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Examining the Relationship Between Acculturation Levels, Help-Seeking Attitudes, And Self-Stigma Perspectives Among International Students

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses a crucial gap in understanding mental health help-seeking attitudes among international graduate counseling students (ICS) in the U.S., despite facing significant acculturation stress. Research on their help-seeking attitudes and self-stigma is limited among ICS. Understanding these factors is vital for supporting their well-being and their future roles as mental health professionals. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study examined the relationships between acculturation level, help-seeking attitude, and self-stigma. The findings revealed a strong direct correlation between acculturation level and help-seeking attitude, suggesting that higher acculturation levels are linked to more positive attitudes toward mental health services. A moderate direct correlation was also found between acculturation level and self-stigma, indicating an increase in self-stigma with higher acculturation stress. These insights highlight the need for targeted support for ICS.

Keywords: acculturation level, help-seeking attitudes, international counseling students (ICS), self-stigma, theory of planned behavior (TPB)

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. continues to attract a growing international student population, exceeding 1.1 million in the 2022-2023 academic year and making a significant contribution to the economy (IIE, 2023). A segment of this population, international counseling students (ICS), is also increasing in graduate programs (CACREP, 2023), yet their unique needs are often unmet (Xiong et al., 2022). ICS face considerable acculturation challenges, impacting their emotional, psychological, and social well-being, often due to the loss of familiar support systems (Alloh et al., 2018; Clough et al., 2019; Hansen et al., 2018; Shadowen et al., 2019; Prieto-Welch, 2016; Xiong et al., 2022). Despite being at higher risk for psychological distress, they frequently avoid seeking professional help, largely due to perceived stigma and negative attitudes toward mental health services (Hansen et al., 2018; Lau et al., 2019; Shadowen et al., 2019).

The growing number of ICS underscores the need for culturally competent approaches in graduate programs. Acculturation, alongside academic demands, leads to stress and negative emotions, which in turn affect their self-efficacy (Keum et al., 2022; Ng & Smith, 2012; Shafaei et al., 2016; Xiong et al., 2022). While external factors like isolation have been extensively studied, there is limited literature on internal factors like acculturation levels, help-seeking attitudes, and self-stigma, which significantly influence ICS's professional identity (Clough et al., 2019; Hansen et al., 2018; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2021, 2019; Interiano & Lim, 2018; Li et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2019).

While the mental health challenges and underutilization of services among international students are well-documented, a notable gap persists in understanding these dynamics specifically within ICS in U.S. graduate programs (Behl et al., 2017; Xiong et al., 2022). Existing literature has largely focused on broader international student cohorts (Kim et al., 2023; Mantovani et al., 2017; Mesidor & Sly, 2016), leaving the complex interplay of acculturation, help-seeking attitudes, and self-stigma among future mental health professionals underexplored (Behl et al., 2017; Ng & Smith, 2012). The present study addresses this critical gap by employing a quantitative, non-experimental correlational design to investigate these relationships among ICS holding F-1 visas and currently enrolled in U.S. graduate counseling programs.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer two questions:

- RQ1: How are acculturation levels and help-seeking attitudes related among ICS?

RQ2: How are acculturation level and self-stigma related among ICS?

By focusing on this distinct population, the study aims to contribute to the empirical knowledge base within the field of Counselor Education and Supervision, particularly regarding cultural competencies and professional identity development among these students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The United States has become a leading destination for international students seeking higher education, who contribute significantly to the diversity of academic environments (IIE, 2023; Prieto-Welch, 2016). Despite their valuable contributions, universities often face challenges in adequately addressing the unique needs of this population, which can be overlooked and underserved (Lau et al., 2019). International students frequently encounter substantial adjustment struggles and acculturative stress, leading to a higher prevalence of psychological concerns compared to their domestic peers (Clough et al., 2019; Hansen et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2023; Shadowen et al., 2019). Even ICS, who are immersed in a field focused on mental well-being, experience these challenges (Behl et al., 2017; Lertora & Croffie, 2020; Xiong et al., 2022). Given the emphasis by the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) on professional identity development, understanding the impact of acculturation on help-seeking attitudes and self-stigma is crucial for supporting ICS's holistic growth and preparing them for the global counseling profession (Philip et al., 2019).

