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A Needs Assessment of International Students' Wives

Vonda Plett Martens
Peter R. Grant

Despite the unique adjustment challenges facing international students' spouses, little research has focused on their adjustment experiences or their programming needs. Understanding the adjustment of these individuals is important both in itself and because spouses play a key role in the adjustment and academic success of international students. Because women make up the vast majority of accompanying spouses, two needs assessments were conducted to explore their particular adjustment experiences and gather information relevant to program development. Hypotheses regarding the impact of conational group size on adjustment were tested as well. Seventy-six wives of international graduate students at a mid-sized Western Canadian university completed a questionnaire. Results suggest these women are highly educated professionals who face a variety of unique cultural and situational adjustment issues. Overall, their preference is for programming with a professional development focus. Unexpectedly, few differences based on conational group size were found. Research implications for service providers and researchers are discussed.

Keywords: *university program development; international students' services; international spouses' needs assessment; cross-cultural adjustment; sojourner adjustment*

In the sojourner literature, certain groups have garnered more research interest than other groups. For example, although the adjustment experiences of international students have received significant research attention throughout the years (Aubrey, 1991; Crano & Crano, 1993; Lewthwaite, 1997; Lin & Yi, 1997), very little is known about the experiences of their accompanying spouses. Research with

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international students attests to the influence of cross-cultural adjustment on students' academic performance (Arthur, 1997; Luzio-Locket, 1998; Schreier & Abramovitch, 1996; Stoyonoff, 1997) and highlights the importance of social support factors in the successful adjustment of students (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Maundeni, 2001; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Mizuno & Ishikuma, 2001; Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama, Fujihara, & Minami, 1997; Tsang, 2001). Sources of support typically identified in the literature include informal sources of support (e.g., consular, host national, and other national friends) and formal sources of support (e.g., counsellors and international students' office staff members). Despite the fact that an increasing number of international graduate students are accompanied by their spouses on their sojourns (Vogel, 1986) and that spouses are a potentially key source of social support, little attention has been paid either to the ways in which the spouse helps the international student adjust or to the adjustment experiences of these individuals in their own right. Although the number of accompanying spouses is reportedly increasing, official records of them are not routinely maintained. Indeed, the literature suggests that accompanying spouses who are not students themselves are generally ignored by university authorities who do not see their well-being as falling within the institution's realm of responsibility (de Verthelyi, 1995; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986).

Although international students' spouses rarely attract research attention, the same cannot be said for spouses accompanying businesspeople on their international assignments. A growing body of research that focuses on the adjustment of these spouses has shown that the success of expatriates sent abroad for business purposes is directly related to their spouses' successful adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Briody & Chrisman, 1991; Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998; Caligiuri, Joshi, & Lazarova, 1999; Harvey, 1985; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Simeon & Fujii, 2000; Takeuchi, Yun, & Russell, 2002; Tung, 1981; Van der Zee, Ali, & Salome, 2005). For example, the inability of spouses to adjust to foreign assignments has been cited as a significant factor in the early return of expatriates (Adler, 1997; Black, 1988; Harvey, 1985). However, even in this literature, the study of spousal adjustment factors does not go beyond a surface exploration of their needs and fails to consider the spouses' experiences in their own right (a notable exception is Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Typically, models developed to understand the business person's adjustment are simply modified to understand spousal adjustment, thereby failing to capture potentially significant differences in their adjustment experiences (e.g., Black & Stephens, 1989).

Despite the general neglect of spouses in the cross-cultural adjustment literature, research suggests that accompanying spouses may face even greater barriers to adjustment than their partners (Harvey, 1985; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). The familiarity of the work or the university environment provides the partner with a level of stability and support unavailable to the spouse. The spouse does not usually have

a formal support network and is more fully immersed in the new culture through daily domestic responsibilities (Briody & Chrisman, 1991; Harvey, 1985; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Vogel, 1986). Spouses may also struggle with issues of self-esteem and identity, as their careers are often put on hold so that they can accompany their partner (de Verthelyi, 1995). Status is then determined primarily by the partner's work performance (Harvey, 1985).

