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In this paper, we review the characteristics of Arab immigrants and propose guidelines for couple and relationship education (CRE) programs with Arab immigrant couples. Arab immigrants are a heterogeneous group, yet they share common cultural characteristics and family values that are essential to understand when working with them. Generally, CRE programs with immigrated Arabs should be mindful of (1) strongly valued religious beliefs, (2) extended family as a primary source of support and marital problem-solving, (3) the tendency to follow gender-based roles and responsibilities, and (4) Arabic language and communication norms. Family educators and practitioners who work with recently immigrated Arab couples should familiarize themselves with these characteristics to better serve them.

Keywords: Arab Americans, couple and relationship education, family life education, immigrant couples

Introduction

Couple relationship education (CRE) is becoming increasingly recognized as an effective, lower-cost, and less intensive alternative to counseling or therapy for couples seeking to strengthen and improve their relationship (Dion, 2005; Hawkins et al., 2008). CRE is not therapeutic but instead is a psychoeducational and preventive approach that helps promote couples' resilience, satisfaction, and effective communication (Ponzetti, 2016). The relationship concepts and skills are addressed through educational activities and dialogue. Family life educators who deliver CRE programs should have solid knowledge about their intended audience as well as the content they are teaching (Ballard & Taylor, 2013).

Ballard and Taylor (2013) identified key principles for best practices in Family Life Education (FLE) with diverse populations that can be applied to CRE. This model considers program content and program design, as well as educators' understanding of the culture, strengths, and needs of the target population (Ballard & Taylor, 2013). Research on the effectiveness of CRE programs suggests that marriage education programs can benefit couples and help them improve their communication and conflict resolution skills, enhance marital satisfaction and commitment to the spouse, and reduce the odds of divorce (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Hawkins et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, much of the early program development, implementation, and evaluation research on CRE programs have largely focused on middle-class European American couples, particularly married heterosexual couples (Ballard & Taylor, 2013; Myers-Walls et al., 2011). This is problematic for practitioners who want to use evidence-based programs in CRE with more diverse populations because the foundations of these curricula may not apply in cross-cultural contexts, and how the programs are delivered may not be effective with diverse audiences (Ballard et al., 2016; Myers-Walls et al., 2011). Recognizing these problems, researchers studying CRE program effectiveness have made progress in identifying the needs of more diverse populations, tailoring and adapting CRE programs to meet the needs of particular groups, including, for example, remarried/stepcouples (Reck et al., 2020), low-income couples (Ooms & Wilson, 2004), Latinx couples (Skogrand et al., 2009), cohabiting couples (Rhoades et al., 2009), and Muslim Americans (Killawi et al., 2017). For example, Killawi and colleagues (2017) found that Muslim Americans tended to seek premarital education through lectures, workshops, and books but rarely sought professional counseling. In addition, premarital education through religious leaders was not perceived as helpful by Muslim American couples because such programs focused more on Islamic rights and responsibilities than on couple-based skills and knowledge (Killawi et al., 2013).

One population that has not received much attention is Arab immigrants. Although some prior work has examined family life education with Arab American Muslims (Blume et al., 2012) and other Muslims (Killowei et al., 2017), scant attention has been paid to delivering culturally-sensitive CRE programs for Arab immigrant couples. There are approximately 3.7 million individuals of Arabic descent living in the United States (Arab American Institute [AAI], 2014). Although most of these (82%) individuals are U.S. citizens (AAI, 2014), many of them are recent immigrants who are in the first or second generation living in the United States. Recent waves of Arab immigrants are members of various religions, including Christianity, Druze, Judaism, and Islam (AAI, 2014; Naber, 2000). Most are legally-documented immigrants or relocated refugees (AAI, 2014).

The purpose of this paper is to provide guidelines for best practices in the design, recruitment, and implementation of CRE programs with Arab immigrants to the United States. The guidelines are based on studies of the cultural, social, and demographic characteristics of Arabs who have migrated to the United States and research on effective interventions with them. We review common trends and characteristics of Arab immigrants as an identifiable ethnic group and discuss the implications of these characteristics for implementing CRE with young Arab immigrant couples. Arabs' shared values and common language are the bases upon which educators can implement effective CRE programs with them. In this review, we focus on first- and second-generation Arab immigrants, defined as individuals who immigrated to the United States, either as adults or as children, from one of the 22 countries in which Arabic is the official language, an area extending from Northern and Western Africa to the Middle East (AAI, 2014). Finally, although we realize that CRE programs are generally offered to diverse audiences, we

think it is unlikely that Arab immigrant couples would avail themselves of general-public programs. In our view, Arab immigrants would be a specific target audience for CRE, just as stepcouples, Latinx couples, or other specific groups.

