

# **Finnish Social and Health Care Professionals in the United States of America**

**Sanna Marjaana Brundirks**

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VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU  
VASA YRKESHÖGSKOLA  
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Sanna Marjaana Brundirks

FINNISH SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE  
PROFESSIONALS IN THE UNITED STATES  
OF AMERICA

Social Services

2011

*“To a wise man, the whole earth is open;  
for the native land of a good soul is the whole earth.”*

Democritus

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Vaasa, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011

Sanna Brundirks

VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU  
 VAMK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES  
 Sosiaalialan koulutusohjelma

## ABSTRACT

Author	Sanna Brundirks
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The aim of this Bachelors thesis was to study the employment and integration of the Finnish immigrants who work in the social services and health care in the United States of America. The target group of the research was social and health care professionals who are first generation immigrants. The study also reveals what future plans these Finns have, and if they are planning to return to Finland. Twelve people living in the states of Illinois and Michigan were interviewed for the research. The research method was qualitative, and the information was collected with theme interviews. The answers were analyzed in the thesis.

The Institute of Migration and VAMK, University of Applied Sciences in Vaasa were co-operators in the project. The research was partially funded by the Institute of Migration. The original idea for the subject of the research was presented by the Institute of Migration. This study will help to understand the reasons for the immigration today and unveil the experiences in the work life of the immigrants in the United States. The thesis can be utilized as a source and inspiration for new immigration studies.

Finnish social and health care professionals find work easily in the United States. They have integrated into the society well, and they enjoy their work. Finnish education and work ethics are respected by the Americans. Finns get good reception in work life, and they are satisfied with their job positions. The United States offers more opportunities to develop and advance the participants careers for Finnish social and health care professionals than Finland does. Nevertheless, the Finnish immigrants value their heritage and culture, and they miss several things from Finland. However, most of them do not wish to move back while only a few of them are hoping to retire in Finland.

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Keywords	Employment, integration, immigration, the United States, social and health care professionals, acculturation
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VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU  
Sosiaalialan koulutusohjelma

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä	Sanna Brundirks
Opinnäytetyön nimi	Suomalaiset sosiaali- ja terveysalan ammattilaiset Amerikan Yhdysvalloissa
Vuosi	2011
Kieli	englanti
Sivumäärä	58 + 3 liitettä
Ohjaaja	Hans Frantz

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on tutkia niiden suomalaisten työllistymistä ja integroitumista, jotka työskentelevät sosiaali- ja terveysalalla Amerikan Yhdysvalloissa. Tutkimuksen kohderyhmänä on ensimmäisen polven maahanmuuttajat, jotka työskentelevät sosiaali- ja terveysalalla. Tutkimus paljastaa myös mitkä ovat näiden suomalaisten tulevaisuuden suunnitelmat ja sen, aikovatko he muuttaa takaisin Suomeen. Kahtatoista ihmistä Michiganin ja Illinoisin alueelta haastateltiin tutkimusta varten. Tutkimusmetodinä käytettiin laadullista tutkimusta ja tiedot kerättiin temahaastatteluin. Vastaukset analysoitiin tutkimuksessa.

Siirtolaisuusinstituutti ja Vaasan Ammattikorkeakoulu olivat mukana projektissa. Tutkimus sai avustusta Siirtolaisuusinstituutilta. Alkuperäinen idea tutkimuksen aiheesta tuli Siirtolaisuusinstituutilta. Tämä tutkimus auttaa ymmärtämään nykypäivän muuttoliikkeen syitä ja kertoo kokemuksia maahanmuuttajien työelämästä Yhdysvalloissa. Tätä tutkimusta voidaan myös käyttää lähteenä ja inspiraationa uusille siirtolaisuustutkimuksille.

Suomalaisten sosiaali- ja terveysalan työntekijöiden on helppo löytää töitä Yhdysvalloista. He ovat integroituneet yhteiskuntaan hyvin ja pitävät työstään. Amerikkalaiset arvostavat suomalaista koulutusta ja työmoraalia. Suomalaiset saavat hyvän vastaanoton työelämässä ja pitävät työstään ja asemastaan. Amerikassa on enemmän mahdollisuuksia kehittyä työelämässä ja edistyä urallaan sosiaali- ja terveysalalla kuin Suomessa. Suomalaiset siirtolaiset arvostavat suomalaista perimää ja kulttuuria ja kaipaavat monia asioita Suomesta. Kuitenkaan useimmat heistä eivät halua muuttaa takaisin Suomeen. Jotkut heistä toivovat eläköityvänsä Suomessa.

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Avainsanat	työllisyys, integraatio, siirtolaisuus, Yhdysvallat, sosiaali- ja terveysalan ammattilaiset, akkulturaatio
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The United States of America has been attracting Finnish people for centuries. In the 2000 Census over 623 000 people announced that they have Finnish heritage. The social and health care field is growing in America today, when baby boomers are getting older and retiring. Immigration has been relied upon to offset periodic shortages of health care workers in United States for some time now. There are number of factors that are related to the United States health worker shortage. The aging of the nursing work force and the fact that the educational system is not keeping up with demand bring challenges. The US Department of Health and Human Services projects an estimated shortfall of 800 000 full time registered nurses by 2020. The hope for balancing this shortage is the international health-care worker migration. In 2005 14 per cent of all health care workers in the United States were foreign born and one in four doctors was born abroad. (Batalova&Clearfield 2007)

This study combines social and health care employment and immigration. I wanted to create a research study that would be interesting and would benefit many people. I decided to write my thesis about something that would be important for me and about something that has not been researched before. I contacted Elli Heikkilä, the research director from the Institute of Migration, Turku, Finland and from that moment on the Institute of Migration was interested in supporting this project. Elli Heikkilä also helped me to find the idea for the research study - Finnish social and health care professionals in the United States. VAMK, University of Applied Sciences accepted my research plan and I was ready for challenge.

The main task of the study is to find out the background of the Finnish immigrants and their motives for moving and staying. The research is going to reveal what it was like to move to the United States and to find work in social and health care field as an immigrant. The study shows also how these immigrants have integrated to the society and what are the things that have made the integration

easier or more difficult. I also wanted to clarify if people are planning on moving back to Finland in the future or if they are going to stay in the United States and what are the reasons behind those decisions.

The area of Mid-West, including Illinois and Michigan, has always been attracting Finnish immigrants. One of the reasons for that has been familiar nature and weather. In the old days, during the Great Migration, farming and factory work were the biggest employers in the Great Lakes area. Most of the Finnish immigrants today find work in business and in health care. There has not been earlier research of the employment of Finnish social and health care professionals within the United States and that makes this study original and important. I believe it will bring valuable information for those who study immigration and also for those who are considering moving to the United States to work in social service and health care.

The thesis includes history of immigration from Finland to America, employment of Finns through the times and a short theory about acculturation and integration process. It also includes discussion about different cultures and challenges that immigrants need to face after moving to another country. The thesis was written while living in the state of Michigan and that explains the large number of Internet sources. Twelve theme interviews were done using Finnish immigrants living in the states of Michigan and Illinois. All the interviewees are first generation immigrants and are working in social services and health care. The research chapter has straight quotations from the interviews to exemplify the results.

There is no previous research about Finnish social services and health care workers in the United States. The Institute of Migration has a lot of research done about migration issues, but never anything so specific that would study professionals in social services and health care and their migration.

## 2. MIGRATION

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another in order to take a permanent or temporary residence. Temporary moving could be for example the seasonal movements of migrant farm laborers. People can either choose to move or to be forced to move. These are called voluntary and involuntary migrations.

(National Geographic Society 2005)

### 2.1 Reasons for Migration

People migrate from country to another for various reasons. The reasons can be separated to two different factors:

**Push Factors** – Reasons for leaving the country because of a difficulty such as food shortage, war, environmental problems, difficulties of finding a job,

**Pull Factors** – Reasons of immigrating because of something desirable such as climate, better income, freedom, getting experiences, better job market

Several types of push and pull factors can influence people in their movements

- Environmental: e.g. natural disasters
- Political: e.g. war
- Economic: e.g. work
- Cultural: e.g. education
- Social: e.g. love

(National Geographic Society 2005: 1-2)

## **2.2. Immigrants and Refugees**

A volunteer migrant is called an immigrant. Reasons for moving can be taking a job in another country, marrying someone from another country, studying or just looking for experiences or wanting a better life in another country. An immigrant believes another country to be in some way better than the country he or she was living before. The new land is attracting the immigrant. Immigrant has positive expectations of the new land and is willing to take the difficulties and challenges that the living in the new country brings. In many cases the changes end up being more difficult than the immigrant is expecting. (Alitolppa-Niittamo 1992, 14)

A person who is forced to move from country to another is called a refugee. A refugee is a person who has a reason to be afraid of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality or political beliefs. A refugee is living outside his nation and cannot receive the protection of the government of his own home land. There is a third group of people who need to leave their homes because of wars, natural catastrophes or food shortages. They are not actually persecuted, but they have to leave their home countries because they feel that their life is in danger. (Alitolppa-Niittamo 1992, 15-16)

## **2.3. Cultures**

The word culture has always had multiple meanings. Culture is the unstated rules by which we live, rules that regulate our everyday practices and activities without our thinking about them or noticing them. Culture is always inseparable from human life. We recognize fellow members of our culture by dress, speech behavior and look. Everything from how we dress to what we eat, from how we speak to what we think is culture. It becomes definable when we travel from country or continent to another or if we look back in time to other cultures than our own. Culture as a way of life tends to produce a commonality of thought and behavior, as well as conformity with reigning standards, norms and rules. (Ryan 2010, 3-5)

