

Career Advancement and Education  
Opportunities:  
Experiences and Perceptions of  
Internationally-Educated Nurses

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# Outline

- Introduction
- Research Question
- Significance of Study
- Definition of Terms
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- Findings
- Recommendations & Conclusion

# Introduction

- Canadian nursing shortages
- Recruitment of internationally educated nurses [IENs]
- Statistics on IENs in Canada
- Alberta in the spotlight

# Statistics on IENs

- 8.3% of registered nurses are IENs
- Provinces with highest percentages: British Columbia (16.4%), Ontario (11.6%), and Alberta (10%)
- Countries of origin: Philippines, United Kingdom, United States & India

# Research Question

What are the experiences and perceptions of IENs working in urban Alberta with regard to career advancement and education opportunities?

# Significance of Study

- Ethical employment
- Long-term retention

# Definitions of Terms

- Internationally educated nurses: Nurses who graduated from a nursing school outside Canada regardless of their citizenship
- Career advancement: Includes career information and guidance, support for development and implementation of career plans, opportunities to assume leadership roles, potential for recognition, and promotion opportunities
- Education opportunities: Includes presence of financial, social, and/or organizational support for pursuing educational activities

# Research Methodology



Qualitative Study: Interpretive Description

- Sample: IENs working as RN in health-care settings in Edmonton, Alberta
- Setting: Hospitals & long-term care institutions in Edmonton, Alberta
- Data collection & analysis: Semi-structured interviews, verbatim transcription, thematic data analysis

# Participant Demographics

- ▶ Ages: 20-30 yrs (2), 30-40 yrs (3), > 45yrs (6)
- ▶ Gender: 10 females, 1 male
- ▶ Country of Origin: India, Philippines, China, Britain, Iran, New Zealand, Guyana.
- ▶ Residency in Canada: 4 to 21 yrs
- ▶ Education: Bachelor, masters, certificates
- ▶ Employment: Bedside nursing, management, education

# FINDINGS

- Motherhood as a priority
- Communication challenges
- Cultural differences
- Recognition in the workplace
- Perceptions on opportunity
- Experiences of racism
- Strategies for success
- Mentorship

# Motherhood as a Priority

- Building a new life:

*“I could have interviewed for other jobs...but you are working to see your family grow up....it’s a security issue and especially for an immigrant...wherever you settle, you try to be comfortable there.”*

- Balancing work and family:

*“It’s just that with the scheduling of acute care you have a lot of rotations....that actually is one of the hindrances...I have a child and that child is my priority in life...”*

# Motherhood as Priority

- Lack of support for working mothers:

*“I had to study, looking after my daughter, and working all by myself...Sometimes when she gets sick she cannot go to school and daycare so I cannot go to work, I have nobody...Sometimes I blame myself...I am in another country, what kind of life I have...”*

# Communication Challenges

- Having an accent:

When asked about career advancement, a participant replied: *“ Not really, because I’m old and my problem is still my accent. When a group of people, when there is a meeting, it is hard to express yourself.”*

- Culturally-appropriate communication:

*“ They also expect you to communicate the same way culturally as Canadians....it takes time and experience to know these non-verbal cues...”*

# Communication Challenges

- Stress of language barriers

*“ I wanted to go to break by myself... I didn't want to think about talking in English, having a break, a real break...”*

# Cultural Differences

- *“Definitely be aware that the paperwork, the whole system, is completely different. Also, the terminology, the pronunciation, the terminology of everything is different, a lot of drugs are spelt slightly different or called different names...” [Britain]*
- *“Back home we didn’t have technology that much. For example, we didn’t have IV pumps, the very basic, and IV pump was a big huge monster at my work...” [Iran]*
- *“You feel you are more independent in a way and, also, you have more responsibility.” [China]*

