

Career counseling for immigrants and refugees



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Abstract

Migration is not a sort of recent social phenomena. These events have affected the lives of individuals and groups of people for a long time throughout human history. There is no a single reason for this, sometimes migration takes place with people trying to escape from political oppression, economic difficulties, or natural disasters. People who choose to leave or make the decision to leave their homes and travel to a host country with the intention of establish and settle themselves, find a new home and a new job are called immigrants. Most of these migrants face a reality with serious economic challenges, unemployment and lack of social resources. Refugees are the ones, who basically were forced to leave their home countries, sometimes without have previously planned to do it, however because of events such as wars, political persecution, atrocities, or natural disasters like tsunamis, earthquakes, or drought seasons, they had no choice other than leaving to save their own and their families lives. In both cases, planned or unplanned, these individuals need to adjust to a host country, learn a new language, find a job, and integrate themselves in that new environment. This paper will discuss the topic of immigrants and refugees and the importance of career counseling to them in two aspects: experiential and through researches done in the area.

Keywords: Immigrants, career, counseling, refugees, psychology.

My Personal Experience as an Immigrant in the U. S.

I am too an immigrant, who first arrived in the U. S. almost 3 decades ago looking to achieve the American Dream as so many other people do. I remember during my childhood I used to watch American movies and I was always impressed by seeing places so clean, organized, and technologically advanced portrated in their images. There was also something else that stayed in my mind since that time, the fact that most of the houses had no fences separating them. The idea that people could live their lives without any fences between their houses amazed me, and my thoughts were that it was possible to individuals share the same neighborhood without invading each other spaces, respecting others privacy, and being aware about boundaries. These thoughts remanined as part of my adolescence and then some years later, in a cold February of 1990 I arrived in NYC, trying to write a new chapter on my own history. In that time, I was 25 years old, already married and with 2 little boys. I left my wife and my 2 sons in my home country, and with the companion of 2 friends that were also coworkers of mine in Brazil, I made that trip to the U. S. One of the reasons that influenced the most in my decision to come to this country had to do with the fact that in that time I was working for Embraer, one of the largest aircrafts companies in the world, however my earnings were not enough to cover for the expenses related to my family. As a result of that situation I was forced to put my college classes, I was doing my 3rd in Economic Science in a local University, and became really frustrated and sad with that whole situation. Then, talking to some of the people, friends there, I realized that not only me, but some of them, were facing similar problems, and then the idea of trying a better opportunity in another country began to materialize on my mind. After many meetings, my 2 friends and I decided to make this journey <https://assignbuster.com/career-counseling-for-immigrants-and-refugees/>

to the U. S. So, after talking with wife and kids, I bought the flight ticket and during my vacation in the job, I flew to New York with these 2 friends of mine. I already had planned that in case if I find a job opportunity here in the U. S. during those days, I would stay and that was exactly what happened. My first job was as a parking attendant in Manhattan, an overnight schedule, which allowed to enroll in an English as Second Level Course in the mornings. I kept a desire in my mind and heart, which was to finish my graduate education one day. I met a guy in that job in New York, another Brazilian, and this young man provided with some information about a Community College in Queens, and I decided to go there and ask about the requirements needed in their course of Business Administration. They informed I must had a financial sponsorship given my non-student immigration status. I was still legally in the country, because of the fact I had entered here with a tourist visa and allowed to stay legally for 6 months. I tried to find someone willing to help me in that matter, however it turned to be really difficult, first because the one only people I really knew in that time were my two friends, but they were also in the same situation as mine, and then the other people I had already met and lived here for a longer time had no legal status or felt uncomfortable to sign as sponsor to someone they were not related. I felt really disappointed about not being able to continue my studies, but then I decided to postpone this dream for a while, shifting my focus to bring and kids to live here with me, which I was able to accomplish 6 months later.