Culture is a way of living, the way of thinking and the way of reacting. These are all learned behaviors. It is a very versatile complex that consists of that knowledge, beliefs, habits and laws that a person has learned as a part of the society. Culture is learned in the society where a person is living. Passing on cultural information in the society is called socialization. It is believed that the impact of the culture is so big that it has an effect on the personality of a person. (Alitolppa-Niittamo 1992, 19)

#### **2.4. Adaptation and Acculturation**

Moving to another country is a very challenging process and it takes time to get used to new the new culture. For some people adaptation to a new culture can be a process that strengthens the personality and brings new richer experiences to their lives. For others learning a new culture is difficult and brings feelings of helplessness. Many things have an effect on the adaptation. The immigrant's personality determines how the person reacts to new things. It is very important how the immigrant feels he or she has been welcomed to the country and if the immigrant is accepted. (Alitolppa-Niittamo 1992, 24-25)

Acculturation is a phenomenon where groups with different cultural background are in direct long term contact with each other and as a result either in both groups or in one of them the culture changes. An individual's behavior changes so that he or she adapts to the new culture. The identity, values and the attitude of the immigrant changes in the process. The changes transfer to the next generations through socialization. (Alitolppa-Niittamo 1992, 24-25)

		Appreciation of the own culture and identity.	
		Yes	No
Appreciation of dominant culture and an importance of interaction.	Yes	Integration	Assimilation
	No	Separation	Marginalization

This table is called Berry's acculturation model. It shows the four models of acculturation. Integration would be the ideal model, where the immigrant is in interaction with the dominant culture, but also wants to save his or her own cultural identity. Assimilation means becoming part of the new culture and taking the values and habits of the new culture, but forgetting the old culture and habits. Separation means the life of the immigrant's own culture without getting influence from the dominant culture. Marginalization is a state where the immigrant is outside the dominant culture and his own culture. (Alitolppa-Niittamo 1992, 29-34)

## 2.5 Intercultural Skills

An immigrant needs to build his intercultural skills to be able to successfully adapt to the new culture. The skills are necessary when communicating effectively across cultures. We can identify several general skills that can be applied to the various aspects of the intercultural communication.

- Understanding cultural identity and history
- Improving verbal and nonverbal communication
- Understanding the role of popular culture in intercultural communication
- Building relationships and resolving conflicts.

(Martin 2005, 22-23)

### **3. THE HISTORY OF FINNISH IMMIGRATION**

The first Finns arrived to America between 1630 and 1660. Finland was under a Swedish rule at that time and the new settlers joined Swedish colonies and were situated along the Delaware River in an area that today would be part of Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey. The immigrants from Finland were sent by the Swedish government as soldiers and government officials. The Delaware settlement, which was also called New Sweden, had received 500-600 settlers, mostly Finns and Swedes by 1660. There were also some settlers from Norway and Holland who came to inhabit New Sweden. In the 1930s the official America reevaluated the place of early immigrant Finns in United States history as a result of Finnish presence in the Delaware Colony. (Kero 1990, 1-6; Kostiainen 1990, 49)

#### **3.1. The Great Migrations**

Finnish movement to overseas started in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Compared to other Scandinavian countries it was a late phenomenon. Between 1864 and 1930 already 360 000 Finns had moved to North America. The main part of the immigration was to the United States. Canada attracted people after 1920s because the United States had adopted a quota system to restrict immigration that allowed only 500 immigrants from Finland to move in every year. The First World War also had its impact, and after 1920's the immigration movement to America slowed down significantly. (Engle 1977, 31; Hummasti 1990, 86-89)

The large immigration movement from Europe to America was a phenomenon that started because of the industrialism and population growth. Travelling got easier and a large economic region was born in between Europe and North America in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The pull factors in America were a lot of land and resources and push factors in Europe were too much of people and workers. Industry needed workers in Europe too, but still it could not offer jobs to

everybody. The political and the religious atmosphere in Europe were also reasons why people wanted to move to America. America was seen as a land of freedom and opportunities. (Korkiasaari & Söderling 2006, 25)

Most of the Finnish immigrants settled in northern parts of the United States. Michigan became the most popular area amongst the Finns. According to the 1930 census Michigan had about 74 000 Finns (first and second generation). Other states with large Finnish populations were Minnesota (60 000), New York (27 000), Massachusetts (26 000), Washington (22 000), California (16 000), Wisconsin (14 000), Ohio (12 000) and Oregon (12 000). (Virtanen 1975, 3)

### **3.1.1 Work in the New World**

Finnish people were unprepared for the American job market. Only a few of them spoke English and few had acquired any industrial skills. Many Finns were drawn by the job opportunities that Upper Peninsula of Michigan had to offer. In the 1860's the first Finns arrived to the "Copper Country of Michigan" and they were imported by one of the large mining companies operating there. The Finn, who had never been a miner, became one in the United States. It has been said that no other nationality ever dug so much iron from American soil. (Engle 1977, 42; Virtanen 1975, 3).

Finnish immigrants ended up digging copper in Upper Michigan, Montana and Arizona, iron ore in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan, coal in Pennsylvania, Montana, Wyoming and Washington and gold or silver in South Dakota and Colorado. The Finns in Michigan worked in other occupations as well: in construction, harbors, factories, fishing. However, the most important occupations were mining, farming and lumbering. (Engle 1977, 42-44)

Finns were assigned with the most menial jobs in mines. English and other foreign born workers who had previously acquired of mining got the skilled and supervisory jobs. The working conditions were miserable. Besides the physically

challenging 10-hour shifts six days a week spent in shaft mines, the miners were exposed to hazards associated with mining like explosives, falling rocks and cave-ins of the hanging walls. Results could be injuries or death. Ventilation was poor and there was always a danger of fire. The mining companies set up the jobs, the pay and the working hours. Workers who could not stand the new industrial discipline were fired. (Engle 1977, 42-44)

### **3.1.2. Adjusting to the Society**

Finnish immigrants were either unwilling or unready to become Americans. They stuck to their language and customs, married within their own community, and stubbornly guarded themselves against too much interference from strangers. They were not readily assimilated by American society and were often isolated to their own communities with their strange Finno-Ugric language. They tried to build their environment as Finnish as possible, with consumers' cooperative stores, Finnish farms and they even established an anti-American political tradition that sought to change the character of American political thought. Because of these actions, they often incurred the suspicion and hostility of Americans and other ethnic groups. Finns also started publishing several different newspapers in Finnish, such as "Työmies" and "Raivaaja". (Engle 1977, 63; Karni 1990, 97-98)

The reasons of the stubbornness can be found from their background. Most Finnish immigrants were young, energetic and driven by the spirit of nationalism that swept by Finland in early 1900s, right before Finland got their independence from Russia. Many of them had the spirit of radicalism that was loosely based on Marxism. Others were committed to a radical Apostolic Lutheran movement based on the teachings of Lars Levi Laestadius. The majority of the 300 000 Finns were also landless croppers and hired farm hands and they sought two dreams in America: economic miracle and freedom to live as they please. The dreams of a lot of Finns were dispelled. Instead of getting rich fast and moving back to Finland many of these immigrants ended up working at the bottom of the

American job ladder. There were immigrants in America from hundreds of other countries seeking what Finns were seeking and bosses who only wanted maximum effort for minimum price. (Karni 1990, 97-98)

Some Finns turned to the church to seek comfort and others tried to work hard and embrace temperance. Still there were some who turned to the labor movement. All Finns wanted to work together to create a Finnish sub-culture. They formed church groups, cooperatives of all kind, workingmen's associations, debate societies and publishing associations and other groups. Education has always been really important for Finns. In 1896 The Finnish Evangelic Lutheran Church established a Suomi College in Hancock, Michigan. Today the school is called Finlandia University. It is offering studies to students with all backgrounds, but is still has classes about Finnish culture and language. (Karni 1990, 97-98: Ulkosuomalaiset 2005)

Most of the immigrants in 1880-1920's were young unmarried men and women. The next generation, their American born children in 1900-1920 were the ones who challenged their parents' idealism. The society started going through a significant changes. By 1910, almost 40 per cent of people in the United States with Finnish ancestry had been born in America. In the 1920's and 1930's large numbers of the children of Finnish immigrants reached adulthood. American society did not approve of the leftist philosophy and activity of the parents. As a result, the children came to feel ashamed of the activities, heavy accent and old fashioned ways of their parents. The "melting pot" attitudes were strong, in which all racial and ethnic groups were to shed their ancient heritages and become as one people - Americans. (Engle 1977, 75-76: Kostiainen 1990, 113: Hummasti 1990, 86-89)

### **3.1.3. Language**

Adopting a new language was a big obstacle for integration for Finns and it caused problems in adapting to their new environment. English and Finnish are

very different languages from each other and in most cases English was unfamiliar for the new settlers. In order to acquire citizenship, the individual had to master the language of the land. After the 1920's the general assimilation and pressure to learn English gradually increased. According to the 1930 census, nearly 90% of the Finnish immigrants aged 10 or older spoke English. It must be noted that the language skills of those 90% were probably quite rudimentary. (Kostiainen 1990, 116-117)