Although little is known about the adjustment of sojourners' spouses in general, even less is known of the particular experiences of international students' spouses. This lack of knowledge and recognition has led to it being called an "invisible" population (de Verthelyi, 1995). Obvious differences between spouses of business people and spouses of students relate to differences in status and income. Although an international assignment tends to be a move up in status and income in the business world, international students' status and standard of living are often reduced during the sojourn (Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Pedersen, 1991). This reduction in income creates additional barriers to successful adjustment (de Verthelyi, 1995).

Three articles were located that specifically focused on the sojourn experiences of international students' spouses in North America (de Verthelyi, 1995; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986). These reports suggest that the population is highly educated and comprises primarily of women. Five key areas of adjustment difficulty are identified. First, role changes accompanying the sojourn experience are reported sources of difficulty (e.g., shifting from a professional role to a domestic role, moving from an independent existence to a feeling of dependence on the spouse). Second, language difficulties are commonly reported. Third, problems associated with feeling socially isolated are frequently highlighted. Fourth, as mentioned above, financial concerns during the sojourn are widespread. Finally, psychological problems (e.g., depression, loneliness, anxiety) in reaction to the stresses of relocation can occur, which further hinders successful adjustment. The adjustment experiences and programming needs of international students' spouses are the focus of the present study.

The Present Study

Lack of awareness of international students' spouses hinders both theoretical investigations into their adjustment and appropriate program development for this population. The present study was initiated by the university's international students' advisor, who approached the researchers with a request for a needs assessment of international students' wives (ISWs). Needs assessments are used primarily to assist managers in developing and improving programs within organizations mandated to provide services to people in need. Posavac and Carey (1997) suggest that "assessing the level of need . . . means looking for potential services needed to bring people up to a satisfactory state and that are not now available" (p. 103). In this

instance, the international students' advisor wanted information on the needs of ISWs so that new programs developed for this group would be appropriate and effective.

Initially, we conducted a needs assessment that focused solely on the needs of wives from the three largest cultural groups represented on campus (i.e., Iranian, Indian, and Chinese). The reasons for this decision were strictly pragmatic and reflected the limited resources and primary information needs of the International Students' Office. Although it was hoped that the questionnaire could be completed in English, the level of English competency in the population was unknown. Therefore, to accommodate the possible need for translators, only spouses from the three largest conational groups represented on campus were invited to participate. Furthermore, given the low number of accompanying spouses who are male and the unique issues that this population may face, the study was limited to accompanying wives. Programmers requiring information to begin program development supported these decisions as this would provide them with data from the majority of accompanying spouses at a minimal cost and in the most expedient manner possible.

While the results from the needs assessment provided useful information, it also raised puzzling questions. Specifically, very few differences in the adjustment experiences or programming preferences were found among spouses from the very different cultural milieus found in Iran, India, and China. Furthermore, contrary to the literature (de Verthelyi, 1995), participants reported that they had adequate levels of social support. In seeking to understand these findings, we noted that all the participants were members of large conational groups. Social support relies first on the availability of opportunities to interact with others (Caliguiri & Lazarova, 2002; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). That is, larger networks offer a greater number of potential sources for social support. Given a general interaction preference for conationals, particularly in the initial stages of cultural transition (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kim, 1987), the apparent homogeneity of responses from respondents from these three very different countries might reflect the fact that they all had a relatively large selection of conationals to draw on for support. If this were the case, the needs of spouses with smaller conational networks might vary significantly from the needs of this sample because of the reduced opportunity for obtaining adequate conational social support. Research also suggests that if conational support is not available, newcomers will turn to host nationals for assistance (Adelman, 1988). To repeat, given a general preference for social interaction with conationals over host nationals, wives from large conational groups (ISW-Ls) would be expected to interact more with people from their cultural group, whereas wives from small co-national groups (ISW-Ss) would be expected to interact less with conationals and more with host nationals out of necessity. Furthermore, it is expected that ISW-Ls would be more satisfied with their level of social support as compared to ISW-Ss.