During that time, I faced challenges so familiar to other immigrants and refugees in this country, as they try to establish and resettle their lives here,

such as learning a new language, adjusting to a different culture, understanding social norms and and experiencing a cultural shock. As I mentioned before, my first job was working as a parking attendant in NYC, a low-paid type of job, and to get things even worse I was victim of a robbery in my first month working in that place. I remember thinking about giving up and returning to my native country, but at the same time doing this was something that would put more financial burdening in me and my family and could be perceived as a personal failure, at least these were my thoughts at that time, so I decided to stay and proceed with my life. In the following years, my family and I started to attend a Brazilian Baptist Church in Queens, with the intention of become more socially integrated and to practice our faith. After a while I was invited to serve in that organization and consequently, I attended a 3-years Theological Biblical Studies in a Christian Seminar in NYC. After graduating in Theology, I was admitted as part of their personal staff, mostly working in the administrative department and at the same time providing social support to families of new immigrants.

On 2005, my family and I moved to Florida, and I finally had the opportunity to return to my studies. I did an associate degree in Psychology at Broward College, a bachelor's in psychology in FAU, then a master's in industrial/Organizational Psychology with Grand Canyon University and currently I am doing a Masters in Mental Health Counseling at Carlos Albizu University. During these years, I had the opportunity of working in so many jobs, such as parking attendant and , administrative officer/advisor in NYC, truck driver in New Jersey, and finally Clinical Counselor/Therapist in Florida.

What would be if I had a good career guidance many years ago? And how can I help other people in situations like mine in terms of career counseling? How is the current situation of immigrants in terms of career choices and challenges in their host country? What is the impact related to mental health issues in the lives of immigrants in their postmigration psychosocial adjustment? How displacement and premigration occurrences may be a precursor to psychological trauma and/or mental health problems? In the continuation this paper will discuss some of these questions.

Immigrants and Refugees, Who Are They?

According to Okocha (2007) immigrants are defined as being individuals who leave their countries looking for better opportunities in other countries, mostly as result of career, economic, or family reasons. The basic difference between these individuals and others characterized as refugees is the fact that immigrants make this decision as their free choice, meaning they move to live in another country without being forced to do so. On the other hand, refugees are those who left their home countries because of fear of persecution due to nationality, religion, race, or enrollment to a certain social group or political opinion. Refugees in their majority forced to leave their homes, without or with little time to planning, and are not allowed to return home. In both of cases, these individuals face tremendous challenges related to loss of properties, distance of family, acculturation, language barrier, and social support. In 2003, almost half of the immigrants entering legally in the U. S. came from only a group of 10 countries: Mexico, India, Colombia, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Philippines, China, Vietnam, El Salvador and Russia, which give us some insight about the diversity in terms of

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background. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that because of war and persecution we reached the highest number of refugees, globally speaking, since the World War II, a number around 52 million people (UNHCR, 2014). In the United States only, during the period comprehending 2013-2014, 70, 000 refugees were authorized to resettle in the country, coming from Cuba, Iraq, and Africa. According to Sue & Sue (2016) in the year of 2013 the foreign-born population in the U. S., including those with legal status was 41. 3 million of people. About 11. 4 million of these immigrants are considered unauthorized, meaning they had entered the country without proper inspection or stay longer their temporary permitted time. The level of education varies among immigrants, with 1/3 of them having a college degree. Immigrants make approximately 28% of physicians, 47% of medical scientists, and 31% of computer programmers. Only 17% of the immigrants with a college degree are considered Latinos, comparing with 75% being Asian or White. The work of those considered “undocumented immigrants” it is in true indispensable in some areas of the U. S. economy such as agriculture, construction, childcare, and in the restaurant and hotel industry (Marrero, 2011).

Displacement and Pre-Migration Experience

Many of the individuals who took the decision or were forced to leave their native to come to a host country had their lives drastically changed. Some were trained skilled professionals in many areas such as doctors, engineers, lawyers and pharmacists just to mention few, however as they moved to another country, it is almost certain they will not be allowed to practice their profession due to differences in licensure or certification. This difficulty may

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result with these individuals having to accept low-income positions, so they would be able to provide for themselves and their families. I personally experienced this sort of situation, which led to frustration, worthlessness, and low self-esteem. After I had been working in a bank and in an aircraft company and achieved a good level of education in Brazil, I was compelled to accept work positions only because of economic/financial needs, however as the year.

