International Students and Crime: New Research Findings

Helen Forbes-Mewett[1]

1 Monash University, VIC 3800, Australia, Helen.ForbesMewett@monash.edu

International students and crime is an issue of major international concern. The issue impacts the lucrative international student market, international relations, host countries' reputations as tolerant and safe, and perhaps most significantly, the safety and security of international students as well as the broader population. This presentation offers an overview of the findings from a recent major study (Forbes-Mewett, ARC Postdoctoral Fellowship 2010-2013) that captures the first in-depth and comparative view of issues relating to the topic across Australia, the UK and the US. The resultant and recently published book begins with the important acknowledgement that most international students do not become victims of crime and fewer still are perpetrators. The findings, however, reveal stark differences between student support structures in Australia compared with the UK and the US. While crimes committed against and by international students have attracted a great deal of media attention, public commentary and debate in both sending and host countries, there has been little research that systematically describes, analyses and reflects on the phenomena. The study draws on 150 in-depth interviews conducted with international students and individuals whose work relates to international students across Australia, the UK and the US. The findings reveal a spectrum of crime from petty theft to kidnapping and murder, presenting vital knowledge about the victims and the perpetrators. Attention is drawn to a commonly held belief that most crime committed against international students is by members of their own national group. Furthermore, the study highlights the largely hidden phenomena of crimes against female international students as well as the strategies students use to stay safe. Examining the different approaches to student safety in host countries, I also consider the ways in which governments, higher education providers and police approach and implement their responsibilities for international student safety.