

NAVIGATING MENTAL HEALTH CRISES

Support Strategies for International Students

The Presenters



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The Agenda

01

**What are we
seeing?**

02

**Effective
strategies**

03

**Case study
analysis**

04

Resources



When it comes to these next four years, I definitely plan to lay low. **I don't have the courage to go anywhere.** I don't have the courage to leave the U.S. I don't have the courage to do any study abroad programs.

Ali Mohammad

Northwestern Univ. Class of 2028

"I was scared that I would get photographed or something, and that would cause a problem. My dad knows that I am very pro-Palestine, and he was like, be very careful, like you don't want to take any risks."

Anonymous International Student

who asked that her name not be used
for fear of jeopardizing her visa

What Are We Seeing?

Multiple federal policy changes affecting international students:



Trade Wars



Immigration
Crackdown



Cancellation of
Federal Funding



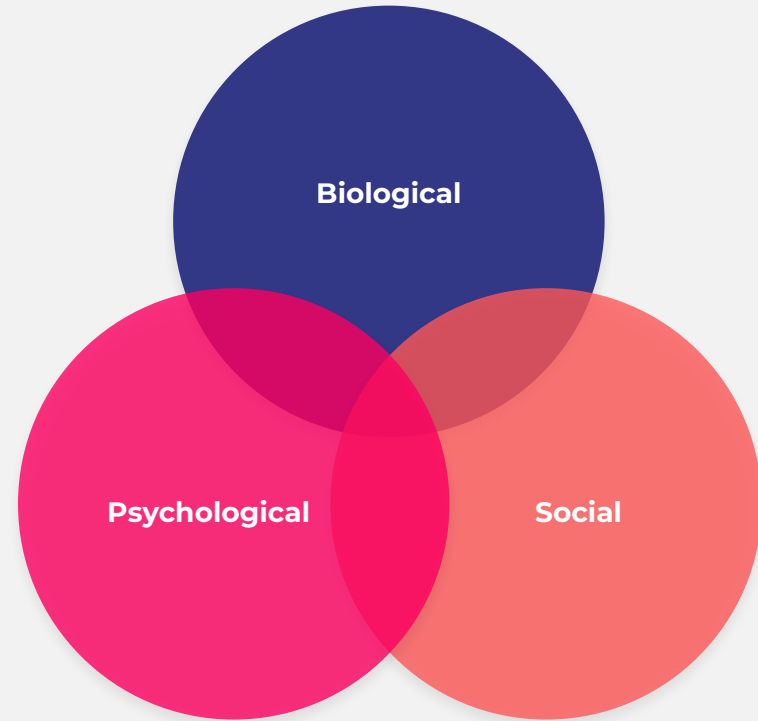
Revoking of Visas

Mental Health is Multifactorial

The **biopsychosocial model** teaches that different factors contribute to mental health.

These factors likely exert their influence through a common pathway of **stress** (and one's ability to **cope with stress**.)

A major modifiable contributor to resilience vs. stress is a **sense of belonging/community**.



Lost in Translation

Communication & Culture

Qualitative study of self-segregation motivation and frequency among 17 Chinese international graduate students at George Mason University.

I want to talk to Americans, but I have no confidence in my English. When I speak with native-English speakers, sometimes I can't understand them and it's very embarrassing. I never talk to them, just the Chinese in my classes. But when I do talk to Americans, I cannot answer deeply, just ask simple questions, answers and so on. **(Yuhan, 1st year graduate student)**

Americans don't really want to talk to me. I figured it must be the language barrier but it's cultural too. It's like they don't know what to talk about. I used to try but kind of gave up. This makes being friendly very hard to do for both of us. When they just see me, they don't know I am not from here but when I start to talk, they can hear that I am real Chinese and suddenly, they stop making eye contact with me and give up. The first year, I tried to become, you know, one of them. Then I realized that's impossible. **(Jian Hong, 3rd year graduate student)**

Communication and Cultural Challenges

- **Fundamental issue: Who “owns” the responsibility for effective communication?**
- **Written/conceptual language differs from spoken/idiomatic language**

The teacher begins class with instructions, "Okay, kiddos. It's time to put your thinking caps on, we have a lot of ground to cover today! Instead of using our devices, you're going to be left to your own devices. Yes, we're going old school and getting back to the basics with some paper and pencil activities. Remember those? Or are you all drawing a blank? I want you to work on some math problems so you can learn the multiplication tables by heart. If you practice long enough, I know you'll find that multiplication can be as easy as ABC."

