The Socio-Cultural Challenges that Face Recent Immigrant Muslims in the USA:

An Adlerian Approach

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

____________________

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

____________________

By:

Driss Moukrim

May 2014
Abstract

Muslims in the U.S.A., especially those who have recently emigrated from their country of origin, face a specific set of challenging circumstances that can increase the risk of mental health problems. Some of these circumstances are those that affect any group of immigrants, such as adapting to a new culture, separation from family, or learning a new language. Some are specific to Muslims, such as social prejudice, changing views about the roles of women and family, or discriminatory laws.

As a group, Muslims are resistant to traditional Western mental health intervention techniques. In order to adequately address these needs, mental health care workers should be aware of the cultural and religious characteristics specific to Muslims, and consider using both the influence of Muslim religious leaders and Adlerian psychology to better help this population.
Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my wonderful family: My wife, my kids Mehdi and Aayah, and my father and mother for teaching me the importance of Islamic values. I pray to Allah to live this life, which is too short, in a way so that He is pleased with me and my family.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the administrative staff for their understanding and patience with me. I especially want to thank Ms. Evelyn for her time. I will always appreciate her help because without your encouragement this paper would not be completed.

I would like also to thank Dr. Haugen for his willingness to help me whenever needed. Dr. Haugen you are one of the best people I have meet in my school journey. I thank him for his good intentions.

I would like also to acknowledge and thank Dr. Marina and Dr. Herb for their interesting classes, multiculturalism course, and Abnormal Psychology, and for their valuable discussions. They have been the most important and formative experiences of my school life. I am grateful for their patience and flexibility because they have allowed me, as well others, to find a niche within this field and to develop an accurate view about myself and others.

I am very grateful to Ms. Sonnet Fitzgerald for editing my paper, and I would like also to thank Earl for his willingness and excitement in offering me assistance whenever I approach him.
Definition of some Islamic terms used in the paper:

**Hadith(s):** Prophet Muhammed’s (peace and blessing be upon him) statements narrated with sound chains of narrators such as Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.

**Imam:** religious leader in a Muslim community who performs daily prayers at the mosques/ masjid in addition to other duties as assigned by the Muslim community.

**Imam –counselor relationship:** The aim of this relationship between both a counselor and Imam to emphasize the imam’s role in referring Muslims to counseling services and the counselor’s role in referring clients who struggle with religious issues to the imam and to the traditional pious healers when applicable.

**Quaran:** Holy book of Islam.

**Sunnah:** prophet Muhammed’s (peace and blessing be upon him) teaching and lifestyle.

**Religious coping:** Utilization of religion (e.g., daily prayers, dua’s –supplications, recitation of the quaran reading of the hadiths, utilization of hope, patience, and other resources encouraged by religious teaching) and relevant community support (mosque attendance, including different events in addition to daily prayers and community gatherings).

**Islamic attire/ hijab:** women’s clothing covering everything except face, hands and feet, with specific head covering with scarf/hijab.
The Socio-Cultural Challenges that Face Recent Immigrant Muslims in the USA:

An Adlerian Approach

Because of the impact that 9/11 had on America, many U.S. Muslims may find themselves asking hard questions when faced with the experience of seeing, reading, or talking about the attacks. Who am I? What does it mean to be a Muslim in America? What is Islam?

The terror attacks have had enormous coverage in the media for the past thirteen years, and have unfortunately contributed to negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. There have been many cases where people of Islamic faith, who may come from many different cultures, felt greatly misunderstood.

Coming from my own sense of alienation in this sometimes hostile culture, I choose to discuss this topic, and to explore how Adlerian Psychology might help promote the understanding of immigrant Muslims. It might also help resolve some of the issues facing this population, such as divorce, raising children in the United States, discrimination, and the threat of religious hate crimes. These issues are challenges for both native Muslims and immigrant populations.

This paper will aim to describe the cultural background of Muslims who have emigrated from various countries to the United States within the previous two decades. Clearly applying Western intervention techniques to people from a strongly different culture will prove to be ineffective at best. These groups are socially diverse and require careful consideration of their specific needs and cultural expectations if a counselor has any hope of success in treating them.

One of the most obvious differences between Western culture and Muslim culture is the concept of “collective societies versus individualistic societies.” This paper will go into more
detail about the power that the collective society holds for this population later on, but this one concept creates significant barriers for many Muslims who seek treatment in the West.

Muslim immigrants come from many different countries and, as such, come from a variety of different cultures. However one thing they all have in common is the influence and power that Islam holds. More than just a religion, it is usually the center of life for Muslim communities. It is generally accepted, regardless of the country, that Islamic rules and family are held above the individual. This is the opposite of how things are viewed in America, and this conflict can lead to problems in treatment if it is not anticipated.

The main point of this paper is to guide non-Muslim counselors who may be working with Muslims in the United States as to how religious and family values may be different than their own. This paper will highlight some of the basic psycho-cultural norms that are present across all Muslim populations, regardless of ethnicity, because Islam is the unifying factor in the worldview for most Muslim people (Rippy & Newman 2008).

The effect of Western culture on recent immigrants is noticeable. Upon arrival, all will encounter cultural challenges, and most will try to adapt by learning English. The benefits to learning English are not only in helping to adapt to a new culture. Knowing the language can assist refugees and asylum seekers in legalizing their stay, and it can help in the process of getting a job in the new country.

This paper will deal with the following issues, while trying to explain the challenges present for a diverse group of people held together by a common religion and experience of recent immigration.

1. Why Adlerian therapy.

2. The goal of this paper.
3. Basic cultural characteristics of Muslim societies.

4. Muslims in the U.S.A.

5. What is Islam?

6. Cultural difficulties that face Muslim immigrants in the U.S.A.

7. Mental health disorders among recent Muslim immigrants

8. The impact of the 9/11 tragedy on Muslims in the U.S.A.

9. The challenges facing Islamic immigrant and refugee children in the U.S.A.

10. Divorce among American Muslims

11. Muslim women in the U.S.A.

Failure to support these immigrants and provide them with a strong source of community support leads to a greatly reduced quality of life.

