

WAGE THEFT IN AUSTRALIA

*Findings of the National
Temporary Migrant Work Survey*

Laurie Berg and Bassina Farbenblum | November 2017



Exploitation of International Students in Accommodation and at Work: A Call to Action

SYMPLED Conference

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UNSW Law

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The National Temporary Migrant Work Survey

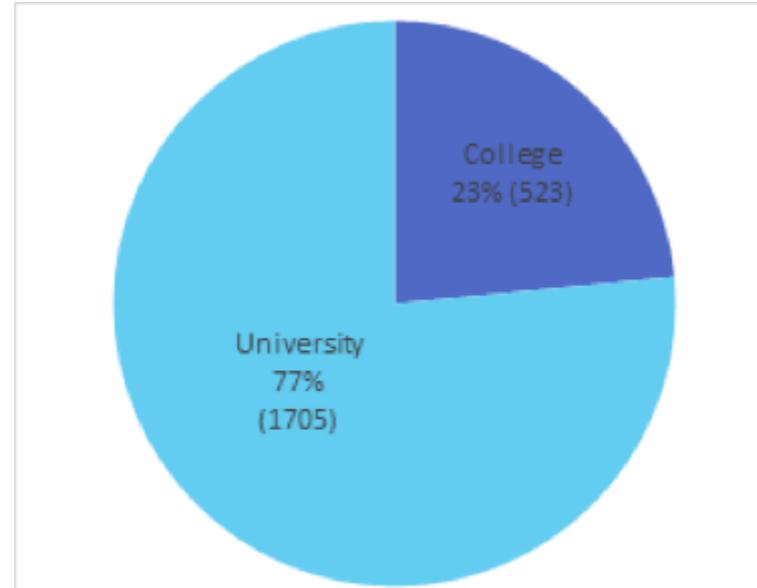
- 32 multiple choice questions, available in 12 languages plus English.
- Portion of the survey on which this report is based:
 - **Participants' personal characteristics** including nationality, year of arrival and gender.
 - **Features of participants' lowest paid job in Australia**, including their hourly rate of pay in that job, type of job, visa while in that job (and for students, name of educational institution), average weekly hours, method of finding the job, geographic location of that job, whether they were paid by cash or bank transfer and whether they received pay slips.
 - **Participants' experience of some other indicators of exploitation**, at any stage during their time in Australia. These include payments for the job up-front, passport confiscation, payment of cash back to an employer, and immigration-reporting threats.
 - **Participants' knowledge and perceptions**, such as their knowledge of the minimum wage and their perception of the proportion of people on their visa who are underpaid.
- Complaints about and access to remedies for underpayment - to be covered in a report in October 2018



Participants on international student visas

2,392 survey participants held a student visa during their lowest paid job.

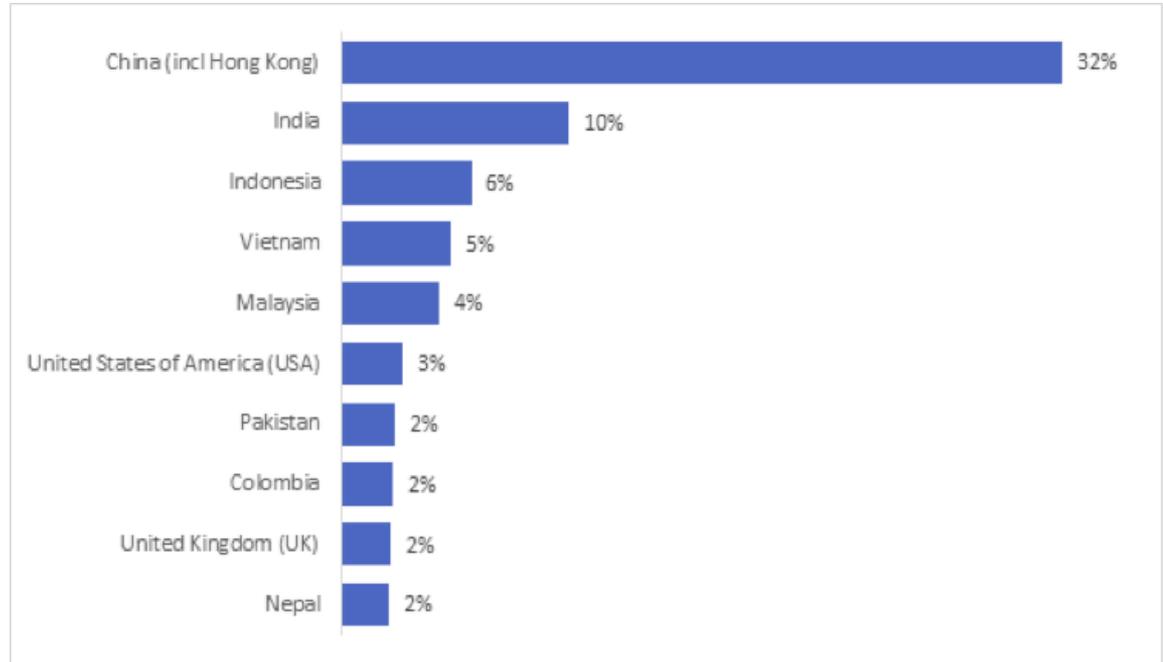
**International student participants'
type of educational institution**