Research supports these relationships between conational group size and interaction patterns. In a series of studies with Korean immigrants located in Chicago and Hartford, Inglis and Gudykunst (1982) found a significant difference between the large and small ethnic group members in the degree to which they were involved in their ethnic communities. Specifically, immigrants in Hartford, an area with fewer Korean immigrants, tended to be less involved in their ethnic community than immigrants in Chicago. Particularly relevant to the present study is a finding by Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) in a study they conducted at the University of Saskatchewan with male international graduate students. As predicted, these researchers found conational group size correlated positively with conational social interaction levels and negatively with host national social interaction levels.

To gather more information to assist in program development, we decided to extend our initial needs assessment to include international wives from other countries who had very few conationals available to them in the university environment. The goal of the second study was not only to gather information that could be applied to program development but also to test whether size of conational group is related to the needs of ISWs. Specifically, we tested the hypothesis that student wives from smaller conational groups (ISW-Ss) experience less assistance and support when they arrive in Canada and are less satisfied with the support they receive than student wives from larger conational groups (ISW-Ls). Program preferences of ISW-Ss should reflect a greater need for social support than the program preferences of ISW-Ls. As well, we expected that ISW-Ss would indicate more of a desire for increased interaction with conationals than would ISW-Ls.

In sum, we conducted two needs assessments with three specific objectives in mind:

1. to gain a better overall understanding of this population and its adjustment experiences,
2. to gather information directly relevant to the development of appropriate programming for this population, and
3. to compare wives from small conational groups with spouses from large conational groups so as to test our hypotheses regarding the impact of group size on adjustment.

METHOD

Respondents

This study was conducted at a mid-sized Western Canadian University. As is typical of most universities, there were no official records of students' marital status or whether spouses had accompanied the students to Canada. Thus, all 218 male graduate students were contacted through a telephone survey and their marital status ascertained. The majority of these students (50%; $n = 108$) came from either

China ($n = 43$), Iran ($n = 32$), or India ($n = 33$). Students who were married and whose wives were neither full-time students nor Canadian citizens were told about the study. All of these students agreed to provide contact information for their wives. A letter was then sent to these potential respondents, outlining the study and requesting their participation. A follow-up phone call assessed their willingness to participate. In total, 77 potential respondents were identified, and 76 of these women agreed to participate, for a response rate of 99%. Most of these women (62%; $n = 47$) came from either China ($n = 19$), Iran ($n = 19$), or India ($n = 9$). The remaining wives ($n = 29$) came from 19 additional countries. The study was carried out in two stages both for research and programming reasons, as outlined previously. In the first needs assessment, only ISWs from the three large conational groups represented on campus (i.e., China, Iran, and India) were invited to participate. In the second needs assessment, ISWs from all other countries were contacted.

Procedure

A questionnaire format that incorporates aspects of an interview approach was deemed most appropriate for this study because of the expected variability in respondents' English levels. The researchers' previous experience suggested that ISWs tend to be more proficient in written than in spoken English and that speaking English with a Canadian can cause them considerable stress. However, it was also felt that the presence of an interviewer was important in the event that respondents had questions regarding the structure or content of the survey. For example, as Lonner (1990) points out, the use of rating scales is less common in non-Western cultures.

The questionnaire was completed in the women's homes in all but two instances, in which cases it was more convenient for them to meet in another location. To ensure greater understanding of the study and issues of consent, this information was presented in both written and oral form. Respondents were encouraged to seek assistance from the researcher at any time if questions arose while completing the survey.

Measures

The questionnaire¹ was developed based on the themes that emerged from the literature, from preliminary interviews with ISWs, through discussions with professionals working with ISWs, and in consultation with the international students' advisor, who wished to develop programs for this population. Questions were designed to assess ISWs' adjustment difficulties as well as their interest in a variety of program options. It was hoped that responses in these two general areas would complement each other. For example, an understanding of adjustment difficulties could help to explain what needs the desired programs were perceived to

