Received: 22 December 2025 | Revised: 11 March 2026 | Accepted: 26 March 2026

DOI: 10.1111/asap.70067

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

asap Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy SPSSI WILEY

The status-related stress scale (SRSS): Measuring opportunity constraints and precarity among Asian adults in the United States with F-1, J-1, or H-1B status

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Funding information
Study was supported by a faculty funding from The University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

The aim of this study was to develop and validate a scale to measure stress associated with maintaining temporary nonimmigrant study or employment status (e.g., F-1, J-1, or H-1B status) among Asian adults in the United States. Items were developed following a combination of both deductive and inductive reasoning and refined through a systematic item generation process involving target population members and expert panels. We recruited a sample of 320 Asian individuals living across the United States on temporary statuses. The sample was randomly divided into exploratory (n = 153) and confirmatory (n = 167)

subsamples to validate the scale using a two-step factor analytic process. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses identified and confirmed two distinct but interrelated factors: Opportunity constraints (four items) and Precarity (four items). Internal consistency was McDonald's $\Omega = .76$ for Opportunity Constraints, McDonald's $\Omega = .70$ for Precarity, and McDonald's $\Omega = .79$ for the full scale score—namely Status-Related Stress Scale (SRSS). SRSS scores achieved full configural, metric, and scalar invariance across gender and visa type, and showed consistent, theoretically meaningful associations with external constructs (i.e., financial strain, anxiety, loneliness, life satisfaction, hope, negative context of reception, desire to stay permanently, and worry about policy changes). The SRSS is the first scale specifically designed to assess stress associated with maintaining temporary, nonimmigrant status among individuals living in the United States. This tool has important implications for policy, social, political, behavioral, and public health assessment, especially in the context of rapidly changing policy and associated distress among temporary migrants as well as permanent residents.

KEYWORDS
international worker, international student, measure, migration, precarity, temporary status, visa-related stress

Public significance statement

Individuals living in the United States with temporary student or employment status (such as F-1, J-1, or H-1B) often face unique stress related to legal uncertainty and limited opportunities. This study introduces a new measure of status-related stress and shows how these experiences are linked to mental health outcomes and other sociocultural stressors. Assessing this unique stress can help researchers, policymakers, and institutions better support these temporary-status migrants.

Individuals on nonimmigrant study or employment status in the United States are likely to face stress associated with their temporary status—yet no validated tool exists to measure it. Although prior research has explored common stressors among international students and workers, such

as acculturative stress, homesickness, and adaptation, stress associated with maintaining lawful immigration status has received limited quantitative attention and is often examined through qualitative accounts (Liem et al., 2021; Park & Shimada, 2022; Soylu, 2022). In this study, we introduce and validate the *Status-Related Stress Scale (SRSS)*, a self-report measure designed to assess stress associated with maintaining temporary, nonimigrant study or employment status among Asian individuals living in the United States (e.g., those with F-1, J-1, or H-1B status), herafter referred to as *nonimmigrants in study or employment status (NSES)*. The SRSS offers a timely, evidence-based tool with broad implications for public health, policy, and immigrant well-being in an era of shifting regulations and heightened anxiety.

International students, workers, and exchange visitors in the United States

According to the Office of Homeland Security Statistics (Baker, 2025), about 90% of nonimmigrant residents were admitted to the United States under temporary work or study categories, including F-1, J-1, and H-1B. During fiscal years 2019–2024, 80% of these individuals were between the ages of 18 and 44, and 57% were male. Most resided in California and Texas, followed by New York and Florida. Notably, individuals from Asian countries make up the largest share of NSES in the United States (Tian et al., 2024), with India and China serving as the largest sending countries, followed by South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines (Statista, 2025).

Although there are many different temporary nonimmigrant classifications for study and employment in the United States, the most prevalent among Asian nationals include the F-1 classification for academic students, the H-1B classification for specialty-occupation workers, and the J-1 exchange visitor classification for students, researchers, and other skilled trainees. The F-1 nonimmigrant classification allows international students to enter the United States for full-time study at an accredited school (college, university, high school, language institute, etc.). The H-1B specialty occupation classification allow U.S. employers to hire highly skilled foreign workers in specialty occupations that require at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent in a specific field. Lastly, the J-1 exchange visitor program is designed to promote educational and cultural exchange, encompassing a wide range of roles including students, scholars, interns, and researchers (Baker, 2025; Wilson, 2019). Further, many individuals transition across classifications such as from F-1 to H-1B status, from nonimmigrant to immigrant status, and eventually to lawful permanent residency. These transitions demonstrate these people's long-term investment in the country and underscore the importance of developing a scale to capture their experiences and concerns.

Stressors associated with living in the United States under nonimmigrant study or employment statuses

During the spring and summer of 2025, thousands of international students on F-1 status saw their SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) records abruptly terminated, effectively leaving students out of lawful status without prior notice (Popli, 2025). Some of these students were forced to leave the country immediately, and others faced distressing uncertainty around the risks of international travel. The fear of leaving the United States, even temporarily, has become a heavy psychological burden for many NSES (Valero, 2025). A few months later, specialty occupation workers on H-1B status experienced "whiplash" from a dramatic policy shift:

the imposition of a $100,000 annual fee (Picchi & Cunningham, 2025). Although the administration later clarified that the new fee only applied for new H-1B applications, the abruptness of the policy change and lack of clear communication heightened anxiety about legal status, travel, and job security (Ortutay et al., 2025). These developments—far from isolated policy shifts—have generated widespread fear and uncertainty among NSES. Many worried about the risks of traveling outside the United States and the broader instability of their future in the country, particularly given that their families, employment, and academic paths are often deeply rooted there. As documented across empirical studies and lived accounts, this issue has become a significant source of distress (Rodriguez, 2025; Valdivia et al., 2025). Yet despite the seriousness of these disruptions, no validated measure currently exists to assess the psychological burden associated with such precarity.

NSES face stressors that are unique, enduring, and largely underrecognized in psychological and policy research. International students, for example, must maintain continuous enrollment, navigate complex work-authorization systems, and comply with shifting institutional and federal requirements—all while managing academic demands in an unfamiliar cultural environment (Lynch et al., 2024). Meanwhile, H-1B workers, many of whom are employed in specialty occupations, experience substantial professional and personal uncertainty. Reliance on employer sponsorship, periodic costly renewal fees (~$3000–$5000), limited time in the H-1B classification (only up to six years), and, for those seeking to work in U.S. industry, the uncertainty of dealing with a lottery system, create chronic anxiety and severely restrict long-term planning (Feeney et al., 2023; González, 2022). These pressures are futher intensified by the constant fear of losing legal status due to job loss, administrative error, or sudden policy changes.

Temporary status-related stress is not a new phenomenon—it has long imposed a persistent burden on individuals navigating temporary nonimmigrant status in the United States (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). However, despite its longstanding presence, such temporary status-related stress has received limited attention within psychological and social science research (Liem et al., 2021; Park & Shimada, 2022; Soylu, 2022). Recent shifts in immigration policy have further intensified these stressors, underscoring the urgency of understanding this overlooked issue. The cumulative effects of legal precarity, bureaucratic uncertainty, and restricted opportunities highlight the need for a more systematic investigation into the psychological toll of status-related stress.

