



Innovations in Counseling: Working with Minority Populations- Part 1 Session 5: Arab American Perspectives on Counseling

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Tahani Dari & Shadin Atiyeh

Question from Vivian Aboualol

What's the best way to address individualism within a collectivist mindset in Arabic clients?

Answer from Presenters

Some possible ways include looking at the client's contributions to the community as well as the effects of the community on the client. Ask the client about their current reputation in the community and what they would like it to be. Ask the client about how the community contributed to his or her sense of well-being. Have tolerance for the client beginning his or her story by describing their parents or grandparents.

Questions from Souzan Amer, Angie Canelli, Lamont Scales

How would you go about counseling an Arab possibly Muslim client who is part of the LGBTQ community?

How can we support our LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) Arab populations?

Are there specific things that should be considered when counseling Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender (LGBT) Arabs?

Answer from Presenters

The book *Bint Arab* by Evelyn Shakir talks about the experiences of Arab American women in the US and addresses the issues of gender in Arab American cultures. *Islam and Sexuality* by Samar Habib may be another potential resource. Also, assess the social structure of the client and who may or may not be supportive. Even if there aren't any supportive persons, what historical or literary figures or religious scriptures can the client draw strength from?

Question from Sarah Ansari

Confidentiality is a big thing, how do you address that with this population?

What has been your experience working with Arab females' issues, like depression, self-harm, anxiety, etc.?

Answer from Presenters

In the first meeting, I spend a good part of the session explaining the legal rights of the client for confidentiality and its limitations in detail. Explain what a release of information is. Don't assume that because a client signs an informed consent that they understand confidentiality. I always talk about what would happen if I saw them outside the work setting in the community, that I won't approach them without them approaching me first and I won't disclose how I know them to others.



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Questions from Shanice Banks and Esther Benoit

Have you experienced any Arabic families seeking family counseling?

Is family therapy seen as a viable treatment option? I'm wondering which systemic therapies might be most appropriate for use with Arab American families.

Answer from Presenters

In my experience working with Arab families, often each family member would approach me individually about the concern and ask for my help to fix it. Direct confrontation is avoided so the family and it's not acceptable to disagree or criticize an elder so the family may see you as the mediator between members. Each person in the family may believe they have a right to know what is going on with the others and may push you for information. This can be a challenging position for a counselor, especially if they're trained to encourage everything to be out in the open. It can be helpful to meet with each person individually and get an understanding of their concerns and discuss what is acceptable to share with the other members and what isn't. It can be useful to do a genogram to map out influential people and the history of the family.

Question from Traci Belanger

I work at a university where we have students from all over the Arab countries...We have an all-female staff - does this mean our students will not use our services?

I have been asked to find a place where I can get domestic violence posters in Arabic and am having a very difficult time finding anywhere that has these...any suggestions?

Answer from Presenters

Gender would be less of a barrier than a lack of understanding of what counseling is and when to seek out counseling. Try to reach out to the Arab students groups and the International Students organizations to tell them about what you offer. One resource that was helpful to me in university was a community building day for Arab American students. Team building activities were done and someone from the counseling department at the university spoke about what they offered and her own experience utilizing the counseling services and that culturally competent counselors were available.

For domestic violence posters, seek out the material used by the local domestic violence/sexual assault prevention agencies. If they don't have the resources to have them translated into Arabic seek out the mosque or Arab American organization around you and ask for a volunteer to translate the posters into Arabic. Translating materials from a local agency is more meaningful than a generic Arabic language poster so that people reading it can tie it to an actual available resource. The organizations would be happy to have their name out there and you may build your own network in the process.

Question from Carnell Colebrook-Claude

Is there any evidence of the effect of group therapy with this cultural group?



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Answer from Presenters

I'm not aware of any studies done on the effects of group therapy with these cultural groups. In my experience, clients have responded well to group settings. Having structured activities make it more meaningful and less ambiguous for participants. Clients often want to have the behavioral expectations clear and their roles in the group setting defined.

Question from Ida Duplechin

Some cultures refer to me with the title of "auntie"(English), "tante"(Fr.), etc. Is this to be expected if the clients feel comfortable?

Do boys experience fewer issues living in standard school/community environment (USA)?

Answer from Presenters

In many Arab cultures, people call others their own age "sister" or "brother," those their parents' age "uncle" or "aunt," those their grandparents age "grandmother" or "grandfather." Other titles may be "mother of..." or "father of..." "teacher," or "doctor." "Haj" may be used for someone who completed the pilgrimage to Mecca. Using these titles is common in Arab cultures and is more likely a sign of low acculturation to American society where first names are more common rather than a sign that the client is more comfortable with you.

