

Pre and Post Migration Stressors and Marital Relations Among Arab Refugee Families in Canada

Research Overview and Findings

Feb 23, 2018

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS

Mohammed Baobaid, PhD, Principal Investigator

Lynda Ashbourne, PhD, Co-Investigator

Dora Tam, PhD, Co-Investigator

Abdallah Badahdah, PhD, Co-Investigator

Abir Al Jamal, MSW, Project Coordinator

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gratitude for the main collaborator and funder, Doha International Family institute (DIFI)



Thank you for all the research participants
Appreciation to all diligent research assistants
Thanks for the following institutional support:



OUTLINE

- Research Project Overview
- Methodology
- Findings
 - Gender-Role Relations
 - Parent-Child Relationships
 - Marital Relationships
- Implications for Service Provision, Social Policy, and Future Research

RESEARCH PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Background
 - Each year Canada accepts refugees from around the world; specifically Canada has admitted over 65,000 refugees from Iraqi and Syrian since 2009
 - Assisting war-conflict impacted refugees to integrate successfully into Canadian communities has not been without challenges
- Research Objectives
 - To assess the impact of pre-and-post migration on marital relations and family dynamics among Arab refugee families,
 - To examine the role of professional service providers in supporting these Arab refugee families

METHODOLOGY

- Research Participants
 - 30 participants interviewed;
 - Countries of origin: Syria (14), Iraq (16);
 - Length of Stay in Canada: 6 months to 7 years
- Semi-structured interviews conducted in Arabic
 - Reflect on family life during the journey of migration
- One Focus Group conducted with 7 Service Providers
- Recorded interviews; data transcribed & coded
- Thematic analysis conducted in English

MAIN THEMES

The pre and post migration experiences have significant impact on:

- Gender-Role Relations
- Parent-Child Relationships
- Marital Relationships

FINDINGS: GENDER-ROLE RELATIONS (1)

- Pre-Migration

- In their home countries, there is a clear division of labour and responsibilities based on gender; the participants enjoy the stability
- Men work outside of the home and hold the roles as provider and protector of the family;
- Women stay home to care for and nurture children and look after their aging parents;

“I married my husband when I was aged 14 years and seven months. I was happy and had everything. I had a helper who came in monthly and she sort of carried a large part of the chores for me.” [P29-Female]

FINDINGS: GENDER-ROLE RELATIONS (2)

- During Transit
 - With rising conflict and the outbreak of war, families felt that their safety and their children's well-being are in danger and therefore, they fled to other countries;
 - Assuming that this was temporary relocation; therefore, families adapted and accepted to the roles changes on protection, provision, and caring for children;
 - The change in some cases brought positive impact on the family. For example:
“One woman described her experience of role reversal when she became the economic provider in transit country. She stated that she gained an enhanced understanding of her husband's previous pressures as an income earner” [P20-Female]

FINDINGS: GENDER-ROLE RELATIONS (3)

- Post-Migration

- Participants described that judgemental or contrary views expressed by people from the broader majority community and from within the local Arab community played an important factor in their sense of comfort and the level of conflict or instability they experienced in their family relationships. For example:

“The first thing is to find a job that would help us more because every family dreams to have a man, a father who is working and securing income, meaning that I am not happy that I am living on assistance (now), I am a self-reliant man who loves to work and this is the way I am used to, even my children.” [P7-Male]

FINDINGS: PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS (1)

- Pre-Migration (during war and in transit)
- Parental Worry & Fathers' Absence
 - Internal Displacement
 - Changed Economic Conditions
 - Checkpoints, Abduction, Torture
 - Safety and Security are Priorities

My relationship with my children was extremely bad compared to our normal relationship due to the various stressors we encountered. [P18 Male]

FINDINGS: PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS (2)

- Post Migration – Structural Changes:
 - Increased time demands for school, children
 - No household or extended family help
 - Language barriers
 - Hard to navigate outdoor space comfortably
 - Societal norms – e.g., discipline

FINDINGS: PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS (3)

- Post-Migration – Family Values
- Changes promoting family life:
 - Safety, Education, Freedom to practice religion
- Threats to family / children's well-being:
 - Adopting Western-style freedoms
 - Loss of cultural traditions, religious practices

FINDINGS: MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS (1)

- Pre-Migration (during war and in transit)
- Psychological, emotional...and physical injury.
- Difficulties coping and living with fear and uncertainties (e.g., job, money, food, and documentation...)
- increased spousal conflict, while others stated that they
- became more distant

“Nothing was normal or explainable... it was not only us, we witnessed our families and relatives experience the same or more difficult circumstances” [P26-Couple].

FINDINGS: MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS (3)

- Attributed conflict/ problems, including intimate partner violence, to the fears/challenges associated with living in that current context rather to partner or relationship.
- Missing the support of extended family members and neighbors

FINDINGS: MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS (3)

- Post-Migration

- Providing support to one another and support from professionals
“You don’t have anyone but me and I don’t have anyone but you. I am yours and you are mine.” [P15-Female].

- Continued impact of trauma on marital interactions

- More isolated, more uncertain about where to find help, and have fewer informal family supports available to them...
unfamiliarity with Canadian rules regarding treatment of women and children

“My relationship with him is not good. ... if he says anything to me, I rage. If I say anything to him, he rages...we are still suffering from this, even now.

IMPLICATIONS

- Service Provision
 - Enhance the utilization of Culturally Integrative Responses
 - Provide culturally focused training
 - Strengthen existing services to meet the unique needs of this population
- Social Policy
 - Extend existing financial and settlement support beyond one year
 - Re-examine current immigration policy governing Government Assisted Refugee and the Privately Sponsored Refugee programs
- Future Research

*“The World Is Dangerous (Not) Because Of Those Who Do Harm But
Because Of Those Who Look At It Without Doing Anything”
~ Albert Einstein*



*Thank You
for coming!*