Nationality of student participants: universities

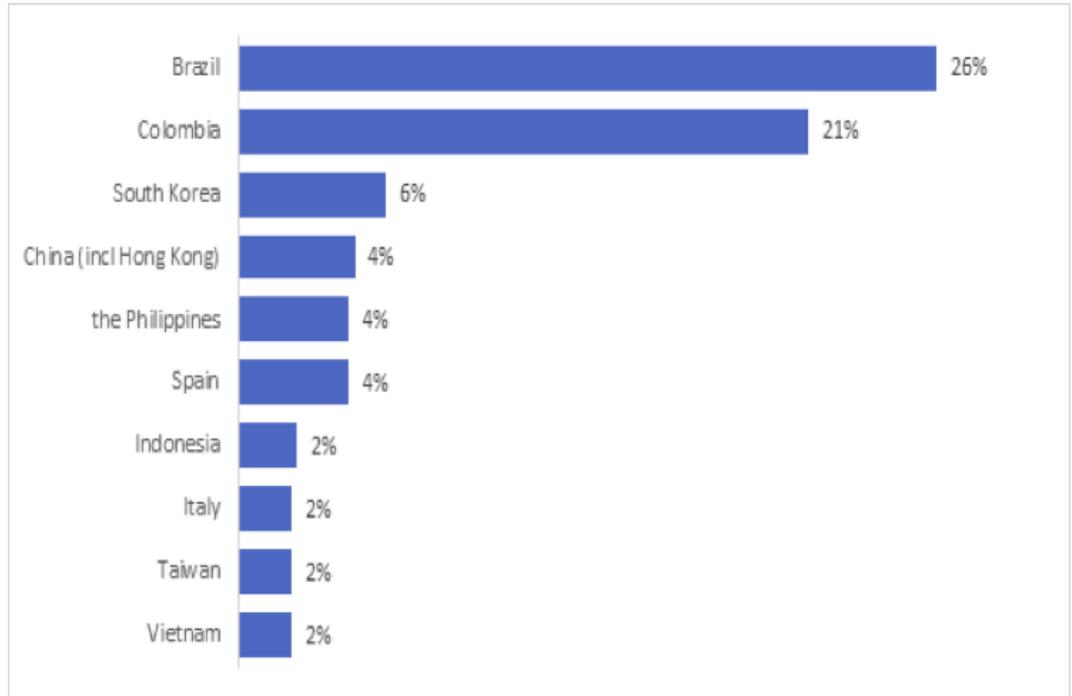
**Top 10 nationalities of
international student
participants studying at
a university**





