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The barrier and success factors during the internship and job search process: lessons for current and prospective U.S. counseling psychology doctoral international students

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ABSTRACT

This study captures the success and barrier factors in the internship and job search process of soon-to-be graduating international doctoral students and early-career psychologists in Counseling Psychology (CP). A total of 17 participants completed a demographic questionnaire and three open-ended questions about the helpful and challenging aspects of their internship and job acquisition process. Utilizing a Consensual Qualitative Research Method (Hill & Knox, 2021), we found that institutional support, interpersonal support, and inequitable practices were typical during the internship and job acquisition process. Participants disclosed more distinct barriers than success factors. The study highlights that support, education, mentorship, and advocacy are still needed to collectively grow and sustain the diversity within CP. The study also offers practical implications and recommendations for international students, international counseling psychologists, and CP stakeholders.

Keywords: employment, Counseling Psychology, international students, internship, school-to-work transition, online survey, Consensual Qualitative Research Method, doctoral students

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INTRODUCTION

One of the largest foreign student enrollments in applied psychology is in Counseling Psychology (CP; APA, 2022), where international students represent about 8% of doctoral trainees (Hui-Spears & Park-Saltzman, 2022). Below, we describe the predoctoral internship and postgraduation experiences in CP training, followed by the acculturation, immigration, and success factors of salience to the international counseling psychology (ICP) community.

Counseling Psychology training

Predoctoral internship

The predoctoral internship offers students the opportunity to gain full-time supervised training in applied psychology. Approximately 1,048 international students applied for predoctoral internships in 2021 (APPIC, 2022). In the same year, about 30% of the Association of Postdoctoral and Predoctoral Internship Centers (APPIC)-accredited internships did not accept international applicants and about 30% of APPIC international applicants did not match (in comparison to the approximately 92% matching rates for all students) (APPIC, 2022). Noting that the predoctoral internship is a steppingstone in applied psychologists' careers (Meele et al., 2021), complications with CPT status, including an internship site's retraction or reticence to complete immigration paperwork, may explain international students' lower matching rate. Moreover, international students may travel and interview for internships in areas where they have limited cultural knowledge or where their previously acquired U.S. values and practices are marginally applicable. Furthermore, although ethically appropriate (Garrison et al., 2022), multilingual internship training opportunities are not listed as a criterion in the APPIC directory. Anecdotally, it is also known that some supervisors prohibit their international trainees to serve clients in their non-English preferred language.

Post-graduation experiences

ICP students, the majority of whom plan to remain in the U.S. post-graduation, usually consider applying either for a post-doctoral internship or for employment weeks or a few months after beginning their predoctoral internship. Evidently, one-year post-doctoral internships are less appealing to international folx with U.S. residency plans. Yet, in 2021, only about 30% of APPIC postdoctoral internships accepted OPT-status international applicants (APPIC, 2022).

For employment-seeking ICP folx, independent practice is unattainable without H1-B visa sponsorship. Recently, nationality bans and other eligibility restrictions impact Global South-originating ICP folx in obtaining and retaining H-1B status (Stuart, 2026). Some jobs in CP programs and university counseling services do not sponsor H-1 B or support LPR applications. Potential exploitation and discrimination may also occur when employers refuse or delay to support employees' LPR application while simultaneously offering insufficient compensation (González et al., 2020). For those with H1-B visa sponsorship, international conferencing may require multiple steps, from renewing and paying for a new U.S. visa in Canada or in their native country before requesting a visa to enter the conference international location while traveling, perhaps, as BIPOC and as Global South citizens.

Five to seven years after training, some ICP folx who opt to leave the U.S. are compelled to navigate the plausible or implausible applicability of their U.S. training globally. Dominguez and colleagues (2022) stressed that international students in mental health-related fields grapple with the lack of transferability of their training in their native country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Acculturation

Berry (2005) defines acculturation as the bidirectional process of adaption to a changing culture, environment, and/or society, which affects newcomers (e.g. ICP members) and older members (e.g. CP field) of a given community (Berry, 2005).

CP adaptation

About 20 years ago, the U.S. CP field began internationalization of its curriculum via new clinical training opportunities, cross-cultural collaborative exchanges, cross-national consultations, and explicit focus on the supervision of international students (Consoli et al., 2017). Other efforts included the development of international counseling competencies and expansion of theories and practice away from a top-down U.S.-centric framework (Hui-Spears et al., 2022). Additionally, various presidents of the Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP) of the American Psychological Association (APA) prioritized internationalization. The SCP developed two international strategic plans, the International CP Section in 2006, the International CP conference in 2008, and the elected position Executive Board of Vice Presidency for International Affairs in 2017. Thus, U.S. CP's adaptation process to its internationalization is keenly evident and ongoing.

ICP members' acculturation

Berry (2005) posits that newcomers of a given culture either assimilate fully to their new environment, prefer to retain their culture, become marginalized of both host culture and native culture, and/or integrate both host culture and culture of origin to their sense of being. Although no current studies exist on the ICP members' acculturation orientations, biculturalism is mentioned as an essential element in their acculturation process. International psychologists may vacillate between the predominant US-centric psychological perspectives and their cultural view of psychology within diverse international circles (Lafromboise, et al, 1993; Hui-Spears, et al, 2022).

