



Journal of International Students
Volume 15, Issue 12 (2025), pp. 159-176
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
jistudents.org
<https://doi.org/10.32674/znma0b12>



Intimate Partner Violence Among International College Students in the US

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ABSTRACT: *Intimate partner violence (IPV), although prevalent across the United States, is among the understudied topics in minority populations, such as international students on college campuses. The present study addresses the underexplored phenomenon of IPV among international college students, aiming to provide insights crucial for navigating relationships and educational pursuits. Utilizing data from the 2022 American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) involving 13,242 international students, this research aims to demonstrate the prevalence of IPV within this understudied group. The results revealed an overall IPV prevalence of 13.7% within the last 12 months, with verbal abuse emerging as the most prevalent form. Univariate logistic regression indicated greater risks for graduate students ($OR = 1.191, p < 0.001$) and those without current relationships ($OR = 1.000, p < 0.001$). The final model confirmed that graduate student status and being single were significant predictors. This highlights how cultural adaptation, societal adjustment, and isolation increase vulnerability. This research highlights the pressing need for tailored prevention and support mechanisms and advocates targeted interventions, such as relationship education during college orientation, to promote equity, belonging, and global engagement among international students.*

Keywords: intimate partner violence, culture, international students, relationships, higher education

Received: August 19, 2025 | **Revised:** Oct 13, 2025 | **Accepted:** Nov 27, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) within the United States is well noted. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2022), 41% of women and 26% of men have encountered rape, violence, or stalking from an intimate partner. Additionally, nearly one in three women and one in four men report enduring severe physical violence within intimate relationships during their lifetimes (CDC, 2022). In college settings, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) reports that one in five students is abused by an intimate partner (Krebs et al., 2007), with 43% of college women reporting violent or abusive behavior from their partners (Knowledge Networks, 2011). However, research has focused predominantly on domestic student populations, leaving the experiences of international students largely unexplored (Bonistall & Postel, 2020). This gap underscores the need to investigate IPV among international students who navigate the complexities of higher education within a foreign cultural landscape (Bonistall Postel, 2020). Recent studies highlight the differences and vulnerabilities of this group, noting that international students may have experiences with sexual violence distinct from those of their domestic peers (Fethi et al., 2023). Furthermore, these students often face unique barriers to seeking help and reporting violence due to cultural factors, visa concerns, and limited knowledge of institutional resources such as Title IX (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016; Martin, 2015; Smith et al., 2024).

The recent surge in international student enrollment within the United States, marked by a substantial rise in F-1 and M-1 visa holders to 1,362,157 in 2022 (Boundless, 2023; IIE, 2022), represents a critical juncture. This resurgence not only reinstates pre pandemic levels but also highlights the significant contributions of these students in enriching academic diversity and bolstering the nation's economy (U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2023). Nevertheless, their journey within American higher education institutions is complex and interwoven with unique challenges such as culture shock, homesickness, academic pressures, language barriers, social isolation, and experiences of discrimination (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Lee & Rice, 2007; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). These stressors are particularly salient for international students at the graduate level, a population that also faces elevated risks of sexual harassment and violence, often complicated by power dynamics with faculty or staff (Bloom et al., 2023; Boyle & McKinzie, 2021; Cipriano et al., 2022; Lorenz et al., 2019; McMahan et al., 2018).

The repercussions of IPV extend beyond immediate relationship dynamics, permeating various facets of well-being among international students and transcending cultural boundaries. In addition to physical injuries, IPV correlates with a spectrum of adverse health conditions affecting the cardiovascular,

musculoskeletal, digestive, reproductive, and nervous systems, often manifesting as chronic ailments. Additionally, survivors grapple with profound mental health issues such as depression, PTSD symptoms, and increased susceptibility to risky behaviors, compounding their vulnerability (CDC, 2022; Leemis et al., 2022). Marginalized racial and ethnic groups, including international students, face increased risks and severe consequences due to IPV, emphasizing the urgency of addressing these multifaceted challenges within this diverse demographic context (CDC, 2022; Stockman et al., 2015).