address. The first part of the questionnaire included measures of programming preferences (i.e., a checklist of program options) and issues related to program involvement (e.g., the need for childcare, scheduling availability, interest in helping administer programs). In assessing adjustment difficulties, the questionnaire included only those topics highlighted in the literature and preliminary interviews that were deemed directly relevant to program planning. This stipulation was necessary both to ensure that the instrument would not become too long and thereby overly taxing for respondents whose first language was not English as well as to manage programming expectations. For example, despite the finding in the literature that financial issues can influence the adjustment process, no questions assessing their financial status or income needs were included, as the staff members in the International Students' Office who were involved in the development of the survey felt this was a concern that they would be unable to address. On the other hand, questions related to competency in carrying out daily tasks, English language ability, and social support factors were included, as the staff felt these aspects of potential need could be addressed through programming. As little is known about the ISW population, a large number of demographic questions were included to help provide a better overall understanding of this group. For comparison purposes, the questionnaire had to remain largely unchanged in the second study, however slight modifications were made to it based on the responses of participants in the first needs assessment. Specifically, questions that had been confusing to respondents were deleted, and several new questions were added to clarify points raised in the first analysis. The rationale for the inclusion of each section of the questionnaire and the general content of those sections are presented below.

Demographic questions. Standard demographic questions composed one section of the questionnaire. This information helps to provide a better overall understanding of the ISW population at this university.

Programming preferences and participation. This section was designed to assess respondents' interest in, and commitment to, a wide variety of program options. Respondents were asked to complete checklists of possible programs and service options that were of interest to them. These items were based on ideas found in the literature and generated through preliminary interviews. Practical information useful to developing programs was also included in this section (e.g., determining how often respondents would like to participate in activities and assessing the need for childcare during program participation). Finally, respondents' interest in assisting in various aspects of program implementation was assessed.

Social support in adjusting to daily life in Canada. Daily living tasks that are easy for individuals to carry out in their home country can produce a great deal of stress

when undertaken in a foreign country, especially when access to usual support networks is limited. According to Ward, Okura, Kennedy, and Kojima (1998), these stresses are greatest when a person first arrives in a new culture. Using Caligiuri and Lazarova's (2002) categorization of different types of social support, social support in this study relates to informational and instrumental support. Specifically, social support is operationally defined as the assistance available to ISWs in adjusting to life in Canada on first arrival and their satisfaction with that help. Participants were asked to identify the sources and the amount of help that they received when learning to perform these tasks in Canada and to rate their satisfaction with this help.

Communicating in English. Language acquisition is critical to successful adjustment and can be addressed easily through language programs. Understanding the degree to which ISWs experience communication difficulty is useful for two reasons. First, it leads to a better general understanding of this population. Second, it may influence the kind of programs offered and the manner in which they are offered. For example, English teachers may wish to focus on areas of particular weakness, and guest speakers may choose to modify presentation styles to accommodate particular English levels. In this section, respondents were asked to rate their perceived level of competence in reading, writing, and speaking in English.

Social interaction patterns. This section assessed respondents' actual and desired levels of social interaction with conationals, host nationals, and other nationals. In addition to providing a richer understanding of ISWs and guiding program development, this information allowed for comparisons of interaction patterns to be made between ISWs from large and small conational groups.

Educational and professional pursuits. Questions in this section focused both on education and professional experiences prior to respondents' move to Canada and assessed their current educational and professional pursuits. Comparisons between ISWs' lives in their home country and Canada provide additional insights into their adjustment challenges.

Size of conational group. Size of conational group was determined by combining the number of graduate students and spouses in each nationality category. Although group size could have been defined in terms of the number of conationals in the community, prior discussions with ISWs suggested there is little contact between ISWs and immigrant populations. Similarly, key informants suggested that there is little contact between undergraduate and graduate students from the same conational groups. In this study, respondents from India, China, and Iran constituted ISW-Ls, whereas ISWs from all remaining countries were categorized as ISW-Ss.

This distinction follows a natural break in the data. That is, although the group sizes (i.e., students plus spouses) for Indian, Chinese, and Iranian participants were all greater than 40, the next largest group was from Indonesia and was made up of only 14 individuals. The mean conational group size for ISW-Ss was 7.3, whereas the mean conational group size for ISW-Ls was 68.2.