Finns often settled in close proximity to one another. Some of the communities were so heavily Finnish that you could easily get along without knowing English. They named towns and villages after Finnish places or areas like Kaleva, Toivola, Nisula and Savo. Learning English was a struggle for many Finns. English and Finnish languages got mixed in the everyday speech of the Finnish immigrants. The term Finglish was introduced for the first time by professor Martti Nisonen in the 1920's. A lot of words were borrowed from English, but were pronounced in a way that was more familiar for Finns, for example "complain" was "kompleinata" and "orange juice" was "orenssijuussi". (Mattila 2008; Virtanen 1975, 2)

### **3.1.4 Returning to Finland**

For the majority of Finnish immigrants the plan was to return to Finland after few years of working in America. That would be enough time to earn some money and be able to buy some land in Finland. Yet only about a fourth of those immigrants ended up returning permanently. Several of them visited once or twice, but decided to go back to America. These travelers become known as "birds of passage". More than a half of those returned emigrants spent less than five years overseas. (Engle 1977, 76; Kostiainen 1990, 116; Virtanen 1975, 2)

A lot of the Old Country Finns struggled with homesickness for Finland after they got older and their children had grown up. Some of them felt guilty about having left in the first place. They knew they faced disapproval from the people back in

home. Many Finns who stayed behind were critical of life in America. (Engle 1977, 75-76)

One of the reasons for returning to Finland was that the desired wealth was not reached. For some people America was not what they had expected. Also adjusting to the society was hard and the new language was difficult to learn. (Kostiainen 1990, 116)

### **3.2. Modern Emigration from Finland**

Today instead of immigration it is more common to use word emigration to describe moving from country to another, especially when you want to talk about Finnish immigration. Traditionally immigration means moving from country to another permanently or for unknown period of time. Today most of Finnish people moving abroad are planning to stay for a certain time period or just temporarily, which is called emigration. Sometimes this can change to a permanent staying in the country if an emigrant for example finds a spouse from the new country. Finns are not a large ethnic group in America today. They are more spread out and not living in dense communities as they used to. One reason for that are the good English skills that Finns have.

High education is more and more common today for Finnish immigrants than it used to be. Also the reasons for moving are most likely non-economic, like getting new experiences, advancing in a career, improving skills rather than seeking a better income. Immigration is often planned to be temporary. It is fairly common for well educated young adults in modern Finland to seek a temporary job from abroad. People with low education and weak language skills face problems with finding a job from abroad.

Typical characteristics for a Finn moving to another country are young female with a good education and knowledge of the language of the country where she is moving to. Often they end up marrying someone from the country they move in

to. The majority of those who end up staying permanently in the country are fairly well educated married women who appreciate high income but who do not necessarily work. (Hoffren 2000)

Immigration to Europe has become a lot more tempting for Finns after Finland became part of the EU. Moving from country to another has become a lot easier. The reasons for moving to America is still an interesting thought for Finns, are probably related to the history of the great immigration movement. Global economy in today's world has made it fairly easy for the worker to move from country to another. Highly educated workers and specialists have become an important factor for companies all over the world. Countries like the United States are recruiting and competing for talented work force. (Wilkman 2005, 9)

Since the 1960's the majority of the immigrants from Finland to United States have been women. The motives for moving have changed, too. In the old days the reasons for moving were hope for the better economic future, in the last 50 years it has been studies or desire for new experiences. After 1960 marriage to an American has been a big reason for many for moving to the States. (Leinonen 2002, 4)

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research Task

The goal of the research was to learn to understand today's social services and health care in America from a Finnish emigrant's point of view. In different times there have been different jobs that a lot of immigrants have ended up doing in a new country. In 1880-1920 many immigrants ended up working as a miners and farmers in America. Social services and health care is one of the most attractive and important fields to work at as a today's immigrant in America. The study will explain the social connections of the immigrants. The study will try to find answers to the following questions.

Main task:

1. Work as a Finnish social services or health care professional in America

What are the push and pull factors in social and health care field?

What are the reasons for moving to America?

How interesting is America in the social and health care workers point of view?

What is the education of the immigrants and where were the studies done?

Is Finnish education respected in the United States?

What are the problems and obstacles for Finns to start working in America?

Secondary task:

2. The integration of the Finnish social and health care workers

What are the connections among the Finnish workers in USA?

What makes America an interesting place to work in?

How difficult/easy it is to work with Americans? What are their attitudes to Finns?

Are Finnish social and health care workers planning to move back to Finland or are they in America to stay? Why?

#### **4.2. Research Method**

A qualitative method has been used in this research. Qualitative research is a type of scientific research that consists of an investigation. It seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. It is a very effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behavior and social contexts of a certain populations. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex descriptions about how people experience a given research issue. Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity and religion. (Family Health International 2000)

Qualitative research is trying to answer to the question why something happens. The aim is to try to understand the target group rather than explain something. This way it is possible to investigate fewer cases instead of big groups and yet get enough information about the subject. The qualitative method is the most productive for this study, because the answers to the questions bring more variety. Generalizing needs to be working in the group that was the target for the research. This means that the twelve people who were interviewed need to be fairly representing the whole target group, who in this case are all Finnish social and health care workers in the US. The term saturation is used in the collection of the material when the collection can be stopped, because the new cases do not bring new information. Also in quantitative research too much material can cause superficiality of the analysis. A nice profound analysis of a small group of research target is usually better than sketchy valuation which does not give enough information. (Saukkonen 2003)

### **4.3. The Target Group of the Research**

The target group of the research is all Finnish citizens who have moved to the United States and who are working in social services or health care. There is no specific information available about the number of the people in this target group. The research is not limited to any certain age group. It is also not essential when they have moved to America as long as they are first generation immigrants. The final number of the people interviewed is 12.

The research was implemented by interviewing Finnish people working in social services or health care in America. Finding people for the research was challenging at first but after two weeks of intensive searching brought up good candidates. The people who took part in the study were interviewed face to face. All the interviewees were from Southern Michigan and Northern Illinois area. All twelve interviews were executed in March 2011.

The people who were interviewed were found through homepages of the local Finnish organizations and groups like Finnish American Chamber of Commerce, Finnish-American Society of the Midwest and Finnladies of Chicagoland, and emailing them. Also social media was used in the process of searching for the people to interview. Finnish-American Society of the West-Central Michigan, Finnish School of Michigan, and the Finns of the South-Eastern Michigan were among the groups connected through Facebook. Also some personal messages were sent via Facebook and some of the email addresses were found this way. Many of the people who were interviewed contacted their friends and told them about the research, which helped finding suitable candidates for the research.

All the interviews were planned and scheduled by e-mails and with the e-mails there was a description of the research sent, so all candidates knew what the research was about before they chose to join. Authorization for the research was signed by all the members joining the interview before starting the recording.

#### **4.4. Collecting the Material**

The material for the survey was collected by interviewing Finnish-Americans in Michigan and Illinois. The interviews were made using a theme interview as a method of a qualitative research. The topics of the interview, so called themes are typically known in the theme interview but the specific form and order is not known. A theme interview is often used in societal studies because it is comparable to the basics of many qualitative researches. It is possible to count frequencies from the material and the results can be analyzed in many different ways. (Hirsjärvi 2008, 203)

The interviews were planned to be 30-60 minutes long. The shortest interview ended up being 17 minutes and the longest one was 49 minutes long. Most of the interviews were about 30 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and none of the people interviewed opposed the recording. The recording of the interviews was successful and all the recordings were clear. Occasionally some sentences were quiet and therefore difficult to hear. In two interviews there was some noise in the background but that did not disturb or cause problems when reviewing the recordings. Two interviews were done in public place, the University of Michigan hall, in quiet area. All the other interviews were done in the homes of the interviewees. The interviewees were asked to find a peaceful place in the house for the interviews and usually there were no other people in the same room during the interviews. In a couple of interviews the children or someone coming in the room disturbed the interview, and the recording of the interview was stop for that and continued later when it was peaceful again. In overall, the recordings were successful.

#### **4.5. The Analysis**

The key function in the role of analysis is to communicate the value of the findings. An even more important purpose is to convince the reader that, through the innate value of the knowledge gained, the research report makes a sufficient

contribution for the level of research in question and that the research measures up to the necessary standards of academic worth. The aim of content analysis is to put qualitative data into a more quantitative framework. It can be used for example in the analysis of tape recordings. The essence of content analysis is to:

- a) Identify the target communications
- b) Identify a number of dimensions of the subject in hand
- c) Go through each communication assigning statements to it to one or other of the dimensions
- d) Count the number of times each dimension is addressed in each communication

(Sharp 1996, 105-106,114)

The recordings are transcribed to a readable form and themed by subjects. The transcription took from three hours to six hours per interview. The transcription was done very specifically, word by word. However, some pauses and laughs were not written down when transcribing the text. Also some of the irrelevant repeat of the speech was occasionally erased in the transcription process if it was causing the text to be hard to read. The intention is to get a common outlook about the opinions of the person interviewed. This is called compressed and editing transcription. Parts of the interview were quoted to the actual research and it is important to remember that speech is different communication than written text thus so it is possible that it can include incomplete sentences and grammar errors. (Ruonavaara 2010)

#### **4.6. The Reliability and Ethics of the Research**

The goal in the research is to avoid mistakes. This is why it is important to validate the reliability of the research. There are many different ways to evaluate the reliability of the ways of measurement. Reliability means that the same results can be achieved again and again. Reliability is ability to give results that are non-coincidental. The reliability can be discovered in various different ways, for

example when two evaluators come to the same conclusion, the results can be found reliable. Another concept that evaluates research is validity. It means the ability of research method to measure exactly what it should measure. For example, the target group of the research can understand the questions differently than the researcher. In that case the results will not be correct or truthful. In qualitative research the important things in terms of reliability is description of people, places and events. It is also important to describe all the parts and details about the qualitative research. (Hirsjärvi 2008, 226-227)

During the interviews it was important to pay attention to the answers of the interviewees. If the answer was not specific enough continuing questions were asked. Also, if the answer was not really answering the question, it was asked later again in different words, trying to get the interviewee to understand the question. In those cases as a researcher and interviewer it is important to think if the questions are not clear enough. At the same time the questions cannot be too specific because the answers to those are usually very short and do not give very much information. The goal in this type of theme interview is to have the interview to be like a friendly conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. It was important to get the atmosphere to be comfortable for the interviewees and one way to do that is to have the conversations at their homes where they feel relaxed.

