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### **Barriers to Leadership Advancement among Internationally Educated Nurses in Canada: A Qualitative Study**

This study explores the leadership advancement barriers experienced by internationally educated nurses (IENs) in Canada. Despite IENs playing a vital role in the Canadian healthcare system, they remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions. Many IENs possess comparable or even greater clinical experience than their domestically educated peers; however, they often face exclusion from leadership opportunities due to systemic, cultural, and credentialing barriers. These challenges are compounded by broader issues such as immigration status, gender, language proficiency, workplace culture, and systemic discrimination within healthcare institutions. There is currently a limited body of research that centers the voices of IENs and examines how these interrelated barriers affect their leadership development. Understanding these experiences is critical for informing inclusive policy reforms, promoting workforce equity, and improving retention of experienced nurses in leadership roles.

The primary aim of this qualitative study is to identify and explore the multifaceted barriers that prevent IENs from advancing into leadership roles in the Canadian healthcare system. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the lived experiences of IENs regarding leadership exclusion and leadership aspiration, identify structural and organizational cultural barriers within healthcare institutions, and generate recommendations for equitable leadership development pathways. A qualitative narrative inquiry or descriptive design will be used, with data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with IENs currently practicing in Canada. Thematic analysis will be employed using MAXQDA 24 software to identify patterns, themes, and interconnections within participants' narratives.