RESULTS

Sample Demographics

Participants came from 22 different countries, reflecting diverse cultures from Africa, Central and South America, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe and represented the three main religions (see Table 1). Most of the women were between 26 and 35 years of age.² The average education level was high (i.e., at least some university education), and the most common areas of study included the sciences and engineering (43%; $n = 27$) and business and economics (22%; $n = 14$). Most of the respondents arrived in Canada either after their husbands (61%, $n = 46$) or together with them (37%; $n = 28$).³ Very few respondents indicated that they were currently taking classes, whereas just more than a third were currently employed. Including their years of employment in their home country and Canada, respondents had spent an average of just under 6 years in the workforce. The majority (83%; $n = 63$) had at least one child, and the average age of the children was just greater than 6 years old. Nearly all of the respondents' husbands were studying a discipline within the natural sciences. Nearly two thirds of these men were in master's programs, and the remainder were enrolled in PhD programs.

Chi-square analyses, independent samples t tests, and descriptive statistics were used to determine differences between respondents from large conational groups (i.e., China, India, and Iran) and respondents from small conational groups. The only group difference found ($p < .001$) was for the husbands' program of study. Specifically, more ISW-L husbands were enrolled in master's-level programs, whereas more ISW-S husbands were enrolled in PhD programs.

Programming Preferences and Participation

The frequencies for the programs, workshops, services, and craft classes requested by respondents were calculated. Table 2 includes all the program options requested by 38 (approximately 50%) of the respondents. Program preferences reflected an interest in professional development. For example, popular programs and services included English classes, computer training, university lectures, a speakers program, and help finding a job. In addition, most of the respondents requested a summer program for their children and wanted information about community services

Table 1 Demographic Information (N = 76)

	<i>n</i>	%
Country of origin		
Iran	19	25
China	19	25
India	9	12
Other	29	38
Religion		
Muslim	30	40
Christian	12	16
Hindu	10	13
Buddhist	2	3
No religion	21	28
Has children	63	83
One child	30	48
Two children	22	36
More than two children	10	16
Husband's program		
MA	48	65
PhD	26	35
Husband's area of study		
Engineering	20	28
Agriculture	17	24
Biology/chemistry	23	32
Veterinary medicine	6	8
Other	6	8
Currently employed	29	38
Currently taking classes	5	7
Academic background		
Sciences and engineering	27	43
Business and economics	14	22
Arts and education	9	14
Other	13	21
Arrival time		
Before husband	2	3
After husband	46	61
Same time as husband	28	37

Note: Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents who answered each question.

available to them. Chi-square analyses were used to compare the large and small conational groups on program preferences. As the high number of comparisons being made increased the probability of obtaining a Type 1 error, alpha was set conservatively at .001. Using this criterion, no group differences between large and small conational groups were found.

Table 2 Programs, Workshops, Services, and Crafts Requested by a Majority of Respondents

	<i>n</i>	%
Programs		
English classes	67	88
Conversational	49	65
TOEFL focus	37	49
Matching with Canadian woman	60	82
Summer program for children	54	71
e.g., day camps	45	59
University lectures	47	62
Speakers program	45	59
Exercise classes	47	62
Outings in area	42	55
Cooking classes	41	54
Discussion groups	40	53
Workshops		
Computer training	62	82
Help finding a job	50	66
First aid and CPR	46	61
Services		
Information about community services	53	70
Newsletter	43	57
Orientation program	38	50
Crafts		
Sewing	46	61

Note: TOEFL = Test of English as a foreign language.

Most of the women in the study (67%; $n = 51$) stated that they would like to be involved in the development and delivery of programs for ISWs. Furthermore, respondents wanted to participate in programs once or twice a month. However, to do so, the majority of the 63 respondents who had children (65%; $n = 41$) stated that they would only be able to participate if childcare were provided.

Adjustment Issues and Life in Canada

Social support in adjusting to daily life in Canada. A 4-point scale ranging from *did not help* (1) to *helped a lot* (4) was used to gather information regarding the level of help the respondents received on first arriving in Canada from a variety of sources. The mean ratings for help from the husband (3.65), a conational friend (3.43), a friend from another country (3.07), and a Canadian friend (3.00) all fell

between *helped* and *helped a lot* on the scale. Given this high level of assistance, it is not surprising that overall the women were satisfied with the help they received adjusting to life in Canada ($M = 3.24$, $SD = .66$, where 3 was labelled *satisfied* on a 4-point scale). Contrary to predictions, no differences were found between ISW-Ss and ISW-Ls either on the amount of help received from the different sources or on their satisfaction with that assistance.

