're local, they know the area, they know the people ... Yeah, they're more aware, because they know the environment, they know the streets. But you know, international students, they're just fresh people, yeah, they ... seldom got the information. (Chinese female university student, 20 – 24 yo)

For some students, lack of experience of Australian society was an important contributing factor to the vulnerability of international students. In the view of these students, exemplified by the comment below, this included protective knowledge about the diversity in behaviour in a multicultural social environment:

So, life in Melbourne is different. You see, you know, a lot of racial differences. And when you live here you thought that a lot of Australian people were going to be in the same culture, you know, in the way ... we behave in a public area. But in Melbourne you can't expect that thing to happen. . . If you have enough experience ... [of a] racial background or minority group, sometimes you can expect something and then it can help you to make the prediction, how could you cope with the environment that you encounter ... . (Thai female university student, 30 – 34 yo)

Three students mentioned language difficulties as contributing to international students' vulnerability. For one student, language difficulties directly restricted people's capacity to seek help:

There are several reasons because international students, maybe some of them are not good at speaking English. So as a result they may not be able to shout for help after they got attacked by somebody else. (Chinese male university student, 20 – 24 yo)

For other interviewees, the vulnerability of international students was related to lacking information about rights and redress.

I think all international students are vulnerable, definitely. Because when we came in this country we don't have any, like, it's obvious that government just didn't care and prepare any booklet or any flyers or any proper information to give: 'that if that happens, what you're going to do'. Because with every different country, the laws are different, the culture is different, and once you come here, you want to know, if you have any booklet to tell you: 'if this happens, that's the procedure you are going to take', or 'if this happens then you can get help from there'. There was nothing like that (expresses frustration). (Turkish female university student, 20 – 24 yo)

Combined, a lack of information, inexperience of living in a large, cosmopolitan city like Melbourne and language differences were seen as important factors contributing to the vulnerability of international students. Three interviewees also identified structural factors a key to the vulnerability of international students.

Structural Factors

A number of students, mainly from the Indian subcontinent, mentioned structural and social factors related to the working conditions of international students. Importantly, these included the type of employment that international students are typically engaged in as well as the social tensions that arise from a perception that international students are taking, or undermining the conditions of, available employment. A related issue was the visa conditions that international students must comply with, that contribute to fears of risking employment. As identified through both the stakeholder interviews and the student survey, one of the safety risks facing international students was that they commonly work late at night and travel alone on public transport:

. . . people can't get jobs during the day sometimes, so they work at night. By the time college finishes and by the time you are at the station at night, these attacks tend to happen at night and because international students have dark skin so they may be more targeted. The students that are attacked are international students. (Pakistani female private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

For another eight interviewees, an interplay of factors means international students are unable or unlikely to take action to defend themselves against attack, which leads to perceptions that they are easy targets and increases their vulnerability as a group. For six of these students, five from India and one from China, a key factor was their perception that taking action against crime would lead to visa or legal problems. For example:

> *Well, my assumption, it can happen to anyone, but international students are more prone to these things because they know they can be easily targeted. … On top of that, they are temporary residents. They can do nothing. If they do anything, they hit back to them and if anything critical happens, then they are not getting PR [permanent residency of Australia]. So, when you apply for PR you must have a clean record. Local people know that. That's why they take advantage. (North Indian male private provider student, 30 – 34 yo)*

The other two interviewees, one from India and one from Columbia, felt that a lack of social networks and knowledge of legal procedures prevents international students from acting in self defence:

> *… I know that I can't take all the liberty over here because this place isn't my country. So I would have to obey rules. I wouldn't want to be in the wrong side of law and break rules for something very small like this.*

For some interviewees, the vulnerability of international students was beyond their control and primarily arose from perceptions in the wider Australian community, including amongst perpetrators. There were seven references of this kind, about resentment towards international students due to the belief that they are taking jobs or opportunities, typified by this comment:

> *Because I have been told in the face that they do not appreciate international students coming in and getting all good grades and getting all the jobs. (South Korean female university student, 25 –29 yo)*

For one of these interviewees, this resentment was also related to the perception that international students are undercutting wages:

> *Indians and Chinese specially being very hardworking, … and … we are ready to work at a lower wage. So, for companies it is easier to give work to Indians and Chinese. So that takes the work away from these people. That could be one of the reasons for anger. (North Indian female university student, 25 – 29 yo).*

Three students, one from Bangladesh and two from India, attributed the vulnerability of international students primarily to a lack of community acceptance in Melbourne, illustrated by the following comment:

> *I think the children's parents need to take some responsibility and the broader community. The community is contributing to the culture to improve and develop the country – [they should accept that] it [international students] is not an international outsider, it is part of our community at this point in time. (Bangladeshi male university student, 30 – 34 yo)*

Overall, an important set of factors contributing to international student vulnerability was largely structural in nature, the outcome of broader social and economic conditions. A contrasting view, although similar in nature, believed that crime and violence against international students is symptomatic of broader social trends that affect all people in the community.

Violence is a general social problem, not directed against international students

A smaller group of five interviewees, one each from Hungary, Japan, Malaysia, Iran and China, believed that international students were not particularly vulnerable to violence or abuse. One Japanese student with three years in Melbourne stated 'I think I am seeing more violence now', but felt this was a general social problem:

> *No, anyone could be put in a situation. Don't take it as a racial issue. Indian students have done some protesting, but even before they start talking their thing. There have been people, there was a guy attacked in Brunswick, he was a good person and he tried to help someone and this gang attacked him. He was not an international student so this could happen to anyone. (Japanese female private provider student, 30 – 34 yo)*

In a similar vein, another interviewee believed that crime is not directed against international students but that the multicultural nature of Melbourne's population, including the presence of large numbers of international students, was causing problems. Another contrasting view was that suburbs with high levels of international students and cultural diversity were safer:

> *I think this thing will happen to everyone, it does not matter if you are an international student or anyone. … I used to live at Blackburn … and that suburb was safer than Mitcham. I think that most of the people that live in Blackburn they are from overseas and maybe that is why it is safer. At Mitcham or Ringwood the majority more than 80 or 90 percent are from Australia so you can find lots of pubs where they are selling alcohol to under age. (Iranian male private provider student, 20 – 25 yo)*

Overall, the views expressed above recognised that there are safety issues facing international students but that these are an outcome of broader social and community issues that affect all people. In contrast, a small group of four interviewees believed that international students themselves contribute to violence.

International students cause violence

One conflicting view expressed through the interviews was about the role of international students in provoking violence. Four interviewees believed that international students effectively 'brought it on themselves' through their behaviour. An equal number held the opposite view. The first opinion was that attacks on international students could be attributed primarily to the behaviour or attitudes of international students, including lack of cultural awareness, rudeness or, as in the following comment, because of their exclusivity:

> *The international students tend to keep to themselves and they do with their own community and their own country. … Because they*

don't follow the social norms and social rules and keep to themselves creating a social barrier. And yeah, that causes a lot of tension. It's like how can you come into our country and just not follow our rules. So being at somebody's home and not following their rules. … So I think, I strongly believe that's the situation going on here. (South Korean female university student, 25 – 29 yo)

Two of the four interviewees, one Indian and one Hungarian, considered that attacks on international students from India could be attributed to their behaviour:

First of all, I think, many of the Indian students here when travelling in the train, they speak in their native language. They play songs in their native language in high volume. I feel it annoys other passengers. So, it is better to give students an orientation about the culture here and about the do's and don'ts – that would make a big change. (South Indian private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

The views expressed by these interviewees were clear in their perception that Indian students, in particular, play a direct role in provoking attacks. An equal number of interviewees, however, held the opposite view and stated that 'blaming the victim' is a spurious argument. The following comment exemplifies this view:

There is sometimes an argument that if a community has not integrated well there is violence. That is sometimes an argument I have heard back home. Here I hear this about Indians. They speak in their own language. As if this means they have invited an attack! … being different is not something that explains crime or can be used as a justification for crime. (North Indian female university student, 35 – 39 yo)

Robbery as a key motivator for violence

In contrast to much of the media portrayal and police commentary on the reasons for attacks on international students,, the interviewees were largely not of the view that the desire to steal property was a motivation for violence. Only three students, two from India and one from China, attributed attacks on international students primarily to robbery, with the following comment being representative:

It's because they [international students] carry more money and it's because they use more advanced mobile phones. And people [international students] believe that the system is more safe and so they carry more money with them. It's easy to get involved. That's what I think it is. … I think the attackers, they believe that the Indian students they are more vulnerable, they carry more money than any other people. So they easily get attacked. (South Indian private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

One of these students was the victim of a serious assault, who on consideration has attributed the motivation to robbery, but whose final sentence below evidences that for him, there may be another element to the attack:

To be very honest, the motivation for this incident that I can think is robbery. They wanted to rob us, they wanted anything from us. Because the way they were wearing the knuckles and the way they punched us and they were beating us. After that they even checked our pockets again and they checked my friend's pocket and they took his purse and everything. They want something from us. Even on that day, even [if] me and my friend we had something they would have beaten us anyway. It was a matter of fun for them to beat us. (North Indian male private provider student, 30 – 34 yo)

In contrast to the motivating factor of theft in violent incidents, the role of alcohol use in causing violent behaviour was identified more widely by the interviewees.

Alcohol

Seven students highlighted alcohol as a major cause of violence, though only one student identified alcohol as the only cause. The belief that alcohol or drug use underlies other motivating factors was more typically expressed:

I think people want to prove they are stronger than us in some way or other, either financially or physically stronger maybe. … All this has happened because of the influence of many other substances whether alcohol or drugs. (South Indian male university student, 20 – 24 yo)

The seven interviewees who discussed alcohol all expressed that part of the problem is that alcohol use is condoned or at least common in Australia, highlighted in the following comment:

One is the availability of substance and well I guess is a shock for us international students to see than you know the drinking culture here is actually considered to be you know a part of life. … But that usually doesn't happen you know back home, because drinking is only considered to be a social event. People drink socially and yes, I mean there are people that get high on alcohol everywhere in the world. But, usually such culture is fortunately or unfortunately not encouraged. So, alcohol would be one of the reasons. (South Indian male university student, 20 – 24 yo)

The role of alcohol is of particular significance given the dominance of international students from India and China in Melbourne, both countries where alcohol consumption is far less of an accepted norm in public life than is the case in Australia. Others, however, thought that the incidence of violence against international students is largely an outcome of 'bad luck'.

Bad luck

Three students, all female, one from China, one from Hungary and one from India, considered that being the victim of violence was a matter of bad luck. While two considered this as the most likely cause amongst a range of other factors, one interviewee was more sceptical about the claims that international students are targeted:

I know about what happened to international students previous, they were sent to hospital because of no reason [unprovoked attacks], … that is what they say. I don't think it is about all international students, maybe bad luck, maybe … (Hungarian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)

Overall, divergent views were expressed about the conditions that combine to expose international students to violence, although racism was the single most commonly identified cause. The views of some interviewees can be seen as ranging from violence as caused by 'bad luck', to international student behaviours, including their inexperience and naivety. On the other hand were beliefs that the causes of crime against international students are embedded in social structures connected to the labour market, immigration policy and patterns of disadvantage and marginalisation faced by international students. Another important theme was the broader social and cultural trends that combine to make Melbourne less safe, especially violence fuelled by alcohol use. Combined, the reasons for crime against international students are generally seen as complex with multiple causes. Irrespective of the causes of violence, the interviews were also focused on identifying the implications of the reported violence against international students and the effects that attacks have had on the behaviour, wellbeing and perceptions of safety of international students. The following section discusses the responses to these questions.

Implications of perceptions and experiences of crime

Students were asked during the interviews about how their perceptions of safety and experiences of crime had impacted on their sense of safety and wellbeing in Melbourne. This exploration included whether they had made any changes in response to attacks, either against them or against others and in the case of those students who had experienced attacks or crime personally, what ramifications this had for them. This included whether they had reported cases to the police or other authorities and their feelings about the outcomes of taking cases to authorities. Students were also questioned about the impacts of their experiences or perceptions of crime, including whether they had changed earlier plans to stay in Australia and whether they would recommend Australia as a safe place to study.

Changes in behaviour

The vast majority (26) of the 35 interviewees reported that they had changed their behaviour or circumstances in response to experiencing, witnessing or hearing about attacks on international students. The most common change reported by students was restricting their activities at night (20 references). For most of these students, as demonstrated by the following comment, this was a considered response to ensure their own safety:

> *After those incidents we try not to use the transport particularly at night and know that certain areas are not safe. When I come home from work I go a different way each time. If you go the same route every day it is easier for people to attack you. (Pakistani female private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Some students mentioned that they avoided potentially dangerous situations at personal inconvenience, especially places where they knew others had been attacked:

> *Because of this incidents I have heard about I do not travel at night; I generally have a plan to get home earlier. If I was working this may be difficult to maintain. … Sometimes I go to Werribee line but generally try to avoid this because that is where my friend was attacked. Normally if I want to visit I try to take some other company if they are interested but otherwise I try to go during the day time. (Bangladeshi male university student, 30 – 34 yo)*

Most interviewees also mentioned that they took care not to carry valuable belongings and two students had purchased cars in response to attacks. Others had taken time off from their studies in response to hearing of attacks against Indian students earlier this year.

> *… I stopped attending classes. … It was three days. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, yeah. Actually I was doing ELICOS in the … [CBD]. And then when all the bullshit has happened, so at that moment I was absent from the class. Many other students also did not attend. … 45 – 50 students. All are Indian and all are from Punjab. They are all scared. (North Indian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Another implication for students was the reaction of parents and friends in their countries of origin. Five students mentioned that their parents or friends had become extremely concerned about their safety after hearing of attacks on students from the same country of origin. The following comment was typical:

> *I know last week, one Chinese girl in Tasmania was murdered. … And the second day, my father ... we always use video conversation ... and my parents told me that you should protect yourself, you should be highly aware of that kind of things. Because ... he was so scared! He talk to me, and warn me, so many times, 'because you are a girl, and you are ... only child in my family'. (South Chinese university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Clearly, the experience of violence has had direct implications for most of the students interviewed. Similarly, hearing reports of violence against other international students had widespread impacts on the students' general sense of safety.