It is important to also try to spend time with the interviewees and have some small talk before and after the interview so that is easier to break the ice and that the interviewees feel comfortable talking about their lives. In most of the cases this goal was achieved. The interviews also got easier and easier, because as an interviewer it was possible to evaluate which questions gave most information and how to ask them to get more information. All the interviews and conversations were in Finnish, because it was easier to carry on the conversation that way. This can be noticed in the quotes in the research part, where the original quote is first in Finnish and right after that translated in English as specifically as possible.

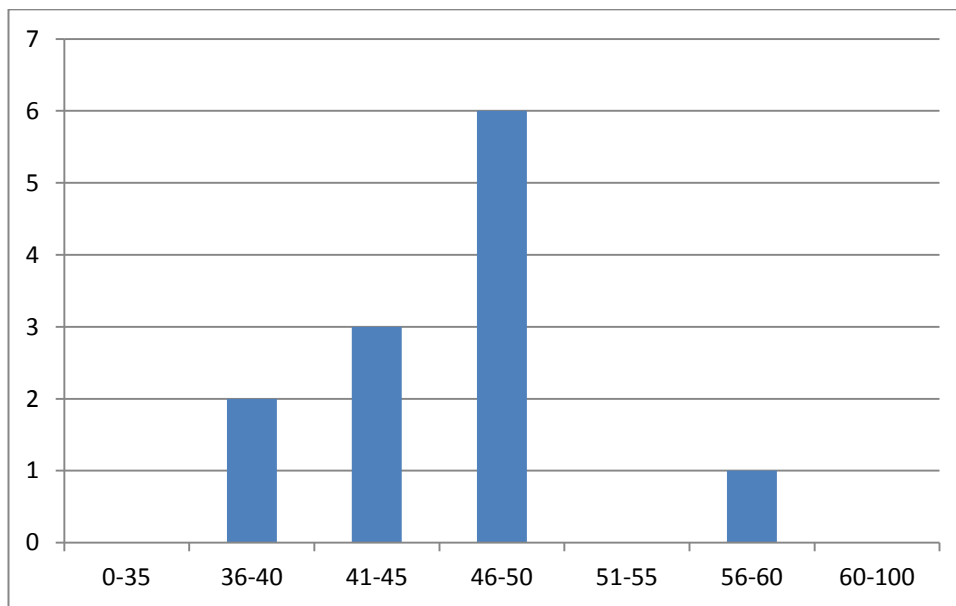
In research, ethics means honesty, conscientiousness and accuracy throughout the whole process. The rights of the research group need to be respected. The research need to be planned, carried out and reported in detail. The researcher needs to have the acceptance of the member of the research group for the research and they need to know what they are taking part of. (Hirsjärvi 2008, 24-25)

People who took part to the research signed a form where they accepted the use of the information from the interviews to be used in the research. The interviewees were informed properly about all the rules and aspects of the research. Taking part to the research was completely voluntary. Reporting and evaluating the results is honest, and the methods are explained carefully in the text.

## 5. THE RESULTS – WORK LIFE

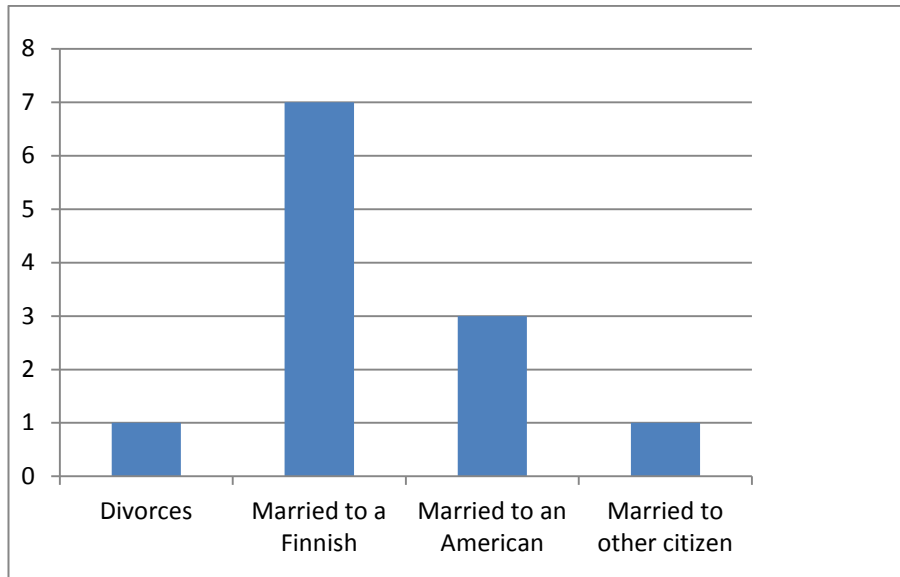
### 5.1. Basics

Twelve people were interviewed for this research. Nine of them were women and three were men. They all were between ages 38 and 57 and majority of them were between 46 and 50 years old. The average age was 45.



**Figure 1.** Age Distribution of the Interviewees

Most of the interviewees are married, only one is divorced. Seven of them are married with a Finnish person, three with an American and one with a Canadian. All the interviewees have families now. Three interviewees have three children, eight of them have two children and one has a one child.



**Figure 2.** Marital Status of the Interviewees

Two of the people who were interviewed are living in Evanston, Illinois, which is north from Chicago and ten are living in Michigan. Five people were living in Ann Arbor and the nearby areas, three in Grand Rapids area and two in Lansing area.

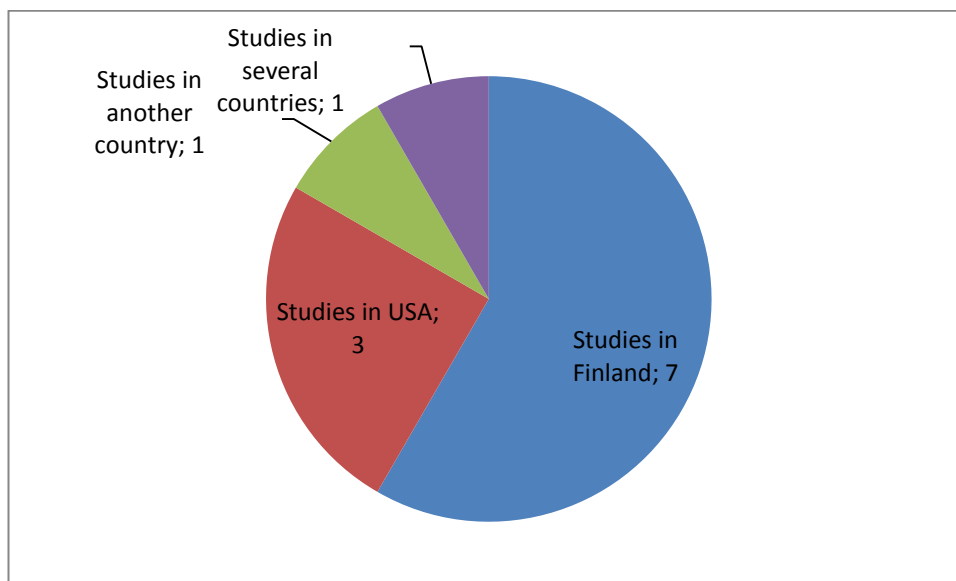


**Figure 3.** The Map of Michigan

All the interviewees were born in Finland and they had moved to America as an adult. Five were from Eastern Finland, three from Southern Finland, three from West Finland and one from the Oulu region.

## 5.2. Education

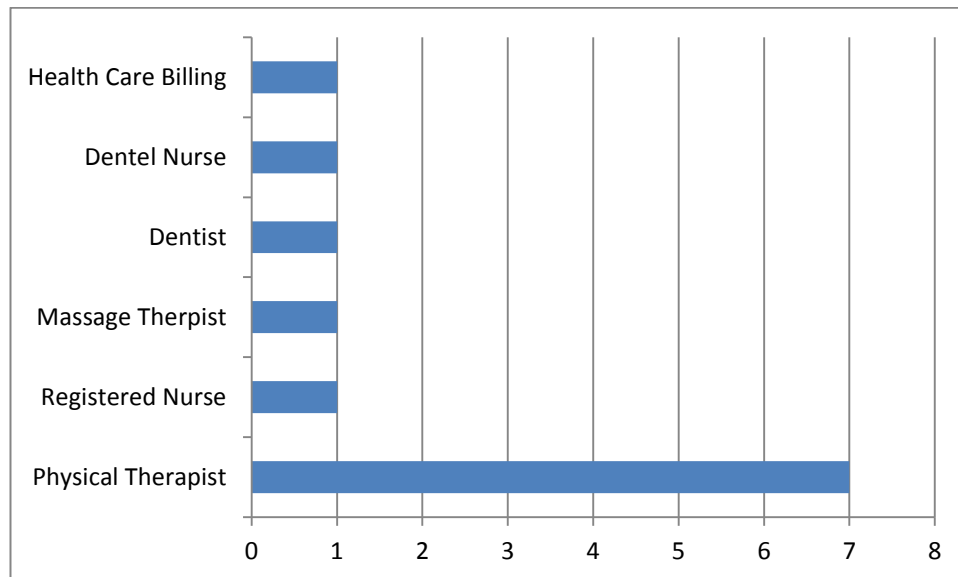
Seven interviewed people had completed their studies in Finland and moved to America after graduating from college in Finland. After moving to the US they have completed their studies with some additional courses either through the company they are working at or by themselves. One went to college in Sweden and three of the people who were interviewed got their degree from a college or another school in the United States. One person has studied both in Finland and in the United States to get her studies completed.