For most respondents, the move to Canada meant a loss of childcare support. Nearly all of the respondents with children (95%; $n = 60$) reported that they now care for their children by themselves. However, only 50% ($n = 30$) of those respondents indicated that they were the primary caregiver in their home country. Respondents from small conational groups who had children were asked what they were doing prior to their move to Canada.⁴ Fourteen (48%) of the women were employed, 10 respondents were studying (35%), and only 4 (14%) of the women were at home with their children on a full-time basis.

Communicating in English. A 4-point scale ranging from *not difficult* (1) to *very difficult* (4) was used to measure respondents' perceived difficulty with various aspects of communicating in English. The results indicate that respondents have "a little difficulty" with reading English ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 0.98$), writing English ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.01$), and speaking English ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.91$). No significant differences were found between respondents from large conational groups and respondents from small conational groups in any of these measures of communication difficulty.

Social interaction patterns. Using a 4-point scale ranging from *never* (1) to *very often* (4), respondents indicated their current and desired levels of interaction with conationals, Canadians, and other nationals. To assess current patterns of interaction, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was used to compare respondents' current frequency of socialization with conationals, Canadians, and other nationals. A significant, $F(1, 69) = 93.81$, $p < .001$, was followed with paired t tests using Bonferroni's correction to determine differences between the three means (as recommended by Howell, 1997). Post hoc analyses indicated that (a) respondents interacted more with conationals ($M = 2.97$, $SD = .84$) than with Canadians ($M = 2.24$, $SD = .72$), $t(71) = 5.74$, $p < .001$, (b) respondents interacted more with Canadians than with other nationals ($M = 1.89$, $SD = .63$), $t(69) = 4.02$, $p < .001$, and (c) respondents interacted more with conationals than with other nationals, $t(71) = 8.43$, $p < .001$. According to the scale used, this means that ISWs interact fairly often with conationals, they interact sometimes with Canadians, and they interact slightly less often with other nationals.

A second set of analyses considered the relationship between actual and desired levels of interaction with conationals, Canadians, and other nationals. Three 2

(Within) $\times$ 2 (Between) ANOVA were used to determine the relationship between group size and actual versus desired levels of interaction for each of the three groups. No main effects were found for interaction with conationals. That is, there was no significant difference between large and small groups or between current and desired levels of interaction with conationals, suggesting that spouses in both groups are satisfied with their current level of interaction with conationals. A main effect was found when interaction levels with Canadians were considered, $F(1, 70) = 32.29$, $p < .001$. Specifically, respondents socialized less with Canadians ($M = 2.24$, $SD = .72$) than they would have liked to ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .67$), $F(1, 70) = 32.29$, $p < .001$. An interaction effect was also apparent, with ISWs from small conational groups interacting more with Canadians ($M = 2.63$, $SD = .79$) than did ISWs from large conational groups ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .56$), $t(70) = -3.93$, $p < .001$. A main effect was also found when considering interactions with other nationals. Specifically, respondents indicated that they socialized with other nationals ($M = 1.92$, $SD = .67$) less than they would like to ($M = 2.33$, $SD = .63$), $F(1, 70) = 24.62$, $p < .001$.

Educational and professional pursuits. Although participants were interested in pursuing their professional development in Canada through studies and employment, few were able to realize this goal. Only five respondents (7%) indicated that they were currently enrolled in any university or college courses, whereas less than half (38%; $n = 29$) stated that they were currently employed. However, only one respondent (2%) suggested she was not studying because of a lack of interest, and only three respondents (6%) indicated their unemployment was due to a lack of interest. Rather, childcare needs and perceived inadequacy in English competency were among the most common reasons given by respondents for not pursuing educational or employment opportunities. The high costs associated with studying was cited as the greatest barrier to pursuing studies by nearly half of the respondents (49%; $n = 33$). In addition, respondents stated that they were unemployed because they believed they would not be able to find a job in their profession. There were no significant differences between large- and small-group respondents in their academic status, employment status, or reasons given for not taking classes or holding a job.