The multidimensional approach to acculturation also posits that newcomers' acculturation shifts are apparent in their values, practices, and identification of either their host culture or their culture of origin (Schwartz et al., 2010). Existing acculturation studies emphasize ICP identity (Hui-Spears et al, 2022), indigenization efforts (Reynolds, 2022), Asian international students training needs (Park-Saltzman et al, 2012; Xiong et al., 2022), globalization (Scheel et al, 2018), cultural adjustment (Xie et al., 2026), and mental health-related issues (Pendse & Inman, 2015). Moreover, ICP folx acculturate to the CP ethos which include examining and addressing their biases, stereotypes, and prejudicial views. Consoli and colleagues (2022) reported on U.S. ICP faculty's emphasis on the CP guild, their identity development as international counseling psychologists, and acceptance of challenges and barriers incumbent of navigating CP as an ICP person. They also reported barriers related to language, feelings of isolation, higher service-related load commonly assigned to faculty of color, and bias and discrimination during tenure and promotion (Consoli et al, 2022, p. 22). Graduating ICP folx may also experience acculturation processes because of their decision to remain in the U.S., the solidification of their integration to the U.S., and the distancing from their country-of-origin identities and networks.

Immigration policies

The second Trump administration has sanctioned actions related to the central tenets of CP (diversity, multiculturalism, social justice, and social activism). ICP folx grapple with adhering to CP values and preserving their immigration status. U.S. immigration policy factors such as length of visa status and non-immigrant visa fees also vary across ICP members. Global South-originating international students experience more extensive, costly, and biased-based immigration restrictions and applications on visa application and renewals, which may lead to withdrawals, delays, or interruptions of training and job

prospects (Nawyn, 2016). Anecdotally, some ICP members coin these immigration-related demands as their second job/degree (Lawless & Chen, 2015). International students have expressed feelings of stress, anxiety, confusion, and a sense of betrayal to governmental directives (Park & Shimada, 2022).

Success

Being admitted to a CP doctoral program, completing such a program, and then working in a related field, in another country and, perhaps, with English-As-Another-Language skills are quintessential evidence of ICP folx' success, strength, and resilience (Consoli et al., 2022). A strength-based approach honors ICP folx' linguistic diversity, bicultural literacy, and the development of their social justice identity as CP professionals (Hui-Spears, et al, 2023). CP critical consciousness training may allow ICP folx to critically examine the various barriers within their career and training trajectory. It facilitates externalization rather than internalization of oppression. It may also galvanize their strengths and help them to dialectically shift barriers as opportunities for success and growth (Hui-Spears, et al, 2023).

Relatedly, Dominguez and colleagues (2022) reported that master's level ICP graduates employ internal and external coping resources including self-preservation resources, immigration preventive steps, self-motivating cognitive processes, and professional and personal social support. Interpersonal coping strategies, social support, and advocacy responsibilities were also reported as instrumental coping resources to mediate internship and work-related experiences. In Consoli and colleagues (2022), ICP faculty reported successful cultural adaptation processes and valued mentorship opportunities.

Theory

Referencing from the School-to-Work Transition theory (SWT; Masdonati et al., 2022), the two to three-year predoctoral internship and postgraduation career procurement is a period where ICP members transition from trainees to professionals. Because the predoctoral internship and postgraduate positions are remunerated, the Psychology of Working theory (PWT; Duffy et al, 2016) is another framework to understand the contextual factors of success or barrier during their search for decent predoctoral internship and postgraduation work. The PWT perspective of the SWT acknowledges the socioeconomic factors (e.g. immigration policies) and forms of marginalization (e.g. international student status) that influence ICP folx' process of accessing decent work (Masdonati et al, 2022). The PWT-infused SWT also centers the resources and social support that facilitate successful work-related experiences of diverse trainees. As explained above, ICP folx experience a myriad of acculturation and immigration factors during their internship and job search process. Also, coping strategies including social support are emphasized in studies on international communities in counseling psychology, showcasing ongoing and recurrent needs for resources to successfully manage challenging trainee-to-work transition (Dominguez et al., 2022; Consoli et al., 2022) and to foster a strength-based approach in our understanding of ICP experiences (Hui-Spears, et al, 2023).

In consideration of the PWT perspective of the SWT, the study purpose is to describe the successes and barriers in ICP members' internship and job acquisition process, with the hope of (a) shedding light on critical factors affecting the internship and job acquisition process of ICP students and ICP professionals and (b) offering more avenues to successfully train, recruit, and retain an increasing number of international mental health professionals who play a critical role in CP nationally and globally. One research question was generated: what are common successes and barriers in the internship and job search process of soon-to-be and early-career international counseling psychologists?

