

Understanding and Working with Arab & Muslim American Families

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Arab American Family Services

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Disclaimer

No Stereotyping

What is being said is not reflective of all Arab/Muslim individuals, families or community.



WHO is Arab American Family Services

- Bi-lingual/Bi-Cultural comprehensive social service organization/2001
- Started with 2...now 40 staff,1 fellow and 3 interns
- Case Management Department
- Elderly Department/Congregate Meal Program
- Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention and Intervention Department
- Immigration Department
- Legislative Policy
- Census Outreach
- DCFS Contract
- Mental Health/Internship Program (Interns)
- Cultural Training and Outreach Program



What is Culture?

- Historically thought to be a pattern of beliefs, values, thoughts, norms, etc....transmitted from generation to generation
- Problem with this definition?

Defining Culture?

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Sexuality
- Religion
- Age
- Class
- Immigration Status
- Disability Status



What is Cultural Competency?

- Individual and institutional sensitivity and implementation.
- Acceptance of and respect for differences
- Continues self-assessment of cultural differences and commonalities

-When you think that we are the same—look for the differences, when you feel there are many differences—look for commonalities.



Keep in Mind...

- Cultural identity can be contradictory and multi-faceted.
 - A person might be Arab but not speak Arabic or might be Muslim but not practice the religion
- Define culture with a reflective and open mind
- Be aware of one's biases
- Recognize that diversity exists both within and between culture



Remember...

- Define culture with a reflective and open mind
- Be aware of one's biases
- Recognize that diversity exists both within and between culture



Cultural Misinformation is...

- Referring to historical information about a group of people and applying it as a generalization
- Limiting what we can see and understand about an individual
- Describing how most people in a group supposedly behave and/or how they should behave



Becoming Culturally Competent

- This does NOT mean learning everything there is to know about the other culture or accommodating everyone
- It DOES mean understanding ourselves.



Categorization

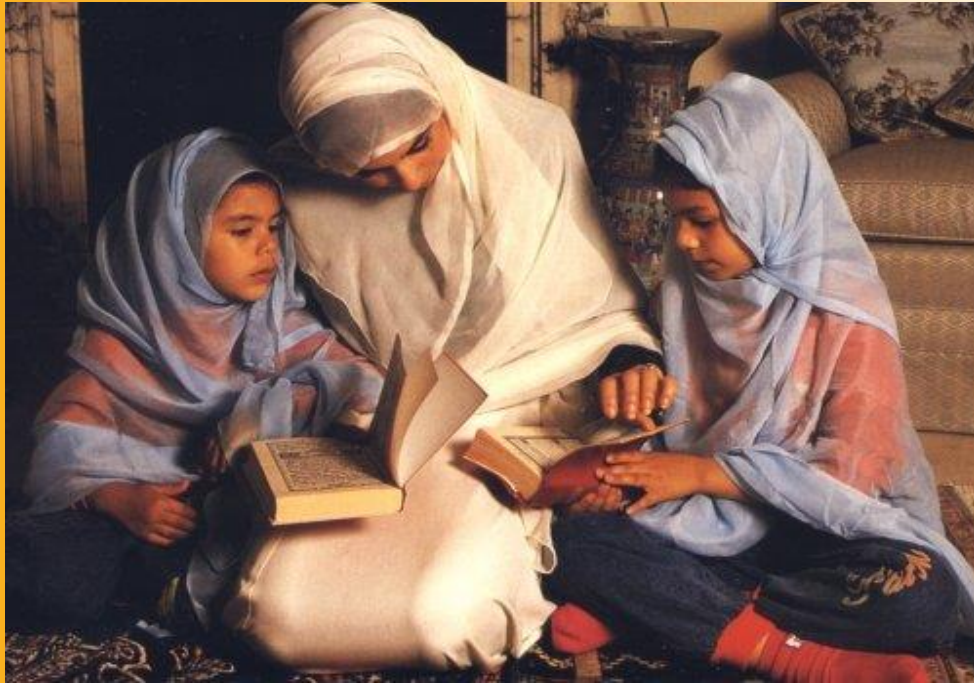
- Immigrant (whole family)
- Children of immigrants 1st generation

Integration and Assimilation takes place!