Adlerian Psychology is an ideal fit for this population because it is consistent with the ideals and requirements of Islam. Further, it allows for consultation and dialogue with Imams, which can help to reduce the suspicion of mental illness which is often prevalent in Muslim communities.

Here is what some possible goals would look like in an Adlerian intervention in a Muslim community:

1. Educated Imams and community leaders. Because of their special place of honor and involvement in their community, Imams would be an essential key in helping new immigrants within their community to adjust. They could also help identify possible mental health issues within their community and can encourage local people to utilize services.
2. Providing for the immediate needs of high-risk recent immigrants. This could include food and housing resources, English classes, job training and placement, legal status, parenting skills and mental health awareness.

3. Introduce recent immigrants to the U.S. school system and teach them how to support their children’s education.

4. Encourage a world view. Muslim communities typically make strong social contributions, seeing each other as brothers and sisters. This leads to accountability and transparency, which help support individuals.

5. Create a direct dialogue between mosques and Islamic centers with mental health centers and social services.

6. Educate Muslims about the role of intervention therapy. Focus on how therapy can help them find their strengths and develop strategies to cope with difficult circumstances.

7. Convey the importance of formal education in the U.S.A. and how graduation will lead to meaningful work.

8. Implement religious coping strategies alongside behavioral coping strategies.

9. Talk about the negative perception of Muslims in the media and the discrimination that people might face on a daily basis. These stereotypes can be extremely damaging and it is important to raise awareness.

10. Encourage workshops about mental health issues at mosques and within the Muslim community.
Why Adlerian Psychology?

There are many reasons why the Adlerian approach is ideal for working with a Muslim population. First, Adlerian Psychology has religious overtones. This makes it a valuable tool for therapists who wish to incorporate spirituality in the counseling process (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999).

Second, it is an approachable theory for people of color, including Muslims.

Freud and Jung, who were colleagues of Adler, were particularly racist. Freud referred to people of color as primitives and savages. Jung considered white people contaminated if they lived in close contact with people of color. In a speech to the Zurich Psychological Society in 1912 Jung stated, “the psychoses of Negros are the same as those of the white man but diagnosis is difficult because the negro is superstitious, does not understand what one wants of him and cannot look into his own thought or retell hallucination or dreams. The Negro is religious and pictures the white man as an ideal” (Nobles, 1986, p.522).

Adlerian psychology works better for Muslim clients because it takes a more holistic and practical approach and focuses on the source of problems rather than looking for a psychological cause. Lifestyle analysis presents easily attainable concepts of the self, others and ideals. Adlerian theories about birth order and sibling jealousy also provide unique insight to Muslim family structure.

These concepts, along with Dreikurs’ 1964 development of the four goals of children’s misbehavior, serve to explain the majority of emotional and behavioral issues with which children within immigrant Muslim families struggle.

A view to the common aspects of social interest and holism:
Adlerian philosophy and Islam share an important basic understanding of human nature. Both are holistic in nature, meaning they believe that everything is connected, and they are relational when it comes to human nature.

The concept of social interest in Adlerian philosophy, of social connection and belonging to others, is extremely important. Adler believed we are all connected, to our nuclear families and then to the world beyond.

One of the important cultural values in Islam is living in a collective society (Duffey, Carns, Carns & Garcia, 1998). For Muslim clients their society may include their family, their religious peers, and their neighbors. Keeping this in mind, when therapists work with Muslim clients, involving the entire family in therapy is not only acceptable but may be beneficial.

Most Muslims have a strong sense of community. The Quran, the holy book in Islam, emphasizes that the earth is one community. “Have we not made the earth a community?” (77:25) People, male and female, are created in the communities of nations and tribes and are called to know one another and be righteous (49:13).

The prophet Mohammed (pbuh) said, “God’s hands are with the community,” and most rituals and prayers such as hajj and daily praying are performed collectively as a group. The Quran suggests that God gave the prophet a mission to reform the communities (11:18) in order for them to engage in just and fair conduct (57:25) and to keep an equal attitude towards them (57:25.) Community is viewed as a family in Islam and the best one is the most helpful to others and their welfare. The prophet (pbuh) even said that he who does not care about his neighbors is not a believer (Al-Fasaha, 2006).

In order to work well with Muslim clients, a therapist must familiarize him or herself with their culture, spiritual beliefs, and worldview. In this way the clients will develop a sense of
trust with the counselor and open up to him or her. It is important to remember that within
Islamic cultures family is highly valued, and this is where an individual gets their self-esteem,
pride, and sense of identity.

According to Islam, family is an institution founded directly by God’s will. Allah says in
the Quran, “Oh mankind, be mindful of your duty to your lord who created you from a single
soul, and from it created its mate and from the two created men and women” (Souarah 4 verse 1).

**Holistic View**

Adlerian Psychology seeks to understand patients through a holistic, interconnected
method instead of a reductionist, separated way. Traditional psychology tends to reduce patient
problems into parts, such as conscious vs. unconscious, body vs. soul, wife vs. mother, or good
vs. evil. At a time when Freud stressed a divided and conflicted personality (Ferguson, 2003)
Adler talked about a united person, working towards a single goal.

Islam too provides a holistic view for how Muslims should lead their lives, combining
spiritual health with the health of the physical body and mind, ‘heart and soul;’ leading
integrated lives in their communities of family, religious leaders and friends.

For Muslims, spirituality and religion cannot be detached. Both are deeply intertwined
with each other, and present in daily spiritual rituals as well as everyday life and common
experiences.

When helping Muslim families, therapists need to work in a holistic manner (Carter &
Rashidi, 2004) need to focus all together on creating peace in the spirit “Rouh”, mind “Nafas,”
intellect “Akalani”,or Tafakour,” body (badan, Jessem,) and emotion “Awatif”(Carter &
Rashidi, 2004).
The Quran sees all these parts as being connected, and if one part is out of balance, the health of the body and mind will suffer. For Muslims, the concept of inner balance and peace are an important goal (Carter & Rashidi, 2004). A common pathway through which this peace is traditionally achieved is diet, fasting, prayer and meditation. It is believed that these actions restore emotional and physical balance to a person.

