

Short- and Long-Term Impacts of Working Holiday Experiences on the Career Development of Young Korean Women in Australia

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The transformative potential of travel for personal and professional growth has long been recognized (Inkson & Myers, 2003). While experiences such as working holidays can be life-changing and serve as critical turning points in career development (Choi, 2021; Yoon, 2014), research on their impact remains limited. Extensive studies on expatriate assignments (Dickmann et al., 2018; Jokinen et al., 2008; Mello et al., 2023; Suutari et al., 2018) focus predominantly on individuals with established careers, leaving a notable gap in understanding how young adults—still navigating the exploratory phase of their careers (Super, 1990)—leverage working holiday experiences to shape their futures. This project addresses that gap by exploring the role of working holidays in fostering career capital, employability, and adaptability.

In particular, young South Koreans are increasingly encouraged to gain international experience to develop the global mindsets, knowledge, and skills essential for competing in the global labor market (Abelmann et al., 2009; Jung, 2013). The working holiday program has become a popular pathway for many, offering

opportunities for self-discovery and social mobility (Yoon, 2014). This program allows individuals aged 18 to 30 to live and work in a partner country for up to one year. In 2023, over 115,000 people in Australia identified as being born in Korea, making Korea the fifth-largest source of working holiday makers (WHMs) in the country (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024). The program is especially attractive to young Koreans from working-class backgrounds, who view it as a means of improving their economic prospects—unlike wealthier individuals, who often pursue overseas education as a form of elite-class reproduction (Choi, 2021). Furthermore, WHMs contribute notably to alleviating labor shortages in Australia, particularly in regional and rural areas. With one-third of regional jobs held by WHMs (Deloitte Access Economics, 2021), many young Koreans relocate to these regions to secure visa extensions, highlighting the reciprocal benefits of the program for both participants and host countries.

WHMs participate in the program for various reasons, including earning income, improving English proficiency, gaining work experience, exploring career opportunities,

and pursuing permanent residency. These motivations present critical developmental opportunities for young people (Collings & Isichei, 2018; Jung & Lee, 2017). However, despite career development being a key consideration, many WHMs work in sectors unrelated to their aspirations, often due to language barriers and visa restrictions (Jung & Jung, 2021; Jung & Lee, 2017; Lee, 2020). The longer-term impacts of these experiences on career trajectories remain underexplored. Jung and Lee (2017) reported that only one-third of young Korean WHMs intended to return to Korea immediately, suggesting that a considerable proportion plan to extend their stay in Australia. Many require support to secure employment or pursue further education to do so. Temporary working holidays can therefore evolve into long-term residence, with WHMs contributing to Australia's economic growth (Lim, 2023). Providing tailored career development support to Korean WHMs is essential for maximizing their potential and aligning their experiences with meaningful long-term career outcomes.

Drawing on human capital theory (Becker, 1964, 1993) and planned happenstance theory (Krumboltz & Levin, 2004), this project investigates how young Korean women develop career capital (Arthur et al., 1995; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), employability (Rothwell & Arnold, 2005), and adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) through working holiday experiences. The focus on women participants aligns with Houldsworth et al.'s (2022) research on gender capital within human capital theory. Existing research demonstrates the long-term positive impacts of international work experiences, such as enhanced career capital, job satisfaction, promotions, and job opportunities (Dickmann et al., 2018; Lee, 2018; Suutari et al., 2018). These experiences are especially

valued by young job applicants entering the labor market (Mello et al., 2023; Walther, 2015).

However, the mechanisms and conditions that drive positive career outcomes from such experiences remain unclear, particularly for young adults. To address this gap, the project will explore the experiences of Korean women WHMs in regional areas, employing a mixed-methods approach that combines thematic analysis and structural equation modeling. Field studies will be conducted in regional and rural Queensland, where WHMs frequently work in industries such as mining, agriculture, and construction to extend their visas (Kossen et al., 2021). Based on the literature, I hypothesize the following:

H1: Working holiday experiences in regional areas will have a positive impact on career capital, employability, and adaptability over a three-year longitudinal study.

H2: Preparedness factors, such as English proficiency and attitudes (e.g., planned happenstance), will mediate the relationship between working holiday experiences and career outcomes.

H3: Economic freedom, age, and education will moderate the relationship between working holiday experiences and career outcomes in both short- and long-term contexts.

The project will address research questions and test hypotheses, focusing on planning and preparedness for working holiday experiences. I anticipate providing policy recommendations to the Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, and the Working Holiday Info Centre under the Overseas Koreans Agency. These recommendations will aim to enhance support for WHMs and strengthen Australia–

Korea relations. Additionally, the findings will offer practical implications for career practitioners who work with this cohort, providing insights to support services. Finally, the project will contribute to theoretical advancements in human capital theory and planned happenstance theory.

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