- Second Generation
- Third Generation



Islam 101



Words of wisdom

“O mankind we have created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honored of you in God’s sight is the greatest of you in piety. God is all-knowing, All-Aware.” (49:13)



Islam

- Is derived from two Arabic root words
- **silm**...Submission
- **Salam**...Peace
- Islam- is submitting yourself to Allah in a peaceful manner
- Muslims – are followers of Islam

Sources of Knowledge

- **Holy Qur'an**
 - Literally means “the Recited”
 - Word of God. Nothing changed from original form.
 - Revealed to Prophet Muhammad through Angel Gabriel;
 - Revealed and written in Arabic; recited by 10M
 - Contain main teaching, values and principles of Islam: a guide to how to live
- **Sunnah**
 - traditions of Prophet Muhammad
 - His words and examples recorded as **Hadith** and **Sunnah** for detailed example of daily life for Muslims to follow.
 - Beard
 - Short pants
 - Kuffie on head
 - Miswak (natural toothbrush)

A Glance at the Muslims World.



- World...1.5 billion

FACT:

- There are more Muslims in China than there are in Saudi Arabia and more in Nigeria than in Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon combined

How many Muslims in USA?

- Estimates vary from 2 ½ million to 9 million!
- Evangelical Missions Quarterly - 4.1 million
- Encyclopedia Britannica - 4.7 million
- Council of American Islamic Relations – 8 to 9 million
- 2007 PEW research estimates - 2.35 million
- Global Initiative - 4-6 million



Muslims composition in Illinois

650,000

- Asian..40%
- African American...30%
- Arab..20%
- Non-Arab...10%
 - White
 - Latino



73 Sects in Islam

- Sunni Islam

- Dominate sect of Islam
- 80-85% of Muslims worldwide
- The name is derived from the book establishing traditional, acceptable Muslim practices, the Sunna.
- Sunni Muslims contend that leadership of the community is not a birthright, but a trust that is earned and which may be given or taken away by the people themselves.



73 Sects in Islam

Shi'i Islam

- Shi'i Islam broke off in 661 AD
- the second-largest Muslim sect, although less than 10% of all Muslims are Shi'ites.
- Shi'a are most commonly found in the Middle East and South Asia, but are uncommon in Northern Africa and Southeast Asia. They represent the majority in Iran, where Shi'i Islam has been the state religion since the 16th century.
- Shia Muslims believe that the Imam is **sinless by nature**, and that his authority is **infallible** as it comes directly from **God**. Therefore, Shia Muslims often venerate the **Imams as saints and perform pilgrimages** to their **tombs and shrines** in the hopes of divine intercession.



73 Sects in Islam

The rest of the sects make up the last 5-10% of Muslim world:

- Khariji
- Sufism
- Druze
- Alawis
- Ismaili
- Etc.,



Pillars of Islam

- Islam - is built on five pillars that are the foundation for all Muslims
 - **Shehada** (Creed/Testimony)- pledge that there is Only one God and that Mohammad is the last messenger of God
 - **Salat** - Prayers Five times a day
 - **Suam**- fasting from sunset to sunrise
 - April 23-May 23
 - **Zakat**- Alms Giving
 - **Hajj**- pilgrimage to Mecca once in your lifetime if your financially and physically able



In Depth Salat (Prayer)

- Scheduling appointments during the prayer time be considerate of it
- Prayer should not take more than 10 minutes
- It is preferred to pray on time, but you can make it up

In Depth Suam (Ramadan)

- Ramadan is simply the name of the **ninth month** of the Islamic lunar calendar. Muslims usually wake before dawn to take a small meal called "**suhoor**". They abstain from eating, drinking and sensual pleasures during the daylight hours of the blessed month. Muslims exert more effort in worship, praying, contemplating, helping others, giving charity, reciting the Quran;
- At **sunset**, (8:30) Muslims break their fast, usually with a big meal with family and friends. Many Muslims also attend the mosque at night, to engage in special night prayers called "**taraweeh**".
- Children, pregnant women, elderly and sick adults are not obligated to fast. You could pay money to feed poor in exchange
- During the last ten days - though the exact day is never known and may not even be the same every year - occurs the Night of Power (**Laylat al-Qadr**). To spend that night in worship is equivalent to a thousand months of worship.

