



Resilience and Professional Identity among F-2 Visa Spouses in the United States: Coping with Career Constraints under Immigration Policies

Fatemeh Melina Bakhshalizadeh
Iowa State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Previous scholars highlighted how F-2 visa regulations interrupt the career of spouses of international students by preventing them from working, but they did not explore the coping strategies of this population in maintaining their professional identity, and how these coping strategies show the traces of feminization of poverty. Through participant observation and interviewing 16 female F-2 visa holders who used to work before coming to the US, and inspired by Abu-Lughod's (1990) concept of resistance, this article shows that F-2 visa regulations have some negative effects on the identity. However, the participants use different coping strategies, such as trying to go to universities/enter job market through change of immigration status, taking opportunities to receive gift cards in return for their work/services, and not acknowledging change in their professional identity; these coping strategies show F-2 visa regulations with other policies contribute to feminization of poverty mainly by postponing the employment.

Keywords: F-2 visa, feminization of poverty, coping, identity, women, career

When spouses of international students come to the US, they mostly receive F-2 visas as dependents of international students (F-1 visa holders). Although F-2 visa holders can become a part-time student, they are not allowed to earn money, such as working on campus like their student husband. In other words, F-2 visa regulations prevent spouses of international students from having a paid job and becoming a full-time student while they hold F-2 visas (Soylemez-Karakoc et al., 2023; Kim, 2006). It is worth mentioning that spouses of international students who come to the US are also restricted from working remotely for other countries when they are in the US, or earning money on social media, because they will be

deported. This means that there is no way to earn money while F-2 visa holders live in the US. The majority of F-2 visa holders are women because their husbands, international students, choose STEM majors¹ which is occupied mostly by male students. One reason is STEM majors are popular among international students because international students can work more years in post-graduation under Optional Practical Training (OPT) compared to the non-STEM majors (Jiang et al., 2020). This shows that female spouses of international students are the majority in F-2 visa holders' population. Thus, the restrictive nature of F-2 visa regulations in terms of earning money intersects with higher population of female F-2 visa holders, and this article argues that immigration policies like F-2 visa regulations contribute to feminization of poverty.

Feminization of poverty

Feminization of poverty can occur domestically and globally. In the US, still female employees earn 0.83 for every 1.00 dollar that a male counterpart earns, and a study showed that mother breadwinners had double poverty rate compared to single male-headed household (Sharma, 2023). Globally, in migration studies, female immigrants in general may not become empowered after migration because the host countries offer low-status jobs caused by ethnic and gender discrimination in the workforce (Akpınar, 2003). For example, Restifo et al. (2023) shows that the economic mobility is more common among the White population compared to immigrants, Blacks, Native Americans, Asian, and Latino subgroups. Although the female immigrants, especially the ones coming from a country with a lower welfare system, might be low-skilled before entering the host countries (Bredtmann & Otten, 2023), looking at the immigrants' employment experience through the lens of gender shows that not only women are among the populations who face obstacles in entering job markets (Carillo et al., 2023), the female immigrants get more domestic jobs like cleaning, cooking, and childcare, or what Gamburd (1999) mentions as a feminized job. One reason is that native females leave the devalued jobs in care work, and the immigrants take these jobs instead (Østbakken et al., 2023) as there is more demand for domestic jobs for female immigrants.

In the case of highly-skilled immigrants, Xie (2024) showed that the foreign work experience of the immigrants are not valued in the US, and the employers count them as entry level employees, which negatively affects their wages. Moreover, scholars emphasized that strict job requirements and requiring new assessments for the education and experience of the immigrants to prove their professionalism devalue them (Barber, 2013; Piper, 2009). One reason high-paid jobs are difficult to get is due to protecting interests of the native people in the host country/nativism in the workforce (Grigoleit-Richter, 2017). Additionally, gender stereotypes affect the employment of the women in higher

¹ STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics majors.

level and leadership positions because in general men are described as rational, independent, decisive and logical (Wang, 2023). Grigoleit-Richter (2017) shows that the gender segregation of technology sectors, which devalue female immigrants' professional performance, postpone career improvements and professional independence of female immigrants by encouraging them to have enough cultural, local knowledge, and language fluency. All these factors lead the female immigrants' wages to grow more slowly than native employees, especially those who come with dependent visa caused by immigration policies (Xie, 2024).

