

Socioecological Perspectives of Resilience Among Arab and Middle Eastern Migrants Ψ

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Nuha Alshabani^{1,2} , Suzette L. Speight¹,
Samsara I. Soto¹, Kristin L. K. Koskey³, and
Carolyn Behrman^{1,4}

Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the lived experience of resilience among Arab and Middle Eastern migrants living in the United States through a socioecological framework. Nineteen first- and second-generation Arab and Middle Eastern adults were interviewed from 10 families. The study explored two research questions (a) how participants described their experience of resilience and (b) how participants experienced resilience in the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Eleven subthemes emerged and included a variety of themes that described the interaction between migrants and their environment at each level of the socioecological system. Findings add to the literature by revealing the dynamic nature of resilience as well as providing a socioecological perspective of resilience, contextualizing our

¹Department of Psychology, The University of Akron, Akron, OH, USA

²Psychiatry Department, Boston Medical Center, Boston, MA, USA

³Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Department, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

⁴Department of Anthropology, The University of Akron, Akron, OH, USA

Corresponding Author:

Nuha Alshabani, Psychiatry Department, Boston Medical Center, 801 Massachusetts Avenue
Crosstown Center, 4th Floor, Suite 400, Boston, MA 02118, USA.

Email: nuha.alshabani@bmc.org

understanding of resilience for this community, and illuminating how socioecological factors can hinder or foster resilience.

Keywords

Middle Eastern North African, Arab, resilience, socioecological, qualitative

Significance of the Scholarship to the Public

This study highlights the dynamic and contextual experience of resilience among Arab and Middle Eastern migrants living in the United States. Findings reveal how resilience is an outcome from the interaction between an individual and their environment. As such, community-based and systemic interventions that address harms across the socioecological system are needed to better serve this community.

Introduction

Psychological scholarship on refugees and immigrants continues to be necessary given the growth of the migrant population and the increase in anti-immigrant nationalism worldwide (Okazaki et al., 2019). Despite calls to understand the long-term resilience required to adapt to large-scale disasters or traumas, limited research addresses migrants' resilience. Moreover, psychological research more often focused on the negative conditions related to migration. Resilience research does not negate migrants' adverse experiences but rather complements the literature's understanding of this process (Roberto & Moleiro, 2018). Counseling psychologists (CP) are adequately equipped for working with migrant communities given their multicultural and strengths-based perspective. Although CP's values provide important tools for understanding resilience within systems, there is little attention to socioecological resilience factors (e.g., outside of culturally appropriate counseling; Kuo & Arcuri, 2014). Finally, despite the American Psychological Association's (APA's) emphasis on the need to address mental health disparities for racial and ethnic minorities (APA, 2019), Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African (AMENA) Americans continue to be understudied (Awad et al., 2019) with even fewer studies on AMENA resilience.

Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African Migrant Context

The experience of migrants in the United States is diverse and may be complicated by several challenges such as separation from family (Joyce &

Liamputtong, 2017). In general, a migrant is a person who has moved or is moving away from their home, across or within borders (International Organization for Migration, 2015). In this study, migrant refers to first- or second-generation individuals living in the United States regardless of their citizenship status. Approximately 44 million migrants (e.g., refugees, undocumented asylees, immigrants) live in the United States (Harjanto & Batalova, 2022). The extensive region from Morocco to Iran, which includes 19 countries in Africa (Khraif et al., 2015), is referred to as the MENA region, and stands for Middle East and North Africa. Among migrants in the United States, around 1.2 million migrants are from the MENA region (Harjanto & Batalova, 2022). Today, MENA Americans are a heterogeneous group of people from different countries, practicing a variety of religions, with roots in different cultures (Naber, 2010). Although MENA is often used in the literature for describing persons from this region there is controversy regarding the Eurocentric nature of the term “Middle East,” and the erasure of Arab identity. Our participants self-identified as Arab, Middle Eastern, and MENA. Thus, we use AMENA to refer to participants and the community.

Through three distinct waves of migration, people from the AMENA region have settled in the United States since the 1880s (Awad et al., 2019). According to Migration Policy Institute (MPI), recent wars resulted in increased migration to the United States, until the Trump administration’s policies restricted immigration from countries where Muslims are the majority (Harjanto & Batalova, 2022). Currently, 1.9 to 3.7 million Americans of AMENA descent live in the United States, but the exact population is unknown as the United States’ census does not include MENA (Awad et al., 2019). The type and range of challenges faced by AMENA migrants before settling in the United States are quite diverse. Pre-migration stressors may include war(s), economic strain, trauma(s), loss(es), and identity-based persecutions. Further, the migration process may include social isolation, discrimination, language barriers, poor living conditions, Islamophobia, acculturation stress, and difficulty obtaining resources (Pampati et al., 2018). Such strains impact AMENA migrants’ ability to acculturate into their host community.

There are two dimensions of acculturation, one involves maintaining heritage culture and the other involves adapting to the host culture. Along these two dimensions are four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 2005). Integration (i.e., the individual orients to both host and heritage culture) is associated with positive adjustment (Fedi et al., 2019; Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017). One reason is that social networks within both the host and heritage cultures provide migrants with culturally-relevant advice, practical resources, and connection (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017). Thus, acculturation informs the current study’s definition of resilience as a dynamic interaction between a person and the environment.

