

Career Choice, Barriers, and Prospects of Asian American Social Workers

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Abstract

The current study explored factors influencing career choices of Asian American social workers and assessed if their personal characteristics and career-related experiences affected their perceived glass ceiling, perception of ethnic discrimination, and perception of career prospects. A total of 208 Asian American social work administrators, supervisors, practitioners and graduate social work students participated in a comprehensive online survey. Participants provided basic demographic and career-related information and completed a set of measures to explore their reasons of choosing social work as their career, and their career perceptions and prospects. Correlation analyses and multiple regression analyses were used to identify predictors of their perception of ethnic discrimination, perceived glass ceiling, and perception of career prospects. The findings showed that altruistic reasons were very important to extremely important in their choice of social work as their career. Social work idealism was found to associate positively with both altruistic reasons and professional concerns of choosing social work. There was a significant relationship between participant's immigration status and family influence on their career choice. Those who were not born in the U.S. were more likely to be influenced by their family in their career choice than those who were born in the U.S. Those whose parents were not born in the U.S. were more likely to be influenced by their family expectations on their career choice than those either of their parents was born in the U.S. Perception of organizational fairness was found to be a strong predictor of perceived glass ceiling, perception of ethnic discrimination, and perception of career prospects. Implications of the findings for social work education and future research were discussed.

Keywords: Asian social workers, career choice, family influence, glass ceiling, organization fairness, career prospects

1. Introduction

A closer look at the racial and ethnic composition of the labor force in 2012 indicated that those of Asian descent were overrepresented in science and technology fields but underrepresented in human service and social service fields (United States Bureau of the Census, 2014). Asian Americans comprised 23.9% of computer workers, 15.5% engineers, 12.9% health care professions, but only 3.6% of social service workers. According to the Council of Social Work Education (2017), 3% of Master's degree (MSW) and 1.9% of Bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) graduates in 2016 were Asian Americans or other Asians. These rates were much lower when compared with the percentage of Asian Americans (6.4%) in the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The Asian population grew 72% between 2000 and 2015 and had the fastest growth rate of any major racial or ethnic groups in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2017). When being asked when they first considered a social work career, 13% of Asian Americans considered before college, the lowest rate when compared with other major race/ethnicity groups (Whitaker, 2008). Forty-five percent considered social work during college and 42% after college, a relatively high percentage as compared with other race/ethnicity groups. The number of active social workers have been growing steadily over the past decade (Salsberg et al., 2017). The majority (72.7%) of BSW graduates were either enrolled in an MSW program or expected to enroll in the next 2 years (Salsberg, Quigley, Acquaviva, Wyche, & Silwa, 2018). Because of a relatively small percentage of Asian Americans considers social work as their career before college and a very low percentage of them graduated with a BSW or MSW, there has been a tremendous gap in recruiting and

training adequate number of Asian American social work professionals to serve the needs of the rising Asian American populations. Greater understanding of the career development processes among Asian Americans is much needed to enhance career-counseling services to Asian American students and perhaps encourage them to pursue non-traditional fields such as social work, mental health counseling, or human services. There is need for research on family, cultural, and contextual influences on career choices, barriers, and prospects among Asian American social workers. The present study aimed to explore factors influencing career choices of Asian American social workers and assessed if their personal characteristics and career-related experiences affected their perceived glass ceiling, perception of ethnic discrimination, and perception of career prospects.

1.1 Cultural and Family Influences on Career Choices among Asian Americans

1.1.1 Family Influences on Career Development

Existing research on Asian American career choice and behavior has been limited. Much of the literature on the role of contextual factors influencing the career decisions of Asian Americans focused on college students. Family impact on career development and career choice among Asian American college students has been less studied compared to studies on areas such as academic achievement and well-being (Qin, 2010; Whiston & Keller, 2004). While immigrant parents wanted their children to pursue occupations that could help bringing up the whole family's socioeconomic status, their children may not necessarily want to pursue such occupations (Chung, 2001). Qin (2010) studied career choice and occupational congruence among Asian American young adults and found that intergenerational conflict and perceived opportunity were barriers to career choices, and negatively associated with interest-choice congruence. Family obligation, on the other hand, acted as positive factor to career-choice congruence. Chen and Fouad (2013) studied racial barriers and cultural factors on educational goals among East Asian students and found that work for honoring parents could be relevant. The study argued that different types of family obligations could influence vocational development among these students. Yee et al. (2007) found that Asian Americans were greatly impacted by their families on choosing certain occupations, particularly among less acculturated families. Immigrant families serve as an important social context for Asian American career choices. Fouad et al. (2008) interviewed 12 first or second generation Asian Americans who had worked for at least five years and summarized seven factors that influenced Asian American's career decision making, namely family influence, social structural influences, cultural influences, self-identity influences, career goals, work values, and role models. The study highlighted the importance of certain cultural and family values on career decision-making process among Asian Americans such as altruism, finding satisfaction and enjoyment on one's work, and continued hope for parental approval of their career choices. Family expectations influenced individuals' career goals, work values, and career interests (Fouad et al., 2008).