When it comes to the literature of female F-2 visa holders, as dependents of international students, F-2 visa regulations contribute to feminization of poverty first because F-2 visa holders who used to earn money back in their home country are not allowed to earn money in any forms for a certain period of time. Consequently, through disruptions or creating a gap in their resume, their career in the future might be negatively affected (Bordoloi, 2015).

Second, due to not being allowed to work/earn money, female F-2 visa holders have to do unpaid housework instead of working and earning money (Bordoloi, 2016). Consequently, due to lack of income, the wives of international students experience downward mobility in their social class in the US (Kim 2010), and they do not feel belonged to their pre-migration socio-economic class in the US. These findings all highlight that the F-2 visa regulations contribute to feminization of poverty, which might be different than literature of other female immigrants in migration context because previous scholars mostly talked about the female immigrants who are permitted to earn money.

Current Study

To explore how F-2 visa regulations contribute to the feminization of poverty, it is very important to first see how the F-2 visa affects the identity and how these women cope with F-2 visa regulations to maintain their professional identity. In the case of international students, studies show that even if international students face academic pressure, they cope through constructing an academic identity (Mukherjee & Fernandes, 2024), fitting in the new US society and navigating the US system (Huang & Khan, 2024). However, there is a gap in the literature about how F-2 visa holders cope when they face challenges. Previous literature highlighted that many wives of international students lose their professional identity and become homemakers (Bordoloi, 2016), but many of them want to become professional women again, and were not satisfied with being only a housewife (Chen, 2009). However, there is a gap in the literature about how the previously employed women cope with F-2 visa regulations to maintain their professional identity.

Inspired by the resistance concept of Abu-Lughod (1990), studying coping strategies of the female F-2 visa holders will shed light on obstacles these women face due to systems of power like immigration policies which would help to explore the traces of feminization of poverty. Abu-Lughod (1990) underlined how resistance can be a diagnostic of power and studying resistance can help as a

methodological way to explore the power in particular situations. This paper argues that Abu-Lughod's concept of resistance can be reflected in coping strategies because Abu Lughod highlighted resistance as resisting being dominated by power without the aim of overthrowing it, which can help the women to withstand the power in an oppressive social system. This paper argues that the concept of resistance by Abu Lughod is similar to coping as coping is the thoughts and behaviors utilized to manage the stressful situation (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Therefore, through exploring the coping strategies of the female F-2 visa holders, this article will show how F-2 visa contribute to feminization of poverty. Therefore, this study will answer three questions:

Question 1: What are the effects of F-2 visa regulations on the identity of female F-2 visa holders?

Question: 2: How do F-2 visa holders cope with the F-2 visa regulations to maintain their professional identity?

Question 3: How do F-2 visa regulations contribute to feminization of poverty?

METHOD

For exploring the effects of F-2 visa regulations on the identity of female F-2 visa holders and their coping strategies in Central University² in the US, this study conducted ethnographic/multi-method research through semi-structured interviewing, participant observation and writing field notes after receiving the IRB approval.

For sampling, this study used criterion sampling because F-2 visa regulations prevent the holders from working, so it was important to choose the women who used to work before the migration as one criterion. Second, this article aimed to explore the effects of the F-2 visa regulations on female spouses because most F-2 visa holders are women (Jiang et al., 2020). Even the demographic data of Central University showed that in the Fall semester of 2021, out of 201 F-2 visa holders, 170 of them were females.

Other inclusion criteria were being 18 years old or above and communicating in English. I recruited participants by face-to-face invitation, using flyers, sending mass emails through local offices, and word of mouth. The participants for this study were 16 women for the interview, which four of them accepted to be observed. The participant observation was in the private setting like in the house of a participant, but mostly in public settings like Central University, churches and community centers, which captured what participants talked about the effects of F-2 visa regulations. The total participants were from 10 different countries, Pakistan, China, Iran, Sri Lanka, Japan, India, Bangladesh, Brazil, a country in South Africa, and a country in East Africa (see Table 1).

² Central University is a pseudonym.