Risk and Protective Factors

ICS, as a growing cohort within CACREP-accredited programs (CACREP, 2023; IIE, 2023), enrich academic discourse by sharing diverse cultural perspectives and broadening the understanding of counseling practices and ethics (Behl et al., 2017; Prieto-Welch, 2016; Interiano & Lim, 2018; Xiong et al., 2022). However, their experiences are often shaped by a complex interplay of risk and protective factors.

Acculturation Challenges

Acculturation is a dynamic, multidimensional process of adapting to a new culture while retaining aspects of one's original culture (Berry, 1992; Hou et al., 2018; Kissil et al., 2015; Akkurt et al., 2018). This process can lead to acculturative stress, which is often more pronounced in ICS with lower acculturation levels (Bertram & Poulakis, 2014; Hansen et al., 2018; Lertora & Croffie, 2020). This stress stems from conflicts in adapting to new academic expectations, communication styles, and social norms. Acculturative stress has been consistently linked to increased mental health concerns, feelings of isolation,

decreased self-esteem, and negative academic outcomes (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Bai, 2016; Behl et al., 2017; Interiano & Lim, 2018). Understanding an individual's acculturation level is therefore crucial for addressing transitional stress and supporting ICS's training and therapeutic effectiveness (Akkurt et al., 2018; Li et al., 2018; Ra & Trusty, 2017).

Mental Health Concerns

International students face heightened psychological risks due to acculturation stressors and often limited support systems (Pan et al., 2017; Kuo et al., 2018; Hansen et al., 2018; Shadowen et al., 2019; Shafaei et al., 2016; Bai, 2016; McKinley, 2019; Smiljanich, 2017). Despite these challenges, ICS often underutilize mental health services.

Help-Seeking Attitudes

Help-seeking attitudes, defined as the willingness to seek mental health services, are influenced by factors such as ethnic identity, language proficiency, and past experiences (Vogel et al., 2006). A positive help-seeking attitude is associated with increased knowledge of mental health services and higher acculturation levels (Cheng et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2023; Li et al., 2016; Xiong et al., 2022). However, international students often exhibit negative perceptions of mental health services, which can impede their acculturation process (Behl et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2022). This negative perception leads to delays in seeking help, influenced by barriers such as fear of emotional openness, stigma, shame, and acculturation levels (Boafo-Arthur & Boafo-Arthur, 2016; Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016; Shadowen et al., 2019). Cultural values, particularly from non-Western backgrounds, often emphasize emotional restraint and associate shame with mental health issues, further complicating help-seeking decisions (Han & Pong, 2015; Interiano & Lim, 2018; Maeshima & Parent, 2022). Conversely, students with positive help-seeking behaviors tend to demonstrate greater educational persistence and resilience (Clough et al., 2019; Kim & Zane, 2016).

Social Isolation

A significant concern for international students is the profound sense of loneliness and social isolation they often experience. This is exacerbated by being far from familiar support systems, facing language barriers, and lacking robust social networks. ICS, despite their professional training, can isolate themselves, struggling with psychological and sociocultural problems that hinder their professional identity development (Interiano & Lim, 2018; Lertora & Croffie, 2020). Building connections and social support has been identified as a key coping mechanism for international students to manage stress and enhance well-being.

Stigma

A pervasive barrier to mental health help-seeking among ICS is the stigma surrounding mental health (Vogel et al., 2006). This stigma is deeply influenced by cultural background, with collectivist cultures often viewing mental illness as a personal failing or a source of shame, leading to fear of judgment and rejection (Crowe et al., 2018; Mantovani et al., 2017). A lack of understanding about mental health diagnoses further fuels anxieties and reluctance to acknowledge mental health concerns (Mathur et al., 2014). The stigma associated with mental health has detrimental consequences for ICS's well-being, impacting their academic performance, social relationships, and professional identity development (Mantovani et al., 2017; Mesidor & Sly, 2016). ICS experience both public stigma, derived from societal views, and self-stigma, resulting from internalized negative beliefs and a lack of cultural understanding in the host country (Arora et al., 2016; Crowe et al., 2018). Self-stigma is a particularly significant barrier to seeking help, especially among racially and ethnically diverse students (Cheng et al., 2018; Mesidor & Sly, 2016). The experiences of marginalization can further impact their resilience (Timsina, 2025).