RESEARCH METHOD

The Consensual Qualitative Research Method (CQR; Hill & Knox, 2021) was selected for this study because it is an inductive, descriptive qualitative method for deriving critical themes in CP qualitative research. By choosing CQR, our participants were able to describe varied and rich experiences related to

either success or barrier factors to their internship and job acquisition process. CQR is also a well-structured, multi-step, consensus-driven, and auditing-focused method which is used with different surveying tools (interviews, online surveys) (Limberg et al., 2021).

Participants

A total of 37 participants were recruited to participate in the study and 17 of these participants responded to some or all of the main survey questions. The data of the 17 participants were then retained. The 17 participants included four soon-to-be-graduating ICP doctoral students and 13 early-career international counseling psychologists (N = 17), ages 29 to 50 (M = 32.5, m = 30), of whom 14 self-identified as women and three self-identified as men. Participants reported a variety of backgrounds (Review Table 1).

Table 1

Participants' demographic characteristics.

Participant (Alias)	Age (Years)	Professional Status	Country of Origin	Gender	Immigration Status
Hye Jin	39	Full-time staff	South Korea	Woman	H-1B visa
Priya	30	Predoctoral intern	India	Woman	F1 visa
Yi Chen	31	Full-time staff	Taiwan	Woman	F1 visa
Seung Yeon	29	Full-time staff	South Korea	Woman	F1 visa
Advika	36	Predoctoral intern	India	Woman	F1 visa
Chia Hwa	39	Full-time staff	Taiwan	Woman	H-1B visa
Hoi Lam	31	Full-time faculty	Taiwan	Woman	H-1B visa
Cheung	31	Full-time staff	Hong Kong	Woman	H-1B visa
Antoine	31	Full-time faculty	Canada	Man	LPR*
Da Xia	42	Self-employed psychologist	Taiwan	Woman	LPR
Haruto	unknown	Predoctoral intern	Japan	Man	F1 visa
Amandine	35	Full-time staff	Mauritius	Woman	LPR
Minori	50	Full-time staff	Japan	Woman	LPR
Aspasia	34	Post-doctoral fellow	Greece	Woman	F1 visa
Olga	30	Full-time faculty	Bulgaria	Woman	LPR
Jua Hua	43	Full-time staff	Taiwan	Woman	LPR
Sveinn	34	Post-internship ABD**	Iceland	Man	No Response

Note: *Legal permanent resident, **All but dissertation.

To participate in the study, individuals had to be (1) 18 years and older ICP students in predoctoral internship or (2) 18 years and older early-career international psychologists (holding post-doctoral clinical positions or seeking practice-oriented employment) who graduated within the past seven years. The sample criteria were selected as these ICP members were the most knowledgeable of the predoctoral and postgraduation circumstances. The institutional review board of the primary investigator approved this study.

Measures

The primary investigators generated the demographic questionnaire and three broad open-ended questions which were finalized in consultation with the ICP Research Committee of SCP. The question on barriers was "What has been the most difficult/challenging aspect of (a) internship application process_____ (b) Job search process_____?" The question on successes indicated "What and who was the most helpful to you during (a) internship application process_____(b) job search process" and another question asked specifically about the immigration-related issues that they experienced during (a) the internship application process and (b) the job search process.

Data Collection

Email invitations were sent to psychology listservs, APA-accredited CP training site directors, CP training programs, and to those meeting the study criteria. Participants read the email invitation, clicked on the embedded Qualtrics link of the study, reviewed and signed the informed consent. Then, they completed the demographic data form and the three survey questions. To ensure the anonymity of participants, the dataset of this study is available upon request from the corresponding author.

Research team

The research analysis team consisted of two auditors and four judges. The auditors included the primary investigator, a 44-year-old Black queer ciswoman of African and European upbringing, who completed pre- and post-doctoral training in Canada and in the U.S. She teaches qualitative research methods in psychology and has published on the experiences of international individuals in the U.S. and beyond. The second auditor was a 54-year-old heterosexual cis-male first-generation Asian immigrant who has worked in higher education for 20 years as a practitioner and administrator. His graduate study was on research inquiry methodology and is versed with various qualitative research methods, such as CQR. He has served in different professional leadership roles including in the International Section of SCP. The judges included four undergraduate psychology students: a 27-year-old African-American ciswoman, a 45-year-old Black ciswoman who lived abroad for a significant portion of her life, a 27-year-old Biracial ciswoman, and a 27-year-old ciswoman of Puerto Rican origin. The judges completed a qualitative research method in psychology course and were concurrently enrolled in an advanced level undergraduate seminar in immigration psychology. The judges were also trained in CQR methodology.

Data analysis

The research team met regularly over the span of academic semesters to analyze the data. The research team generated paragraphs on their biases and expectations on the study topic. Using an inductive process, each judge independently reviewed and generated domains emerging across three participants' responses. Afterwards, the judges met and agreed on a preliminary list of nine domains from the three participants' responses. Then, the judges reviewed each remaining transcript line by line together and aligned statements into appropriate domains. Domains were revised with subsequent review of additional data. Then, the judges developed core ideas, categories, and subcategories of corresponding domains. The auditors offered feedback throughout the analysis process. Judges engaged in regular reflexive dialogues to bracket intrapersonal reactions. Finally, the list of domains, categories, and sub-categories were revised and organized in terms of barrier and success factors in accordance with the study purpose (Hill & Knox, 2021).