Understanding the intricate interplay of factors contributing to IPV perpetration and prevention among international students is pivotal. The CDC (2021) identifies a complex web of individual, relational, community, and societal factors that influence risk and protection against IPV. Individual risk factors include low self-esteem, a history of aggressive behavior, substance abuse, mental health challenges, societal norms, income inequality, and cultural acceptance of aggression. Conversely, protective factors encompass stable, positive relationships, robust social support networks, and community cohesion with access to vital resources and services (CDC, 2021).

Guided by the Social–Ecological Model (SEM) and Acculturative Stress Theory (Berry, 1997), the present study conceptualizes IPV among international students as the product of interacting individual, relationship, community, and societal influences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021), with acculturative stress operating as a key mechanism within this ecology (Berry, 1997). At the individual level, stressors tied to migration (e.g., language demands, academic pressure, documentation/visa concerns) can exacerbate emotional dysregulation or help-seeking hesitancy. At the relationship level, power imbalances and controlling behaviors may be intensified by small social networks, financial dependency, or uncertainty about campus processes. At the community level, the campus climate, access to culturally responsive services, and the presence of international-student-specific support may buffer risk. At the societal level, immigration policy contexts and cultural norms around gender and help-seeking can shape both IPV risk and disclosure (CDC, 2021; Stockman, Hayashi, & Campbell, 2015). Within this nested model, Acculturative Stress Theory by Berry clarifies that population-specific mechanisms such as the demands of adapting to a new sociocultural environment (e.g., culture shock, discrimination, social isolation) can heighten vulnerability to IPV victimization and reduce the utilization of formal support, particularly for students navigating high academic expectations or restrictive visa conditions (Berry, 1997; CDC, 2021; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008).

Despite the significance of these factors, IPV among international college students remains relatively underexplored (Bonistall Postel, 2020; Daigle et al., 2016). This gap is particularly concerning given evidence that international students often lack awareness of Title IX resources and face unique barriers to reporting, such as fear of deportation or damage to their academic standing (Smith et al., 2024). Furthermore, culturally specific IPV prevention and response programs are rare, suggesting that current interventions may not meet the distinct needs of this diverse population (Martin, 2015; Forbes-Mewett &

McCulloch, 2016). This study examines variables that index differential acculturative/academic stress exposure, relationship-level support or vulnerability, and gendered risk patterns, as documented in prior work (Berry, 1997; CDC, 2021; Stockman et al., 2015). Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What is the prevalence of IPV among international college students in the US?
- Does IPV prevalence vary based on demographic factors among international students, such as year of study, relationship status, and biological sex?

METHOD

Study Design

The secondary data analysis of the 2022 dataset from the American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) was conducted upon approval from the IRB. The ACHA-NCHA is administered to a large, although nonrandom, sample of colleges and universities across the United States. Specifically, the authors sought the Determination of Non-Human Subject research owing to anonymity and public availability from the corresponding university IRB (2023--0755).

Participants

The original data included $N = 102,905$ college students from different academic institutions in the U.S. The current study focused only on the sample's international students ($n = 13,242$).

Procedure

The ACHA-National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) is a nationwide survey conducted by the American College Health Association (ACHA). It helps college health service providers, educators, counselors, and administrators gather data on students' habits and behaviors regarding key health issues. Currently, the ACHA-NCHA offers the most extensive and comprehensive dataset available on college student health, providing valuable insights to those in the fields of college health and higher education. The ACHA-NCHA survey was administered online to the participating colleges during the Spring and Fall of 2022. The 2022 survey, specifically the ACHA-NCHA III, collected data from more than 69,000 students across 129 institutions in the Spring and over 33,000 students at 51 institutions in the Fall. This information can aid colleges and universities in understanding student health needs and creating targeted interventions.

Instrument

The current study utilized various variables from the ACHA-NCHA to assess intimate partner violence and socio-demographics, such as sex, age, visa status, grade level, and partner relationships, among international students. The respective questions for each variable are discussed below in their designated sections.