Fear and trauma

Twenty-four students reported feeling scared or intimidated after hearing of attacks on other international students. These included seven students, two from India (one male, one female) and five students from China (two male, three female) who had no personal experience of attacks or assaults and did not know anyone who had been physically attacked. Their comments demonstrate that the impacts of attacks extend beyond those directly victimised:

> *Nowadays I feel so scared, so insecure. Just cos of the racism, just cos of the attacks. … I'm just feeling so insecure and I just can't go anywhere around because I'm not safe. (North Indian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Similarly, 11 interviewees who had not been victim of an attack, but who had either witnessed a serious assault or heard of one on a friend or relative, expressed feeling upset or frightened and having changed their perceptions of safety in Australia. For these students, it was the incident itself that caused fear or trauma, especially if onlookers failed to assist victims:

… And they hit him, in his head, with a bottle of beer … a big bottle, and on Swanston St. And he fell down and he doesn't remember … when he woke up he says he must have been there a very long time and no-one even check, like, is he alright or what's going on; no-one. And he said the same thing, [that] while he was arguing, there was no-one to check as well. … That was pretty scary …. (Turkish female university student, 20 – 24 yo)

For other students, witnessing the resulting harm of an assault was distressing. One interviewee was upset about the impacts of an attack on her housemate from South India and also fearful for her own safety:

What happened they were in Australia for about two months and they used to live in Sunshine and he was coming from work at night and got badly injured. …I feel really bad, because of this incident, his quality of life has been impacted. He is having treatment for a really bad head injury.... They could not find the criminals. He has two children and because of this incident he was not able to work anymore and his wife is studying and with 20 hours of work it is hard to pay fees. I am scared now. We come home late; that is very frightening. (Pakistani female private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

The discussion above highlights the impact of violence on those who have not been a direct victim and the implications are serious enough in terms of behaviour change and general feelings of safety. Unsurprisingly, the impacts on those who were victims of violence were often very serious and far reaching.

Impacts of the serious assaults

Of those nine students who reported having been victims of physical assaults, five reported major impacts on their study, health and feelings of safety and wellbeing in Australia. Each of these students was in the sub-sample of six who had been seriously assaulted. Four interviewees were hospitalised as a result of attacks and two have suffered permanent injury. There were a further two references by interviewees to other cases where students, both from India, had suffered serious permanent disability as a result of attacks. Four interviewees, two from India, one from Bangladesh and one from Iran, mentioned that they had suffered financial hardship due to attacks. One student, from Bangladesh, lost his job:

I could not go to my job when I was attacked. My employer could not keep my job when I was away. Someone else took my job. I used to work in a call centre. So when I got back there they would not give me work. If it was a better job, maybe in a factory, they would have supported me, but they did not support me. … I lost my job and had to call my parents to ask for support. They are still supporting me. (Bangladeshi male university student, 20 – 24 yo)

Four interviewees, two from India, one from Iran and one from Bangladesh, reported that their studies had been interrupted. For example:

I had a lot of issues after that. I did not complete that semester, I needed to see a psychologist, a lot of things went. I went back to my country to settle down. I started back this January. It was before last summer before the summer last year that this happened. (Bangladeshi male university student, 20 – 24 yo)

One of these interviewees, formerly a high-achieving university student, was forced to change his course of study, on advice from his doctors:

Actually I was doing very well (in professional training) and I hoped to clear with good marks and high distinction. But it [the attack] changed my life. I couldn't do it. I had to do Community Welfare that I was not interested. …Because I was going through these medical procedures, because they were not sure, I had bruise inside the brain, and they were not sure what exactly it is. And that's why, they didn't even recommend me to go for any other higher education courses. So that's why I had to choose [Community Welfare]. (North Indian male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

Some of the interviewees who had been victims of assaults focused on the psychological effects and expressed on-going doubts and intrusive thoughts about how they might have avoided the situation or defended themselves. Two students who suffered permanent physical injury as a result of their attacks reported that their entire lives have changed. For example:

That incident affected my whole life. …I went through three operations and there were 20 stitches on my head. My ribs were broken and both my hands were broken and I wasn't even able to stand. For the next four months I wasn't even able to eat [by] myself. Not even able to go to toilet, nothing. (North Indian male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

At the same time, another student, who had been robbed and hit in the head, reported that the incident had little effect on him, other than making him more cautious. Another response was to move accommodation; three victims of assaults, two from India and one from Iran, had moved suburbs after being assaulted. Another two interviewees, one from India and one from Bangladesh, left Australia and returned to their home countries temporarily, in the case of the Indian student, to access medical care.

Three interviewees discussed the assistance they had received from their educational institutions. One victim of a serious physical assault, studying at a private provider institute, had not received any assistance although the institute was aware of the assault. Another student from China had not reported his assault to his university administration and refused an offer of counselling:

I don't want people to know because it's not good (looks embarrassed). I just talk to [manager and teacher] and tell them what happened. [Manager] is good man. I think this is … a good university. They care about this. [Manager] tell me 'do you want to talk to some psychologist?' I think is unnecessary. I don't have psychological problems. (Chinese male university student, 20 – 24 yo)

Another student felt he had been very well supported by his university:

The university supported me. They, the Student Services, monitored the whole situation and asked me to go to the police. … The university supported me. I still talk to my psychologist. We meet with a group and have a snack and talk. I still go to her. [International unit of his university] has helped by giving some flexibility with the withdrawal time and allowed me to go back home without visa problems. (Bangladeshi male university student, 20 – 24 yo)

Overall, the violence has had serious implications on student wellbeing, some of which will affect the individual's health and wellbeing for a life time. The experiences of support from services and educational institutions were also mixed. While there are examples where support has been appropriately offered and received, for others, the support was not there or it was not appropriate to their needs. Another area of investigation in the interviews was about experiences with police and other authorities in relation to experiences of violence.

Responses by police and other authorities to crime against international students

A common focus amongst interviewees was the response to crime of police and to a lesser extent, educational and legal authorities. Most students reported a range of negative experiences and perceptions about the responses of authorities. Thirteen out of 35 interviewees referred to the fact that that they or a friend had reported crime to the police. Twelve of these interviewees expressed that the response from police was unsatisfactory, however, two of the four seriously assaulted students reported that their attackers had been apprehended and charged.

In the majority of cases, interviewees reported that the police took no action in response to reports of violence against themselves or a friend. A few of these cases related to theft or property crime:

> *I reported, um, this year … in this March, I lost my computer at home … to report to the police … They didn't do anything. They just come to my house and have a look. They ask me some question. And they said, just 'wait'… and nothing happened. (Chinese female TAFE student, 25 – 29 yo)*

However, in seven cases where students reported that police had taken no action, serious assaults had occurred, as in the following comment from one victim:

After that [identifying his attackers on video footage] the officer told me we are going to charge them and give me a call. I am still waiting for a response. Still I am waiting.

References to a dismissive attitude on behalf of police were common. For example,

> *When they had hit from the head and the glass had broken and then, he still has a scar, but luckily it didn't cut very deep. If it would've cut more deeper than what it was, he won't be alive. He went to the police and he went to hospital. … and they [the police] weren't helpful. He [her friend] said they weren't helpful and he didn't want to tell the details, not really, their attitude was (demonstrates a dismissive look, shrugging shoulders) (Turkish female university student, 25 – 29 yo).*

A number of students expressed anger and despair about the lack of police response to their cases or those of friends. In one case where a serious assault had occurred, the victim felt that police inaction was contributing to the continuing incidence of crime against international students:

> *S: The police did not help at all. I am very angry. The way they did not take the case up makes me angry. If they had taken actions against this, these kinds of things would not happen so much. It happens everywhere but the way it happens to – [unfinished]*
>
> *I: What did the police do when you reported the incident?*
>
> *S: They took a statement but they have never got back to me. It has been over a year and I have not heard anything. (Bangladeshi male university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

In another case where a serious assault had occurred, an interviewee attributed lack of police action to incompetence or possible laziness amongst some officers. For example, one interviewee felt that police spent time questioning the victim, allowing the offenders to flee:

> *Even in my friend's case I saw they [the police] were ok, 'so what did you do and what did you do? How much money did you have and what time you left?' And they spent about 1.5 hours questioning [his friends, the victims]. And by that time the guys [attackers] must have gone somewhere else. (North Indian male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

One clear impact of the perceived poor response by police to reports of crime against international students could be seen in interviewees' expressions of lack of faith in the police in Melbourne. For eight students, the lack of satisfactory outcomes from reporting crimes to police was evidence of negative attitudes towards international students. One student who was victimised at his workplace was unsuccessful in his attempts to get police to charge the offenders and attributed this to discrimination, and there was a general perception amongst the 12 students who had reported unsatisfactory outcomes from involvement with police that reporting crime is not effective:

> *One of my friends told us that the police did not help when they were in trouble or threatened, they did not help when he was attacked, so we decided not to contact the police about this incident. (Bangladeshi male university student, 30 – 34 yo)*

Two other students, both from China and not amongst the 12 who reported unsatisfactory dealings with the police, shared this attitude:

> *Many Chinese people get attacked, but they do not call the police, this is because there is a language barrier and they know the police cannot do much. (Chinese female university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

This belief that police and authorities are unwilling or unable to intervene may be contributing to another commonly expressed view, apparent in the following comments, that international students are unable to take action against violence or abuse and must rely on themselves alone:

> *It may not be the case, but when you are an international student, you think we are not getting as much help from the police because we are outsiders. (Bangladeshi male university student, 40 – 44 yo)*

Overall, the interview responses suggest that there is little faith in police being able to prevent or support students if they are victims of violence for a range of reasons, including past experience, language barriers and a perception amongst international students that they have fewer rights to police protection than do domestic students. These were the views expressed by 12 of the 35 students; a similar number also held the belief

that police, along with other authorities were at least partially responsible for exacerbating the effects of crime.

Another commonly expressed view (by 12 interviewees) was that unsatisfactory or ineffective responses by authorities had the impact of exacerbating the effects of crimes. In one case, a victim of a serious physical assault stated recounted that he become embroiled in a cascade of discriminatory or unhelpful responses, commencing with verbal abuse from the attending police officers, who kept the victims at the station for questioning and refused their requests to call an ambulance:

> *… what happened to me is not acceptable. Police calling us 'bloody overseas' and hospital telling us that they cannot provide a doctor… I was bleeding like anything. They [the police] should have called the doctors. … We had to fight with the police to call the emergency services. …. Please call an ambulance'. This is what I was saying and they said 'mate go and sit at the taxi rank. We know what we have to do'.*

This victim's troubles continued when he was informed first that a doctor was not available to see him at the major public hospital he attended and then had to struggle to gain admission:

> *I said, 'Doctor please understand my situation, I have already lost an eye, I am not in a good position, I have multiple fracture in my face. My other eye is swollen very badly. You can see that. …They said 'no we can't because it will cost a lot of money'… I decided to leave the country because I am not getting good treatment. … I took treatment for three months in India.. (North Indian private provider student, 30 – 34 yo)*

Another student expressed frustration with his experiences of an unsupportive criminal justice system:

> *I don't think the legal system or the police system is very supportive here…Even in the court… they asked me like, 'why did you go to that MacDonald's?' … Isn't that a foolish thing to ask? Because I was feeling hungry and it was nearest to me and that's why I went there. … I was the victim and they were asking me questions like this type! It doesn't make sense to me. (North Indian male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

In other cases where interviewees were not victims, they reported being disillusioned with the response of authorities or institutions. The following comment, about a private provider institute's response to a serious assault on a fellow student, exemplifies this view:

> *The school send emails and say 'we are working with the police … in the safe of our students' … but they did nothing else, just send emails. And another one [email] say like 'we are going to … collect money for him' instead of to give him … for example a free term [of tuition]. … I don't see the school as … a really good place to help people. (Columbian male private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Overall, approximately one-third of all interviews expressed a lack of faith with police, health services and other authorities in adequately responding to violence and attacks and/or to their causes and impacts. A further area of questioning was undertaken in relation to how crime and violence impacted on student perceptions of Australia generally.

Views about Australia

As part of the exploration of the implications of violence, interviewees were asked whether, in light of their experiences and perceptions of safety, they would recommend Australia as a place to study. Despite the earlier reported findings that the majority of students had changed their perceptions of safety in Melbourne due to attacks on international students, 65 percent of the interviewees (23) stated that they would still recommend Australia as a place to study.

At the same time, eight interviewees were definite in their view that they could not recommend Australia as a place to study. However, for three of these students, all female, two from India and one from South Korea, their reservations were primarily related to concerns about the quality and system of international education provision in Australia rather than safety. The following comment was illustrative of these students' perceptions:

> *To be honest I would not recommend coming unless there is a course they cannot do anywhere else. I don't think the system has been very welcoming. I felt like I have had to fight for everything at every point. We are treated as if we have lots of money; there has been no idea about service to the students or concern for welfare. To me the system here seems very cynical. I have been a bit disillusioned. (Indian female university student, 35 – 39 yo)*

Five interviewees reported that they had changed previous plans to settle in Australia as a result of attacks on international students. Only one of these students had personally experienced violence, in the form of verbal abuse. Three of these five students were from India; one was from Turkey and one from Mauritius. Four of these students stated they would complete their studies before leaving while one is considering leaving sooner. None of these five students would now recommend Melbourne as a safe place to study, a view represented in the comment below:

> *I always say to my cousins, brothers and sisters, 'don't come here, it's not safe' and … if I have an option, I'll go for New Zealand I think. (North Indian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

A further three students, two of whom had suffered serious physical assaults, remained undecided about their plans due to attacks. The two victims who had suffered permanent physical disability from their attacks similarly expressed uncertainty about their future plans, demonstrated in one student's considerations, below:

> *That is something that I haven't decided yet. When I came here, I thought of establishing myself here. But after so many mixed experiences, I am in a dilemma what to do and what not to do. Maybe I will move to another country and there is couple of options that I have. And there are many better options. … I am little scared… I am not much safe in Melbourne. After my incident, when someone comes to me to ask for a cigarette or a lighter or I do have a back in my mind, that feeling of fear comes; is he going to come and hit me? (North Indian male private provider student, 30 – 34 yo)*

A number of interviewees referred to their overall feelings about Australia. Fifteen students referred to their overall experience of living in Australia and of Australian people as positive. These interviewees included four of the nine students who had been victims of assaults. One of the four interviewees who had suffered a serious assault expressed his feelings that Melbourne is a good place to study and live in despite the incident he experienced:

> *I love Melbourne. I know after this I changed my mind, but still I like Melbourne. Maybe if I was in Iran, maybe this accident could happen. (Iranian male private provider student, 20 – 25 yo)*

Overall, the views expressed by this group of students suggests that the violence and attacks on international students are important, though not necessarily determining, influences in shaping overall perceptions about Australia and on-going plans about study or future settlement. The final section of the student interviews was in relation to beliefs about actions or strategies that are required to protect international student safety.