Table 1: Participants' Pseudonyms and Professions Before Migrating to the US

Names	Profession Before Migrating to the US
Rebecca	Management
Sanaz	Health Sector
Sarah	Academia
Mastaneh	Health Sector
Mariah	Industry
Lili	Industry
Tina	Finance
Kelly	Industry
Dannielle	Industry
Leyla	Education Sector
Sue	Academia
Jessica	Business
Sita	Finance
Dina	Education Sector
Niloofar	Academia
Lee	Industry

Five participants had children, and one was pregnant. Four women were changing their immigration status to get a student/F-1 visa or employment H-1B/J-1 (all these visa categories allow them to earn money/work).

Table 2: Themes and concepts

Main themes	Themes	Sub-Themes
Effects of F-2 visa on identity	Identity crises	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questioning who they are• Loss of social role and identity as a professional and independent woman• Could not show who they are
	Change of identity to a homemaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase in household duties compared to pre-migration• Feeling becoming the maid of the house
	Identity as a wife is highlighted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staying home• Depending financially on husband
	Loss of class identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not having maid like pre-migration

Not feeling change in their identity	Becoming a homemaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not feeling belonged to the pre-migration social class• Sharing the house chores before and after migration• Being a housewife and depending on husband are parts of their gender identity
Coping strategies to maintain their professional identity	Refusing to acknowledge change in their professional identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Even if they do not work, and are a housewife and are financially dependent, they see themselves as a professional woman
	Finding legal opportunities to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Receiving gift cards• Changing the immigration status to study and or work in the US through F-1 or H1-B
Feminization of Poverty	Receiving gift cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not always available and• Not a sufficient source of income
	Finding legal opportunities to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delay in employment due to different assessments or new certificates needed in the US as participants' degree is not gained in the US• Delay in becoming a full-time student who can work on campus due to lengthy and risky process of change of immigration status

For data analysis, this study through open coding explored the themes appeared from the transcription of the interview and the field notes. After conducting open coding and exploring the perspectives of every participant, the commonalities between codes created the themes (see table 2). Open coding is an effective method for a phenomenological qualitative study that aims to take into account the perspectives of all the participants (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the next section, I will highlight these themes with quotes from the transcriptions.

RESULTS

The results of this study showed that F-2 visa regulations had negative effects on the participants' identities and through trying to maintain their professional

identity, the participants described coping strategies and challenges that underlined how F-2 visa regulations contribute to feminization of poverty. The following sections will highlight the effects of F-2 visa regulations with more details.

Negative Effects on Identity

F-2 visa had some negative effects on the identity of participants by preventing them from working compared to their husbands. One participant, Lily, mentioned that although in the US, she was more relaxed, had more free time and did not have to wake up early, and looked polished, she felt that she did not have a social role. The repercussions of these restrictions had an even worse impact on five participants who mentioned that they went through the identity crisis leading them to question who they were, or how they saw themselves. For example, Sita and Mariah mentioned that they could not show who they are because they could not use their talents and were only a wife of a student.

(...) So, my identity, my work is what I am, myself. [It] is not own to anybody. Now, we have friends, if we go to any student organization or something, everybody knows me as his wife, and I don't have my own identity. Wherein, like people know me from my name, it is impossible. Everybody knows me, I am F-2 and his dependent, and that's all. —Sita

Even Dina, who was fine with not working, now Dina did not know what to do in the US and believed that she lost her identity a little.

Moreover, five women felt their identity was negatively affected due to having different immigration statuses and limitations compared to their husbands because they saw themselves as restricted. For example, Mariah saw herself as a dependent person, not a provider for the family, because she could not support her family financially due to being prevented from working. For Mastaneh, she believed that seeing these differences in immigration status negatively affected her identity as she said, "Negatively, my professional identity is in question, it affects my identity, I have the similar potential as my husband, but now I am totally dependent on my husband". In severe cases like Sue, she felt she was not a real person.

I [do] not really think I am a real person in America. If a person cannot work, it's not a real person; you can't count it. It's not a human. Sometimes I feel like [an] animal, you know, if a person who cannot work, it is no difference with animal, I think. —Sue

Change of Identity to a Homemaker

After coming to the US, few women did not see an increase in their household duties due to no interruption in their gender roles at home, such as sharing household duties before and after migration. In addition, there were women who

felt that being a homemaker is part of their gender identity, and after coming to the US, they did not feel they became a homemaker now, such as Jessica who believed that, as a woman, this was her job to do the household duties. However, most spouses faced increase in their household duties compared to pre-migration due to various reasons, such as had maids or family members to help, or their husband did equal or more housework than the female spouse because the wife had a job. Thus, six out of the 16 women in my study felt that their identity was affected due to becoming a housewife as they felt that they changed to a homemaker.