Intimate partner violence

IPV was analyzed via the following methods: 1) A partner called me names, insulted me, or put me down to make me feel bad (No (1), Yes (2)); 2) A partner often insisted on knowing who I was with and where I was or tried to limit my contact with family or friends (No (1), Yes (2)); 3) A partner pushed, grabbed, shoved, slapped, kicked, bit, or hit me without my consent (No (1), Yes (2)); and 4) A partner forced me into unwanted sexual contact by holding me down or hurting me in some way (No (1), Yes (2)). 5) A partner pressured me into unwanted sexual contact by threatening me, coercing me, or using alcohol or other drugs (No (1), Yes (2)).

Relationship Status

The questions analyzed were as follows: 1) What is your relationship status? (Not in a relationship (1), In a relationship but not married/partnered (2), Married/partnered (3)).

International Student

The participants were asked if they had a visa (for example, F-1 or M-1) to study or work in the United States. (No (1), Yes (2)).

Socio-demographics

The sociodemographic questions analyzed for the current study included the following: 1) What sex were you assigned at birth? (Female (1), Male (2) Intersex (3)), 2) How old are you? (years), 3) What is your year in school? (1st-year undergraduate (1), 2nd-year undergraduate (2), 3rd-year undergraduate (3), 4th-year undergraduate (4), 5th year or higher undergraduate (5), Master's (MA, MS, MFA, MBA, MPP, MPA, MPH, etc.) (6), Doctorate (PhD, EdD, MD, JD, etc.) (7), Not seeking a degree (8), Other (please specify) (9)).

Data analysis

The university IRB approved the data analysis, which was performed via SPSS Version 26.0. The data were split based on the visa question (yes or no) for the main analysis. International students were separated in a different data file if they answered “Yes” to the visa question. All the variables in the question were

recoded into dichotomous variables to perform logistic regression analysis. The cumulative score of the five categories of IPV was calculated and recorded as “1” if the total score was less than or equal to five and as “2” if the score was above five, based on the median split ($M = 5.0$). Following standard analytical practices for sex-based comparisons in national health datasets such as the ACHA-NCHA, participants who were identified as intersex ($n = 9$) were excluded from the analysis utilizing the dichotomous biological sex variable (male/female) because of their small sample size. This approach ensures robust statistical power for binary comparisons while maintaining participant anonymity as per the dataset's constraints. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the background information. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were used to answer the first research question. The second research question was answered via univariate logistic regression. A logistic regression model was used to analyze the significant variables in the univariate analysis.

RESULTS

The total sample size consisted of $N = 102,905$. Of these, 13,242 individuals were classified as international students. Among the 13,242 participants, 57.8% ($n = 7633$) reported being female, and 42.1% ($n = 5568$) reported being male as the sex assigned at birth.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of international students.

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Year in school		
1st-year undergraduate	2632	19.9
2nd-year undergraduate	1734	13.1
3rd-year undergraduate	1539	11.6
4th-year undergraduate	1101	8.3
5th year or more undergraduate	229	1.7
Master's	3396	25.7
Doctorate	2432	18.4
Not seeking a degree	51	0.4
Others	116	0.9
Biological sex		
Female	7633	57.8
Male	5568	42.1
Intersex	9	0.1
Relationship status		
Not in a relationship	7431	56.3
In a relationship but not married/partnered	4386	33.2
Married/partnered	1382	10.5

Note. The total number of participants analyzed was $N = 13,242$.

A small number of individuals (0.1%, $n = 9$) reported as intersex. The mean age of the participants was $M = 23.84$, with a standard deviation of $SD = 5.9$. Most of the sample consisted of undergraduate students (55.4%, $n = 7235$), followed by graduate students (44.6%, $n = 5828$). Of these $n = 5828$ participants, 25.7% ($n = 3396$) reported being master’s level students, and 18.4% ($n = 2432$) reported being doctoral level students. *Table 1* provides detailed information on different international student demographics.

Statistical Inferences

What is the prevalence of IPV among international college students in the US?