Key Features of Marriage and Family in Arab Cultures

Although Arab immigrants vary in terms of country of origin, religious affiliation and practice, skin color, socioeconomic status, and other demographic characteristics, four common characteristics have been identified in the literature for this group: (1) strong adherence to conservative religious faiths, (2) institutionalized functions for the extended family, (3) tendency towards traditional gender-based roles and responsibilities, and (4) Arabic language and communication norms. These characteristics overlap in the lived experience of Arab Americans, with religious beliefs influencing firmly held values about the importance of extended kin and gender roles, but we examine them separately in this review. Those cultural characteristics should not be generalized to all Arab immigrants, of course, as there is variability within this category of immigrants and new citizens.

Religious Beliefs

Arab immigrants are members of various religions, including Christianity, Druze, Judaism, and Islam (AAI, 2014; Naber, 2000). Most Arabs who have immigrated to the United States are Christians (63%), but there are substantive numbers of Arab Americans who are Muslims (24%), with 13% identified as belonging to other religious groups (AAI, 2014). Christian Arab Americans are mostly Roman Catholic, but some follow Chaldean and Orthodox traditions (Samhan, 2015). The majority of Muslim Arab Americans follow the Sunni sect, with a smaller percentage belonging to the Shia sect (Samhan, 2015).

Generally, Arab immigrants tend to be strong adherents to their faiths (Barry et al., 2000; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003) and hold conservative religious values about marriage and family (Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014). It is common to find Arab Christians holding traditional attitudes toward marriage and family that are similar to Arab Muslims (Abudabbeh, 2005). For example, for both faiths, marriage is considered an essential aspect of life that everyone should experience. Consequently, findings suggest that Arab Americans are more likely to marry and less likely to divorce than the general U.S. population (Brittingham & de la Cruz, 2005) and more likely to live in family households led by married couples (American Community Survey, 2013). Arab American households are slightly larger than the U.S. national average, perhaps because they are more likely to live with extended family members and to have more children than Americans in general (American Community Survey, 2013).

Marriage is seen as a contract between two families rather than between two individuals (Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014). However, this does not mean that individual spouses do not have a say in their marriages. For instance, among Muslims, each partner can premaritally state their

expectations for marriage, such as a woman stating that her husband will not prevent her from seeking employment (Al-Krenawi, 2014). For all religious groups of Arab Americans, marriage rituals include an engagement period, a religious ceremony, and a wedding reception (Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014). The engagement period is seen as the time for future spouses to become better acquainted and develop affection and love between the couple. It is also the time when both partners get to know extended family members, especially future in-laws. Premarital sexual intercourse is forbidden by all Arab American religious groups.

Arab immigrants tend to see religious practices such as praying and going to the mosque or church as ways of keeping couples and their extended family members closely connected. The religious foundations underlying getting married and having children also serve as ways by which extended families are brought together, and marriage and reproduction are seen by Arabs as important familial duties. Children are highly valued, and the religious beliefs of Arabs of all faiths support childrearing by married parents as a healthy environment for children (Zarean & Barzegar, 2016).

One subtle difference between Arab religions is that Catholic Arabs are taught that marriage is a sacred, unbreakable promise intended to be a life-long commitment and divorce a sin (Al-Krenawi, 2014), whereas Muslim Arabs consider divorce as a last resort solution to marital problems and is not prohibited (Zarean & Barzegar, 2016). Strictures against divorce in the Catholic faith have been found to impact Catholic Arab American couples' relationships because these spouses tend to tolerate more marital problems due to these religious prohibitions (Al-Krenawi, 2014).

Suggestions for CRE Practice

It is not necessary for CRE leaders to be experts in the faiths commonly represented in Arab immigrant communities. But they should be conversant with some of the basic tenets of these faiths, at least as those tenets are relevant to marriage and family issues. For instance, because Arab religions forbid premarital sex, explicit or implicate messages related to couples' sexual lives may be perceived by them as inappropriate, especially among audiences that include unmarried (engaged) couples.

Practitioners also should be aware of the variety of religious backgrounds of Arabs and avoid the misconception that all Arabs are Muslim. CRE leaders should also be aware that just as there are a variety of Christian faiths, such as Syrian Catholic, Chaldean Catholic, Roman Catholic, etc. (Abudabbeh, 2005), Muslims also are heterogeneous in their religious practices, such as Sunni and Shia sects (Alghafli et al., 2014). In all cases, showing respect for the importance of Arab individuals' religious values is essential in establishing rapport.