The nature of status-related stress and its influence on psychological and mental health outcomes

The lived reality of NSES in the United States is shaped by a complex web of legal, institutional, and bureaucratic constraints. Their ability to remain in the country is contingent on maintaining enrollment, continuous employment, or institutional affiliation—leaving little room for life disruptions or errors (Soylu, 2022). Even minor changes in circumstances, such as switching jobs or taking a leave of absence, can jeopardize one's legal status. As immigration policies and adjudication patterns shift—sometimes abruptly—NSES face a constant sense of precarity in their day-to-day decision-making and long-term planning (Feeney et al., 2023; González, 2022). This regulatory fragility has profound implications for health and well-being. Research has shown that uncertainty around status or visa renewals, travel risks, and constraints on pathways to permanent residence contributes to chronic stress, anxiety, and diminished mental health outcomes (Lynch et al., 2024; Prasath et al., 2023). Unlike general cultural stress, status-related stress is tied to legal status and institutional policy, producing unique psychological effects. For instance, many

NSES report an ongoing fear of sudden status loss, barriers to professional advancement, restrictions on international travel, and difficulty making major financial and family planning decisions (Biesiada, 2025).

What distinguishes status-related stress from more general forms of immigrant or cultural stress is its restrictive regulatory context and precarious nature. Although status-related stress is conceptually distinct from these broader stressors, it may also be closely interconnected with them, as migration status often shapes individuals' experiences of discrimination, immigration-related constraints, and the broader context of reception. It is not only about cultural adjustment or experiencing discrimination, but about living within a fragile, conditional legal framework that governs nearly every aspect of mobility, employment, and stability. Indeed, NSES, not only in the United States but also in other countries, must constantly adapt to sudden and unpredictable changes in policy, institutional guidance, and political tone—many of which are often out of their control (Wright et al., 2022). This situation creates a chronic state of vigilance and uncertainty that can erode mental health, disrupt relationships, and inhibit long-term integration (Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Prasath et al., 2023). Despite these known stressors, there are currently no validated psychometric tools that specifically capture the stress associated with the uncertainty, precarity, and constraints of living on a temporary status. Existing constructs—such as cultural or financial stress—offer partial insight but cannot capture the precarity that defines life on a temporary visa status (González, 2022). Therefore, developing a measure that assesses stress specifically related to living on a temporary, nonimmigrant study or employment status is crucial. Without such a measure, it is difficult to assess the scope of this issue, compare it across populations, or evaluate its effects on mental health, well-being, and long-term outcomes for this population.

Proposing theoretical dimensions of status-related stress

We propose that status-related stress can be broadly categorized into two interrelated yet distinct dimensions: *Precarity* and *Opportunity Constraints*. According to Hung et al. (2024), "precarity" is a term that captures migrants' experiences amid the *uncertainties* inherent in contemporary migration systems. In the context of our study, Precarity refers to persistent anxiety about the potential loss of legal status, the possibility of status revocation, and the uncertainty around international travel or unforeseen events. This precarity is further compounded by the "flimsy" nature of most nonimigrant statuses, which often involve opaque renewal procedures, shifting immigration policies, and limited legal protections (González, 2022). Living under such conditions fosters a chronic sense of instability, forcing individuals to continuously monitor their compliance and prepare for abrupt disruptions to their lives (Biesiada, 2025).

In parallel, Opportunity Constraints encompasses the structural limitations placed on NSES' ability to fully participate in economic and personal life. These limitations include restrictions on employment, barriers to career advancement and opportunities, limited access to financial services such as student loans or credit, and constraints on making long-term commitments, including purchasing a home or starting a family (Feeney et al., 2023; Hastings et al., 2023). Even highly skilled individuals may find themselves unable to pursue promotions, switch jobs freely, or invest in their futures due to status-related conditions (Domínguez et al., 2022; Kingsbur, 2021). Together, Precarity and Opportunity Constraints form a broader structural condition of vulnerability. This vulnerability is socially produced through exclusionary norms and legally enforced through immigration policies, resulting in a lived experience of constraints that shapes not only what NSES can do but also how they imagine and plan for their futures.

The gap in measurement and theorizing

Despite growing recognition of the stressors faced by NSES, no existing instrument adequately captures this experience. Studies on immigrant mental health have traditionally focused on acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, or social isolation (Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Prasath et al., 2023; Schwartz et al., 2010), but these frameworks overlook the challenges faced by NSES. As González (2022) argues, immigration policy shapes everyday conditions among migrants on temporary statuses, influencing their psychological stability and occupational mobility. These policy-driven conditions are central drivers of status-related stress, yet their effects remain undermeasured—and therefore insufficiently understood—in social-behavioral research. Without a targeted, validated tool to assess this type of stress, it is difficult to evaluate its prevalence, examine its correlates, or design policy or clinical interventions. This gap limits both scholarly understanding and practical response. Addressing this gap, we developed and validated a new instrument to assess the core dimensions of stress associated with maintaining temporary nonimmigrant study or employment status—Precarity and Opportunity Constraints—among NSES, beginning with Asian participants, who represent one of the largest groups within this population.

Further, it is critical to examine whether such an instrument functions equivalently across gender and visa status. Experiences of stress may differ across one or more of these factors. For instance, women tend to internalize stress more than men (Chaplin et al., 2008), and may perceive status-related stress differently. Stress may also vary by status: international workers on H-1B visas may face pressure related to employment and legal status, whereas international students may experience stress tied to academic performance, financial obligations, and future immigration prospects (Soylu, 2022). These differences could influence how status-related stress is experienced and reported, underscoring the need to examine whether the scale captures comparable constructs across gender and status to ensure it captures comparable constructs.

Further, because the effects of temporary nonimmigrant status stessors on mental health and other life outcomes have been under-theorized, the availability of a measurement tool to assess these stressors can facilitate theory development in this area. For example, how do these status-related stressors map onto the more general migration-related sociocultural stressors that many immigrants face regardless of their migrant status (temporary visa, green card, or even U.S. citizenship)? Do holders of temporary, nonimmigrant visas therefore experience both status-related and general migration-related sociocultural stressors, or is there a more complex type of intersection or interaction between or among these stressors? How does status-related stress relate to financial worries—especially given that NSES may be either: (a) bound to a specific employer or (b) restricted to work for a limited weekly hours? Having answers to these questions will help to facilitate the generation of theoretical propositions regarding status-related stress, as well as how these stress can be addressed or mitigated at both the individual and social levels.

