

Abstract

This study aims to explore Saudi women students' social experiences during their study at Flinders University and their understanding of those experiences. The study sought to determine the extent to which Saudi women experience stereotyping at Flinders University; how such stereotyping has influenced their social life and study; how they consider their experiences differ from those of other women students; and what resilience strategy they employ to respond to their experiences. The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological study design, where responses from seven Saudi women undertaking postgraduate or undergraduate programs at the university were analysed in order to contribute to the research on this subject. Eight themes emerged from the interviews with the women students, which were identified as relevant to the aims of the study. The study found that the majority of the subjects had largely positive experiences within the university, although there were a few times when they felt they were subject to stereotyping. In their social experiences the women all had some encounters with racism, discrimination, taunting, or Islamophobia, and several struggled with finding acceptable housing. Emotions of homesickness, loneliness, depression and feelings of being an outsider presented challenges to the participants in the research. All of the women interviewed had developed coping strategies to overcome obstacles, which included adopting a positive attitude, emphasising the positive, using their friendship networks, doing things with other international students, ignoring insults and keeping busy with their studies. All seven women expressed a strong identification with their religion, which gave them purpose and strength to focus on their academic goals. Recommendations are included, which may be useful to the university in increasing its support of international Muslim students.