Nevertheless, the ability to integrate is influenced by the availability of resources in the community, policies on immigration, systemic barriers, and attitudes toward migrants (Ungar et al., 2013). For example, discrimination has been associated with acculturation difficulties for some AMENA migrants, particularly those who identify as Muslim (Hashemi et al., 2019). Communities that are welcoming to migrants foster a sense of comfort, relief, and belonging which aids migrants in the acculturation process (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017). The United States has become increasingly unwelcoming toward AMENA migrants, which subsequently may increase acculturation stress (Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014). In the United States, there is a long history of anti-AMENA prejudice, which worsened after the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks (Naber, 2010). Further, the media portrayal of, and political rhetoric on, AMENA Americans continues to foster a climate of anti-Arab prejudice (Awad et al., 2019). There is limited psychological research regarding AMENA culture. Still, there is a shared language and heritage that values family, religion, hospitality, respect for authority, and education (Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014). The current study addressed these research gaps by expanding knowledge on AMENA migrants and their resilience from their perspective through an ecological lens.

Socioecological Framework of Resilience

In the socioecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), the environment is described as multiple interdependent systems (i.e., micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono systems) with concentric relations (Figure 1). Research indicated that these environmental systems may have a greater impact on resilience capabilities than an individual's capacity to change (Ungar et al., 2013). However, only recently has research moved from a focus on the individual to the environment. Across the literature, resilience has been defined as a trait, an outcome of protective factors, and a dynamic process (Roberto & Moleiro, 2018). How resilience is defined influences how it is conceptualized, measured, and intervened upon. As such, a theory of resilience that addresses multiple systems and their interactions is necessary (Masten, 2016).

Yet, a review of the literature revealed that much of the resilience research in psychology focused on the microsystem, (i.e., an individual's interaction with their immediate environment; Vesely et al., 2017). Initial studies explored why some migrants had better mental health outcomes despite enduring the same adverse experiences as counterparts with poor outcomes (Vesely et al., 2017). Next, studies focused on family-level factors and resilience (Timshel et al., 2017). Still, the focus was on the microsystem. Naturally, there are calls for research to address the mesosystem (i.e., the interaction between microsystems), exosystem (i.e., resources that strain or strengthen mesosystem

relationships), macrosystem (i.e., societal, and cultural factors), and chronosystem (i.e., the historical context; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Recently, meso- and exosystem factors have been researched. For example, interactions between the family and school system (mesosystem) are impacted by exosystem factors such as housing, employment, and transportation resources (Ungar et al., 2013). At the macrosystem level, research indicated that when cultural values are maintained among immigrant families, children engage in fewer delinquent behaviors (Ungar et al., 2013). Goodman et al.'s (2017) studies reported that in addition to internal resources (microsystem), women used external resources, such as social support, case management, and federal aid. Notably, the use of external resources hinged upon access to them; hence, resilience is bound by the environment. Within the chronosystem, immigration to the United States has been viewed as involving a process of racial struggle (Maghbouleh, 2017). AMENA migrants are in a context in which many in the United States view them as hostile outsiders and there is a contradiction between their legal racial status, (i.e., White), and their experiences of being treated as non-White (Awad et al., 2019; Maghbouleh, 2017).

Although research has moved away from focusing on individual factors, a systemic approach to conceptualizing resilience is still lacking (Vesely et al., 2017). Barriers include the emphasis on Western values and no universal definition of resilience within the extant literature (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2020; Sleijpen et al., 2016). The APA defines resilience as successfully adapting to challenges using "mental, emotional, or behavioral flexibility and adjustment," and lists the availability of social resources as a factor that impacts individual resilience (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.). Nonetheless, resilience depends on the interaction between adversity, resources, and cultural adjustment (Roberto & Moleiro, 2018). For example, a migrant may experience financial instability (adversity) and navigate to the office of Job and Family Services (resource), which may or may not have materials in their native language (adjustment). These interactions depend on, and are influenced by, various contextual and negotiated factors (e.g., the ability of migrants to obtain resources and the availability of these resources; Ungar, 2013). Resources must be provided in a culturally appropriate manner and culture itself can be utilized as a source of resilience (Masten, 2016). Across diverse groups of AMENA Americans, cultural values such as the importance of family and religion are commonly reported (Kia-Keating et al., in press). Thus, we defined resilience as "the ability to adapt following adversity that involves using external resources or individual tactics that promote well-being." This definition was shared verbatim with participants and differs from APA's definition as the environment is part of resilience rather than an added factor.

Current Study

This study addressed the call for psychological research to (a) attend to the subjective experience of resilience, (b) explore the conceptualization of resilience through a socioecological lens, and (c) increase literature on well-being and resilience for AMENA persons in the United States ([Awad et al., 2019](#); [Vesely et al., 2017](#)). The guiding research questions were as follows: “How did AMENA migrants in the United States describe their lived experience of resilience?” and “How did AMENA migrants describe the impact of micro, meso, exo, and macrosystem factors on their resilience?”

Methods

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to explore the common lived experience of resilience among AMENA migrant families living in the United States. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach characterized by its focus on the lived experiences of people through a shared phenomenon as well as the convergence and divergence of that experience for those individuals ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). This approach aligns with best practices for working with migrant communities including an in-depth understanding of their unique experiences, contextual factors, and cultural milieus ([Bartholomew et al., 2015](#)). We used J. A. Smith et al.’s (2009) interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to research in psychology. IPA is ideographic and aims to understand the essence of contextual lived experiences by focusing on rich vivid descriptions and prioritizing depth over breadth (J. A. Smith et al., 2009; [Wertz, 2005](#)). Additionally, IPA is concerned with the double hermeneutic of (a) how the participant makes sense of their experience and (b) how the researcher interprets the participant’s meaning-making. Thus, the first author employed both an empathetic and inquisitive mindset to understand the participants’ lived experiences (i.e., participants’ meaning-making) while also seeking to uncover meaning beyond what was explicitly stated (i.e., researcher’s interpretation).