**Figure 4.** The Education of the Interviewees

Seven interviewees have a vocational or Associates degree, two have a Bachelor's degree and three have a Master's or a Doctorate degree. I interviewed seven physical therapists, one registered nurse, one masseuse, one orthodontist, one dental assistant and one person working in social and health care billing. The

reason why there are so many people with vocational education is that physical therapist education used to be vocational in Finland, and it became Bachelor level degree later on.



**Figure 5.** Occupation of the Interviewees

### 5.3. Moving to the United States

The biggest pulling factors for moving to the United States were work related. Eight interviewees described one of the main reasons for moving to be great work market in the USA. American companies searched employees from Finland by posting advertisements about jobs to Finnish newspapers and schools. Many of the interviewees found their jobs from the United States and decided to move overseas. Four of them mentioned being curious and interested about living and working abroad and told that it was one of the pulling factors in moving. One person told about great experiences in youth from the United States as a big reason to move. One interviewee described a good life situation enabled moving to the United States. In one situation the only reason for moving was her husband's career and studies. Six people mentioned recession and unemployment

in Finland to be a pushing factor in moving process. This was the only reason interviewees described as a reason to leave Finland.

The vast majority of people interviewed moved to the United States in the early 1990's and in the mid 1990's. Only one had moved in the 1970's and one in the 1980's. None of them had moved in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The recession in Finland in the early 1990's seemed to be the reason for so many people moving to the US and on the other hand the reason for small migration in 2000-2010 is most likely the good economical times in Finland when people did not feel the need to move to look for work.

### **5.3.1. Green Card and Immigration Law**

Most of the immigrants who were interviewed never had any problems with immigration law, such as getting a green card or a work permit. In many cases, the biggest work was done by the companies who hired the workers. Only two interviewees found the immigration process with the paperwork to have been difficult and frustrating. People who were married with an American said that the green card application through marriage was easy but they were suspecting that today it is more difficult than it used to be in the past.

### **5.4. Working in the United States**

In overall, the Finnish immigrants have great chances to find work in social services and health care. Six interviewees had a job already in the United States before moving out from Finland. Three interviewees found a job right after arriving and three people found jobs after finishing their studies in the United States.

*”Mä muistan että alunperin mä odotin että se ois mulle... et se että mä en oo amerikkalainen niin se aiheuttais jotenki vaikeuksia tai se*

*ois jonku työntekijän mielestä haitta, mutta mä en oo ikinä kokenu sitä. Se oli vaan mun mielessä sillon alussa mutta mun oli pakko todeta että se oli vaan mun oma juttu. Se ei ollenkaan pitäny paikkaansa.”*

“I remember that originally I was expecting that it would be... that I wasn't an American, would cause some problems or that some worker would think that as a fault, but I never experienced that. It was only in my mind in the beginning but I have to note that it was just my own thing. That did not hold true at all.”

Reasons for staying home have been mainly choices for these immigrants, for example staying home for a period of time after having a child. The interviewees seem to be happy about the hours they work weekly. Many of them have been working part time at one point and some work long hours every week. There is more freedom to choose how many hours a professional is willing to work per week than there is in Finland. This way the working life can be adjusted to the life situations. Only one interviewee described search for a job to be challenging. According to her, good relations and good application are more important in the process than what one can actually do. Today five interviewees work for a company, two people mainly teach, three have a company where they are shareholders, one has her own firm and one works for a company, but also has her own patients.

#### **5.4.1. Continuing Education**

Two interviewees told that they needed additional education before starting to work. In some fields there is a requirement to pass a licensure exam and language exam before they are eligible to work. Also, in some professions like physical therapy it depends on the state if a worker is eligible for a job or not without additional schooling, for example someone can work in Michigan but cannot in Texas with the same education. Physical therapy is a field where there has always

been a great demand for educated professionals and that field has been attracting workers from Finland and all over the world.

Some interviewees talked about how contents of courses need to be matching with contents of American courses for the job. Some employers demand for certain courses in the Finnish education to be eligible for the job. This varies from place to place. In the mid 1990's it started to get harder for Finnish physical therapists to prove that they are qualified for work in the United States and to start working in the United States in that field.

*”...tehtiin credential evaluation elikkä se pätevyystutkimus vaikka mulla oli jo lisenssi ja vaikka mä olin jo tehny töitä (Yhdysvalloissa) ja opiskellu lisää ja mä opetin fysioterapeuttiopiskelijoita Suomessa, niin tota sinne piti lähettää näitä papereita. Ei pelkästään tuntimääriä vaan opetussuunnitelmat ja kaikki ja ne vertas sitä tarkalleen, ja sieltä tuli semmonen paperi että joo, sä oot pätevä. Mutta sitten kielitestit ja kaikki nää joutuu tekemään.”*

”...credential evaluation was done even though I had I license and I had worked (in the United States) and studied more and I taught physical therapy students in Finland and I had to sent these papers. Not just class credits but curricula and everything and they compared it precisely and they sent a paper that yes, you are qualified. But then language exams and these you have to do.”

Finnish education itself is highly respected in the United States according to the interviewees. Many workers consider themselves precise and hard workers.

*“Kyllä sitä (koulutusta) arvostetaan mun käsittääkseni aika korkeelle. -- Ja ehkä vielä niinsanotusti enemmän suomalaista työmoraalia. Suomalaiset on kovia tekemään töitä.”*

“It (education) is respected pretty highly as far as I know. -- And maybe even more so called Finnish work ethics. Finnish people are hard workers.”

## **5.5. Work life**

Many interviewees thought that the work is very similar in Finland and in the United States. For some, the language was a challenge in the beginning. The cultural differences are the biggest social difference and the lack of universal health care is the biggest structural differences in social services and health care.

### **5.5.1. Positive Things about the Work**

The most important thing that came up from the interviews as a good thing in work in the United States was the satisfaction to the work team that people had and also how much they enjoyed the work itself. Seven people mentioned these themes very important.

Six people said that the work benefits were good or better here compared to Finland. Good insurance was one important thing to the interviewees. Possibilities to educate themselves and to specialize in different fields were very positive possibilities that came up. Four people mentioned the salary to be an important part of the work. However, two people told that the salary is good, but they would not say it makes a big difference, because the living costs are higher too.

*”Palkkaus on erittäin paljon parempi täällä. Se on kyllä voi sanoa että täällä hankkii kyllä jos vaan jaksaa tehdä töitä. Se on todella hyvä. Suomessa hirveen alipalkattuja terapeutit siellä mitä niille pitäis maksaa. En mä tiä, terveydenhuollon palkkakuoppa siellä on.”*

“Salary is a lot better here. I can say that you earn here if you keep up working. That is very good. In Finland the therapists are so underpaid compared to what they should be paid. I don’t know, health care salary lag there is.”

*”En mä oikeestaan tiedä voiko sitäkään sanoa että palkka on huomattavasti parempi kun elinkustannukset on täällä niin huimasti suuremmat. Että.. ehkä joskus oisin voinu sanoa että palkka on parempi mutta kun ottaa huomioon mitä jää sitten kuukauden päätteksi käteen niin mun mielestä se ei nyt sittenkään pidä paikkaansa.”*

”I don’t know if you can say that the salary is significantly better because the cost of living is so much higher here. Maybe previously I could have said that the salary is better but when you consider what you got in the end of the month I would say it isn’t true after all.”

Three people mentioned the working hours to be good. People feel like they have fairly good possibilities to decide and plan their working hours. Two people told about how the lack of rotating shifts makes a great difference. The employment is good in America in the health care and that came up as a positive thing from three interviewees. The workers in the United States feel like work they do is more respected and they get more responsibilities in the United States than they would in Finland. One person mentioned how well entrepreneurs are supported in the States.

### **5.5.2. Difficulties in the Work**

Working in the social services and health care gets stressful. Seven people mentioned that there is a lot of work to do and the workers are very busy. Three of them mentioned that as a worker in America they see a lot more patients per day than they would in Finland and a lot of times several people at once. This is

possible by giving more responsibilities to the assisting staff and also less time to work with one patient. The work is efficient but it may bring a higher risk for mistakes.

*“Täällähän sulla voi olla vaikka viis potilasta yhtäaikaan, mutta Suomessa sulla on vaan yks. Silti sitä ei katsota ryhmäksi. -- Suomessa sulla saattaa olla 7-8 potilasta ja täällä sulla saattaa olla 15-20 päivässä.”*

”Here you can have five patients at the same time, but in Finland you have just one. Yet it is not considered as a group. - - In Finland you might have 7-8 patients and here you might have 15-20 a day.”