In severe cases, three participants felt that their identity changed to the maid of the house due to becoming a homemaker. For example, Dannielle said, "I used to have a maid to take care of children and do the housework, but now I do it that I was not doing before. So now I am maid myself". Interestingly, Dannielle believed that women do housework, and men work outside and still felt that she was the housewife and maid of the house now.

Identity as a Wife

Due to being enforced to stay at home and becoming only a homemaker, three participants mentioned that their identity as a wife was highlighted after coming to the US. For example, Lee said, "F-2 visa always made me that I am a wife I have family, yeah, that's all I have to stay at home." For Sue, being a homemaker was equated with being a "wife." Sue mentioned that before coming to the US, because they did not have a child, she felt she and her husband were lovers, not a husband and a wife; however, now because her husband was working and Sue was a housewife, she felt more like a wife.

(...) I do dinner for him, clean the house, and he gave me money. I really like a wife, a person who have to depend on him to live, that's not good feeling for me; so, I feel F-2 visa really effect my identity, I feel that. He become my boss, sometimes I feel. I don't know why. I just feel it. One night, I do the dinner, he said immm it's no delicious, and I feel little guilty. I mean, I have nothing to do except to do dinner. Maybe I [made a] mistake but this felt like three minutes. After three minutes, I said if you do not like my dinner, you do it yourself, OK? You know I can feel that, it really effect me, you know. Before I come to America, if I [did] something he do[es]n't like, I don't care you know I said go away, I don't care; but now, I more care his feeling [than] before. I don't like it. —Sue

Some women made fun of their current situation as a housewife, for example by labeling themselves as a maid or their husband as their boss.

Loss of Class Identity

Not being able to have a maid to do the house chores was a sign of loss of previous social class. In addition, two participants felt that they lost the identity of belonging to a certain social class back in their home country as they believed that their income and the way of spending money changed. Social class creates an identity for people because not only social class highlights the place of the people in the society, but also gives them a social identity (Holm Pedersen, 2012).

(...) We were in top tier social economic before, now, we fell in down in social economic; we become more frugal that we thought. I wish that H4 & L2 visa holders and F-2 visa holders to work which could let the financial economy of the family to remain intact (...). — Mariah

Coping Strategies

As the participants in this study used to be professional women, who used to work in their home country, after coming to the US, the majority wanted to go to the university and work to maintain their identity as a professional woman. This is also true among the women who mentioned that due to being prevented to work, they had more free time to do what they want. For example, over half of the participants expressed missing their careers more than missing other aspects of their previous life, such as family, or food, or friends. In addition, F-2 visa regulations, by preventing F-2 visa holders in this study from engaging in paid employments, made the majority of the participants become financially dependent on their husband and face difficulty in accessing resources.

Moreover, almost half of the women faced different types of social pressure due to not working caused by F-2 visa regulations. The reasons were being enforced to not follow the social norm in the US as most women go to work, comparing themselves with their friends or relatives who have a job and being criticized or questioned or advised by their relatives and friends for their jobless status. Below, I will highlight different ways that F-2 visa holders try to cope with F-2 visa regulations.

Refusing to Acknowledge Change in Their Professional Identity

On the one hand, there were some participants who did not acknowledge a change in their identity due to cultural factors, such as being dependent on their husband and or being a housewife were the components of their gender identity which they stated could not be separated from who they were as a woman. Thus, they believed their identity has not changed due to F-2 visa regulations. On the other hand, some women still believed that they were professional woman in the US even if they were a housewife, caused by F-2 visa regulations, and not a woman who work and financially is independent. This means that although identity is reflected through what people talk about or detected through the relationships and roles, the participants believed that even if they cannot practice their professional identity, they are still a professional woman.

Finding Legal Opportunities to Work

Another coping strategy for maintaining professional identity was more evident in circumventing the F-2 visa regulations in a legal way to have a paid opportunity and improving their career through studying and working at the university.

Receiving gift cards

One way for F-2 visa holders to maintain their professional identity as a woman who have income in the US is finding opportunities in return for receiving gift cards, such as donating plasma or babysitting at a lower pay rate even if earning gift cards did not help my two participants much with expenses.