# Cultural Differences

- *“Easier in a way that here we have a lot of help... We have the dietary, the PT, the OT department... We have a different set-up in the Philippines, and mostly the RN does everything...” [Philippines]*
- *“When I was trained back home we were always kind but firm... I came here and customer service is first and the patient is always right. There is a lot of abuse in healthcare now from patients and their families towards nurses. In my country that wasn’t tolerated...” [Guyana]*

# Recognition in the Workplace

- Negative assumptions about IENs:

*“ It is a challenge working with white Caucasian staff because they think we are foreign educated women or nurses so we don’t know as much...”*

*“ At one time one of the students asked me a question and at the time I just finished my studies and she was surprised I didn’t have difficulty answering her question, right, because she thought I am from a foreign country, I’m an immigrant...”*

# Recognition in the Workplace

- Earning respect: *“You have to struggle to be accepted, and I think that is everywhere... people didn’t realize my experience when I came initially. It kind of just filtered out a little bit at a time...”*
- Proving abilities: *“They treat you as if you don’t know anything and things like that. That’s why I said: Well I’ll just prove myself.”*
- Working harder than others: *“You are not in the group; sometimes you have to work harder than anybody else...”*

# Recognition in the Workplace

- *Communicating skills: “Part of being recognized is being able to communicate effectively to management, to co-workers...express yourself...”*
- *Networking: “With the Canadian managers if you have the relationship, if they know you... they help you find opportunities... This manager I have, she’s Canadian...she gave my resume to the bigger manager for the better job, this is the relationship, it is networking...”*

# Perceptions of Opportunity

- Lack of minorities in management: “*There is not a minority that is really successful...if there are more people that will take the challenge, I think there will be more minorities in these positions.*”

# Perceptions of Opportunity

- Difference as a barrier to advancement: *“Well, I could have (pursued promotion). At the same time in certain areas I am a foreigner and really a colored person... Even if you work harder than anybody else, people don’t really accept that. People look at you like you are a different person.”*

# Experiences of Racism

- *“I find it very interesting, people don’t speak racism or discrimination because legally, politically correct you don’t discriminate...I definitely feel to a certain degree that there is discrimination...”*
- *“Some people would deny that it existed (racism) but when you’ve gone through it you know that it exists and so you try not to let it bother you too much.”*

# Strategies for Success

- Taking personal responsibility: *“I think it is your knowledge or skill level that would make a huge difference regardless of where you are from...”*
- Rejecting the label of “victim”: *“There is clicking that goes on, there are groups. If you let it bother you, it can overtake you... if you are assertive enough to call on it and say it’s not right...you can surpass it...”*

# Strategies for Success

- ▶ Redefining career advancement: *“I’m looking after patients... personal growth is there, in that I learn new things, new medications come on board, new stuff are coming out for wounds...there is always room for that kind of personal growth...”*
- ▶ Planning for the future: *“If I had the chance I would say maybe I will take more education. Maybe I will take more education, just to get a better career.”*


# Mentorship for Career Advancement

- *“When you come at the very beginning and especially if you have no family and you have no friends, you are looking for anybody who is going to take you under their wing and help you along the way, to make sure that you fall in the groove...”*
- *“It helps in a way for them to say if you are an IEN and you came here and you succeeded then maybe there is hope for me.”*

# Recommendations

- Improving initial orientation of IENs
- Providing opportunities for mentorship
- Education funding for IENs
- Development of ongoing support systems
- Providing resources for childcare

# CONCLUSION: AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

- Multi-layered identities as women, minorities, and immigrants  A complexity of challenges.
- IENs/ immigrants/ minorities = future Canadian workforce.
- A commitment to equitable opportunities in career and education advancement.

# References

- Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2009). Workforce Trends of Registered Nurses. Retrieved Jan, 2011 from:[https://secure.cihi.ca/estore productFamily. Httpf =PFC1565&locale=en&lang=EN&mediatype=0](https://secure.cihi.ca/estore/productFamily.Httpf=PFC1565&locale=en&lang=EN&mediatype=0)

# Questions