1.1.2 Cultural Values, Ethnicity, and Career Choices

Shen (2013) explored the relationship between internalized stereotyping, parental pressure, and parental support on career choices among 315 Asian American undergraduate and graduate students and found that perceived pressure and the influence of parental pressure on career choices significantly predicted internalized academic and career-related stereotypes against Asian Americans. The study found those who internalized Asian American stereotypes were more likely to choose culturally valued majors than non-culturally valued majors. Ghosh and Fouad (2016) found that acculturation and endorsement of cultural values, differences in major and career-related values, and intergenerational conflicts regarding major and career-related values, predicted major differences in family expectations on career. The study found that Asian parents and their child might not communicate adequately and clearly about their expectations regarding career choices and majors. A recent study by Hui and Lent (2018) examined culturally relevant factors that might contribute to Asian American's consideration of practice fields in which they were overrepresented or underrepresented. The study concluded that family support and acculturation played important roles in career choice consideration.

Poon (2014) argued that Asian American college students' career choices might be influenced by their intersecting identities as students of color and as members of second generation Asian Americans. The study found four major themes including family desires, perceptions of racism and inequalities in labor market, lack of ethnic role models in atypical career fields, and peer influences on dominant career choices to obtain financial reward. Poon (2014) argued that for some Asian American students, choosing a career might be influenced by their personal interests or family expectations. Their immigrant experiences living in a racialized society also shaped the social environments within which they make career choices.

1.2 Factors Attributing to Social Work Career Choices

1.2.1 Family Psychosocial History

Several studies on the role of family psychosocial history on career choices have found that family history of violence, trauma, mental illness, and substance abuse might influence a person's decision to pursue a career in social work (Biggerstaff, 2000; Daniel, 2011; Sellers & Hunter, 2005; Wilson & McCrystal, 2007). Sellers and Hunter (2005) found that students coming from a troubled family background with significant indicators of violence and psychopathology were likely to pursue a career in social work and choose mental health or health as their practice concentration. Wilson and McCrystal (2007) suggest that unresolved psychosocial trauma may affect the retention of social workers as such unresolved issue is likely to surface in direct practice when they experience much work-related stress with little support.

1.2.2 Career Motivations and Concerns among Minority Students

Daniel (2011) explored factors that shaped minority students' motivation and decision to pursue a career in social work. The study found that many racial and ethnic minority students were initially discouraged by friends and family who regarded social work as a poor career choice because of its lack of financial rewards, a lack of prestige that the profession had in their specific ethnic communities, and a high level of psychological demands of social work. The study summarized several career-related concerns raised by these minority students such as a lack of ability to effect change due to agency bureaucracy and "the negative and stereotypic perceptions of poor and minority clients" (Daniel, 2011, p.904). Moriarty and Murray (2007) found that that low level of compensation and occupational status has negatively affected the number of men choosing to become social workers. Daniel (2011) also argued that social work salaries would need to keep pace with other helping professions to attract minority students entering to the field. Minority students were motivated to become social workers because of their desire in serving poor and vulnerable populations and the belief of the profession as the most effective way to support their communities (Daniel, 2011). Other studies explored the relationships between personal values and career choice and found that social work students were motivated by altruistic vision of social work and a strong desire to help others (Csikai & Rozensky, 1997; Wilson & McCrystal, 2007).