It is not considered job but it [is] considered that I have a little money like donating plasma then I feel getting money, and I feel less like anything. They give you a tip, I cannot get some money there. They give you debit card, they put the tip in cards like Walmart. —Tina

Changing the immigration status

Another way to legally work in the US was trying to change their immigration status through getting employed or by becoming a full-time student which would allow them to work on campus during studying or after graduation. However, my participants mentioned other issues in terms of getting legally employed in the US. For instance, in terms of changing immigration status through employment by increasing their chance to get a job, my participants should have a network and take exams or get the US accepted certificates.

Also, companies had to be willing to sponsor these women to get working visas which made the employment process even more competitive. Then, after receiving a job offer, these women must apply for H-1B visa, which requires winning an annual lottery to be able to work in the US.

(...) I have heard from many people that it is not an easy task to get H-1 B visa from F-2 that is also, somewhere affecting my identity. Because of the lottery system it is hard, and everything is based on luck, so employer should sponsor us. We need to prove them that we are the best candidate for them to work in their organization just, but it's not easy to convince the employer to invest on us because you need, he invest[s] his money for the sponsorship and everything. So, the private organization has lottery and only once in a year the lottery system runs, and it's mostly in April. —Sita

Moreover, the participants mentioned that employers in the US prefer mostly STEM major-related professionals. Thus, only two women were trying to get a

working visa, one who used to work in finance, and another used to work in a health sector. Even Mastaneh another participant, who used to work in the health sector, mentioned financial obstacles and the time-consuming process of preparing for required exams in the US were preventing her from pursuing her career in the US as she said,

(...) For working in health sector in the US, I should do internship or observer ship, but it is like I have to pay for it, so if I take the exam, I need to pay a lot, but it is tough compared to joining to the universities which I have to pay less. Financial obstacle, expensive exams, observer ship, I have to spend my money. The reading part is normal. And it is time consuming thing is the exam process as I had my degree, and I was practicing in my home country, but here I cannot continue. —Mastaneh

To be able to maintain their professional identity, most participants try to study at the university as full-time students to obtain an American degree meanwhile working on campus and be able to work after graduation in the US. However, getting accepted at universities had its own challenges that these women were trying to overcome, such as getting accepted in a competitive graduate program. Also, fees and passing required language proficiency exams and pre-university exams, such as GMAT, which is hard even for native English speakers, were the obstacles.

Most participants preferred to be a full-time student because being a part-time student was not financially possible for most. Although for three participants it was financially possible to study as part-time students, the fact that graduating as a part-time student would not give an Optional Practical Training employment opportunity did not encourage all.

Challenges of Changing Immigration Status

F-2 visa holders who want to work are required to get an H-1B or Expert visa. Also, by becoming a full-time student, which could help F-2 visa holders to study and work on campus, they needed to change their immigration status to get an F-1 or student visa. However, if these spouses wanted to change their immigration status in the US, this process was challenging. The participants mentioned if they want to change their immigration status in the US through US Citizenship and Immigration Services, they face different challenges because they need to wait and pay the fees for a change of status and be in danger of getting a rejection and having to leave the US to go to an American embassy out of the US to reapply for an entry visa. Also, there is a possibility that the US Citizenship and Immigration Services might not change their visa on time and cause them to lose their employment opportunity as it is a long process. Niloofar heard recently that the process of change of immigration status is faster now if F-2 visa holders pay an extra money.

There is a faster way compared to change the immigration status within the US through US Citizenship and Immigration Services which is leaving the US

and applying for change of the status through an American embassy outside the US. However, participants mentioned its challenges, such as waiting for their visas outside the US and travel expenses. For example, Sarah mentioned traveling expenses, staying in another country due to not having an American embassy in her home country, and unpredictable times of separation of the family members, like her son and her husband. Moreover, changing immigration status outside the US was sometimes impossible. For example, Leyla could not return to apply through the American embassy in her home country due to the political crisis in her country, and she needed to change her immigration status in the US.

Although the change of status process is not easy and is time-consuming in general, three participants mentioned COVID-19 worsened this process by making the change of immigration status's process even longer within the US.