CRE programs for Arab immigrant couples should attempt to make meaningful connections between scientific-based information and commonly held religious beliefs regarding marital life

(Cho, 2018). For example, the concept of love is religiously and culturally determined, and the ways love is expressed to the wife or the husband might differ from Western cultures. Couples, especially women, may not feel comfortable expressing public displays of affection (PDA), and it is unacceptable socially before marriage (Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001). Family professionals should be aware of this when facilitating the class and discussing such concepts.

Given that religious institutions have played a significant role in preparing couples for marriage and educating them about family issues, often through weekly meetings or daily prayers (Almalki & Ganong, 2018; Eldeeb, 2017), practitioners may find it helpful to seek local religious leaders' support during the recruitment process for CRE programs. Arab American couples tend to trust religious leaders, who often serve as mediators when couples have marital problems (Aloud, 2004). Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000) suggested that religious and community leaders could serve as moderators in helping individuals as they are more likely to know their experiences and acculturation levels. Therefore, the integration of the CRE program with the local religious centers could be useful in teaching couples about healthy families. Moreover, holding CRE classes in a church or mosque might be convenient for members of Arab communities, as these centers are often familiar places where community members socialize.

Importance of the Extended Family

The extended family system is highly valued in Arab culture, prioritized over nuclear families, and couples usually are thought of within that wider family context (Al Darmaki et al., 2016). Arab families are patrilineal, so couples are more closely involved with the husband's extended family following marriage than the wife's family (Joseph, 1994). However, all older kin are respected and valued, and younger kin have responsibilities to help aging parents (Dhami & Shikh, 2000). In fact, extended families represent interlocking ties of loyalty and obligations, which are accompanied by norms for expected behaviors and expectations for tangible and intangible support. Traditionally, extended kin networks have been critical in mate selection, couple and individual well-being, and marital adjustments. A successful marriage of one's children is believed to be a sign of good parenting (Haboush, 2007), so parents and in-laws of young married couples are often actively involved with them in multiple ways.

Mate Selection

Among Muslim Arab Americans, arranged marriages in which parents and other extended family members plan and approve marriages between two individuals who know each other very little, if at all, is still an observed practice, although younger generations tend to have more say about their future partners (Harkness & Khaled, 2014). Historically, marriages between first cousins who share a common ancestor also have been common in Arab-Muslim families (Harkness & Khaled, 2014). This type of marriage is believed to increase family bonding and cohesion (Radovanovic et al., 1999). Immigration reduces the likelihood that marriages are arranged

because long distances make it harder for kin to negotiate marriages, and extended family bonds are weakened somewhat by migrations. Perhaps because of this, increasing numbers of Arab immigrants seek partners from other ethnic groups (Kulczycki & Lobo, 2002), resulting in more heterogeneous marriages.

Even when marriages are not arranged by parents and other extended kin, however, there are expectations among Arab Muslims that permission to marry must be granted by a guardian, usually the woman's father (Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014). Among Arab Christians, couples are expected to obtain their parents' and families' approval before marrying. For all Arabs, parents' approval of the marriage is believed to contribute to healthy family functioning in the future.

Support and Advice

Immigrating is challenging for many reasons, but for Arabs immigrating may be particularly stressful if they are not accompanied by extended family members and older kin (Alhasanat-Khalil et al., 2017). Similarly, Latinx immigrant couples are more likely to deal with immigration demands such as emotional losses, not feeling at home, missing family in their home countries, as well as other cultural and occupational challenges (Falconier et al., 2013). A positive association was found between acculturative stress and decreased relationship satisfaction among Latinx immigrant couples (Negy et al., 2010). Research evidence suggests that immigrant couples miss their families and experience feelings of loss, and therefore the support they receive from their partners is associated with more marital satisfaction (Falconier et al., 2013). Among Arab couples, research suggests that older kins' advice about marriage and childrearing is appreciated by younger family members and having extended family members live nearby is seen as a benefit for marital relationships (Al Darmaki et al., 2016). Research on other ethnic groups of immigrants also suggests that living far from extended kin networks is negatively associated with learning skills related to parenting, communication, and conflict resolution (Bryant et al., 2008; Wheeler et al., 2010). If Arabs lose access to extended kin as a source of social and emotional support, immigrant spouses become more important sources of support for each other, putting greater stress on their marriages (Aroian et al., 2010). The loss of extended kin social support also affects individual well-being. For example, lack of social support and greater stress were predictors of postpartum depression in Arab immigrant women in the United States (Alhasanat-Khalil et al., 2017). Different from European couples, it is not the tradition for Arab couples to rely solely on their spouses for support, but rather they rely on extended family members (Aloud & Rathur, 2009). Research findings suggest extended family is the most important social support unit for Arab American couples (Al-Krenawi, 2014; Killawi et al., 2017).

