

The Role of Counselling Psychology on Expatriate Adjustment in East Asia: A Systematic Review

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Abstract : Purpose: This research paper seeks to review the empirical studies in the field of expatriate adjustment in East Asia in order to produce a thematic understanding of the current adjustment challenges, thus enabling practitioners to enrich their knowledge. Background: Learning to live, work, and function in a country and culture vastly different from that of one's upbringing can pose some unique challenges in terms of adaptation and adjustment. This has led to a growing body of research about the adjustment of expatriate workers. Adjustment itself has been posited as a three-dimensional construct; work adjustment, interaction adjustment and general or cultural adjustment. Methodology: This qualitative systematic review has been conducted on all identified peer-reviewed empirical studies related to expatriate adjustment in East Asia. Five electronic databases (PsychInfo, Emerald, Scopus, EBSCO and JSTOR) were searched to December 2015. Out of 625 identified records, thorough evaluation for eligibility resulted in 15 relevant studies being subjected to data analysis. The quality of the identified research was assessed according to the Standard Quality Assessment Criteria for Evaluating Primary Research Papers from a Variety of Fields. The data were analysed by means of thematic synthesis for systematic reviews of qualitative research. Findings: Data analysis revealed five key themes. The themes developed were: (1) personality traits (2) types of adjustment, (3) language, (4) culture and (5) coping strategies. Types of adjustment included subthemes such as: Interaction, general, work, psychological, sociocultural and cross-cultural adjustment. Conclusion: The present review supported previous literature on the different themes of adjustment and it takes the focus from work and general adjustment to the psychological challenges and it introduces the psychological adjustment. It also gives a different perspective about the use of cross-cultural training and the coping strategies expatriates use when they are abroad. This review helps counselling psychologists to understand the importance of a multicultural approach when working with expatriates and also to be aware of what expatriates might face when working and living in East Asia.

Keywords : adjustment, counselling psychology, East Asia, expatriates

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