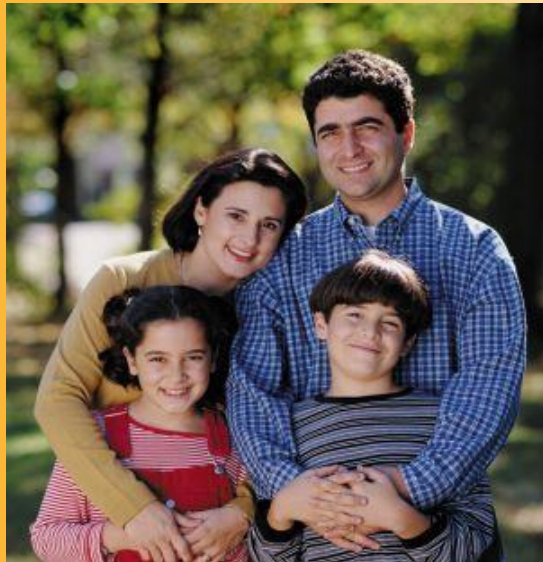


Holidays

- Muslims have Two sacred religious holidays:
 - **Eid Alfitr-** Eid of Fast Breaking 5/23/2020
 - It is a moment of joy and celebration for fasting 30 days in the month of Ramadan
 - **Eid Aldha- Eid of Sacrifice** August 07/30/2020
 - Commemorates prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah.
 - Governor Quinn signed a religious tolerance bill that [requires universities to provide alternate assignments to students who miss work or exams](#) to observe holidays,
- Muslims follow the lunar calendar



Muslim Women



Question

- What comes to mind when you see or hear a Muslim women?

Women in Islam

Stereotypes about Muslim Women

- Myth
 - Uneducated
 - Have no rights
 - Can't make own choices
 - Oppressed
 - Subservient
 - Not allowed to divorce
 - Can't lead
 - Can't own property
 - Can't travel
- Fact..1400 years ago
 - Right to education
 - Right to inheritance
 - Right to initiate marriage
 - Right to keep her maiden name
 - Right to initiate divorce
 - Right to keep kids (13)
 - Right to be active in all aspects of life
 - To lead
 - To travel

Gender Interactions in Islam

with traditional/conservative followers of Islam the following do not take place:

- No shaking hand with opposite gender
 - It is a form of respect and modesty
- men and women do not look each other in the eye
 - Not because of fear or oppression, but out of respect
- In Islam it forbids the isolation and seclusion of man and woman alone
 - Interaction is to be in public
- In Islamic settings, men and women will sit separately



Hijab: Suppression or Liberation?

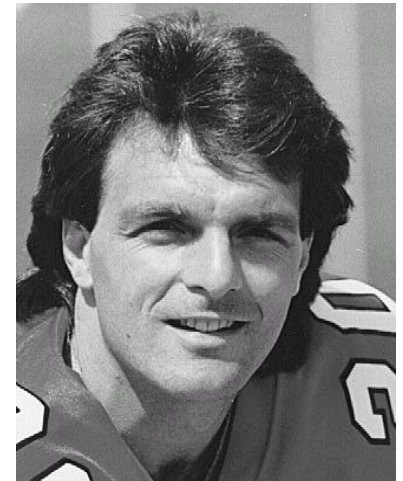
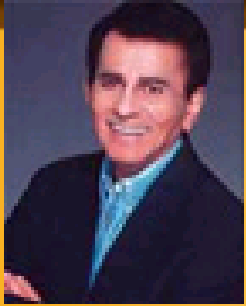
- Hijab means “conceal”
- It is not a sign of religious fanaticism, it is a statement of a Muslim woman’s identity
- Although prescribed, it is a choice
- Wearing the hijab is not universal among Muslim women, and varies within the countries and families.