Trustworthiness

The researchers consulted and implemented feedback from leaders of the International Section of CP in the development of the study. We decided on the online surveying method as it eased participation accessibility, ensured anonymity in our small ICP community, and reduced immigration policing repercussions. Two research experts in CQR and CQR-M were consulted and they both affirmed that CQR was more adequate than CQR-M. CQR-M is a modified version of CQR, utilized predominantly for online-based studies with 65+ participants. CQR-M-based studies include a combination of open-ended and quantitative-based survey questions (Spangler et al., 2013). In consideration of our sample size, our desire to analyze the data in-depth, and the lack of quantitative-based surveying method in this study (Spangler et al., 2013), we selected CQR. The judges and auditors met to review procedures at each step of the CQR analysis process. Comprehensive documentation of the data analysis was relegated in Microsoft Excel documents. Also, several discussions at the beginning of the data analysis focused on maintaining egalitarian practices in power dynamics and inside-outside voice perspectives within the research team. Finally, after a coder's departure during CQR cross analysis phase, the team dialogued and planned accordingly to ensure continuity of similar consensus dynamics.

RESULTS

Participants wrote a total of 11,461 characters. The section findings describes each theme and category found in this study. Under each category description will be corresponding quotes from participants. Table 2 displays two themes, nine domains, 17 categories, and two sub-categories found in this study.

Table 2

Frequency of themes, domains, categories, and subcategories.

Themes, domains, categories, sub-categories	Frequency	
Success factors		
Support		
Helpful persons		
Institutional support	12	T
Interpersonal support	11	T
Self-support	7	V
Culturally inclusive climate	4	V
Critical self-awareness		
Identity Considerations	3	V
Socio-economic privilege	3	V
Barrier factors		
International status hurdles		
Additional costs	3	V
Convoluted immigration processes	4	V
Time and effort		
Time	2	V
Effort	4	V
Stress		
Immigration responsibilities	5	V
Graduate student responsibilities	3	V

Intersectionality		
Site microaggressions	2	V
Inequitable practices	8	T
Factoring cultural identity	3	V
Lack of support		
Lack of support in job/internship/school processes	3	V
Lack of support in immigration related processes	3	V
Lack of competence		
Institutional lack of awareness and knowledge	4	V
Institutional lack of skills and action	3	V

Note: V= Variant (1-8), T= Typical (9-15), G= General (16-17).

Theme 1: Success factors

The theme success factors provides elements that facilitate internship and job acquisition. It includes three domains, three categories, and two sub-categories.

Domain 1: Support

Helpful Persons. Generally, participants expressed receiving an empathic understanding and a willingness to help, advocate and/or provide adequate services and assistance from helpful persons within their social circles and academic environment. The category helpful persons is organized into two sub-categories: institutional support and interpersonal support.

Institutional support. Participants reported on the support they obtained from faculty, staff, employers, supervisor, advisor, and other professional mentors. For instance, Aspasia mentioned the institutional support she received about her CPT status. She shared that: "Advocacy from adviser or program director to try to help my situation through our university international center as they had the final say in how to manage my CPT during internship." She also mentioned receiving "advice, suggestions, and instrumental support from mentors." Yi Chen reported about faculty support during her internship search process. She wrote: "faculty who provided guidance [....] faculty in my program in advising me [on] how to prepare [internship application] materials." Cheung wrote:

> "Luckily I learned all the necessary information from my university [...]. [My] internship site was very helpful in providing feedback for my job interview [...] center for Career Opportunity in my university; they provided information about how to work under F1 visa."

In addition to internship supervisors, Da Xia alluded to professional organizations and conferences as a way of building professional support: "Supervisors at my internship site and mentors who I came across from professional organization and conference." Jua Hua identified support from "other international mentors in the larger psych[ology] community" during her internship and job search process.

Interpersonal support. Interpersonal support describes resources from peers, friends, classmates, cohort members, family members, and colleagues. Amandine shared receiving support during her job search process from "peers from my graduate program." She also stated: "I personally heard about the [University Counseling Jobs] website from other intern in another internship site." Aspasia also mentioned the support she received from other international students during the job search process. She wrote: "Emotional support from those who understood my situation or was willing to try to understand the situation and give empathy [...] friends who were in the same boat as an international person." Sveinn received support from "Friends

who have already applied to internship in previous years." Antoine identified "Some family members who went through the immigration process were helpful."