Although immigrant couples experience a decrease in social support from extended family members who stay in their country of origin, the extended family remains the primary source of support and strength for many Arab Americans (Al-Krenawi, 2014; Al-Krenawi & Jackson,

2014). This support includes tangible resources as well as emotional support - in Arab cultures, families are considered the primary providers of financial help and accommodation for newlyweds if needed (Abu Baker, 2003).

Solving Problems in the Extended Family

Extended family members are typically highly involved in solving couples' marital problems (Abu Baker, 2003). Commonly, female relatives play significant roles in providing emotional support for an upset wife and providing her with marital advice (Abu Baker, 2003). Sometimes couples are advised to take a break or temporary separation from each other, during which each partner returns to their family of origin to reflect on their problems for a period ranging from several days to months (Abu Baker, 2003). The wife's male relatives then discuss the marital problems with the husband. In this stage, the upset wife can demand the husband change certain behaviors that she believes contributed to marital problems (Abu Baker, 2003). Kinship connections between the families of the husband and the wife usually keep couples together, even if the root of marital problems remains unresolved. Although the involvement of the extended family is seen as mostly positive, relationships with extended kin can escalate a couple's marital problems instead of providing support (Abu Baker, 2003). Thus, some couples may refuse to accept the involvement of the extended family in their lives and decisions because of possible negative consequences, such as enduring marital conflict for the sake of preserving the marriage (Abu Baker, 2003, 2006).

Because of the longstanding cultural tradition of managing marital and family issues privately within the family, Arab Americans tend to engage in limited help-seeking behaviors in the mental health setting (Martin, 2014; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003). Engaging a professional in marital problem-solving is stigmatized, viewed as an indication of the family's failure to resolve the problem on their own (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Individuals may even avoid acknowledging the existence of a relationship or mental health issues in the family to prevent bringing shame to the family by exposing the couple's private problems or potential mental health issues to a non-family member (Timraz et al., 2017; Youssef & Deane, 2006). In a study examining the behavior of help-seeking among different ethnic groups, Arab American clients tended to quit counseling because of their discomfort in the therapeutic setting (Martin, 2014).

Suggestions For CRE Practice

The importance of the extended family has several implications for CRE with Arab American immigrants. Educators can utilize this information in recruiting, structuring the group setting, and in the context of CRE programs.

Recruiting. Educators also may want to consider when recruiting that couples could be encouraged to bring along their parents or in-laws, especially mothers-in-law. Broadening the

lens of CRE to include parents and other older kin may make the program seem safer, more culturally congruent, and could help demystify what might be done in the CRE program. Involving extended family members in the recruitment process can be helpful. Thus, for educators, recruiting participants for the CRE classes should take into consideration the help of the extended family and draw their attention to the significance of the CRE classes in promoting healthy relationships. Building trust between the educators and the family is important because the family may still have an influence on the couple's life. For couples, extended family can provide additional support, such as childcare support, which may influence the couple's decision to attend the CRE classes.

Knowing that Arab immigrants will be reluctant to seek outside help may be useful in recruiting. Educators should not expect to make some announcements about their CRE program, send out emails or post flyers, and get many couples to respond. Recruiting will need to be proactive and yet sensitive to couples' potential reluctance to participate. As noted earlier, enlisting the help of religious leaders in promoting the program may help, as would asking other respected community leaders to vouch for the usefulness of the program and the wisdom and integrity of the educators leading the program.

The language/wording used to promote the CRE offering may be important as well. Stressing confidentiality in what transpires would be an important value, as would emphasizing that CRE is for everyone and not just for couples with marital problems or issues to resolve. Young individuals do not want their actions to reflect poorly on their parents' childrearing, so normalizing the need for opportunities to enrich already positive couple bonds may help alleviate these concerns.

It is important to make sure that advertising and recruitment efforts effectively communicate the goals of the CRE program, topics that will be covered, and what participants can expect to achieve by the end of the program. Couples may be more open to the idea of group-based relationship education if they understand that they will not be required to disclose anything that makes them uncomfortable.

Format of CRE Programs. Including other family members as well as couples in program formats also may be beneficial. Some research findings suggest the presence of extended families in an intervention can improve their interpersonal skills within family relationships and help to prevent future marital problems (Abu Baker, 2003). Family involvement in an intervention delivered in a social work setting was found to help social workers address problems more quickly and to discuss the problems from different perspectives (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). The involvement of the extended family can be an option but should not be required, as for some, it can complicate and escalate couple conflict.