1.3 Career Choices, Career Barriers, and Career Prospects among Asian American Social Workers

1.3.1 Social Work Idealism and Career Calling

There have been very few studies on career choices and career experiences among social workers in Asia or Asian American social workers. Ngai and Cheung (2009) found that idealism and career orientation affected emotional exhaustion of social work students in Hong Kong. Positive career orientation was defined as "a combination of career attitudes that incorporates favorable perceptions of one's ability to express oneself in the world of work through a successful career" (p.109). Guo et al. (2014) found that career concern and career curiosity predicted professional competence of social work students in China through the mediation of calling. Students' calling reflects their passion to fulfill life meanings in the pursuit of social work career (Guo et al., 2014; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). Duffy and Dik (2013) completed an extensive review of literature on the notion of "calling" to career-related well-being outcomes and found perceiving a calling has been associated with career maturity, career commitment, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, life meaning, and work meaning.

1.3.2 Career Barriers and Career Prospects

Lee (2009) studied factors that influenced career choice of 370 Asian American social workers and found that family immigration status significantly influenced their perception of career barriers, which in turn affected their choice of being a social worker. First generation Asian immigrant social workers perceived more career barriers than the second or third generation Asian Americans. Social work students often face significant career barriers including limited professional job opportunities, undesirable compensation, and little recognition of their professional status (An & Chapman, 2014; Guo, 2017; Hwang, 2007). Guo (2017) found that attitudinal and normative barriers were significant predictors for satisfaction with academic major and occupational intention among a group of social work undergraduates in China. Among students who perceive a high level of congruence between characteristics of social work education and occupation with their own interests, goals, and values, they tend to show positive satisfaction with their major and occupational choice. When Chinese students perceive the low recognition or support from significant others, they might experience a low level of satisfaction with the academic major and are less likely to pursue social work as their profession. Hwang (2007) studied a sample of 192 Asian American social workers and found that their perception of a glass ceiling and beliefs of an agency's organizational fairness have been influenced by their experiences of discrimination, acculturation, and Asian's visibility of agency power position. The findings

suggest that Asian American social workers may exhibit low levels of ambition toward upward mobility in their career ladders because of a glass ceiling. Other studies have also found associations between organizational justice, work-related attitudes, and organizational behaviors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career prospects (Daley, 1988; Foley & Kidder, 1999; Foley et al., 2002). In summary, there is need for more research on family and cultural influences on career choices and decision-making process, and career perceptions such as ethnic discrimination, glass ceiling, organizational fairness, and career prospects among Asian American social workers.

2. Method

The focus of the study was to understand the timing and reasons of choosing social work among Asian American social workers, and generate meaningful descriptive data and identify possible relationship among the variables of career motivations, career perceptions, and career prospects. Based on the findings of previous studies reviewed in the literature, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

1. Social work idealism is positively related to both altruistic reasons and professional concerns of choosing social work among Asian American social workers.
2. There is a positive relationship between participant's immigration status, parent's immigration status, and family influence on career choices among Asian American social workers.
3. Perception of a glass ceiling is positively associated with perception of ethnic discrimination.
4. Perception of organization fairness predicts perceptions of a glass ceiling, ethnic discrimination, and career prospects.

2.1 Procedures

Convenient and snowball sampling design was used to recruit potential participants. Recruitment consisted of multiple steps. First, the researcher compiled a list of Asian American service organizations including national and regional service networks in New York, California, Hawaii, and Midwest regions, as well as National Asian and Pacific Islander Social Work Educators Association and several social work schools. The researcher then emailed an invitation letter to these schools and organizations to provide pertinent information of the study and ask for their support to share the study information with their colleagues and members. The researcher reached out to specific subgroups within Asian American populations including Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos, Japanese, and South Asians, to maximize the ethnic diversity of the sample. Furthermore, an invitation letter was posted at various social media outlets of both national and local chapters of social workers, and graduate social work student associations. Finally, participants who completed the study were asked to invite their friends and colleagues to participate.

The invitation letter explained the purpose of the survey and provided a link for participants to enter the survey. Participants were assured about the anonymity and confidentiality of the survey. They were asked to provide basic demographic and career-related information and complete a set of measures to assess their reasons of choosing social work as their career, and their career perceptions and prospects. These measures include: Reasons for Choosing Social Work as Career Scale (Csikai & Rozensky, 1997), Social Work Idealism Scale (Csikai & Rozensky, 1997), Family Influence Scale (Fouad et al., 2010), Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003), Perceptions of Ethnic Discrimination (Hwang, 2007), Perceived Glass Ceiling (Hwang, 2007), Organizational Fairness Scale (Hwang, 2007), and Career Prospects Scale (Hwang, 2007). When required, the researcher obtained the permission from the scale developers to use these scales for the present study. Qualtrics Online Survey Software was used to administer the survey. The study was approved by Touro College's Institutional Review Board.

