Addressing Mental Health Stigma and Awareness in Middle Eastern Immigrant Families through
Culturally Sensitive Practice and Intervention

A Graduate Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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School Psychology

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ABSTRACT

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA AND AWARENESS IN MIDDLE EASTERN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES THROUGH CULTURALLY SENSITIVE PRACTICE AND INTERVENTION

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According to the California Department of Education (2021), as of Fall of 2020, 6,378 students from Afghanistan, 1,813 students from Armenia, 1,291 students from Egypt, 1,278 students from Ukraine, 1,085 students from Yemen, 1,028 students from Pakistan, 997 students from Israel, and 917 students from Iran were reported to be immigrants in California’s public and private schools. Within this report, studies found that refugee children and adolescents may develop psychological distress in response to the trauma they have experienced and are experiencing, such as fear, sadness, apathy, inattention, anger, irritability, separation anxiety, sleep disturbances, somatic complaints (e.g., headaches and stomachaches), and school problems (American Psychological Association, 2008). In response, however, Middle Eastern families were more reluctant to seek mental health services to support family members due to the impact of mental health stigma stemming from social factors, minimal knowledge, and stigmatizing beliefs and attitudes about mental illness (Zolezzi, Alamri, Shaar, & Rainkie, 2018; Coker, 2005). This review of literature identifies the importance of school personnel becoming culturally aware and competent regarding the struggles and trauma immigrant and refugee children and their families have faced in order to offer them meaningful support in the most
effective way. Educators and school districts are encouraged to create a welcoming and collaborative environment for immigrant families, so they develop protective factors and feel supported with helping their children succeed academically and social-emotionally. Evidence-based interventions were examined and selected to help support immigrant and refugee students successfully access their education, as well as cope with internalizing feelings and externalizing behaviors that resulted from their previous home-life and school experiences. The importance of parent involvement, as well as strategies to build positive home-school relationships was also identified to help families feel welcomed in their child’s new school, as well as become an integral part of their child’s education.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of Need

According to the California Department of Education (2021), the data collected in Fall of 2020 showed that in Los Angeles Unified School District, 20,575 students were reported as immigrants. Data gathered in Fall of 2020 also showed that 6,378 students from Afghanistan, 1,813 students from Armenia, 1,291 students from Egypt, 1,278 students from Ukraine, 1,085 students from Yemen, 1,028 students from Pakistan, 997 students from Israel, and 917 students from Iran were reported to be immigrants in California’s public and private schools. As the prevalence of families emigrating from war-torn countries in the Middle East to the United States of America increases, it is important that schools are prepared for the “culture shock” these children and families will experience as they begin to familiarize themselves with their new country and new way of life. Immigrant and refugee children may be feeling nervous, scared, or unsafe when attending an unfamiliar school, away from their family. First generation children from immigrant households may struggle with balancing their family expectations and values, while also assimilating to societal values. It is important that educators are equipped with the tools needed to help support and understand refugee, immigrant and first-generation children and their families as they navigate a new language, a new community, and a new education system. Educators must develop a sense of cultural competency through professional development opportunities to help them gain knowledge of Middle Eastern cultural values, and the impact it may have as they acculturate and assimilate to American society. By equipping educators and school districts with tools on how to create a welcoming and collaborative environment for our immigrant families, these families will develop protective factors and feel supported with
helping their children succeed academically and social-emotionally. Ultimately, it is essential that school administrators and staff are prepared to offer culturally appropriate support and intervention within their schools, while also building on the strengths contributed from each family. Children and families need to feel heard, respected, and celebrated by those outside of their culture to develop a trusting relationship. Schools will be able to establish a positive school-family partnership once cultural values are explored and understood by all individuals.

Purpose of Graduate Project

The purpose of this project is to offer knowledge to educators and school administrators on the challenges that Middle Eastern immigrant families have experienced, explore strategies to successfully and appropriately support immigrant and refugee children, and to understand the impact that mental health stigma has on discouraging families from receiving and seeking support for their children. Children as young as kindergarten have experienced economic, political, and social instability have shaped the way they see their world today. This three hour workshop provided to K-12 school districts will help educators explore Middle Eastern cultures and address the challenges that immigrant, refugee, and first generation students in their classrooms may be facing due to their circumstances, such as trauma, depression, anxiety, anger, and confusion that may impact their academic functioning. This workshop will be available in person, as well as, via an online platform, as it is created to be easily accessible to all educators. Topics will address what the Middle East is, the impact of trauma, the history behind mental health stigma, cultural sensitivity within a school setting, the need for school-based interventions, and the importance of parent involvement and building relationships. Scenarios, examples of evidence-based interventions, and online resources will also be explored and
provided for educators to offer additional knowledge on how to create a positive and welcoming school climate, and to pass along any resources or information to families as needed.

Terminology

❖ **Acculturation**: A developmental process of change in which individuals usually adjust to a new culture by merging their native traditions with those of the new culture (Elizalde-Utnick, 2010).

❖ **Acculturation Stress**: Difficulties that immigrants may experience related to trying to adjust to the new cultural or societal norms of their new host country (Asnaani et. al., 2021).

❖ **Assimilation**: The process of giving up original cultural identity to take on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the majority culture (Elizalde-Utnick, 2010).

❖ **Collectivism**: A philosophy that the psychosocial unit of identity resides in the family, group, or collective society (Sue & Sue, 2016, p. 748).

❖ **Cultural Brokering**: It is the act of bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001).

❖ **Cultural Competence**: Awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to function effectively within culturally diverse populations (Sue & Sue, 2016, p.748).

❖ **Cultural Incompetence**: When counselors unwittingly impose their standards of normality and abnormality upon culturally diverse clients without consideration of cultural differences (Sue & Sue, 2016, p.748).

❖ **Cultural Values**: Values held in common by a cultural group that helps shape worldviews and the perceptions of individuals of that culture (Sue & Sue, 2016. p.748).
❖ **Culture Shock:** A sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

❖ **First Generation:** (a) Of or relating to an immigrant or immigrants to a new country; (b) Of or relating to a person or persons whose parents are immigrants (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, n.d.).

❖ **Immigrant:** People who have moved to the United States from the country where they previously resided (Sue & Sue, 2016, p.768).

❖ **Mental Health Stigma:** Perception that individuals with mental health disorders are weak, flawed, dangerous, and socially incompetent (Wahl and Harman, 1989; Wahl, 2003).

❖ **Protective Factor:** A characteristic at the biological, psychological, family, or community level that is associated with lower likelihood of problem outcomes or that reduces the negative impact of a risk factor on problem outcomes (The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009).

❖ **Refugee:** Individuals who flee their country of origin in order to escape persecution or oppression (Sue & Sue, 2016, p.768).

❖ **Risk Factor:** A characteristic at the biological, psychological, family or cultural level that precedes and is associated with a higher likelihood of problem outcomes (The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009).

❖ **Trauma:** A very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

This literature review will begin by providing an overview of the countries that make up the Middle East, as well as their various cultural values, customs, and religious practices to provide the reader with some background knowledge. Then, the topic of trauma and the impact it has had on Middle Eastern children will be discussed. Following this topic, mental health stigma and the history behind mental health stigma in Middle Eastern communities will be explained to offer knowledge and understanding prior to discussing the importance of building relationships amongst Middle Eastern families. Next, achieving cultural sensitivity within a school setting will be explored, as well as the importance of building school-home relationships. The need for culturally sensitive school-based interventions will be discussed to target academic challenges, internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety, depression, and trauma, and externalizing behavior, such as defiance, physical aggression, or bullying. Lastly, the importance of family involvement in school-based interventions and in their child’s overall education is explained.

What is the Middle East?

According to Sewilam et. al. (2016), the Middle East can be defined as “the countries of southwest Asia and North Africa.” The countries of the Middle East include Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The Middle East may also extend to the countries of Afghanistan, the Comoros, Djibouti, Maghreb, Pakistan, Sudan, and Somalia (Pariona, 2020). The largest ethnic group in the Middle East are Arabs, followed by Iranian and Turkish people, and Arabic is the most common language spoken. Mohit (2002),...
wrote that 90% of people in the Middle East are Muslims who practice Islam, which not only is their main religion, but also their way of life. It is important to note that Christianity and Judaism are also commonly practiced religions in those areas.

Arabs first immigrated to the United States in the late 1800s. A majority of Arab Americans are native born in the United States and have ethnic ties to one of the Arab countries. About 56% of Arab Americans trace their ancestry to Lebanon, 14% from Syria, 11% from Egypt, 9% from Palestine, 4% from Jordan, and 2% from other Arab countries. (El Badry, 2006). According to research conducted by Nassar-McMillan and Hakim-Larson (2003) and Suleiman (1999), Arab American Immigrants arrived to America in two major waves. The first was between 1875 and World War II when Arab Christians from Lebanon and Syria immigrated to America for economic reasons. After World War II, the second wave of Palestinians, Iraqis, and Syrians immigrated to the United States to escape Arab-Israeli conflicts and civil war during the late 1940s. This history is important to consider as these individuals came to America to escape the turmoil their homeland was facing and to find a new way of life.

Arab families who immigrate to America also bring along their cultural and family values. In particular, family obligations, interdependence among members in the family, and hospitality are considered very important (Nassar-McMillan, 2011). Children may be faced with high expectations and a pressure to conform due to the group orientation. Arab culture is described as a collectivistic culture, meaning that the success or failure of an individual in the family reflects on the entire family, leading to stress and anxiety surrounding this personal responsibility to maintain social behavior and success. Arab parents also expect to remain a part of their child’s life for as long as possible and do not expect their children to leave the home until marriage. There is a strong sense of community and identity that revolves around their faith in
God and their cultural beliefs. The man is also believed to be the head of the household. These are important factors to consider as community members and educators interact and become familiar with Arab individuals, whether they recently emigrated from their country or if they are first generation individuals with roots in Arab countries.

It is also important that individuals are aware of the beauty of Middle Eastern cultures and acknowledge the cultural strengths that these people bring to America. Nassar-McMillan (2011) shares that Arab Americans have high levels of educational and economic success. This may be due to their ability to acculturate and assimilate quickly, despite how difficult it may be for them in a new country.

When dealing with prejudice and discrimination from a larger society, Middle Eastern family and community supports serve as protective factors. Families can provide resources to help bear personal issues and problems. Specifically, newer Arab Americans receive support and acceptance within Arab communities. Being a part of a religious community can also provide guidance and support when navigating their problems. Overall, Middle Eastern families should feel that their culture is celebrated and valued in order to feel at home in their new country.

**What is Trauma?**

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines trauma as a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time. Refugee children in particular may experience psychological distress due to exposure to indirect trauma, direct trauma, and intergenerational trauma transferred between family members (Baker & Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999). An article written by Fazel and Stein (2002) explained trauma that refugee children face in three different stages. The first stage of trauma is explained as when the children are forced to flee their homes to escape war and combat, meaning that they were exposed to the
The cruelties of the war. The second stage is the trip to America, which may often be a long and dangerous journey that may include children being separated from their families. Lastly, the final stage includes the difficulties with acculturating to the American culture and adjusting to a new culture and language. Their families are also faced with establishing themselves financially and socially (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

Refugee children and adolescents may develop psychological distress in response to the trauma they have and are experiencing, such as fear, sadness, apathy, inattention, anger, irritability, separation anxiety, sleep disturbances, somatic complaints (e.g., headaches and stomachaches), and school problems (American Psychological Association, 2008). Some children may also experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a psychiatric disorder followed by a traumatic event, which may manifest itself in re-experiencing the trauma, avoidance of trauma-related stimuli or emotional numbing, and hyperarousal (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [AACAP], 2010). Symptoms may also include sleep difficulties, irritability, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, oppositional behavior, separation anxiety, fears, apathy, and other impairments, including reduced academic achievement.