Nationality of student participants: VET and ELICOS

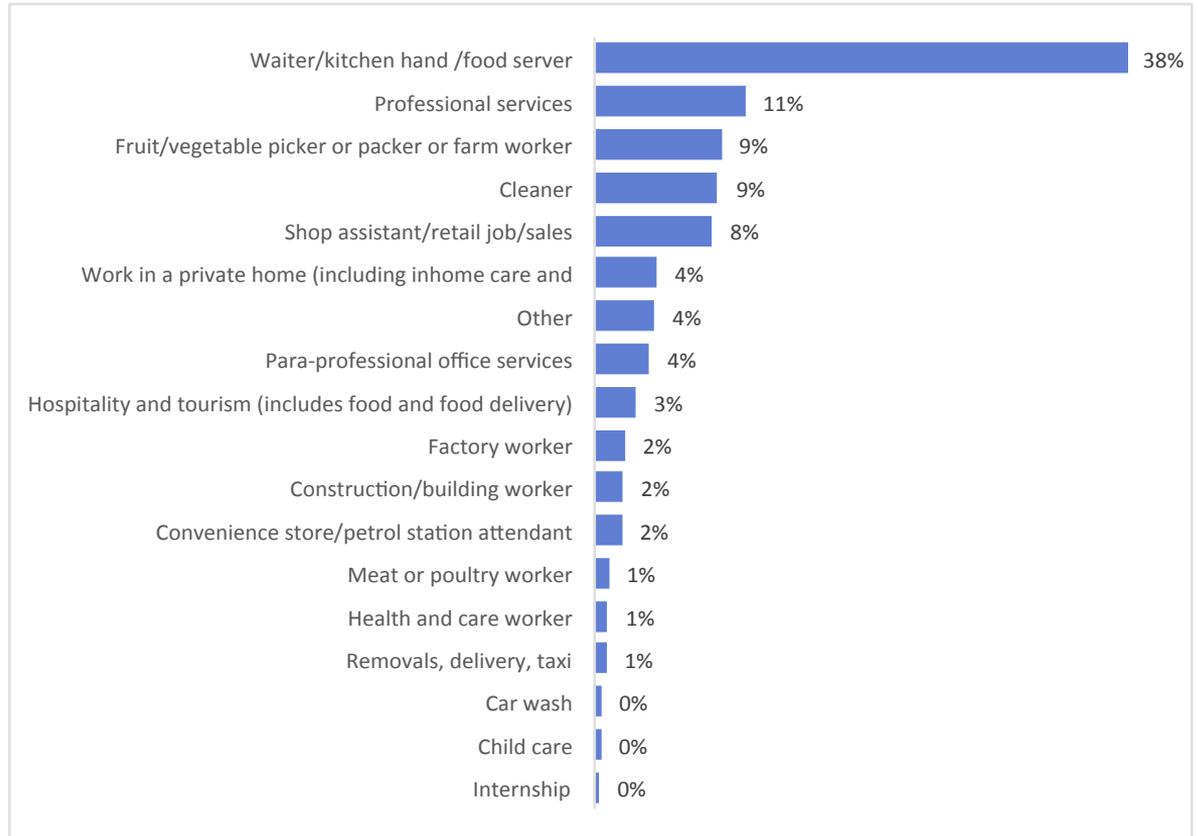
Top 10 nationalities of international student participants studying at a vocational or English-language college