The present study

The present study addresses the urgent need for a standardized, psychometrically sound instrument to measure the specific psychological stressors associated with maintaining temporary nonimmigrant study or employment status in the United States. Despite the increasing visibility of the multiple vulnerabilities experienced by migrants, no existing scale captures the legal and existential pressures faced by individuals navigating life on temporary statuses. To fill this gap, we developed and validated a tool designed to assess stress associated with maintaining legal

temporary student or employment status, which we hypothesize as including two interrelated constructs: Precarity (e.g., fear of status loss, reentry uncertainty) and Opportunity Constraints (e.g., restrictions on employment or long-term planning).

By establishing the reliability and construct validity of scores generated by the scale, the present study provides a much-needed empirical foundation for assessing how temporary status-related legal precarity contributes to mental health and other social outcomes. The scale is intended to support future social-behavioral and health research, inform clinical and counseling practices, and offer a tool for policy evaluation and advocacy in the context of migration frameworks.

We also examined associations between status-related stress and theoretically relevant correlates. First, we assessed its association with positive and negative mental health indicators. Second, we examined its associations with migration-related sociocultural stressors (Meca & Schwartz, 2024), including financial strain, language-related stress, negative context of reception, and perceived discrimination based on ethnic background. Because this is an initial validation study of a newly developed scale, we do not hypothesize these external constructs as indicators of convergent, divergent, or criterion validity. However, we hypothesize that Precarity, Opportunity Constraints, and the total SRSS scale score (which combines the two subscales) would relate positively to financial strain, depressive symptoms and anxiety, and negatively to indices of positive well-being. Due to the absence of prior literature, we did not advance specific hypotheses regarding associations of status-related stress with cultural stress indicators (discrimination, negative context of reception, and language-related stress).

METHOD

Procedures

Data for the present study were drawn from a larger cross-sectional research project investigating stress and mental health among Asian adults residing in the United States under temporary nonimmigrant study or employment statuses. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2024), Asian refers to ethnic groups from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. We focused on recruiting major Asian national-origin groups that represent the largest shares of individuals on temporary student and employment-based statuses, including those from China, India, Vietnam, and South Korea. Individuals from other various East and Southeast Asian backgrounds, including the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Cambodia, were also recruited to reflect broader representation within the traditional Asian diaspora. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained through the first author's institution.

Data were collected between mid-April and mid-July 2025, using three primary channels: (1) convenience sampling through online community and social media platforms (60%), (2) targeted recruitment via university international offices and ethnic associations (24%), and (3) snowball sampling through participant referrals (16%). Specifically, we posted our survey recruitment on various legitimate online social groups of international students and workers, primarily on Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. These groups are closely monitored by their admins and moderators. The first author requested membership in these groups, and explained the study to their administrators and moderators, before posting the recruitment on the group page. Study participation was possible through community engagement and trust-building, as many group administrators initially declined or blocked our recruitment requests to protect members from potential scams or because their policies did not permit survey postings. We also emailed the

international offices of U.S. universities, as well as ethnic group associations, and asked for their assistance in distributing our survey.

Data were collected via secure anonymous Qualtrics links, designed and monitored to prevent duplication, fraud, bot responses, and inattentive participation. Surveys were piloted to identify design errors, typos, and clarity issues, with additional feedback from the research team's network. After data collection, the research team followed Qualtrics guidelines to screen responses that Qualtrics had flagged as being potentially fraudulent, low-quality, or inaccurate. These responses were manually reviewed and excluded to maintain data quality.

Sample

All participants were provided a link to the study screening survey, where they were asked to complete a list of questions to ensure their eligibility. Inclusion criteria included: (1) being 18 or older; (2) currently residing in the United States on a temporary nonimmigrant study or employment status (F-1, J-1, or H-1B); (3) identifying as Asian; and (4) being able to read, write, and respond to an English survey.

Participants who met these criteria were able to proceed to the Informed Consent form to receive detailed information about the study. Only participants who consented to participate were redirected to the main survey link, where they were presented with our study questionnaires. After completing the main survey, participants were redirected to a thank-you page, where they could provide an email address to be entered into a gift card drawing. Participants were also encouraged to refer up to three people who they believed might be eligible to participate in the study, although this step was optional. Participants could leave the survey at any time, but only those who completed the main survey were redirected to the thank-you page to provide their email addresses for the gift card drawing. We offered 52 monetary gift cards, 45 worth $20, 5 worth $50, and 2 worth $100. Approximately 14% of participants received gift cards through the drawing. Most participants took approximately 20–40 min to complete the main survey.

The final sample consisted of 320 participants who met the inclusion criteria. Approximately 6% ($n = 20$) of respondents did not provide demographic information. This occurred because our demographic questions were placed at the end of the survey, and these individuals exited the survey before reaching the demographic questions. Therefore, the following distributions are based on valid percentages representing those respondents who provided demographic information. The gender distribution was 52.3% male, 46.3% female, and 1.3% other. The mean age was 27.78 ($SD = 4.91$, range 18–45). The majority of our sample came from Vietnam (26.3%), China (20.3%), India (15.3%), and South Korea (13.0%). The remaining participants (25.0%) were from the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Cambodia. Among inidivuals on F-1 status, 11.4% were pursuing their associate's degree, 31.4% were pursuing their bachelor's degree, 25% were pursuing their master's degree, 24.3% were pursuing their doctoral degree, and 7.9% reported "Other" (e.g., enrolling in Optional Practical Tranining, OPT, after finishing a degree). Regarding the highest level of education attained, 10.3% had completed high school, 9.7% completed their associate's degree, 46.3% completed their bachelor's degree, 22% completed their master's degree, and 11.7% completed their doctoral degree. Participants were residing across 39 different U.S. states, with the most common states being California (16.6%) and Texas (28.5%). Regarding participants' current status, 47% reported F-1, 23.3% reported J-1, 15.3% reported H-1B, and 14.4% others (e.g., declined to answer or were in a pending transition). Time in the United States among participants varied between "less than 1 year" to "more than 10 years", with the

majority (70%) having been in the United States between 1 and 6 years. Lastly, 73.1% of participants were the first person in their immediate family to reside in the U.S. for study or work.

Measures

Status-related stress scale (SRSS)

The initial item pool was developed using both inductive (e.g., focus groups, lived experiences) and deductive (e.g., literature and policy review) approaches (Boateng et al., 2018). The first author, who is a member of the target population and has long-term engagement in online forums and communities consisting of individuals on temporary statuses, drew on observations of common challenges and themes discussed between 2015 and 2025. Prior to item generation, she conducted two small focus groups (four participants each) with Asian international students and temporary workers from diverse national backgrounds (i.e., Vietnam, South Korea, China, Malaysia, India), recruited through the research team's networks. Insights from these discussions, alongside literature and policy reviews, were used to inform an initial pool of draft items.

The first and last authors refined these items, which were then reviewed by three members from the target population—Asian adults residing in the United States on temporary nonimmigrant statuses. Based on their feedback, items were further edited for clarity. Next, two expert evaluators—scholars with expertise in scale development, content validity, and migration/temporary status populations—provided additional input and suggestions. The first and last authors incorporated this feedback to finalize the scale, anticipating two subscales: (1) Opportunity Constraints and (2) Precarity. The full 19-item list, as administered to participants prior to analyses, is provided in the Appendix.

