Acculturative Stress and Social Support Among Immigrant
Arab American Adolescents in East Tennessee

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated sources and levels of acculturative stress among immigrant Arab American adolescents, and sources of social and emotional support that may mitigate acculturation-related stressors. The purposive sample (N=230) consisted of Arab American youth, 11-17 years of age, most of whom attended public schools in a moderate-sized city in East Tennessee, USA. Respondents were balanced in terms of gender, most were 13-17 years old, and were middle and high school-aged students. Over half were born in one of 16 different Arab countries, mainly Iraq, Egypt, and Syria. They had lived in the United States for 1-17 years, with a mean of 9.4 years, and most had lived in the State of Tennessee for 1-2 years. Using a non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design, the investigator used a modified instrument based on Kang (1996) and Thomas & Choi’s (2006) surveys that measured acculturative stress and social support. Participants were found to have experienced moderate to high levels of acculturative stress, particularly related to racial prejudice and stereotypes. Strongest sources of social support were from parents and friends, and the lowest levels were from American social organizations and religious organizations. Parent social support had an inverse relationship with acculturative stress, but Arab cultural organizations and American social organizations were found to increase acculturative stress. The research highlighted the pervasiveness of immigrant acculturative stress among this group and the potential for negative mental health consequences. Implications are discussed regarding the need for evidence-based and culturally appropriate interventions for immigrant Arab American youth and strategies for mitigating acculturative stressors they face, including those manifested by bullying and harassment in schools. The study also highlights the need for Arab-friendly curricula in schools that celebrate and respect Arab history and culture, and teach similar values to young people in attendance.