Professional Identity Development

Counseling accreditation standards and ethical codes emphasize the development of a robust professional identity for all students, which is significantly influenced by cultural background and experiences (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016; Kuo et al., 2021; Xiong et al., 2022). A strong professional identity, characterized by understanding roles, responsibilities, and ethical guidelines, correlates with increased counselor self-efficacy (Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2019; Kuo et al., 2018). However, acculturation challenges, including psychological and sociocultural stressors, often hinder ICS's self-efficacy and professional identity development (Kuo et al., 2021; Leong, 2015; Xiong et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges through self-reflection, mentorship, and culturally sensitive support systems is critical for ICS's success (Kuo et al., 2018, 2023). Cultivating a culturally inclusive academic environment through diverse curricula and supportive faculty and advisors is crucial for fostering positive acculturation experiences and enhancing ICS's training (Kuo et al., 2018; Um et al., 2023). ICS who are trained and equipped well can serve as valuable ambassadors for the counseling profession in their home countries and contribute to the development of culturally competent counseling literature (Behl et al., 2017; Jang et al., 2014; Ng & Smith, 2012; Nilsson & Dodds, 2006; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009; Hansen et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2022).

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental correlational design to examine the relationships between acculturation level, help-seeking attitudes, and self-stigma among international counseling students (ICS) enrolled in U.S.

graduate programs. A quantitative approach was selected for its objectivity in analyzing complex phenomena through measurable variables and statistical procedures (Barker et al., 2016; Privitera, 2019). This correlational design was particularly suitable for investigating the strength and direction of relationships between these continuous variables (Salkind, 2017). Data were collected using established and validated survey instruments: the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994), the Inventory of Attitudes Toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS) (Mackenzie et al., 2004), and the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (SSOSH) (Vogel et al., 2006). Responses were collected via a Qualtrics online survey, converting participant input into quantifiable observations for subsequent statistical analysis.

Instruments

This study employed three validated instruments: the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), the Inventory of Attitudes Toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS), and the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (SSOSH). The 36-item ASSIS measures acculturative stress across seven subscales, demonstrating high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .94) and robust construct validity (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Tian et al., 2019; Yakunina et al., 2013). Help-seeking attitudes were assessed by the 24-item IASMHS, which evaluates attitudes across psychological openness, help-seeking propensity, and indifference to stigma, exhibiting good internal consistency and validity (Brás et al., 2022; Hyland et al., 2015; Kantor et al., 2018; Mackenzie et al., 2004; Tuliao et al., 2019). Self-stigma was measured using the 10-item SSOSH, consistently demonstrating strong reliability and validity (Vogel et al., 2006, 2009). All instruments were administered without modification, as permitted by their open-source nature.

Procedures

Following IRB approval from the university, this quantitative, correlational study employed a non-probability convenience sampling strategy. Participant recruitment utilized a multi-pronged approach, including emails to program leaders at CACREP-accredited graduate counseling programs and social media posts targeting international student groups on various university Facebook platforms across the United States. All recruitment materials adhered to IRB ethical guidelines, providing a clear overview of the study and researcher contact information. Participation was voluntary, with electronic informed consent obtained via Qualtrics. Participants were screened for inclusion criteria (international student status, F-1 visa, and current enrollment in a U.S. graduate counseling program). Those meeting the criteria completed demographic questions and responded to three validated Likert-scale instruments. No identifying information was collected, and all data adhered to American Counseling Association guidelines and Qualtrics security protocols.