Views on effective preventative policy responses and actions

As a final part of each interview, students were asked to reflect on their views about useful policy responses and actions by authorities to prevent violence against international students. A range of responses were forthcoming, from structural reform of Australia's education system, to community dialogue about racism, to collective action by students, to the need for enhanced caution by individual students. These suggestions have been grouped within the headings of police and criminal justice improvements, improved services, improved information, administrative reform and social change.

Police and criminal justice system improvements

The most commonly suggested area of intervention was in policing with 18 of 35 interviewees suggesting that improved police response is important in preventing further violence. For nine interviewees, the perceived lack of action by the police and criminal justice systems was their major focus. Two of these students focused on the deterrent effect of stronger penalties, as seen in the following comment:

> *[T]he government and the police have to give them some kind of special punishment regarding all this bullshit, so they will not do that for the next time. They [perpetrators] have to think, 'oh we just can't do so', because of the punishment or some kind of thing, because they [the government/ police] are doing nothing I think. (North Indian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

For six students, four from India, one from Columbia and one from Bangladesh, police handling of cases needs to be monitored and improved:

> *They should work on how the police are taking the cases. It is not really giving anything; it is making the situation worse. People are not feeling comfortable. … Something needs to be done. (Bangladeshi male university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Twelve interviewees believed that increased police patrols or presence in problem areas, especially around public transport, would prevent violence. In a related theme, eight interviewees mentioned the need for increased security in public places, especially around public transport:

> *Every student needs to travel in the front of train. We cannot all buy own car. There needs to be more safety at the stations. (North Indian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

While seven interviewees mentioned the need for improved lighting and two recommended more surveillance cameras, one student was sceptical about the preventative effect of cameras and emphasised the need for staffing of stations:

> *Putting cameras at the train station just records the violence, because it may be over by the time any police get there. More patrol at night would be good. In train station having operators would help others to feel safe or a security company being present, having people there. (Bangladeshi male university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Three interviewees, one from China, one from India and one from Iran, recommended restricting the availability of alcohol, especially to young people.

Improved services for international students

Four students, three from China (two studying at private provider institutes) and one private provider student from India, emphasised the need for a welfare and response service or authority specific to international students to improve responses and outcomes in international student safety. One of these students, the victim of a serous assault, recommended a 'one-stop shop' for international students after being unable to access services:

> *When I came back [after treatment in India] there are many … [services] that provide help. You know what they asked me? 'Are you a permanent resident of Australia?' I said 'no'. 'Sorry we can't help you'. 'Are you living in our area? Sorry we can't help you'. 'Are you our student? Sorry we can't help you'. (North Indian male private provider student, 30 – 34 yo)*

Improved information for international students

The second most commonly mentioned area for action, referred to by 12 interviewees, was the need for enhanced information provision. Five students believed that information needs to focus on cultural adaptation:

> *I think … whosoever is coming to Australia or going to any other country, they need to be informed that they are entering into a different culture. And yes it takes time to build up confidence to be in a new place. But, initially you know be around people that you know and may be travel in groups until and unless you are confident enough to travel alone and take care of what ever happens. I think they need to be aware that it is a different culture. … (North Indian female university student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Seven students suggested that international students need detailed information about the practicalities of life in Melbourne, including how to travel safely on trams and trains, situations to avoid and what to do in emergencies. One of these students stressed the need for comprehensive information about life in Australia, encompassing both practical concerns and cultural adaptation:

> *… Being in Australia is not just about being in a university… I think every university has missed that point. … There is nothing from the government to say, 'ok, you're coming here, this… information like how the life goes in Australia, or how you use the [transport]…' Like, I'm coming from the city; I didn't have any problem with the city life, but there were my friends, they never use the public transport or they wouldn't [have] seen the train or tram. They had the problem with city life. … There is (emphasis) the language problem, there is the cultural differences and there is the places where you live is like a physical difference, the tram, the transport and how you rent the place, it's just completely different for every single different country. … I think there could be some background information about Australia and Australian culture and the laws, how they could be helpful, when you first arrive. And I think that should go to every single student for every single university when they first arrive to Australia, they should have booklet to just outline 'that's happened, what can I do?' And where I could get the support, or … you don't even know just who to talk [to] …. (Turkish female university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Three students, all from India, talked about the preventative role that information about attacks can have in raising awareness of dangers amongst international students. Some interviewees considered the question of administrative responsibility for information provision to international students. Three interviewees saw this as primarily a responsibility of individual educational institutions.

In one case, a student, who had earlier stated that universities and organisations like the Australian international education agency IDP were responsible for information provision, considered that universities were better equipped to provide necessary information to their students, but that the real need is amongst private RTOs. In most cases, enhanced information provision was recommended alongside administrative reforms to Australia's education services for international students.

The need for administrative reform

Six students mentioned the need for administrative reform of Australia's international education sector. This suggestion was often combined with recommendations about the need for better information provision. The following comment was representative:

> *Ah, I think information is important... Because I found here a lot of mess about the student education. It's not clear and often the immigration agents don't know what is right for you. So, there is a little bit of mess I think. (Italian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

The interviewees were divided on the question of where responsibility for international student safety lies. Seven students attributed responsibility to more than one institution or area and talked about the need for joint, cooperative action by a range of players. Twelve students stated that the Australian government in general is responsible for ensuring the safety of international students. In the words of one student:

> If Australian government approves international students to come here to study, it is their responsibility to ensure safety; they are responsible. If students are put in dangerous situations, they need to know they can go to the government. If you know there are consequences for attacking someone, if they are international or Australia, they [the government] should take action. (Pakistani female private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)

Only three students saw student safety as primarily the responsibility of educational institutes, and all of these comments related to information provision. Another five students, three from universities and two from private RTOs, recommended that education institutes could introduce a range of initiatives, including information forums, safe spaces for international students to socialise and mentor programs. Two private provider students were adamant that educational institutes are unable to intervene effectively. In the words of one student:

> Actually, our colleges or institutes can't do anything, because we are safe in the college, but we are not safe in the roads or transport system, you know? What I mean actually, it's a street crime [phenomenon]. (North Indian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)

Seven interviewees mentioned the importance of individual preventative action by international students:

> I think, our students should, um, protect ourselves, ... have good awareness, these things happen, because I don't think there is … a good area and a bad area, but I think sometimes is just happen (emphasis) ... not matter what area. So I think our university student, especially international student, should um, take care of yourself very, very well. ... Aware this kind of things. … Sometimes, it's just one minute, that happen. So, we should avoid this kind of things happen. (South Chinese female university student, 20 – 24 yo)

In keeping with their belief in the importance of individual preventative action, three interviewees, two female from China and one male from South India, recommended self defence training for international students.

The need for social change in Australia

In contrast with the emphases above on institutional or individual responsibility were another set of comments which focused on the importance of community level action to bring about social change in Australia's attitudes towards international students. Six students talked about the need for community action to improve the acceptance of international students in Australia. This was illustrated in the comments by one student, who had earlier talked about the need for cultural adaptation by international students:

> *I think it's a very complicated and interdependent issue. You can't just say 'the university's going to handle this, it's the university's problem', or it is only Victoria's problem, or its Melbourne city problem. It's about all Australia … it's about the understanding of the other culture. How the Australian acts toward you, how they look to other culture and their understanding. (Turkish female university student, 20 – 24 yo)*

For one of these students, broad community based action holds a preventative promise:

> *I think this needs to start at high school. Teachers or counsellors need to educate young people that we have international students in Australia and most of the people that come here are paying big money to get their educations, some of them may be here for PR but it is a big country and there is loads of work here, so it does not mean it will take work away from them. I think it should start at school. Once it reaches the point police need to come into action it is already to late. (Mauritian male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Three students emphasised that the Australian government needs to listen to international student victims. One of these students expressed frustration that the government was not doing so and felt that this attitude of denial helped create violence at a protest called by Indian students:

> *The reason the whole thing happened with the Indian protest was … international students need a bit more safety. … I don't know … it should not be like that. … The government should listen to what they [Indian international students] need and this may help to solve a lot of issues. International students come here to learn something, not to have to fight for their safety. (Indian male university student, 19 yo)*

Two students, both from India, believed the government has an obligation to recognise racism as a possible motivating factor of violence. Others similarly felt there is a need for greater public acknowledgement of racism in Australia. In the words of one student:

> *There needs to be debate in the community about the racial tensions, I think at the moment the police and government are denying there is a racial issue in Australia. If this is correct why are they sending police and government official to India to provide information on how to be safe in Australia? This does not make sense. (Indian female university student, 30 – 34 yo)*

In contrast, another Indian student believed the community needed to show acceptance to international students and that the issue is not racism:

> *The community has to show them [international students] that we are not in an unsafe situation and it's all because of; it doesn't mean that Australians are racist. The people need to take more action against violence and not racism. (South Indian male private provider student, 20 – 24 yo)*

Another student, from Columbia, spoke of the need for 'solidarity' between Australian and international students to bring about change to an education system which treats students as commodities:

> *I think we are [treated] like a business, you know? And each student is not a student, is not a person, is like money. (Columbian male private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Again, there are divergent opinions about where the priorities lie in terms of what needs to be done to improve the community safety of international students. Views include the need for police and justice system reform, improved information and services for international students, administrative reform, community action and increased responsibility on the part of students themselves. Each of these suggestions overlap with those identified through the stakeholder interviews and the student survey.

Conclusions

The purpose of this section has been to report on the findings from interviews with 35 international students in relation to their perceptions of safety, the causes and impacts of violence against international students and their views about what needs to be done to improve international student safety. While there were some highly divergent opinions expressed about the nature of the issues, there are some clear themes that can be identified. In particular, there is a high level of awareness and concern about safety and many student interviewees now feel much less safe than they had expected prior to arrival in Australia. Many students are very fearful; in some cases, this fear is exacerbated by language difficulties but more significantly, interviewees expressed a lack of clarity about how to respond when unsafe situations arise. This lack of clarity was usually about rights but there was also confusion about Australian cultural norms relating to violence and how to respond to it. There was also concern expressed about the various places and circumstances that generate fear for safety. These include the combined influence of widespread alcohol use within the community, public transport, increasing violence at night and suburban pockets that are perceived as unsafe. Students also widely reported that the violence is perpetrated by groups of men who were seen as marginalised, uneducated, territorial and racist and as sometimes coming from marginalised ethnic backgrounds themselves.

Perceptions about the causes of violence are varied and are formed from interviewees' personal experiences and those of their friends, as well as by media coverage. Racism was the single most common identified important element. Other causal factors included structural conditions and community trends that create the conditions for tension and violence between ethnic groups. Others interviewees stressed the need for behavioural change amongst international students themselves. In addition, a small number of students felt that there was no problem with safety in Melbourne.

The impacts of violence were experienced by most of the interview group, particularly those who were direct victims of violence or who were close to victims. Almost all of the students were cautious and most expressed some level of fear for their safety on public transport, at night and in particular public places, including certain suburbs or localities such as parks, streets or train stations. Most interviewees took specific measures to protect their own safety and some have modified their behaviour considerably to maximise their own safety. The victims of serious violence have been severely impacted in relation to their health, employment opportunities and career prospects. The impacts of violence also affected family members, both in Australia and in victims' home countries. Opinions varied about what needs to be done to improve community safety for international students; suggestions ranged from the need for police and justice system reform, community change and administrative reform to the need for increased care and responsibility by individual students. The need for improved information and services featured in the comments of interviewees.

Overall, student perceptions and experiences found here were varied. The incidence of violence in Melbourne has had widespread implications and effects, some of which are extremely serious. Many of the responses reported here were supported by findings from the on-line student survey and stakeholder interviews. These combined findings are summarised in the following section before we arrive at recommendations for enhancing international student safety in Melbourne.

5.5 Summary of Key Findings

The broader purpose of this section is to report on the findings revealed by data gathered through an on-line student survey, interviews with stakeholders and interviews with international students. A detailed discussion of the findings generated through each method is reported above. In order to consolidate and clarify the implications of these findings, this section draws these findings together in order to identify areas of overlap, areas of contradiction and to identify key issues and implications that will inform recommendations arising from this study. We do this by summarising the findings in relation to the core questions that guide this research. Specifically, these are:

- What are safety issues experienced by international students?
- Why is violence occurring and what are its impacts?
- How do international students compare across ethnic groups in terms of the incidence and experiences of violence?
- What are the responses of authorities, government, community and educational institutions and how do these responses match the nature of the issues?

The following summary draws on the evidence and what it says in relation to each of these questions.

What are the safety issues experienced by international students?