The prevalence of IPV among international college students in the United States, focusing on experiences in the last 12 months, was analyzed by frequency. The prevalence of IPV was 13.7% ($n = 1818$) across all five categories. Furthermore, for verbal abuse, where a partner called names, insulted, or put down the participant, 9.0% ($n = 1189$) indicated encountering such behaviors, making it the highest category of IPV reported. Across all IPV categories, responses varied by biological sex (see *Table 2*).

Table 2: Frequencies and percentages of intimate partner violence categories based on the sex of international students.

	Females		Males	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
A partner called me names, insulted me, or put me down to make me feel bad.	6839 (57.4%)	733 (61.9%)	5071 (42.6%)	451 (38.1%)
A partner often insisted on knowing who I was with and where I was or tried to limit my contact with family or friends.	7168 (57.9%)	400 (56.3%)	5209 (42.1%)	310 (43.7%)
A partner pushed, grabbed, shoved, slapped, kicked, bit, choked, or hit me without my consent.	7349 (57.9%)	201 (54.5%)	5338 (42.1%)	168 (45.5%)
A partner forced me into unwanted sexual contact by holding me down or hurting me in some way.	7404 (60.5%)	156 (60.5%)	5410 (39.5%)	102 (39.5%)
A partner pressured me into unwanted sexual contact by threatening me, coercing me, or using alcohol or other drugs.	7356 (62.7%)	197 (62.7%)	5390 (37.3%)	117 (37.3%)

Note. The total number of participants analyzed was $N = 13,242$.

Regarding controlling behaviors, such as a partner insisting on knowing a person's whereabouts or limiting contact with family or friends, 5.4% ($n = 713$) reported these behaviors. Physical violence without consent, including pushing, grabbing, or hitting, was reported by 2.8% ($n = 373$) of the participants. Sexual abuse, where a partner forced unwanted sexual contact, was reported by 2.4% ($n = 316$) of the participants. For sexual coercion involving threats, coercion, or substance use, 2.4% ($n = 316$) reported experiencing pressure.

As expected, more female than male international students reported experiencing a partner calling them names, insulting them, or putting them down to make them feel bad (61.9% vs. 38.1%). Similar results were demonstrated for a partner who often insisted on knowing their whereabouts or attempted to limit contact with family or friends (56.3% vs. 43.7%). Physical IPV, being pushed, grabbed, shoved, slapped, kicked, bitten, or otherwise hit without consent, was reported by 54.5% of females and 45.5% of males. Forced sexual contact, defined as being held down or otherwise physically harmed, was reported disproportionately by females (60.5%). Finally, pressured sexual contact through threats, coercion, or the use of alcohol or other drugs was reported by 62.7% of the females compared with 37.3% of the males.

Does IPV prevalence vary among international students based on demographic factors such as year of study, relationship status, and biological sex?

All the variables in the question were recoded into dichotomous variables to perform logistic regression analysis. The cumulative score of the five categories of IPV was calculated and again recoded as “1” if the total score was less than or equal to five and “2” if the score was above five based on the median split ($M = 5.0$). Univariate logistic regression analysis provides crucial insights into the prevalence and correlations of intimate partner violence (IPV) among international college students (Table 3). The univariate logistic regression analyses indicated significant associations between IPV occurrence, academic year of study, and relationship status, with $p < 0.001$. Specifically, graduate students presented a greater prevalence of IPV than undergraduate students did, with 55.4% of the graduate students affected. Additionally, individuals without a current relationship reported a higher prevalence of IPV (56.3%) than did those in relationships. Further examination of the relationship between academic year and IPV occurrence revealed a statistically significant association, with higher odds of IPV among graduate students than among undergraduates ($OR = 1.191$, 95% $CI [1.119, 1.267]$). Similarly, relationship status and IPV occurrence were significantly associated, with participants without a current relationship having higher odds of reporting IPV than those in relationships ($OR = 1.268$, 95% $CI [1.148, 1.401]$). Biological sex differences also emerged, with females reporting a higher prevalence of IPV (57.8%) than males did (42.2%). Although the association between gender and IPV occurrence was marginally significant ($\chi^2 = 3.284$, $df = 1$, $p = .070$), slightly lower odds of IPV among females were revealed than among males ($OR = 0.911$, 95% $CI [0.823, 1.008]$).