CRE facilitators, aware that Arab immigrants may be reluctant to make public disclosures about their marriages, may consider structuring classes in ways that minimize activities in which

participants are asked to openly share issues of concern, problems, or even positive things about their marriages. Instead, having the educator/leader share information with the group may be more comfortable for Arab participants. Providing ways of privately or anonymously asking questions or providing input should be planned into CRE formats with Arab couples as well. CRE program as a group setting can help them benefit from interacting with other participants in these settings and helping them realize their problems are not unique to them. Realizing that other couples experience similar issues can help them disclose more and become more engaged. With assistance from the CRE facilitator, this can help them learn about their needs and practice new skills in a safe environment, surrounded by other couples who may share related experiences. One way of overcoming the publicity issue is by engaging a CRE facilitator who speaks Arabic and English and has a shared cultural background with the participants. Building a rapport by approaching each couple separately prior to the class and explaining the purpose of the CRE classes in a non-judgmental manner might encourage more participation.

CRE Content. Early on, leaders should be clear that CRE is not about blaming anyone or finding deficits to correct or otherwise stigmatize individuals or their families. Normalizing CRE as a value-added experience for well-functioning couples is also a message that should be included not only in recruiting but repeatedly throughout the program. Perhaps because Arab culture is highly hierarchal, participants prefer an instructional-explanatory model for CRE content. Individuals from this population usually have high expectations for educators and their ability to explain conditions and supply information concerning the issues. They may prefer to remain passive during the sessions as they expect the class leaders to explain the content and provide direct and clear instructions for any class discussions.

Educators should also recognize feelings that may exist regarding extended kin being far away and what the loss of readily available support from them might mean to young Arab immigrant couples. Educators also should recognize that couples may feel as if they are representing their families and that their participation in CRE may be an indication that they are letting their extended kin network down in some way. Proactively addressing these potential feelings about extended kin may help participants be more receptive to program content. Parents and other kin who are in attendance also need to hear these normalizing comments and be made to feel as if they are valuable partners in helping the young couple benefit from CRE.

Finally, educators should not assume that couple relationships originated from romantic love between two partners or that participants were likely to have dated prior to marriage. Educators may want to be flexible in including content about premarital bonding, as the experiences of Arab immigrant couples are likely to be varied.

Clearly Defined Gender Roles

Although there are considerable variations within Arab communities regarding women, gender, and patriarchy, numerous studies pointed out that distinct gender roles and responsibilities are

important to Arab immigrants (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1999; Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014). Compared to men, women are expected to be obedient and pay greater attention to the home, domestic duties, childrearing, and providing emotional support for their families (Abu Baker, 2003; Al Darmaki et al., 2016). Males are expected to be the primary financial providers and the authority figures in the family (Abu Baker, 2003). When women work outside the home for wages, most accept the authority of their husbands at home, but they express their ideas and contribute to decision-making (Al-Krenawi, 2005).

When marital disagreements arise, Arab women may face cultural pressure to be primarily responsible for reducing conflicts and maintaining a peaceful and stable household environment (Abu Baker, 2003; Al Darmaki et al., 2016). If they cannot solve whatever marital problems arise, even with the aid of extended kin and perhaps their husbands' cooperation, Arab women often try to endure rather than seek outside help or file for divorce (Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014; Haboush, 2007). However, some findings suggest the acculturation process may have challenged these cultural norms, and the education and assimilation that occur during the acculturation process have helped women become more assertive in seeking professional help (Al-Krenawi, 2005). For some women, particularly religious ones, divorce may be seen as a sign of failure and the woman's failed responsibility of keeping the family together (Abu-Ras, 2007; Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014). Also, in many countries from which these Arab immigrants originated, fathers retain physical and legal custody of children after divorce (Abu Baker, 2003; Abu-Ras, 2007; Haboush, 2007), so some women may be reluctant to risk losing their children in U.S. courts if they seek divorce.

Gender role expectations outside of the home are relevant as well. Informed by religious beliefs and observed more often among Muslims (Read, 2002, 2003), gender segregation outside the home might be a characteristic of Arab culture generally, but research evidence suggests that it is less common among acculturated families (Ajrouch, 2004). This means that Arab women, especially those of the Muslim faith, may prefer interacting only with women outside the family household, and men prefer interacting only with men. For instance, Muslim Arabs prefer working with teachers, physicians, and other practitioners of the same sex (Haboush, 2007). This gender segregation clearly affects women's employment outside of the family household. Among Arab American women from different Muslim and Christian backgrounds, cultural expectations regarding women's roles as housewives were identified as a key barrier to paid employment (Read, 2004a; Read & Oselin, 2008). Studies show that first generation Arab immigrant women have lower rates of employment compared to other first generation ethnic groups, such as Latinx (Read, 2003, 2004b).