In Islam, spirituality is an important and effective part of the healing process of grief. It is seen as the work of an individual’s soul toward a deeper connection with the creator and a clearer understanding of the meaning of life.

Most Muslim families follow the Quran, which is the holy scripture, and the Sunnah, which are traditions of the prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Both of these texts play a central role when families face difficulties (Carter & Rashidi, 2004.) Therefore, it is important that a counselor be very familiar with the texts themselves, or be willing to consult with an Imam when suggesting treatment.

The role the Quran plays when treating Muslim families who are facing challenges cannot be underestimated or ignored. Any therapists who want to be in any way effective with this client population must be willing to immerse themselves in this deeply spiritual culture and understand the significance religious belief holds for their patients. It may often be useful, for patients, to prescribe reciting passages from the Quran, or fasting. These techniques will be understood, trusted and utilized by immigrant Muslims even if they seem strange to a Western professional.
Challenges Facing the Adlerian Therapist

1. Many Muslim clients will come to session expecting very practical advice on how to solve their problems. They may be surprised and put off by having to talk about things. “How will talking solve anything?”

2. Many Muslims consider talking as a tool for social connection; that is, pleasing others. It is not commonly seen as a means of expressing emotion.

3. Many Muslims may not understand and dislike being asked about intimate parts of their life such as their childhood, marriage or sexual relationships.

4. Muslims immigrants from a modest culture will have significant trouble discussing feelings with a therapist of the opposite sex. Women may see this as harassment and a man asking about something as intimate as their feelings can be offensive.

5. Many Western therapists believe they have an ethical obligation to educate their clients (especially female clients) about their ideals of freedom and equality. This may not always have the desired effect. For example, encouraging an immigrant Muslim woman to go against her husband can lead to abuse, divorce, neglect, and estrangement from her community. The Muslim family has its own rationality based on collective experience. Confronting the culture of the client can harm the client.

The Islamic Perspective of Mental Health

From an Islamic perspective there are many different causes of mental illness, such as: heredity, biochemical imbalances, learned behavior, trauma, or physical and emotional deprivations in early life. In addition there are other causes that are not recognized by modern
science which ascribe some cases of mental illness to exterior influences. This belief is common among all cultures and religious beliefs throughout history.

In the Quran, Allah (swat) informs Muslims that certain types of mental illnesses are caused by the influence of the Jinn. The Quran describes the nature of the Jinn kind, its power and limitations, the effect of its influence on humans, how to prevent becoming a victim of its influence, and how to treat its effects.

Victims of the influence of the Jinn and Shaytan (Satan) are those who are weak, lack self-esteem, struggle to have self-identity, or are greedy for more and more pleasure in their earthly existence.

These victims appear to suffer from delusions, hallucinations, obsessions and compulsive behaviors. It is important to remember that these mental illnesses are not always caused by external influences. However a holistic treatment plan that takes into consideration all aspects of mental illness, heredity, biochemical factors, sociocultural and spiritual, needs to be employed appropriately with these clients.

Who are the Muslims in the U.S.A.?

Ethnically, Muslim immigrants are extremely varied and come to the US from over one hundred different countries around the world. The most common countries of origin include Southeast Asia, the Arab Peninsula including Palestine, India and Pakistan.

On arriving in the United States, Muslims, like most immigrants, tend to congregate in major cities such as New York, Chicago, Washington D.C. or Los Angeles. Minneapolis is an interesting exception as a small city with an unusually large Muslim population for its size.

If you were to create a map showing the heaviest concentration of Muslims in the U.S.A., you would see four major centers. New York, Washington D.C., California, with heavier
concentrations in the big cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco, and a sort of Midwestern
triangle bordered by Chicago, Detroit, and Texas.

Each of these centers in the US where immigrants of Islamic faith have tended to gather
also has a specific ethnic group associated with it. For example, Californian Muslims are mostly
Iranian. Los Angeles has the largest population of Iranians of any city in the world outside of
Tehran. Texas Muslims are mainly Southeast Asian, and Midwestern Muslims are often Arabic.
Chicago has its own population of Eastern European Muslims, such as Bosnians, Albanians and
Turks.

Reasons for Immigration

The recent Muslim immigrants have come to the United States for the following three reasons:

1. Refugee status. Currently, many of the Muslim countries around the world are
   unfortunately controlled by dictators. This exposes Muslims countries to war,
   tyranny, persecution, violence and poverty. Many Muslims flee their home
   country for the stability and opportunity of life in the United States.

2. Education. As far back as 1990, over a half million students at universities in the
   United States were from foreign countries, and the number is much higher today.
   Many of these students choose to remain in the U.S.A. after completing their
   education. Over 75% of medical students remain in the United States.

3. Anti-Islamism. In certain countries, such as Algeria, Iran, Sudan, or Pakistan,
   Muslims face severe persecution for their faith. Some flee their country of origin
   and come to the United States looking for a place where they are safe in their
   beliefs.
What is Islam?

Of the three major monotheistic religions, Islam is the youngest. It is also the second-largest and the fastest growing religion in the world (Bernstein, 1993; Esposito, 1999). Mirroring this, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States (Maruand & Andani, 1996).

Islam began in the city of Mecca in Arabia with the prophet Mohammed (pbuh) and spread to every corner of the world.

Islam comes from the Arabic root word for ‘peace.’ It means to follow Allah, the Arabic word for God. This God is the same God worshiped by Jews and Christians. Any person is considered a Muslim as long as they confess that, “there is no god but the one god and Mohammad (pbuh) is the prophet of god.”

Islam requires that its followers establish a strong, connected community together. In fact, the Quran explains that this community is a necessary step towards realizing God’s will here on earth (Denny, 1995). Through this religious community, Islam works to eliminate discrimination and prejudice based on race, culture or income. Al-Faruqi (1998) states “by affirming the brotherhood of all peoples, Islam denies the concept of ethnocentrism and the doctrine of election”. As a universal religion, it aspires to include all nations within the Islamic states” (p. 59).