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used (J. A. [Smith et al., 2009](#)). To meet the inclusion criterion participants had to be first- or second-generation migrants. We limited participation to this group as their migration experience is more recent than those who are third generation and beyond. First- and second-generation participants are likely better able to articulate the process of resilience within the context of migration (i.e., the essence of the phenomenon). First-generation included participants who were not born in the United States. Second-generation included participants who were born in the

United States and had a parent born outside of the United States. Recruitment material was shared online through listservs and contacting AMENA-serving institutions.

Participants

The study's sample included 10 cases of AMENA families. Following the methods outlined by [Atallah \(2017\)](#), a minimum of two and a maximum of four participants were requested for each case. However, in three cases (i.e., cases four, five, and six) due to various events (e.g., confusion about the interview format, one withdrawal from the study, and unforeseen work conflict), only one participant was interviewed. Following consultation with peer debriefers and initial data analysis, it was determined that these cases provided rich and descriptive data that answered all research questions, and all three cases were retained. Thus, a minimum of one and a maximum of four individuals participated per interview for a total of 19 participants.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 80 years ($M = 40.21$, $SD = 18$). A majority ($n = 14$) of participants self-identified as first-generation and the rest identified as second-generation ($n = 5$). About half identified as women ($n = 11$) and half as men ($n = 8$). Their education level ranged from some high school ($n = 1$), some college ($n = 2$), associate degree ($n = 1$), bachelor degree ($n = 9$), to currently enrolled in graduate studies ($n = 6$). Participants self-identified as Arab ($n = 6$), Middle Eastern ($n = 5$), Biracial (White/Arab/Middle Eastern; $n = 3$), White ($n = 1$), and Arab/Middle Eastern ($n = 4$). Their national origins included Syria ($n = 4$), Palestine ($n = 7$), Jordan ($n = 2$), U.S./Palestine ($n = 3$), U.S./Lebanon ($n = 1$), U.S./Jordan ($n = 1$), and Palestine/Jordan ($n = 1$). A large majority identified as Muslim ($n = 15$); the remainder identified as Atheist ($n = 3$) and Agnostic ($n = 1$). Finally, participants' income brackets included \$26,000–\$35,999 ($n = 3$); \$36,000–\$69,999 ($n = 6$); greater than or equal to \$70,000 ($n = 5$); and undisclosed ($n = 5$).

Methods for Increasing Trustworthiness

Bracketing was used throughout the study to both enhance meaning-making and recognize the researchers' personal biases to set them aside. Reflexive writing, the process of bracketing, involves examining personal beliefs through self-reflective writing, discussion, analytic memos, and consultation to identify how these beliefs impact the research and to maintain the focus of the study on the participants' voices ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#); [J. A. Smith et al., 2009](#)). In the current study, bracketing involved research team discussions, the first author's reflective writing

after participant interviews, team meetings, and data analysis, as well as notes written within each transcript. Reflections were analyzed with interview data to shape themes.

The primary researcher identifies as AMENA, a cis-woman, a child of migrants, and had prior experience and training in qualitative research. Author two identifies as a Black cis-woman, author three identifies as a Latina cis-woman, and both have expertise in racial oppression and counseling psychology. Authors four and five identify as White cis-women with expertise in mixed methods and qualitative research respectively. All authors are U.S.-born, American citizens, and did not share participants' migratory and resettlement histories, which made them outsiders to participants' personal, and often difficult, lived experiences. As such, we relied on the literature to supplement our knowledge. The second, fourth, and fifth authors served as peer debriefers in study design, data analysis, and interpretation. Peer debriefing enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of findings (Janesick, 2015) by working with a qualified and impartial colleague(s) to review transcripts, methods, and findings. The peer debriefer(s) may assess emerging and final themes, if a key point is missed, or if a point is overemphasized.

The use of cultural advisors is recommended for ethical research with migrant populations (V. J. Smith, 2009). Advisors can provide the cultural knowledge needed for ethical design, facilitate building trust with the community, and provide an insider perspective during data interpretation (V. J. Smith, 2009). In the current study, the cultural advisor is a cis-male, AMENA migrant who had an insider experience. He teaches foreign languages, history, and English as a second language. The cultural advisor verbally provided cultural and linguistic knowledge. He gave suggestions for addressing sensitive topics with participants during the development of the interview protocol. He also provided consultation throughout the project and assisted with recruitment and provided feedback on data analysis. An overview of the cultural advisor's contribution is outlined in [Appendix A](#). Additionally, two experts in AMENA research (one faculty member and one graduate student) were given a draft of the interview protocol. They provided written feedback, suggestions, and edits to the interview protocol. A final credibility technique is the use of thick, rich quotes and descriptions in our findings.