An article by Birman et. al. (2007), shared that although symptoms of traumatic stress may manifest themselves at school as academic and behavioral problems, they are often not recognized as mental health concerns. The authors continued to explain that without valid, culturally sensitive assessment, it will be difficult to distinguish whether the immigrant child’s difficulties are due to cultural adjustment struggles or disabilities, and may lead to their difficulties going unaddressed for years prior to ruling out behaviors related to cultural maladjustment. Roy and Roxas (2011) also added that “educators who work with refugee families and students have little prior training or knowledge of how trauma can affect a person’s
motivation to be engaged in schooling” (p.524). Fear and anxiety from previous negative experiences with authorities or events prior to arriving to the United States may be manifested in the lack of comfort or ability for students to communicate in class or for parents to communicate in meetings. It is important for educators to identify if their students are showing signs of these behaviors in order to offer support and resources to them and their families.

What is Mental Health Stigma?

Mental health stigma can be defined as the perception that individuals with mental health disorders are weak, flawed, dangerous, and socially incompetent (Wahl and Harman, 1989; Wahl, 2003). The World Health Organization reports that overall stigma affects an individual's self-esteem, disrupts family relationships, limits access to employment, healthcare, educational opportunities, and housing, and therefore is a cause of discrimination and exclusion. Corrigan and Penn (1999) shared that mental health stigma occurs when the public endorses stereotypes about mental illness and acts on these stereotypes, which result in negative attitudes that motivate the public to reject, fear, avoid, and discriminate against individuals struggling with mental illness. Overall, individuals who are living with mental illnesses are having to bear the burden of coping with the symptoms of their mental illness, such as anxiety, depression, and hallucinations, as well as cope with the social stigmatization of their condition (Rusch, Angermeyer, & Corrigan, 2005). Negative attitudes may also influence these individuals’ living, working, learning, and ability to establish and maintain friendships.

Corrigan (2004) defines mental health stigma in four social-cognitive processes, cues, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Cues include an individual’s physical appearance, impaired social skills, and psychiatric symptoms as identified by the general public. Stereotypes result when individuals with mental illness are perceived as incompetent, weak or dangerous.
This can lead to the third process, prejudice. The general public may believe in these stereotypes, thus resulting in prejudice behaviors against the individual. Lastly, discrimination may occur against these individuals, which may lead to bullying and societal exclusion. Corrigan (2014) added that the consequences of stigma can affect an individual's self-esteem, decrease opportunities for social interactions, and reducing the likelihood of seeking care to address the mental health problem.

Additionally, Ahmedani (2011) explains the three specific levels of stigma as social stigma, self-stigma, and health professional stigma that can each create barriers for individuals with mental health or behavioral difficulties to access help and support. Social stigma is defined as “a belief held by a large faction of society in which persons with the stigmatized condition are less equal or are part of an inferior group” (p. 4). If social stigma continues to impact the individual, they may start believing that they themselves are inadequate and may start feeling guilty about their own condition, thus exhibiting self-stigma (Corrigan, 2004). This may impact a person’s self-esteem or self-efficacy, ultimately altering their behavior (Corrigan, 2007). Sewilam et. al. (2014) also added that social stigma that has become internalized may “threaten quality of life, disrupt social relationships, and decrease the likelihood that persons with mental illness seek mental health services or obtain employment”. Lastly, health professional stigma is considered the stereotyped attitudes that health professionals have towards their clients (Ahmedani, 2011). Desai, Rosenheck, Druss, and Perlin (2002) found that individuals with mental health illness believed that once health professionals in general health settings became aware of the individual’s mental health condition, they were not given the same care as someone who does not have a mental health illness. On the other hand, health professionals’ attitudes may also reflect more of a helping role, rather than reflecting typical social stigma.
When addressing mental health stigma amongst adolescents, a study was conducted on 57 8th grade students who were interviewed to find out their attitudes and views on mental health (Chandra & Minkovitz, 2007). Findings included that the adolescent’s willingness and comfort to address their mental health concerns relies heavily on how family members, peers, and school staff respond to them seeking mental health care. Specifically, more than half of the respondents shared similar beliefs that their parents would disapprove of seeking help, dismiss any mental health concerns, and would not adapt well to their child needing help for a “mental health issue”. On the other hand, teens who have positive mental health attitudes attribute this to positive personal experiences when accessing services and acquiring accurate mental health knowledge. Furthermore, the authors recommended that those offering students mental health services should be mindful of the stigmatizing attitudes towards mental health services and the viewpoints those in their social network may have that may influence the child’s willingness to seek and receive support. It is important to understand the perspectives these adolescents have, as well as the biases their peers and family members may hold to ensure a successful treatment plan.

History Behind Mental Health Stigma in Middle Eastern Communities

Prior to investigating how schools within the United States can help support refugee and immigrant students through culturally sensitive interventions, it is important to understand the history behind the reluctance to seek mental health support from Middle Eastern families.

Zolezzi, Alamri, Shaar, and Rainkie (2018) conducted a comprehensive literature review on the stigmatizing beliefs, actions, and attitudes of Arab individuals toward individuals with mental health conditions. A majority of the studies they reviewed found that seeking God or faith healers as a first-approach to mental health healing was more preferable than seeking mental health services. This may also be due to the stigmatizing beliefs linked to reports of individuals
distancing themselves from the family, mental illness harming the family’s reputation, and feelings of shame. A majority of studies also found that Arab populations across many Middle Eastern countries saw mental illness as “God’s punishment, God’s will, evil eye, demons, spirits, paranormal phenomena, supernatural curse, and magic about people with mental illness” (Zolezzi, Alamri, Shaar, & Rainkie, 2018, p. 605). Rusch et. al. (2005) also reported that mental illness can be considered as a sign of weakness, and a source of shame or disgrace if the individual’s illness becomes known to the public. For example, Coker (2005) found that individuals from Egypt believed that behavioral disorders are often met with social rejection, such as social disapproval, devaluation of family members with mental illness, diminished marital prospects, and increase in social distance. They are considered “crazy” or “mad”, harmful to others, having impaired reasoning, and are responsible for their own illness. These beliefs are important to consider when understanding the history behind mental health stigma in Middle Eastern countries.

Eapen and Ghubush (2004) surveyed 325 parents of children with mental health struggles in the United Arab Emirates to gather information on their thoughts regarding their child’s mental health. The researchers found that 38% of those surveyed would seek mental health services if a family member developed a psychiatric problem. Reasons behind their reluctance to seek services include that their hesitance in acknowledging that their family member has a mental illness, the stigma attached to their family member needing to seek services, and the skepticism about the effectiveness of mental health services. However, those with better parental education, better occupations, and socioeconomic status were more willing to utilize mental health services. Therefore, it is important that individuals offering support understand how the
parents may perceive mental health disorders and services, as well as the sociocultural factors that may impact their willingness to seek treatment for their child or other family members.

Moreover, a study conducted with 104 Jordanian individuals found through surveys that adolescents seeking treatment for psychosis were not further stigmatized, and instead these children were perceived as receiving more help compared to other children with psychosis who do not seek treatment (Gearing, Brewer, Schwalbe, Mackenzie, & Ibrahim, 2013). Additionally, the researchers found the belief that engaging children and their families in mental health treatment may help improve the child’s outcomes. Although this positive perception is uncommon, as shown in previous studies, it is important to understand that not all Middle Eastern families negatively perceive mental health treatment.

Sewilam et.al. (2014) proposed interventions to help reduce stigma related to mental illnesses among Middle Eastern communities. The first intervention is aimed at educating families “to support their affected members in overcoming shame and seeking treatment” (p. 116). This can be addressed through promoting social support not only from family members, but also from friends, neighbors, and community members to help close the distance between the individual with mental health needs and their community. Additional interventions promote engaging traditional healers and religious leaders with mental health specialists to help support the individual, encourage them to seek treatment, and reduce social distancing and discrimination between the individual and their community. Lastly, educating young individuals in their school, medical, nursing, and ancillary mental health training facilities on the impact of mental health stigma can help bring awareness to the problem and reduce stigmatizing attitudes. These interventions can be considered and adapted to help support students within the school system coping with externalizing behaviors and internalizing feelings in a culturally sensitive manner.
Cultural Sensitivity in a School Setting

Within the school and community settings, understanding the effects of migration stress and acculturation stress are beneficial in promoting cultural sensitivity. Bigram et. al. (2007) defines migration stress as “the difficulties resulting from disruptions in children’s everyday lives when removed from a familiar environment” (p.14). Some children may experience “cultural bereavement” or a sense of loss of their past life, cultural context, surrounding, friends, and family left behind. Parents and grandparents may feel this sense of loss more heavily as it was their decision to emigrate from their home country, which children will witness within their homes. Schools should play a part in giving immigrant youth the opportunity to receive social support from ethnic adults and peers who may help them cope emotionally with adapting to their recent changes and offer orientation to their new American culture.

The level of acculturative stress that the child and family is experiencing should also be acknowledged when practicing cultural sensitivity. Bigram et. al. (2007), defines acculturative stress as “challenges that children and their families face in adjusting to the new culture in settlement” (p. 14). These students may struggle with integrating aspects of two cultures into their own cultural identity. In their 2005, Vedder, Boekaerts, and Seegers found that immigrant students are more likely to succeed in school when acquiring competence in the new culture, however, Phinney (1990) also added that a positive ethnic identity is also important for a students’ psychological well-being. Conflict and misunderstanding may develop when acculturation gaps between parents and children result from children acculturating to the American culture and language faster than their parents, who may be more connected to their native culture compared to their children who are more eager to learn the ways of the new culture. Birman (2006), shared that when students are able to maintain ties to their culture, they
are less likely to experience stress from taking on the responsibilities of translating, or “cultural brokering”, for their family members because it lessens the possibility of family conflict or acculturation gaps. When schools understand how acculturative stress may play a part in a students’ home life, they can help support the connection between the student and their culture by assisting them in reaching out to their parents and offering resources to help strengthen the home-school relationship.

It is important to understand that culture, values, and religion can differ significantly between Middle Eastern communities, specifically between Arab American and Muslim American communities, therefore, educators must determine the background and beliefs of each family prior to assuming and responding in a stereotypical manner (Sue & Sue, 2016). Some families may be more acculturated or assimilated than others, while some may have strong and traditional cultural and religious standards. It is important to acknowledge that children may acculturate more quickly than their parents, which may cause generational acculturation conflicts. For families who adhere to the traditional hierarchical family structure, this may cause pressure and stress on children who are expected to behave appropriately and according to their parents' standards. By understanding the child’s role within the family, educators can better understand the child’s struggles and offer the most appropriate support while also respecting their family expectations.

Amri (2010) and Ibrahim & Dykemon (2011) provided recommendations for clinicians when working with Arab American and Muslim American clients to encourage cultural sensitivity. These recommendations are also beneficial for interacting with Arab immigrant families within the school setting as they offers valuable insight on positive interactions and understanding of their culture. First, it is important for the clinician or educator to identify their
own attitudes about Arab Americans and Middle Eastern immigrants. It is also important to recognize that these individuals face discrimination and violence because of their background or religious beliefs. Middle Eastern communities are diverse groups, as recent immigrants are more likely to hold stronger traditional values and beliefs. Educators must collaborate with each family to gain an understanding of their lifestyle and beliefs. They can determine the structure of the family through questions and observations as necessary and identify if the traditional families appear highly interdependent. Amri (2010) and Ibrahim and Dykemon (2011) warned individuals to be careful of self-disclosures as they may be interpreted as a sign of weakness, however positive self-disclosures may enhance the relationship. Arab American families may be reluctant to share family issues or express any of their negative feelings. Families will feel more comfortable with being a part of their new society once feeling that their social issues, family life, economics, business, and other aspects of life are respected and taken into consideration.