Arab Americans

Who Are They?



Arab Americans



Who are the Arab Americans?

- Arab Americans are descendants from any of the 22 Arab countries
- Constitute an ethnicity made up of several waves of immigrants
- Began immigrating to US in late 1880s, continue to immigrate today
- Represent a common linguistic, cultural, and political tradition



Arab Americans

- United States...3 million
- Illinois is the six largest state with Arabs
- Illinois 450,000
 - Chicago 250,000
 - South West Suburbs 150,000
 - This is lower than actual
 - Fear of census..
 - MENA Category



Arabic Language

- ranks sixth in world
- language of the Qur'an, it is also widely used throughout the Muslim world.
- It belongs to the Semitic group of languages which includes Hebrew and Amharic

Arabic Dialects

- There are many Arabic dialects.
 - **Classical Arabic** – the language of the Qur'an – was originally the dialect of Mecca in what is now Saudi Arabia.
 - **Modern Standard Arabic**, is used in books, newspapers, on television and radio, in the mosques
- **Colloquial (Local dialects)**
 - Aramaic...Chaldeans and Assyrian
 - Berber...North Africa
 - Kurdish...Syria and Iraq

Know your interpreter and client



Interpreters/Translations

- Know your client country of origin
- Know her/his ability to comprehend the system they find themselves involved
- Even interpreters are not familiar with “system”
- Choose an interpreter wisely
- Be aware of complexities involved with working with interpreters. They might have an agenda, or his/her dialect or tribal/country affiliation might not be well received. (For meetings, check in advance if female translator is okay and vice versa).
 - confidentiality
 - Not always appropriate family members to interpret



Aspects of Arab/Muslim Culture

That impact the survivors seeking help or assistance and overcoming them to help clients began to heal



Ayab/Haram/Kalam Innas

- Arab culture is dominated by: Ayab (shame)
- While Islam is dominated by: ***haram*** (forbidden).
 - These two concepts are intertwined and can be confusing even for Arabs and Muslims!
 - Many Arab families operate with more of the Ayab concept rather than the Haram Concept!

Aspects of Arab Culture

- ‘ayb
 - Arabic term referring to “shame.”
 - Talking back to husband
 - Talking back to your mother in law, father in law, sister in law, or brother in law!!!
 - Wanting to work or finish school
 - Being divorced, so asking for divorce is
 - Unmarried young women going out or working

Aspects of Arab Culture

- Haram
 - Arabic term referring to “forbidden”
 - Anything that is forbidden by Islam
 - Dating (halal Dating)
 - Pre-marital sex
 - Children out of wedlock
 - Alcohol/Pork
 - Drugs
 - Cheating

Aspects of Arab Culture

- Kalam Innas: Arabic phrase referring to “the people’s talk.”
 - Significant part of Arab socialization which guides behavior whereby group members, before taking action, are encouraged to consider what other people in the community might say about their actions.



Aspects of Arab Culture

- All conflicts are exclusively dealt with within the family; community; religious mediators
- Outside help is last resort; usually result of intervention via, hospitals, schools, law enforcement, neighbors, etc.
- Most times outside help is rejected especially by the female family so they can send her back to her husband's family!!