Self-support. ICP members indicated the need to rely on themselves. Antoine said: "I had to do everything on my own." Amandine shared: "when graduate programs don't facilitate a support mechanism (e.g., interview practice, essay review...etc), it's up to applicants to rely on their own network for guidance and support." Amandine's statement was double coded as lack of support. Aspasia shared the various experiences that she needed to address on her own as an ICP member:

> "Figuring out how to be on CPT during my internship. Figuring out tuition and student fee costs to pay out of pocket due to not being on an assistantship and having to be registered for the summer (in order to be on CPT) compared to domestic students who didn't need to be registered for the summer. [...] Figuring out how to find a job that can sponsor me. Figuring out how to talk about the need for employment sponsorship at varying levels of the search process (initial application, phone interview, in person interview). Finding jobs that would sponsor me and say this explicitly in their job description. Figuring out where I would want to live long enough for a job until I could get a green card. Figuring out where I would want to live given my minority statuses and wanting to find a diverse location."

Some of Aspasia's statements were also coded in the categories culturally sensitive climate and additional costs. Cheung reported her decision to secure a postdoctoral internship to manage stressful concurrent responsibilities. She said that it was "very stressful because of the limited time to secure a job while working on internship and completing dissertation. Thus I secure[d] a temporary post-doc[toral position] with my internship site."

Domain 2: Culturally sensitive climate

A series of responses focused on the essentiality of a culturally sensitive climate as another success factor during the internship and job search process. Priya reported on culturally minded folx who were instrumental to her internship and job application process. She wrote:

> "peers who were culturally/racially sensitive and were willing to provide assistance [during the internship application process.] Finding a work environment that can be supportive to my needs. [....] other international colleagues (or colleagues of color) who are more advanced than me regarding their cultural/racial identity development."

Some of Priya's statements were also double coded in the category identity considerations. Aspasia indicated that job descriptions that included immigration expectations were one of the most helpful aspects of her internship and job acquisition process. She stated that "Jobs that would specifically describe and highlight whether they could sponsor a work visa or not." Yi Chen also reported that "Counseling centers seemed to be less biased [...] and employers that were unbiased in the internship search process." Haruto also reported similarly about "[I] was trying to find the sites that are culturally sensitive and friendly for international student interns."

Domain 3: Critical self-awareness

Identity considerations. Although the domain culturally sensitive climate revealed participants' intentional search for inclusive internship sites and jobs, we wanted to highlight participants' expressed awareness of their international student identity during the internship and job-seeking prospects (variant). Chia Hwa shared:

> "I was very conscious during the internship process to select sites that would have knowledge of what I needed as an international student (i.e., good international services on campus, support, and resources - diverse and international staff members)."

Moreover, Sveinn acknowledged that his "family responsibilities" were salient to his internship search process.

Privileges. Some participants acknowledged advantages from their immigration status and their native country, such as economic status, and/or social capital, which may affect available support and access to resources during the internship and job search process (variant). For example, Antoine acknowledged immigration-related privileges attained from his "high status" foreign nationality. He shared "I'm privileged and from a country with low cultural distance from the USA." Furthermore, Chia Hwa stated:

> "I already had my green card by then [during the job search process] and did not need to be sponsored by anyone. I am very grateful for this a[s] I have heard about 'horror stories' and international graduates who are taken advantage of."

Olga acknowledged the privilege of having Canadian citizenship which made it easier when it came to immigration/Visa and CPT during their job search process. She indicated: "because I have Canadian citizenship, immigration/VISA stuff is easier. Just needed to make sure CPT was in order, which was easy."

Theme 2: Barrier factors

Barrier factors included persons, circumstances, dynamics, and systems that hinder their internship and job acquisition process. Although success factors were more reported, the theme barrier factors included more domains, categories, and sub-categories than success factors.

Domain 4: International status hurdles

Additional Costs. Participants expressed that international students pay additional costs to maintain their international status in the U.S. during internship (variant). Yi Chen shared:

> "I had to stay enrolled during internship and pay tuition, which was not the case for my fellow US citizen classmates. This resulted in paying one quarter of my already small stipend toward tuition. I had already defended my dissertation, so this made it even more challenging because the school told me I need to enroll in dissertation credits and I had to ask the office of international students to create a special case for me."

Da Xia reported on the "international student" only tuition. She wrote: "[I] found out that I had to pay out-of-state tuition for my internship year because of my international student status, which costs nearly $4000 more than regular semesters."

Convoluted immigration processes. A total of four participants reported complex immigration processes that hindered their internship and job search process (variant). Olga wrote:

> "Some technical things to be aware of during transition from CPT to OPT (e.g., starting/end dates), negotiating visa sponsorship with potential employers (most stressful), looking into visa process (second most stressful), looking into options of working in home countries vs US related to job opportunities, licensure, etc. (Taiwan, Canada--also stressful)."

Some of Olga's sentences were double coded as the category "stress." Amandine also pointed out the immigration challenges in job offer negotiations, "negotiating for salary while relying on employer's sponsorship for H1B or permanent residency was challenging." When she was a predoctoral intern, Chia Hwa experienced complex immigration issues due to a lapse in adhering to CPT status deadline. She wrote:

> "During internship I had a baby and forgot to renew one of the CPT form in time (i.e., 3 days late) as a result of having a new born and losing track of time/dates and almost got kicked out of the U.S. [...] I had to stop the internship until I received my green card."