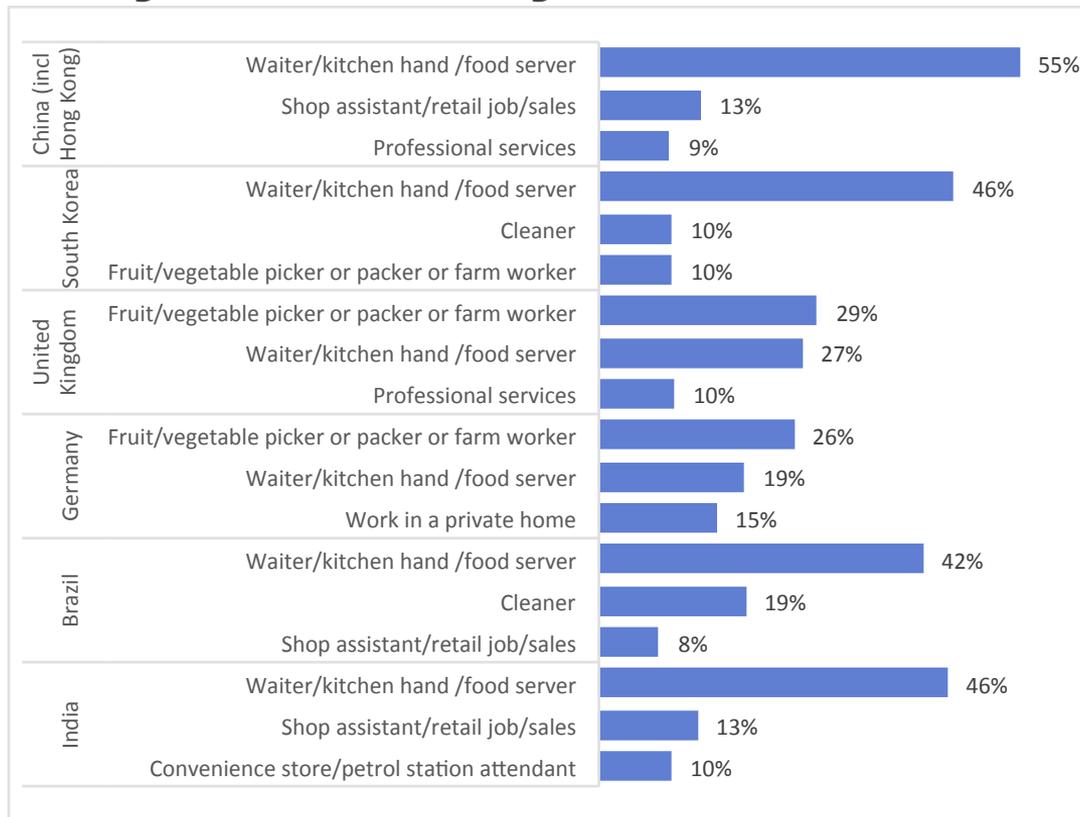
Lowest paid job types for participants overall

Participants' lowest paid job



Students' jobs by nationality

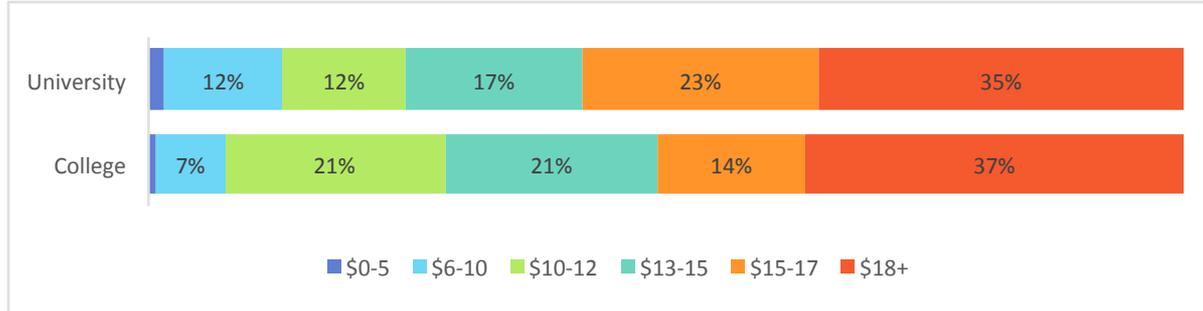
Proportion of international students of each nationality who identified job type as their lowest paid job in Australia, for the 6 nationalities with the greatest number of international student participants



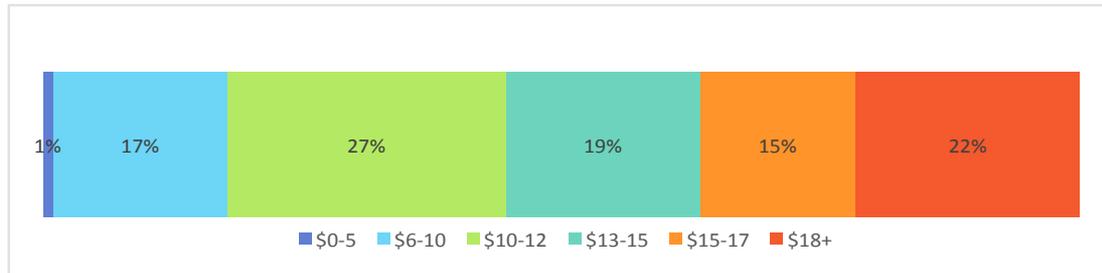


Students' hourly wages

Hourly wage rates in participants' lowest paid job, comparing university and college students



Hourly wage rates in participants' lowest paid job for students working 21 hours + per week