2.2 Participants

The sample included 208 Asian social workers or social work graduate students in the U.S. Their ages ranged from 21 to 68 years (mean =37). About 82% were females and 16% were male. The majority identified their ethnicities as Chinese (51.2%), followed by Korean (13.7%), Japanese (8.9%), Filipino (6.5%), Asian Indians (4.2%), and multi-racial ethnicity (6.5%). The majority (83.2%) reported that neither of their parents was born in the U.S. About half (53.6%) of participants were not born in the U.S. The majority were married (52.7%) and identified themselves as heterosexual (85.6%). Approximately 45.6% had no religious affiliation, 40% believed in Christianity, and a smaller number practiced Buddhism (9%) or other religions. The majority worked full-time (75.3%). About 41% were employed in social work-related organizations for less than 4 years, 24.6% were employed for 5-9 years, 16.8% were employed for 10-19 years, and 17.4% were employed for 20 years or more. About 29% reported their annual income to be below \$45,000, 35% had annual income of \$45,000 to less than \$75,000, and 36% had annual income \$75,000 or more. Most lived in New York/New Jersey (49.7%), California (17%), Hawaii (13.7%), Nevada (5.2%), and

Massachusetts (3.9%). The majority had a master's degree in social work (73.8%), 8.3% had a postgraduate degree and 13.1% had a bachelor's degree in social work or other disciplines. About 41% were direct practitioners or case workers, 10.8% were administrators, 9.1% were supervisors of direct practice, and about one-fifth were graduate students. These participants worked in very diverse practice concentrations including mental health (25.7%), health and disability services (18%), senior services (10.8%), family or youth services (6.6%), child welfare/child care (5.4%), education and schools (10.8%), domestic violence (2.4%), substance abuse (1.8%) and housing (3%). The majority were supervised by social work professionals (57.8%) and the rest of them were supervised by other professional disciplines including human services (15.1%), education (7.8%), business (4.2%), and law (2.4%).

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 Demographics, Agency Characteristics, and Career-Related Variables

Participants were asked to report their demographic and personal characteristics including their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, immigration status, parent's immigration status, level of educational attainment, income level, work status, job title, job tenure, and where they lived. They also shared about their agency characteristics that included the professional background of their supervisor and the primary focus of the program. They were also asked about their timing in choosing social work and if social work was their primary career choice or not, their reasons for staying in current job, their likelihood of staying in the current job for the next 3 to 5 years, and their overall level of job satisfaction.

2.3.2 Social Work Idealism

The original scale of 26 items of the Social Work Idealism was designed to explore "thoughts and behaviors that value and promote individual and societal change" (Csikai & Rozensky, 1997, p.530). The scale was analyzed for reliability following which 3 items were removed. The revised 23 items had a Cronbach's alpha of .74.

2.3.3 Family Influence

The Family Influence Scale (FIS) was administered to examine the role of family influence on careers (Fouad et al., 2010). The FIS comprised of 22 items and has four subscales: Informational Support ($\alpha=.89$), Financial Support ($\alpha=.82$), Values and Beliefs ($\alpha=.75$), and Family Expectations ($\alpha=.82$). The Cronbach's alpha for the FIS was .88 (Fouad et al., 2010). The researcher was advised by Fouad to remove two items of the Financial Information Subscale to improve the overall reliability. The sample of this study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .87 for the FIS. The Cronbach's alphas for the subscales were .89 (Informational Support), .86 (Family Expectations), .86 (Financial Support), and .72 (Values and Beliefs).

2.3.4 Reasons of Choosing Social Work as Career

The Reasons for Choosing Social Work as Career Scale was administered to measure the participant's motives for selecting a career in social work (Csikai & Rozensky, 1997). The scale, comprised of 14 items, has three subscales - Altruism, Professional Concerns, and Exploratory Factors. The sample of this study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .79 for the Altruism Scale. After one of the five items of the Professional Concerns Scale was removed, the Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .82.