Domain 5: Time and effort

Time. Minori reported difficulty in searching for international student-accepting internship sites. She wrote: "No easy way to search for them [internship accepting international students] ...so, wasted [a] lot of time." Yi Chen wrote about "Working on dissertation and having a full caseload [...] cost, time and effort involved in the process." Yi Chen's statement was double coded as part of the subcategories effort and additional costs.

Effort. A few participants shared about the additional energy needed to complete various obligations including their immigration requirements. For instance, Priya shared about the difficulties in "remembering to renew CPT." Similarly, Olga also mentioned, "Some technical things to be aware of during transition from CPT to OPT."

Domain 6: Stress

Immigration responsibilities. Variantly, ICP members reported experiencing stress because of immigration processes. Antoine shared: "Getting an H1B, then working toward permanent residency. Extremely stressful, because at times I thought I might be rejected for both." Due to visa expiration, Chia Hwa expressed feelings of stress from pausing her predoctoral internship due to missing the CPT renewal deadline. She wrote: "I was very lucky [about] that since it took a total of 2 months [to reinstate my CPT status.] I was readmitted to my internship to finish it up instead of having to reapply all over again. What a mess!!" Also, Da Xia expressed the fear evoked from the job search process since her OPT application and H1B sponsorship needed to be acquired in a timely manner. She reported: "the fear of not getting OPT in time and sponsorship for H1-B create a lot of stress to move my job search process as early as possible."

Graduate student responsibilities. Typically, participants indicated feeling stressed from graduate student responsibilities. Amandine expressed heightened stress due to the workload involved in the internship application process and the anxiety of possibly moving away from their support system. She wrote:

> "In general, internship application was stressful for me because of the amount of work on application materials and financial implications on the on-site interviews or open house [...] Also, the idea about possibly moving to a different state for a year without close family member(s) or friends' help and support can be anxiety provoking for international students."

Moreover, Sveinn identified the challenge of "managing stress" during the internship application process and job search process.

Domain 7: Intersectionality

Site microaggressions. Variantly, ICP members reported working in employment settings that were culturally insensitive to international applicants. For instance, Antoine revealed his internship site's "concern" about being a non-citizen. He reported: "my [internship] site was all concerned because I wasn't American" (disclosure provided before the second Trump administration). Yi Chen shared about staff who pathologized their realistic/valid anxiety about the job acquisition process as an international student. Yi Chen wrote: "The staff at the site did not feel sympathetic to my anxiety about getting a job or having to leave the country and said I was catastrophizing."

Inequitable practices. Typically, ICP members indicated receiving differential treatment in doctoral training, predoctoral internship search process, and employment search process. Hoi Lam shared that:

"Most of the places are not actively seeking candidates with F1 visa." Yi Chen believed that she experienced differential treatment which limited internship choices. She wrote:

> "[I] did not match in Phase I [of predoctoral internship] even though I was told by multiple faculty that my application is exceptionally strong and I applied to sites that were excellent fits. [...] It was the confusion [...] when my fellow classmates did and none of the faculty could tell me how to strengthen my application. One of the possible reasons is that I was an international student on an F-1 visa with specific restrictions and this is disclosed in the application materials. I matched at Phase II but at a place that was very remote and not necessarily a good fit. [...] I am not sure what the visible barriers were but I felt there were invisible barriers for international students by limiting the number of places where you can apply and not getting interviews at places that seemed like the best fit."

With regards to the job process, Da Xia shared:

> "I also had to limit my options and not pursue an academic position or post doctoral fellowship because of the risks of not getting my OPT and H1B sponsorship in time. [...] It's discouraging when seeing certain organizations include 'no [visa] sponsorship available for applicants' in the job posting."

Finally, Advika reported on how one's racial minoritized status can negatively affect the job search process. She wrote: "Minority status can be a barrier at White dominated institution."

Factoring identity. This subcategory focuses on the identity factors or incidents of salience to participants' internship and job search process. Participants reported these identity factors or incidents as barriers to their internship and job search process. For instance, Hye Jin expressed an expectation to assimilate to U.S. professional decorum during her job search process. She wrote:

> "Conforming to what is believed to be desirable instead of allowing your person to come through genuinely and be fully present in the moment. [...] the focus on formalities that are nearly meaningless, such as one's Vita/resumé in regards to who you are as a person and what you can offer as a therapist/healer."

Advika shared about phone interviews when the applicant has a non-U.S. English accent. She wrote: "phone interviews [during the internship search process] can be challenging with non-American native accent. [During the job search process,] cultural differences." Moreover, Olga shared about the challenging process of consolidating the learning attained during transition from their intersectional identity as international female student to international female professional. She said:

> "[the challenges during internship application process were] summarizing learnings from graduate program concisely, and being able to talk about my own integrated identity as clinician. [...] [during the job search process, the challenges were] summarizing learnings from [my] entire training program and talking about myself as [a] professional (integrated identity not just as clinician, but as a psychologist)."