Similar to recommendations for working with Arab American and Muslim American clients and families, Bemak and Chung (2014) and Burnett and Thompson (2005) also offered culturally sensitive recommendations to consider when working with refugee families. First, it is important for counselors or educators to conduct their own self-assessments to explore their own attitudes towards immigrants and refugees as it is important for these families to build interpersonal relationships and social networks. It is important to remember that multiple stressors surround immigrants and refugees, such as the stress of migrating to and living in a different country, learning a different language, and navigating new social, economic, political, educational, and social systems, which may be confusing and frightening for these families. Day to day stressors may include limited resources, lack of employment opportunities, or frustrating interactions with different agencies. By inquiring about the family or students' beliefs regarding
the causes of their difficulties and understanding and validating the conceptualization of their pressing problems, culturally relevant services can be appropriately provided as the families will feel seen and heard. Families may be impacted by poverty, fear of immigration, parents working multiple jobs, and a lack of extended family support. Additionally, it is beneficial to take into account environmental factors, language barriers, and potential exposure to discrimination and hostility when practicing cultural sensitivity to offer appropriate support and resources to the families. Individuals impacted by their refugee experience may show symptoms of post-traumatic stress or other mental disorders, such as nightmares, avoidance, hopelessness, or negative beliefs about themselves or others. It is important to identify and address these feelings when observed in refugee and immigrant children in schools to consider the impact it is having on their academics and social-emotional functioning and offer culturally sensitive interventions.

Need for School-Based Interventions

In an article written to educate school personnel on supporting refugee children and youth, NASP (2015) emphasized the importance of recognizing the effect of trauma on school functioning. They stated that extreme stress, adversity, and trauma can impact a student’s cognitive functioning, concentration, memory, and social relationships. The stress these students are feeling can cause internalized symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, grief, fear, anger or isolation, as well as cause externalized behaviors, such as startle responses, reactivity, and aggression. Many of these students may have experienced interruptions in their schooling, as well as language gaps, leaving them unprepared to effectively participate in their new school.

A study was conducted by Dryden-Peterson (2015) on refugee children in countries of first-asylum, countries that provide refugees with temporary protection pending resettlement, to explore what aspects of their previous educational experience are important for U.S. teachers and
school personnel to understand. When researching refugee students from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Uganda and Burundi, Somali refugees in Kenya, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Malaysia, and Syrian refugees from Egypt. Dryden-Peterson (2015) found that the four educational experiences that have significant implications on their schooling in the United States include limited and disrupted educational opportunities, language barriers to educational access, inadequate quality of instruction, and discrimination in the school setting. Specifically in Syria, Akbarzadeh and Conduit (2016) found that Syria had the second worst school attendance rate in the world due to the war conflict, and that 2.8 million Syrian children were not attending school in 2014. In Aleppo, Syria’s largest city, school attendance was about 6%. When considering these findings, teacher’s and school personnel should be equipped and prepared to offer culturally sensitive school-based interventions to address classroom and academic functioning, internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety, stress, and trauma, and externalizing behaviors, such as aggression and bullying.

Classroom Strategies & Interventions

In general, culturally sensitive interventions for immigrant students, including those from Middle Eastern backgrounds, are crucial for students to effectively access their new school environment (Elizalde-Utnick, 2007). When designing effective instructional interventions, teachers should keep in mind the student’s level of acculturation in order to tailor their academic approach to best support their academic needs. For example, teachers can contextualize instruction by making connections between what the student already knows and new information. Additionally, teachers can implement differentiated instructional strategies to help support students within the classroom. Differentiated instructional strategies include previewing key academic vocabulary before each lesson, scaffolding important concepts, contextualizing
vocabulary, providing photo illustrations and manipulatives providing support or scaffolding materials in the students’ first language, teaching concepts and vocabulary in the students’ first language through a community volunteer or a proficient bilingual peer, and providing translated key concepts to preview at home. When implementing these strategies, it is important to consider the student’s school readiness level, learning style preferences, language dominance, and interests.

Schools within the United States offer a variety of English Language Learner programs that range from full day bilingual instruction to pulling the student out of the mainstream classroom for a few periods a day, also known as an English as a Second Language Program (ESL). A full day bilingual program offers students instruction in various academic subjects in their native language with English as one of the subjects. According to Boyson and Short (2003), some schools have included “newcomer” programs for students who have had disrupted or no prior education for more extensive academic support. Some mainstream classrooms also employ the “Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol” (SIOP), which is a program that provides scaffolded or supportive educational techniques for ELL students within the mainstream classroom. This empirically validated program offers ELL students opportunities to participate in mainstream classrooms, rather than pull out services, so that they may also benefit from enhanced instruction, group work, and multisensory lesson plans (Boyson & Short, 2003). Furthermore, these programs can help reduce acculturative and migration stress for ELL students and help them adapt to their new school environment. Specifically, the ELL classes can provide ways for students to get to know other students from different countries and help normalize their experience or make them feel more comfortable about their own identity (Birman, 2002, 2005).

Berry and colleagues (2006) conducted a national study on immigrant youth that found
that adolescents who experienced more discrimination are less likely to experience biculturalism. This discrimination has led adolescents to either assimilate or distance themselves from their culture or to reject their new American society, rather than find ways to integrate the two together. In schools, it is important that immigrant students feel supported when exploring their own culture, while also adapting to the new American culture. Birman et. al. (2007) have explored ways for immigrant students to endorse a variety of acculturative styles and for schools to create more opportunities for successful adaptations. Schools can display art or information in the form of posters or pictures around the school about immigrant cultures and languages. A program in Chicago called “Changing Worlds” collected stories and pictures from immigrant families to display their migration story, a map of their country, and their family picture to foster a sense of hospitality, interest in different cultures, and inclusion within the school setting. Some schools also hold school wide events or assemblies to incorporate the history and culture of different immigrants, such as holding seasonal celebrations or anniversaries of important historical events and inviting families to take part in it (Trickett & Birman, 1989).

Within the classroom itself, teachers can incorporate immigrant cultures into the history or social studies curriculum and ask parents or students to talk about their backgrounds and experiences (Birman et. al., 2007). By utilizing lesson plans and techniques, ELL teachers can help enhance students’ mental health and teach them English by providing them with opportunities to share their experience and receive support from peers (Birman, 2002, 2005). A study conducted by Kozulin (2006) researched the effectiveness of Concentrated Reinforcement Lessons (CoRel) with immigrant students in Israel. This academic intervention utilizes principles of mediated learning, which aim to help immigrant student’s transition into inclusive classrooms, specifically in the areas of reading comprehension and mathematics. According to the authors,
the CoRel uses “culturally sensitive principles of mediated learning and integrates cognitive functioning and domain-specific learning skills in small groups under intensive supervision” (Bal & Perzigian, 2013 p. 16). This year-long intervention resulted in improvements in immigrant student’s cognitive functioning, math proficiency, and reading comprehension.

**Internalizing Behaviors: Anxiety, Depression, Trauma**

Social emotional support offered through schools is key to addressing feelings of anxiety, depression, or trauma that may be due to the student immigrating to a new country and facing acculturative stress. According to Elizalde-Utnick (2010), symptoms of acculturative stress may include anxiety and depression, feelings of marginality and isolation, elevated psychosomatic symptoms, identity confusion, difficulty in school performance, and family stress. School-based individual or group counseling can be offered to help address the social-emotional impact, however it is important for counselors to take into consideration that interventions within this setting should accommodate the student’s culture and language. Elizalde-Utnick (2010) shared that “Because immigrant students are often vigilant about how they are being perceived and accepted by others, teachers’ and counselors’ verbal and nonverbal responses are especially important” (p. 15). Interventions should help student’s foster a sense of belonging, acceptance, and respect. With that in mind, it is important for school personnel involved to be mindful of acculturation levels of both student and parent, avoid stereotyping, remember that diversity exists within groups, and determine how the student and their family perceive mental health issues.

The Developmental Assets Framework may be a beneficial tool to help school personnel identify areas of need to support refugee and immigrant students within the home, school, and community setting. The Search Institute (1997) created the Developmental Assets Framework to identify the supports and strengths that young individuals need to succeed in their day to day life.
This framework has been translated into multiple languages, with Middle Eastern languages such as Arabic, Farsi, and Armenian amongst them, to be utilized with families, children, and youth of diverse backgrounds. This can help all individuals identify which assets need to be strengthened and which ones they may be struggling with, so that they can become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.

The Search Institute (1997) identified twenty internal assets that specifically focus on the social-emotional strengths and values needed to function successfully in all aspects of life. These include personal skills, commitments, and values required to make good choices, take responsibility for their own lives, and be independent and fulfilled. The four areas school personnel should consider when offering interventions to promote more adaptive internalizing behaviors include the student’s commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. It is important for individuals struggling with a commitment to learning to develop a belief in their own abilities, knowing what they are learning will have a lasting impact. Schools can identify if the student has the motivation to do well in school, if they are actively engaged in school, and if they care about their school.

Schools can also help individuals develop positive values that can help them make healthy life choices. Students who uphold this asset value helping other people, promote equality, practice integrity and honesty, and take personal responsibility for their actions. Some children may struggle with developing social competencies and need guidance on how to interact effectively with others, make difficult decisions, and cope with uncertain or new situations. This may be an area that is still in development for refugee and immigrant children who might be learning how to plan ahead, make choices or develop empathy, sensitivity and friendship skills.
They may still be learning how to resist negative peer pressure or dangerous situations and seek peaceful conflict resolution.

Another internal asset that immigrant and refugee children may struggle with is having a positive identity, such as a belief in their own self-worth and feeling as if they have control over their own well-being. A 2015 NASP article including tips for educators supporting refugee children and youth emphasized the importance of understanding and recognizing the stressors these students may be dealing with from the trauma of premigration and settlement experiences. They may feel they do not have control over the things that happen to them, and may struggle with developing a sense of purpose, self-esteem, and a positive view of their personal future needed for having a positive identity (Search Institute, 2015). When selecting evidence-based interventions to be implemented with immigrant and refugee children, understanding their strengths, weaknesses and identified assets may be beneficial to pinpoint where they need the most emotional support.

The Armenian American School Psychologist Association (AASPA) created a Social Emotional Learning Workbook to be utilized by school psychologists or school counselors with children from Armenia and Artsakh experiencing emotional distress resulting from the attack on Artsakh in September of 2020 (Page, Youssefian, & Ovanessian, n.d). This workbook has been provided in both English and Armenian to assist school personnel in facilitating conversations about the student’s emotions, thoughts, and actions to help improve overall mental health, academic success, and educational performance. The workbook is comprised of activities based on Social Emotional Learning and Cognitive Behavior Therapy to help improve emotional awareness by developing emotional vocabulary and self-awareness, exploring coping skills for
sadness, grief, anxiety, and anger, connecting feelings, thoughts, and actions, and building problem solving skills to aid in developing goal directed behavior.

The AASPA also created strategies, tips, and guidelines presented in both Armenian and English to help implement social emotional learning resources in the classroom for Armenian refugee children (AASPA, n.d). These resources include social-emotional learning in the classroom, checklists that can be posted in both Armenian and English to help show Armenian families how teachers are implementing community-building, belonging and emotional safety, and student centered discipline strategies within their classroom in their native language. AASPA also offers examples of classroom rules and schedules in Armenian and English as a resource for teachers to help Armenian refugee students better understand the classroom expectations. These resources gathered by the AASPA are beneficial to helping teachers and school staff with Armenian refugee students in the classroom to feel more supported and gain a sense of belonging within the school system.