2.3.5 Self-Compassion

The Self-Compassion Scale was designed to explore the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors associated with the various components of self-compassion (Neff, 2003). The scale, comprised of 26 items, has 6 subscales - Self Kindness ($\alpha=.78$), Self-Judgment ($\alpha=.77$), Common Humanity ($\alpha=.80$), Isolation ($\alpha=.79$), Mindfulness ($\alpha=.75$), and Over-Identified ($\alpha=.81$). The Cronbach's alpha for the Self-Compassion Scale was .92 (Neff, 2003). The sample of this study yielded a Cronbach's alpha for the Self-Compassion Scale as .94. For the subscales, the Cronbach's alphas were .86 (Self Kindness), .86 (Self-Judgment), .81 (Common Humanity), .80 (Isolation), .81 (Mindfulness), and .80 (Over-Identified).

2.3.6 Perceived Glass Ceiling

The Perceived Glass Ceiling, comprised of 4 items, was developed to assess gender discrimination in the workplace (Hwang, 2007) and the Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .83. The sample of this study yielded the Cronbach's alpha as .92.

2.3.7 Perceived Ethnic Discrimination

The Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Scale, comprised of 7 items, was administered to measure the discrimination perceived by Asian American social workers (Huang, 2007) and the Cronbach's alpha reported for the scale was .90.

This sample yielded the Cronbach's alpha for the scale as .81.

2.3.8 Perception of Organizational Fairness

The Perception of Organizational Fairness Scale, comprised of 11 items, was administered to explore the notions of organizational decision-making and promotion practices as perceived by social workers (Huang, 2007). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .93. For the current sample, the internal consistency of the scale was .94.

2.3.9 Perception of Career Prospects

The Perception of Career Prospects Scale, comprised of 6 items, was used to assess the participant's desire to be promoted as aspirations represent career-related goals (Huang, 2007) and the Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .84. The study sample yielded a Cronbach's alpha for the scale as .86.

2.4 Data Analyses

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 23) was used to compute descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations for interval or ratio level variables, and frequency distributions for categorical variables. Reliability statistics was calculated to assess the internal consistency of each standardized scale. Correlation analysis to measure the linear association between variables, and multiple regression analysis to identify predictors for outcome variables were also computed.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The means, standard deviations, scale reliability, and correlations between social work idealism, altruistic reasons, professional concerns, self-compassion, organizational fairness, perceptions of ethnic discriminations, perceived glass ceiling, and career prospects, were presented in Table 1. There was statistically significant relationship between altruistic reasons and professional concerns ($r=.39, p<.01$), the two subscales of the Reasons for Choosing Social Work as Career. Social work idealism was found to correlate positively with both altruistic reasons ($r=.39, p<.01$) and professional concerns ($r=.33, p<.01$). Organizational fairness was related positively with career prospects ($r=.42, p<.01$) but negatively with perceptions of ethnic discrimination ($r=-.27, p<.01$) and perceived glass ceiling ($r=-.42, p<.01$). Perception of ethnic discrimination was found to relate strongly with perceived glass ceiling ($r=.60, p<.01$).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations among Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Social work idealism	91.79	6.96	.74	1.0							
2. Altruistic reasons	24.69	3.7	.79	.39**	1.0						
3. Professional concerns	14.9	3.69	.82	.33**	.39**	1.0					
4. Self-compassion	87.38	18.6	.94	.13	.02	-.11	1.0				
5. Organizational fairness	47.42	12.7	.94	.30**	.054	.06	.26**	1.0			
6. Perceived ethnic Discrimination	23.35	8.52	.81	.03	.13	.05	-.12	-.27**	1.0		
7. Perceived glass ceiling	16.31	7.05	.92	-.03	.17*	.05	-.10	-.42**	.60**	1.0	
8. Career prospects	22.6	6.40	.86	.16	.05	.03	.11	.42**	-.08	-.12	1.0

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

3.2 Timing and Reasons for Choosing Social Work as a Career

The participants were asked about when they first considered social work as their career choice. The majority (59.4%) first thought about becoming social workers during their college years. About a quarter first considered the profession while in graduate schools or after. Only 15.8% thought about a social work career prior to entering college. The respondents were also asked if social work was their first or primary career choice. Fifty-six percent reported that social work was their first or primary career choice while 44% has a career change to enter social work.