Table 3: Univariate logistic regression analysis demonstrating the predictors of IPV among international students.

Variable	Category	Odds Ratio	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	<i>p</i>
Year	Undergraduate Student	1.000	-	-	-
	Graduate Student	1.191	1.119	1.267	<.001
Relationship Status	No Relationship	1.000	-	-	-
	Relationship	0.879	0.835	0.926	<.001
Biological Sex	Female	1.000	-	-	-
	Male	1.056	0.995	1.122	0.070

Note. The total number of participants analyzed was $N = 13,242$. The bold symbols indicate values that are significant at $p < 0.05$.

Final logistic regression model

A logistic regression model (Table 4) was constructed to predict IPV based on relationship status and academic year, which were significant ($p < 0.05$) in the univariate analysis among international college students. Initially, the classification table for the model showed an overall correct prediction of IPV status in 86.3% of the cases.

Table 4: The final regression model predicts intimate partner violence based on the year of study and the relationships among international students.

Variables	β	S.E.	Wald	<i>df</i>	AOR	95% CI
Constant	-1.839	0.025	5211.945	1	0.159	-
Year (Graduate Students)	0.345	0.053	42.592	1	1.412	(1.273, 1.566)
Relationship (No relationship)	0.280	0.052	29.422	1	1.323	(1.196, 1.464)

Note. Only the significant variables from univariate logistic regression were included in the final model. Omnibus tests of model coefficients revealed that the coefficients were significant ($\chi^2 = 64.248$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$). All the *p* values are < 0.001 . The biological sex variable was not significant and was hence omitted from the above table.

The constant term in the model was statistically significant ($\beta = -1.839$, Wald = 5211.945, $p < 0.001$), indicating a negative association with IPV occurrence. Upon introducing relationship status and academic year as predictors, the omnibus

tests of model coefficients were significant ($\chi^2 = 64.248$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the model significantly contributed to predicting IPV occurrence. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test indicated that the model fit the data adequately ($\chi^2 = 0.860$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.650$). Although the model's explanatory power improved minimally (Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.005$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.009$), it remained statistically significant. Specifically, including relationship status and academic year as predictors led to significant coefficients for both variables.

DISCUSSION

The prevalence of IPV among international college students in the United States represents a critical area of inquiry, necessitating a nuanced exploration to address the unique challenges faced by this understudied cohort. The alarming rates of IPV within the broader U.S. population, particularly among college students, underscore the importance of investigating this issue among international students navigating a foreign academic and cultural environment (CDC, 2022; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007; Knowledge Networks, 2011).

Interpreting the findings through a nested theoretical framework lens helps explain both the overall prevalence (13.7%) and the patterns of IPV forms documented in this study. Verbal and controlling behaviors, the most common categories, are consistent with relationship-level coercive dynamics that can be amplified when community-level networks are thin and when societal-level immigration contexts complicate help-seeking behavior. SEM positions these behaviors within broader campus and policy environments. Moreover, Acculturative Stress Theory explains why international students, as newcomers managing cultural adaptation and academic demands, may experience elevated strain that both heightens exposure and suppresses disclosure or service use (Berry, 1997).

The findings of the current study provide insights into the prevalence of IPV (13.7%) among international college students in the U.S., revealing variations in the occurrence of different forms of IPV. Verbal abuse emerged as the most prevalent category, affecting 9.0% of participants, followed by controlling behaviors (5.4%), physical violence without consent (2.8%), sexual abuse (2.4%), and sexual coercion (2.4%). These patterns mirror those observed among domestic students, where a survey by researchers at the Michigan State University School of Social Work revealed that 62% of 3,070 female and male undergraduate students reported experiencing physical, psychological, or sexual abuse by a partner (Cho et al., 2020). This comparison highlights both the similarities and differences in IPV experiences between international and domestic students, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of IPV and the need for targeted interventions to address the specific challenges international students face.