Data Collection

A Qualtrics survey link was emailed to potential participants to provide informed consent and permission to record interviews. An Arabic version of the informed consent was available. Participants were encouraged to pick pseudonyms and when one was not chosen a pseudonym was selected by the

primary researcher. The primary researcher conducted all interviews using Zoom. Upon completion of the interview, each family was provided one electronic gift card from a national retailer valued at \$40.00 for their voluntary participation. Funds for the gift cards were provided by the primary researchers' department. One week following the interview, participants were contacted by phone or email and asked if they had additional comments or statements to retract. They were not compensated for follow-ups. To engage in member checking, participants were sent the list of initial themes, descriptions of themes, and quotes from their interviews. They were encouraged to provide feedback on data interpretation. Three individuals responded and reported they agreed with the interpretation and made minor changes, such as adding clarification (e.g., a location or year) to a quote. IPA is suitable for larger sample sizes (i.e., 8–12 cases), and data collection stopped at the saturation of subthemes (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Saturation was determined when the primary researcher noted the same topics continued to emerge in each interview. A list of topics from each interview was included in the research journal as part of the analytic memos. When no new topics were added to the list, saturation was met.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was informed by the story circle method, which involves interview questions that elicit stories from participants. Each participant shares a story to a prompt for about 3 to 5 minutes. The researcher and other participants listen to the storyteller without asking questions or interrupting. After all stories are shared for the prompt, all participants are invited to share reactions, comments, or questions to the stories and discuss what they heard (Behrman & Spickard-Prettyman, 2017). This reduces the chance for one speaker to dominate. Thus, this method involved participants in the analysis process as they reflected on, interpreted, and created meaning-making around what was said in the interview. The interview began with open-ended invitations such as, "Describe what resilience means to your family." These were followed by more focused questions that directly addressed socio-ecological factors such as, "How, if at all, have interactions with schools, religious organizations, and other local agencies affected your family's resilience?" No participants requested the use of an interpreter for their interview.

Data Analysis

NVivo (version release 1.5) was used to analyze data, which consisted of more than 10 hours of recording (interviews ranging from 54 to 96 minutes in length) and were transcribed into 227 pages of written dialogue. The unit

of analysis was each interview transcript (which engaged between one to four participants). In IPA, coding involves two overall steps: initial coding followed by focused coding. Initial coding included the researcher reading and rereading each unit of analysis (interview transcript) to create initial analytic notes (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The first author analyzed transcripts individually by comparing incidents of data to other incidents to allow core categories to emerge. This allowed the researcher to combine the emic (participant or insider view) with the etic (researcher or outsider view). The researcher organized initial notes by research questions, a technique known as structural coding (Saldaña, 2015). Then, reread the interviews, this time in reverse order, and added more notes to the list of emerging themes. As recommended by J. A. Smith et al. (2009), the researcher read each transcript again and made notes on the *content* or what the participant said; *linguistics* or the use of metaphors, phrases, and fluency; and *conceptual* or the researcher's meaning-making of the content. Notably, *linguistic* coding prioritized the voice and worldview of the participants (Saldaña, 2015). These steps were repeated with each case. Analytic memos were used to bracket the researcher's reactions throughout data analysis. Step two, focused coding, was employed to create themes by searching the data for the most significant and frequent codes (Saldaña, 2015). In focused coding, the researcher integrated case notes and interpretations to determine subthemes. As such, themes were created from the researcher's notes and were used to represent larger chunks of data. Next, a comparison of data both within and between interviews was utilized to reach saturation (i.e., the absence of new themes). Finally, themes were organized using simple organization structures including word diagrams (Saldaña, 2015). It is recommended to use a relevant theory to move the findings from the concrete level to a theoretical level (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological model was utilized to complement, verify, and aid in describing findings.

Findings

Analysis yielded four themes (Figure 1) further illustrated by subthemes that are supported with direct quotations from participants. With each direct quote, the case number out of ten is provided for each participant to reveal relationships between participants. For example, quotes from Aiysha and Hamsa, include the notation (Case 1) to illustrate that they were in the same family. Families are labeled in the order in which they were interviewed. As such, Aiysha (Case 1) and Hamsa (Case 1) were in the same family and first to be interviewed. The following themes were organized to represent environmental influences on participants' resilience capacity.

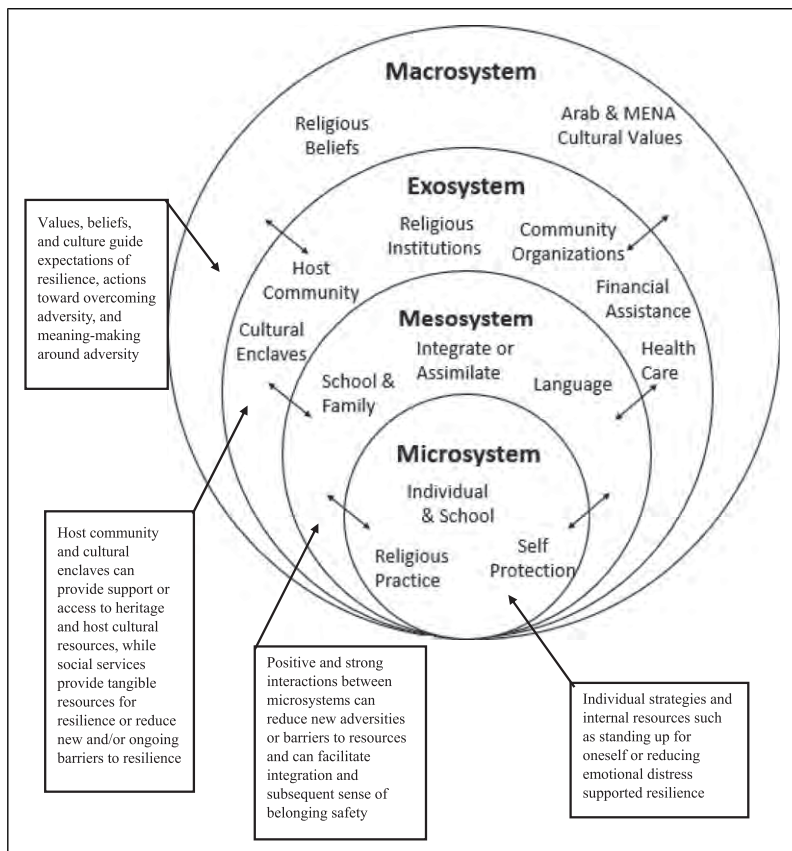


Figure 1. AMENA migrant's experience of resilience through socioecological interactions.