Domain 8: Lack of Support

Lack of support in school/internship/job processes. A handful of participants reported lack of support in job, school, or internship processes. Amandine identified a lack of support during the internship and job search application processes. She indicated that:

> "[For the job search,] no one from my internship site (university counseling center) had ever mentioned this important source [University Counseling jobs website] to us. Since many senior staff from my internship site were the agency's form]er interns, they didn't seem to have a wide range of professional network at national level or beyond university counseling centers, and therefore they didn't seem to have a lot of sources to share job openings with interns."

Yi Chen reported experiencing lack of support over the sometimes-lengthy process in job acquisition and thus, a need for more flexibility with professional development days. She wrote:

> "They [predoctoral internship site] did not give me additional professional development days off for interviews when I asked and told me I had to use my vacation days or sick days (without telling them I am going on job interviews)."

Antoine wrote "nothing" when asked about what was helpful during the internship application process. He elaborated that: "Nothing really…I felt like I had to do everything on my own." The second sentence of Antoine's statement was also coded as self-support.

Lack of support in immigration-related processes. Jua Hua identified inadequate support from her university when trying to obtain CPT status. She stated that "Getting my university to give me a CPT [was most difficult during internship application]." Haruto identified lack of support in immigration-related process during his job search and even needing to engage in "negotiation [with a prospective employer] for assistance with H1B visa application."

Domain 9: Lack of Competence

Institutional lack of awareness and knowledge. International psychologists reported experiencing institutional lack of awareness about ICP members' internship and job search process (variant). Hye Jin shared receiving inadequate advice from people in positions of power, which was coded as both institutional lack of skills and lack of awareness. She wrote: "the poor advice of people that are in positions of power, yet are not willing or able to see that they do not have pertinent advice [during the internship application process]." Amandine also identified the inadequate knowledge of the staff at her internship site. She wrote:

> "I have heard that some training directors seemed unfamiliar with CPT and implication of APA requirement of 12 months full time training period on international trainees' eligibility for OPT in the future. [...] Many staff at the internship site were not aware of the work restrictions for international trainees. Since many senior staff from my internship site were the agency's former interns, they didn't seem to have a wide range of professional network at national level or beyond university counseling centers, and therefore they didn't seem to have a lot of sources to share job openings with interns."

Da Xia also indicated about her institution's lack of knowledge and guidance on immigration policies and her internship site's lack of competence. She stated:

> "My program was clueless [on] how to help. [...] faculty in my program didn't know much about tuition required for international student. [...] [There was a] Lack of available guidance and information about visa issues and application process specific to international students."

Institutional lack of skills. Da Xia reported the lack of competence from her academic institution's international office: "Staff at OIS [Office of International Students] also did not have consistent policy on CPT policy for counseling psychology internship." Amandine also shared: "There's also a concern about whether staff from training sites have adequate knowledge and experience in supervising and providing mentorship to trainees from foreign countries."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Utilizing the CQR qualitative method (Hill & Knox, 2021), this study identified success and barrier factors in the internship and job acquisition of ICP members in CP. A notable factor of success was the professional (institution, faculty, internship supervisors, academic advisor, professional organization contacts) and interpersonal (classmates, other international students, friends, family, cohort members, and colleagues) support that international persons received during this critical career formation period. The PWT perspective of the SWT considers social support as an essential moderator of the relationship between socioeconomic constraints (e.g. immigration policies) and successful work transition (Masdonati et al., 2022). Lee and Knutson (2022) reported that psychological and practical support in academic institutions

were instrumental to the adaptation of international students (p. 67). In Conversely, self-support emerged as another success factor. Indeed, an initiative-taking style during the school-to-work transition is found to decrease the impact of economic constraints (e.g. immigration-related concerns) on one's work volition (Wan et al., 2023). Thus, the combination of both social support and self-support is needed during this career formation period.

Moreover, our findings pinpoint the salience of a culturally inclusive climate and critical self-awareness. Participants appeared cognizant of their likelihood of internship and employment success in environments that are inclusive and conducive to their international student status. The internationalization process of practice-based psychology has certainly impacted the quantity of sites accessible to international trainees - the number of internship sites open to international students rose from 70% to 93% from 2021 to 2025 (APPIC, 2025). However, university counseling centers, which a participant reported as more culturally sensitive to international students, represent 21% of internship sites available to international students (APPIC, 2025). Also, cultural sensitivity goes beyond international student representation to understanding the needs of the ICP community (Park-Saltzman et al, 2012).

Participants also shared critical self-awareness lessons learned during this career formation process. They acknowledged how their immigration and socio-economic privileges played a role in their success. Indeed, from PWT perspectives, economic constraints negatively impact future decent work in immigrant workers (Duffy et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2023). Participants' acknowledgement of their privilege and of the relevance of their social identities in their search processes aligns with the introspective component of the ICP training and values (Pieterse et al, 2009). Moreover, participants reported challenges with the professional decorum during their search processes. Although participants perceived these experiences in professional decorum as barriers, their self-awareness may protect/buffer participants to realistically navigate the U.S. climate with critical discernment of best self-advocacy strategies.