Another aspect involving immigrating to another country is related to the uncertainty about the future, something like a daily microaggression in terms of feelings of impotence, doubts about what is going to happen, fear of immigration authorities, shame by not talking fluently and thoughts of not being able to provide to their families. I personally met with highly qualified professionals who spent years washing dishes, serving tables, cleaning houses, and the list goes on and on, however even with a positive attitude and demonstrating gratitude by having an opportunity, some of them developed mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

Immigrants and refugees experience difficulties like learning a new language and culture, loss of professional status, and sometimes they must work in physical labor in low wage positions (Yakushko, 2008). Mental health issues might play a significant role a good portion of the immigrants and refugees in their attempts to enhance their career development in a new country.

Post-Migration and Acculturation Experiences

Situations involving language barrier, cultural differences in values, attitudes, beliefs and worldview are some of the challenges face both by immigrants and refugees in their adjustment in a host country. Learning a new language may create a sense of frustration, exacerbating challenges and adjustment, contributing to culture shock, feelings of helplessness, emotional trauma, and sometimes raising doubts related to a person's self-worth and decrease social status (Bemak & Chung, 2015). Post-migration can also be hard for those individuals trying to find jobs that matches their professional training and education (Willot & Stevenson, 2013). According to Yakushko (2009) just by finding work and developing a career in a new country can benefit a refugee or immigrant person by reducing social isolation and at the same time help learning the language and culture through the interaction with other coworkers.

Career Counseling with Immigrants and Refugees

For counselors working with the immigrant and refugee population is essential being aware of the fact they come from different and diverse backgrounds, meaning that many times a counselor must be able to adapt his or her method of counsel to achieve an effective career counseling. According to Sue and Sue (2016) there are at least 3 features of culturally competent counselors. Therefore, it is important to counselors be aware of their own biases, preconceived notions, personal limitations, and assumptions. Also, it is equally important to counselors gain a deal of understanding about his or her client's worldviews. If one considers that many of the immigrants and refugees come from cultures with collectivistic and group-oriented perspectives related to their orientation in terms of locus

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of control and locus of responsibility (Sue and Sue, 2003). And lastly, there is a need to be aware while dealing with immigrants and refugees the concerns regarding identity development, especially with those younger persons since they tend to have a faster acculturation process but often develop a rebel attitude, questioning against traditional norms and roles, which may affect their career decisions.

Immigrants and refugees can face risk of unemployment which can result in a negative impact on their health and social well-being (Jamil, 2012).

According to studies conducted among immigrants and refugees remain unemployed after their migration to the U. S. (Krahn, H., 2000). Lack of language proficiency is consider one of the main reasons related to unemployment among immigrants and refugees. Depending on the job position it is required that the individual applying for that job would be able to communicate well in the English language, such as in engineering, medicine, and teaching. Unfortunately for many of these individuals, especially adults that already passed the grammar learning stage, this become difficulty to achieve.

Therefore, a Career Counselor must be sensitive to these groups of individuals and their basic needs in these times of adjustment and adaptation. Some of the roles that a career counselor should embrace while working with immigrants and refugees in these stressful moments can be relate to help with translating and explanaing junk mail, assisting with job applications, explaining about social norms, and also advocating for better opportunities (Atiyeh, 2017).

A counselor working with this segment of individuals should be aware about the emotional and psychological aspects involved in the lives of these persons, who after fleeing or leaving their home have the necessity of establish a new home elsewhere, and secure education and employment to themselves. Atyeh, S. (2017) states, “ Career counselor have the skills to address the trauma of this upheaval, orient the refugee to the cultural and economic climate, teach job readiness skills, engage the client in career planning and self-determination, and advocate for equitable opportunities for refugees and other immigrants”.

Conclusion

In the United States and many other developed countries there is a massive movement of individuals who are leaving their countries due to economic crisis, political persecution, war, or because of natural disasters. After finding a new country to establish their new homes, these individuals; immigrants or refugees, being a process of adaptation and adjustment to a new reality, demanding a lot of stress and affecting them psychologically. A Career Counselor can help or assist these individuals in many positive and effect ways. Reaching out, supporting, advocating, looking out for services, and helping they integrate to a new community. Therefore, cultural competency, compassion, and social justice may play important roles to career counselors and their work with immigrants and refugees.

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