

Chapter 6

Challenges and Reflections on the Experience and Development of the Profession of Nutrition and Dietetics: A Starting Point With the First Indigenous Dietitian in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

Culture's membership could result in varied pathways to careers, choices of career, and work opportunities. Several factors including culture and gender of individuals could influence career development and the practice of the career. Some theories were developed to connect culture and career, and others were developed for assessment and applications on career development. Therefore, the author for this chapter has used the systems theory framework of career development (STF) to tell her story, challenges, and reflection on the professional development and experience as the first indigenous dietitian in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

BACKGROUND

The Saudi community is diverse, complex and heterogeneous. Therefore, working within and practicing a profession in Saudi Arabia (SA) requires a solid background and understanding about its people and communities they live in. The Kingdom of SA is divided to 14 provinces and each province has a unique culture. All Saudis speak one language (the Arabic language) but use different accents. Although the country of SA is an Islamic state, they have different cultural practices and beliefs. Saudi citizens are also exposed to various cultures through communicating with foreigners who live and work in the

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country. Saudis also travel to many countries either to visit or study in. Many Saudis also get married to people from different nationalities. All these diversities require working professionals, including the registered dietitian nutritionists “RDNs” to expand their understanding about the communities and the cultural aspects they are working with.

As with other professions, working cross-culturally, is what registered dietitians (RD) get in relations to their own cultures. Cultural identity defines people as persons and as part of their community (Hall *et al.*, 2012). This could influence their understanding of their community as part of the whole world and allow for interpreting community interactions with others (Collier, 2005). Culture could be referred to the practices including the practice of nutrition and dietetics (Patton & McMahon, 2005). For example, RDs are the best professionals to address the nutritional needs of individuals in the community and to support nutritious and healthy food patterns (Stallings, 2003). As for other professionals, a strong cultural identity is important to all dietitians as a group with common interests and practices as they generally might identify with more than one culture (Sue & Sue, 1990). This chapter presents the author’s personal story, reflection on the professional development and experience in one of the health-related disciplines *the nutrition and dietetics* in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). It reviews the history, education, and work experience in the field of nutrition and dietetics within Saudi communities. Additionally, and based on STF and its applications, the chapter presents author’s story and measure the impact of some individual factors, particularly *culture* influences on her experience and career development. Environmental influences at social and societal levels and their impact on her experience and career development are also measured. Description of some challenges and problems, the author faced throughout her journey and experience in the profession and how this empowered and qualified her to become one of the leaders in the profession are also detailed. The chapter also presents to readers the current status of the education and practice of dietetics in Saudi Arabia (SA). Finally, conclusions and some recommendations to consider to improve the practice of dietetics profession in the country of SA are presented as required.

CASE DESCRIPTION: CONNECTION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE AND INFLUENCES ON EXPERIENCE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

For all professionals who provide health care, it is tremendously important to understand and relate nutrition facts and services to their practice. Altogether health professionals need minimally fundamental training to successfully evaluate dietary consumption and deliver suitable diet instructions and management to patients/clients (DiMaria-Ghalili *et al.*, 2014). However, the advanced dietary assessment and treatment should be provided by a licensed dietitian. They should also be familiar with the food habits and cultures of the communities in which they work.

The theoretical framework used to guide the writing of this chapter was previously applied in practice when assessing the career and with career counselling. STF facilitates determination of the individual in context by telling career stories. Then after, STF could be applied to analyze influences on individuals at the macro and micro levels. Systems theory constructs align with the philosophical shift from positivist approaches to constructivist approaches (Sampson *et al.*, 2017). In STF, career development is presented as an energetic process, illustrated through its process influences and change over time and when there is a chance (Figure 1).

This part of the chapter aims to present and review the author’s history and education of dietetics. It also presents her work experience and involvement with national, regional and international profes-

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