

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 who were 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. Three emergent themes were identified: 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. Often, these workforce challenges lead to feelings of isolation or alienation, work-life imbalance, and emotional strain. 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 with support by ensuring workforce inclusiveness, offering affordable childcare policies, and culturally responsive processes. Other practical steps include adopting family-friendly policies, developing mentorship programs, and providing cultural sensitivity training to foster inclusiveness. Finally, educators are encouraged to implement cross-cultural communication and life skills curricula to empower IW. Communities can also support IW by providing resources such as childcare and job training.

Keywords: professional identity; cultural adaptation; workplace equity; diversity; inclusion