Student survey findings

- Students generally feel there are safety risks using public transport, travelling at night and in certain areas, such as the CBD and Footscray;
- The main places where safety threats have occurred include 'in the street', 'using public transport' and 'at shops or shopping centres'. A small proportion of threats also occurred 'at my workplace' and 'at college or university';
- International students feel less safe than local students and are also more concerned about the effects of alcohol use as a threat to safety;
- Most (85%) of safety threats experienced by students are not reported with the main reason being the belief that 'it wasn't serious enough';
- In contrast to local students, some students (17 out of 58) who had experienced serious threats to safety, did not report because they were either scared or believed that they had no right to report as a non-Australian citizen;
- International students are more likely than local students to take measures to protect their own safety. In particular, they avoid travelling at night, avoid carrying valuables in public and stay away from dark streets;
- The majority of international students believe that Melbourne is less safe than expected before arrival.

Findings from stakeholder interviews

There are polarised views amongst stakeholders in relation to the safety issues for international students. In order of the extent to which the opinion was expressed, key understandings include:

- International students are no more or less safe than anyone else in the community;
- International students are less safe due to lack of local knowledge, lack of situational awareness, worldly inexperience, culturally inappropriate and risky behaviour, and lack of information;
- International students are less safe due to structural issues such as financial and socio-economic vulnerability, including housing affordability with international students concentrated in areas that are less safe and using public transport in areas that are unsafe; and
- Safety risks increase in line with ethnic and racial differences.

Findings from the student interviews

- International student expectations about safety are informed largely by knowledge of others who study or who have studied in Australia;
- Most interviewees feel less safe than they expected in Melbourne;

- Agreed risks to safety include:
    - Alcohol and drug use in the community (18 interviewees);
    - Public transport is a place where intimidating and/or potentially dangerous interactions can occur; often involving groups of alcohol-affected young people (24 interviewees);
    - Melbourne is less safe at night (15 interviewees);
- All interviewees take precautions to protect their personal safety particularly the avoidance of travelling by public transport at night
- The majority of the 35 interviewees, 20 (57 percent) had either witnessed or personally experienced an assault or robbery, or were close to another international student who had been seriously assaulted or robbed.
- Safety threats occurred in the course of travel or undertaking daily activities in public places. One report was of a workplace incident
- International students feel unprepared to deal with safety threats either because of language, unclear expectations about what is 'normal' behaviour in Australia or because they don't know their rights in relation to protection;
- International students report a lack of support from the community when violence has occurred;
- Most international students feel unsafe and half of the interviewees have experience significant impacts ranging from never going out at night to suffering from brain injury and having to alter career plans

Why is violence occurring and what are its impacts?

Findings from the student survey

- Half of all international student respondents had experienced racism in the form of either verbal abuse, physical intimidation, robbery or physical attack;
- When international student safety is threatened, there is often a religious or sexist dimension to this threat. Men are more likely to experience violent threats to their safety.
- Only a small proportion of local students attribute safety issues to racism and a small number (5) of local students expressed explicitly racist views in relation to the presence, and behaviour of international students.
- There is a polarisation of views amongst local students about the extent to which safety issues are an outcome of racism versus opportunism;

Stakeholder findings

There are polarisations amongst stakeholders in relation to the causes of violence. In order of priority, these include:

- The view most commonly expressed was that the cause is student naivety and behaviours – students put themselves in dangerous situations. This view varied between whether or not it was the student's fault or whether they are misled or misinformed about life in Australia;
- Socio-economic conditions – vulnerability largely depends on lack of access to social and economic resources. E.g., richer students can live in safer areas of Melbourne and are therefore more safe;
- Offender profiles and patterns – international students are seen as materially worthwhile and/or easy targets on which to build reputation and peer credibility for some individuals and groups of young offenders;
- Systems/institutional issues – racism is embedded in social structures and institutions including the justice system, the labour market, transport arrangements and so on are reflective of stratification on racial lines. Thus international students are vulnerable to violence as an outcome of this stratification. This was a minority view expressed by three stakeholders.
- A majority of stakeholders (17 out of 29) believe that crimes against international students are primarily opportunistic rather than racist in motivation. At the same time, one view is that is Australian cultural history to 'pick on newcomers'.

Findings from the student interviews

- The most important cause of violence is racism. Others include alcohol, robbery, the particular vulnerability of international students, bad luck or being in a bad place. Some believe that international students 'bring it on themselves'
- Theft of property was identified as a very minor explanation for violence
- Perpetrators of violence are identified as groups of young men primarily, but not necessarily, from Anglo backgrounds. There is recognition that perpetrators are marginalised, uneducated and territorial.

How do international students compare across ethnic groups in terms of the incidence and experiences of violence?

Findings from the student survey

- Indian and students from the sub-continent, and to a lesser degree, Chinese students are perceived as less safe than other groups of students;

- There was also a strong opinion that those most different from being Anglo-Celtic in terms of religion and skin colour were also most vulnerable;
- The majority of all students believe that international students are less safe than local students;

Findings from stakeholders

- A dominant view of stakeholders is that Indian and Chinese student populations are most vulnerable as an outcome of the sheer force of numbers. This aligns with the view also that there is a greater tendency for these groups to 'stick to themselves' and not integrate with the community;
- However, police interviewees drew a clear distinction between international students from these two groups and other members of the same ethnic communities who were not international students, seeing this distinction as based on different access to financial and social capital, greater situational awareness on the part of non-student residents, and more familiarisation with the local environment than newly arrived international students;
- There was strong commentary about Indian students with a common view that they are 'easy targets' either due to the socio-economic profile of recent intakes or general naïve behaviours at odds with established youth cultures.

Findings from international student interviews

- Those who are most different from the Anglo norm are seen to be the most vulnerable.

What are the responses of authorities, government, community and educational institutions and how do these responses match the nature of the issues?

Findings from the student survey

Strategies suggested by students were in conflict reflecting a polarisation of views in relation to the core of safety issues as being opportunistic or racially motivated. But included the need to:

- Address racism and welcome students
- International students need to be better prepared/the onus is on them
- Better policing and law enforcement
- Education services and security – measures such as timetabling to prevent travel at night
- Safer public transport
- The Media and broader community issues

Suggestions from stakeholders included

Multiple strategies were proposed as necessary to improve international student safety. These varied according to the perspective and included:

- Strategies to equip individual students to protect safety such as better information and strategies to support assimilation;
- General community campaigns and responsibilities – such as education in schools about racism, more opportunities for engagement between international and local students and improved connection of international students with community resources,
- Education and training providers – better admissions monitoring and standards, mentoring, student consultation, student welfare teams and better work integrated course design, greater responsibility for community safety messages and education;
- Better Police response – police cross-cultural training, resources for multiculturalism, greater response to international student issues and more contact between students and police;
- Government – regulation of training providers, regulation of migration agents, coordination between government agencies, implement effective complaints system, improve safety of public transport, greater student consultation, invest student money in support services, name and address racism, review visa conditions, provide legal services, address housing issues and provide access to transport concessions.
- Research – develop evidence base about violence and promote best practice in supporting international students; better understanding of offender profiles, patterns and motivations.
- Media – ensure balanced representation of the real experience of international students.

Findings from the student interviews

- The most common strategy suggested was improvements to the police and criminal justice system
- Other strategies necessary include:
- Improved services for international students – eg, a 'one-stop shop' for services;
- Improved information – pre-arrival and post-arrival on all aspects of living in Melbourne
- Administrative reform of education provision
- Social change that includes addressing broader community safety issues and racism within the community;

5.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this section was to summarise the key findings of the research methods implemented in response to the core questions of our research. These findings reveal widely different perspectives on issues relating to international student safety. There were important differences between local students and international students. Similarly, stakeholders and international students had very different perspectives on the nature and incidence of violence against international students, including its causes, impacts and on what should be done about it. In particular, there was a marked difference in opinion about the extent to which racism affects international students. The dominant stakeholder view was that racism is not a major contributing factor in threats to student safety. This view was starkly at odds with the experiences reported by international students through both the survey and the international student interviews.

At the same time, there was agreement across all findings about situations and places where safety risks are greatest. These were at night, on public transport, in various suburbs and areas of Melbourne (though opinions about which particular suburbs and areas were unsafe differed), as a consequence of particular low-paid occupations and sub-standard housing arrangements and in public places where people have been drinking alcohol. There was also a strong understanding that international students are more likely to be exposed to these situations and localities due to their lack of private transport options, because they are forced to live in unsafe areas of Melbourne and because they lack the family and friendship networks available to domestic students. Similarly, there was general agreement about who is most vulnerable to violence. Students from Asia and the Indian Sub-continent were most commonly identified as being at particular risk but across the findings, there was an evident recognition of the role that difference plays in relation to vulnerability. There was recognition, particularly amongst students, that individuals and groups who were further removed in appearance and cultural background from the Anglo Australian norm faced greater threats to their safety.

While there were some contradictions apparent in our research findings, there was also a degree of overlap in understandings and ideas about what should be done to protect international student safety. Suggestions varied according to a respondent's perspective and position; amongst the stakeholders, there was greater emphasis on enhanced information provision, including precautionary advice and the need for strategies to support students to integrate with the broader Australian community. There was also a greater emphasis on the role of government in coordinating services. On the other end of the spectrum, were views emphasised to a greater degree by students about the need for improved police response to violence, a focus on improving security on public transport and on providing dedicated services for international students. The views across the different groups, however, were not mutually exclusive, showing that there is considerable scope for strategies and planning to be relevant to the perceptions of both students and other stakeholders. The following section elaborates by considering these combined findings in greater detail, before leading to a series of identified priorities.

SECTION 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction:

The previous sections of this report provide the background, details and evidence generated by our investigation of community safety of international students in Melbourne. To recap, the research is intended to be a scoping study undertaken in response to increasing events of violence inflicted on international students and the public debate that has ensued in relation to the causes and implications of this violence. In order to inform this debate, this study has been designed to explore international students' experiences of safety and wellbeing in private and public education systems in metropolitan Melbourne. In doing this we have had a particular focus on ensuring representation from the two largest groups of international students from India and China as well as other international students. A particular focus has been to explore the causes of violence against international students and we are informed by relevant literature and multiple sources of data. The aim is to inform the debate about how best to maximise international student safety in Melbourne and to contribute to recommendations about how this might best be achieved. Further, the intent is to highlight the complexity of the issues surrounding international student safety and to raise broader questions and issues about how community safety issues should be approached.

In Section One, we give the background to the study, with an overview of the issues of violence affecting international students that have prompted this study. We discussed how these issues have been treated by the media, both in Australia and overseas, and we have discussed the public debate that this has given rise to. In particular, we reflect on the extent to which the debate has largely been constructed around a polarised set of views about the causes of the attacks. One side of the argument is that the violence is primarily motivated by racist intent. The contrasting, and arguably dominant view is that the violence is opportunistic and that international students have been victims because, in essence, they have been 'at the wrong place at the wrong time'. A core assumption we bring to this project is that such a polarisation is unhelpful in understanding what is actually a highly complex phenomenon, is effective in stifling meaningful discussion, and leads to misguided policy and strategic planning aimed at addressing the issues. Our research indicates that opportunistic crime intersects with 'race' issues and what starts as petty crime can become racialized in any single incident. On the other end of the continuum there are outright 'hate crimes' where the main motivation is racism. Therefore, one of the main objectives of this study is to interrogate this argument based on robust evidence.

We also base our discussion within the broader policy context and discuss the growth of international students in Australia as a direct outcome of post-compulsory education and training policy reform implemented since the late 1980s. This reform has been central to a broader government social and economic policy response to globalisation and the wider effort to situate Australia competitively in an increasingly deregulated and competitive global trading market. Importantly, Australia competes with other OECD countries for a share of international student enrolments. The revenue generated by fees and other expenditure now represents Australia's third largest export industry that effectively subsidises domestic education and training infrastructure. Similarly, we examine the issues surrounding the safety of international students, primarily from the subcontinent and from China, and what that means in terms of immigration policy. Given Australia's immigration policy history that has been heavily biased to maintaining a 'white Australia' until relatively recently, the large-scale immigration of international students from Asia represents a major shift in the cultural and ethnic fabric of the local population. The growth of the Indian population in Melbourne is particularly important.

Section Two discusses the relevant literature that informs our understanding of the issues of violence against international students. First, we clarify the term 'community safety' and our understanding of this as being a concept that is not limit in relation to broader community context and as one central element of wellbeing. Community safety is about the extent to which people feel safe and free from fear in going about their public and private lives. The degree to which this is the case is directly shaped by the broader set of social, economic and environmental conditions. These conditions include such dimensions as a sense of 'belonging' within the community, the quality of connections with other people, the quality of public infrastructure such as public transport and so on. Within this framework, incidents of violence are understood as one outcome of a broader social context that fails to ensure community safety.

In Section Three, we review the literature on ethnicity and race as fundamental in shaping identity, social organisation, social relations and in characterising global migration flows. The role of ethnicity and race is also enduring and central in explaining social conflicts both locally and globally. While in Australia, there is a legislative framework in place aimed at the elimination of racism and race-based discrimination, these measures are limited in scope and effectiveness. We also argue that in some measure, the complaints based nature of the Australian legislative framework contributes to the phenomenon of 'racism denial'. By this, we refer to the deeply embedded cultural discomfort in identifying racism and the ways in which the actual nature of racism is rendered invisible. This denial operates to support durable social processes of racialisation, and defines patterns of dominance and marginalisation based on race. Such divisions are understood as underpinning the emergence of 'hate crimes' that are commonly perpetrated by those within the dominant group, who themselves are excluded and marginalised. In essence, our assumption is that racism is embedded within social organisation and that there is a racial dimension to all social interaction. How this plays out, however, is complex, context specific, and also shaped by a range of other dynamics including class, gender, religion, environment and other factors that operate to shape individual behaviour and social relations.