This concept of “One Nation” is called ummah and is very popular among Muslims. However similar concepts exist within Judaism and Christianity as well (voll, 1994). What makes the Islamic idea special, however, is that religion may be the only thing that people who are part of the ummah have in common. They may be from very different races, cultures, behave differently, and have different incomes. Islam is what they all share.
The Presence of Muslims in America

Muslims have been in the U.S.A. practically from the beginning. According to Abdullah Quick (1996). There are two factors supporting their early existence:

1. The New York Ethnological Society collected information on Africans forcibly deported to America in the slave trade. By their estimates, 40 to 60 percent of the African slaves were Muslims, and 20 percent were Muslim women.

2. The expulsion of Muslims (along with Jews) from the Iberian Peninsula in 1609. Many of these displaced Muslims found their way to America. Their influence can be seen in early American architecture in areas where Spain had an influence. The architectural style now known as Spanish or Californian style is consistent with that of talented Muslim workers from Iberia.

Some Characteristics of the Muslim Collective Society

Historically Muslims from especially North Africa and Southeast Asia tended to live in familial or community groups. This gave the group a better chance of surviving harsh conditions. For the group to function successfully, it was traditionally headed by a strong male figure, and individuals practiced asabiya or full submission to the authority of the group. Life in this system is about group goals and submission to the group identity of the family and the greater good. This was a powerful and successful system that worked well. Chaleby (1992) argues that the collectivistic nature of the family affects the individual concept of himself or herself as an independent person. The person in this culture is not autonomous but is connected to an extended family and he directs energy towards achieving group rather than personal goals, whereas the individualistic Western culture values independence, autonomy, achievement, and completion (Katz, 1985).
Because this concept is so different to the value placed on the individual that most Western people hold, Western therapists who seek to work with Muslim clients must have a good understanding of how this worldview works or they will alienate their client, possibly cutting them off from support. From a Western point of view, it might look as if the father figure is too controlling or dominating in this model. However, it is a model that has been successful for families for many years, and there are benefits to women and children in this structure that may be overlooked, such as extended support networks and well established family roles (Chaleby, 1992).

Muslim scholars agree that this strong sense of community, even to the extent of tribalism, exists and influences Muslim society and politics today (AL-Jabri, 1991; Barakat 1993).

Counselors working with Muslim clients need to give particularly close attention to this setup and work to understand the client’s family relationships if they want to succeed in treatment. They must figure out family conflicts, identify coalitions between family members, and specifically understand a client’s status within the family if they want to make any headway against a problem within a Muslim family framework. A counselor who ignores the family and just works on personal issues with their Muslim client will miss the point and misunderstand their client entirely.

**Social and Cultural Challenges**

Most immigrants coming to the United States do so in order to improve the lives of their families. Unfortunately, it is the case that sometimes the cultural shock upon entering a new country can prove difficult, and adapting can cause tension among family members. The U.S.A. is not an Islamic country. For example, many Muslims find it difficult to pray the prescribed five
times a day, because work and school do not make allowances for this here. Some of the other problems faced by recent Muslim immigrants include language barriers, work, immigration status, and perceived social status.

**Language Barriers**

Upon arriving in the United States, even educated people can find mastering a new language and the variety of American dialects very stressful and surprisingly difficult. Because of this, many people experience a loss of self-esteem.

In many areas, English is a necessary step towards achieving some basic integration goals such as obtaining a driver’s license. In fact learning English is a major step towards not only regaining self-esteem and reducing tension and anxiety, but leading a more capable and active life.

**Work**

If an immigrant does not have English skills or legal status in the U.S., supporting themselves and their families through meaningful work is extremely difficult. Often, immigrants end up working in family businesses.

**Immigration Status**

Living life as an illegal alien can have long-lasting negative effects on the mental health of immigrants, as well as their families back home. They often live life in constant fear, with a sense of being besieged. It is also a hardship that they are never able to leave the country and see their families again; often for the remainder of their lives.

**Social Status**

For reasons already discussed, many immigrants who might be well educated and have held respected careers in their home country are forced to take menial or low-status jobs in the
United States. Career is closely tied to identity for many people and this change can lead to a great loss of self-esteem or feelings of humiliation. The standard of living is higher in America than in many Muslim countries, but this is not enough to offset the shame many immigrants feel about the work they must do before learning English and gaining legal work status.

**Mental Health Disorders**

The above challenges which affect many Muslims in the United States, including recent immigrants, are complex. Besides cultural challenges, Muslims often face racism and discrimination. These stressors can contribute to mental health issues and adjustment disorders. Many immigrant Muslims are likely to have experienced multiple losses, such as the loss of a homeland as well as the loss of family, and this contributes to their risk of mental health disorders. Some of the most common mental health issues seen in the Muslim population are listed below:

**Anxiety and Depression**

This is especially common in populations coming from war-torn countries. For refugees coming from places like Iraq, Bosnia, or Somalia, it seems there is always something on the news to remind them of the trauma experienced in their homeland. Mghir and Risking (2001) studied the psychological effects of the war on the Afghani people and concluded that many were traumatized, and had lost their homes and family members. The war in Bosnia brought a great deal of suffering to the people there. Homes were destroyed and families were torn apart as people came to America and other countries fleeing the violence. Somalia is another country that has seen a huge amount of violence recently. A study of Somalis in the U.S. found the incidence of anxiety and depression to be 33.8% (Blui et al., 2006).
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Research has found that the intensity of the experience and the duration of the trauma raise the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder. This is very common in refugees from countries affected by war such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, or Somalia. Jaranson and colleagues (1998) found torture to be a significant risk factor for a variety of physical and mental health difficulties including PTSD in a sample of 1134 East African refugees (Somali, 622).

