International Symposium on Arab Youth   Poster Sessions

May 29th, 10:45 AM - 11:15 AM

Acculturation Strategies and Arab Youth Cultural Identity Development: A Review

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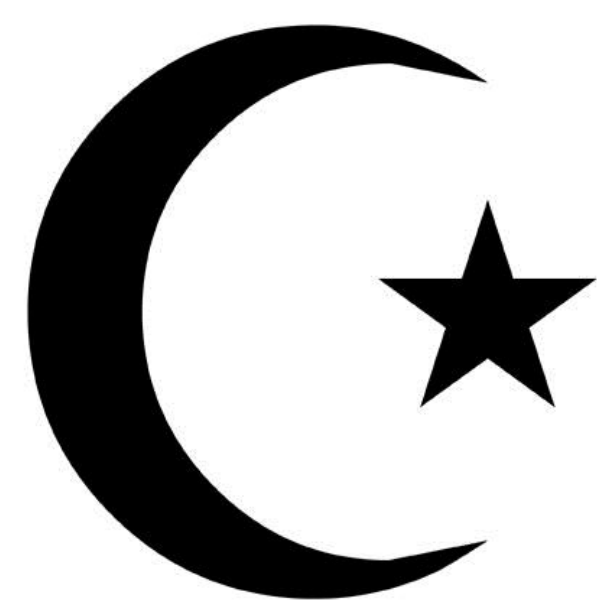*University of Windsor*

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ABSTRACT

As youth immigrate to a new country, they tend to acculturate in various ways. By definition, acculturation is "the processes through which immigrants gradually adapt their language, behavior and/or values as a result of their contact with the mainstream culture" (Wang et al., 2012). Immigrant youth adopt one of four acculturation strategies, namely assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Coatsworth & Maldonado-Molina, 2005; Wang et al., 2012). Research has shown that adopting an integrated profile with a balance between both heritage and mainstream cultures translates into greater psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. Synthesized information from research on immigrant youths' adaptation also holds that the acculturation strategy that they adopt influences their cultural identity development, stability or change. Cultural identity is composed of the immigrant youth's ethnic identity; shaped by their culture of origin; and their national identity; identity supported by the larger society (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Berry, 2006; Britto & Amer, 2007; Wang et al., 2012). The purpose of this poster is to provide a greater insight into existing research on Arab youths' identity development and how this is shaped by the acculturation strategy that they adopt. This can be a base for future research on the stability or fluidity of Arab youth cultural identity development and factors leading to youths' successful acculturation.

INTRODUCTION

According to Statistics Canada, by 2030 over 80% of Canada's population growth will be due to immigration (National Post, 2012). Arab youth comprise a major proportion of immigrant youth population here in Canada (Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012). This, in turn, would be an essential influence on the clientele base in need for psychological services in future. Therefore, a more in depth understanding of immigrants' acculturation experience is critical to enhance our cultural competence as professionals in healthcare and social services. Important themes to consider in this literature review are acculturation strategies, cultural identity development and the social goals and values of Arab families and youth.

CULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

- The acculturation strategy that immigrant youths adopt influences their cultural identity development, change or lack thereof (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Berry, 2006).
- Cultural identity consists of youth's ethnic identity; shaped by their culture of origin; and their national identity; identity supported by the larger society (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Berry, 2006; Britto & Amer, 2007; Wang et al., 2012).
- Immigrant youth's cultural identity is further influenced by the host country's approach to immigrants' acculturation (Britto & Amer, 2007).
- In a comparative study, Canada's Multiculturalism policy translated into youth adopting an integrative profile; maintaining their heritage culture while engaging in mainstream society. In France, however, maintaining heritage is viewed as a threat to successful integration; thus enforcing immigrant youth to assimilate to mainstream culture (Berry & Sabatier, 2010).

ARAB YOUTH IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

- Ethnic identity is highly valued in the Arab community; however recently Arab immigrant youth are encouraged by their families to integrate and maintain the healthy balance between their heritage and the Canadian culture (Rasmi et al., 2012).
- An American study showed that more Arab youth now adopt a bicultural identity with a moderate to strong sense of affiliation to both cultures and a preference to engage in behaviors promoted by both(Britto & Amer, 2007).
- As their immigrant youth affiliates, inconsistencies between acculturation preferences cause acculturative stress and put Arab immigrant youth at risk for depression, stress and anxiety (Flores & Kaplan, 2009; Aroian et al., 2012).
- Likewise, discrepant expectations translate into at-risk behaviors amongst Arab immigrant youth (Aroian et al., 2012).

ARAB FAMILIES ACCULTURATION

- Arabs' acculturation is influenced by both value discrepancies as well as multiple social and policy changes that impacted their lives(Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012).
- The occurrence of September 11th events has challenged Arabs' acculturation experiences due to facing stereotypical views based on these. Over the years, and with collaborative efforts between Arabs and other members of the Canadian society, these experiences have minimized (Aroian et al., 2011; Britto & Amer, 2007).

SOCIAL GOALS AND VALUES

- The primary social goal of Arab immigrant youth is obedience; Arab youth are socialized to follow their families' guidance and look for their acceptance; they are more interconnected with their families than their non-Arab counterparts (Aroian et al.; Berry, 2006; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2012).
- Enculturation process involved in Arab orientation is highly imperative; the adoption of Arab values and practices of promoting dignity, honor and family reputation, is related to greater family support and, in turn, more effective adjustment to the new culture amongst Arab Canadian youth(Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012).

Implications

A literature review will have implications on all levels of practice. At the micro level, it will provide a more in-depth understanding of Arab youth's unique experiences, upon which meaningful patterns between acculturative strategies and cultural identity may be drawn. As well, meaningful patterns can also be drawn between the effectiveness of the acculturation strategy adopted and how this impacts the unique experiences of Arab youth. At the mezzo level, gaining greater insight into Arab youths' values and beliefs would assist in conducting a needs assessment upon which more effective programs and services could be developed. At the macro level, more funding could be attributed to programs and services targeting Arab youth, and the literature review ma y enact a new social policy change nationwide.

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