As with other ethnic immigrant groups, successive generations who have become more socialized into American cultural values are less likely to adhere as closely to these strict gender role norms. For instance, Arab American women who grew up in secular households and who were second or third generation immigrants were less likely to follow traditional gender roles,

had greater influence on household incomes, and contributed to household decision-making (Aswad, 1994; Read & Bartkowski, 2000).

Suggestions for CRE Practice

Family practitioners and educators who work with the Arab immigrant population need to be aware of the variation that exists in gender dynamics and its relation to individual differences in acculturation experiences. Arab immigrants who have spent more time in the United States may be more acculturated and may not follow traditional gender roles, although some may. It is critical to consider the level of acculturation of the target group. For example, those who recently came to the United States may be more attached to cultural beliefs regarding bans against mixed-gendered socializing. So they may not be willing to attend a mixed-gendered CRE program. Even if couples are willing to attend a CRE program in which both men and women are in the same setting, it might be more acceptable, and participants may be made more comfortable by creating some distance between couples to increase their privacy during class activities and discussions. Arab women may face more pressure against attending CRE mixed-gender classes, and some women may not be able to attend if their husbands are not willing or able to attend with them. Implementing gender-segregated classes may be helpful in Arab communities holding strong preferences against mixed-gender meetings. If same-gender classes or programs are necessary for people to attend in comfort, then facilitators should provide take-home activities so that individuals can engage with their partners at home. CRE leaders might also consider using paired male-female educators if there will be cross-gendered classes. Not only does this allow for some modeling of couple behaviors, but it raises the possibility of spending some time during the class in male-only and female-only groups.

CFLEs need to be aware that the changes in the husband roles and wife roles and the backlash between the Western values and the Arab world values is one the areas of marital disagreement in the Arab family household (Al-Krenawi, 2005). Certain topics, such as sexuality in marriage, are more likely to be accepted in gender-segregated classes with educators who are of the same gender as the participants. For example, women in abusive marriages may be reluctant to seek help (Abu-Ras, 2007), but CRE programs may be appropriate channels to raise awareness about family violence and provide information for seeking further help in local community centers.

Communication with Arab Immigrants

In addition to understanding Arab immigrants' religious beliefs, the importance of extended family, and their enactments of distinct gender roles, CRE program leaders should be aware of another important cultural characteristic – Arabic language and communication norms.

Arabic Language

Arabic is the official language of 22 countries from northwest Africa to the Middle East. This language is one of the main ethnic characteristics that define Arab Americans and distinguish them from other ethnic groups. Although spoken Arabic dialects (Fusha) are slightly different from one country to the next (e.g., Egyptians speak an Egyptian-Arabic dialect different from Gulf-States Arabic), formal Arabic Fusha, either spoken or written, is widely used and understood by all Arabs, regardless of homeland. Because there are differences between the spoken local dialects and formal written Arabic, however, it is recommended that educators consider using interpreters when teaching classes for limited English-speaking participants (Blume et al., 2012).

Communication by Arab immigrants and Arab Americans has been described as indirect, emotional, and ambiguous (Al-Krenawi, 1998; Hall, 1976). For example, the meaning of spoken words is often embedded in the situation or the relationship between individuals, such as in a counseling or therapy session, when Arab clients may use idioms such as “a dark life” or “my heart fell down” to describe feeling depressed (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). In conversations and writing styles, ambiguous communication can take different directions and jump back and forth, leaving some details relying on the listener’s ability to get the meaning from the context (Hall, 1976). Repetition and elaboration are also common features used by Arabic speakers (Feghali, 1997). Repetition is useful to emphasize certain points, explaining or describing something (Nelson et al., 2002). Finally, the use of words such as “Inshallah,” which means “God Willing,” is frequent and indicates to others that the speaker believes that God has total control of the future (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Feghali, 1997).

Non-Verbal Communication

Nonverbal communication in Arab cultural contexts can be characterized by indirect eye contact in certain contexts, expressive body language, closeness between individuals, and relaxed attitudes toward time (Feghali, 1997). Lowering one’s gaze during face-to-face interactions with the opposite sex or between children and an older adult is considered polite (Feghali, 1997). Silence, which may be used to show support, disagreement, or anger, can also mean showing respect to authority figures such as older kin and teachers.

It is common for pairs of men or pairs of women to walk hand in hand or to hook arms when walking (Feghali, 1997). Greetings of individuals of the same gender may involve handshakes and cheek kisses depending on the closeness of the relationship (Feghali, 1997; Hall, 1976). It is customary for Arabs to greet or say goodbye to everyone present when entering or exiting a room, meeting, or gathering. Speaking fast and loudly is also common for Arabic natives. In Arab culture, people stand close to each other and tend to touch frequently with the same gender (Hall, 1976). The approach to time is relaxed; in social interactions, Arabs focus on relationships rather than following a specific schedule (Feghali, 1997).