Employed respondents were asked how long it took them to find their current employment and to rate their job satisfaction. On average, it took respondents almost 6 months to find a job ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 10.85$, range = 0 to 60 months), and satisfaction with their current employment was fairly low. On a 4-point scale, respondents rated their job satisfaction at 2.73, a score that falls between *dissatisfied* (2) and *satisfied* (3). Furthermore, the women tended to hold jobs unrelated to their professional training. The most common jobs (71%; $n = 10$) were childcare provision, house cleaning, and work in the service industry.

Summary of the Results

Taken together, the results show that this sample of ISWs are highly educated women trained in science, education, business, or economics. Their main interest is in furthering their professional development in Canada through programs offered by the International Students' Office once or twice a month. In their home country, these professional women usually did not care for their children alone, whereas in Canada this was the norm. It is not surprising, therefore, that most indicated that the provision of adequate childcare was necessary before they could participate in any program. However, they were very interested in helping to develop and deliver such programs in collaboration with staff from the International Students' Office. More generally, many respondents stated that they would like to socialize more with Canadians, suggesting that the provision of childcare might allow them to interact with Canadians more often and, through such interactions, improve their English speaking skills.

DISCUSSION

The main goal of this research was to gather information that would directly assess ISWs' interest in participating in a variety of program options. Overall, interest in participating in programs was high. In addition, most respondents were willing to assist in the development and operation of programs. Given their professional training and work experience, it is not surprising that respondents seemed particularly interested in programs emphasizing professional development. For example, popular program options included English classes, computer training, help finding a job, university lectures, a speakers program, and discussion groups.

A second goal of this research was to learn more about this population to establish a basis for further applied or theoretical research. Clearly, the wives who accompany their husbands on their studying sojourn are accomplished in their own right. Well educated (most typically in the sciences or in business), with nearly 6 years of formal work experience, most of these women left their studies or jobs in their home country to join husbands who have typically preceded them in the move to Canada. On arrival, most receive adequate help from either their husbands or friends in adjusting to the demands of daily life in a new country. Although the majority of these women wanted to study or find employment, most of them remained at home, taking care of their children. The cost of taking classes and the lack of available childcare prohibits all but a few from furthering their studies while on their sojourn. The women who did find employment worked outside their profession, primarily in the service sector. Finally, although most ISWs are satisfied with the amount of time spent socializing with their conationals, they would like more opportunities to interact with Canadians and to improve their English skills.

A noteworthy finding is the overall lack of significant differences between spouses from large and small conational groups. The similarity between ISW-Ss and ISW-Ls was evident in the program preferences of the respondents. Spouses from small groups did not indicate a greater preference for programs with clear social support elements, as was predicted. Furthermore, spouses from both groups were equally satisfied with the help they received from their husbands and friends on arrival in Canada. Although satisfaction with current levels of social support were not directly assessed, spouses' satisfaction in the early stages of adjustment is important, as Ying and Liese (1991) suggest that support at this time is critical. Given the preference for conationals in social interactions reported in the literature (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Kim, 1987), it is interesting that even spouses from small groups reported satisfaction with their level of social interaction with conationals. However, caution is advised in interpreting this finding, as the focus of the question might have been misunderstood. Although it was hoped that respondents would interpret the question at an abstract level (i.e., ideally how much would you like to interact with conationals), it is quite possible that respondents interpreted it in a more concrete sense. That is, respondents might have based their desired level of interaction on the specific group of conationals available to them. Thus, it is difficult to assess whether spouses from large and small groups are truly satisfied with the amount of social interaction they have with conationals in general or whether they are simply satisfied with the amount of interaction they have with a particular group of individuals.