Insurance companies cause a lot of extra work in the United States. It can also be a burden for the workers in health care. Six people told that they had a hard time with the paper work for the insurance companies. Some patients cannot get insurance and might have problems with paying the bills. The workers are not always able to help the people who need the care because they do not have insurance.

Six interviewees told about the big responsibilities and the threat of a law suit to be part of everyday life in social and health care. Mistakes cannot be made and that causes insecurity. The cultural differences can be seen for example in how it is more difficult for Americans to undress in meeting with a physical therapist. Especially in Islamic cultures women are not supposed to undress in front of anyone and that makes the therapy difficult. Also decisions that the health care professionals make can be important.

*”Suomessa että en nyt usko että tässä tarvii röntgenkuvaan ottaa että turhaan sädetään, ja täällä se on että ilman muuta pitää ottaa se että jos siellä sitten onkin jotain niinku 0,1 prosentin chance että siellä*

*on jotakin ja sitten niinku aina otettava koska sä oisit, sua syytettäs siitä että sä et sitä tehny.”*

”In Finland you don’t think that there is a need for an x-ray and radiate for nothing and here of course you need to do it in case there is something like in 0,1 per cent chance and you always have to take it or you would be blamed for not doing that.”

Five people were not happy about the short vacations that workers in America have. Three thought that the work is challenging, for example, when working with severely injured people. One person said that the doctors have too much power in planning the treatment and that is why sometimes the healing is slower than if they could decide the treatment themselves.

Good things about work		Difficulties in work	
Nature of work and work community	7	Lot of work and busy work	7
Work benefits	6	Insurances	6
Salary	4	Responsibility & weak unions and contracts	6
Work appreciation and responsibility	3	Short vacations	5
Employment	3	Challenges in work	3
Working hours	3	Power of doctors	1
Support for entrepreneurs	1		

**Table 1.** Good Things and Difficulties in Work

## **5.6. Work Relations and Integration in Working Life**

Cultures have different ways of taking a stand on work. The work ethics vary and the workers value different things in work environment. The United States is a multicultural area, “a melting pot” of cultures. Yet, it is always a challenge to integrate to a new work environment. The differences between Finnish and American working cultures are quite similar even though Finns consider themselves hard workers with higher work ethics than Americans.

### **5.6.1. Americans as Workers**

Finnish social and health care workers described the environment at the work to be mostly good. Most of them liked their co-workers and had good relations with them. The experiences about co-workers were mostly good and the interviewees thought their co-workers are hard working and that they have good professional skills. However, the interviewees thought that the work ethic of the Americans can be weaker than it would be among Finnish workers. American social and health care workers might more easily treat patients badly or be arrogant. Many interviewees thought that workers with low education can often have very weak work ethics. According to them the morals and work ethic grows with the education: the higher the education, the better the ethics in work life. Also high education increases the personal pride among the Americans in social and health care professions. That seems to be more visible characteristic in America than it is in Finland. Two interviewees thought that it is more difficult to get fired in social and health care field than it is in Finland, and that is why workers can get away with irresponsibility.

### 5.6.2. Reception in the Working Life

Overall the reception from both American co-workers and the patients has been very good or pretty good. In working life Finnish health care professionals are well respected and accepted. They are being treated equally and they get a good response of the work. Four people mentioned that Finns are known as hard workers in the United States and that partly gains the respect towards them. Four people also said that Americans have high expectations for Finnish people as workers.

Some interviewees have noticed some prejudice but mostly curiosity. The accent and the Finnish names arouse questions and interest from the patients but that is more of a positive thing and even an ice breaker in the conversation. Many Finns see it as an advantage rather than disadvantage. Two interviewees estimated that the area where one works makes a difference in reception. Both of them had had good experiences in one area and bad experiences in other. They both thought that in multicultural areas the working is easier than in homogeneous areas.

*”Usein ihmiset jotka tulee peloissaan ja kivuissaan hoitoon, niin mulla on ainaki ollu positiivista että on ollu muusta maasta ja on ollu hyvin kiinnostunu mistä mä oon kotosin ja se on helppo jutella semmosista asioista. Ja se voi niinku pehmittää sitä hoitoa siinä niin mulle se on ainaki ollu hirveen positiivista. Ei kukaan oo sanonu mitään negatiivista siitä.”*

”Often people come to treatments afraid and in pain, and I feel it has been positive that I am from another country and they have been very interested about where I am from and it is easy to talk about things like that. It can soften the treatment and to me it has been very positive. No one has said anything negative about it.”

*”Se riippuu niin paljo missä on. Ann Arborissa kun me asuttiin niin sinne on kaikki ihmiset tullu ympäri maailmaa, -- siellä oli hirveen*

*helppo olla. Kohtelu oli tosi kivaa ja kaikki piti toisiaan samanvertasina. Länsipuolella Michigania se on, aina kun kuulee aksentin niin kaikki on niinku että hmmm..tää on jostaki muualta ja on paljo semmosta niinku rasistisuuttakin, mutta ei mitään ihan semmosta selvää.”*

”It depends a lot where you are. When we lived in Ann Arbor where people had arrived all over the country, -- it was really easy to be there. The treatment was very nice and everybody was equal. In West Michigan it is, every time when they hear an accent everybody is like hmmm...she is from somewhere else and there is a lot of racism too, but nothing very clear.”

One interviewee described the overall atmosphere at work to be negative among co-workers. All and all the interviewees were very pleased and happy about the treatment they had got from co-workers and from the patients.

## 6. THE RESULTS - INTEGRATION

### 6.1. Contacts to Americans

All the Finnish people who were interviewed seemed to have either very much, quite a lot or some contacts to Americans outside the work. It was interesting how well the immigrants had integrated to the society. However, two interviewees estimated that in the beginning it was a lot harder to get to know people than it is now. Three people said that it is hard to make deeper relationship or friendship with Americans than it is with Finns. Many interviewees made friends through their children's hobbies or found friends from the neighborhood. One interviewee mentioned her religion to be a strong bonding factor with Americans. Overall Finnish people thought that Americans are easy to get to know to, but becoming friends with them is difficult.

	Contacts to locals	Contacts to Finnish Americans
Very much	4	4
Quite a lot	5	5
Some	3	0
Few	0	1
Very little	0	2

**Table 2.** Social Contacts of the Interviewees

### 6.2. Connections to other Finns in America

Nine people were either very much or quite a lot in contact with other Finns living in America. Three people said that they had very few or fairly few contacts with Finnish Americans. The biggest bonding factors between Finnish Americans were celebrations and special occasions. Ten people mentioned them to be a place to meet other Finnish immigrants. Also, children were another combining reason;

Finnish language schools for kids bring the parents together too. Interviewees believed that Finnish people keep in touch a lot after getting to know each other. Two people mentioned Finnish Center to be a place to meet other Finnish people, and many had got to know more Finns through their friends. Sometimes meeting other Finns can even be a coincidence in areas where there are fairly many immigrants.

### **6.3. Integration**

Interviewees evaluated their integration into society and told their own thoughts about the process of becoming part of the society. Five of them thought that they have integrated very easily and four people described that the integration happened fairly easily. Two people said it took a lot of time but they feel like they have adapted. One person had never really adapted to the society, and missed Finland a lot. Most of the interviewees were very happy to their current life situation.

It seems to be very important for Finnish immigrants to keep up Finnish culture and Finnish habits. For many that is a way to ease the homesickness. Language is one important specific thing that is very valued among Finnish immigrants. In families where both parents are Finnish and also in families where one of the parents is Finnish keeping up the language skills is important. All the interviewees spoke Finnish or Swedish to their children. Some of the children were very good in the Finnish and some did not speak very much. Usually in families where one of the parents speaks English as a mother language it is more challenging for the children to learn Finnish. This is because the most common language in the house is still English, when the parents speak English to each other.

*”Tää on suomalainen talo. Se ei siitä muutu. Että täällä opetellaan suomee, puhutaan suomee ja niin tota ymmärretään sitä ja niin edelleen, ja (lapset) tietävät suomalaisesta kulttuurista paljon.”*

This is a Finnish house. It doesn't change. Here you learn Finnish, speak Finnish and understand Finnish and so on and (kids) know a lot about Finnish culture.

*”Sehän on osa sitä kulttuurista minää että ymmärtää sen kielen. Niinku mun pojan kans on ollu kauheen tärkeätä että mä puhun aina suomea ja hän vähän vaihtelevalla menestyksellä puhuu takas mutta jos se on hyvin tärkeä se asia, niin kyllä hän sen sanoo suomeksi.”*

”It is part of the cultural identity that you understand the language. Like with my son it has been really important that I always speak Finnish and he speaks Finnish back more or less but if it is a very important matter, then he will say it in Finnish.”

Things that have made the integration easier and faster for Finnish immigrants has been Finnish or Finnish-American family in the United States and also all the friends in the States. The longing for family and friends in Finland are at the same time reasons that have made the integration more difficult and slower for some immigrants. Some immigrants described the culture in America to be old fashioned when it comes to gender roles, equality and paying with checks. Some values are different in the United States and that can make integration more difficult. Finnish immigrants described the United States to be superficial and selfish. Expensive health care, unsafe environment and low quality schools are concerns for them. One interviewee said moving to America has been a great experience and one interviewee said that Finnish and American culture are very much alike. Overall, the immigrants have adjusted very well, even though they miss some things about Finland.