Suggestions for CRE Practice

Effective communication is necessary for any educator in any setting to meet program goals. Marketing and recruitment of CRE with Arab Americans, as with any population, is key for successful program implementation. Research with Arab Americans and Arab immigrants highlights effective methods used for recruitment, such as identifying community leaders who speak the Arabic language and letting them help by connecting family life educators with the community (Blume et al., 2012). Flyers and brochures, as well as personal visits, can be used for practicality. If using flyers for recruiting Arab immigrants, bilingual flyers (after ensuring the translation to Arabic is correct) should be used, indicating (a) the purpose of the class, (b) the target audience, (c) general goals, (d) time and location of the classes, and (e) contact information of the bilingual person in charge of recruitment. Written communication may be more helpful in recruiting as this group tends to carry written documents with them for appointments. In terms of retention, which can be a challenge (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000), facilitators should remind participants at the end of each session about the time of upcoming sessions and any homework or expectations that participants should bring to the next session. There is evidence that calling or texting participants can be more effective than emails (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Timraz et al., 2017).

If CRE program participants have limited English fluency, programs should be implemented in Arabic if possible. This means that recruiters, educators, and anyone else who has direct contact with participants, should be fluent in Arabic. Alternatively, using interpreters for a limited-English audience works when having a native Arabic-speaking facilitator is not possible (Blume et al., 2012).

Even for participants who display a good command of English, CRE program leaders are advised to preview key terms at the start of the session with participants and to provide handouts that explain important concepts that will be discussed. During the session, it is important to build in repetition and frequent summaries since repetition is one of the important features of the Arabic communication style (Hall, 1976). Using teaching aids such as PowerPoint, relevant pictures, and videos also may enhance learning by providing repeated messages in different formats. Sarcasm and humor should be avoided, as these can be misunderstood by newcomers to English. If practitioners use humor, they should inform Arab audiences that they mean to be funny and then explain what the humorous comment means and how it relates to the subject being presented (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).

The role of the facilitator in preparing Arab immigrants for a session includes tone of voice, gesture, space, and welcoming participants. For example, individuals may greet others of the same gender with a kiss on the cheek, or they may shake hands at the beginning and the end of each class. CRE program facilitators, however, do not have to kiss or shake hands unless it is initiated by the participant. It is expected that the facilitator will greet participants before starting

the session. During classes, when asking everybody to introduce themselves to the class, it is common for any of the participants' parents in attendance to have nicknames. For example, a mother who has a son named Ahmed may prefer to be called "Ahmed's mother" rather than by her first name. The facilitator should encourage everyone to participate.

Finally, facilitators should clarify their roles and the ways in which they can help at the beginning of the sessions. Arabs tend to trust professional helpers (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). This trust may create high expectations by participants that the program facilitators will provide an ultimate solution for their marital problems, so educators should be prepared to suggest resources for couples wanting therapy or counseling.

When teaching Arab immigrants, educators should consider using discussions and dialogue, which may be more effective than lecturing. Storytelling is one of the effective modes of learning rooted in Arabic cultures (Blume et al., 2012). Repetition of important content is helpful. Finally, leaders should be flexible about starting times, if possible. If sticking to a schedule is important, then this needs to be communicated to Arab immigrant participants and framed as a favor that the educator is asking of them. Perhaps allowing time for informal socializing among participants at the start of sessions (and building this time into the lesson plan) would be a good way to balance different orientations to time and scheduling.

Conclusions

Couples and relationship education programs are designed to address relationship issues for couples who are in committed relationships (Halford, 2004). Family scholars have noted one of the challenges in teaching CRE programs is to be inclusive of all families, using teaching strategies that meet the needs of culturally diverse couples (Ballard & Taylor, 2013). Although empirical evidence on cultural adaptation in couples' education, specifically with Arab Americans and Arab immigrants, is lacking, there have been some efforts to discuss general FLE programs for Arab Americans (e.g., Blume et al., 2012).

Please refer to Table 1 for an overview of the Guidelines for CRE Programs with Arab immigrants.