Psychotic Disorders

Studies by the World Health Organization show that in non-Western societies, schizophrenia correlates strongly with stress, such as divorce or loss. Abd El Gawad (1995) compared the symptoms of schizophrenia in Muslims in Egypt with those of Muslims in the U.S.A. and Great Britain. He discovered that symptoms such as incongruous thoughts, withdrawal, mental fog and incoherence ranked higher in Egyptians than in Westerners. However, delusions placed second among symptoms displayed in the U.S.A. and Britain but only tenth in Egypt.

Somatic Complaints

It is very common in Muslim cultures for patients who are struggling with their emotions to complain of physical ailments such as disrupted sleep, lack of energy, headache, abdominal pain, or arthritis. Patients may make physical gestures to communicate anger or frustration, or may use euphemisms such as, “I can’t even touch my head,” or “I feel like I have been hit by a train.”

In a holistic mind-body culture such as Islam, mental complaints are expressed physically because there is no distinct domain for the self. These are the only words patients have to express their pain. Also, in Muslim cultures expressing emotional distress is not something commonly
supported, so people may tend to use physical pain as a stand-in for their emotional hurt to avoid criticism.

**Mood Disorders**

Mood disorders are commonly manifest in Western patients with dysphonia and somatic complaints such as loss of appetite, weight change, sleep disturbances, or psychomotor agitation.

In contrast, in Muslim populations, dysphonia is more likely to present with depressed mood and a loss of interest and pleasure in activities. Some scholars report that non-Westerners do not differentiate between somatic and affective complaints, so may report depression as a somatic rather than a psychological symptom (Rosaldo, 1984).

**Sexual Disorders**

Paraphilia (deviant sexual behavior,) sexual dysfunction and other sexual disorders as defined in the DSMV cannot be as broadly applied to an immigrant Muslim population as they would be to a Western population because of the difference in culture. What is considered deviant in one culture may be perfectly normal and acceptable in another.

For example, the Western definition of pedophilia cannot be applied to Muslims who come from a cultural tradition where marriage is performed before the age of 18. On the other hand, sexual intercourse before marriage, which is widely accepted in the West, is forbidden in Muslim cultures. In addition while Western thought does not consider homosexuality a deviant practice, it is condemned in Muslim culture.

These are some of the mental health issues facing Muslim immigrants in the United States today. According to researchers, it is most common for patients to have a mixed diagnosis with more than one problem or disorder present at a time, rather than a single, simple issue such as just anxiety or just depression. Symptoms are highly distinctive among American Muslims.
To avoid misdiagnosis, practitioners are advised to be aware of the unique challenges facing this immigrant population.

**Divorce among American Muslims**

In North America, the divorce rate for Muslims has doubled since 1966 (Siddiqui & Ba-Yunus, 1998). Nearly one third of Muslim marriages in the United States will end in separation or divorce. Researchers agree that there are six main factors that increase the risk of divorce for American Muslims, explained in further detail below.

What is divorce in an Islamic context? How can the Muslim population, its leaders and communities deal with divorce? Let us look to Adlerian psychology again for guidance on intervention and marriage enhancement as a means to counsel couples in distress.

**Divorce in Islam**

Unlike other religions, marriage in Islam is not considered to be pre-ordained or made in heaven. It is simply a contract between two people (Hogben, 1991, p. 155). Like any other contract, marriage contracts in Islam are based on a number of conditions, with each partner having both duties and privileges (Prothro, Diab & Lufty, 1974, p. 37). Because marriage is conditions of their contract are not met. Otherwise, divorce is not prohibited under Islamic law and is considered to be the condition least approved of by God (Fyzee, 1974, p. 37).

Under Islamic law, a wife can divorce her husband against his will under three circumstances. First, if there is a provision in the marriage contract which gives her the right to do so. Second, she may divorce him against his will if he is considered to have broken the contract, such as taking a second wife. Third, the *khuluh* divorce may be initiated by the wife if she has a genuine and understandable reason for seeking a divorce. Such a reason may range
from his treatment of her during the marriage to disliking his appearance because of a deformity or accident.

With the increasing divorce rate among American Muslims, divorce has become a pressing issue in many Islamic communities. Here are the main reasons contributing to the current divorce rate, according to researchers:

1. **In-law conflicts:** In some Muslim communities, particularly Southeast Asian ones, a new wife is expected to leave her parent’s home and live with and care for her in-laws, either for traditional or economic reasons. This can cause tension and conflict. Living with in-laws does not allow a young couple to adjust to married life together and to grow organically as a couple.

2. **Adultery and haram (forbidden) sex:** It is no secret that North American society is extremely sexualized with cable TV and the internet glorifying sexual activity outside of marriage. In many marriages, especially where one partner is faithful, adultery will mean the end of the marriage.

3. **Incompatibility:** Many Muslims are aware at the beginning of their marriage of spiritual or political incompatibility but they stay married to their spouses because of pressure from their families. A husband may feel strongly about his wife wearing hijab, but she may feel just as strongly about not covering up. Either the husband or wife may start the marriage as a conservative or liberal, and find that their beliefs change over time. One spouse may be focused on their spiritual life while the other is focused on their social life. These conflicts lead to tension in the marriage.
4. **Unrealistic expectations:** This is a major cause of conflict and divorce in Muslim marriages, especially in cultures where gender roles have not been challenged for hundreds of years and are now changing rapidly. The man wants a wife who will support him and cook for him. The woman, who is intelligent and understands more about Islam, knows she can demand more from a marriage. Both end up with unrealistic views about how daily life with their new spouse is going to be in reality.

5. **Individualism:** As Muslim immigrants adjust to American life, they take on the concept of secular individualism that is so prevalent. Marriage becomes about what it brings to you as an individual and if it does not do you any good any more, it is discarded. The rise in divorce among Western Americans is mirrored by Muslim Americans.

6. **Abuse:** In the past, it was only the most extreme case of physical abuse that would push women (in particular) to initiate divorce. Today, many forms of abuse are recognized, such as verbal and emotional abuse, and the harmful effects of even mild abuse. More abused women are divorcing their abusers.