- **Cultural references, jokes, figures of speech, etc.**

Difference in Values

In Eastern culture, we need to be humbled and polite but in America, people speak up, like stand up for themselves. So, if you are humble, that means you are weak here. So, sometimes [Americans] will take advantage of that. For a long time, I didn't feel I belonged here because of this but then I learned to do things their way. Now, I have friends, like from everywhere and my life is easier

Leming, 2nd year graduate student



Self-Segregation and Sense of Belonging

It's just easier to live with Chinese. We eat the same food and understand each other better. I have so many [sic] to deal with here in America in my studies, in my life. When I come home, I don't want that pressure.
(Benxi, 2nd year graduate student)

I feel like I'm still in China, kind of. All of my friends are Chinese, I speak Chinese all day except in class. Really, class is the only time I need to speak English. We help each other a lot and share a lot of information about, everything really. Maybe I could have done this on my own, maybe not. I'm very happy to have my Chinese friends and roommates **(Chexin, 2nd year graduate student)**

I can say I belong at MAU but I don't belong in America. We don't have any relationships [in America] except with out professors. **(Xi, 3rd year graduate student)**

Sometimes the way I am treated by Americans makes me think it was a mistake to come
(Mao, 1st year graduate student)

Intercultural Impasses

In this study, participants opted for self-segregation in their living arrangements, social circles and endeavors to create social support. The support gained from self-segregation remains mixed. This is regarding the differing, although predominantly positive responses, regarding international students' sense of belongingness in their academic lives, campus community, and their life in the United States.

Previous studies have contended that interaction with host nationals is beneficial to international students' well-being and academic success while studying abroad (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Pham & Tran, 2015; Rose-Redwood, 2013). It is the conclusion of this study that while there may be multi-faceted benefits to such interactions, it is by no means vital to the procurement of a sense of belonging. Considering the difficulty and frustration expressed by some of the participants in initiating and sustaining relationships with host nationals and international students of different nationalities, encouraging these relationships may be counterproductive to the development of social support and academic success. Thus, rethinking our perceptions of social support as being something only developed with host nationals, or the international community solely, may be warranted.