Participants were asked to respond to the prompt "Please indicate how much you relate to the following statements: Due to my status as a person living in the United States on a temporary visa[1] (e.g., F-1, J-1, H-1B)." Sample items for Opportunity Constraints include: "I don't have the same opportunities in life as U.S. citizens or permanent residents" and "it is harder to succeed in the United States because of the restrictions and limitations of my visa." Sample items of Precarity include: "I worry that policy or visa status changes will impact my future" and "I feel stressed about the many rules and regulations I must follow to maintain my legal status." Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, along with internal consistency reliability estimates, are reported in the Results section.

Financial strain scale

Financial strain was assessed using the 4-item Financial Strain Scale (FSS; Ullah, 1990; Warr & Jackson, 1987), which measures how often individuals experience financial strain or hardship, such as "have serious financial worries?" and "unable to do the things you need because of shortages of money?" Participants rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). The 4-item FSS is widely used in population health and socioeconomic research and has demonstrated

[1] The survey used the colloquial term "temporary visa" to aid participant understanding, but this paper uses the precise technical language: *temporary nonimmigrant in study or employment status*.

good validity and reliability (Thompson et al., 2017; Ullah, 1990). Reliability coefficient in the present study was $\alpha = .84$.

Anxiety

We used the 7-item generalized anxiety disorder scale (Spitzer et al., 2006) to measure the severity of anxiety symptoms. Participants rated how often they had been bothered by the following problems over the two weeks prior to assessment. Sample items include "feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge" and "feeling afraid as if something awful might happen." Participants rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*nearly every day*). The GAD-7 is widely used and has been validated across diverse immigrant populations (Sahbaz et al., 2024). Reliability coefficient in the present study was $\alpha = .87$.

Depressive symptoms

We used the 10-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale Boston Form (CESD-B; Kohout et al., 1993; Radloff, 1977) to assess depressive symptoms. This scale measures the frequency of depressive symptoms over the week prior to assessment. Sample items include "I felt depressed" and "I felt lonely." Participants rated each item on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*rarely or none of the time*) to 4 (most or *all of the time*). Two items are reverse coded, meaning that higher responses indicate less depressive symptomatology (i.e., "I was happy" and "I enjoyed life"). The scale has demonstrated good reliability and validity across diverse populations, including immigrant groups (Sahbaz et al., 2025). Reliability coefficient in the present study was $\alpha = .82$.

Loneliness

We used the 3-item UCLA Loneliness scale (Hughes et al., 2004) to assess the extent of how often participants experience loneliness since living in the United States. Sample items include "How often do you feel that you lack companionship?" or "How often do you feel left out?" Participants rated on a 3-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*hardly ever*) to 3 (*often*). The 3-item scale has been widely used and validated among Asian and immigrant populations and provides an adequate dimensional measure of loneliness comparable to the original 20-item UCLA Loneliness Scale (Alsubheen et al., 2023; Gosling et al., 2024). Reliability coefficient in present study was $\alpha = .73$.

Life satisfaction

We used the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) to measure individuals' overall satisfaction with their lives. Sample items include "In most ways my life is close to my ideal" and "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing." Participants rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale is widely used and has demonstrated good reliability and validity across diverse populations (Diener et al., 2013). Reliability coefficient in the present study was $\alpha = .81$.

Hope

We used the 12-item Adult Hope Scale (AHS; Snyder et al., 1991) to measure participants' level of hope. Sample items include "There are lots of ways around any problem" and "I energetically pursue my goals." There are 4 filler items in the scale (e.g., "I worry about my health") that are not included to calculate the total hope score. Participants rated each item on an 8-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*definitely false*) to 8 (*definitely true*). The scale is widely used and has demonstrated good reliability and validity across diverse populations (Gallagher et al., 2024). Reliability coefficient in the present study was $\alpha = .85$.

Mental well-being

We used the 7-item Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (Shah et al., 2021; Stewart-Brown et al., 2009) to assess participants' positive mental well-being over the two weeks prior to assessment. Sample items include "I've been feeling useful" and "I've been dealing with problems well." Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The scale has demonstrated good reliability and validity for measuring mental well-being across diverse populations (Stewart-Brown et al., 2011). Reliability coefficient in the present study was $\alpha = .81$.

Language stress

To assess language stress, we adapted the 7-item language-related stress subscale from the Hispanic Stress Inventory from Cervantes et al. (1990) for use with diverse language groups. Although the inventory was originally developed and validated among Hispanic populations, the language-related stress subscale has been used and adapted in prior diverse immigrant research to assess cultural stress (Alpysbekova et al., 2025; Cervantes et al., 2012). For the present study, we reviewed and made minor wording adjustments to a few items to ensure their relevance for our target population. Sample items include "It bothers me that I speak English with an accent" and "Since I don't speak English well, people have treated me rudely or unfairly." Participants responded to each item using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Reliability coefficient in the present study was $\alpha = .85$.

Negative context of reception

The 6-item Negative Context of Reception Scale (Schwartz et al., 2014) measures the extent to which individuals feel excluded and shut out of opportunity in the U.S. because of their home country or ethnic background. Sample items include "People from my country are not welcome here" and "It is hard for me to get a good job because of my national background." Participants rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale has been validated for use across diverse immigrant populations (Alpysbekova et al., 2025; Schwartz et al., 2024). Reliability coefficient in the present study was $\alpha = .80$.

Perceived discrimination

We used the 7-item adapted version of the Perceived Discrimination Scale (PDS; Phinney et al., 1998) to assess participants' experience with *ethnic* discrimination. Sample items include "How often do people you don't know treat you unfairly or negatively because of your ethnic background?" and "To what extent do you feel that you are not accepted by other Americans?" Participants rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*almost always*). The scale has demonstrated good reliability and validity and has been widely used in studies of immigrant populations (Xu et al., 2025). Reliability coefficient in the present study was $\alpha = .91$.

Additionally, participants were asked to rate how much they wanted to stay in the United States permanently on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*definitely want to stay*). Participants were also asked to rate how much they worried about potential changes in immigration policies under the current administration might negatively affect them. Participants responded to this item on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*not worried at all*) to 4 (*very worried*).

Data analysis strategy

We conducted a series of analyses for the present study, including: (1) exploratory factor analysis (EFA); (2) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA); (3) assessments of internal consistency (composite reliability); (4) evaluations of construct validity, including correlations with immigration-related sociocultural stressors (i.e., financial strain, language stress, perceived discrimination, negative context of reception) and mental health indicators (i.e., depressive symptoms, anxiety, loneliness, mental well-being, life satisfaction, hope); and (5) tests of measurement invariance across key groups (i.e., gender, visa status).

