

'Crying your guts out': some international students fear seeking help for burnout

 [cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/crying-your-guts-out-some-international-students-fear-seeking-help-for-burnout-1.4295700](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/crying-your-guts-out-some-international-students-fear-seeking-help-for-burnout-1.4295700)



Most students are encouraged to seek help to combat stress, but international students who are burning out fear that asking for help may lead to deportation.

Adolfo Ruiz, 21, is from Venezuela and studying in B.C. After months of intensive study, working part-time and living in a cramped room, he hit a wall emotionally.

"You are just crying your guts out and you are not able to talk," Ruiz said. "It was like a total, mental emotional breakdown for me."

But Ruiz said he was afraid to ask for help. "If you mess up once, then your record is totally stained for the rest of your life," he said.

As an international student hoping to stay on in Canada, Ruiz feared that any public sign of weakness could hurt his chances

A few 'have been deported'

He said if he wants to apply for a work permit after graduation or permanent residency, he must prove he is not a burden to the taxpayer. This means any recorded mental health issue is subject to scrutiny from immigration.

If he violates any part of his current work-study permit, he could be deported, immigration authorities say.

"I constantly go back to the terms and conditions of my study permit and read through them again," Ruiz said.

International students in the country on a study permit must be actively pursuing studies, Canadian immigration

officials say. If they're sick or suspended from school, have deferred their studies or don't show up for class, they could be deemed in violation of their permits

Ruiz's story is common, according to Byron Cruz, the head of Sanctuary Health, an advocacy group for refugees and migrants seeking healthcare.

'They get very vulnerable'

Cruz said he's seen an increase of international students requesting help.

"There are situations where they get very vulnerable with no mental health support and a few of them have been deported," he said.

Cruz said provincial health authorities will contact immigration officials or the Canadian Border Service Agency if there is a student in violation of a permit for health reasons.

A spokesperson for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) confirmed study permit holders who have not met conditions may face enforcement from CBSA, including removal from Canada.

A psychiatric assessment may be required for an officer to determine whether an individual is likely to place excessive demands on health and social services.

For burned out students, a few days of missed classes can look like sick leave.

A spokesperson for Vancouver Coastal Health said they do not contact the CBSA without a patient's permission.

School's discretion

Will Tao, a Vancouver immigration lawyer, says many of his clients are international students.

There are counselling services offered in public institutions or students can speak to faculty in private institutions.

Tao said it's the school's discretion to grant leave or report students to authorities. "But the schools themselves haven't had guidance from immigration on how to report," he said.

"A lot of young students have had a very isolating, financially difficult, challenging, traumatic time in Canada and some of these stories need to be recognized."