With regard to reasons for choosing social work as a career, the mean score of altruistic reasons was 24.69 (SD=3.7, range 6-30), indicating that altruistic reasons were very important to extremely important for these participants in their choice of social work as their professional career. The mean score of professional concerns reasons was 14.9

(SD=3.69, range = 4-20) indicating that professional concerns were moderately important to very important for their choice of social work. The exploratory factors including in the scale – growing up in a dysfunctional family, and encouragement from family/friends to pursue social work – turned out to be only somewhat or moderately important in their choice of social work as their career.

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify factors that could best predict the altruistic reasons and professional concerns of choosing social work as a career. Five possible factors were entered - age, gender, participant's immigration status, self-compassion, and social work idealism. In regard to the altruistic reasons of choosing social work, the results found four factors as significant predictors ($F=9.60$; $p<.05$) (Table 2). With a beta of .28 ($p<.05$), social work idealism emerged as the strongest predictor, accounting for 9.5% of the variance. The second important factor was gender ($\beta=.28$; $p<.05$), followed by age ($\beta=.25$; $p<.05$), and participant's immigration status ($\beta=.17$; $p<.05$), accounting for 4.8%, 4.1% and 2.9% of the variance in altruistic reasons. These results indicated that higher level of altruistic reasons was a function of higher level of social work idealism, female gender, older, and those who were born in the U.S. Overall, the model explained about 21% of the variance in altruistic reasons ($R=.46$).

Table 2. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis – Predictors of Altruistic Reasons

Factor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Social work idealism	.31	.10	.28	3.76	.000	15.24	.000
Gender	.38	.14	.28	3.55	.001	12.04	.000
Age	.43	.18	.25	3.08	.002	10.75	.000
Immigration status	.46	.21	.17	2.28	.024	9.60	.000

With regard to professional concern reasons of choosing social work, the results found two significant predictors ($F=9.34$; $p<.05$) (Table 3). With a beta of .32 ($p<.05$), social work idealism emerged as the strongest predictor, accounting for 8.3% of the variance. Another factor was self-compassion ($\beta=-.18$; $p<.05$) accounting for an additional 3.1% of variance. These findings indicated that higher level of professional concerns was a function of higher level of social work idealism but lower level of self-compassion. Overall, these two factors explained about 11.4% of the variance in professional concerns ($R=.34$).

Table 3. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis – Predictors of Professional Concerns

Factor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Social work idealism	.29	.08	.32	4.02	.000	13.20	.000
Self-compassion	.34	.11	-.18	-2.26	.025	9.34	.000

3.3 Family Influence on Social Work Career Choice

Table 4 summarized the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and inter-correlations of sub scales of Family Influence - Informational Support, Financial Support, Family Expectations, and Values and Beliefs. In this sample, the majority (83.2%) reported that neither of their parents were born in the U.S. and about half (53.6%) were not born in the U.S. Independent sample t-test analyses were conducted to assess the relationship between participant's immigration status, parent's immigration status, and family influence. This study found statistically significant relationship between participant's immigration status and family influence ($t=-2.04$, $p<.05$). Those who were not born in the U.S. were more likely to be influenced by their family on their career choice than those who were born in the U.S. There was also a significant relationship between parent's immigration status and family expectation (subscale of Family Influence) ($t=-3.0$, $p<.01$). Those whose parents were not born in the U.S. were more likely to be influenced by their family expectations on their career choice than those either of their parents was born in the U.S.

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Inter-Correlations of Family Influence Subscales

Variable	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4
1.Information support	2.89	.95	.89	1.0			
2. Financial support	3.53	1.22	.86	.41**	1.0		
3. Family expectations	2.79	.93	.86	.13	.13	1.0	
4.Values and beliefs	2.51	.95	.72	.34**	.15*	.47**	1.0

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

3.4 Reasons for Staying on Social Work Profession

Participants were asked how likely they would stay in their current position in their next 3 to 5 years. About 55.8% said very likely or somewhat likely and 44% said somewhat unlikely or very unlikely. Participants were asked what their personal reasons were for their staying at their current job. An overwhelming majority (98%) reported that they stayed at their current job because they liked to help people. Many enjoyed working with other staff members (90%), found their work interesting (92%), believed in the program (90%), found balance between work and family (82%), and believed that social work was a safe place to work (90%). Some said they stayed at their job because of good salary and/or benefits (63%) and flexible hours (70%). A much smaller number stayed at their job because they could not find another job (14%).