*“Et kyl mä niinku oon tyytyväinen siihen että mä oon päätyny tänne. Ja varmaan oon sopeutunu ja amerikkalaistunu paljon enemmän kuin mä itse tajuun, koska mä nään vaan itseni täällä ja voin verrata vaan amerikkalaisiin.”*

“I am happy that I ended up in here. And probably I have integrated and become americanized a lot more than I even realize, because I see myself only in here and can compare only to Americans.”

#### **6.4. Importance of the Language**

It is not surprising how big of an importance knowing English makes for Finnish immigrants. Good language skills have traditionally been appreciated in Finland and that can be seen in the Finnish education structure where studies for foreign languages are available and encouraged. Almost all of the interviewees described good English skills to be extremely important or very important in the integration process. Many of them knew English pretty well, but thought that speaking it was challenging. Two interviewees estimated that the better the language skills are, the more respected and competent you will be in the society and in the working life. Knowing the professional vocabulary is important. Some interviewees still have problems with difficult words but most of them find themselves fluent.

#### **6.5. Connections to Finland**

Finnish immigrants keep contact to Finland and most of them have a lot of connections. Social networks, emails and Skype have made connecting a lot easier, and many Finns think they keep more in contact because it is so easy these days. Even though using Skype has become really common, a lot of interviewees still use phones too to keep up with relatives and friends. Easy and fast ways to connect with family in Finland is definitely another reason why integration is easier and faster for the immigrants. Almost all interviewees kept contact to Finland from once a day to once a week.

Most of the immigrants who were interviewed travelled to Finland once a year or every other year. Some of them had had longer breaks between visits from three years up to nine years. Some immigrants would like to go more often. The biggest reason why they did not was that flying is expensive, especially with the whole family. Other reasons that were mentioned were short vacations and stressful travelling.

Five interviewees have gone back to Finland for a period of time, but decided to move back to the United States again. The reason to move back for two of them was a desire to complete studies in Finland. Three people wanted to go back to have a child and maternity benefits in Finland. Two people wanted their children to learn more Finnish and that is why they decided to go to Finland. The reasons to move back to United States were better salary and quality of living, better working possibilities, desire to keep Green Card and possibility for one of the parents stay home with children. One person felt that she was so integrated to American culture and working life already, that she did not enjoy staying and working in Finland anymore. Many interviewees know several Finnish families who have moved back to Finland permanently after living in the States for years.

*”...asuttiin siellä vuosi, ja se oli niin hankalaa, koska me oltiin muututtu, Suomi ei ollu muuttunu. Ja me haluttiin tulla tänne takas. -- Meidän elitaso täällä on sillai korkeempi varmasti täällä niillä palkoilla kuin mitä meillä ois Suomessa. Ja täällä on niin paljo mahdollisuuksia.”*

”...we lived there a year and it was so difficult because we had changed but Finland hadn't. And we wanted to come back here. --- Our standard of living is higher here with these salaries than it would be in Finland. And there are so many opportunities here.”

*”Monet on täältä yrittäny meidän kavereistakin käydä siellä (Suomessa) ja muuttaa takasi mutta tuota sitten on tullu takasi. Mutta on käyny toisinkin päin että on jääny sinne.”*

”Many of our friends have tried to go there (Finland) and move back there but have eventually come back over. But the opposite has happened too that they have stayed.”

## **6.6. Life in the Future**

None of the twelve interviewees were planning on moving back to Finland, at least not in the near future. Children’s school, family, good jobs and a good life style were the biggest reasons why these immigrants wanted to stay. The interviewees believed that both countries have their good sides and combination of both cultures would be the best solution. Four people thought that it is possible that they would move to Finland when they retire, or at least they would like to live half of the year in Finland and half of the year in the United States. One interviewee was hoping to move to England in the near future. Five people said that they are probably going to stay in the United States for the rest of their lives.

*“No sillon kun mä jään eläkkeelle niin sillon ehkä. Siinä vaiheessa mä voin lähtä, puoli vuotta siellä ja puoli vuotta täällä. Se ois mun mielestä sillain just sopivasti.”*

Well maybe when I retire. At that point I can leave, half of the year there and half of the year there. I feel like that would be just right.

*“...yhteyksiä on mutta muuttasinkö takasi (Suomeen) niin en mä usko, ei siellä sitten kauheesti oo mitään. Et kyl se elämä on täällä.”*

”...there are connections but would I move back (to Finland), I don't think so. There is not all that much there anymore. The life is here.”

### 6.7. Plans and Goals of Life

Finnish social and health care workers are on average happy and satisfied in their lives. Four people said that their philosophy right now is to live one day at a time, have an open mind and see what life brings. Two people wanted to study more and to complete their education. Two people talked about developing their career; one of them was planning on starting his own practice and the other one was hoping to get another worker to her practice. Five people were thinking about retirement fund or retirement age and set a comfortable, secure retirement as a future goal. Children's education was another thing - three people talked about getting their children through college as a goal. Also keeping up Finnish language for the children and their connections to Finland active was important. The hobbies of the children kept the interviewees busy too.

*”...eläkerahasto. Se on iso juttu. --- Ja suomen kielen vaaliminen on se toinen iso asia. Et nää kaks (lapset) pysyy suomalaisina sen kielen puolesta. Koska sitten kun meistä aika jättää niin näitten perhe on siellä. Se on tärkeätä. ”*

”...retirement funds. That is a big thing. --- And keeping up Finnish is another big issue. That these two (children) will stay Finnish as far as language is concerned. Because when we pass away their family is over there. That is important.”

## 7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the study was to reach Finnish social and health care workers who have moved to America and to learn more about their lives. In this thesis immigration and employment of social and health care professionals has been combined to an interesting mixture. Why did these immigrants decided to move to the United States? Are they happy about their jobs and careers? Have they integrated to the society and is the Finnish culture still part of their lives? Are they planning on moving back to Finland some day?

The social work field and especially health care field are an enormously growing business in the United States and the workers are gathered from all over the world. The study revealed that most of these Finnish social and health care workers had arrived to the United States in the 1990's after jobs. Around that time the recession in Finland was strong and there were not very many jobs available. Most of the interviewees were women, but it is hard to say if this is generally true because the group that was interviewed was so small.

Many of the Finnish immigrants just wanted new experiences and wanted to try something new and that was a good enough reason to move abroad. When they arrived to the United States for the first time, they were planning on staying only for a year or two. Some Finnish families moved back to Finland after few years in the United States. Some of the returnees do not feel like Finland is the place for them and for one reason or another they decide to go back overseas. Work opportunities and the quality of work definitely are big factors for Finnish immigrants when they try to choose where to live. Family and friends are the biggest reasons why these immigrants want to try to move back, but career opportunities are better for them in USA. Nevertheless, some of the Finnish immigrants have stayed in Finland after returning there from the United States. It would be interesting to study also their reasons and motives to stay in Finland.

It was surprising how well Finnish immigrants had found jobs in their field. Many of them had already created successful careers and they seemed to be happy and pleased about their careers and lives in general. One fact that expressed the satisfaction was that the interviewees were not interested in moving back to Finland, at least not before retirement. Most of the interviewees had been in the United States for so long that they had already gotten used to the culture in the United States and this is why they did not have a desire to move back. Some of them had succeeded better in their careers in the States that they could have in Finland, like having their own practices and so forth. Also, it is so easy and fast to connect to the families and friends in Finland through the modern techniques, such as social networks, and that has eased the home sickness.

Finnish education and work ethics seem to be values that are respected among Finnish people and American employers. The salaries and the opportunities in America are better for the social and health care workers according to the interviewees. On the other hand, the school system and expensive insurances cause insecurity. The connections between other Finns in the United States made a big difference for the immigrants. Finnish people are considered to be a safety net and the contacts to other immigrants are important for Finns in order to keep up the cultural habits and traditions.

The integration to the American society has been fairly easy for these immigrants. Many of the interviewees said that it took time at first to get used to the society and to get to know people and find friends. Finding work fast is a very important part of the integration process. It is also a great benefit to master the language. Good language skills help the workers to gain trust, professional skills and respect in the eyes of patients and co-workers. Finnish people rarely experience any racism or prejudice. Mostly the attitude that the Americans have had for the Finnish immigrants has been positive and curious. Usually Finns feel that Americans have high expectations and that their skills and education are highly respected and trusted in their jobs. Finnish people and their working skills seem to have a very good reputation in the United States.

These immigrants have not lost the contact to Finland or their Finnish cultural identity. Many of them keep up the Finnish culture in their homes in various different ways from arranging Finnish celebrations to baking Finnish food and to building saunas in their houses. The Finnish language is important for the immigrants and they try to keep it up also for their children. All the Finnish immigrants who were interviewed speak Finnish to their children and want to teach them Finnish culture and habits. They also travel to Finland regularly and they want their children to be able to travel and spend time with their Finnish family. For many, the contacts to other Finnish immigrants were very important. Many interviewees described it to be very important factor in their lives and that it helped them to feel like home in the United States.

Finnish immigrants have a confident and positive view about their future. Many of them are hoping to spend half of the year in Finland after retiring and possibly even move to live in Finland. Secure retirement arrangements and being able to provide good education for the children are the most important goals to achieve in the future for the immigrants.