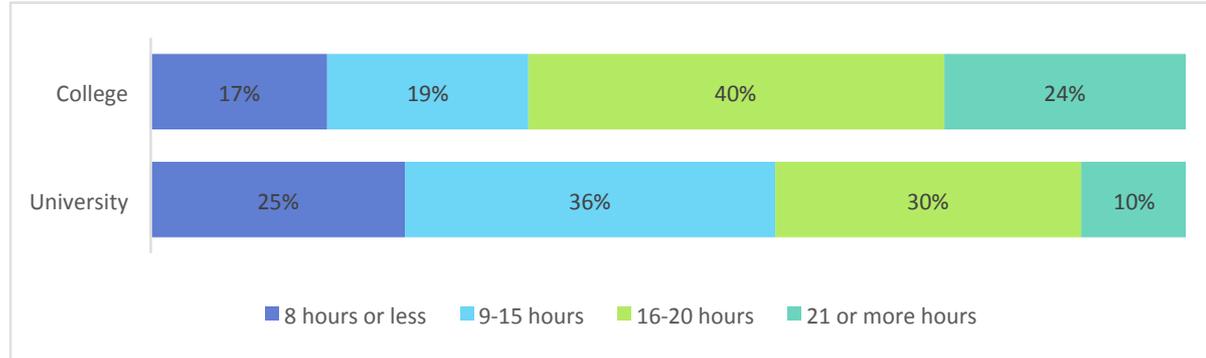
Key findings on wage rates by nationality for all participants

- Wage rates of \$12 per hour or less were reported by at least a fifth of temporary migrants from every major nationality
- Participants from China, Germany and Vietnam had the largest proportions of nationals earning \$10 per hour or less
- Around three quarters (75-81%) of Chinese, Taiwanese and Vietnamese participants earned \$17 per hour or less, compared with 35-41% of American, Irish and British participants