Following from this, we review a growing body of literature on the international student experience that seeks to understand why international students choose Australia as a destination and what their

experiences are post arrival. We discuss how there is mounting evidence to challenge a number of commonly held perceptions of international student motivations and behaviour. These include the notion that international students are primarily motivated to study in Australia in order to gain permanent residency, that international students are predominantly from wealthy backgrounds, and that they are resistant to mixing with the local community and prefer to interact 'amongst themselves'. A further common assumption is that international students commonly place themselves at risk by behaviours that leave them vulnerable. There is mounting evidence to show that such perceptions are largely misrepresentative of the complexity and diversity of student motivations, characteristics and experiences. The reasons that international students choose Australia as a destination is driven by a range of considerations including being able to undertake a particular course of study, academic standing, and other issues such as perceived safety beyond opportunities for permanent residency. Similarly, students come from a diversity of backgrounds and the cost of living in Melbourne is a major challenge for many. Other studies also show that international students widely identify a lack of opportunity to meet and mix with local residents and that student experience is enhanced by this contact if available. At the same time, international students face a range of constraints and issues that domestic students do not have to face to the same degree. This includes difficulties in finding affordable, convenient and quality accommodation, employment with safe and fair conditions, and being reliant on public transport that is considered unsafe particularly to use at night. As discussed in detail in Section Three, studies consistently show that a large proportion of international students are impacted by racist behaviour and one study shows that international students experience higher levels of anxiety than the general population. Combined, the mounting evidence is that, while experiences are diverse, contextual and complex, overall, international students face their daily lives in Australia under different conditions than the local population and there are a range of issues that impact on their safety in ways that are not experienced to the same extent or in the same way as the domestic student population.

In Section Four, we report on how we have embarked on this research choosing a mix of methods to gather both extensive and intensive insights into the student experience. Beyond the literature review and media analysis discussed above, we undertake a mix of methods include an on-line student survey and 29 in-depth interviews with stakeholders including government, student, education and community representatives. We also conducted 35 interviews with international students from India, China and other nationalities. We acknowledge a range of limitations in the implementation of these methods and we make no claim that it is possible to generalise from the results. At the same time, the research captures the views and opinions of a wide representation of people who have direct experience of the issues of concern to the research and involvement with policy development and strategic planning in improving international student safety. We report on these findings in Section Five and there is some strong resonance in our findings with other emerging research.

All of the data was gathered to inform responses to four key questions. These include:

- What are the safety issues facing international students?
- What are the causes of the violence against international students?
- What are the impacts of the violence on international students and the broader community?
- What are the responses necessary to maximise safety for international students?

Drawing on evidence gathered, this section responds to each of these questions in turn.

6.2 What are the safety issues facing international students?

The findings from this study revealed highly diverse views on what is understood as the key safety issues for international students. At one end of the spectrum, the understanding was that 'there is not a problem' and that the issues of reported violence are blown out of proportion by the media. The other extreme is the view that international students are highly vulnerable to violence and exploitation as an outcome either of socio-economic disadvantage and situational vulnerability, or of racism that is deeply embedded in the broader political economy. Views expressed were highly dependent on the situation of the various groups who contributed to the research and one of the most striking features was the clear division between locals – both stakeholders and students – compared with international students. The dominant perspective of stakeholders, in particular, was that international students are no more or less at risk than domestic students (with the exception of the police stakeholders, a majority of whom tended to feel that international students were slightly less safe for reasons discussed in Section 5 above) and that issues of violence can be largely explained by international student behaviours that placed them at risk (again with the exception of the police, who in addition to this added offender considerations into the mix). In contrast, international students widely report not feeling safe in a range of circumstances, that Melbourne is not as safe as they expected and that they go to great lengths, to the extent that institutional constraints allow, to protect their safety, minimise their visibility in public and put in place a range of self-protection strategies – in particular the avoidance of travelling on public transport at night.

While not all international students feel unsafe, evidence from the student survey and interviews suggest that most students have either directly experienced issues ranging from verbal abuse to violence either directly or were close to someone who has experienced this. Certainly, all students identify international students, particularly Indians and Asians, as less safe than locals. While we have documented numerous accounts of incidents that were clearly serious threats to physical safety, more generally, international students have experiences that they claimed were not serious enough to report, but were nonetheless identified as a threat to safety. Moreover, international students were much less likely to report incidents that threaten safety than domestic students because they didn't think they would be taken seriously, they didn't know whom to report the incident to or they didn't think that anything could be done

about it. Comments from both the survey and the international student interviews also documented cases where students didn't feel they had the right to complain to authorities as non-citizens, and that they felt unable to assess dangerous situations as they were unsure about cultural norms of behaviour. This was particularly the case when alcohol was involved in the situation. There were also cases where students reported feeling unable to 'name' the issue or have the language to ask for help. This was not necessarily related to English language competence but rather feeling ill-equipped and unconfident at a time of stress to name the issue or ask for help.

These views and experiences were clearly unaligned with the majority of stakeholders who were of the view that most international students have a good experience in Melbourne, that Melbourne is as safe as can be expected for a big cosmopolitan city, and that with some notable exceptions, issues relating to international student safety could largely be solved by a change in behaviour on the part of the students themselves. Disturbingly, a number of stakeholders expressed views that suggested bemusement that international students should be surprised that they experienced threats to their safety. One comment was that, '… Australians have always picked on new arrivals…' Similarly, another suggested that Indian students should '…hit the gym', and likened international students to vulnerable animals '… in the jungle.' The inference of such comments is that as newcomers, they should expect to be, at best, 'picked on' and at worst, devoured, unless they defend themselves by immediately adapting to the norms of the prevailing culture. The police, however, were consistent in their refusal to blame students themselves for their victimisation, although they shared the view that international students should take some responsibility for their own safety and could develop better strategies around situational awareness to reduce the likelihood of becoming the victim of crimes against the person. Nevertheless, the police view in general was that the community as a whole shares a collective responsibility for community safety across governments, education providers, police, local communities and international students themselves.

This 'disconnect' between those responsible for policy, planning and the delivery of educational services, and those who are reliant on the systems and structures in which they study, is perhaps the most striking of the findings and of particular concern in terms of developing better responses to improving the safety of international students. This research suggests that those who are in positions of power to affect the conditions of international students, are out of touch with the daily lived experiences of international students, and are unaware of the need to identify problems of safety as experienced by international students. This gap in interpretation is resonant of the kind of racialisation processes that are discussed in Section Two, where unequal divisions between ethnic and racial groups are perpetuated as much, if not more, by institutional inaction as they are by directly discriminatory practices. International students are saying, by their actions and accounts of their experiences that, at minimum, they feel less safe than they expected to be in Melbourne, if not living in fear. This is largely unacknowledged at least by the stakeholders interviewed for this study. This finding suggests the need for more research and monitoring of the international student experience, and greater opportunities for dialogue and communication between international students and those who provide the services.

Despite this obvious difference in understanding about the nature and magnitude of safety issues, there is clear agreement across the findings about where and when international students are most at risk. These include first and foremost, on public transport. Other factors that are both in themselves important but usually combine to created unsafe conditions include the night time in Melbourne and particularly in places known to be less safe than others - most notably the CBD, Footscray and St Albans. The wide use of drugs and alcohol – but alcohol use in particular, was widely identified as an important risk factor in creating unsafe situations. While these issues were often identified as a risk to community safety for all Melbournians and visitors to Melbourne, it was also acknowledged that international students are positioned as more vulnerable to these risks due to a range of socio-economic factors. These include a lack of private transport options, the relative absence of family and social networks and a shortage of affordable accommodations in areas of Melbourne considered safe. This vulnerability was borne out by the student survey and interviews in various ways. For example, a key response of international students to safety issues was to avoid going out at night – often at great inconvenience and stress.

There was also general acknowledgement that safety risks increase in line with ethnic and racial differences. The most common view expressed through the student survey was that Indians and Chinese were the student groups that are least safe although there was some wide recognition that safety risks overlapped with gender and religious issues. Those who wore clothing and symbols signalling that identified individuals as being Muslim and dark skin colour was also widely identified as a risk factor. Essentially, those who least resemble Anglo-Celtic norm were identified as at risk. This was a view shared by both stakeholders and students.

Finally, it was also broadly agreed by all of the groups canvassed for this study that the issues relating to community safety are complex. The international student body is highly diverse and each individual is situated differently according to a range of factors including country of origin, appearance, religion, gender, financial circumstances, course of study, friendship networks, age, language skills and even sheer physical fitness. Similarly, the community safety context is complex. Melbourne is a big city by any standards and education providers vary widely in terms of resources, student service infrastructure and conditions. Equally complex is the extent to which educational providers can influence the broader safety conditions for students. While educational institutions clearly are major stakeholders in relation to international student safety, they are only one player amongst many who influence the broader community safety landscape. As one stakeholder said in relation to the role of education institutions in community safety,

> *…we've got a responsibility to deliver a high quality education but also a rewarding social and cultural experience and a safe experience but we can only do the things within our charge. (Educational) Institutions … can't make trains safe. Can't alleviate housing shortages, but we're certainly prepared to do the things we can do in partnership with others.*

As such, one-dimensional responses to issues of international student safety are unhelpful in the context of this complexity and a coordinated response by all players is essential. Perceptions about the nature of community safety issues, however, overlapped with data about the perceived causes of violence against international students. We discuss this in the following section.

6.3 What are the causes of the violence?

As discussed in Section Two, a key focus of this research was to explore the causes of violence against international students and the extent to which violence is motivated by racism as against opportunism. This is largely in response to the polarised public debate that has arisen in response to the reported incidents of violence against Indian students in particular which we discuss in Section Two. In order to explore this, each of the research methods canvassed views and opinions about this issue as well as international student experiences of racism.

As reported in Section Five, there was a similar disjuncture about the causes of violence between the views and opinions expressed by stakeholders and international students. With some exceptions, most stakeholders interviewed attributed the causes of violence primarily to opportunism and believed that perpetrators of crime are alienated uneducated young men who seek to inflict violence against others either for 'fun', in order to steal property, or to develop enhanced reputation, 'street cred' or status amongst their peers. A key theme arising from the interviews was that socio-economic and situational factors contribute to international student vulnerability to violent crime, meaning that international students were more likely to be 'in the wrong place and the wrong time'.

However, police interviewees also contributed the view that at least some of this violence is what they termed 'expressive' – that is, young male offenders who themselves feel alienated or disenfranchised are trying to say something through the commission of violent crimes against others. This may reflect the offender's own sense of social disadvantage or powerlessness, and needs to be understood in tandem with the focus on opportunism and elements of ethnic and racial targeting in such attacks. Moreover, the image of the hardened, 'alienated' young male offender is at odds with police knowledge on offender profiles specifically in relation to international student attacks. One Victoria Police member commented,

> *A lot of the perpetrators of these crimes are sort of cleanskins, they're young, they're adolescent, they don't tend to have a record, and they're not necessarily hardened criminals.*

Student naivety and behaviours were also a major contributing factor in crimes against international students. Similarly, most domestic student respondents to the student survey attributed the violence to opportunism.

In contrast, the evidence from the student survey and interviews suggest otherwise. Key findings to support this included that almost half (49.9%) of international student respondents report experiencing threats to safety that have a racist element including verbal abuse, physical intimidation, robbery or physical attack. Disturbingly, a small proportion of domestic student survey respondents expressed vehemently racist views in relation to international students lending some support to the international student perspective. International student interviewees also attribute racism as the most important cause of violence and that racist abuse as being part of the violent incident and that robbery was a minor factor in the reported crimes. A theme that arose particularly from the international student interviews was also that police responses to crime against international students were widely perceived as being inadequate, unhelpful and/or incompetent. There were also claims of directly racist treatment by Police. It was also clear that international student survey respondents were much more reliant on official sources of support when their safety is threatened than their domestic student counterparts.

To reiterate from the earlier discussion, this research does not identify definitive conclusions about the causes of violence, nor would we suggest that there is one simple explanation. Rather, our understanding is that the causes of violence are highly complex, situational and are an outcome of the combination of individual circumstances combined with broader social processes. Similarly, we are aware of the limitations of available crime data and the extent to which the role of racism and ethnicity can be attributed to any one case. Addressing these gaps in data is an important priority in itself. At the same time, the disjuncture between the views of stakeholders and domestic students on the one hand, and the experiences of racism reported by international students on the other, fit with theoretical explanations of the workings of racism. In particular, theories of 'racism denial' are resonant here. There is no evidence of explicit discrimination on the part of the decision makers and the service providers we spoke to (although examples of 'race hate' were expressed by some domestic students). Rather, there was a wide inability to recognise that racism is a factor in the broader community safety context. The dominant view is that issues of violence are an outcome of the interrelationship between broader social pressures and the behaviours of international students themselves. In contrast, evidence reported by international students suggests that their lived experience includes dealing with racist threats and that this has an impact on their capacity to feel safe. This is effectively unacknowledged by many of the stakeholders.

As discussed earlier, racism denial is elusive and difficult to quantify. There is a dearth of research on the experiences of targets of racism. To reiterate, racism denial is actually often seen as common sense, benign in its intent and shaped by context. There is no simple expression of racism denial but rather a combination of often contradictory practices, expressions and beliefs that play out differently, with different effects in different contexts. Evidence of this belief in 'common sense' and contradictory beliefs were found throughout the stakeholder interviews. While most stakeholders were clear in their concern for international student safety, a key theme was the belief that the victims became targets due to their youth, appearance as appearing unable to defend themselves or that they took risks that made them vulnerable. At the same time, contradictory views that could be interpreted as racist in themselves were expressed by the same interviewees. Some of the comments made by stakeholders were of particular concern given that they express a view that is tolerant or accepting of a degree of violence on the basis that it has always happened. More generally, however,

the views that contribute to racism denial were those that were based on stereotypical views of international students and their behaviours such as,

> *…What's happening is they tend to stay with and live with people from not just the same state, but the same village. They're not mixing outside, they have very little knowledge of what life is really like in Australia.*

This quote is intended as an example of the difficulty in 'pinning down' the construction of race denial and its effects. The statement is no doubt true in some places, and there was no intent on the part of the interviewee to be patronising or racist. At the same time, the beliefs underlying this statement fail to account for the diversity of students and their circumstances, the reasons why it might be the case that some international students might 'stick together' and the potential role that students' relative sense of safety in Australia might play in their clustering together. It also emphasises the responsibility of students to 'make an effort' rather than highlighting the role of perpetrators or the conditions in which violence arises. The role of fear or a sense of exclusion from the local environment is likely to at least partly explain why some students choose to live with people they know from their home country and the literature discussed in Section Three as well as the evidence gathered through the student survey would support this. Results from the student survey showed that more than one-third of student survey respondents (36%) believed that Melbourne was 'somewhat unsafe', 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe' for international students. This suggests that a large proportion of international students fear for their safety – a suggestion that is further supported by the international student interviews where one quarter of the interviewees had been the victim of violence and a further 32 per cent had been close to someone who had experienced violence. Of more direct relevance to this question, is that the lived experience of racism is clearly a major contributing factor to this fear. As reported earlier, more than one-third (34%) of student interview respondents who said they had experienced threats to their safety said that there was a racist element to that threat.

