Career Development for Refugees

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Introduction

“Information about the career development and career transition issues of immigrants and refugees remains limited, yet career counseling to these populations can be one of the most significant contributors to their positive transition into a new culture” (Yakushko, 2006).

The quotation above is true because finding a job and developing a career is central to refugees getting established in their host countries, but refugees experience many difficulties when they arrive in this new country and culture. The difficulties include learning a new language and culture, a loss of professional status, and often working physical labor and low-wage jobs (Yakushko, 2008).

The stress that comes with these challenges may impact the mental health of refugees. Finch, Catalano, Novaco, & Vega (2003) found that finding work, financial hard-ship, and job demands were significant stressors for Latino immigrants that contribute to mental health difficulties, such as depression and anxiety. High acculturated stress, low social support, and low self-esteem were found to be predictors of high anxiety for immigrant farm workers, which are similar reactions to their experiences that refugees may have (Hovey & Magana, 2002).

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is a career development theory that considers the interactions between environment and personal factors as important for career development. The concepts that are the focus of SCCT are…

• Self-efficacy
• Outcome expectations
• Barriers

SCCT can be a useful theory for understanding the career development of refugees because it takes into consideration the contextual background factors (Lent et al., 2000).

SCCT may be particularly suited for using with refugees because their self-efficacy and outcome expectations are significantly influenced by their personal and their new environmental factors (Yakushko, 2008). Their forced relocation will likely have a dramatic impact of their self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Self-efficacy of refugees may be diminished by the difficult environment they find themselves in, but it may still be strong because of personal factors or of the hope from not being in the difficult environment they were in before.

Outcome expectations may be low because of the tragedies they likely experienced, or it may be high because they are now in a safer environment.

Recommendations

Yakushko (2008) discussed different topics for career counseling that would help empower refugee clients:

• Exploring the Career and Work Background
• Examining the Contextual Factors
• Dealing With a Career Transition
• Building Knowledge About Career Options
• Discussing How to Obtain and Maintain a Job
• Exploring Cultural Norms About Work
• Developing Work-Related Intercultural Competence
• Discussing Opportunities for Work and Education
• Balancing Work and Family Life
• Attending to Individual and Systemic Facilitators and Barriers of Work and Career Goals

Yakushko (2008) also discussed ways career counselors can develop their own competencies in working with refugees.

• Challenging Personal Assumptions
• Using a Team Approach to Treatment
• Using Interpreters or Working With Linguistic Limitations
• Unfamiliarity With the Helping Process
• Creating Workshops and Structured Groups
• Developing a Global Perspective

Conclusions

• More research is needed on the career development of refugees because it is an important factor for their resettlement into their new country.
• Future research needs to examine the efficacy of different interventions on refugee populations and in different contexts (Yakushko, 2008).
• SCCT may be a useful theoretical perspective for working with refugees, but other theories may be effective as well as long as their personal and environmental factors are considered.
• If psychologists are doing career counseling with refugees there are many specific topics that can used to empower the client.
• Psychologist who work with refugees also would need to develop their own competences.
• Yakushko (2008) stated that in addition to looking at career counseling for refugees in the context of the individual that one should also consider the families, cultural communities, and the receiving communities.

Bibliography