Data Analysis

Data collected via Qualtrics were stored on encrypted servers and analyzed in Excel using the Data Analysis ToolPak. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between acculturation level, help-seeking attitudes, and self-stigma among international counseling students (ICS). The Acculturation Scale for International Students (ASSIS), Inventory of Attitudes Toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS), and Self-Stigma of Seeking Help (SSOSH) yielded continuous data, supporting the application of Pearson's r (Salkind, 2017). Prior to analysis, outliers were identified and addressed to ensure data reliability (Salkind, 2017). Assumptions for correlational analysis were assessed by examining data normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test and visually inspecting linearity between variables via scatterplots (Salkind, 2017).

Description of the Sample

The study targeted 648 international students enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs, receiving 47 initial survey responses. After excluding two partial responses and seven participants who did not meet inclusion criteria, the final sample for analysis consisted of 38 (N) participants. This sample size resulted in a confidence level of 80% for the study. The participant ethnicity was predominantly Asian (71%), with others identifying as Black or African American (16%), White (8%), and other ethnicities (5%). The sample was majority female (76%), with 24% identifying as male. Participants represented a diverse range of countries, most notably India (24%), China (16%), and Malaysia (11%). The vast majority of respondents (84%) were enrolled in a Clinical Mental Health Counseling program.

RESULTS

Research Question 1 investigated the relationship between acculturation level (measured by the ASSIS) and help-seeking attitudes (measured by the IASMHS) among ICS. Both instruments demonstrated good reliability and validity. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used as the test statistic, with a significance level set at $p < .05$. The analysis yielded a strong positive correlation, $r_{(36)} = 0.6814$, $p < .00001$, with an observed coefficient of determination $r^2 = 0.46$. Given that the obtained r value (0.6814) exceeded the critical value of $r_{(critical)} = 0.325$ for a two-tailed test with $df = 36$ at $p < .05$, the relationship was statistically significant.

Research Question 2 investigated the relationship between acculturation level (measured by the ASSIS) and self-stigma regarding seeking mental health services (measured by the SSOH) among ICS. Both instruments demonstrated good reliability and validity. Using Pearson's product-moment correlation with a significance level of $p < .05$, a moderate positive correlation was found: $r_{(36)} = 0.4171$, $p = .0091$. The observed coefficient of determination was $r^2 = 0.16$. As

the obtained r value (0.4171) exceeded the critical value of $r_{(critical)} = 0.325$ for a two-tailed test with $df = 36$ at $p < .05$, the null hypothesis was rejected, supporting the research hypothesis (H_2) that a statistically significant relationship exists between acculturation level and self-stigma among ICS.

Table 1: Results of the Pearson Correlation

	ASSIS	IASMHS	SSOSH
ASSIS	-		
IASMHS	0.6814* <.00001	-	
SSOSH	0.4171* .0091	0.4778* .0029	-

Note. * $p < .05$. Acculturative stress scale for international students (ASSIS), inventory of attitudes toward seeking mental health services (IASMHS), self-stigma of seeking help scale (SSOSH)

The results for both research questions indicated moderate to strong correlations. To mitigate the increased risk of Type I errors, a post hoc analysis using Bonferroni correction was conducted, adjusting the significance level to .0166 (Salkind, 2017). Even with this adjustment, the associations between the variables remained statistically significant, indicating a minimal probability of Type I error.

Table 2: ANOVA: Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
ASSIS	38	4705	123.81	650.42
IASMHS	38	2303	60.60	225.16
SSOSH	38	1219	32.07	50.07

ANOVA: Single Factor						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F crit
Between Groups	167516.28	2	83758.14	271.4533	1.8E-43	3.078057
Within Groups	34249.55	111	308.5545			
Total	201765.83	113				

Note. *Acculturative stress scale for international students (ASSIS), inventory of attitudes toward seeking mental health services (IASMHS), self-stigma of seeking help scale (SSOSH)

Table 3: Post Hoc using Bonferroni Correction

Groups	<i>p</i>-value	Bonferroni Corrected
ASSIS v IASMHS	4.4266E-21	0.016666667
ASSIS v SSOSH	2.21334E-33	0.016666667

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the intricate relationships between acculturation level, help-seeking attitudes, and self-stigma ICS. This population is particularly significant due to their heightened psychological risks stemming from acculturation stressors and often limited support systems. Furthermore, their unique position as future mental health professionals introduces distinct dynamics to their experiences with mental health and help-seeking. Understanding this specific cohort is crucial for tailoring culturally competent training and support within counselor education programs, as their experiences will directly shape their future professional practice. This study helps address a noted research gap regarding this specialized population.