What this evidence clearly indicates is that, while we cannot be definitive about the causes of all violent crimes that have occurred, racist motivations are an important dimension of why violence occurs. More broadly, racism impacts on the extent to which international students feel safe whether or not they have been victims of violence themselves. As discussed, however, violence is situational and the socio-economic conditions in Melbourne create the context for potential violence. While not articulated to the same degree by students, a key theme in the stakeholder responses was about the extent that housing shortages, strains on public transport infrastructure and labour market conditions generated key risk factors for international students. A shortage of rental accommodation and rising house prices mean that there is currently an acute shortage of affordable housing in Melbourne (Condon 2009). This is particularly the case in the inner city where educational institutions are largely concentrated, meaning that international students are commonly forced into sub-standard accommodation. The alternative for many international students is that they live in more affordable areas with higher crime rates. Combined with international students' relative lack of private options for transport, international students are forced to travel by public transport, often in areas that are less safe and at times that are more risky. Employment options open to international students compound these pressures with much part time employment being of a casual and part-time nature in the hospitality, transport or services industries – much of which requires work at night. These pressures combined were widely identified by stakeholders as impacting on international student safety and have similarly formed a basis for much of the government response detailed in Section Two.

There was agreement across all non-police respondents, however, about who the perpetrators of violence are. Perpetrators of violence were consistently identified as being groups of young, uneducated and alienated men. Police interviewees, however, suggested that without being able to draw on specific data about offenders from the Victoria Police database, they could not speak with certainty about offender profiles other than to say that they were overwhelmingly male. Police officers did stress, however, that anecdotal reporting suggested that where groups of offenders were responsible for assaults against international students, there was no evidence of ethnic or racial homogenisation within the groups, with the majority being mixed-race, mixed-ethnicity groups of offenders across the cultural spectrum, sometimes including but definitely not limited to young male offenders of Anglo-Celtic background, and sometimes not including Anglo-background youth at all.

As with the police observations on this issue, there was broad recognition by stakeholders in general that perpetrators of violence are often from multi-ethnic backgrounds. Youth and community service providers also indicated that those who were known to be involved in crime are often relatively new arrivals to Australia themselves and had grown up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The role of territorialism in the violence was also acknowledged by some stakeholders. More widely, the role of alcohol and drugs in making Australians 'crazy' was also acknowledged, particularly by international students and in relation to violence that occurs in the CBD.

The data gathered through this research is limited in what it can say about identifying offenders and what their motivations are. Accounts of violence from international students is also sketchy in relation to the identity and motivations of attackers however the role of 'difference' was identified as important by a number of the interviewees. As quoted earlier, the view of one international student was that,

> *Maybe some bad guys are trying to turn into [target] different races. They are trying to start [target] international students who are studying here or they think that may be international students do not belong here. Or they think that the society is being ruined by or interrupted by international students. (Chinese male university student, 25 – 29 yo)*

This view about the significance of the difference is an important consideration, particularly in light of the historically unprecedented entrance of Indian and Chinese students to Australia. As discussed in Section Two, this migration mix represents a major shift from previous waves of migration which has been dominated by white European waves of migration. Beliefs that Indians and Chinese are 'taking over' may be common and as a group, international students from these countries are highly visible due to physical, racial and cultural characteristics that are

a major departure for the Anglo-Celtic norm. These factors are complex and as one community service provider observed, the reasons for hostility are historically specific and embedded in many factors including class, gender, race and geography. As she described:

> *...it is built into the geography of the place....I think the Indian students are the new group that are significant and are copping it now...Sudanese do well as migrants...but a different kind of thing happens in that international students...there is a tension about class as well...the Indian students are a highly aspirational, middle class and they want to achieve and education is a pathway for them and there is resentment for them... and then there is this group of men who are from poor and marginalised (backgrounds) and they think education is elitist and something that they attack...the tension is there.....there is a strong strain in Anglo working class culture of anti elitism and anti education...you think you are better than us... there is a thread of racism in that community...*

More broadly, however, the connection was made by contributors to this research between an increase in violence and broader social pressures. For example, one stakeholder talked about the congestion and pressure within the Melbourne CBD and the 'hot spots' generated by large numbers of young people in the city at clubs and venues.

Compellingly, one police officer spoke of his fears that:

> *We've got a generation [with which] we're going to have a real problem. And we're seeing it now in their teenage years with violence...and I think if you override that with the media's use of violence, in movies and things like that, and even video games, I think they become a little bit desensitised to [violence], and I think that there's a strong combination there. ... As they grow up and mature [from the 12-19 year old age group], hopefully there will be some changes. But I think we're going to see some very, very violent people coming out of this particular [youth] demographic as time goes on.*

Accommodation pressures were widely identified as a major factor with the high price of accommodation forcing international students to live in suburbs characterised by high levels of disadvantage. The same pressure results in the need for travel on public transportation in areas known to be unsafe. International students are more vulnerable as a result of the material aspects of life as they have to work late hours, catch public transport and live in less than optimum accommodation. Combined, there is evidence that international students become 'intruders' in areas where there is a high degree of social marginalisation amongst the local population and the literature on hate crimes is useful here. Moreover, international students, unlike domestic students do not come into a network of social supports such as family and community. As such they are more reliant on each other for social support, overcoming isolation and information. This has been interpreted as lack of participation and engagement with broader society.

Our view is that while there is evidence that there are clearly some people who commit acts of violence that are motivated primarily by racial hatred, the reasons why these acts are carried out are often more complex and need to be seen in the context of broader community power relations. As discussed earlier, singular incidents of violence cannot be seen in isolation from broader patterns of social and economic power relations. Importantly, the extent to which racist attacks can occur, as Hage (2002) puts it, is directly connected to the amount of 'breathing space' that government and culture allows. Hage (2002) suggests that one of the effects of incidents of extreme racism allows greater room for 'non-extreme racism' to flourish. That is that it is that the blame for racism can rest with a few 'bad guys' who are the perpetrators rather than examining the broader and embedded nature of racism that is institutionalised in broader and unequal social relations. The operation of 'racism denial' plays a role here. This research suggests the need for a greater interrogation of the role of racism in relation to crimes against international student safety as well as closer attention to the broader community conditions in which international students are living. For example, one stakeholder highlighted the dangerous conditions of one particular railway station that is well known as a place for drug-dealing and violence and is located close to where large populations of international students live and have to travel to work in jobs at night. Despite common knowledge that no-one is safe using this particular station, no government action had been taken to improve the conditions. As they described:

> *International students have to work . . .at times that are late at night... or they are studying late in town so they have to catch the train...anyone in their right mind knows that West Footscray station is not a good place at night...there are a lot of drug dealings going on and a lot of un-savoury characters are there at those times at night and it is damn scary...very scary – but these young people have to use it...the councils don't listen to improve it and in some ways the system doesn't care...they don't care about local residents and we don't shout enough about it and they certainly don't care about international students so they are kind of forced to be in particular places that are not safe...so they get attacked...*

A singular focus on marginalised youth as being responsible for racist violence will do little to change the conditions in which racist or ethnically-targeted violence is cultivated in the first instance. Such responses include the need for attention to public infrastructure as well as the more difficult work of changing community attitudes. Responses to violence must be multi-dimensional and require contributions from across government to respond.

Overall, the evidence from this research strongly suggests that racism is an important element of the causes of violence against international students. This is based on the experiences of international students which also align with the broader literature on race and racism and how this can erupt in 'hate crimes'. The forms in which racism manifests, however, is much wider than direct expressions of 'race hate'. It is as much about inaction and silence about the conditions and power relations that subordinate some groups over others. Recent intakes of international students from India and China are particularly vulnerable given their visible difference, the socio-economic conditions in which they must negotiate Melbourne and other differences such as class which is at odds with many population centres within Melbourne. The role of racism in crime is not widely acknowledged by stakeholders which contributes to a general silencing of the nature and significance of race and the incidents of crime that is generated by racism within the community. At

the same time, this one element of crime and the socio-economic factors including housing shortages, pressures on public transport and labour market conditions all contribute to situating international students as particularly vulnerable. In this light, violence as motivated by racism, as but one, albeit important, element of a cocktail of factors that produce safety risks.

The third central question we respond to is in relation to the impacts of violence. There are numerous impacts at different levels arising from our findings. These range from the effects of violence on victims, impacts on the broader international student population, impacts on the broader local community and impacts internationally.

The first and most clear impacts are on the victims of violence themselves. Through interviews with international students, we identify and discuss the reports of nine international students who have been victims of assault. For at least five of these students, the impacts have been traumatic and life-changing. Besides sustaining severe injuries including broken bones, lacerations, loss of vision and head injuries amongst others, the impact of these injuries have narrowed life opportunities including one person who could no longer pursue his professional career pathway of choice and another who felt compelled to return to India to receive the care necessary to treat his particular set of injuries. The effect of these assaults are also experienced by those immediately close including partners, housemates, children and other family members and these effects are emotional, financial and life-changing.

Less simple to identify are the effects of the violence on those who have not been directly affected but either have contact with those who have or have generally been affected by the extensive media coverage that the attacks have received. In Section Three, we review the literature on the impacts of racism on wellbeing which identifies a range of common psychological responses to the experience of racism. In brief, these include a responses such as anxiety, anger, hyper-vigilance, over or under-achievement, self-blame, self-harm or avoidance (Paradies 2006). We also review the current literature on student experiences which reveals that there are numerous issues that international students face including language acquisition and proficiency, social isolation and loneliness, inadequate finances and incomes, labour market and workplace discrimination, and experiences in relation to personal safety (Mazzarol, Soutar et al. 2001). Further, another recent study shows that international students experience anxiety at higher levels than the general population and that this is related to feelings of safety (ACPET 2009).

Findings from this research lend further support to other evidence that perceptions of safety affect individual wellbeing and there are a range of responses expressed to show that many students are deeply affected by threats to safety. The clearest indication of this is the extent to which international students adjust their behaviour to protect their safety. The vast majority of international student interviewees had changed their behaviour. The most common response was to avoid travelling at night, a response that was further supported by the student survey with more than half of all international students saying that they don't travel at night to protect their safety. For some, this was a response motivated by extreme fear. As quoted earlier some students feel unable to go out at all.

> *[N]owadays I feel so scared, so insecure. Just cos of the racism, just cos of the attacks. … I'm just feeling so insecure and I just can't go anywhere around because I'm not safe. (North Indian female private provider student, 25 – 29 yo)*

Others demonstrated hyper-vigilance in the protection of their safety and we earlier cite the example of one female student who goes to great lengths in public to disguise the fact that she is female, avoids eye contact and pretends she doesn't speak English in order to avoid potential conflict. More generally, anxiety and fear was expressed and as reported in Section Five, a major theme in the general comments provided by international student survey respondents were strong expressions about racism, government neglect, their fears or experiences and making appeals for change. There is also evidence from the student that many international students don't report threats to safety because they 'didn't think that anything could be done about it' or they 'didn't think it would be taken seriously', also as reported in Section Five. Open-ended responses from the survey also revealed that some international students did not believe that they have any rights to report crime given their status as non-citizens.

One of the obvious implications is the lack of trust in the police expressed by international students. Those who were victims of violence report an inadequate police response to the issues, say that reports of violence or theft were not taken seriously or that police behaviour was interpreted as being racist, inappropriate or unhelpful. A number of stakeholders, particularly those representing student associations or national groups, also suggest that international students have a high level of distrust of the police and a number of the stakeholders, including police themselves, identified that international students were frightened to approach police – either for fear of being found to breach visa conditions, because of homeland experiences of police or because they believe that they have no rights to complain. These barriers for international students are particularly important given international students' relative reliance on official sources for support and protection given the absence of family and social networks. Unlike most domestic students, and as indicated in the student survey, international students only option for support should an incident occur, is often official sources.

From the police perspective, which is clearly at odds with much of the reported responses above, the main barriers identified by Victoria Police in this regard revolve around the lack of understanding they feel international students may have about the role of police in Australia relative to their home countries, including the limitations of what police can and can't do; lack of understanding by international students about how the bail and justice systems work more generally in relation to arrests and offender release; cultural barriers about when it is appropriate to report crimes; concern, as noted above, that some international students bring their fear of police in the home country with them to Australia; and barriers to accessing services that Victoria Police tries to provide to international student victims of crime. One police officer who deals regularly with victims of crime following incidents of assault expressed frustration that despite concerted efforts to support international student victims of assault, the assistance is often not wanted or accepted:

So every morning when I go through the incident fact sheets, we ring every international student who's been assaulted and speak to them and we're not doing that with every victim of crime. ... [But] it's quite hard to offer support because sometimes it's very hard to get onto some of the people we're trying to speak to. The other point is that very, very few of the [international students] that we speak to want any other support or want anything and less, I would think, than other people we have contact with. We will ring them and say who we are....but when we explain what it is we're offering them it's rare to get anyone saying 'actually, I do want something.' ... 'No, I'm fine, thank you for calling' [tends to be the response to this contact] and it's rare that we have anyone want to take up anything.