I think the only way is getting F-1 visa. The USCIS is not working so fast nowadays. The process of change of status takes 15-20 months now to wait. No professor will wait for you that long. It costs like 1000 dollars for applying to change of status. Besides the payment, you need to wait, that is due to COVID. It was 6-9 months before to change the status. —
Rebecca

Rebecca was a part-time student with the help of paying her tuition by a scholarship mentioned that she could not continue her education without it and was waiting for her change of immigration status to receive her F-1 visa.

COVID-19 also worsened the change of immigration status outside the US as COVID-19 made people wait a long time to make appointments in the embassy. These are general problems that the participants faced when they tried to maintain their professional identity due to F-2 visa, employment and change of immigration status regulations, which exacerbated with COVID-19.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study contributed to the studies that underline the restrictive nature of immigration policies which limits the sustainable development of the immigrants (Martinez, 2009) and contributed to the feminization of poverty which is in line with previous literature as migration to West does not guarantee a better life for female immigrants (Pessar & Mahler, 2003; Piper, 2008). Although this study is in line with other studies about spouses of international students as these women lost their professional identity, and F-2 visa affected their career negatively (Bordoloi, 2015; De Verthelyi, 1995), the majority of women in this study lost their identity as independent women by becoming financially dependent on their husbands. In addition, in this study being prevented from working, lack of social role, and not having the opportunity to show or create their own identity in the US by using their talents caused identity crisis due to not knowing who they are or how to see themselves.

However, being a professional woman was an important part of these women's lives, which led the majority of the women in this study try to maintain

their pre-immigration identity as a professional woman. Align with resistance concept by Abu-Lughod (1990), the women in this study were trying to withstand the power by using different coping strategies as a way of resistance without aiming to overthrow F-2 visa regulations as a system of power. For instance, none of these women voiced their experience in public. Instead, the women in this study used coping strategies as ways of resistance to maintain their professional identity, such as not acknowledging a change in their professional identity and trying to find legal opportunities to have a paid employment and continuing their career through studying. By attempting/aiming to change their immigration status as a change in condition that threatened their professional identity, the women, instead of just adapting to their new condition as an F-2 visa holder, they were trying to build a new professional identity as similar as possible to their pre-immigration one, though these women's pre-immigration professional identity has not remained unchanged. This article calls this process as "*identity navigation in post-immigration*", which is coping through finding a compromise between what the conditions can offer in terms of change and the extent to which people are willing to allow or accept changes in their professional identity.

In other words, the female F-2 visa holders with all the challenges of being able to work legally in the US, such as requirements for getting a job or becoming a full-time student, change of immigration status process, such as waiting, paying expenses and facing the risk of losing the opportunity, exacerbated by COVID-19, these women still tried to overcome these difficulties by resisting to be dominated by F-2 visa regulations. These women could only accept that they cannot work, and they could stay at home as a homemaker; however, they preferred to try to maintain their pre-migration identity as a professional and an independent woman and try to cope with the negative impacts of the F-2 visa regulations on their everyday lives and their sense of identity.

In line with the importance of studying coping strategies as a resistance for detecting a system of oppressive powers inspired by Abu-Lughod (1990), this article underlines that circumventing the F-2 visa regulations to legally work in the US which the participants use as a coping strategy to maintain their professional identity shows how F-2 visa regulations contribute to feminization of poverty. To be specific, receiving gift cards as the only way to earn money without the fear of deportation while holding an F-2 visa for the women may not be always available and a sufficient source of income, leading to feminization of poverty.

Second, for finding paid employments, because the participants' degree or work experience are gained in their home country, they could not continue their career immediately, and they needed to go through different assessments or gaining new certificates which counted as time consuming and expensive for the F-2 visa holders leading to postponing their employment. One possible explanation is that the US does not recognize most of the professional occupational and credential licenses (Xie, 2024). In this regard, studies show even if few spouses of international students receive J-2 visa, another category of the spouses of international students who are allowed to work in the US, they face

barriers in finding a job due to the fact that the US devalue their credentials (Soylemez-Karakoc et al., 2023), or leading highly-skilled dependent spouses to have a more modest job which they did not expect before coming to the US (Elitok & Nawyn, 2023). This is in line with previous scholars mentioning that West due to the strict job requirements and requiring new assessments for the education and experience of the immigrants to prove their professionalism deskilled and devalued the immigrants' career (Barber, 2013; Piper, 2009).