First, we split the sample randomly into exploratory ($n = 153$) and confirmatory ($n = 167$) subsamples. This randomization was conducted in SPSS (version 31) using the Select Random Cases command. Prior to conducting the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), item distributions were examined for normality. Most items were left-skewed, with the majority of participants endorsing higher response options (i.e., 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale; item means ranged from 3.36 to 4.26). Absolute skewness values ranged from 0.35 to 1.6, and absolute kurtosis values ranged from 0.03 to 2.41 – representing only moderate degrees of departure from normality. However, we nonetheless utilized principal axis factoring (PAF) for factor extraction, as it is robust to violations of normality and focuses on shared variance among item responses (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Fabrigar et al., 1999). Direct Oblimin rotation was applied to allow for correlated factors, consistent with our theoretical expectations that the factors would be related to one another.

Using the exploratory sub-sample, we entered all 19 item responses into an exploratory factor analysis, using Principal Axis Factoring and Direct Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was confirmed by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, where the KMO value must be above .60 and a the Bartlett's Test result must be significant ($p < .05$). Our sample met these criteria (KMO = .85, $p < .001$). The number of factors was initially examined using the eigenvalues greater than 1 (Kaiser's criterion) and inspection of the scree plot (Fabrigar et al., 1999; Hair et al., 2010). Following recommendations from Tabachnick & Fidell (2013), each factor had to be defined by at least three items to ensure the applicability of standard internal consistency indices to the corresponding subscales in future research. Next, we checked the pattern matrix for factor loadings after rotation, where we looked for items with (a) meaningful loadings $\geq |.40|$ (preferred for scale

development and publication-quality results), (b) no cross-loadings ≥ |.30|, (c) theoretical interpretability, and (d) a minimum of three items per factor (Hair et al., 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). This approach reflects widely accepted best practices for conducting EFA and ensures that the retained factors are both statistically and conceptually sound.

Second, using the confirmatory sub-sample, we estimated a confirmatory factor analytic model using the surviving items from the exploratory step. To decide which items to retain during the confirmatory step, we applied a stringent cutoff of |.50| or higher for factor loadings. Items that failed to meet this threshold were discarded. Factors were permitted to correlate with one another, and no cross-loadings were specified.

The fit of the confirmatory factor analytic model was evaluated according to standard structural equation modeling fit indices and criteria (see Kline, 2023). The chi-square index, which tests the null hypothesis of perfect model fit, should be as small as possible; the comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), which evaluates the extent to which the specified model represents an improvement over a null model with no paths or latent variables, should be at least .90; and the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), which indexes the extent to which the covariance structure implied by the model deviates from the covariance structure observed in the data, should be below .08 for acceptable fit. It is important to note, however, that models should not be discarded if most, but not all, of the fit indices suggest adequate fit (Lai & Green, 2016). If multiple factors emerge and are correlated with each other, we would specify a second-order factor (a higher-order factor with the first-order factors as indicators) as explaining the correlations between or among the first-order factors.

Third, we computed internal consistency reliability for each factor, and for all retained items on the scale, as well as intercorrelations between the factors that were retained. Fourth, we computed bivariate correlations of the scale factors with the other constructs that we assessed. Finally, we examined measurement invariance across key groups (i.e., gender, visa type). To examine measurement invariance in the full sample, we conducted a series of multi-group confirmatory factor analyses (MGCFA) across two grouping variables—gender and visa status. Following a stepwise approach, we systematically tested the extent to which the measurement structure of the instrument remained equivalent across these groups (Brown, 2015). This approach allows for identifying the level at which invariance no longer holds between groups by progressively imposing equality constraints on model parameters and evaluating changes in model fit. Throughout this process, the terms *multi-group CFA* and *measurement invariance testing* are used interchangeably. We began with configural invariance, freely estimating factor loadings and item intercepts to verify that the same factorial structure—both in the number of latent factors and in the pattern of factor–indicator relationships—was consistent across groups. This step assessed whether the hypothesized two-factor model provided an adequate fit to the data for all groups (i.e., different genders, visa types). Upon establishing configural invariance, we proceeded to evaluate metric (weak factorial) invariance, where factor loadings were constrained to be equal across groups. This test examined whether the strength of the relationships between the observed indicators and their associated latent constructs was comparable across groups. Metric invariance was supported if the constrained model did not exhibit a significant decrease in fit vis-à-vis the configural model, suggesting that respondents from different groups interpreted the constructs in a similar way. Last, we evaluated scalar (strong factorial) invariance by constraining both factor loadings and item intercepts to equality across groups. This step assessed whether individuals from different groups who shared equivalent levels of the underlying latent construct (i.e., status-related stress) would obtain similar observed scores. A lack of scalar invariance—often referred to as differential item

functioning—would imply that systematic group differences exist in item responses despite equal latent trait levels (McDonald, 2013). Importantly, we would only test for metric invariance if the configural invariance model fit the data acceptably, and we would only test for scalar invariance if the majority of items met criteria for metric invariance.

All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS version 31 and M*plus* version 9 (Muthén & Muthén, 2025). We used the Maximum Likelihood Robust (MLR) estimator for the CFA and invariance tests. This estimator provides robust standard errors and chi-square corrections for moderate violations of normality and is recommended for small-to-moderate sample sizes (n = 100-300; Kline, 2023).

RESULTS

Exploratory factor analyses

Initial eigenvalues indicated five factors with values greater than 1, whereas inspection of the scree plot showed a clear "elbow" at the second factor. Examination of the pattern matrix indicated that the first factor (four items) and third factor (four items) were conceptually coherent, representing the Opportunity Constraints and Precarity themes, respectively, and were retained. The second (2 items: #5 and #19), fourth (1 item: #18), and fifth factor (1 item: #10) were discarded due to insufficient items. The items that were discarded were "#5. I don't have many options to work in the United States and that limits my income to support myself," "#19. I feel like my life is on hold," "#18. I feel anxious about visiting U.S. government agencies, as I fear any issue could affect my ability to stay in the United States," and "#10. I worry that my school or work performance could impact my ability to stay in the United States."

As a result, we then retained the two meaningful, interpretable factors and labeled them Opportunity Constraints and Precarity. Opportunity Constraints include the following items: "#1. I don't have the same opportunities in life as U.S. citizens or permanent residents," "#2. It is harder to succeed in the U.S. because of the restrictions and limitations of my visa," "#4. I would have more working options if I could get a green card/permanent residency," and "#8. My professional development and opportunities are restricted." Precarity include the following items: "#11. I worry that policy or visa status changes will impact my future," "#14. I hesitate to travel outside of the U.S. because I fear being denied re-entry or facing difficulties at the U.S. border," "#15. When my visa expires, I hesitate to visit my home country because I am afraid that my visa renewal may be denied," and "#17. I feel stressed about the many rules and regulations I must follow to maintain my legal status."

According to the extraction sums of squared loadings before rotation, these two factors accounted for 35.43% of the total variance. Because an oblique rotation (Direct Oblimin) was used, the rotated sums of squared loadings are not additive and thus are not interpreted in percentage terms (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In the EFA, the correlation between these two factors was r = .45.