Theme One: Macrosystem

This theme revealed how components of the macrosystem (e.g., values and beliefs) enhanced resilience for AMENA migrants in the United States. Two subthemes were revealed.

Subtheme One: Arab and Middle Eastern and North African Values. All 19 participants described cultural values and how these values influenced their response to and ability to overcome adversity. For example, Zara (Case 3) described her experience of drawing strength from her cultural values to address challenges. She stated, "And then you pull from that [culture] you pull from like the values and strengths that you have to be able to like, put that next

step forward.” Other participants described how values and culture helped them cope with the challenges involved in migrating to the United States. Amira (Case 6) shared how using her culture helped her when she was stressed, isolated, or longing for home. “I’m trying to keep my culture in my heart. I’m trying to [do] what I was doing with my family, with my parents, over there. Try to do it here.” These quotes revealed that cultural values guided participants toward strategies to overcome adversity.

A value described in every interview was the value of family. For instance, Hamsa (Case 1) remarked, “In my country, in [the] Middle East, the relationship between the dad, mom, and kids I think it’s stronger than here [United States].” Others reported also reported that family was important. For example, “Family, like a big value of ours, is family” (Zara, Case 3). The value of education was also prominent, phrases like “Education is something important” (Farah, Case 10) and “Always put your education first” (Bashir, Case 4) illustrate this value. The value of education led to resilience through practices such as openness to learning from others, lifelong learning, and learning from experiences. For instance, Sabiha (Case 7) shared how she connected with her American neighbors due to her willingness to learn from them. She stated, “You’ve got to have your heart and mind open to others.” Similarly, Rayan (Case 8) shared that being open to different perspectives can provide valuable knowledge on how to overcome adversity. She stated, “To see different perspectives of people, you know, going through things in life and how they deal with it is a resource.” These quotes revealed that valuing education fostered resilience through connection to supportive others and information.

The participants also described AMENA’s values of generosity, hospitality, and caring for others. For instance, Cedar (Case 5) stated, “Arab American culture, we just tend to stick together more. There’s much more generosity that you’ve gotten and hospitality where you really extend a hand.” Also, Danny (Case 3) described the culture as “You know, Middle East and generosity, they stretch the table as much as whatever they own.” These quotes revealed that through these values AMENA migrants give and receive resources as well as social support that foster resilience. For example, Mariam’s value of hospitality helped her build relationships in the United States, which fostered resilience through supportive neighbors.

Subtheme Two: Religious Beliefs. The following quotes revealed how religious beliefs shaped AMENA migrants meaning-making around adversity to foster resilience. Twelve participants described the influence of religious beliefs on resilience. As is true for many, AMENA people’s religious beliefs are deeply intertwined with cultural values. Rayan (Case 8) described the connection between culture and religion: “I can say that my culture was religion.” Many believed that things would work out, seeing adversity as a “test from God” (Hamsa, Case 1). Participants drew a connection between religious beliefs and

hope or optimism which fostered resilience. For example, throughout his interview, Majd (Case 8), shared that he is an “optimistic person” who tends to focus on the “bright side.” He stated, “We’ve learned through our religion, Islam, to be accepting of fate and being positive about it and looking at the bright side of things.” This quote shows how religion guided his attitude towards overcoming adversity. Likewise, after discussing financial hardship, Mahdi (Case 2) repeated the phrase “*Alhamdulillah*” which literally translates to “praise be to God,” a phrase he said he used to “stay positive.” Some participants described an Islamic belief that difficulties faced by Muslim people will be resolved by God. The connection between religion and resilience through meaning-making is best illustrated by one participant:

So, it’s normal to go through challenges and there’s a reason for us to be here. So, you got to find, like, go behind the reason find why Allah, God, chose [for you] to be here. So, always look at the positive way, not just the negative way. And yeah, I think this is like really helped us sometimes we go through like a bad, like feeling and depression and stuff like that... We [are] all going through a hard time. And always after the hard time, a good time will come to us, Allah [God] he promised us this. (Aiysha, Case 1)

Aiysha’s quote illustrates that religion provided a deeper meaning and reason for adversity. Her religious belief fostered resilience by reducing her stress and by providing a way to make meaning of adversity. Aiysha added, “We always have hope, you know, like, *Allah* is there. *Allah* is going to help us. This life is a test.” The aforementioned quotes affirm the assertion that religion provided a belief that adversities are “tests” with a “reason” or greater purpose for experiencing them. Similarly, several participants shared that hardships are a “learning experience” (Rayan, Case 8).

Another religious belief that influenced resilience is the notion of “God’s will” or “destiny.” Participants shared that religion taught them that what happens is “predetermined” by God. For some this belief fostered resilience by giving them peace and meaning as illustrated by phrases like “God willing” (Zahid, Case 10), “God always helps you” (Sabiha, Case 7), and “Thanks to God” (Bashir, Case 4). The frequency of these phrases and the 11 participants who used them revealed that God’s will was a pervasive belief in the sample. Rose (Case 9) shared that these beliefs make challenges “easier” and stated, “That [destiny] alleviates the pressure, you don’t carry it personally. And you feel like you’re guided towards something. You know that you’re not always in control and that’s actually helpful.” Similarly, Hamsa (Case 1) shared that viewing adversity as a “test” helped him as well stating, “When you look at what happened to you from this view, it makes you like feel acceptance to your situation and try to deal with it.” Others did not find religion helpful. For instance, Rayan (Case 8) stated, “In religion you’re, thrown in things and

hoping for the best to happen or not doing anything, because you think it's gonna work out." Rayan showed how she believed religion leads to passive behavior that hinders resilience.