Requirements for change of immigration status also postponed the employment process for the F-2 visa holders due to the lengthy and risky process. To explain, due to immigration and employment policies if the women who found a job cannot win the H-1 B lottery or the ones who got an accept from the university cannot change their immigration status on time, they might lose their opportunity to work or study as a full-time student. Consequently, this means delay in their employment and feminization of poverty. Therefore, the coping strategies of the F-2 visa holders as resisting to F-2 visa regulations through maintaining professional identity shed light on the challenges they faced which acted as what Abu-Lughod says diagnostic of power because the coping strategies helped to detect in what ways F-2 visa regulations contribute to feminization of poverty.

IMPLICATIONS

Researchers in social justice should do more research to highlight the discrimination and inequality between F-1 visa holders and F-2 visa holders due to immigration policies as these women lose their days and stay home whereas they could work, save and improve their careers. Furthermore, not only to prevent feminization of poverty, promoting more gender neutral language in career aspects is needed (Wang, 2023), but also policymakers in employment sectors should not follow the global gender ideology of considering men as the main providers of family (Bever, 2002; Gamburd, 1999) and undermining the economic role of the female spouses in the household because they accompany their husbands (Gnanadev, 2023). The reason is among these spouses are women who are highly skilled and used to equally or even more than their husbands contribute to their household income in their home country. Thus, restrictive immigration policies like F-2 visa regulations can feminize the poverty, which is against the United Nations' sustainable development goals because these goals are supposed to decrease the poverty and prevent economic disparity between genders (Sharma, 2023).

In addition, F-2 visa holders might become US citizens in the future as their husbands might get a job in the US, and there were participants in this study who were already in the middle of applying for their green card; so, letting these women continue their professional identity is very helpful in improving their self-esteem, as continuing the professional identity in the host country would prevent the gap in their career boosts their self-esteem (Seo and Kim, 2017). This study can inform the employers in the US to not reject the applications of the highly

skilled immigrants who have a gap in their resume. Instead, recruiters should ask the immigrants about the reasons they have a gap in their resume because the immigrants might be prevented to continue their career for a time period due to immigration policies.

Also, the positive experience of F-2 visa holders living in the US can encourage potential married international students to choose the US over other countries, bringing more profit to the US. For example, international students contributed \$33.8 billion to the US economy (NAFSA, 2022) and created 415,996 careers in 2019-2020 (Institute of International Education, 2020). However, half of the women in this study mentioned they would not encourage future spouses of international students considering coming to the US with an F-2 visa due to the restrictions. Therefore, the negative experience of F-2 visa holders due to F-2 visa regulations may discourage married students and their spouses from choosing the US to pursue education and encourage them to choose another country like Canada, which has a more flexible immigration status for spouses of international students. In fact, according to NAFSA, while the US loses international students, other countries such as China, Australia, and Canada see an increase in the number of international students (NAFSA, 2020), and all these countries have more flexible employment regulations for the dependent spouses of international students. Thus, the restrictive effects of the F-2 visa can be one reason for the decrease in the number of international students. Thus, this article can help policymakers and universities to see the negative effects of the F-2 visa and encourage them to have a more flexible employment policies for F-2 visa holders.

Finally, feminist researchers should see whether F-2 visa regulations still exist because most F-2 visa holders are women through conducting interviews with policymakers. In other words, what if the majority of F-2 visa holders were men? Would we still have such a restrictive policy? This study has limitations as there would be the narratives of F-2 visa holders who could not speak in English. Although we had participants from 10 different countries in three different continents, Asia, Africa, and America, we did not have participants from other continents like Europe, as an example, to capture perspectives of female F-2 visa holders from other countries. This study interviewed 16 female F-2 visa holders, and even if literature shows that they are the majority in the F-2 visa holders population (Jiang et al., 2020), this study is not generalizable for all the F-2 visa holders' population. Thus, future studies should include other genders to capture their experience. This study did not have a follow-up interview to learn about the experience of the participants throughout a time like a longitudinal study. So, we do not know what changes these women faced throughout their journey in the US. Therefore, more longitudinal study should be done to capture the effects of F-2 visa regulations throughout the time.

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Author bio

Fatemeh Melina Bakhshalizadeh, PhD, in Iowa State University, USA. Her major research interests lie in the area of the effects of structural barriers and social inequalities on the well-being and health of vulnerable populations. Email: melinab@iastate.edu