While reports of fear, anxiety and powerlessness was not the case for all student respondents, these were key themes from the findings and a majority of the students canvassed through both the survey and the interviews expressed views about feeling fear and needing to adjust their behaviour. At minimum, almost all international student survey respondents report that Melbourne is not as safe as they expected – a finding that in itself has implications for wellbeing. What is particularly important about these findings is the extent to which the view that international students need to make a greater effort to mix with domestic students and the broader community. This was a view proposed by a number of the stakeholders and one that is widely put in public discourse. The fear generated by the attacks has contributed to changes in behaviour amongst international students that further prevent such interaction – limitations on travel and the freedom to go out at night clearly produces constraints on the extent to which integration between local and international students can occur.

The findings also suggest that there are broader impacts on community safety. One is the polarisation of views about community safety as discussed in response to the attacks on international students which both compounds as well as reflects social divisions on issues of community safety and racism. Official responses that effectively deny the role of racism also serve to heighten tensions as reflected in student protests and increasing international and local media press expressing concern about the safety about their citizens.

Perhaps most significant is the extent to which the attacks have shed light on what appears to be a trend of increasing violence in the community, as an outcome of broader social pressures including a rapidly increasing population, stress on public transport, housing shortages, patterns of alcohol and drug use that promote threats to safety and pockets of populations within the metropolitan region that are disadvantaged are all major factors identified as contributing to a decline in public safety. Coupled with this are international student reports of being unsupported by bystanders when becoming a victim of violence. Such reports reinforce the notion of Melbourne as being uncaring – again a response that arises when there are low levels of trust or sense of belonging – and are key elements of safe communities.

Finally, the findings also show the fear and anxiety that is generated internationally. International student interviewees highlighted the concern expressed by parents overseas and the media attention to the issues, particularly in India but also internationally, have given rise to real concerns. Given that the primary source of information in relation to choice of the destination for study is through friends and others who have studied, there is the potential that the violence will have ramifications in terms of future international enrolments and international relations.

Overall, the findings from this research show that the impacts of violence against international students have individual, community and international repercussions. It also highlights the extent to which international student safety is married with broader community safety issues and institutional problems such as inadequate public transport and general public safety risks have impacts that are racial in their dimensions. International students are particularly vulnerable to these problems with relatively limited options in terms of transport and options in receiving help or services. Government neglect or denial of the relationship of such problems to racism serves to deepen the problem. Rather, the general response has been to encourage international students change their behaviour to stay safe. The evidence from this study suggests that such responses are out of touch with both international student perceptions and behaviours.

6.4 What are the responses necessary to enhance student safety?

This final section concludes our discussion and addresses one of the key questions of posed by this research which is what needs to happen in order to maximise international student safety. In responding to this question, we are mindful of the high media profile given to the events surrounding international student safety and that this attention has continued, if not escalated over the course of undertaking this research. Opinion pieces, government actions and other research continue as daily news items and the following references are just a few that have appeared on the day of writing this section (AAP 2009; AAP 2009; Das 2009). Given the pace of this action, we are obliged to draw a line on this particular research due to sheer practical limitations.

In Section Two, we reviewed the range of actions proposed and/or implemented by all levels of government, education associations, community groups and student associations. The actions are diverse, have taken the issues of international student safety very seriously and are wide ranging in scope. Some of these actions such as those proposed by the Victorian Government (DIIRD 2008b), have been in development prior to the relatively recent escalation of public concern and debate over the years. More recent developments have been an urgent response to this escalation and an attempt to protect harmonious international relations particularly with India and China and minimise the impact of the issues to future international student enrolments in Australian education and training programs. A major theme of the actions has been to reinforce the image of Australia as a safe place to live (COAG 2004; Flitton, Jackson et al. 2009).

Recommendations proposed by government are broad and have implications across government agencies including the police, education

authorities and providers, immigration authorities, community services and ethnic community associations. In general, we are highly supportive of such actions and the speed at which actions are taking place. As discussed in Sections Five and Six, the findings of our research identify the necessity for such wide ranging actions due to the extent to which issues of community safety are intrinsically a cross-sectoral concern. Public transport, local government planning, community policing and crime prevention, better knowledge of offender motivation, culturally appropriate victim support, education provider regulation, student welfare services, immigration services, housing policy and so on, are all important sectors that need to contribute to enhancing international student safety. Given the extent of such planning and recommendations, we do not intend to duplicate recommendations that are already in process within the public policy arena and that we implicitly support. For example, the general thrust of the Victorian Government's plan to improve communications, orientation, services and support to international students are important initiatives that we endorse (DIIRD 2008b). Similarly, increased funding and efforts by Victoria Police in expanding multicultural operations, pro-active community policing initiatives and increased surveillance of areas identified as dangerous are also welcome and important responses (Victoria Police 2009a). Given this context, we limit our discussion to those areas of concern that have been identified through the evidence gathered and what this reveals in terms of apparent gaps in policy, planning and research. As identified by this research team, the central priority for policy development and strategic planning rests first and foremost on naming, exploring and addressing racism and that this is the framework from which strategic action must flow. Firstly, this includes the need for recognition, action and research on racism. This is the starting point from which to consider policy directions that impact on the various authorities that contribute to the community safety landscape. In this context, the following section starts with a discussion on racism and why there is a need to be explicit about its existence and implication. We go on to discuss the broader ramifications for different sectors.

Addressing racism

Throughout this report, we have explored the extent to which crimes against international students are motivated by racism as opposed to opportunism. This attention is partly in response to polarised public debate characterised by a clear element of 'racism denial' which seeks to portray Australia generally, and Melbourne in particular, as a city characterised by multiculturalism and one that is tolerant and accepting of diversity. As such, crimes are identified as opportunistic rather than racist in intent. At the same time, there are contradictions within the argument. For example there are those who say that Australian culture has a tradition of 'picking on new arrivals'. Others claim that ethnic communities themselves are racist, therefore legitimising racism as 'normal' or 'natural'. The claim that Australia is safer than the USA or the UK is also a further justification of the view that Australia, if unsafe, is so within acceptable parameters (AAP 2009).

In Section Three, we provided an overview of the theoretical literature of racism denial and we argue that the claim that violence is largely opportunistic is in itself a form of 'racism denial'. Belief in such a view allows 'breathing space' for inaction on racism and allows authorities and the general community to ignore the experiences of those who are different from the Anglo-Celtic norm and the various forms of exclusion that such ignorance generates. Specifically, it disguises the fact that international students have different needs to domestic students. Attention to those needs should be central in the delivery of educational services as opposed to being an adjunct to a system that is essentially designed to serve a domestic training system (Anderson 2005).

As discussed above, our findings are clear that experiences of racism, both direct and indirect, are common for international students and the extent to which this occurs increases with difference from the Anglo-Celtic norm. As such, we emphasise that not all international students experience direct forms of racism. The extent to which students are affected depends on individual circumstances and characteristics. Skin colour and religious difference are central to this vulnerability combined with gender, class background and other factors such as place of residence, course of study and employment status and type. Such a view is supported by the views expressed through the student survey as discussed in Section Five. Our research also captures the direct manifestations of this which predominantly includes verbal abuse or more subtle forms that are difficult to name or identify. Cold treatment when being served in shops or 'just a look' were forms of racist threats that international students named but said that they didn't report because it 'wasn't serious enough', were identified by half of the international student survey respondents. We also documented experiences of international students who were victims of assault and the racist elements of these attacks were also clear. The impacts of these crimes are severe, life-changing and far reaching.

From the same perspective, we also argue that more broadly, a lack of acknowledgement on the part of a policy makers, authorities and associations, about the safety issues that affect international students is also a form of indirect racism. As discussed above, one of the most striking findings of our research is the 'disconnect' between stakeholders and international students. The major outcome is an emphasis on the part of authorities and other representatives on the need for international students to change their behaviour and to avoid risks. Further, the need for students to make a greater effort to integrate with the local community is also a point of emphasis. Our findings suggest that such an emphasis effectively misses the point. International students do take steps to protect their own safety and the conditions in which they must negotiate Melbourne mean that they have different needs and vulnerabilities. Ignoring such differences is a form of racism in itself.

Specifically, we argue that there is a need to name and identify racism in all of its manifestations. This means acknowledging that there is a problem and that this is structurally embedded. We also agree with the notion that to do this has important ethical dimensions given that international students have been courted so thoroughly and that their economic contribution to the Australian economy is so significant and relied upon by the education and training sector and the broader economy (Davis 2009). We argue that government in particular, but those that contribute to policy making context more generally, need to position themselves as advocates in the elimination of racism rather

than denying its existence, which only serves to disguise and deepen the problem. What this means for different sectors varies and we make no claim that our suggestions here are exhaustive. The aim is to highlight some of the major strategic implications.

Education and Training Providers

The key implication of naming racism in the provision of education and training services is greater recognition that the needs of international students are different from domestic students. As discussed, the current system is essentially designed around the needs of the domestic education system (Anderson 2005). While many strategies to improve services and the student experience have been proposed, and we aware that there are many institutions that exemplify high quality practice in relation to supporting the needs of international students, the following recommendations are made as central principles and practices in education and training provision:

- As part of the institution planning process, ensure comprehensive and regular monitoring and understanding of student characteristics, needs and experiences. This monitoring should be inclusive of understanding the characteristics of students by ethnicity, race, gender, employment and the broader characteristics that are relevant to safety such as mode of travel, accommodation and type of employment. Such monitoring should include both qualitative and quantitative methods that allow tracking of issues, problems and strengths in relation to the student experience. It also should allow for identifying issues relating to racism, and how this impacts;
- This research should continuously inform the development of student welfare and educational support services in recognition that the student body is dynamic and changing with changing demographics and broader conditions. Such services also need to recognise the complexity of student wellbeing and safety and the limitations of 'one-off' strategies such as DVDs on safety or social activities. In isolation these strategies are only relevant to segments of the student body and are only partial responses to much broader community safety issues as discussed throughout;
- Reinvestment of international student fees into support services for international students needs to be a central component of institutional budgeting processes. How this money is reinvested should be informed by student needs analysis described above;
- Evaluate and improve existing practices that impact on the safety of international students including campus security measures, transport options and time tabling that forces travel at night;
- Also informed by student needs analysis, review and implement approaches to cross-cultural communication for teaching, administrative and student services providers to better respond to international student needs and the characteristics of the particularly institutional international student mix;
- In line with broader recommendations made by government, opportunities for engagement with domestic students and local communities are an important dimension of the suite of strategies aimed at cultivating networks and a sense of belonging.

Policing

The role of the police is of obvious and central importance in relation to community safety and the prevention of violent crime. As discussed in Section Two, we also note the serious concern expressed by Victoria Police, the extensive actions proposed and implemented and the expansion of resources to better respond to multiculturalism and issues that particularly impact on international students. We particularly endorse responses that stress greater consultation with communities, improving police responses to international student issues and increased surveillance of known areas of risk. The evidence gathered through this research, however, indicates some clear priorities in terms of addressing both the actual incidence of crime as well as the vicarious fear and distrust that has been generated by attacks on Indian students. These include:

- Improve the evidence base that will enable a greater understanding of offender patterns, profiles and motivations surrounding assaults and violent robberies targeting international students. The police have identified the need for further research in this area and improved data capture that picks up more finely-grained information about offenders as well as about victims. This will enhance the capacity of the police to develop and share more precisely informed strategies for crime reduction and prevention and enhanced community safety for international students.
- Implement a complaints mechanism specific to the needs of international students. This complaints process should be widely communicated to international students, especially in regard to its availability and operation;
- Review multicultural police practices in light of international student reports on racist police responses and the continued incidence of crime with racial or ethnic elements. In particular, reconsider current approaches to and time spent on cross-cultural training for police and its impact on better responses to crimes against international students;
- In consultation with community leaders and associations from countries with the largest groups of international students and particularly India and China, undertake research on which to base a nuanced and culturally specific response to addressing barriers for particular student groups in contacting or engaging with police, including specifically the areas of victim support and providing follow-up on case progress for international students who are victims of crime.

- Develop well-articulated strategies in consultation with community representatives for educating international students about the roles, capacities and limitations of police in Australia, and provide further pathways for creating more realistic expectations about how police and the justice system operate in Australia and how international students can access these systems and rights.

Government

Again, we note the attention that all levels of government have dedicated to responding to and addressing international student safety issues. In general, we are supportive of these efforts and are limited in the extent to which we can make additional recommendations. This study does reveal a range of priorities that we wish to highlight:

- Improve the evidence base on which to plan for the improvement of community safety for international students. This includes expanding census data to be inclusive of international student characteristics. We also recommend that the learnings of this inform the implementation of a national study in order to more clearly identify the racist dimensions of community safety issues for international students and to further enhance the safety conditions of international students;
- There is a need for a coordinated and faster response to engage all stakeholders in the development of strategic responses to international student safety issues. This includes involvement across government sectors, community services, education providers and community representatives;
- Develop a national strategic approach for data-sharing and risk assessment exercises that allow police across the States and at the Federal level to exchange information, strategies and approaches to harm minimisation, crime prevention and enhanced community safety mechanisms for international students;
- As part of a coordinated whole of government response, address public transport safety issues and safety in public spaces;
- Review and enhance communication and information for students both pre- and post-arrival, with particular reference to regulating the role of migration agents in this context;
- Review regulation and auditing standards of the private education and training sector to ensure quality and accountability of services to international students.

Other sectors

While government, education institutions and the police, are clearly key stakeholders in responding to international student safety issues, there are several other sectors that also have a stake in the issues. Notable are employers and industry as well as ethnic communities. The following directions are suggested as being important strategic actions.

- Issues of international student employment need to be further investigated in their own right because they impinge on international student safety. This is an issue that should be identified and taken up in the first instance by the Victorian and the Australian governments and also addressed with relevant industry associations and unions. Key industries are those that employ high proportions of casual and part-time labour including the retail, hospitality and transport industries. In the first instance, detailed research is required to understand the extent of the issues as well as a review of industry practices in relation to racism and the management of diversity;
- Another issue that has been raised is the extent to which established ethnic communities can facilitate supporting international students. Consultations with key associations are recommended in order to assess the potential for this.