Theme Two: Exosystem

This theme revealed that when the exosystem (e.g., neighbors, community organizations, social services) provided resources, access to these resources built up migrants' resilience capabilities. Three subthemes emerged and are described below.

Subtheme One: Cultural Enclaves. Twelve participants shared that they resettled in, made intentional efforts to engage with, or moved to AMENA or Muslim communities. Specifically, these participants engaged in AMENA or Muslim community organizations, events, or places of worship. For example, Mahdi (Case 2) shared that "socializing with other Muslim communities" was crucial for his family as they overcame acculturation difficulties. Participants deemed these organizations "necessary" for keeping a connection to their culture, which in turn supported resilience through maintaining their cultural and religious values. For example, Hamsa (Case 1) had difficulty being separated from other Syrians when he first came to the United States. His capacity to be resilient to acculturation difficulties was strengthened through connecting to the AMENA community. He shared, "So, it's easier for us in [the city] now to find a lot of Arabs, a lot of Middle Eastern people. So, and maybe this kind of people is closer to us because of the habits, the language, all of this stuff." Likewise, Arab friends helped Aiysha (Case 1) overcome the initial isolation she felt in the United States. She stated, "Especially the first year when I had like lots of Arab friends, they were in 12th grade with me. So, I was fine like not feeling I am alone." Farah (Case 10) discussed connecting with families at the *masjid* (a place of worship). Connections with other Muslim parents helped her navigate raising her children in a predominantly Christian country. Community helped her be resilient to the acculturation stressors she faced. Amira (Case 6), Bashir (Case 4), and Mariam (Case 9) stated that they also go to the *masjid* to "Feel connected" to their culture, their religion, and other people. For example:

I think the mosque and organization here are more important than in our country, because in our country, the community, one community, all of them, Syrian, all of them Arab all of them Muslim. But here, if you don't have this kind of organization, or *masjid*, you will lose your identity. It's very important here, otherwise, nobody will meet other people. This place is where everybody needs to meet each other. When I need something, I go there and ask, "I need someone [to] help me," and maybe they help. (Hamsa, Case 1)

Many shared that living in an Arab or Muslim community made them feel happy or safe, which fostered their resilience. Mahdi, (Case 2) stated, "It is the best community in the United States. For example, [in speaking of their neighborhood Mahdi stated] friends of our children from Syria, from Jordan, Pakistan, from Egypt, and so on, they are like one big family." Amira (Case 6) said of her community, "Here we have a huge community, a huge Muslim community so it's easy for us." Farah (Case 10) reported, "I hear a lot of stories like happen to other Muslim ladies and families and racism things, but I feel sorry, like, we are really blessed that people here like very accepting." Not all participants found Arab or Muslim spaces helpful. For instance, Cedar (Case 5) shared his family "never really connected to the Arab community" because his family did not share the religious identity of his local community.

Subtheme Two: Social Services. Twelve participants shared varied experiences accessing social services. For example, Farah (Case 10) felt social services in the United States were more equitable than in Jordan, "When you compare [services] with like systems overseas it's like way better here [United States], which easily like help us to overcome things." Farah added, "Everything is better so that what makes it like easy adjusting." Her quotes revealed how an environment that has accessible resources can foster resilience by reducing barriers to adjusting and aiding with integration. Participants used various social services, such as food or health care assistance. Mariam (Case 9) described her experience upon her arrival to the United States: "In the beginning, because I don't have any job, I have to start with this [social services] step." This provided her with resources to pursue education and career opportunities which fostered resilience by empowering her to be financially stable. Amira, (Case 6) also used social services sharing, "Before my husband got the full-time job, we are eligible for financial aid. I like it. I think we missed over there; we don't have social services overseas."

However, Rose (Case 9) found applying for assistance difficult, "I think the hardest thing is the process can be hard." She identified systemic barriers of time, translation services, and transportation as factors that limited access to resources for migrants and subsequently hindered resilience. Rose added, "Sometimes you have to, to call and be on the phone for two, three hours, or you have to go there and spend an entire day. It's just not very accessible." Likewise, Mahdi (Case 2) found the process difficult stating, "Sometimes they accept approval, sometimes they don't, and they do not tell you why." However, Bashir (Case 4) reported having a positive experience. He stated, "Within 30 days of coming here [United States], I found a job." This enabled him to be resilient to potential stressors as he was financially stable and independent soon after arriving in the United States. Others shared that citizenship status impacted their ability to access services. For example, Aiysha (Case 1) stated, "With Medicaid, I do have insurance, but he [Hamsa]

don't have it and he cannot apply for it." Then Hamsa (Case 1) added, "I can't have any help from the government." He described that while waiting (over 2 years) for his asylum case to be decided he cannot access services and he experiences employment barriers which greatly reduce his resources for resilience. He stated, "And I quit my job for like 3 weeks or so because I don't have a work permit. If I work illegally, it's, it's bad for my case [laughs]."

Subtheme Three: Host Community. Ten participants described relationships with non-AMENA neighbors and community members who connected them to resources that fostered resilience. AMENA migrants reported building relationships with Americans to protect themselves against prejudice. For instance, Farah (Case 10) stated, "Even if you talk to them [Americans] like a little bit, they'll like, even if they hate you, they'll change their mind." Throughout her interview, Farah described how she saw her "good experience" in the United States as an outcome of supportive relationships. She fostered resilience and reduced barriers through connections with the host community. Similarly, Danny (Case 3) who experienced overt racism when he first came to the United States explained, "I overcome by being more kind to them." He added that after building connections, "people will turn around" and those who were prejudiced became his friends.