Ehntholt, Smith, and Yule (2005) conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of a school-based cognitive behavioral therapy intervention for refugee children who have experienced war related trauma. The authors found that this 6-week intervention based on the “Children and War: Teaching Recovery Techniques” manual (Smith et al., 2000) helped decrease overall post-traumatic stress symptoms (behavioral difficulties, peer problems, hyperactivity/inattention and low levels of prosocial behavior) in children ages 11 to 15. This manual specifically offered school personnel not trained in mental health with the knowledge and skills to conduct the group interventions. These sessions included activities such as normalizing common experiences in war, stress reactions, and bad dreams through drawing, writing, and group discussion. They also included discussion on nightly routines, relaxing
activities, bodily reactions to stress, coping self-statements, avoidance, scheduling, and looking towards the future. Overall, Ehntholt et. al. (2005) found that “the CBT sessions were successful in providing these children with much needed support and the skills to cope with the trauma-related symptoms they were experiencing” (p. 245). These activities can be adapted to use within the school setting, individually or in groups, with Middle Eastern students, individually or in a group, who may be struggling with navigating internalizing feelings of anxiety and depression.

An additional study evaluated the effectiveness of a school-based cognitive behavioral therapy mental health intervention called Mental Health for Immigrants Program (MHIP) (Kataoka e al., 2003). Although this program was implemented with Latino students, it is aimed to support students who have been exposed to community violence, such as beatings, shootings, and threats. The 8 sessions covering common trauma reactions, relaxation techniques, combating negative thoughts, coping and avoidance, and exposure to trauma through drawing/writing proved to reduce PTSD and depression related symptoms. It is important to consider that these interventions may be adapted to support diverse refugee populations when facilitated by culturally competent individuals who understand the trauma Middle Eastern immigrants and refugees may be experiencing.

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) was an evidence-based intervention evaluated by Schottelkorb and colleagues (2012) to address PTSD related symptoms among refugee elementary school students from 15 different countries, including Middle Eastern countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. This program offers group sessions to students within the school day, individual sessions for parents, and conjoint parent-child sessions that incorporate psychoeducation and parenting skills, relaxation skills, cognitive coping and processing, processing trauma, conjoint parent-child session, and safety planning. The
authors found a decrease in student’s PTSD symptoms when implementing this program, despite limited parent involvement. Therefore, this study proved that TF-CBT still proved to be effective in supporting refugee students and should still be implemented within the school setting, even if parent involvement may not be possible.

*Externalizing Behaviors: Bullying and Aggression*

Just as The Search Institute created the Developmental Assets Framework to identify internal assets to help build social-emotional strengths, values, and commitments to make good choices, they also identified 20 external assets, such as supports, opportunities, and relationships to help youth succeed within their families, schools, and communities (Search Institute, 1997). These external assets include support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. It is important to recognize that young children and adolescents need to be surrounded by family, school, and a community that loves, cares, accepts, encourages, and appreciates them for them to succeed and grow developmentally. It is also important to employ evidence-based interventions to help these children feel empowered and valued within their home, school, and community, so that they can feel safe and respected. Elizalde-Utnick (2015) shared that refugee children who struggle with self-control due to migration and acculturation may benefit from self-regulation training that helps them develop goal settings and problem-solving strategies, as well as increases self-monitoring and self-efficacy beliefs.

Additionally, youth need boundaries and expectations to help them succeed, clear rules and consequences within the home and school settings, positive peer influence to model acceptable behavior, and encouragement to do their best (Search Institute, 2015). Peer mentoring programs may also be beneficial for immigrant students as the newly arrived students could be paired with someone who came earlier, and from their country of origin, to help them understand
school expectations and become more socially integrated amongst other students (Birman et. al., 2007). Youth may also be encouraged to use their time constructively by helping them find opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom to learn and develop new skills and interests alongside other students (Search Institute, 2015). These external assets should be evaluated for each struggling student, and considered when deciding on the best intervention to implement to help them cope with any externalizing behaviors that may result from their previous and current experiences, specifically when it comes to immigrant and refugee children facing bullying.

Bridging Youth and Children’s Services (BYCS) collaborated with the International Intercultural Center and Haneefiya Learning Center to survey 110 Muslim refugee students on their experiences with bullying and discrimination within the school. They found that 1 in 5 students, and 1 in 4 male students, felt intimidated, harassed, humiliated, bullied, or emotionally/physically abused by classmates due to their Muslim heritage. Of the students surveyed, 10% felt that their teacher or school administrator does not treat them fairly, while 15% felt isolated or excluded from social situations due to being Muslim. 8% of these students also felt like they were treated differently because they wear traditional Islamic garments, such as hijabs, prayer hats, or other religious symbols) (Bridging Youth and Children, 2016).

The BYCS addresses these challenges by creating a youth leadership program in the high schools and community centers called the Global Citizen Forum (Bridging Youth and Children, 2016). This program encourages Muslim refugee and non-refugee students to share their experiences, build solidarity with peers, and develop the skills necessary for addressing bullying. The BYRC also encourages schools to provide programs to address refugee student complaints of bullying and harassment and utilize skill-building workshops to raise awareness of bullying
and promote positive coping and resiliency. Extracurricular activities and youth groups are also recommended to help promote positive connections between youth and train peers to become advocates for others. Teachers, counselors, and school staff are advised to attend cultural competency trainings and trainings to help recognize the warning signs of refugee students who may be affected by bullying and provide safe school climates. These recommendations offer intervention strategies to refugee Muslim students who may be exhibiting feelings of anger, fear, and isolation.

A study conducted by Rousseau and colleagues (2007) evaluated the effectiveness of a school-based drama therapy program for immigrant and refugee students. This study aimed at preventing emotional and behavioral problems, while also improving academic achievement through giving young immigrants and refugees an opportunity to “reappropriate and share group stories, in order to support the construction of meaning and identity in their personal stories and establish a bridge between the past and present” (p. 454). The results indicated that students experienced a decrease in behavioral and emotional symptoms interfering with their school activities and interactions, as well as a decrease in their self-perception of social impairment. Refugee and immigrant students were also found to improve in mathematical achievement. This study reiterates the importance of giving refugee students the opportunity to share their experiences in a comfortable setting with culturally sensitive adults and peers.

An additional study was conducted by Ceballos and Bratton (2010) to explore the implementation of Child Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) to address school behavior problems for immigrant Latino children while supporting parents by teaching parenting skills through role playing and child-parent play sessions. The CPRT was aimed to help strengthen the bond between a parent and their child, thus decreasing any family stressors that may be
impacting the child’s behavior within the home and school setting. Results of this study indicated a significant positive change in the student’s classroom behavior, as well as improvements in parent-child stress. Although this study was conducted with immigrant Latino families, it is important to consider the benefits of utilizing this intervention with other families of diverse backgrounds to help alleviate student’s externalizing behaviors within the home and school environment.

Similarly, Schottelkorb and colleagues (2012), also examined the effectiveness of child-centered play therapy (CCPT), a program that offers students the opportunity to communicate their thoughts and feelings through specific toys, such as multicultural dolls, play food, musical instruments, and other toys that reflected the student’s cultural background. These sessions were coupled with therapists demonstrating positive regard and empathy towards the family and students. Results of this study revealed a decrease in PTSD related symptoms in the children. Therefore, authors encouraged elementary school counselors to implement this intervention with refugee children to support their academic and social emotional functioning. When considering the toys utilized in each session, it is beneficial to incorporate multicultural toys, objects, and books to help the children feel comfortable and develop a sense of belonging.

Importance of Parent Involvement and Building Relationships

School personnel, such as School Psychologists, School Counselors, Social Workers, and family liaisons have a crucial role in providing support services to immigrant and refugee families by helping them access school and community services (Elizalde-Utnick, 2007). These services include orientation programs for new immigrants, free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch programs, information about after-school childcare programs that provide homework support, family involvement programs that support the development of reading and mathematical
reasoning, parenting workshops and parent support groups, ESL classes for parents, access to school interpreters, and information about community-based, culturally based social service agencies. Additionally, creating and building positive relationships with immigrant families is crucial to supporting their acculturation process and promoting a successful transition for their children within the school setting. A majority of Middle Eastern parents want to be involved with their children’s education; however they may need guidance on what that may look like in an American education system. It is important that effective systems are in place to help encourage partnership with newcomer families so that they feel welcome, build strong family–school relationships, and communicate with school personnel (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011).

It is common for schools to incorrectly believe that immigrant parents are too busy, preoccupied, or disinterested to be involved with their child’s schooling. It is important that schools recognize and dispel this commonly held misperception and find ways to include immigrant parents in their children’s education (Huss-Keller, 1997; Crozier & Davies, 2006). Birman & Ryerson-Espino (2007) shared that immigrant parents may not know how or when it is appropriate to communicate with their child’s school, and may not be knowledgeable of the extent to which they need to advocate for certain educational programs for their children in the American education system. Fostering a positive home-school collaborative environment is crucial to helping families who may feel discouraged or less than confident about becoming involved in the school system.

In a study conducted by Oweis et al. (2012), when exploring the parenting practices of Jordanian parents, they found that “Parents need to monitor their children and supervise them from a distance, to make sure that things are going well. We are obligated to keep our values and traditions, so we cannot allow mistakes that are deviating from the values and a tradition of our
“society” (p. 244). According to Weine et al. (2006), refugee parents are concerned about the Americanization of their children due to the U.S. societal emphasis on openness and individuality. They want their children to learn their native language and to maintain their family and cultural traditions despite being a part of a new culture. Refugee parents may perceive the American culture as lacking discipline, and may worry that their children may have difficulties with academic and social adjustment in this new environment. Many parents may be unable to adequately supervise their child due to inflexibility with their work schedules and working long hours. Schools must provide a safe place for parents to share their concerns and collaborate on ways to provide their children with the best education.

Research from Huss-Keeler (1997), Crozier and Davies (2006), and Birman and Ryserson-Espino (2007) offered ideas for activities and interventions to help educators involve parents within the school. First, it is important to contact parents by the use of bilingual and bicultural liaisons, to help remove children from cultural brokering, and directly bridge communication between parent and school (Huss-Keeler, 1997; Birman & Ryerson-Espino, 2007). This liaison may be an English-speaking immigrant parent or teacher at the school whom the family can trust to relay information about the school and community. Providing interpreters to families during parent-teacher conferences can also facilitate positive interactions and remove the child from having the responsibility of being the “culture broker” in the meeting.

Additionally, providing school orientations to immigrant parents, with the help of bicultural/bilingual liaisons and interpreters, will offer families more information about the U.S. school system and information on how and when to contact their child’s school. In addition to sending home packets of educational information in the family’s home language, having in-person orientations will also help build interpersonal relationships with the school and express
how the school encourages parent involvement. It may also be beneficial to repeatedly hold brief, informational meetings with cultural navigators present who can help discuss unfamiliar U.S. school expectations and policies (Miller, Thomas, & Fruechtenicht, 2012).

Another activity to encourage immigrant parent involvement includes offering special after-school events for parents, such as holding international dinner events where families can bring their own dishes to represent their heritage or holding festivals with displays and activities that represent their culture (Huss-Keeler, 1997). Schools can also hold events where children may invite their family members to participate in sports competitions, art/dance/music ceremonies, talent shows, clean-up, public murals, or gardening activities to help them feel like they are a part of the school (Miller, Thomas, & Fruechtenicht, 2012). Activities such as this can help parents feel more connected and understood by the school, and may help families feel more comfortable when compared being involved in more traditional Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings or conferences (Huss-Keeler, 1997).