Confirmatory factor analyses

The confirmatory factor analysis model using the second sub-sample (n = 167) provided an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(19) = 37.01$, $p < .01$; RMSEA = .075, 90% CI [.038, .111], p(RMSEA ≤ .05) = .12;

TABLE 1 Item-factor loadings from exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the two retained factors and their items.

Item	Factor opportunity constraints			Factor precarity		
	EFA ($n = 153$)	CFA ($n = 167$)	CFA ($N = 320$)	EFA ($n = 153$)	CFA ($n = 167$)	CFA ($N = 320$)
#1. I don't have the same opportunities in life as U.S. citizens or permanent residents.	.43	.56	.58			
#2. it is harder to succeed in the U.S. because of the restrictions and limitations of my visa.	.78	.90	.83			
#4. I would have more working options if I could get a green card/permanent residency.	.65	.58	.62			
#8. my professional development and opportunities are restricted.	.70	.54	.62			
#11. I worry that policy or visa status changes will impact my future.				.53	.67	.66
#14. I hesitate to travel outside of the U.S. because I fear being denied re-entry or facing difficulties at the U.S. border.				.60	.58	.57
#15. When my visa expires, I hesitate to visit my home country because I am afraid that my visa renewal may be denied.				.54	.73	.65
#17. I feel stressed about the many rules and regulations I must follow to maintain my legal status.				.52	.51	.56

CFI = .92; TLI = .88; SRMR = .06. All items from the exploratory solution loaded at .50 or greater in the confirmatory solution. As a result, all items were retained on the Opportunity Constraints and Precarity factors. We then reconducted this final CFA solution using the full sample ($n = 320$), and the model demonstrated excellent fit, $\chi^2(19) = 22.28$, $p = .27$; RMSEA = .02, 90% CI [.00, .06], $p(\text{RMSEA} \leq .05) = .89$; CFI = .99; TLI = .99; SRMR = .04. See Table 1 for factor loadings from both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses.

The correlation between the two factors was $r = .65$, $p < .001$ (for CFA using second sub-sample) and $r = .67$, $p < .001$ (for CFA using the full sample), indicating that they capture interrelated dimensions of the underlying construct. As a result, we specified a model with a second-order factor. To facilitate model identification, the unstandardized factor loadings for both first-order factors on the second-order factor were both fixed to 1 (Thompson, 2004). By definition, with two first-order factors, the fit of a model with a correlation specified between the factors is identical to the fit of a model with a second-order factor specified as explaining this correlation. The standardized loadings for this second-order factor were .86 and .78, respectively, for the Precarity and Opportunity Constraints factors. These strong loadings may be interpreted as indicative of adequate reliability for the second-order status stress construct. Figure 1 illustrates the second-order factor model of the Status-Related Stress, in which Opportunity Constraints and Precarity load onto a higher-order Status-Related Stress factor.

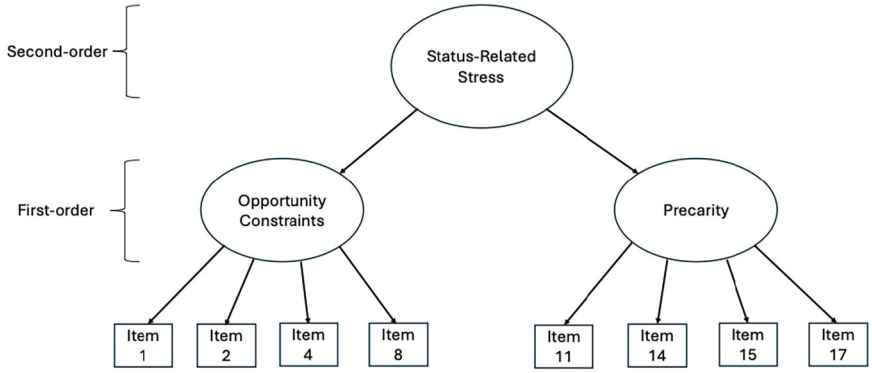

FIGURE 1 Hierarchical factor structure of the status-related stress scale.

Reliability

Using the full sample ($n = 320$), internal consistency reliability was assessed for each subscale and for the overall scale. As is standard for scales identified through factor analysis, we used McDonald's omega as an index of internal consistency reliability (Hayes & Coutts, 2020). The opportunity constraints subscale (4 items) demonstrated acceptable reliability (McDonald's $\Omega = .76$), as did the Precarity subscale (four items; McDonald's $\Omega = .70$). The combined 8-item scale, which we refer to as the Status-Related Stress Scale (SRSS), showed good internal consistency (McDonald's $\Omega = .79$). These coefficients indicate that both the individual subscales and the overall scale can be used reliably in subsequent analyses.

Composite scores were computed for the two subscales (Opportunity Constraints and Precarity), as well as for the SRSS (all 8 items). For the subscales, the means were 15.79 ($SD = 3.13$) for Opportunity Constraints and 15.59 ($SD = 3.04$) for Precarity, with a possible range of 4–20. The full SRSS score had a mean of 31.38 ($SD = 5.34$) with a possible range of 8–40. Examination of distributional properties indicated that all scores were moderately negatively skewed (Opportunity Constraints: −0.81; Precarity: −0.76; SRSS: −0.63), reflecting that most participants reported relatively high levels of status-related stress. Kurtosis values were within acceptable limits (Opportunity Constraints: 0.46; Precarity: 0.40; SRSS: -0.03), suggesting no extreme peakedness or flatness. Overall, the composite scores appear to be reasonably distributed for subsequent analyses (Stefana et al., 2025).

Validity

We examined the correlations of the two subscales (Opportunity Constraints and Precarity), as well as the SRSS with other external constructs (see Table 2). The SRSS and both subscales showed consistent, theoretically meaningful associations with external constructs. Financial strain, anxiety, loneliness, negative context of reception, desire to stay permanently, and worries about negative impacts from policy changes were significantly and positively related to the Opportunity Constraints subscale, the Precarity subscale, and the full SRSS. Life satisfaction was negatively associated with Precarity and the SRSS, while hope was unexpectedly positively associated with Opportunity Constraints and the SRSS total score. Depressive symptoms, mental well-being,

TABLE 2 Correlations between subscales and full scale with other relevant constructs.

Constructs	Opportunity constraints (subscale 4 items)	Precarity (subscale 4 items)	Status-related stress scale (full scale 8 items)
Financial strain	.23***	.32***	.32***
Anxiety	.16**	.23***	.22***
Depressive symptoms	.03	.07	.05
Loneliness	.19***	.13*	.19**
Life satisfaction	−.08	−.15*	−.13*
Hope	.14*	.06	.12*
Mental well-being	−.04	−.08	−.07
Language stress	0	.08	.04
Negative context of reception	.17**	.25***	.24***
Perceived discrimination	0	−.03	−.01
Desire to stay permanently	.32***	.18**	.30***
Worry about negative impact from potential policy changes	.35***	.37***	.41***

Note: ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.

language stress, and perceived discrimination evidenced no significant associations with any of the status-related stress scales.