Overall, participants reported more barriers than success factors. These challenges emerged from immigration responsibilities, unexpected additional costs, and intersectional experiences, which required time and effort to address; thus, contributing to ICP folx' stress. Xu and Flores (2022) indicated that ICP students manage the stress of being a graduate student while also navigating acculturation and time-sensitive immigration processes. Studies report the impact of immigration policies (Domínguez et al., 2022; Consoli et al., 2022) or, as it is referred, the "second job" of international students (Lawless & Chen, 2015). Domínguez and colleagues (2022) found that the number of stressors affecting graduating students was more acute in international graduate students than in non-international graduate students. Knowing that, from the PWT perspective, employment anxiety significantly predicts decent work perspectives (Wan et al., 2023), further attention to stress-based management support for ICP folx may be warranted.

Moreover, participants reported difficulty in the internship search process because of limited wide-spread competency in CPT procedures. Notably, the growing visibility of anti-immigration sentiments may play a role in securing, sustaining, and completing a predoctoral internship and attaining career mobility (Lan, 2012). Referring to APPIC's indication that about 30% of international students did not match in 2021(APPIC, 2021) and in alignment with social justice principles (Hui-Spears et al., 2022), inequitable practices and perceived microaggressions during internship may not be unfounded. Sadly, international students reported that their domestic colleagues and staff in their internship site were unable to properly empathize with their experiences (Lee et al, 2022), which a participant disclosed in this study.

Participants alluded to areas from which support may be further developed or enhanced. They identified lack of support as stemming mostly from programs', internship sites', and career settings' absence of a service or support about the multiplicity of immigration responsibilities. It may explain why some participants only named themselves as a source of support which can be translated as meaning both self-advocacy and lack of support. In Domínguez and colleagues (2022), international graduate students desired better support from their academic advisors about international status-related stressors. Notably, lack of support may imply lack of competence on the part of institutions in consciously, cognitively, and pro-actively supporting international folx.

Limitations

Although this study is the first to attend to the training and career-related successes and barriers of ICP folx, there are limitations to consider. First, although our sample is representative of the intersectionality of the ICP community, the results of this study are not generalizable to all ICP members. International students from Africa or South and Central America may experience additional structural barriers/discrimination in visa approval, CPT/OPT approval, immigration sponsorship, and so many others due to colorism and anti-Blackness, all of which need to be better captured in future studies. Due to the high number of Asian-identified participants, future studies may purposefully ask international participants on intersectional factors that may hinder or improve their career trajectory. Another limitation was the use of an online surveying approach rather than in-person interviews which could elicit more in-depth responses particularly regarding stress-based experiences.

IMPLICATIONS

The study findings have socio-ecological implications in the training, retention, and recruitment of ICP members. To best advocate and mentor international students, academic advisors need training on their advisees' needs including ever changing immigration procedures. They may develop their advisees' self-advocacy skills and encourage them to use best stress management practices to navigate academic and professional challenges. They may also nurture their advisee's development of trainee-to-professional CP literacy that may foster bicultural professional practices (Keith et al., 2016). Moreover, internship site directors may work to create an inclusive climate that highlights the strengths of international trainees and increases their site's sensitivity to international trainees' needs. This may include cross-cultural competency training and guidelines to unequivocally address insensitivities. International students may be encouraged to speak up when microaggressions occur. Furthermore, at the community level, the APA Division 17 ICP section serves as an essential platform for mentorship, community building, community celebration, and community advocacy. Academic advisors and site supervisors may recommend their international students to participate in the ICP section (Langrehr et al, 2020). Furthermore, due to the intersectional nature of ICP folx' experiences, the ICP section may develop social activism-grounded guidelines for ICP students to navigate insensitivities in their training and work environment. In addition, SCP may consider establishing systems-wide best practices on how to effectively train, mentor, and advocate for international students with the focus on prevention, career, mental health training, multiculturalism, and social justice.

Early-career international psychologists need to consult with an immigration attorney unaffiliated with their agency/academic institution. This legal professional will prioritize their best interests when immigration challenges occur. International psychologists are also encouraged to consider their bicultural skills (e.g. bilingualism) as assets and how those, as any developed expertise, should be compensated to prevent tokenism and extra (unpaid) work. Furthermore, unit administrators and supervisors may organize staff-wide consciousness raising training on the strengths and challenges of international psychologists; in this way, the burden of raising awareness on such topics is not the responsibility of ICP folx. Unit directors are encouraged to partner with on-campus stakeholders, including Human Resources office and, if existing, DEI offices, to tackle the "no visa sponsorships" statement in psychology job descriptions. This will be particularly relevant for institutions that hold values of global education and social justice or those with a high number of international students (Hwang et al., 2014). At the community level, international psychologists may continue fostering relationships within the ICP and the APA International Psychology. The value of "decent work" means that APA unequivocally affirms the importance of and offers strategies for the recruitment and retention of international folx in APA-accredited programs. At the systemic level, APA can continue to submit amicus briefs and statements in opposition of anti-immigration policies particularly in terms of internship and employment.

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