The findings revealed a positive association between the level of acculturation and help-seeking attitudes among ICS. This indicates that as ICS become more acculturated to the host culture, their attitudes toward seeking professional mental health support tend to become more favorable. This result aligns with prior research, including that by Zhang and Dixon (2003) and Han et al. (2017), which similarly found positive correlations between higher acculturation levels and more positive attitudes towards professional help-seeking, particularly among Asian American students. This suggests that the process of cultural adaptation may foster an increased recognition of the value and utility of mental health services. As ICS immerse themselves more deeply in the host culture, they may internalize prevailing U.S. norms, especially within academic and professional counseling contexts, which generally promote open discussion of mental health and professional intervention. This shift could lead to a reduced reliance on traditional, informal support systems or a greater acceptance of professional therapeutic modalities, thereby addressing the common observation that international students often underutilize professional services (Boafo-Arthur et al., 2016; Minh-Hoang et al., 2019). This finding, however, appears to contradict Boafo-Arthur and Boafo-Arthur (2016), who suggested international students might prefer medical over psychological help or abstain from seeking professional support when facing greater acculturative challenges. This divergence underscores the unique context of ICS, whose professional training and exposure to mental health concepts likely mediate their experiences differently from general international student populations.

Conversely, the study also identified a positive association between acculturation level and self-stigma regarding seeking mental health services. This

indicates that higher acculturation levels were linked to increased self-stigma among ICS. While this finding might initially seem counter-intuitive given the positive correlation with help-seeking attitudes, it aligns with some prior research, such as that by Bofo-Arthur and Bofo-Arthur (2016), Han and Pong (2015), and Maeshima and Parent (2022), which suggests that international students facing acculturative difficulties may also experience heightened stigma. The association, though significant, was moderate, implying that acculturation accounts for only a portion of the variance in self-stigma, with other significant factors likely contributing. This paradoxical finding highlights the complexity of the acculturation process. One explanation could be the phenomenon of cultural conflict and internalization; as ICS acculturate, they may internalize host culture norms promoting openness while simultaneously retaining heritage cultural values that associate mental health struggles with weakness or shame. This internal dissonance could intensify self-stigma. Additionally, their developing professional identity as counselors might create pressure to appear "mentally robust," making personal help-seeking feel particularly stigmatizing. This suggests that interventions aimed at reducing self-stigma must go beyond simply promoting help-seeking and delve into the deeper cultural and identity conflicts that acculturation can engender, especially for those in mental health professions.

These findings are critically illuminated by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that behavioral intentions are shaped by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The positive relationship between acculturation level and help-seeking attitudes directly corresponds to the "attitude toward the behavior" construct, suggesting that acculturation experiences foster more favorable evaluations of seeking help. Conversely, the observed positive association between acculturation level and self-stigma is particularly relevant to the concept of "perceived behavioral control." Self-stigma, characterized by internalized shame or fear of social disapproval, can act as a significant barrier, diminishing an individual's confidence in their ability to access services. Even with a positive attitude, high self-stigma can undermine the perceived ease or feasibility of seeking help, thus impeding behavioral control. While not directly measured, the influence of cultural stigma and perceived social disapproval implicitly relates to "subjective norms," as these factors can powerfully deter help-seeking intentions. This study, by examining acculturation level, self-stigma, and help-seeking attitudes, provides empirical evidence for how these variables collectively shape the components of TPB. The differential impact of acculturation on "attitude" versus "perceived behavioral control" is crucial. This suggests that interventions cannot solely focus on improving attitudes towards help-seeking; if acculturation paradoxically increases self-stigma, then programs must also explicitly address internalized shame and perceived barriers to control. This points towards a need for multi-pronged interventions that target all three TPB constructs, extending beyond individual student welfare to the broader professional landscape.