Some shared that the host community provided emotional support and helped them navigate the new country. Yet, others had difficult experiences with the host community. For example, Aiysha (Case 1) stated that Americans "lefted [her] alone." Similarly, Sabiha's children had a hard time connecting with peers. Sabiha (Case 7) stated, "Young people here, especially in high school... they don't accept newcomers." These women revealed that when host communities are not welcoming migrants experience additional challenges and allocate resources to addressing these new challenges. However, this experience was dynamic, as even Aiysha found support, "They [co-workers] helped me a lot. Like supported me with any difficulty I will face because of my English or because I don't know the system here or how things it works," (Aiysha, Case 1). Likewise, Zahid (Case 10) shared that his friends made his transition easier. "It was a little easier to adjust because of my experiences making friends in public school."

Supportive host communities connected participants to resources that fostered resilience. For instance, Bashir (Case 4) explained how friends helped him navigate the environment: "You know, how to do this, how to do that, where to get this, where you know don't do that stuff." For Amira (Case 6) people helped her with communication. "When I talked to anyone and they know like it's not my language, they try to make it easy for me. Yeah, and if I get any mistake, they fix it to me. It's helped me a lot." These quotes showed how host community friends provided tangible resources and support. Similarly, Sabiha (Case 7) described access to resources through neighbors

she effortfully connected with. "In the U.S., they don't easily interact with you. I started a relationship with an older lady across from my house... and we became friends and she kind of guided me through." Sabiha added, "She started introducing me to the neighborhood." Through these connections, Sabiha found a job, childcare, and a support system for resilience.

Theme Three: Mesosystem

This theme revealed that strong relationships between microsystems fostered resilience by increasing connection to support and resources. Three subthemes emerged. Here, the interaction between parents and schools describes a mesosystem relationship whereas above education was described in terms of values (macrosystem). These two systems co-occur and influence each other; they are separated in these findings to show different ecological levels.

Subtheme One: Language. All participants discussed language-related acculturation difficulties. They described their mesosystem interactions (e.g., with peers, coworkers, family, neighbors) that were challenged by language proficiency. Some discussed the barriers they faced due to lower English proficiency and others described Arabic language proficiency as a tool for connecting to family or culture. Thus, language was described as both a barrier to resilience, as integration was hindered, and as a tool for building resilience, as language brought participants closer to others. Regarding barriers, Amira (Case 6) recalled, "Everybody studied English overseas but when we came here, we thought ourselves like not understanding anything." Aiysha (Case 1) shared that although she is still improving her language proficiency, it took years for her to feel comfortable speaking English. "The first couple years, I was suffering until I got used to it [English] and talk with more American people." Her quote showed the isolation she felt due in part to the language barrier that disconnected her from others and in turn hindered her resilience. Hamsa (Case 1) described the difficulty of learning a new language as an adult. This challenge impeded his ability to get the information needed to navigate his new home, subsequently hindering his resilience. He stated, "Still we face some problems. Sometimes when we go to the doctors, when we go to the specific issues, we don't know the specific words." Amira (Case 6) also described barriers due to language, "It was hard for me to make different friends here in the beginning." She stated that after 10 years of living in the United States, she still avoids speaking English.

Relatedly, an accent was associated with challenges to resilience, namely discrimination, for those who were English proficient. For example, Mariam (Case 9) recalled "sometimes, until now, some people they don't like my accent." She shared that people treat her differently because they think she "doesn't know things." Zahid (Case 10), Cedar (Case 5), and Farah (Case 2)

had similar experiences. Bashir (Case 4) reported that he did not experience any discrimination. "When I first come here, I have some accent, and everybody wanted to know where I came from, but they were all welcoming." Still, others shared how they navigated these difficulties. Danny (Case 3) stated that he continued to improve his English proficiency without internalizing prejudice. "The language got a little better, and just you know, I did not let that [discrimination] stop me from meeting Americans and finding a job." In terms of Arabic proficiency, participants reported learning Arabic enabled them to connect with their family and culture. For instance, Fatima (Case 2) gave "Arabic lessons" to her grandchildren which enabled them to communicate with relatives in Syria.

Subtheme Two: Integrating Culture. All participants described integrating AMENA and U.S. cultures. Between first- and second-generation participants, differences in cultural integration were noted. Second-generation participants described identity integration. For example, Cedar (Case 5) shared that experiencing anti-Arab prejudice impacted his identity development. He stated, "For me, I was just having this dual identity of being Arab and being American. And like, you know, people telling me that those are kind of mutually exclusive." Similarly, Leila (Case 3) shared that she had "Whitewashed" herself, but eventually moved from assimilating to integrating both her AMENA and American identities. Likewise, Aya (Case 3) described learning to integrate her identities when she met other AMENA students in college. The quotes show how environments that promote assimilation may hinder resilience through identity confusion whereas environments that promote acceptance can strengthen resilience through identity integration.