Miller, Thomas, and Fruechtenicht (2012) also recommended offering community dialogues or forums where diverse neighborhood members, including Middle Eastern families, come together to gain a greater appreciation of their shared humanity and to dispel stereotypes, as well as having community agencies partner with schools to provide services before or after school hours in multiple native languages so that the school becomes a natural community resource center for these families. Classroom lessons and school-wide assemblies that incorporate different world cultural identities and values can also be implemented within the school year as a way for students to feel more welcomed, as all as offering stories, videos, texts, books, and other classroom and library media sources that are available in multiple languages to depict the multiple cultures served at a school (Miller, Thomas, & Fruechtenicht, 2012).
Schools must anticipate any challenges in building relationships with immigrant families that may impact their involvement in the school. Hughes and Bierens (2007) shared that many refugees may struggle with losing control over family unity and influence once their child goes to school. They may be skeptical about building new relationships if they have previously experienced racial and ethnic discrimination or multiple losses. Miller, Thomas, and Fruechtenicht (2014) introduced multiple ways for educators to build strong relationships with refugee families within the schools. The first includes providing family members and educators the opportunity to collaborate to share stories, traditions, hopes, and dreams as well as fears and worries families may have as their children enter the U.S. educational system. Schools can also collaborate with trained community leaders who have also been refugees to help build an understanding of differences that require new adjustments to home and school.

Teachers and school administrators can schedule meetings at times that are mindful and understanding of the value of family routines, religious practices, work schedules, or other cultural traditions. Another includes giving families a map of the school with pictures and labels that show where each staff member can be located, and what their role may be.

It is important that schools facilitate successful two-way communication systems between school and family that offer each person an equal voice and opportunity to share questions, concerns, or insights (Chu & Wu, 2012). When a parent’s English language is limited, they may feel that they do not have anything to add or contribute to the conversation, especially when an interpreter is not present in the meeting. Miller, Thomas and Fruechtenicht (2014) recommended that schools offer multiple formats for communication, as well as both written and verbal translations of school brochures, forms, and policies to avoid any literacy issues. It may also be beneficial to prepare families prior to any meetings with explanations of the purpose of the
meeting, what will occur, who will be in attendance, any input needed from parents, and to ask for any questions they may have during the meeting in order to alleviate any nervousness or anxiety before the meeting occurs. Schools should also be aware of any professional development workshops or training opportunities for educators to address effective communication strategies to help overcome reluctance, gain trust, and respond in an appropriate manner to parent and student emotions. By creating meaningful relationships with immigrant parents, collaboration will begin to occur between the school and family, and parents will feel more comfortable becoming involved with their child’s education.

**Synthesis of Literature Review**

In conclusion, research over the last 20 years suggests the importance of offering culturally sensitive school-based interventions to refugee and immigrant children and families to help them navigate a new educational system, cope with the acculturative process, and address internalizing feelings of anxiety, depression, and trauma, as well as externalizing feelings that result from aggression and bullying. Prior to identifying and implementing culturally sensitive interventions with Middle Eastern families, school staff and administrators must understand their cultural values and traditions, as well as the history behind their reluctance to seek support due to their beliefs surrounding mental health stigma. Within the school and community setting, understanding the effects of migration stress, acculturation stress, and a student’s acculturative level are beneficial in promoting cultural sensitivity and applying it in practice. Additionally, research has identified the importance of building relationships with families and promoting family involvement within the school community through orientation programs for new immigrants, free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch programs, information about after-school child care programs that provide homework support, family involvement programs that support
the development of reading and mathematical reasoning, parenting workshops and parent support groups, ESL classes for parents, access to school interpreters, and information about community-based, culturally based social service agencies (Elizalde-Utnick, 2007). The following chapters describe the development of the project, which aims to provide knowledge to educators and school administrators, via a workshop platform regarding the challenges that Middle Eastern immigrant families have experienced, explore evidence-based interventions and strategies to successfully and appropriately support immigrant and refugee children, to help others understand the impact that mental health stigma has on discouraging families from seeking support for their children, and to inform families about resources within the school and community setting. Additionally, the intended audience, presenter qualifications, intended environment and equipment, and outline of the project will also be explained in the upcoming sections. An overview of the workshop will be provided in Chapter 4 and the final summary, discussion and conclusion, and future implications related to the research will be discussed in Chapter 5. The workshop agenda and slides will be provided for review in Appendix A.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The following project: Addressing Mental Health Stigma and Awareness in Middle Eastern Immigrant Families through Culturally Sensitive Practice and Intervention is a program presented in a workshop format created to provide educators in K-12th grade districts the knowledge and skills to support Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee families and their children within the school system. With the numbers of students immigrating to America from war-torn countries rising, it is important that schools are prepared to support and accommodate these students and their families as they navigate a new language, a new education system, and an overall new way of living. Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive literature review of information that will be presented within the workshop, such as the history behind mental health stigma in the Middle East, how to incorporate cultural sensitivity within the school system, and exploring school-based interventions to use within the classroom, as well as to address internalizing and externalizing behaviors. This project serves to educate school personnel on the factors impacting students within the school system, such as trauma, lack of appropriate education, and acculturation stress. Educators will have the opportunity to explore ways to encourage a strong family-school partnership, promote a positive communication system between home and school, and help families feel seen and welcomed. The following sections will explore the development of the project, intended audience, presenter qualifications to host the workshop, the environment and equipment needed to successfully hold the workshop, and an outline of the workshop itself.
Development of Project

Experience as a first-generation Palestinian woman, as well as a school psychology fieldwork and internship student within Ventura County influenced the author to develop a passion to advocate for and seek appropriate and culturally sensitive supports for Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee students. Specifically, the multicultural counseling course the author took the second year of her graduate program challenged her to look for ways her own school sites are promoting positive home-school collaborations, effective two-way communication systems, and overall mutual respect and understanding for diverse populations. The author’s experience within the school system, as well as her personal research conducted on supporting Middle Eastern immigrant students, has revealed a need to address the lack of support offered to this population. This workshop serves to provide educators with evidence-based culturally appropriate interventions and strategies, in hopes that they create their own toolkits to tailor to each immigrant and refugee student’s unique needs. Additionally, it creates an opportunity for open dialogue and collaboration on this topic amongst educators who work with these students, such as teachers, school psychologists, school counselors, and school administrators.

From the author’s personal experience, the minimal knowledge elementary, middle school, and high school teachers and principals had about the Middle Eastern culture in the community of Ventura County revealed a need to develop a program to provide knowledge and evidence-based culturally sensitive practices to schools who serve to support their immigrant or refugee students from the Middle East. Although the school staff may not have been aware of the assumptions they created about Middle Eastern cultural values and practices, this was something the author consistently encountered frequently, as there were no teachers, counselors, or school personnel from a Middle Eastern background who understood Middle Eastern experiences. The
author comes from an immigrant family and saw firsthand how her own family members did not fully believe in the purpose or benefits of seeking therapy or mental health services, as this was not a topic that was embraced or taught while they grew up in their homeland. For students whose parents are still learning the English language and becoming familiar with their new American society, seeking appropriate services may often be difficult for them. Therefore, the author became driven to create a program with resources to address the struggle with knowing how and where immigrant parents and children in attaining support for a positive American educational experience.

A comprehensive review of research through California State University Northridge’s Oviatt Library found that there was minimal research conducted to examine the experience and need for support of immigrant and refugee Middle Eastern students within the school system. However, research was found regarding the need to support immigrant and refugee students from other various cultural backgrounds and was included in the development of this program in hopes of it successfully addressing the difficulties faced by the Middle Eastern population. The research was collected through databases, such as SAGE Journals, Wiley Online Library, ResearchGate, and the National Center for Biotechnology Information. Additional research was collected from diversity counseling textbooks, such as Counseling the Culturally Diverse, and websites containing evidence-based research, such as the National Association of School Psychologists, Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services, and The Search Institute. Throughout the workshop presentation, the research and resources gathered from the literature review will be explored and discussed with the group to help them formulate ideas on how to incorporate these practices within their own schools and classrooms.
Intended Audience

This workshop is intended for administrators, teachers, school psychologists and school counselors in Kindergarten through High School settings to provide information to help support Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee families. Administrators may benefit from utilizing the information presented to address systematic change within the whole school to help provide a welcoming environment for newcomer families. Students may benefit from the implementation of culturally sensitive interventions to address academic concerns, as well as teacher’s advocacy for the most appropriate educational placement for these students within English language classes. School psychologists and school counselors become more aware of the social-emotional difficulties these students may face and how to appropriately address them, while also considering any acculturation or assimilation factors, and mental health stigma within the family.

The program’s workshop slides may be accessed through a school’s district website to provide educators with evidence-based resources at any time. By attending the workshop, participants will have the opportunity to share any thoughts or concerns, personal experiences, and to collaborate with other educators to explore a variety of ways to address this population in a culturally sensitive manner. As facilitated by an individual culturally aware of the characteristics of Arab Americans, Arab immigrants, and Arab refugees, as well as the research behind supporting this population, this workshop proves to provide professional development to school communities that are home to Middle Eastern families. It is important that careful consideration is taken if accessing these slides and resources prior to attending the workshop led by a professional trained on this topic, as they may be misused or misunderstood without proper knowledge of the culture. This program is not intended to be facilitated by an individual unaware of Middle Eastern culture and practice. Therefore, if a school is interested in implementing this
program workshop within their district, they are responsible for seeking a knowledgeable
individual on this topic, and may need to collaborate with other districts who have a prominent
Middle Eastern community.

Upon attending the workshop, educators will find that the recommendations and
interventions provided to serve Middle Eastern students may also benefit other cultures within
the classroom, as well as promote a positive school climate that embraces and celebrates
diversity. Prior to promoting acceptance and understanding amongst the school population, it is
important that educators are taking the steps to become more culturally aware of any stereotypes
or biases that may present themselves when interacting with a culture different than their own.
This workshop intends to provide a positive step towards a positive direction for schools
preparing to implement culturally sensitive practices. Although this workshop will be presented
in English, the audience will be reminded of the importance of providing resources to families in
their home language, such as Arabic, Armenian, Farsi, or Hebrew, and will be advised on how to
provide those translations to families. Additional consultation may need to be provided from the
facilitator following the workshop to address specific cases that may require additional training
or support, as this workshop is only the first step towards becoming more culturally aware.

Personal Qualifications

The individual facilitating this workshop must be a trained professional with a
background of knowledge in diversity, equity, and inclusion provided through multicultural
courses taken during their credentialing programs. These individuals may be school
psychologists, school counselors, or directors and administrators within the district who are
familiar with biological, social, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, and linguistic factors
that impact a Middle Eastern student’s development and learning. It is also important that they
are competent on social-emotional topics, such as trauma, internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and the results of mental health stigma within Middle Eastern communities in order to provide individuals with accurate and appropriate information. Specifically for this topic, it is also important that the individual is well versed and familiar with Middle Eastern culture, language, and values when presenting to individuals who want to further their knowledge on how to support this population. The presenter of this workshop must have characteristics of understanding and respect for Middle Eastern culture, as well as encompass qualities of compassion, effective communication, active listening, and social awareness. It is important that they create a comfortable and trustworthy environment to encourage open dialogue and curiosity, without feelings of judgement or incompetence. Therefore, they must promote positive and productive discussion, and know when to intervene if the discussion becomes misunderstood or misinterpreted in a negative context. Overall, these individuals must keep in mind the purpose of this workshop, which is to advocate for the implementation of better support and strategies to help Middle Eastern immigrants and refugees within the school system.