**The Adlerian Therapy Intervention**

The majority of Muslims in the United States are lacking adequate preparation for marriage, and I believe it is the role of the community (mosques and Islamic centers) to provide this education via seminars and workshops for young Muslims to teach them about the rules of marriage (*nihkah,* gender relations and sexual matters.)
Adlerian therapy, which is very consistent with Islam, can be used to create a preventative program to combat divorce. This could be applied in stages and used to treat the six problems identified above.

Alfred Adler recognized that “it would be a real blessing for marriage humanity and the future generation if before every marriage there were some marriage therapy …to supplement inadequate preparation and improve erroneous attitudes” (Adler, 1978).

An Adlerian divorce prevention program would need to be done in an Islamic community center with an Imam as a facilitator.

During the first session, the Muslim couple would meet to develop their personal awareness of marriage as a concept, discuss their expectations of marriage, and what needs to be done to make a marriage work.

During the second session they would discuss more deeply their expectations of the marriage and each other.

The third session would examine their families of origin. This will give them a chance to see how their past experiences shape their expectations and what impact their families of origin will have on the new family they are creating.

The fourth session would focus on the difficulty of communication. Each member of the couple would learn about their own personal communication style and work on a communication model.

During the fifth session, couples would study conflict resolution and how resolving conflict can create intimacy. Couples would learn about the way they tend to handle conflict, and study some strategies for resolving conflict.
The sixth and final session is all about cooperation. Couples will learn that it takes cooperation to run a family and would learn ways to help each other, such as with household tasks.

Lastly, Adler stated, the fundamental guarantee of marriage and the meaning of marital happiness is the feeling that you are worthwhile and that you cannot be replaced, that your partner needs you, that you are acting well and that you are a fellow human and true friend” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 432).

This program would not entirely eliminate divorce from the Muslim community but, since no such program currently exists, it would fill a need and counteract several of the main problems currently causing divorce among American Muslims. The American Muslim community needs workshops and seminars such as these to educate young people in the religious responsibility of marriage.

Some Considerations about Muslim Immigrant Women During Therapy

Although many recent immigrant women make a considerable contribution to family life and community decisions, and are engaged in many social activities, they are often considered oppressed by American standards due to their Islamic faith.

So what is the image of Muslim women from an Islamic perspective?

Muslim Women from an Islamic Perspective

Muslim women are called “the natural leaders” Umahat Almouminin (wives of the prophet PBUH) who imparted Islamic learning to the first and second generation of believers.

Although a husband is the head of the household, the wife has substantial influence over family decisions (Erickson & Al-Timmimi, 2001). An old saying often cited among Muslims with diverse backgrounds states that “the man is the head, but the women is the neck, and she
can turn the head anyway she wants.” Although the Muslim man’s role is to act as a provider and a protector of the family, Muslim women have different but equally important roles and influence within the family and the Muslim community (Ali, Mahmoud, Moel, Hudson, & Leather, 2008).

A 2009 Gallup survey showed that Muslim women attend masjid and Islamic centers frequently and, in the USA, they are involved in community matters equally as often as men.

If we look at history, we find that Muslim women have been queens, heads of state and rulers for centuries. I am a Muslim and I remember all the Muslim girls in my neighborhood, including my sisters and others with whom I grew up, being nagged incessantly by their parents to do well in school and become doctors, professors, lawyers, engineers and other types of professionals. The pursuit of knowledge is the duty of every Muslim, whether male or female.

When working with Muslim women clients, it would be appropriate for the therapist to be familiar with the following cultural characteristics:

1. Religion
2. Hijab
3. Social support of the client
4. Arranged marriage.

Considering these concepts will help the therapist understand Muslim women clients within the conceptual frame of their culture.

Religion

Religion plays a major role in a Muslim immigrant’s life. Muslims use their religion as a cultural identity marker and a tool to guide them in all aspects of life. Many Muslims find religion and tradition a useful coping mechanism for stressful situations and frequently attend
Islamic centers. Often parents struggle to keep the faith strong in their kids by enrolling them in Sunday schools.

**Hijab**

The veil and the hijab are at the core of Islamic tradition and religious beliefs. This issue has been debated in literature, history and sociology, and in every country ranging from Islamic to Arabic to western (Mernissi, 1978). They all agree that hijab is meant to promote privacy for females and to prohibit the intermingling of sexes. It supports modesty, decency, chastity and, above all else, respect and worship.

For example when a woman rejects hijab, she is indirectly rejecting traditional authority. It is the man who says that the hijab protects a woman’s purity, it is the outsider who judges.

Some may rationalize that such dress is not required in the American context and that women in the US may choose to wear western clothing (Hermansen, 1991). Other women may choose to stop wearing the hijab because of negative reactions from others (Ahamadi & Cole, 2010). These religious and cultural conflicts in the new environment may represent clinical issues for some women, and the therapist may need to consider the pros and cons of wearing hijab.

**Family Support**

Immigrant women need family and social support to alleviate emotional distress and to help them cope with their own personal stress associated with being uprooted from their homeland and resettled in a totally new environment.

According to Ahmed (1992) this factor is particularly prevalent among women with low economic status and lack of education. Many of these women feel lonely, unheard and
powerless, and the lack of money makes their lives hard. Their husbands are often absorbed with work and the wives stay home, feeling as if they are widows and raising kids on their own.

Social Life

Culturally, most Muslim women have a very connected social life. They often meet with family members and neighbors. In the United States, because of work schedules and the long distance, it is more difficult to find ways to meet other women and families. The most effective techniques include attending the Islamic centers or moving close to other Muslim families.

Arranged Marriage

Arranged marriage has traditionally been the norm for most Muslims around the world. Generally, Muslim women do not date regardless of their level of education, class, country of origin or level of adaptation. Many Muslim women are unwilling to commit to marriage without the consent of their parents and without the involvement of both families, because they believe that arranged marriages prove to be more successful and lasting than romantic ones. The common belief is that when parents arrange marriage on behalf of their children, the marriage is not built on physical attraction or blind love but on familial compatibility. A marriage in Muslim culture is not a contract between individuals who decide to get married but it is a familial or a communal affair.