This study has practical implications for individuals and groups hoping to address the programming needs of ISWs. International students' offices, universities, and community organisations can use the findings to influence policy and develop programs for ISWs. The apparent homogeneity of the ISW population in terms of its adjustment experiences and programming needs is good news for program planners. Although there is great diversity in the ISW population (e.g., in this study, spouses represented more than 20 different countries), there seems to be general consensus regarding program preferences and adjustment experiences. Based on this study, it is recommended that programs developed for this population focus primarily on professional development and address issues that could hinder participation (e.g., childcare). Furthermore, in developing programs, university and community groups are encouraged to draw on the resources available to them in the population of educated and experienced ISWs. More specifically, ISWs should be provided with the resources and support needed to enable them to actively help develop needed programs. Not only will this approach require fewer institutional resources, but it may in itself address the expressed need of ISWs to use their professional expertise and develop new employment skills (for an example and discussion of an ISW-run initiative, see de Verthelyi, 1996).

Several limitations to the present study bear consideration in interpreting the findings. First, despite the lack of differences between spouses from large and small conational groups and the considerable cultural diversity in this sample, the generalizability of the findings to other populations of ISWs is unknown. Clearly, any institution contemplating program development for spouses of international students should not apply the results of our study uncritically. Nevertheless, the results represent an important step in understanding what, until now, has been largely a neglected and invisible population.

Second, the relevance of the findings for male spouses is unknown, as they were not represented in the sample. In our studies, like others (e.g., de Verthelyi, 1995, 1996), we were only able to locate a very small number of male spouses who accompanied their wives while studying at this university. On one hand, this means that the findings generalize to the vast majority of spouses of international students who are women. On the other hand, it also means that the needs of male spouses are unknown and are likely to be different, particularly as they are very isolated from others in the same circumstance. In the future, increasing numbers of accompanying male spouses may warrant the development of programming designed for a unique population of men who might have very different needs from those of the women in our studies. However, until then, the best recommendation for international students' advisors is for them to become acquainted with these men and to try and meet their needs individually in the context of existing programming opportunities.

A third limitation of our study was its emphasis on asking the respondents simple closed-ended questions in English. Clearly, open-ended questions in the respondents' native tongue would have been preferable in terms of capturing more completely the experiences of these sojourners who came to Canada at the request of their spouse rather than for their own professional reasons. However, the expense of such a research endeavour was too prohibitive for us to contemplate. Furthermore, looking back on our experiences, the fact that our respondents were able to provide us with so much information suggests that our research approach has merit. Indeed, we would argue that a strength of our approach was our ability to provide the international students' advisor with relevant practical information in a timely manner, a merit that is desired by most researchers who wish to influence the development of new programming at the planning stage (Posovac & Carey, 1997).

The findings as well as these limitations raise many interesting research questions. For example, in this study, social support was defined narrowly. It would be interesting to explore what constitutes social support from the perspective of the spouses. What roles do they see co- and host nationals playing in the adjustment process? In this study, a clear demarcation was made between conationals and other nationals; however, it is not clear whether spouses view all other nationals in the same light. Perhaps religious or cultural similarity is a more important factor in

social support networks than nationality. Finally, what roles do relatives and friends in the home country play in their adjustment? Another line of research could assess the applicability of established models of adjustment to ISWs. Although there are relatively few accompanying male spouses, an evaluation of their needs and understanding of their adjustment experiences in comparison with their female counterparts would be fascinating to undertake.

Clearly, there are innumerable research questions that could be explored with international students' spouses given the general neglect of this population by researchers and program planners throughout the years. This study provides an initial basis for that research to proceed and for programs to be developed. It is hoped that through the accumulation of research and the development of programs, the ISW population will become more visible and will receive more adequate assistance during their sojourn.

NOTES

1. Copies of the questionnaire are available on request.
2. As we were advised in the first needs assessment with ISW-Ls not to ask respondents' age for reasons of cultural sensitivity, interviewers recorded their estimate of each respondent's age. However, as the advice not to ask age appeared to be misguided, the respondents' age was directly assessed in the second needs assessment with spouses from small conational groups. The average age as estimated by interviewers for spouses from large conational groups in the first study was 31 years, whereas most ISW-S respondents (62%; $n = 18$) in the second needs assessment indicated that they were between 26 and 35 years old.
3. Respondents from large conational groups in the first needs assessment were not asked how long they had resided in Canada. However, this question was included in the second study. ISW-Ss reported having lived in Canada for just more than 3 years.
4. This information is only available for spouses from small conational groups, as the question was added after the completion of the first needs assessment.

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