Case Study Analysis



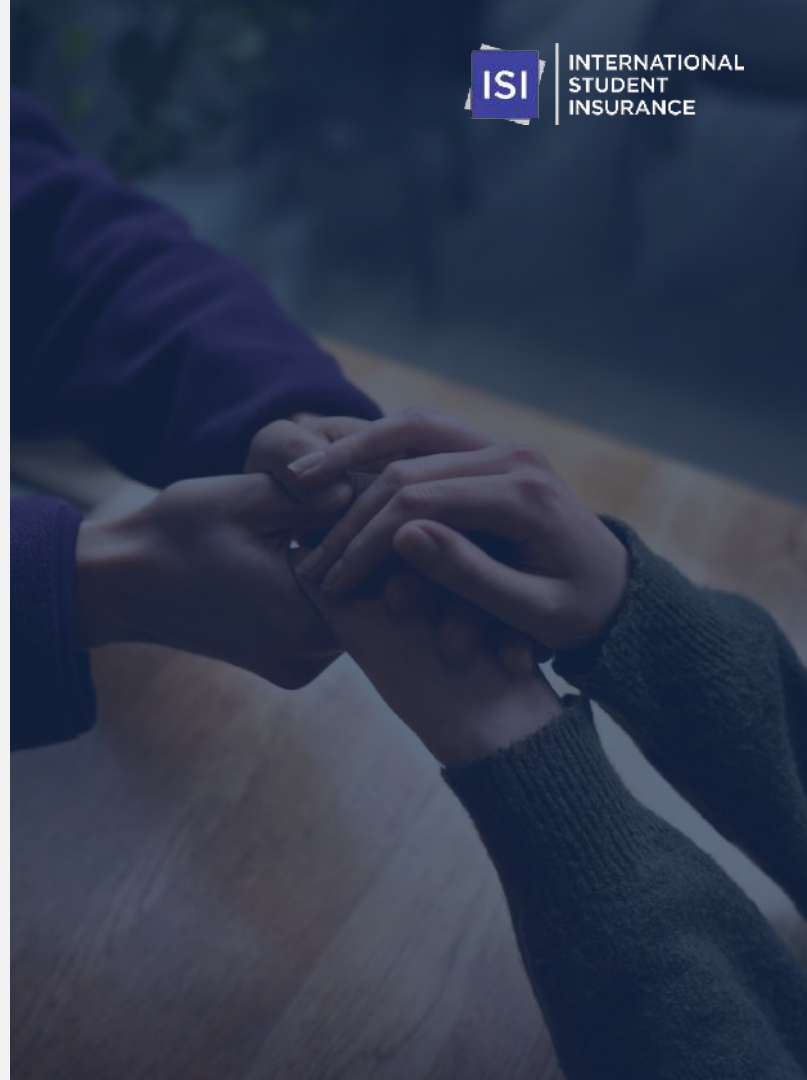
Ways to Support Mental Health



30-year-old Chinese international student, female, first year of the Master program, came to your office to get a travel signature for upcoming trip to go home for the winter break. In your conversations she disclosed that she experienced cultural shock after coming to the state, felt disappointed at their program because a professor she was interested in working with just left. She had difficulties in 2 classes, felt anxious to ask questions, concerned about language barriers, had a hard time to make friends, and felt isolated in general.

Early Intervention for Prevention

- Check in, listen, and build a trusting relationship
- Provide understanding and emotional support
- Encourage to connect with community of her choice (e.g., connecting to the Chinese Student Scholar Association, Cultural Centers, professional associations, student clubs)
- Encourage engagement and interactions
- Share resources (e.g., tutoring office, language corner, mentoring program, workshops on cultural adjustment)





Key Concepts in Prevention

- Connections matters
- Help to destigmatize mental health issues
- Encourage help seeking behaviors
- Initiate or join efforts to help building a sense of belonging
- Collaborate with mental health professionals to promote resilience

She came in your office a few months later to ask a visa related question. You noticed that she lost weights, looked tired, spoke slower than before, and cried in your office when you mentioned extra steps she needed to take to handle the issue. When you asked, she disclosed that she could not sleep, felt overwhelmed and scared. You recall her name was mentioned in the “students of concern” list because her professor expressed concerns over the “disappearance” from classes and gave no response to emails or phone calls.

Timely Intervention:

Support for Help Seeking

**Express
Concerns
and Care**

**Knowing
when to
Refer**

Consult

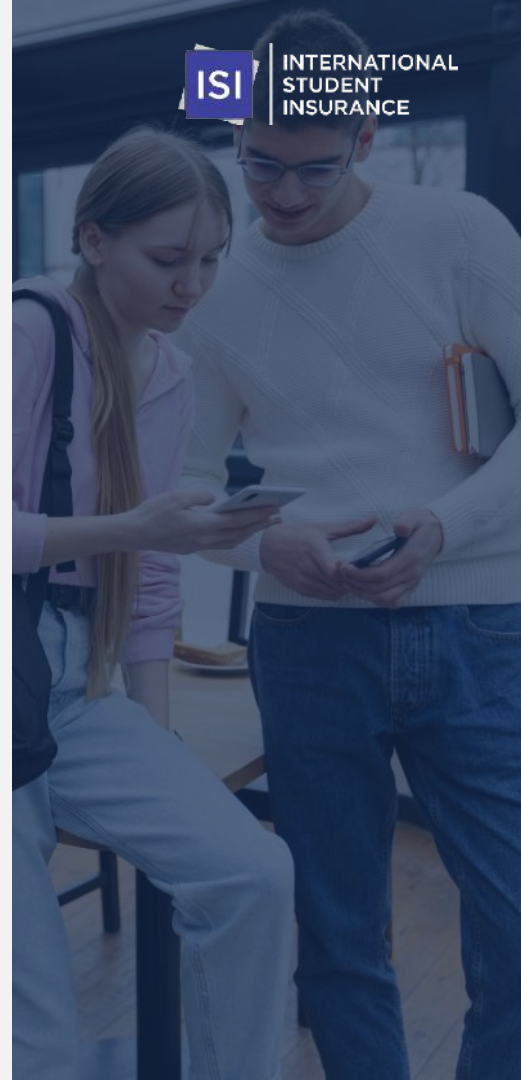
**Make
Appropriate
Referral**

Follow Up

When to Refer for Further Assessment

Observation on non-verbal clues & verbal reports from self and others

- Deterioration in personal hygiene or dress
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Noticeable change in mood or cognition (e.g., being disoriented)
- Appeared to be in distress
- Prolonged impairment in daily function
- Excessive absence
- Academic problems
- Social isolation and unusual behaviors
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Threats of harm to themselves or others



What May Help the Student to Feel Safer to Seek Help?