These are some of the unique cultural characteristics of Muslim women. Understanding them will help a therapist working with this population be more effective and sensitive to the needs of their clients.

Challenges Faced by Immigrant Muslim Children

Many Muslims who have immigrated recently to the United States did so seeking a better life for their children. These families assumed that their children would adapt and assimilate
easily into their new culture but, unfortunately, these children have faced a number of complex challenges in their new country.

Recent findings suggest that these challenges could be eased through support from the schools, as well as by providing families with effective parenting skills, improved social skill, and better communication between children and parents.

Issues facing Immigrant children include:

**Lack of Basic Skills**

Often Muslim children are coming from refugee camps. They are trying to establish themselves in a new environment and they are under a huge amount of stress. They may be in a new culture, learning a new language, grieving a lost home and family, and redefining who they are. In their home country, cultural traditions, religion, parenting and school were all familiar. But many children from countries such as Bosnia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq or Nigeria may have lived in camps in several different countries before finally landing in the United States. Their education has been fractured and they are lacking the basic skills they need to compete with other children their age.

**Religious Challenges**

In many Muslim countries, children are educated about Islam every day at school. In the United States, parents often cannot give their children the kind of cultural and religious education they hoped for. Islamic centers teach children Arabic, religion, and give them a connection to their home culture, but only for a few hours once a week.
Challenges at School

Adapting to American society can be especially difficult for immigrant children who receive little or no formal education in the United States. The grade system used in the U.S.A. is especially difficult and confusing for many Muslim families.

Learning a New Language

Educators and social scientists agree that English fluency is the best way for a child to excel at school and to ensure their future success. But English is a difficult language and can be frustrating for children.

Difficulty Leaving Their Home Behind

Few studies have examined the psychological impact immigration has on children and adolescents (Padilla & Dura 1995). Recent research shows that supporting the mental and emotional health of immigrant children is just as important as teaching them English or having dual-language classrooms. These children often feel caught between two worlds, forced to make a painful decision between the home country they love and survival in the country where they live now. Some children refuse to choose and pick neither. This choice can last generations and prevent true adaptation.

Because of the harsh challenges facing immigrant children, parents need all the resources they can get. Immigrant parents should partner with Imams, native Muslim parents, mental health professionals, and school administrators as much as possible. The more involved in the community the parents become, the more students learning will improve.

Adlerian Intervention

To deal with the distinct issues facing immigrant children, parents must develop new skills. Having the right approach can prevent many maladaptive and behavioral problems. The
Adlerian STEP model (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting) is appropriate for this purpose. It can help parents improve their attitudes towards their children, as well as better support them in their academic success.

STEP is an Adlerian-based parent training program (Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1997) created in 1993, that consists of seven stages or steps. It has been proven to be helpful among children with special needs and with families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The seven stages of STEP are:

1. Understanding yourself and your child (be aware of your parenting style and understand the child’s challenges in his new environment).
2. Understanding beliefs and feelings (acculturation versus assimilation, what you need to change in their beliefs).
3. Encouraging the child and yourself (encouragement and self-esteem).
4. Listening and talking to your child (reflective listening and respectful communication).
6. Use discipline that makes sense by giving choices.
7. Choose your approach and personalize it.

The STEP Education program will make an important contribution to the Muslim community in two areas.

First, it will empower parents to get involved in their children’s schools. This will make them highly aware of the needs and challenges their kids are facing in the school environment.

Second, establishing this kind of training at mosques and Islamic centers enriches the community and builds family cohesion. It improves communication between parents and their children, and also between families and teachers and school administrators.
The 9/11 Tragedies

Anti-Muslim sentiment and stereotypes about Muslims were present in Western media long before 9/11 happened. However, 9/11 brought about some alarming developments.

1. Biased media outlets began spreading false, negative information about Islam and Muslims.
2. Sharp increase in Islamophobia.
3. Harsh government policies were enacted against American Muslims, seemingly with the intention to control and domesticate the Islamic population instead of to understand and respect American Muslims as part of a pluralistic society.

The use of Adlerian group therapy with Muslims clients in Islamic centers and in collaboration with the Imam helps to foster a sense of safety and belonging among Muslim clients.

The Media’s Role in Spreading Misinformation

Western media has been promoting false stereotypes about Muslims for years. An interesting article by Shaheen (1997). Discusses the way Muslims have been portrayed over the years in movies such as Lawrence of Arabia (1962), Black Sunday (1997), Rollover (1991) and Delta Force (1986). In every one of these movies, Muslims and Islam are shown in a negative light.

The main misconception portrayed about Islam is that Islam is a religion of violence. This includes the beliefs that “Muslims are terrorists,” and “Islam is anti-American.” Such unfair beliefs have been reinforced by radical individuals or groups with their own agendas.

Another major misconception is that Islam is strictly a religion of the Arabs. However Muslims immigrate to the United States from Eastern Europe, Bosnia, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, North Africa and many other non-Arab countries as well.
The media has also wrongly interpreted the Muslim idea of submission to Allah. Instead of correctly understanding this as “worshipping God,” the media puts forth the idea that Islam demands the submission of non-Muslims to Muslims, or of women to men. It is a common belief that Muslims subjugate others and oppress women.

Constantly facing these false beliefs in society can be extremely frustrating and difficult, especially for young Muslims who are still establishing their identity and sense of self.

**Islamophobia**

Islamophobia is discrimination against, hatred for, and violence or prejudice against Muslims based solely on their religious faith (Barkdull et al., 2011). This tendency, which may always be present to some degree, escalates whenever there is a terrorist attack by Muslim extremists.

According to Sheridan (2006), Muslims are the most likely to report increased incidents of being stared at, hearing offensive remarks or seeing negative stereotype in the media such as associating Islam with violence. This discrimination has posed deep challenges to many Muslims living in America. Even though most American Muslim scholars and religious centers denounce the terrorist attacks, all were blamed for them.

Islamophobia is especially harmful in the effect it has on children. A Muslim child brought up in an environment of prejudice will fear admitting his religion. They may live with constant insecurity and fear of admitting publicly who they really are.