Implications

The findings of this study carry significant implications for various stakeholders involved in supporting international students, particularly those in counseling programs.

Counselor Education Programs

The study's results underscore the critical need for culturally sensitive and comprehensive mental health support services specifically tailored for ICS within U.S. graduate counseling programs. Educators should be acutely aware of the paradoxical relationship between acculturation and self-stigma, recognizing that increased cultural integration does not necessarily equate to reduced internalized shame. Programs should proactively address self-stigma through curriculum, supervision, and peer support initiatives, explicitly discussing the unique challenges faced by ICS in balancing cultural heritage with professional identity. Curricula should integrate discussions on the complexities of acculturation and its varied impacts on mental health, including the potential for increased self-stigma, to better prepare all counseling students international and domestic for culturally competent practice. Investing in the mental health and well-being of ICS is not just about supporting individual students; it is about shaping the future of the counseling profession. If these future counselors struggle with internalized stigma about their own mental health, it could impact their professional efficacy and ethical practice. By addressing their unique challenges, institutions are fostering a more culturally competent, resilient, and ethically sound cohort of future counselors who can better serve diverse populations.

University Mental Health Services

University counseling centers should develop targeted outreach and intervention strategies for ICS. This includes offering culturally informed counseling, group therapy focused on acculturation challenges, and workshops designed to de-stigmatize mental health help-seeking within diverse cultural contexts. Given the finding that higher acculturation correlates with positive help-seeking attitudes, efforts to facilitate healthy acculturation processes through social integration programs, language support, and cultural orientation could indirectly promote help-seeking.

Policy Makers and Administrators

Policies should support increased funding and resources for specialized mental health services for international students, recognizing their distinct needs and the unique stressors they face. Furthermore, advocating for the integration of mental health literacy and stigma reduction efforts into broader international student orientation and support services is essential.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future research should build on this study by employing longitudinal designs to understand the dynamic impact of acculturation on help-seeking attitudes and self-stigma over time, clarifying causal pathways (Samuel & Okey, 2015). Given the moderate association for self-stigma, subsequent studies should explore additional mediating/moderating factors, including cultural beliefs, prior mental health experiences, social support networks, coping mechanisms, perceived discrimination, and the internalization of cultural values. Incorporating qualitative methodologies like interviews or focus groups could provide nuanced insights into ICS's lived experiences, illuminating complex internal processes related to self-stigma and help-seeking (Mohajan, 2020). Comparative studies between ICS and other international student populations are needed to determine if observed relationships are unique to counseling students or generalizable, clarifying the impact of professional training. Researchers should also strive for larger, more diverse sample sizes to enhance generalizability (Privitera, 2019). Finally, developing and evaluating targeted interventions to reduce self-stigma and promote positive help-seeking among ICS is crucial, specifically addressing the paradoxical relationship found. Such interventions could leverage the Theory of Planned Behavior framework, and future research should utilize more granular or multi-dimensional acculturation measures to identify specific facets linked to changes in help-seeking and self-stigma.

CONCLUSION

This study found that significant positive correlations exist between acculturation level and both help-seeking attitudes and self-stigma among ICS in U.S. graduate programs. Specifically, higher acculturation is associated with more positive attitudes towards professional mental health support, yet also with increased self-stigma. These findings highlight the intricate relationship between acculturation and mental health help-seeking behaviors, providing valuable insights for counselor educators and supervisors. This understanding is particularly vital given the growing enrollment of ICS and the existing literature gap concerning their unique challenges (Bell et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2017; Ng & Smith, 2012; Osborn & Stein, 2019; Xiong et al., 2022). Future research should explore mediating variables, such as acculturative stress, and employ qualitative methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of specific help-seeking preferences and barriers, including the influence of cultural beliefs and prior mental health experiences. Addressing these complexities will enable the counseling profession to develop culturally responsive programs that effectively support the mental health and professional identity formation of ICS, thereby facilitating their acculturation process and promoting holistic professional growth.

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