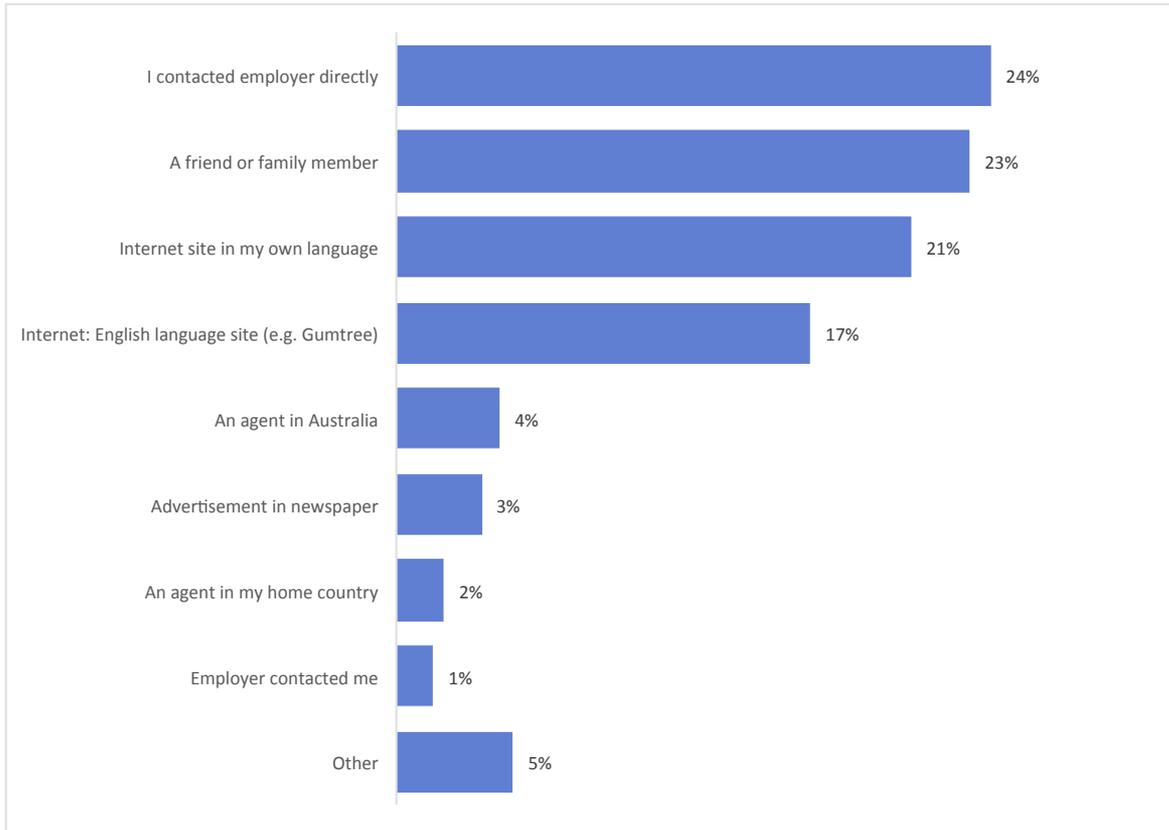
Weekly hours

Average hours worked per week in international students' lowest paid job, comparing college and university students



Method of finding lowest paid job

How participants earning \$6 to \$12 per hour found that job





Cash payments and non-provision of pay slips

- 50% of participants rarely or never received a pay slip in their lowest paid job
- 49% of international students were paid in cash in their lowest paid job
- 70% of participants earning \$12 per hour or less were paid in cash
- Cash payments were most prevalent among Chinese (65%), Korean (55%) and Colombian (46%) participants



Knowledge of minimum wages in Australia

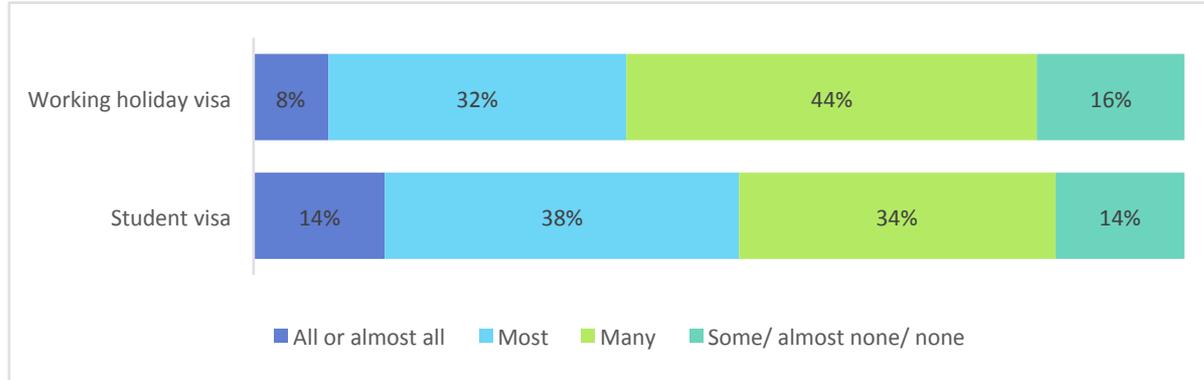
Proportion of college and university student participants earning \$15 per hour or less who knew the minimum wage in Australia is \$16 per hour or more





Perception of the prevailing wage among migrants on the same visa

Responses of international student and Working Holiday Maker participants earning less than \$15/hour to the question: 'What proportion of temporary visa holders on your visa do you think are paid less than \$17.70/hour?'





Accommodation – preliminary findings

- Substantial barriers to finding affordable, quality accommodation on/near campus
- Widespread exploitation of international students with respect to withholding of bond, overcharging, misrepresentation and harassment.
- International students have low rights awareness and want better information pre-departure
- Limited assistance available to international students in Australia to address exploitative accommodation conditions or find better accommodation



The role of education agents

The FWO and government agencies have important roles to play, as do education providers.

What role should education agents play, and what do you need in order to better support international students to avoid and address exploitative accommodation and work?

- Pre-departure
- Ongoing advisory role when student is in Australia?



Information for Impact project: A call to action

- Objective: sector-wide collaboration to provide education agents, universities, VET and ELICOS institutions with evidence that enables them to develop and deliver information to assist international students to avoid and address workplace and accommodation-related exploitation
- Partners: Education agents, English Australia, ISANA NSW, Fair Work Ombudsman, CISA, Redfern Legal Centre, UNSW, UTS. Advisors: ATO, Commonwealth Education Department.
- Survey of students pre-departure

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Migrant Worker Justice Initiative

www.mwji.org