Invariance testing

Next, we tested the second-order factor (the full SRSS) for configural, metric, and scalar invariance across gender and visa type. The configural invariance model is specified simply by positing the same number of factors, and the same pattern of items loading on each factor, across groups. Metric invariance is evaluated by constraining each corresponding factor loading to be equal across groups. The fit of the configural (unconstrained) and metric (constrained) invariance models is then compared in terms of the difference chi-square values ($\Delta\chi^2$), the comparative fit indices (ΔCFI), and the difference in RMSEA values (ΔRMSEA). Invariance can be assumed provided that at least two of the following three criteria are satisfied: nonsignificant $\Delta\chi^2$; ΔCFI < .01; and ΔRMSEA < .01. A similar procedure is used to test for scalar invariance, where the fit of the metric invariance model (with factor loadings constrained equal across groups, but item intercepts left unconstrained) is compared against the fit of the scalar invariance model (with factor loadings and item intercepts constrained equal across groups).

Across gender, the configural invariance model provided an excellent fit to the data, $\chi^2(38) = 48.02$, $p = .13$; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .04 (90% CI = .00–.08, close fit probability = .61). We found full metric invariance, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 9.15$, $p = .17$; ΔCFI = .008; ΔRMSEA = .003, as well as full scalar invariance, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 6.61$, $p = .36$; ΔCFI = .003; ΔRMSEA = .001.

To conduct invariance tests across visa status, sample size imbalance across the F-1, J-1, H-1B, and others required comparing the F-1 group against a combination of all of the other groups (because of small sample sizes). The configural invariance model provided an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(38) = 56.77$, $p = .026$; CFI = .95; RMSEA = .06 (90% CI = .02 to .09, close fit probabil-

ity = .32). We found full metric invariance, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 5.19$, $p = .52$; ΔCFI < .001; ΔRMSEA < .001, as well as full scalar invariance, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 6.13$, $p = .41$; ΔCFI = .002; ΔRMSEA = .002.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, we developed and validated the status related stress scale (SRSS), a measure capturing stressors associated with with maintaining temporary nonimmigrant study or employment status among Asian adults in the United States. Results supported a coherent 2-factors structure (Opportunity Constraints and Precarity), good internal consistency, and significant correlations with relevant constructs such as financial strain, anxiety, loneliness, negative context of reception, life satisfaction, hope, desire to stay permanently, and worries about negative impacts from potential policy changes. Below, we discuss the theoretical meaning of the factor structure, reliability and validity evidence, invariance across subgroups, as well as preliminary implications for theory, practice, and policy. Limitations and future directions are also discussed.

Theoretical meaning of the factor structure

Consistent with our expectations, which were grounded in prior literature, relevant theorizing, and lived experience during item development, factor analyses supported a coherent two-factor structure including Opportunity Constraints and Precarity. Opportunity Constraints (4 items) reflect limitations on personal and professional autonomy due to status-related restrictions. These limitations include constraints on financial independence and general opportunity, such as barriers to employment mobility for workers or to work opportunities for students. Precarity (4 items) captures the chronic uncertainty and fear surrounding legal status, including potential denial of visa renewal when traveling abroad, loss of status if one fails to meet rules and regulations, and inability to travel freely. Essentially, precarity reflects the emotional toll of living under temporary and conditional authorization.

Together, these dimensions reflect distinct but interrelated aspects of status-related stress. Opportunity Constraints align with theories of constrained agency and social exclusion among temporary status and unauthorized migrants (González, 2022; Kovak & Lessem, 2020; Nakphong et al., 2022), whereas Precarity resonates with literature on legal vulnerability, regulatory uncertainty, and general life insecurity (Crumley-Effinger, 2024; González, 2022; Park & Shimada, 2022). Together, these experiences contribute to status-related stress, which manifests differently in various aspects of life, is not a singular experience but rather a multifaceted condition influenced by both external limitations and internalized uncertainty. This two-factor structure offers a nuanced measure framework for understanding status-related stress.

Reliability and validity evidence

Scores on the two subscales and the full scale demonstrated good internal reliability, as reported in the Results section. Regarding sociocultural stress indicators, both Opportunity Constraints and Precarity were moderately and positively correlated with financial strain, negative context of reception, desire to stay permanently in the United States, and worries about potential negative policy changes, which can be used for convergent validity in future studies. No associations were

found with ethnic discrimination and language stress, suggesting that they are distinct constructs from status-related stress factors and can be used for discriminant validity. Not surprisingly, higher status-related stress was directly associated with greater financial strain, reflecting limitations on NSES' economic independence and ability to live comfortably.

The moderate correlations of status-related stress with negative context of reception and desire to stay in the United States permanently suggest that, although one form of stress arises from legal status and the other from one's ethnic or national background, both contribute to participants' shared feeling of being "outsiders" in U.S. society. Yet, many NSES who have already invested a significant number of years in the United States and developed meaningful social and professional connections may find it hard to start over in their home countries, where there may be fewer professional opportunities. These aspirations and concerns are closely tied to their level of status-related stress: the stronger the desire to build a future in the United States, the greater the distress about the temporary nature of their status.

Regarding negative health indicators, both Opportunity Constraints and Precarity exhibit modest positive associations with anxiety and loneliness, whereas no association emerged with depressive symptoms. Increased status-related stress could co-occur with heightened nervousness, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness and a lack of companionship (Akiba et al., 2024). Status-related stress is characterized by chronic uncertainty about one's legal status, future stay, and livelihood (Soylu, 2022). This ongoing threat and alertness tend to elicit anxiety-related responses (e.g., worry, restlessness) rather than depressive symptoms, which are more commonly linked to prolonged hopelessness or disengagement after the stress becomes chronic and internalized (Burani et al., 2022; Steimer, 2002). In this context, anxiety serves as a more immediate emotional response to ongoing instability, whereas depressive symptoms may emerge later if difficulties persist or result in tangible losses (e.g., forced return to one's country of origin). The social and structural constraints imposed by nonimmigrant visa conditions can limit individuals' sense of belonging and access to meaningful relationships, contributing to loneliness and perceived social isolation. These feelings may accompany anxiety without necessarily translating into depressive affect. Further, because we utilized convenience sampling, the sample may not fully represent the broader population. Individuals experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, or depression may have chosen not to participate, especially during a sensitive period when concerns about privacy or potential immigration-related consequences were heightened.

Regarding positive health indicators, Precarity was negatively and modestly associated with life satisfaction, whereas Opportunity Constraints evidenced a positive and modest association with hope. Neither factor was significantly associated with mental well-being. Higher levels of precarity were linked to lower life satisfaction, likely reflecting the uncertainty about the future and the limitations imposed by legal restrictions. Although the positive correlation between Opportunity Constraints and hope was unexpected, it might be explained in terms of resilience and determination to succeed in spite of the barriers inherent in a nonimmigrant visa (see Snyder et al., 2002, for further discussion of this potential function of hope). However, these forms of status-related stress may not directly impact mental well-being unless they become chronic and result in tangible adverse outcomes. Although these correlations are modest, these positive and negative mental health indicators can serve as criterion validity evidence—either predictive or concurrent—in future studies focusing on NSES populations in the United States and/or in other countries.