Demographic factors significantly influenced IPV prevalence among international students. The higher odds of IPV among graduate students ($AOR = 1.412$, 95% $CI [1.273, 1.566]$) can be read as a function of intensified acculturative and academic stress (e.g., research and funding pressures, supervisory power

dynamics, and potential isolation from undergraduate peer networks). Within SEM, these are individual- and community-level risks; within Acculturative Stress Theory, they reflect heavier adaptation demands that can exacerbate conflict and reduce bandwidth for help-seeking. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that the academic pressures and isolation experienced by graduate students can exacerbate their vulnerability to IPV (Bonistall Postel, 2020). Students not currently in a relationship also had higher odds of experiencing past-year IPV ($AOR = 1.323$, $95\% CI [1.196, 1.464]$). Because the IPV window spans the previous 12 months, these respondents may have reported recently ended abusive relationships or harassment by former partners. Within SEM, relationship-level risk persists beyond relationship dissolution, particularly when community-level support is limited; within Acculturative Stress Theory, smaller social networks and fears around institutional or immigration repercussions may further constrain disclosure, prolonging exposure. This finding aligns with research suggesting that individuals without a current partner may lack support systems that mitigate IPV risk (CDC, 2021). Although females reported a larger share of IPV cases descriptively, the sex association was marginal. It did not remain in the final model, underscoring that biological sex alone is an incomplete predictor once relationship and community contexts are considered. This fits the SEM's emphasis on multilevel determinants and comports with the literature showing that societal-level gender norms intersect with migration-related stressors to shape risk and help-seeking patterns among international students (CDC, 2021; Stockman, Hayashi, & Campbell, 2015).

In addition, the social and societal norms prevalent among international students may act as barriers to reporting IPV incidents. The literature suggests that cultural factors, including norms surrounding gender roles and expectations, may influence reporting behaviors (Daigle, Hoffman, & Johnson, 2016; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). International students often adhere to societal norms, prioritize privacy and may hesitate to disclose personal matters, especially within intimate relationships (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). The stigma associated with discussing relationship challenges openly may contribute to underreporting, creating a hidden layer of IPV experiences among international students. Furthermore, the logistic regression analysis provides valuable insights into the factors associated with IPV among international students. The significant association between IPV and the year of study highlights the need for targeted interventions and support services, especially for graduate students who reported higher odds of experiencing IPV. This finding supports the literature suggesting that graduate students often face heightened stress and isolation, which can increase their risk of IPV (Abdullah, Abd Aziz, & Mohd Ibrahim, 2014). Relationship status also emerged as a significant predictor, with individuals without a current relationship reporting higher odds of IPV. This underscores the importance of relationship education and support for international students (Bonistall Postel, 2020; CDC, 2022).

Implications

Guided by the Social–Ecological Model (SEM) and Acculturative Stress Theory, the present findings point to a coordinated, multilevel response that matches the pattern of risk observed in this study. The 13.7% past-year prevalence of IPV, with verbal abuse as the most common form, justifies campus-wide awareness and psychoeducational efforts that normalize help-seeking and teach recognition of coercive control while clarifying confidential pathways to care for international students. Critically, intervention resources should be targeted to groups with higher adjusted odds in the logistic regression model among graduate students ($AOR = 1.412$, 95% $CI [1.273, 1.566]$) and students not currently in a relationship ($AOR = 1.323$, 95% $CI [1.196, 1.464]$) by embedding tailored programming into graduate program orientations, lab/advising contexts, and postbreakup support options that address the 12-month risk window captured by the survey. Because immigration and cultural concerns can inhibit disclosure, campuses should pair survivor advocacy with international student services, plainly state how reporting interacts with visa status, and expand multilingual counseling and after-hours access. Finally, institutions should evaluate implementation using brief pre/post indicators (knowledge of coercive control, perceived access to confidential help) and year-over-year monitoring of ACHA-aligned IPV indicators to ensure that culturally responsive policies and colocated services meaningfully improve safety and uptake among international students. Beyond the university, a truly comprehensive response requires the active engagement of key external entities at the community and societal levels to address the unique vulnerabilities of international students, such as overcoming barriers such as isolation, language, and cultural differences, and local community-based organizations (CBOs) and IPV advocacy groups should receive targeted resources and training to better serve this population.