It is also necessary that the presenter of this workshop review the workshop slides and scenarios in preparation for the workshop so that they feel comfortable and competent when presenting the material. This may also provide them the opportunity to seek additional support or information on areas they may feel less confident in addressing to a group of school personnel. If the presenter is planning to hold this workshop remotely, it is essential that they also are proficient in using ZOOM, such as knowing how to provide attendees with a ZOOM link, utilize the polls function, create break out rooms for attendees to collaborate, and navigate the chat box when attendees have questions or comments. Overall, the individual facilitating this workshop remotely must plan for any technical difficulties that may arise from using an online platform,
such as a weak WIFI connection, difficulties with attendees logging on to the ZOOM, or needing to reschedule due to unforeseen circumstances.

Environment and Equipment

This workshop will be held yearly, remotely or in person, to provide educators within a school district the professional development opportunity to gain knowledge on mental health stigma and awareness in Middle Eastern immigrant families through culturally sensitive practice and intervention. Either the location of the workshop or a ZOOM link, and a copy of the workshop slides, will be provided to attendees upon confirmation of attendance. The benefits of using a ZOOM platform include the opportunity to join break out rooms for collaboration with other school personnel, utilizing the poll function to gauge the background experience of the participants, as well as provide check in “quiz” questions after each section, and to use the chat box to ask any questions/offer feedback throughout the presentation. This workshop may be recorded for those in attendance to access at a later time. Those who do not feel comfortable with the session being recorded will be advised to turn off their camera, and/or change their name, to maintain confidentiality. In addition, the workshop slides and resources will be provided to school personnel via a district’s website for those who may not be able to attend the workshop.
Chapter 4

Project Overview

This culminating project is presented as a workshop designed to offer additional professional development opportunities for school personnel and administrators in K through 12th grade school districts who are interested in increasing their knowledge of culturally sensitive practice with Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee communities. This workshop is structured to be 3 to 4 hours, depending on the length of discussion during the scenario collaboration slides and breakout sessions. This workshop is also designed to be easily presented in person, or via the ZOOM platform by an individual who has the qualifications and cultural competency to discuss Middle Eastern culture, as well as, culturally sensitive practice within the schools. The workshop in its entirety will be presented in Appendix A.

Project Outline

This project includes a series of slides to be presented throughout the workshop. The workshop will begin by offering the audience a brief overview of what to look forward to throughout the workshop, as well as a snapshot of the topics that will be discussed. Workshop slides 4 through 13 will give a background history of the Middle East, the trauma faced by this population, and the mental health stigma within the Middle Eastern communities. Next, cultural sensitivity within the school setting will be explored as built upon from what the audience has learned from the previous slides. This workshop also includes built-in 10 minute breaks to give the participants a chance to reflect on what they have learned, as well as take time away from their screen to avoid fatigue. Upon returning from the break, slides 18 through 25 will introduce culturally sensitive interventions and how to implement them within the school setting. First, classroom strategies will be reviewed, and then interventions targeting internalized behaviors and
externalizing behaviors will be discussed. Afterwards, the audience will discuss the importance of family involvement and building relationships within Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee families. Then, the participants will be given the opportunity to collaborate with other participants within a breakout room and discuss strategies that have been successful and unsuccessful within their own schools. Then, three scenarios will be discussed amongst the group to offer insight and suggestions on how to handle common situations within the school setting with this target population. Prior to ending the workshop, the participants will be given resources to review and share with the parents and faculty within their school system.

The following slides will be presented and discussed during the workshop:

Slide 1: Title & Introductions
Slide 2: What to Look Forward to…
Slide 3: Learning Objectives
Slide 4: What is the Middle East?
Slide 5: Cultural & Family Values
Slide 6: Why Did They Come to America?
Slide 7: A Culture to be Celebrated!
Slide 8: What is Trauma?
Slide 9: Trauma Faced by Refugee and Immigrant Families
Slide 10: What is Mental Health Stigma?
Slide 11: 4 Social Cognitive Processes of Mental Health Stigma
Slide 12: 3 Levels if Stigma
Slide 13: Mental Health Stigma Among Adolescents
Slide 14: History Behind Mental Health Stigma in the Middle East
Slide 15: Interventions to Target Mental Health Stigma
Slide 16: Cultural Sensitivity within a School Setting
Slide 17: Recommendations for Working with Arab American & Muslim American Families
Slide 18: Recommendations for Working with Refugee Families
Slide 19: Break
Slide 20: Why Do We Need School Based Interventions
Slide 21: Classroom Strategies and Interventions
Slide 22: English Language Learner Programs
Slide 23: Intervention for Internalizing Behaviors (Part 1)
Slide 24: Intervention for Internalizing Behaviors (Part 2)
Slide 25: Developmental Assets Framework (Internal Assets)
Slide 26: Interventions for Externalizing Behaviors
Slide 27: Developmental Assets Framework (External Assets)
Slide 28: Do Parents Want to Get Involved?
Slide 29: Ideas for Activities and Interventions to Get Parents Involved
Slide 30: Tips for Building Strong Relationships with Refugee Families
Slide 31: Break
Slide 32: Opportunities for Collaboration (Breakout Room)
Slide 33: Scenario 1
Slide 34: Scenario 2
Slide 35: Scenario 3
Slide 36: Resources
Slide 37: Resources Continued.
Slide 38: Questions?
Slide 39: Thank You
Slides 40-45: References
Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

The purpose of this project’s workshop is to provide educators with the knowledge and understanding of Middle Eastern culture, the challenges immigrants and refugees face when coming to America, and how to successfully and appropriately support the children and families within the school system. The comprehensive literature review conducted on this topic and explored throughout the workshop is intended to provide educators with the evidence-based interventions and strategies to best address the needs of this population, while also providing educators with the background knowledge and history behind the trauma, mental health stigma, and acculturation process and assimilation experienced by Middle Eastern families.

The countries that comprise the Middle East include Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, as well as, Afghanistan, the Comoros, Djibouti, Maghreb, Pakistan, Sudan, and Somalia (Sewilam et. al., 2016; Pariona, 2020). Refugees from these countries may experience psychological distress due to exposure to indirect trauma, direct trauma, and intergenerational trauma transferred between family members (Baker & Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999). This may result in fear, sadness, apathy, inattention, anger, irritability, separation anxiety, sleep disturbances, somatic complaints (e.g., headaches and stomachaches), school problems, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (American Psychological Association, 2008). Moreover, a Middle Eastern family’s source of mental health stigma and reluctance to seek support may be due to the family believing that it is a sign of weakness, and a source of shame or disgrace if the individual’s illness becomes known to the
public, as well as, reports of individuals distancing themselves from the family, mental illness harming the family’s reputation, and feelings of shame (Zolezzi et al., 2018; Rusch et al., 2005). Therefore, it is important for school personnel to identify and address these feelings when observed in refugee and immigrant children in schools prior to choosing and implementing culturally sensitive interventions to address their social-emotional and academic needs.

Over 20 years of research has been conducted to explore the importance of offering culturally sensitive, evidence-based support to immigrant and refugee families as they transition into a new educational system, navigate the acculturation process, and address their own mental health stigma and reluctance to seek support from school resources. Research conducted by Dryden-Peterson (2015) found that the main hurdles that impact refugee children when attending the American schools include limited and disrupted educational opportunities, language barriers to educational access, inadequate quality of instruction, and discrimination in the school setting. Therefore, it is important for schools to utilize evidence-based interventions and practices to support newcomer Middle Eastern students within their schools. Culturally sensitive classroom strategies may include implementing differentiated instructional strategies, English Language Learner programs, displaying art or information in the form of posters of pictures around the school about immigrant cultures and languages, and incorporating immigrant cultures into their history or social studies curriculum (Elizalde-Utnick, 2007; Boyson & Short, 2003; Birman et al., 2007). This project also serves to provide the audience with the research validated interventions to help target internalizing feelings, such as anxiety, depression, and trauma to support students in the schools. The Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets are explored to provide the audience with information on the internal protective factors students need to succeed in all areas of their life, and to be considered when implementing the evidence-based
interventions such as, social emotional workbooks created by the Armenian American School Psychologist Association, and activities utilizing school-based cognitive behavioral therapy and trauma focused cognitive behavior therapy. The external assets are also explored to help identify how best to support students struggling with externalizing behaviors, such as bullying and aggression. These interventions may include bullying prevention programs, skill-building workshops, extra-curricular activities, school-based drama therapy programs, child parent therapy programs, and child-centered play therapy. Overall, these interventions will be discussed and explored within the workshop to provide educators with the tools to support immigrant and refugee students within their schools.

In addition, this workshop serves to promote the importance of building genuine and positive relationships between the school and family. Lines, Miller & Arthur Stanley (2011) addressed the importance of offering support to immigrant families to “encourage partnership with newcomer families so that they feel welcome, learn how to build strong family–school relationships, and are able to communicate with their child’s teachers and school”. Activities and interventions to help promote a positive and collaborative relationship with parents include contacting parents by the use of bilingual, bicultural liaisons, providing interpreters to families during parent-teacher conferences, providing school orientations to immigrant parents, sending home packets of educational information in the family’s home language, offering special after-school events for parents, and facilitating successful two-way communication systems between school and family that offer each person an equal voice and opportunity to share questions, concerns, or insights (Huss-Keeler, 1997; Miller et. al., 2012; Crozier & Davies, 2006; Birman & Ryserson-Espino, 2007; Chu & Wu, 2012). Overall, these topics are further discussed in detail.
within the workshop and provided as a learning opportunity for individuals motivated to support Middle Eastern immigrant, refugee, and first generation students and their families.

**Discussion**

School psychologists, school counselors, teachers, and administrators are intended to benefit from the information and resources provided throughout this workshop. This program workshop will be offered as a resource for additional knowledge and evidence-based practice for school districts who must navigate the influx of immigrant and refugee children attending their schools. Although this workshop has not been formally presented, it may be beneficial to collect feedback from the audience after each session on the effectiveness of the topics presented. Specifically, it is recommended that feedback and data be gathered from educators who use the interventions and strategies within their schools to determine their effectiveness. This workshop can be tailored to meet the needs and interests of the community served by this audience, as well as provide opportunities to address thoughts and questions that may arise as a result of the topics discussed. By providing school districts with a copy of the slides that lay out the interventions and resources available to students and their families, educators can easily access information on immigrant and refugee families and utilize the information presented in the slides as a tool and reference when faced with different culturally challenging situations throughout the year. This project may continue to evolve as additional research is conducted specifically with students emigrating from Middle Eastern countries.

**Future Research**

Although there is substantial research conducted on evidence-based intervention with immigrant and refugee families from all over the world, the research found specifically with Middle Eastern students and families was scarce. Additionally, a majority of the interventions
targeting internalizing and externalizing behaviors, as well as school wide strategies that were explored as a part of the project were also found to provide support to other ethnicities within the school. Therefore, it is important for research to evaluate the effectiveness of culturally sensitive interventions used with Hispanic or Asian families on Middle Eastern families, thus exploring more strategies and supports to utilize with the Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee population. It is also important to evaluate which interventions and strategies discussed within the workshop are of most value and success to be used with the target population within the schools, and which need to be further researched and adapted and explored to promote cultural sensitive intervention and practice.

It is the author’s intention that as additional research is conducted with Middle Eastern students, the findings will be incorporated into this program to provide the most current information on the effectiveness of the recommended interventions and strategies. The information within this workshop may also be adapted and translated into Arab languages to be provided to parents as a resource within the home, as well as, provided to other educators in Middle Eastern countries supporting their own students and families as they navigate mental health stigma and trauma.
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131-139.
Appendix A: Project

Link to Google Slides: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ZFp3equD_N_2zAg9UCblPfiPBG7jo5OGJxtNWeoFolM/edit?usp=sharing

What to Look Forward To...