Measurement invariance across subgroups

We evaluated whether the SRSS scores were equivalent across gender and visa status. Results supported configural, metric, and scalar invariance across gender and status. This suggests that Asian NSES in our sample—regardless of gender or visa status—conceptualize status-related stress in largely comparable ways. The construct therefore appears to reflect a shared experience anchored in structural and legal precarity, rather than differing subgroup-specific understandings.

IMPLICATIONS

The present study, beyond introducing a new measurement tool, contributes to theoretical and practical understanding of status-related stress among immigrants and minority populations in the United States. It extends minority, cultural, and immigration stress frameworks by highlighting legal precarity, such as visa restrictions and uncertainty, as stressors affecting mental health. This perspective underscores the importance of intersectional approaches that consider how temporary nonimmigrant study or employment status interacts with ethnicity, professional role, and other identity factors shaping lived experiences.

Practically, the SRSS equips researchers, clinicians, and counselors with a concise tool for screening and intervention planning among migrants on temporary statuses. Our findings also underscore status-related constraints as significant risk factors for psychological distress, warranting coordinated attention from educational institutions, employers, service providers, and policymakers. More broadly, the SRSS provides a foundation for future research examining the psychological impact of temporary nonimmigrant status and structural vulnerability for international students and workers in the United States. It also provides a foundation for targeted interventions, such as buffering against the effects of structural barriers (e.g., employment support and visa support) and reducing emotional distress (e.g., mental health support tailored status-related stress). Ultimately, we hope the SRSS serves as a foundational tool for generating empirical evidence to support advocacy efforts and inform policy reforms that reduce structural stressors and promote well-being among individuals living under temporary nonimmigrant status.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the present findings. First, group sizes were uneven across visa categories, with substantially more F-1 students than working professionals participating. This imbalance may partially reflect the study's incentive structure: as noted in the consent form, only 52 gift cards were available through a drawing, an incentive likely more appealing to students than professionals. Second, the sample was not evenly distributed by country of origin. Vietnamese participants were overrepresented compared to Chinese and Indian participants—the two largest Asian groups in a temporary nonimmigrant study or employment status in the United States. Because recruitment relied on status-based, ethnic, and institutional community networks, the first author, who is Vietnamese, was able to build stronger trust and engagement with Vietnamese communities than with Chinese or Indian networks. Third, self-report measures may be influenced by individual differences in self-evaluation and cultural norms vis-à-vis disclosing mental health challenges. Although all participants were screened for English

proficiency, some misunderstanding of survey items could still have occurred. Fourth, the scale was developed to broadly capture stress across the three most common statuses in the United States for students and workers, which means that visa-specific or origin-specific stressors may have not been fully represented. Additionally, because our sample consisted exclusively of Asian adults, future studies should examine validity of the scale scores for other racial or ethnic groups. Fifth, the use of convenience sampling limits the representativeness of the findings. Finally, although collecting data from NSES during the early months of the new presidential administration is a strength, this specific sociopolitical moment may limit generalizability. Replication across different political contexts and administrative periods will be essential.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the present study, we developed and validated the first tool, to our knowledge, to measure status-related stress among NSES in the United States. The scale demonstrated adequate reliability and a stable conceptual structure across gender and across visa types. Although the scale was initially assessed among Asian NSES, it can be adapted to assess other ethnic populations. Indeed, given the number of international students, expatriate workers, and other temporary nonimmigrant individuals in various countries (e.g., Australia, Germany, China), the SRSS provides opportunities to examine status-relates stressors in other contexts and countries. We hope that our work provides resources and inspires further research and applied efforts to understand and support NSES across national contexts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Duyen H. Vo: conceptualization, investigation, writing - original draft, methodology, validation, visualization, writing - review and editing, software, formal analysis, project administration, data curation, resources, supervision. **Sumeyra Sahbaz**: writing - original draft, writing - review and editing, validation, formal analysis, supervision, resources. **Aigerim Alpysbekova**: writing - original draft, writing - review and editing, resources. **Alejandra Garcia Isaza**: writing - review and editing, methodology, validation. **Samuel Mckay**: writing - review and editing, methodology, validation. **Seo Woo Lee**: investigation, writing - review and editing, data curation. **Mia M. Cisco**: investigation, writing - review and editing, resources. **Tae Kyoung Lee**: writing - review and editing. **Miguel Pinedo**: writing - review and editing. **Christian Escobar**: writing - review and editing. **Seth J. Schwartz**: funding acquisition, writing - original draft, methodology, validation, writing - review and editing, formal analysis, supervision.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the University of Texas at Austin. The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants through the online survey.

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How to cite this article: Vo, D. H., Sahbaz, S., Alpysbekova, A., Garcia Isaza, A., McKay, S., Lee, S. W., Cisco, M. M., Lee, T. K., Pinedo, M., Escobar, C., & Schwartz, S. J. (2026). The status-related stress scale (SRSS): Measuring opportunity constraints and precarity among Asian adults in the United States with F-1, J-1, or H-1B status. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *26*, e70067. https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.70067

APPENDIX A

Blueprint of 19 original items

Participants respond on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher score indicates higher status-related stress.

Instructions

Please indicate how much you relate to the following statements: Due to my status as a person living in the U.S. on a temporary visa (e.g., F-1, J-1, H-1B) …

1. **I don't have the same opportunities in life as U.S. citizens or permanent residents**.
2. **It is harder to succeed in the U.S. because of the restrictions and limitations of my visa**.
3. I experienced difficulty getting the job I want.
4. **I would have more working options if I could get a green card/permanent residency**.
5. I don't have many options to work in the U.S. and that limits my income to support myself.
6. I do not have enough social support that I need.
7. Employers deem my status as too costly or complex to be considered.
8. **My professional development and opportunities are restricted**.
9. I feel discouraged by the limited opportunities to stay permanently in the U.S.
10. I worry that my school or work performance could impact my ability to stay in the U.S.
11. **I worry that policy or visa status changes will impact my future.**
12. I hesitate to make big investments like buying a house or a new car in the U.S.
13. Uncertainty about whether I can stay in the U.S. or must return to my home country makes me feel restless.
14. **I hesitate to travel outside of the U.S. because I fear being denied re-entry or facing difficulties at the U.S. border**.
15. **When my visa expires, I hesitate to visit my home country because I am afraid that my visa renewal may be denied**.
16. I worry about what I would do if I had to return to my home country.
17. **I feel stressed about the many rules and regulations I must follow to maintain my legal status**.
18. I feel anxious about visiting U.S. government agencies, as I fear any issue could affect my ability to stay in the U.S.
19. I feel like my life is on hold.

Note. Bolded items (items 1, 2, 4, 8, 11, 14, 15, 17) are retained after EFA and CFA.