Table 1. Guidelines for CRE Programs with Arab Immigrant Couples

Characteristics of Arab Cultures	Key Application to CRE Programming	Key Methods
Religious Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs. At least (63%) of Arab Americans are Christians. • Strong adherence to conservative religious beliefs specifically related to the importance of marriage and family formation. • Religious-based services are common ways to seek premarital education • Understand how religious beliefs may affect marriages and mate selection. For example, it is not common for couples to be dating before marriage. 	<p>Content: Avoid content related to explicit or implicit messages related to couples' sexual lives, as it may be perceived as inappropriate.</p> <p>Design: Religious facility can be used as the location for CRE classes.</p> <p>Family life educator: Use the assistance of religious leaders when recruiting for CRE classes.</p>
Importance of the Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the significant role of the family in individuals' lives. • Extended family members are typically highly involved in solving couples' marital problems. • Kinship connections between the families of the husband and the wife usually keep couples together. • Family is the most important social support unit for Arab American couples. • Arabs might be reluctant to seek outside help. 	<p>Content: Incorporate class discussions and scenarios that involve family roles in couples' lives.</p> <p>Design: Provide the CRE program in the context of the family and extended family should be optional.</p> <p>Family life educator: Consider approaching parents and in-laws and building trust with them first when recruiting for CRE classes will more likely encourage more participation.</p>
Gender Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and sometimes supported by their religious beliefs. • Gender segregation outside the home is less common among acculturated families. • Wives may feel more responsible for reducing conflicts and maintaining a peaceful and stable household environment. • Arab women often try to endure rather than seek outside help when marital issues arise. 	<p>Content: The backlash between the Western and the Arab world values regarding gender roles is one of the areas of marital disagreement in Arab households</p> <p>Design: Gender-segregated classes might be more acceptable for recently immigrated Arabs.</p> <p>Family life educator: Co-facilitating CRE program (male and female) may be more effective if presenting mixed-gender classes.</p>
Arabic Language and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arabic language is the unified feature of Arab Americans' ethnic identity. • Repetition and elaboration are common features used by Arabic speakers • Non-verbal communication includes expressive body language, closeness between individuals, and relaxed attitudes toward time. • Storytelling can be an effective method of class facilitation. • Greetings of individuals of the same gender may involve handshakes and cheek kisses. 	<p>Content: If CRE program participants have limited English fluency, CRE programs should be implemented in Arabic.</p> <p>Design: Preference of an instructional-explanatory model is the best to use for CRE class structure.</p> <p>Family life educator: leaders should be flexible about starting times if possible. If sticking to a schedule is important, then this needs to be communicated.</p>

In this paper, we reviewed common characteristics of Arab immigrant couples, drawing implications for CRE program adaptations for such couples. Drawing on the major principles of best practices in intervention and counseling with Arab Americans, we discussed the core cultural values of this group and proposed a set of guidelines for CRE program implementation that addresses the needs of the Arab immigrant community. The significant roles of religion, the importance of the family, clearly defined gender roles and responsibilities, and Arabic language and communication norms shape the implementation of CRE programs for these couples. Our analysis emphasizes the significance of religious values and the importance of religious leaders in assisting with personal and marital problems (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2007; Aloud, 2004). Parents also have strong influences on individuals' marriage and divorce decisions. Given that Arab immigrant families may associate seeking professional help with failure (Aloud & Rathur, 2009), educators should make efforts to clarify any misconceptions about the goals of CRE programs. Stigma about seeking professional help and a preference for relying on family and kinship as the main pathway for social support are some factors impacting seeking professional help (Al-Krenawi, 2014; Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014) and may contribute to the underutilization of professional help by this group. The lack of professionals who have an understanding of Arab immigrants' cultures can influence the utility and experience of the CRE program (Killawi et al., 2017). Thus, we recommend that FLE professionals consider these factors when working with Arab immigrants.

We want to note that cultural humility is also an important concept for CRE leaders to bear in mind. Cultural humility is the idea that no single leader, even if well-versed in a cultural context or a member of the culture, will be able to know everything about the culture. Instead, to be effective, leaders should be open to learning new things from their program participants and expect and welcome the diversity of participants they will encounter. Cultural humility should be an educator's goal, as well as to hold some degree of cultural competence with the groups they are leading.

To achieve desired outcomes, the implementation of CRE programs with Arab immigrants should consider the four cultural characteristics identified in this paper. CRE programs can empower Arab immigrants to navigate their couple relationships effectively by teaching them healthy marriage skills and improving communication. We hope this review contributes to further study of immigrant families and to investigations exploring ways of providing more inclusive and strength-based perspectives in couple and family life education.

This paper is a first step in providing culturally competent CRE to Arab immigrants. There is much to be done to improve CRE with this group. For instance, scholars may conduct content analyses of CRE programs to determine content that is relevant for Arab immigrant couples. Interviews with Arab couples who participated in CRE might also give additional insight into their programming needs, and interviewing couples reluctant to participate may also provide

useful information about scheduling, recruiting, and communicating with them. Arab immigrants will continue to migrate to the United States, and family life educators should be prepared to help them learn couples' skills.

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