Limitations

The present study, although it clarifies the factors influencing IPV among international college students, has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on self-reported data could introduce bias, as participants may underreport or overreport their experiences of IPV due to fear, shame, or misunderstanding of the questions (Daigle, Hoffman, & Johnson, 2016). Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships between demographic factors and IPV experiences. Longitudinal studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the temporal dynamics of IPV among international students (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). Additionally, the sample was drawn from a single dataset, which may not represent all international students across various U.S. institutions. This limitation reduces the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of international students. Future studies should consider employing a more diverse sample to capture a broader range of experiences and contexts (Abdullah, Abd Aziz, & Mohd Ibrahim, 2014). A significant limitation to the generalizability of

the present findings is the unknown geographic distribution of the international student participants. Although the ACHA-NCHA dataset includes institutions from various regions across the U.S., the data utilized are deidentified at the respondent level. The raw dataset does not include institution-specific identifiers or geographic locations (e.g., state or region), and this information is not computable, even on the basis of the university's name, as it is masked to maintain the anonymity of participating schools and students.

Moreover, this study did not explore cultural differences in the perception and reporting of IPV in depth. The cultural norms and stigma associated with IPV in different countries could affect how international students respond to IPV surveys (Berry, 1997; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). In addition, the operationalization of “international student” by visa status does not distinguish country/region of origin, time in the U.S., language proficiency, or campus climate factors that theory and prior work suggest are integral to acculturative stress and help-seeking.

Future Research

Future research should address the limitations identified in this study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of IPV among international students. Longitudinal, multi-institution studies are needed to establish temporal ordering (acculturative stress → conflict → IPV → disclosure/help-seeking), capture postbreakup trajectories across semesters, and strengthen generalizability across regions and campus types (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). Expanding the scope of research to include a more diverse sample of international students from multiple institutions across different regions in the U.S. would increase the generalizability of the findings. This approach would also allow for examining regional differences in IPV prevalence and the effectiveness of local support services (Abdullah, Abd Aziz, & Mohd Ibrahim, 2014). Future research should also pay specific attention to the prevalence and nature of stalking among international students, as this form of nonphysical IPV is an acute safety concern that was briefly mentioned in the introduction but requires distinct measurement and analysis to inform campus intervention and safety planning efforts. Measurements should move beyond survey items to validated scales that index frequency and severity, alongside standardized acculturative stress instruments and contextual variables (e.g., language proficiency, time in the U.S., and campus climate). Analytically, multilevel models can separate students from campus-level influences, and mediation/moderation tests can evaluate whether acculturative stress explains the elevated odds among graduate students and those not in relationships or whether social support buffers risk. A mixed methods design, including in-depth interviews and focus groups, can surface culturally specific meanings of abuse and barriers to reporting that surveys may miss (Jones, 2017). Moreover, pragmatic trials can evaluate the effects of culturally tailored interventions (e.g., colocated survivor advocacy with international offices, immigration-literate communication campaigns, and graduate-lab bystander training) on service uptake, well-being, and IPV reduction among international students (Bonistall Postel, 2020; Hutcherson, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The current study advances the understanding of IPV among international college students by situating its prevalence and correlates within a nested Social–Ecological/Acculturative Stress lens. The 13.7% past-year prevalence, coupled with higher adjusted odds among graduate students and among those not currently in a relationship, identifies priority groups for outreach and tailored services. By linking measurable student characteristics to theoretically grounded pathways of risk and protection, this study provides a clear, actionable rationale for multilevel prevention and support on university and college campuses. At the same time, limitations in design, measurement, and generalizability indicate that richer longitudinal and multi-institution research, including intervention trials, is warranted. In summary, universities can make immediate, theory-guided improvements (health education, colocated services, and policies) while building an evidence base for culturally responsive, campus-wide strategies that enhance the safety and well-being of international college students.

Acknowledgment

The author used AI-based tools, including Grammarly, to assist with grammar checking, language refinement, and paraphrasing during manuscript preparation. No AI tools were used to generate original content or conduct the study.

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