Acknowledging myths of mental health and help seeking, then providing alternative perspectives

Confirming the confidentiality

Emphasizing no record on the transcript



Making no assumption, simply asking the student about the preference for providers

Following up after the referral was made

Several months later, her housemate came into your office expressing a concern over her. The housemate mentioned that she talked about desperation and indicated some desire to hurt herself.



Know protocol to handle emergency



Consult with Mental Health Services on or off campus



Communicate concerns to appropriate offices/teams



Be resources for students, family, and colleagues on campus



Resources for student, family member, colleagues in other campus units

Urgent Intervention: Consult and Refer

Effective Strategies



Key Resources for Supporting International Students

International Student Hub

A central platform for programming, mentorship, and transition support, fostering student engagement and belonging.

Supporting Our International Students and Scholars Webpage

A resource with the latest immigration updates that affect our community, ensuring faculty and staff also stay informed on policy changes.

Know Your Rights Information

Guidance on legal rights in various settings.

Pre-arrival emails

Programs That Foster Engagement and Community

Global Buddies

A friendship-building initiative that pairs international and domestic students to promote cultural exchange and deeper connections.

Clubs in Partnership

Collaboration with student cultural organizations to provide further opportunities for community engagement and to share resources.

International Student Transition Program

Tailored support for new students, including orientation, intercultural competency training, and peer networking.

Other I-Hub Initiatives

Cultural celebrations (in partnership with Club Partners, Student Life, and Residential Life), Discover New York and the US, Alternative Breaks, Cultural Conversations.

Faculty and Staff:

Practical Ways to Support International Students

Resources to create more inclusive spaces on campus through professional development guidance and support

- Immigration 101: Essential Terms and Concepts for International Students
- Navigating Intercultural Communication: Building Effective Conversations with International Students
- Intercultural Communication and Story Circles
- Name pronunciation workshops

Regular engagement across campus to empower colleagues to connect students to key resources

- Meet and Greets
- Monthly emails to keep colleagues informed about key programs, dates, and deadlines for international students

Services & Resources

Health Insurance

What does your plan cover?

- Inpatient and outpatient mental health care
- Substance abuse coverage included
- Pre-existing conditions

How to use their plan?

- Where can they go (in-network v. out-of-network)?
- How much will they pay?
- What does the claim process look like

Telecounseling

- Some insurance plans include integrated telecounseling
- How do you use it? What type of communication goes out
- Is there language support available?

Hotlines & Services



Emergency Line 911



Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

<https://988lifeline.org>

Call 988



National Domestic Violence Hotline

<http://www.thehotline.org>

1-800-799-SAFE



It Gets Better Project (LGBTQ)

www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/get-help

1-866-4-U-TREVOR



Crisis Text Line

<http://www.crisistextline.org>

Text HOME or HOLA to 741741 to reach a live volunteer Crisis Counselor

Relaunch:

Mental Health Training Program

- **Powerpoint Presentation**

Professionally designed presentation to walk your students through the training

- **Video Content**

Two videos on mental health awareness and student perceptions on culture shock and stress from around the world

- **Student Handout**

A downloadable student guide take-away, or we can supply hard copies, to distribute to students

- **Interactive Activities**

Activities that encourage dialogue on many of the larger issues such as myths surround seeking help

- **Proctor Guide**

Complete guide to walk you or your staff through the training, including a full script and talking points





Key Resources for Supporting International Students

“Addressing Mental Health Issues Affecting International Students” Booklet

Mental Health Crisis of an International Student or Scholar

MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness

MindfulNYU

THANK YOU!

**Please complete this session
evaluation NOW!**

Or Save Link now and Evaluate later!