- Learning Objectives
- What is the Middle East?
- What is Trauma?
- What is Mental Health Stigma?
  - Middle Eastern Communities
- Cultural Sensitivity in a School Setting
- Interventions
  - Classroom Strategies
  - Internalizing Behaviors
  - Externalizing Behaviors
- Opportunities for Collaboration
  - How Can We Involve Parents?
- Scenarios
- Resources
Learning Objectives

01. To offer knowledge to educators and school administrators on the challenges that Middle Eastern immigrant families have experienced.

02. To understand the impact that mental health stigma has on discouraging families from receiving and seeking support for their children.

03. To explore strategies to successfully and appropriately support immigrant and refugee children using evidence-based interventions.

04. To offer additional knowledge on how to create a positive and welcoming school climate, build collaborative relationships with families, and pass along any resources or information to families as needed.

What is the Middle East?

The Middle East can be defined as “the countries of southwest Asia and North Africa”.

The countries of the Middle East include Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen (Sewilam et. al., 2016).

The Middle East may also extend to the countries of Afghanistan, the Comoros, Djibouti, Maghreb, Pakistan, Sudan, and Somalia (Pariona, 2020).
Why Did They Come to America?

- Arabs first began immigrating to the United States in the late 1800s.
- A majority of Arab Americans are native born in the United States and have ties to one of the Arab countries.
- About 56% of Arab Americans trace their ancestry to Lebanon, 14% from Syria, 11% from Egypt, 9% from Palestine, 4% from Jordan, and 2% from other Arab countries. (El Badry, 2006).
- According to research conducted by Nassar–McMillan & Hakim–Larsen (2003) and Suleiman (1999), Arab American immigrants arrived to America in two major waves.
  - The first was between 1875 and World War II when Arab Christians from Lebanon and Syria immigrated to America for economic reasons.
  - After World War II, the second wave of Palestinians, Iraqis, and Syrians immigrated to the United States to escape Arab–Israeli conflicts and civil war.

Cultural & Family Values

- The largest ethnic group in the Middle East are Arabs, followed by Iranian and Turkish people.
- Arabic is the most common language spoken.
- Mohit (2002), wrote that 90% of people in the Middle East are Muslims who practice Islam, which not only is their main religion, but also their way of life.
  - It is important to note that Christianity and Judaism are also commonly practiced religions in those areas.
- Family obligations, interdependence among members in the family, and hospitality are considered very important.
- Children may be faced with high expectations and a pressure to conform due to the group orientation.
- Arab culture is described as a collectivistic culture, meaning that the success or failure of an individual in the family reflects on the entire family, leading to stress and anxiety surrounding this personal responsibility to maintain social behavior and success.
- Strong sense of community and identity that revolves around their faith in God and their cultural beliefs (Nassar–McMillan, 2011).
A Culture to be Celebrated!

- Arab Americans have high levels of educational and economic success.
  ➢ This may be due to their ability to acculturate and assimilate quickly, although difficult for them.
- Families can provide resources to help bear personal issues and problems.
- When dealing with prejudice and discrimination from a larger society, arab family and community supports serve as protective factors.
- Specifically, newer Arab Americans receive support and acceptance within Arab communities.
- Being a part of a religious community can also provide guidance and support when navigating their problems.

What is Trauma?

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines trauma as a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time.

3 Stages of Trauma Experienced by Refugee Children (Fazel and Stein, 2002)

1. When the children are forced to flee their homes to escape war and combat, meaning that they were exposed to the cruelties of the war
2. The trip to America, which may often be a long and dangerous journey that may include children being separated from their families.
3. The difficulties with acculturating to the American culture, and adjusting to a new culture and language
Trauma Faced By Refugee & Immigrant Families

- Refugee children and adolescents may develop psychological distress in response to the trauma they have and are experiencing, such as fear, sadness, apathy, inattention, anger, irritability, separation anxiety, sleep disturbances, somatic complaints (e.g., headaches and stomachaches), and school problems (American Psychological Association, 2008).
- Some children may also experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a psychiatric disorder followed by a traumatic event, which may manifest itself in re-experiencing the trauma, avoidance of trauma-related stimuli or emotional numbing, and hyperarousal (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [AACAP], 2010).
  - Symptoms may also include sleep difficulties, irritability, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, oppositional behavior, separation anxiety, fears, apathy, and other impairments, including reduced academic achievement.

What is Mental Health Stigma?

Mental health stigma can be defined as the perception that individuals with mental health disorders are weak, flawed, dangerous, and socially incompetent (Wahl and Harman, 1989; Wahl, 2003).

The World Health Organization reports that overall stigma affects an individual's self-esteem, disrupts family relationships, limits access to employment, healthcare, educational opportunities, and housing, and therefore is a cause of discrimination and exclusion.

Corrigan & Penn (1999) shared that mental health stigma occurs when the public endorses stereotypes about mental illness and acts on these stereotypes, which result in negative attitudes that motivate the public to reject, fear, avoid, and discriminate against individuals struggling with mental illness.
4 Social Cognitive Processes of Mental Health Stigma

Cues
An individual with mental illness's physical appearance, impaired social skills, and psychiatric symptoms as identified by the general public.

Stereotypes
Individuals with mental illness are perceived as incompetent, weak or dangerous.

Prejudice
The general public may believe in these stereotypes and the decisions made based on the stereotype.

Bullying & Exclusion
“The consequences of stigma can be profound, including affecting an individual's self-esteem, decreasing opportunities for social interactions, and reducing the likelihood of care seeking for one's mental health problem.” Corrigan, 2014

3 Levels of Mental Health Stigma

Social Stigma
“A belief held by a large faction of society in which persons with the stigmatized condition are less equal or are part of an inferior group”- Ahmedani (2011)

Self-Stigma
If social stigma continues to impact the individual, they may start believing that they themselves are inadequate and may start feeling guilty about their own condition, thus exhibiting self-stigma-Corrigan, 2004

Health-Professional Stigma
Individuals with mental health illness believed that once health professionals in general health settings become aware of the individual's mental health condition, they are not given the same care as someone who does not have a mental health illness-Druz & Perlin, 2002
Mental Health Stigma Among Adolescents

- Adolescent’s willingness and comfort to address their mental health concerns relies heavily on how family members, peers, and school staff respond to them seeking mental health care.

- More than half of the respondents shared similar beliefs that their parents would disapprove of seeking help, dismiss any mental health concerns, and would not adapt well to their child needing help for a “mental health issue”.

- On the other hand, teens who have positive mental health attitudes attribute this to positive personal experiences when accessing services and acquiring accurate mental health knowledge.

- Those offering students mental health services should be mindful of the stigmatizing attitudes towards mental health services and the viewpoints those in their social network may have that may influence the child’s willingness to seek and receive support (Chandra & Minkovitz, 2007).

History Behind Mental Health Stigma in the Middle East

- Seeking God or faith healers as a first approach to mental health healing was more preferable than seeking mental health services.

- This may also be due to the stigmatizing beliefs linked to reports of individuals distancing themselves from the family, mental illness harming the family’s reputation, and feelings of shame.

- Arab populations across many Middle Eastern countries saw mental illness as “God’s punishment, God’s will, evil eye, demons, spirits, paranormal phenomena, supernatural curse, and magic about people with mental illness” (Zolezzi, Alamri, Shaar, & Rainkie, 2018).

- Mental illness can be considered as a sign of weakness, and a source of shame or disgrace if the individual’s illness becomes known to the public (Rusch et. al., 2005).

- Individuals from Egypt believed that behavioral disorders are often met with social rejection, such as social disapproval, devaluation of family members with mental illness, diminished marital prospects, and increase in social distance (Coker, 2005)
  - They are considered “crazy” or “mad”, harmful to others, have impaired reasoning, and are responsible for their own illness.
Interventions to Target Mental Health Stigma

Social Support
Educating families “to support their affected members in overcoming shame and seeking treatment”
Offering social support not only from family members, but also from friends, neighbors, and community members to help disseminate the distance between the individual with mental health needs and their community.

Religion
Engaging traditional healers and religious leaders with mental health specialists to help support the individual, encourage them to seek treatment, and reduce social distancing and discrimination between the individual and their community.

Education
Educating young individuals in school, medical, nursing, and ancillary mental health training facilities on the impact of mental health stigma can help bring awareness to the problem and reduce stigmatizing attitudes.

These interventions can be considered and adapted to help support students within the school system coping with externalizing behaviors and internalizing feelings in a culturally sensitive manner.

Cultural Sensitivity within the School Setting

Migration Stress
- “The difficulties resulting from disruptions in children’s everyday lives when removed from a familiar environment”.
- Some children may experience “cultural bereavement” or a sense of loss of their past life, cultural context, surrounding, friends, and family left behind.
- Parents and grandparents may feel this sense of loss more heavily as it was their decision to immigrate from their home country, which children will witness within their homes.

Acculturative Stress
- “Challenges that children and their families face in adjusting to the new culture in settlement” (Bigram et al. 2007)
- Our students may struggle with integrating aspects of two cultures into their own cultural identity.
- In a study conducted by Vedier, Boekaerts, & Seegers, 2005, they found that immigrant students are more likely to succeed in school when acquiring is also important for a students psychological well-being, competence in the new culture, however, Phinney (1990) also added that a positive ethnic identity
Recommendations for Working with Arab American & Muslim American Families

- Identify own attitudes about Arab Americans and Middle Eastern immigrants.
- Recognize that these individuals face discrimination and violence because of their background or religious beliefs.
- Recent immigrants are more likely to hold stronger traditional values and beliefs.
- Educators must collaborate with each family to gain an understanding of their lifestyle and beliefs.
- They can determine the structure of the family through questions and observations as necessary and identify if the traditional families appear highly interdependent.
- Arab American families may be reluctant to share family issues or express any of their negative feelings.
- Families will feel more comfortable with being a part of their new society once feeling that their social issues, family life, economics, business, and other aspects of life are respected and taken into consideration.

Recommendations for Working With Refugee Families

- Conduct own self-assessments to explore their own attitudes towards immigrants and refugees as it is important for these families to build interpersonal relationships and social networks.
- Multiple stressors surround immigrants and refugees, such as the stress of migrating to and living in a different country, learning a different language, and navigating new social, economic, political, educational, and social systems, which may be confusing and frightening for these families.
  - Day to day stressors may include limited resources, lack of employment opportunities, or frustrating interactions with different agencies.
- It is beneficial to take into account environmental factors, language barriers, and potential exposure to discrimination and hostility when practicing cultural sensitivity to offer appropriate support and resources to the families.
- Individuals impacted by their refugee experience may show symptoms of post-traumatic stress or other mental disorders, such as nightmares, avoidance, hopelessness, or negative beliefs about themselves or others.
10 minutes
Take A Break!

Why Do We Need School Based Interventions?

- Extreme stress, adversity, and trauma can impact a student’s cognitive functioning, concentration, memory, and social relationships. – NASP, 2015
- The stress these students are feeling can cause internalized symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, grief, fear, anger or isolation, as well as cause externalized behaviors, such as startle responses, reactivity, and aggression.
- Many of these students may have experienced interruptions in their schooling, as well as language gaps, leaving them unprepared to participate in their new school.
- When researching refugee students from Democratic Republic of Congo in Uganda and Burundi, Somali refugees in Kenya, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Malaysia, and Syrian refugees from Egypt, Dryden-Peterson (2015) found that the four educational experiences that have significant implications on their schooling in the United States include:
  - limited and disrupted educational opportunities
  - language barriers to educational access
  - inadequate quality of instruction
  - discrimination in the school setting.
Classroom Strategies & Interventions

**Contextualize Instruction**
- Keep in mind the student’s level of acculturation in order to tailor the curriculum to best support their academic needs.
- Make connections between already known information and new information.