6.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this section is to conclude this research by responding to the key questions that shape the research design, implementation and analysis. Drawing on the research findings, we discuss the four key questions concerned with the nature of the safety issues for international students, the perceived causes of violence against international students, what the impacts of these issues are and what should be done about it. Throughout, we understand these issues as being framed by the broader social, historical and economic context and that the recent increase in violence against students is an outcome of broader social tensions and stresses. At the same time, we acknowledge the situational nature of the issues and limitations in making definitive claims about singular causes of violence.

In large part, we wish to address a wide polarisation of views about the causes of violence that have had the effect in simplifying the issues as being an outcome of either racism or opportunism. Our central argument is that there is a racist element to violent crimes that are symptomatic of broader community safety landscape that is also shaped by racial and ethnic divisions. We support this argument by drawing on the evidence gathered through this research. By ignoring the role of racism, the risk is a failure to identify a key dimension of community safety problems and misguided policy and planning. We also argue that such denial serves to deepen rather than address issues with racist dimensions. Not all crimes are motivated by racism but to underplay the fact that racism exists, misses the opportunity to present the image that Australian authorities and institutions are serious about ensuring the elimination of racism. As such, insistence that the crimes are opportunistic in character is counter productive to the broader effort to promote Australia as a safe and inclusive destination. We also argue that there is a clear ethical dimension in naming and addressing racism. The Australian Government and the education and training sector has dedicated enormous strategic energy in attracting international students. The obligation is to take safety issues very seriously and to understand and address all dimensions of the issues at hand.

We conclude by highlighting a number of strategic priorities for the educational and training sector, government and the police. A key emphasis is on generating a better evidence base about the characteristics and experiences of international students. There is a clear need for improved coordination across government, education providers, authorities and communities, and better communication mechanisms between all stakeholders. We argue the that diverse needs of international students must be understood as central to the post-compulsory education and training system rather than peripheral as has been the case to date.

In a globalised world, movements of people present challenges of working and living with people of different cultural backgrounds. The globally mobile are the workforce of the future. Although Australia is a culturally diverse society, with successful models of multiculturalism, the attacks on international students indicate that we cannot be complacent. Addressing safety issues for international students is a human rights issue but also goes to the fundamental question of how we deal with difference and diversity in the fabric of our society.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACPET	Australian Council of Private Employment and Training
AFAC	Australian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council
AL	Assessment Level (set by DIAC for student visa conditions)
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ALTEC	Australian Learning, Training and Education Centre
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development (autonomous agency within DFAT)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBD	Central Business District
CIT	Cambridge Institute of Technology
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CoM	City of Melbourne
CRC	Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW
CRICOS	Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students
DAP	Diverse Australia Program
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST	Department of Education Science and Training (now DEEWR)
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIIRD	Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development
ELICOS	English language intensive courses for overseas students
EMCRX	European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia
ESOS	Education Services for Overseas Students (Commonwealth government Act)
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia
FIAV	Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria
FISA	Federation of Indian Students of Australia
HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities
ICEPA	Institute for Community, Ethnicity and Policy Alternatives, Victoria University
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination
ICVS	International Crime Victimisation Survey

IDP	International Development Program Education Pty Ltd
IISAC	Indian International Student Advisory Centre (IISAC)
LGA	Local Government Area
MCTEE	Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment
MODL	Migration Occupations in Demand List
NIRV	National Inquiry into Racist Violence
NMIT	Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE
NPEAB	National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau
NUS	National Union of Students
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSC	Overseas Student Charge
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PR	Permanent residency (of Australia)
RDA	Racial Discrimination Act
RHA	Racial Hatred Act
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service (Australia)
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
UA	Universities Australia
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VMC	Victorian Multicultural Commission
VRQA	Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority
VTI	Victorian TAFE International
VU	Victoria University

ATTACHMENT 1: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions are grouped into four main areas: Background; Perceptions and Experience of Safety; Implications; and, Policy responses. The interviews are intended as semi-structured and the aim is to address the key questions that are listed below. They do not have to follow in order, rather, the bases need to be covered over the course of the interview. To facilitate, a summary of key questions are provided at the end of these guidelines. It may be useful to have the prompt sheet with you to scan while you are conducting the interview.

Background information:
The interviewer would explain the background to the study, purpose and nature of the interview. Also, all ethics considerations about privacy and researcher obligations would be explained and consent forms signed.

QUESTION 1:
Please tell me about where you are from and what you are doing in Australia.

(With this, ascertain age, gender, religion, country of origin, rural/metro, course of study, where they are living here, plans to return home, whether they have paid work here and what sort of transport they use).

QUESTION 2:
Perceptions of safety and experiences of violence

In general, how safe do you feel in since arriving in Australia?

Is your student experience more or less safe than you anticipated before you arrived in Australia?

When and where do you feel least/most safe?

Can you describe a situation when you felt unsafe or under threat and/or experienced violence?

Can you describe/have you witnessed incidences of violence that have involved international students? If so, how frequently have you witnessed such events?

In your view, do you think that international students are more vulnerable than others to violence or attack? Are their students from particular countries/ethnic backgrounds who are more at risk than others? Who are these and why do you think this is the case?

In your view, why do you think violence against international students occurs? Who do you think the perpetrators are and why do they do it?

QUESTION 3:
Implications of safety issues

If you have experienced and/or witnessed violence against international students, how has this affected you?

Would you recommend to others from your home country to study in Melbourne?

What are the reasons why/why not you would/would not recommend Melbourne as a place to study?

QUESTION 4:
Policy

What do you think needs to be done to prevent violence attack against international students?

Who needs to take action – by the police? The institution? The student community? Transport authorities?

Attachment 2: Student Survey

1. About the survey

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: Scoping Study on International Students' Community Safety. This project is being conducted by a team of researchers, Prof. Hurriyet Babacan, Dr. Gurjeet Gill, Ms. Joanne Pyke, A/Prof. Santina Bertone, A/Prof. Michele Grossman and Ms. Alex Bhatal from Victoria University. The purpose of the study is to investigate issues of safety and well being of international students. This has become particularly important following the recent attacks on Indian international students. It is urgent to investigate the reasons underlying these attacks and their effect on student populations so that the police,government and education providers can respond appropriately and on the basis of sound evidence.

The aims of the study are:
1. To explore international students' experiences of safety and well-being in private and public education systems.
2. To establish the extent of racially motivated verses opportunistic attacks and its effect on student safety and well-being.
3. To gather information from educational institutions and student bodies on students' expectation of Australian education experience.
4. To examine policies and responses of key stakeholders such as the police, public transport providers, key government and non-government agencies, education providers (both public and private), and student recruitment agencies.
5. To provide evidence to inform policy, community, education, and international students on safety and wellbeing.

The information gathered will inform strategies to tackle the existing issues and prevent similar problems in future. This survey is one of the methods that we are using to gather the information we need which may take from 5 - 20 minutes to complete. If you go ahead with the survey, you have given consent to the research team to use the information you provide.

Completing the survey is an opportunity to express your views about international students' community safety. The confidentiality of your response is assured. The responses will be received and analysed using 'survey monkey', and at no point will any of the research team be able to personally identify who has completed the questionnaires. The combined responses will be used for academic publications, research articles, conference papers and to develop recommendations to improve student safety. These recommendations will inform those with an interest in the safety and well-being of international students studying in Australian education institutions.

We do not expect any risks linked with taking part in the survey. However, it is possible that you may experience negative emotions about the recent incidents and relevant media debates. If you become distressed or show signs of discomfort, please terminate completion of the on-line survey. Only answer the questions you feel comfortable with. If you feel you need support after completing the survey you can contact: Dr Harriet Speed, Registered Psychologist, Ph (03) 9919 5412, Email: harriet.speed@vu.edu.au

2. Survey of students about community safety for international students

Please note that once you have completed the survey, you cannot go back. Please make any changes before you click 'done' at the end of the survey. This section of the survey asks for general demographic information that will be aggregated to ensure that we receive a wide representation of views on the issues related to this survey.

1. Are you:

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

2. In which country were you born?

3. What is your ethnic background? For example, Anglo-Celtic Australian, Italian, Chinese Australian, Singaporean Indian, Aboriginal Australian.

4. What languages do you speak? Please list from the language in which you are most fluent to the language in which you are least fluent.

First language
Second language
Third language
Other languages

5. In which age group are you?

- ◯ 15-18
- ◯ 19-25
- ◯ 26-35
- ◯ 36-45
- ◯ 46-55
- ◯ 56+

6. Are you?

- ◯ A local student
- ◯ An international student

7. What type of educational institution are you attending?

- ◯ Private college or other institution
- ◯ TAFE
- ◯ University

Other (please specify)

8. What is the name of the educational institution that you attend? (Optional)

9. What type of accommodation do you have in Australia?

- ◯ I live in my family home with my parents
- ◯ I live in my own house/apartment
- ◯ Student apartment operated by an educational institution
- ◯ Private rental apartment or flat
- ◯ Private rental house
- ◯ Room rental within a local household

Other (please specify)

3. Community Safety in Melbourne

This section of the survey asks about your perceptions and experiences of safety as a student in Melbourne.

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about community safety in Melbourne?

	Agree - disagree
I feel that Melbourne is a safe place to live	
I feel safe when using public transport	
I live in a safe part of Melbourne	
I feel safe at my workplace	
I feel safe when attending college or university	

Other comments

11. In the past twelve months, have you personally experienced any of the following when using public spaces such as shopping centres, public transport, streets or other places.

	Frequency
Verbal abuse	
Verbal threats	
Physical intimidation	
Physical attack	
Having something robbed that you were carrying such as a wallet or phone	
General Rudeness	

Other (please specify)

12. If you answered 'yes' to anything in Question 11, was there a racial, religious or cultural element to such behaviour? For example, racial taunts, name calling, demands that you return to your country.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

If yes, please describe

13. If you answered 'yes' to anything in Question 11, where did you experience this kind of behaviour?

- ☐ Using public transport
- ☐ In the street
- ☐ At shops or shopping centres
- ☐ At college or university
- ☐ At my home
- ☐ At my workplace

Other (please describe)

14. If you answered 'yes' to anything in Question 11, did you report the incident to anyone?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

15. If you answered 'yes' to Question 14, who did you report the incident to?

- ☐ The police
- ☐ A teacher or lecturer
- ☐ The student union
- ☐ A member of my community or church
- ☐ A health service provider such as a doctor or counsellor

Other (please specify)

16. If you answered 'no' to Question 14, why did you not report the incident?

- [ ] I was fearful about the consequences of reporting the incident
- [ ] I didn't think anything could be done about it
- [ ] I didn't know the perpetrators
- [ ] I didn't know who to report the incident to
- [ ] I didn't think I would be taken seriously
- [ ] Other, please explain

Other (please specify)

17. Do you use your mobile phone when you feel your safety is threatened?

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No
- ( ) I don't have a mobile phone

18. Who is the first person you would call on your mobile if you felt that your safety is at risk?

- ( ) Mother or father
- ( ) Husband/wife or life partner
- ( ) Brother or sister
- ( ) Other relative
- ( ) Friend
- ( ) Police
- ( ) 000

Other (please specify)

19. What other strategies do you use to protect your safety in public spaces?

- [ ] Travel in company
- [ ] Staying away from dark streets
- [ ] Avoiding public transport
- [ ] Not travelling at night
- [ ] Keeping valuables concealed
- [ ] Avoid carrying cash or valuables in public places

Other (please specify)

20. If you are an international student, what were your expectations about safety in Australia before coming here?

- ( ) I am not an international student
- ( ) I expected to be safe in Australia
- ( ) I expected Australia to be as safe as my home country
- ( ) I expected Australia to be unsafe

Other (please describe)

21. If you are an international student, how do you feel about your safety in Australia now?

- ( ) I am not an international student
- ( ) Australia is as safe as I expected
- ( ) Australia is about as safe as my home country
- ( ) Australia is less safe than I expected

Other (please specify)

22. Please rate how safe you think different groups of students are in Australia.

	Level of safety
Students generally	
Local students	
International students	

23. Are there international students who are from a particular country or background, such as Indian or Chinese students, who you think are less safe than other groups?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

If yes, please specify which group you believe is least safe,

24. If you would like to make a further comment about community safety of international students, please make it here. Thank you for your time in completing this survey.

ATTACHMENT 3: KEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Interview questions for the Scoping Study on International Students' Community Safety in Metropolitan Melbourne.

Key questions:

1. Do you believe that international students in Melbourne are safer, as safe, or less safe than other members of the general community?' Are there international students from a particular background – for example, Chinese or Indian – that are as safe, safer, or less safe than other members of these communities who are not studying here from overseas?' On what basis do you make this assessment?

2. 'In your view, do you think particular ethnic or racially-based groups of overseas students are especially vulnerable to violent crime? If so, which ones? What do you think are the main reasons for this (e.g. is it ethnicity or race only, or do age, gender, social status or other factors come into play as well?')

3. 'What do you see as the difference, if any, between an 'opportunistic' crime and one that is motivated by racial or ethnic factors?'

4. 'Can you think of incidents or circumstances that you would attribute to a combination of opportunism AND racial or ethnic motives? Please describe one of these if you can.'

5. 'What are we not doing now to promote safety and security for students from different cultures that you think we should be doing?'

6. 'What do you see as the main risks involved in the current climate, in which Indian students feel particularly vulnerable? For the students? For the police? For the general community?'

7. 'Do you feel that students themselves should have some role in enhancing their own safety? If so, what do you see as the key things they should be focusing on?'

8. 'In what ways do you think stakeholders can work together more effectively to share strategies and knowledge around reducing the risk of assault for international students?'

9. 'What do you see as the most important factor or factors that policy makers need to keep in mind when developing frameworks for promoting cross-cultural community safety and wellbeing?'

10. 'What is the best strategy, in your view, for promoting greater safety and security for overseas students from different cultural backgrounds who come to study in Melbourne?'

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