Questions from Jael Esquibel and Mary Ann Little

As a Career Counselor, I am wondering how you might work with an Arab American client to "brag" about themselves on resumes, CV, and in job interviews?

How would you help create positive images for them when they are uncomfortable "bragging" and putting themselves out in a positive light? A bit challenging...

Answer from Presenters

As a career counselor, make it your job to learn your client's strengths. You can tell them what you've observed and have them practice telling you what you've noticed are their strengths. Use career assessments to get a report of the client's abilities and interests. Ask the client what a friend or family member may say about them. Normalize their concern about bragging as cultural and how it is difficult to learn how to do something that goes against the way they were raised.

Question from Teresa Fisher

What negative or positive implications would this White racial identity have? Please explain why some recent Arab Americans may identify themselves racially as White? Where does this data come from?

Answer from Presenters

Look at Ajrouch and Jamal's article from 2007: "Assimilating to a White identity: the case of Arab Americans." Being Arab is an ethnicity, so race can vary.

Question from Dana Isawi

Are there any evidence-based therapy approaches that work with Arab Americans?

Answer from Presenters

Baum (2011) gives recommendations for addressing politics with Arab clients in “Issues in psychotherapy with clients affiliated with the opposing side in a violent political conflict.” Sayed (2003) discusses the effects of language on how concerns are presented in “Psychotherapy of Arab patients in the West: Uniqueness, empathy, and otherness.” Beilin & Allen (2005) writes about using advocacy in counseling: “A multilevel approach to integrating social justice and family therapy.” Erickson & Al-Tamimi (2001) and Haboush (2007) discuss how to do counseling from within the client’s social structure in “Providing mental health services to Arab Americans: Recommendations and considerations.” Lambert (2008) in “A counseling model for young women in the United Arab Emirates: Cultural considerations” wrote about her experiences counseling Arab women in the United Arab Emirates and how a systemic and solution focused approach was most effective. Nasser-McMillan and Hakim-Larson (2003) stated that Arab clients would prefer solution focused, systemic, and cognitive behavioral therapies in “Counseling considerations among Arab Americans.”

Question from Shannon Kasim

What are the views regarding medication use and psychiatric hospitalizations?

What are the suicide rates for Arab Americans?

Answer from Presenters

Abdulrahman, Tracy, Scarborough, and Galeas wrote about a study in 2011 titled “Suicide among Arab Americans” comparing the suicide rates of Arab Americans and non-ethnic whites. They concluded that a strong ethnic identity may be a protective factor in enclave communities.

Question from Lynn Oborski

Without exception, my Arabic speaking clients, from Iraq, avoid social contact with others from their own community, citing "fear of gossip" as a concern. Can you offer any suggestions as to how to address this in therapy, as loneliness and isolation is a huge factor in their lives?

Answer from Presenters

The fear of gossip from others can be very real. In some countries with corrupt governments, people can fear friends or neighbors reporting on them and people can be imprisoned just from hearsay. Also, there are many diverse groups in Arab countries and though Americans may see a group of Arabs from Iraq as coming from the same culture as one group, the clients may not see themselves as belonging to the larger group. Loneliness and isolation may be a huge factor because the strong family and social ties at home have been broken in immigration. It may be helpful to acknowledge that having social contact with other Iraqis may never be able to replace what was lost. The reality is that the social life in the U.S. may be very different than in Iraq and that is a real loss the client has experienced. What can be helpful is recognizing what was lost and what was gained in immigration.

Question from Sonia Reso

Is the importance of education viewed the same for males and females?

Answer from Presenters

It depends on the family and their own values. In general, education is important. In my experience working with families, the men and women are usually equally educated. The bigger disparity in education level tends to be between social classes rather than gender.

Question from Suanne Schaad

Can you tell us more on the family expectations regarding alcohol and other drug use?

Answer from Presenters

Again, depends on the family's values. Alcohol is forbidden in Islam, so traditional Muslim families don't drink alcohol. In those families where it is acceptable, it is usually frowned upon to be obviously intoxicated but acceptable to start drinking at a younger age.

Question from Yolanda Wilson

Does the limitation of prayer in school limit coping skills to Arabs?

What is the best way to explain to an Arab parent that their child is facing problems that are more Americanized yet not expect an immediate result if they acknowledge help?

Answer from Presenters

Prayer should not be limited in school and there should be a private room where students can go to pray. It only takes a few minutes and probably only needs to be done once during the school day. Some Muslims only pray five times a day during the month of Ramadan. Prayer's significance can vary depending on the person, so limiting prayer in school can have negative effects on the student's coping skills, religious and ethnic identity, the student's feeling of being accepted by the school, or the parents' level of engagement in the school.

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