It is important to notice that seven out of twelve people in the target group were physical therapists. This is why it is more difficult to prove that the research could be telling about the whole social and health care field. There are a lot more immigrants that are physical therapists in the Mid West area than any other health care professionals and that is why it was necessary to have more physical therapists take part in the study. That way there is approximately the same number of people in the same proportion. There was only one person in the target group that was working in the field that was closer to social services than health care. However, it is important to remember that the structure of social and health care field is different in the United States than it is in Finland, and that is why many of the jobs cannot be categorized to one or another. My experience is that social and health care field is more combined in the United States than it is in Finland.

## 8. DISCUSSION

This research showed that Finnish social and health care workers can find work fairly easily in the United States and that Finnish schools and education really is respected in the job market. Generally there is a demand for Finnish workers in social and health care in the United States and even though there is not so much immigration that there used to be in the 1990's those who move there, find the experience positive and often end up staying for longer periods than one or two years. Finnish people find the integration to the society to be quite easy and contacts to other Finnish immigrants make it even easier. At the same time it is important for Finnish immigrants to keep up their Finnish identity and culture.

The study proves that there is a need for organizations that keep up Finnish culture, heritage and language. In Michigan and Illinois there are several different associations that arrange meetings, parties and events. One of them is Finnish Cultural Center and Hall in Farmington Hills, Michigan. Schools where children can learn more Finnish are very popular all over the world and they have an important role in keeping up the Finnish culture and language for children with Finnish parent or parents. All these activities make a big importance in the lives of Finnish immigrants and help them to feel like home.

I was very happy that I found twelve interviewees for the research. After some difficulties in the beginning of the process, I ended up getting a lot of contacts and possible interviewees. Lack of time was partly the reason why I did not take more than twelve interviewees, but at the same time I feel like twelve is large enough group to get fair and truthful information for the study.

This research opens many possibilities for new studies. It would be interesting to find people who lived in the United States working in the social services or health care and moved back to Finland permanently. The results could be compared to the results of this study. That would bring new information also about people who are returnees. It would be interesting to find out why did they want to move back and how long did they stay.

The study is written in English and that brought definitely more challenges to the whole process. The writing has been slower and more difficult. Naturally it is more difficult for me to express myself in English. However, I wanted to write in English because I think it will be more beneficial for me in the future when looking for work and it also trains my language skills. The fact that this study is written in English also benefits more readers than it would if it was written in Finnish.

The whole process of writing this thesis became longer than it was planned in the beginning. The theory part was difficult for me to demarcate. I would have wanted to tell more about Finnish social and health care workers in the United States and today's immigration in general and more about the previous research but I run out of time. Nevertheless, I feel like this study was very successful. The research study itself taught me a lot and the interviews gave me a great material to write a study that is reliable and successful. Part of the study was written in Michigan and part of it in Finland. The study was challenging but educational and it took more time than I expected. I am happy that I got to be working on this study and I hope it will help to bring more studies about immigration and that it is a good foundation for new studies.

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## APPENDIX 1/1

**Hyvä Yhdysvalloissa asuva suomalainen,**

Olen Michiganin Three Riversissä asuva Vaasan Ammattikorkeakoulun sosionomiopiskelija, ja teen opinnäytetyötäni Yhdysvalloissa asuvista suomalaisista sosiaali- ja terveysalan työntekijöistä. Tutkimus on nimeltään ”Finnish Social and Health Care Professionals in the United States of America”. Valmis työ on englanninkielinen. Opinnäytetyöhöni kuuluu osana tutkimus, johon tarvitsen apuasi!

Etsin tutkimuksen kohderyhmäksi haastateltavia. Haastattelu on noin 30-45 minuuttia kestävä. Se käydään kasvotusten ja nauhoitetaan, jotta tiedot saadaan ylös täsmällisinä kirjoittamista varten. Haastattelulla kerättävän tiedon avulla tulen kirjoittamaan tutkimuksen Yhdysvaltoihin muuttaneista sosiaali- ja terveysalan työntekijöiden asemasta työmarkkinoilla, kokemuksista siirtolaisena Yhdysvalloissa ja tulevaisuuden näkymästä. Tutkimus on tärkeää koottaessa tietoa nykyajan muuttoliikkeen syistä ja muuttaneiden kokemuksista Yhdysvalloissa työskentelystä. Tieto tulee olemaan arvokasta myös tulevien siirtolaisuustutkimusten pohjaksi.

Annetut tiedot tullaan käsittelemään luottamuksellisesti ja ne tulevat vain tutkimuskäyttöön. Tutkimus tehdään Vaasan Ammattikorkeakoululle ja Siirtolaisuusinstituutille. Vastaajan henkilöllisyyttä ei yhdistetä annettuihin tietoihin eikä tulla paljastamaan missään vaiheessa. Tutkimuksen valmistuttua haastatteluja ei tulla käyttämään muihin tarkoituksiin ja haastattelumateriaali tuhoaan. Valmis tutkimus tulee olemaan luettavissa internetissä Siirtolaisuusinstituutin Web Reports-julkaisuissa.

Jos kiinnostuksenne heräsi, olkaa hyvä ja ottakaa minuun yhteyttä, niin voimme järjestää ajan haastattelulle!

[sannabrundirks@yahoo.com](mailto:sannabrundirks@yahoo.com) tai puhelimitse 269-718-\*\*\*\*

Kiitos ajastanne! Yhteydenottonne on minulle erittäin arvokas!

Vastauksistanne kiittäen,

Sanna Brundirks

sosionomiopiskelija, Vaasan Ammattikorkeakoulu

Siirtolaisuusinstituutti

## APPENDIX 2/1

Dear Finnish American,

I am a student of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences majoring in social services and I live in Three Rivers, Michigan. I am working on my thesis about Finnish social and health care workers who live in the United States. The official name of the thesis is “Finnish Social and Health Care Professionals in the United States of America.” The complete thesis will be written in English. The thesis includes a research and for that I need your help!

I am looking for interviewees for the target group of the research. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview will be done face to face and it will be recorded so that the information can be studied specifically for the writing process. The information received from the interviews will be the main source in writing the thesis about Finnish workers position and state in labor market, personal experiences as an immigrant in the United States and their future. The research is important in finding information about the reasons for the immigration today and the experiences in the work life of the immigrants in America. The information will also be valuable source for new immigration studies.

All the given information will be handled confidentially and it will only be for research purposes. The research will be made for Vaasa University of Applied Sciences and The Institute of Migration. The identity of the interviewees will not be connected to the research or revealed in any case. The interviews will not be used in other purposes after the thesis is ready and the interview material will be destroyed. The complete study will be available for reading online in the Web Reports series of the Institute of Migration.

If you are interested, please, contact me and we can set time for the interview!

[sannabrundirks\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:sannabrundirks(at)yahoo.com) or by phone 269-718-\*\*\*\*

Thank you for your time! Your contact is very valuable!

Thank you for your answer,

Sanna Brundirks

Social Services, Vaasa University of Applied Sciences

Institute of Migration

## APPENDIX 1/2

## Tutkimuslupa

Olen halukas osallistumaan Sanna Brundirksin laatimaan tutkimukseen ”Finnish Social and Health Care Professionals in the United States of America”. Olen lukenut tutkimuksen kuvauksen ja antamaani haastattelua saa käyttää lähteenä laadittaessa tutkimusta Vaasan Ammattikorkeakoululle ja Siirtolaisuusinstituutille keväällä 2011.

Nimi: \_\_\_\_\_

Puhelin: \_\_\_\_\_

Allekirjoitus: \_\_\_\_\_

Päivämäärä: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2/2

## Research Permit

I am willing to take part to a research, compiled by Sanna Brundirks, called "Finnish Social and Health Care Professionals in the United States of America". I have read the prescription of the research and my interview can be used as a source when the research is compiled for Vaasa University of Applied Sciences and Institute of Migration in spring 2011.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 1/3

Haastattelurunko (puolistrukturoitu teemahaastattelu)

-perustiedot (ikä, siviilisääty, asuinpaikka)

-koulutus (Suomessa vai Yhdysvalloissa)

-muutto Yhdysvaltoihin (miksi, milloin, veto ja työntötekijät)

-työllistyminen (ongelmat, esteet, koulutuksen pätevyys, jatkokoulutus)

-työ Yhdysvalloissa (hyvät puolet, huonot puolet, vaikeudet)

-työskentely amerikkalaisten kanssa (asenteet, käytös, vastaanotto)

\* \* \*

-kontaktit paikallisiin (työn ulkopuolella)

-kontaktit amerikansuomalaisiin ja muihin maahanmuuttajiin (verkostot, toiminta)

-sopeutuminen kulttuuriin ja viihtyminen ja vapaa-aika (oma ja perheen)

-kielen merkitys sopeutumisessa

-siteet Suomeen

-tulevaisuus (odotukset, tavoitteet, suunnitelmat)

## APPENDIX 2/3

## Interview Outline (Half structured theme interview)

- Basics (age, marital status, place of residence)
- Education (in Finland or in the United States)
- The move to the United States (why, when, push and pull factors)
- Employment (problems, obstacles, qualification of education, continuing education)
- Work in the United States (good sides, bad sides, difficulties)
- Work with Americans (attitudes, behavior, reception)

\* \* \*

- Contacts to locals (outside the work life)
- Contacts to Finnish Americans and other immigrants (networks, activities)
- Adaptation to the culture, comfort and spare time (own and family)
- The meaning of the language in the adaptation process
- Bonds to Finland
- Future (expectations, goals, plans)