

Sacrifices from relocation to a foreign land: Multifaceted challenges experienced by self-initiated expatriate female nurses during cross-cultural adjustment

Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study is to understand the nature and multidimensional challenges of cross-cultural adjustment as experienced by female Malaysian self-initiated expatriates (SIE) working as registered nurses (RNs) in Saudi Arabia. In-depth interviews with twenty-two Malaysian SIE RNs provided rich data on their adjustment experiences. The resulting data were subjected to a qualitative content analysis using Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou's (Black et al., 1991) cross-cultural adjustment (CCA) model. The results show that the nurses faced several challenges. Five themes emerged: learning to speak Arabic, adapting to a confrontational communication style, facing new work practices, dealing with homesickness and loneliness, and adjusting to new gender norms at work and in public. This study contributes to our understanding of expatriate adjustment by providing new interpretations of the cultural challenges faced by female SIEs and the nature of their adjustment process. The results also support the literature on expatriation by highlighting the challenges of cultural adjustment and giving specific information on the conditions and constraints facing female RNs in Saudi Arabia, a subject that has received little critical attention so far.

Keywords

Cross-cultural adjustment; Cultural challenges; Female; Qualitative methods; Registered nurses; Saudi Arabia; Self-initiated expatriates