3.5 Factors Influencing Perception of Ethnic Discrimination, Glass Ceiling, and Career Prospects

Five possible factors including gender, income, participant's immigration status, job tenure, and organizational fairness were entered in stepwise multiple regression analyses to estimate models that could best predict the perceptions of ethnic discrimination and perceived glass ceiling among Asian American social workers. In regards to perceptions of ethnic discrimination, the results found three factors as significant predictors ($F=8.78$; $p<.05$) (Table 5). With a beta of $-.27$ ($p<.05$), organizational fairness emerged as the strongest predictor, accounting for 7.1% of the variance. The second factor was participant's immigration status ($\beta=-.23$; $p<.05$) followed by gender ($\beta=.19$; $p<.05$) accounting for 5.4% and 3.4% of the variance. These results showed that higher level of perceptions of ethnic discrimination was a function of lower level of perception of organizational fairness, female gender, and those who were born in the U.S. Overall, the model explained about 15.8% of the variance in perception of ethnic discrimination ($R=.40$).

Table 5. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis – Predictors of Perceptions of Ethnic Discrimination

Factor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Organizational fairness	.27	.07	-.27	-3.39	.001	10.82	.001
Immigration status	.35	.12	-.23	-3.00	.003	10.01	.000
Gender	.40	.16	.19	2.38	.019	8.78	.000

The same three factors (organizational fairness, gender, and immigration status) were found as predictors of perceived glass ceiling ($F=13.46$; $p<.05$) (Table 6). With a beta of $-.41$ ($p<.05$), organizational fairness emerged as the strongest predictor, accounting for 17.2% of the variance in perceived glass ceiling. Two other factors including gender ($\beta=.17$; $p<.05$) and immigration status ($\beta=-.16$; $p<.05$), each accounting for 2.6% of the variance. These findings showed that higher level of perceived glass ceiling was a function of lower level of perception of organizational fairness, being female, and those who were not born in the U.S. Overall, the model explained about 22.4% of the variance in perceived glass ceiling ($R=.47$).

Table 6. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis – Predictors of Perceived Glass Ceiling

Factor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Organizational fairness	.42	.17	-.41	-5.41	.000	29.59	.000
Gender	.45	.20	.17	2.19	.030	17.41	.000
Immigration status	.47	.22	-.16	-2.16	.033	13.46	.000

Finally, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to explore predictors of the perceptions of career prospects among Asian American social workers. Six possible factors including gender, participant's immigration status, job satisfaction, organizational fairness, perceptions of ethnic discriminations, and perceived glass ceiling were entered. The results revealed two significant predictors ($F=15.57$; $p<.05$) (Table 7). With a beta of $.41$ ($p<.05$), perceptions of organizational fairness emerged as the strongest predictor, accounting for 15.5% of the variance in perceptions of career prospects. Another factor was immigration status ($\beta=-.16$; $p<.05$) accounting for an additional 2.6% of the variance. These findings indicated that higher level of perceptions of career prospects was a function of higher level of perceptions of organizational fairness and among those who were born in the U.S. Overall, these two factors explained about 18.1% of the variance in perceptions of career prospects ($R=.43$).

Table 7. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis – Predictors of Career Prospects

Factor	R	R ²	β	t	p	F	p
Organizational fairness	.39	.16	.41	5.36	.000	26.11	.000
Immigration status	.43	.18	.16	2.10	.038	15.57	.000

4. Discussion

4.1 Major Findings and Future Research

This study explored factors influencing career choices among Asian American social workers and assessed if their personal characteristics and career-related experiences affected their perceptions of a glass ceiling, ethnic discrimination, and career prospects. The findings showed that altruistic reasons were very important to extremely important in their choice of social work as their career. Professional concerns were moderately important to very important for their choice of social work. Social work idealism was found to correlate positively with both altruistic reasons and professional concerns of choosing social work. Regression analyses found social work idealism as a major predictor for both altruistic reasons and professional concerns, accounting for 9.5% and 8.3% of variances of these variables respectively. The findings of altruism and idealism as key motivators of career choice of social work in this sample were consistent with findings of several studies on social work career choices (Csikai & Rozensky, 1997; Daniel, 2011; Wilson & McCrystal, 2007). Existing literature suggests the role of family psychosocial history on career choice. For this sample, psychosocial factor such as “growing up in a dysfunctional family” was only somewhat or moderately important in their choice of social work.