Muslims who have been the victims of hate crimes, discrimination and violence are often American citizens. They are usually hard workers, with families. They come from all walks of life: entrepreneurs, doctors, engineers, technologists, scientists, teacher, and professors. America is their home, just like Christians, Atheists, Jews and others. Muslim victims contribute to the
U.S. economy. Masouad, cofounder of North Bruisick and Muslim link.org, mentions in a recent article in the New York Times that Muslims spent $170,000 billion in America and their market is highly educated and fast growing (Amato, 2010).

It is not fair that these citizens have no right to freedom of religion in a country that claims to offer it. Living a life of discrimination and fear for your physical safety is especially hard when it is based on retaliation for something you did not even do.

**Harsh Government Policies Targeting American Muslims**

Many government policies have targeted Muslim communities indiscriminately and unfairly since 9/11. For example:

1. In 2001, the State Department issued a 20 day mandatory hold on all non-immigrant visa applications submitted by men between age 20 and 45 from Arab and Muslim countries.

2. In November 2001, the Justice Department detained and interviewed 5000 individuals who had come to America from Arab and Muslim countries since January of that year.

3. In January 2002, the Department of Homeland Security tracked down and deported 6000 non-citizen males from Middle Eastern countries.

4. In 2002, the Department of Justice issued an internal memo to the INS requesting that they search all Yemenis, including American citizens, entering the U.S.A. As a result Yemeni Americans were removed from airplanes and boarding lines and forced to wait for hours for security clearance.
Police Surveillance

In 2006, during the War on Terror, the New York Police Department developed a secret surveillance program that surveyed and monitored the daily life of American Muslims throughout New York City and beyond, including several other states. This program was exposed by the Associated Press and other journalists who had obtained leaked documents, prompting an outcry from public officials and civil rights activists. Advocates and American Muslim religious leaders rightfully pointed out that religious and racial profiling was not only ineffective police work and a waste of taxpayer dollars, but also marginalized and criminalized an entire innocent segment of society.

Impact of These Stereotypes and Policies on Muslim Mental Health

A study by Abu-Ras and Abu Bader (2008) showed that American Muslims displayed an increased rate of anxiety, fear of hate crimes, and worry about the future. Another study by Rippy and Newman (2006) showed a significant association between perceived discrimination and depression. Research by Sheridan(2006) shows that a third of American Muslims score high on the depressive scale, indicating poor mental health. Finally, a majority of the American Muslims interviewed by Abu-Ras and Suarez (2009) reported post-traumatic stress symptoms, such as increased arousal anger, difficulty sleeping, exhaustion, and problems with communication and decision making.

Researchers propose that discrimination has different effects on different Muslims; Immigrants vs. non-immigrants, religious vs. non-religious, or men vs. women. For example, men more often express feelings of fatigue and exhaustion and fear of increased harassment by the government, whereas women were more likely to report reluctance to leave home, and a greater fear of being in public places (Abu-Ras & Saurez, 2009.)
Adlerian Intervention

The increase of negative experiences have not stopped Muslims from attending mosques and Islamic centers to perform religious rites such as praying, reading and fasting. Unfortunately, there is a lack of competent Imams (religious leaders) who can provide these Muslim attendees with the kind of the treatment that will enable them to effectively deal with their mental health issues.

It appears that applying Adlerian group therapy as a means to deal with the above issues in the community, and engaging the Imam in the counseling process a is a real community need.

According to Al-tusuli (a noted Muslim jurist), the Imam’s role in the Muslim community is to strive to make life a little easier if possible for Muslims. He needs to invite Muslims to reduce their mental distress and anxiety by utilizing religious coping techniques, along with providing recommendations for mental health professionals; particularly counselors who are familiar with Muslim culture.

Mosak and Maniacci suggest that Adlerian counseling has “a religious tone,” (p. 71) making it valuable for those who wish to include spirituality or religious faith into the counseling process. Islamic cultural and religious values such as self-sacrifice, helpfulness, caring for others, and valuing relationships have a unique similarity to Adlerian social interest (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006).

One of the advantages of using Adlerian counseling is instilling hope and a sense of cultural identity among people. For example, the Adlerian therapist might emphasize, through productive discussion, that Islamophobia is the result of the media misunderstanding Islam as a rigid ideology and incorrectly labelling followers irresponsible, disrespectful and terroristic by nature.
Conclusion

This paper attempts to clarify the socio-cultural challenges that face recent Muslim immigrants who come from various cultural backgrounds (Asian, Indian, North African, and over one hundred countries around the globe.) It would be inappropriate for therapists to fit them into one ethnic group such as Arabs or Middle Easterners.

Keeping in mind the various sub-traditions of Islam, such as Sunni, Schisms, and African American Islam will be helpful for the therapist. However, one particular element shared among all these cultures is their inclination towards considering religion as a cultural and spiritual identity and a way of life.

The difficult acculturation process for the children of these immigrants, discrimination and the rise of Islamophobia after any terrorist attack have a strong negative impact on the wellbeing of Muslims in the USA. The rise of divorce among Muslims represents a wake-up call for this community to strengthen its cultural fabric through collective work with community leaders and Imams, alongside a comprehensive multicultural approach, such as Adlerian psychology.

It seems that utilizing lifestyle analysis, the Adlerian System Training for Efficient Parenting (STEP) and group therapy and other Adlerian intervention techniques with Muslim clients will promote a sense of belonging and safety within this population. The incorporation of religion with therapeutic conversation is also important when working with this population.

It is important for counselors to reach out to the Imams in many of the ways presented in this paper. Productive discussions should include areas of mutual assistance and the need to demonstrate sensitivity in working with Imams to ensure their receptivity.
Most Muslims tend to utilize religious coping skills to preserve their values and de-escalate their stress in time of distress. A good therapist will utilize religion to help Muslim clients use positive coping skills instead of negative ones, which can have a poor effect on health. Positive coping skills can also be achieved with an Imam who has been trained to understand mental health issues.
References


appropriate measures and assessing sociocultural risk factors. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 41*(5), 400-408.


