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Breaking the Labor Market Barrier: The Lived Experiences of Immigrant Women Entering the United States (U.S.) Workforce

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Abstract

Immigrant women (IW) contributed to the U.S. workforce and often navigated systemic barriers while employed. This qualitative phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of 16 IW recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. The purpose of this research was to understand the challenges that IW faced when entering the U.S. workforce as they transitioned to full-time employment. Data collection methods included a pre-survey and semi-structured interviews. From the data analysis, three themes emerged: cultural tension, work-life strain, and community networks as a support system. The findings highlighted the systemic barriers faced by IWs, including accent discrimination, challenges in cultural adaptation, and limited access to childcare and resources. The study findings showed that IWs used community networks and their faith to build resilience against workforce challenges. Through community networks and other support systems, IWs were better able to navigate the workforce. Overall, the findings highlight the need for structural changes and policies to govern the workforce. Policymakers can address discrimination and bullying by implementing anti-discrimination policies and providing bias awareness training. Employers can be more intentional in their support by ensuring workforce inclusiveness, offering affordable childcare policies, and implementing culturally responsive processes. Other practical steps include adopting family-friendly policies, developing mentorship programs, and providing cultural sensitivity training to foster inclusiveness.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptation; Diversity; Inclusion; Professional Identity; Workplace Equity