Previous literature found that Asian Americans were greatly influenced by their families on developing career goals and interest, and choosing certain careers, particularly among less acculturated families (Fouad et al., 2008; Yee et al., 2007; Qin, 2010). This study of Asian American social workers also found significant relationship between participant’s immigration status and family influence on their career choice. Those who were not born in the U.S. were more likely to be influenced by their family on their career choice than those who were born in in the U.S. There was also a significant association between parent’s immigration status and family expectation. Those whose parents were not born in the U.S. were more likely to be influenced by their family expectations on their career choice than those either of their parents was born in the U.S. The study by Fouad et al. (2010) tested the relationship between family influences on career choices with several criterion variables including parental attachment, individualism-collectivism, satisfaction with life, and career decision-making self-efficacy across a diverse sample including a small number of Asian Americans. Future research to explore relationships between these constructs and family influence among a large group of Asian American social workers is very much needed to further our understanding on specific roles and family related factors influencing career choices and career decisions among them.

This study explored the relationship between social workers’ career perceptions toward ethnic discrimination, a glass ceiling, career prospects, and organizational fairness and assessed factors influencing their perceptions of ethnic discrimination, glass ceiling, and career prospects. Perception of organizational fairness was found to be a strong predictor of perceived glass ceiling, perception of ethnic discrimination, and perception of career prospects, accounting for 17.2%, 7.1%, and 15.5% of variances in these variables respectively. Immigration status and gender were also found to have small influences on social workers’ perceptions of ethnic discrimination and perceived glass ceiling. These findings contributed to a growing body of literature that assessed the relationship between perceptions of a glass ceiling, beliefs of an agency’s organizational fairness, experience of discrimination, acculturation, and career barriers (Foley & Kidder, 1999; Foley et al., 2002; Hwang, 2007; Lee, 2009).

4.2 Study Limitations

The present study has several limitations. Study participants were somewhat diverse in several demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, immigration status, religion, income level, and what regions in the U.S. they lived. However, the study was influenced by sampling bias due to convenient and snowball sampling designs. Therefore, the sample of the study may not be representative of Asian American social worker populations at large. Findings were limited in generalizability. Analyzes of results based on cross-sectional survey design cannot assert causality among study variables. All the analyses rely on self-report data and may result in observation bias and recall bias. These biases may link with how they perceive their career barriers and career prospects and how long they have worked as a social worker. To minimize these biases, participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of the survey and were encouraged to answer each question honestly.

4.3 Conclusion

While the number of social workers has grown steadily over the past decade (Salsberg et al., 2017), the percentages of Asian Americans graduated with a BSW or MSW remain very low. In this study, only 15.8% of participants thought about a social work career before entering college. This relatively low rate was similar to the finding of another study published a decade ago that found relatively few Asian American social workers considered social work as their career choice before college (Whitaker, 2008). Forty-four (44) percent reported that social work was not their first or primary career choice. It was a career change for them to enter social work. These results confirmed the trend of a tremendous gap in recruiting and training adequate number of Asian American social workers to serve the needs of Asian American populations. Social work is a dream career for many Asian American social workers because of their idealism of the profession, strong altruistic vision of social work, and their desire to serve the populations. The findings of the study also suggest that their perception of discrimination and a glass ceiling as a result of their perception of organizational fairness may affect their perceived career prospects and their decisions to stay in their job or not. To enhance recruitment and retention of Asian American social work practitioners, career development, and professional growth opportunities for these social workers to be reflective on their personal needs and values, and professional experiences is very much needed. This also suggests that maintaining recruitment and retention of Asian American social workers may require changes not only in social work education but also in the culture, practices, and conditions of their employment. The intent of the study was to produce meaning descriptive data and help identify possible relationship among major career-related variables for further research in a larger scale. This study contributed to more knowledge and understanding on family influences on career choice, timing and reasons for choosing social work as their career, reasons for staying in their job, as well as their career decisions and career perceptions of ethnic discrimination, glass ceiling, organizational fairness, and career prospects among Asian American social workers.

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