**Differentiated Instruction**
- Previewing key academic vocabulary before each lesson.
- Scaffolding important concepts.
- Contextualizing vocabulary.
- Providing photo illustrations and manipulatives providing support or scaffolding materials in the students' first language.
- Teaching concepts and vocabulary in the students' first language through a community volunteer or a proficient bilingual peer.
- Providing translated key concepts to preview at home.

(Elizalde-Urnick, 2007)

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English Language Learner Programs

**Programs**
- Full Day offers students instruction in various academic subjects in their native language with English as one of the subjects.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) pulling the student out of the mainstream classroom for a few periods a day.

**Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)**
- Program that provides scaffolded or supportive educational techniques for ELL students within the mainstream classroom.
- Offers ELL students opportunities to participate in mainstream classrooms, rather than pull out services, so that they may also benefit from enhanced instruction, group work, and multisensory lesson plans (Boyson & Short, 2003).

**Utilizing Lesson Plans and Techniques**
- ELL teachers can help enhance students' mental health and teach them English by providing them with opportunities to share their experience and receive support from peers (Birman, 2002, 2005).
- Conceptual Reinforcement Lessons (Collot)
  - Utilizes principles of mediated learning, which aim to help immigrant student’s transition into inclusive classrooms, specifically in the areas of reading comprehension and mathematics (Kozulin, 2006).

**School Wide Events or Assemblies**
- Schools can display art or information in the form of posters of pictures around the school about immigrant cultures and languages.
- Incorporate the history and culture of different immigrants, such as holding seasonal celebrations or anniversaries of important historical events, and inviting families to take part in it (Frickett & Birman, 1989).
Interventions for Internalizing Behaviors
Anxiety, Depression, Trauma (Part 1)

School-Based Counseling
- Interventions should help students foster a sense of belonging, acceptance, and respect.
- With that in mind, it is important for school counselors to be mindful of acculturation levels of both student and parent, avoid stereotyping, and remember that diversity exists within groups, and to determine how the student and their family perceive mental health issues.

Mental Health for Immigrants Program (MHIP) (Kataoka et al., 2003)
- 8 sessions covering common trauma reactions, relaxation techniques, combating negative thoughts, coping and avoidance, and exposure to trauma through drawing, writing, and group discussion.

School-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- “Children and War: Teaching Recovery Techniques” manual (Smith et al., 2000)
- Sessions: normalizing common experiences in war, stress reactions, and bad dreams through drawing, writing, and group discussion.
- Discussion on nightly routines, relaxing activities, bodily reactions to stress, coping self-statements, avoidance, activating scheduling, and looking towards the future.

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (T-F CBT) (Schottelkorb et al., 2012)
- Group sessions for students within the school day, individual sessions for parents, and conjoint parent-child sessions that incorporate psychoeducation and parenting skills, relaxation skills, cognitive coping and processing, processing trauma, conjoint parent-child session, and safety planning.

Social Emotional Learning Workbook
(Page, Yousefian, & Ovumession, n.d.)
- Translated in both English and Armenian to assist school personnel in facilitating conversations about the student’s emotions, thoughts, and actions to help improve overall mental health, academic success, and educational performance.
- The workbook is comprised of activities based on Social Emotional Learning and Cognitive Behavior Therapy to help improve emotional awareness by developing emotional vocabulary and self-awareness, exploring coping skills for sadness, grief, anxiety, and anger, connecting feelings, thoughts, and actions, and building problem-solving skills to aid in developing goal-directed behavior.

Social Emotional Learning Resources in the Classroom for Armenian Refugee Children (AASPA, n.d.)
- Classroom checklists that can be posted in both Armenian and English to help show Armenian families how teachers are implementing community building, belonging and emotional safety, and student centered discipline strategies within their classroom in their native language.
- AASPA also offers examples of classroom rules and schedules in Armenian and English as a resource for teachers to help Armenian refugee students better understand the classroom expectations.
Developmental Assets Framework (Internal Assets)

**Social Competencies**
Guidance on how to interact effectively with others, make difficult decisions, and cope with uncertain or new situations. This may be an area that is still in development for refugee and immigrant children who might be navigating how to plan ahead or make choices or develop empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. They may still be learning how to resist negative peer pressure or dangerous situations and seek peaceful conflict resolution.

**Commitment to Learning**
Schools can identify if the student has the motivation to do well in school, if they are actively engaged in school, and if they care about their school. Knowing what they are learning will have a lasting impact.

**Positive Identity**
A belief in their own self-worth and feeling as if they have control over their own well-being. They may feel that they do not have control over the things that happen to them, and may struggle with developing a sense of purpose, self-esteem, and a positive view of their personal future needed for having a positive identity.

**Positive Values**
Students who uphold this asset value helping other people, promoting equality, practicing integrity and honesty, and take personal responsibility for their actions.

Interventions for Externalizing Behaviors

**Bullying & Aggression**

**Global Citizen Forum (Bridging Youth and Children, 2016)**
This program encourages Muslim refugee and non-refugee students to share their experiences, build solidarity with peers, and develop the skills necessary for addressing bullying.

**School-Based Drama Therapy Program (Rousseau and colleagues, 2007)**
Preventing emotional and behavioral problems, while also improving academic achievement through giving young immigrants and refugees an opportunity to "reappropriate and share group stories, in order to support the construction of meaning and identity in their personal stories and establish a bridge between the past and present."

**Programs & Extracurricular Activities**

- Programs to address refugee student complaints of bullying and harassment and utilize skill-building workshops to raise awareness of bullying and promote positive coping and resiliency.
- To help promote positive connections between youth and train peers to become advocates for others.
- Teachers, counselors, and school staff are advised to attend cultural competency trainings and trainings to help recognize the warning signs of refugee students who may be affected by bullying and provide safe school climates.

**Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT) (Schottelkorb and colleagues, 2012)**
- A program that offers students the opportunity to communicate their thoughts and feelings through specific toys, such as multicultural dolls, play food, musical instruments, and other toys that reflected the student’s cultural background.
- These sessions were coupled with therapists’ demonstrating positive regard and empathy towards the family and students.
Developmental Assets Framework
(External Assets)

Support
When addressing the level of support a student has in their current life, it is important to know that young children and adolescents need to be surrounded by family, school, and a community that loves, cares, accepts, encourages, and appreciates them for them to succeed and grow developmentally.

Empowerment
Elizalde-Utnick (2015) shared that refugee children who struggle with self-control due to migration and acculturation may benefit from self-regulation training that helps them develop goal settings and problem solving strategies, as well as increase self-monitoring and self-efficacy beliefs.

Boundaries & Expectations
Youth and adolescents need boundaries and expectations to help them succeed, such as clear rules and consequences within the home and school setting, positive peer influence to model acceptable behavior, and encouragement to do their best.

Constructive Use of Time
Youth and adolescents may be encouraged to use their time constructively by helping them find opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom to learn and develop new skills and interests alongside other students (Search Institute, 1997).

Do Parents Want to Get Involved?

- A majority of middle eastern parents want to be involved with their children’s education, however they may need guidance on what that may look like in an American education system.
- It is important that effective systems are in place to help “encourage partnership with newcomer families so that they feel welcome, learn how to build strong family-school relationships, and are able to communicate with their child’s teachers and school” (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011).
- Birman & Ryerson–Espino (2007) shared that immigrant parents may not know how or when it is appropriate to communicate with their child’s school, and may not be knowledgeable of the extent to which they need to advocate for certain educational programs for their children in the American education system.
Ideas for Activities & Interventions to Get Parents Involved

Parent Involvement

- **Contact**
  - Use bilingual or bicultural liaisons, to help remove children from cultural brokering, and directly bridge communication between parent and school (Huss-Keeler, 1997; Birman & Ryerson-Espino, 2007)
  - With the help of bilingual/bicultural liaisons and interpreters, this will offer families more information about the U.S. school system and information on how or when to contact their child’s school. In addition to sending home packets of educational information in the family’s home language, having in-person orientations will also help build interpersonal relationships with the school and express how the school encourages parent involvement.

- **School Orientations**
  - Holding international dinner events where families can bring their own dishes to represent their heritage or holding festivals with displays and activities that represent their culture (Huss-Keeler, 1997). Schools can also hold events where children may invite their family members to participate in sports competitions, art dance/music ceremonies, talent shows, clean-up, public murals, or gardening activities to help them feel like they are a part of the school (Miller, Thomas, & Freudentfeldt, 2012)

- **After School Events**

Tips for Building Strong Relationships with Refugee Families

- “Sociocultural conversations conducted in the home or community where family members and educators share stories, traditions, hopes, and dreams as well as fears and worries for their children entering the U.S. educational system.”
- Schools can also collaborate with trained community leaders who have also been refugees to help build an understanding of differences that require new adjustments to home and school.
- Teachers and school administrators can schedule meetings at times that are mindful and understanding of the value of family routines, religious practices, work schedules, or other cultural traditions.
- Give families a map of the school with pictures and labels that show where each staff member can be located, and what their role may be. (Miller, Thomas, & Freudentfeldt, 2014)
- Facilitate successful two-way communication systems between school and family that offer each person an equal voice and opportunity to share questions, concerns, or insights (Chu & Wu, 2012)
- Schools offer multiple formats for communication, as well as both written and verbal translations of school brochures, forms, and policies to refrain from any literacy issues.
- Prepare families prior to any meetings with explanations of the purpose of the meeting, what will occur, who will be in attendance, any input needed from parents, and to ask for any questions they may have during the meeting in order to alleviate any nervousness or anxiety before the meeting occurs.
- Schools should also be aware of any professional development opportunities for educators to address effective communication strategies to help overcome reluctance, gain trust, and respond in an appropriate manner to parent and student emotions.
10 minutes
Take A Break!

Breakout Rooms
10-15 minutes

STEP 01
Introduction
Name
School/School District
Position

STEP 02
Why did you choose to come to this workshop?
Share a personal experience (if you feel comfortable)

STEP 03
What is Your Key Takeaway?
Something You Will Try at Your Own School
01

Scenario
A new student from Egypt recently joined your class. You notice that she has been sitting alone at lunch and playing alone at recess. When asking her why she does not play with the other students, she tells you that they do not include her in any games. She also shared that she overheard them calling her the “weird new kid”. How can you help this student make friends within her classroom? How can you encourage the other students to befriend her?

02

Scenario
Parent conferences are approaching and you notice that you have not been able to get ahold of Danny’s parents. Danny recently immigrated from Afghanistan and his family speaks minimal English. Danny has also let you know that his dad works the night shift and his mother takes care of his sister during the day. What are some things to consider when talking to the parents? How can you show cultural sensitivity and understanding during the parent conference?
Scenario

Dalia is a refugee student from Syria who recently moved to the United States. Each morning Dalia comes to class crying that she wants to go home. She has difficulties attending to class lessons and frequently puts her head down on her desk. You ask her if she wants to talk about how she’s feeling, however she is reluctant to share her feelings with you. You refer her to the school-based counselor, however her parents disagree with having her pulled out of class and state that they can help her at home. How can you reassure Dalia’s parents in a culturally sensitive way that the school-based counseling can benefit Dalia?

Ventura County Community Resource Guide

HOT LINE NUMBERS

For Emergency Assistance:
- 911
- 800-459-9999

For Dalia's School:
- 805-562-5200
- Dalia's Teacher

For Counseling:
- 805-562-5200
- School Counselor

Community Services:
- 805-562-5200
- Community Services Agency

Health Services:
- 805-562-5200
- Health Insurance

Food Assistance:
- 805-562-5200
- Food Stamps

Housing Services:
- 805-562-5200
- Housing Assistance

Legal Services:
- 805-562-5200
- Legal Aid

Other Services:
- 805-562-5200
- Transportation

Ventura County Human Services
- 805-562-5200
Ventura County Community Resource Guide Continued

Questions?

Thank You for Attending

References


References


References


References


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