Associative Thinking

- Mainstream tend to think in a linear, goal-oriented, structured, sequential way
- Mainstream telling a story about a life experience would likely do so chronologically in a way that created a beginning, middle, and end
- Arabs are raised and acculturated to think associatively
- Associative thinkers are not bound by the conventions of mainstream
 - Go off on tangents or relate segments out of sequences
 - It may make sense in their ‘big picture’ of what they are trying to communicate, but it can be difficult for linear thinkers to follow
 - Their thinking to mainstream, may appear to jump from point-to-point throughout the conversation
 - A never ending story with no beginning, middle or end.
 - Very circular



Arab/Muslim Americans: Family Relationships

The Arab/Muslim family can be described as patriarchal, patrilineal, hierarchal, pyramid, with regard to age, sex and extended. There are four family types, nuclear, aila, humla, tribe

- Collectiveness stressed
 - Individualism not encouraged
- Extended family important
- Family Responsibilities
 - Operate as a social and economic unit
 - Obligation to family
 - Reputation



Rude Gestures

- Body gestures
 - The Western gesture for “Everything is OK”
 - Beckoning
 - Cupping of fingers
 - Spitting
- Manners
 - Courtesy is Essential
 - Start with niceties and small talk to gain trust



Issues with Muslim Patient

- Needing a Koran to read or hear
- Needing a scarf to wear on her head
- Needing to pray five times a day
- Needing to fast during Ramadan
 - No IV or oral medication...if possible
 - Muscular injections are permitted
- Following halal diet in food and medicine
 - Not take food with pork
 - Not take medication with alcohol or gelatin

End of life/Death

It is Allah who creates you and takes your souls at death (16:70)

The day of your death is written at your birth and all of life happenings are written on the Preserved Tablet

- Present life is only a trial preparation for next life
- Merely movement from one world to next
- Life of this world does not hold any value compared to the life of the next world
- Goal is to attain a place in the garden of Paradise, which is eternal
- Muslim Pts. Will never accept an estimate of life expectancy
 - Only Allah knows end of life and takes it
 - For Muslims death is accepted and welcomed...if performed all expectations of Allah on earth
 - Help dying person recite the Shahadatan and recite Qu' ranic verses
- Life support
- Need a priest or Muslim Chaplin
- Views on preparing for funeral
- Burying a person the same day if possible
 - Respect
 - Dignity
 - Within 24 hrs needs to be buried
 - Islamic washing is done by trained community members
 - Wrapped in simple white cloth
 - Christians within 3 days as with resurrection
 - No embalmment
 - No autopsies if possible, will accept if explained with respect



Institutional Barriers

- Language
- Arab are labeled as white, no real data
- Immigration policies and procedures
- Work policy
- Transportation
- Education
- Employment

How do we help?

- What is our role as providers?
- What can we do to assist an Arab/Muslim client
- Is the “system” understood by everyone in the same way?
- How can I make my “system” more accessible to everyone who walks into it?



Suggestions:

- **Offer Arabic language translators.** Also, be willing to tell your clients the name of the translator before the session. Especially in small communities, people may want to make sure that they don't know the translator socially before agreeing to the session.
- • **Offer home services if possible.** Many people might feel more comfortable talking to service providers in a private setting.
- • **Provide the option of a same-sex practitioner.** Many Muslims prefer not to meet in a closed room with a person of the opposite sex. Also, allow opposite-sex clients to decide whether to shake your hand.
- • **Consider your terminology.** Include "Middle Eastern" or "Arab" under ethnicity on intake forms, and include "Muslim" or "Islam" under religion.
- • **Establish rapport.** Refrain from asking sensitive questions, such as about sex or alcohol use, during the first session. Those questions can wait until you have established a solid relationship.
- • **Hire familiar faces.** Try to increase the number of Arab and Muslim staff in the office, through such means as advertising in Arabic-language press and offering training for Arab and Muslim graduate students.
- • **Ask for help.** If you think a better understanding of your clients' religious or cultural background would help you to help them, ask their permission to consult with an a professional;, Imam or other community leader for advice.
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Consultation

- AAFS does offer consultation services and Interpretation to schools, hospitals, police departments, social service agencies, DCFS, Family Court, Divorce (on behalf of victim) etc., for such cases.
- Due to no funding for these type of consultation, AAFS does charge.



Resources

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