First-generation participants described integrating different cultural values. Many stated that the difference between the "conservative" AMENA culture and the "secular" American culture was a barrier to integrating the two. For example, Cedar (Case 5) stated, "When my mom came to the United States, my grandfather was very anxious and protective about his daughters. Very anxious about, you know, how they would change and be affected by American culture." Others described how cultural differences created a barrier to integrating into American life. Farah (Case 10) stated that she often had challenging conversations with her children confessing, "The hardest thing for any immigrant is to balance between American values and the Arab values, especially as a Muslim." Also, Hamsa (Case 1) shared that due to cultural differences he can never "truly be friends with Americans." However, Mariam (Case 9) believed integrating her culture with the American values she admired made her resilient. Likewise, Dany (Case 3) stated, "I have a part of me that is the good part of culture of U.S.A. and another part of me the good part of who we [AMENA people] are." For Rose, maintaining one's heritage was equal to being resilient to prejudice. She stated, "Some [migrants] have a shift

in values or opinions or even religion. So, it's about standing up for yourself, and making sure that nothing can get to you or change you."

Subtheme Three: Family and School System. Twelve participants shared that families are involved in school systems. For instance, Farah (Case 10) stated, "My dad, he was like, 'Take care of education.' He makes sure education is something important." Participants described how the family is involved in education broadly including traditional school and other learning experiences. For instance, Zahid (Case 10) described how his mother taught him to focus on learning asserting, "If you have free time, you could be working, you could be studying, you could be learning something new." His quote also showed how he was taught to continue learning to increase his resilience capabilities. The family was instrumental in connecting participants to resources that supported education. Sabiha (Case 7) described how her mother was closely involved in her education by meeting with teachers monthly and encouraging learning over the summer. She stated, "Whenever the school ends in the summer she'll [mother] walk us to a bookshop that sold old books, and she'd go tell the guy 'Give me the reading books for second grade... for third grade' whatever grade we are." Similarly, Ismail (Case 7) described how when his family was displaced to a refugee camp his brother became his teacher: "My brother, he took care of me in the sense he got books, and he started teaching me. So, I was ready to go to school." Both quotes reveal how families became engaged in the education of youth to build resilience.

AMENA migrants described the following family and school system factors as hindering their resilience. Mariam (Case 9) shared how intervening in the school systems was challenging for AMENA parents: "The parents they have to be aware and to go and to discuss this issue [prejudice]. But sometimes it's hard for immigrant people, because of, as I told you, the language or they don't understand the system." Additionally, Amira (Case 6) described how AMENA parents had requested that Muslim holidays be recognized in school recalling, "They send like survey to let them like accept our holiday as a day off at school." However, she became frustrated when despite this effort "nothing happens." Lastly, Leila (Case 3) shared about discrimination her dad faced within her school. She stated that when he came to school "it was always like, you know, hearing comments from people seeing like the weird looks, and people looking at my dad." Together these quotes revealed that some family efforts to increase resilience through school involvement are blocked by resistant or harmful environments.

Theme Four: Microsystem

The microsystem included various internal or psychological resources to foster resilience.

Participants described three subthemes.

Subtheme One: Individuals in School. Fourteen participants described how their school was either amenable to their needs or created additional barriers, which subsequently hindered their resilience. Some reported that their school had services that empowered AMENA students in transitioning to the U.S. school system. For example, Aiysha's high school offered a tutor and English language services. She described how these services helped her navigate the new system, complete assignments, and build English proficiency. Farah (Case 10) also described a school system that supported AMENA students. When her daughters started wearing the *hijab* to school, she expected backlash sharing, "Like the American teacher none of them asked her like, 'Why would you wear this?'" Fortunately, the school was supportive. "Some of the teachers they start talking about *Ramadan* for us and about the *Eid*." Her quotes revealed that the supportive school environment fostered resilience for her children by reducing barriers and increasing their sense of belonging.

However, some shared that unwelcoming school systems hindered resilience. Zahid (Case 10) described how American school was hard for migrants: "When your parents aren't adjusted to it, it's even harder for you to adjust to it because you don't know what was going on." Likewise, Aiysha's (Case 1) college did not offer tutoring or language support and she suffered academically, "When I had to go to college, I was all alone. There's no tutor who can help me work there. So, I was really like suffering." She added, "I didn't know how to like, even know how we have homework, but how everyone's knowing that we have homework." Aiysha's quote showed how her lack of knowledge about U.S. educational systems combined with a lack of support led to not enough resources for resilience. Relatedly, Leila (Case 3) shared how prejudice was integrated into the curriculum. She stated, "And it's [racism] like, so outward, like in our school system, to the point where, like, our teachers are preaching some of this stuff to us." She described how being in this school environment resulted in her and her sisters needing to hide their identity. "It's like a survival tactic to Americanize, like whitewashed ourselves."

Others shared that education made them resilient to oppression. Bashir (Case 4) described that when his family became displaced, he could rely on his education as a source of resilience. He stated, "You have to depend on yourself and make yourself strong and there is nothing no weapons other than education." This weapon helped him defend himself. "Life is a fight. You go outside and fight and fight for your life and fight for your rights." He added, "Education is the things that nobody can take out of you." He repeated this sentiment throughout his interview showing how crucial education was in his process of overcoming adversities. Likewise, Amira (Case 6) viewed education as a personal strength: "I don't have family help me to support me with

anything, so I have to do it by myself.” She described how her education increased her confidence to “solve any problem” and be resilient through adversity. Others shared how they used education to cope. For instance, “I read a lot of psychology-related self-help books. And this is a huge resource for me as well. Yeah, learning about the mindset, thoughts, emotions, and resilience really helped me a lot” (Rayan, Case 8). For others, learning about U.S. systems empowered them to be resilient through standing up for their rights. For example, Rose (Case 9) stated, “When you know the system, you’re more likely to defend yourself.” Similarly, Aya (Case 3), Cedar, and Ismail shared how various college experiences resulted in consciousness-raising that fostered resilience. For instance, Cedar (Case 5) shared, “I started to really learn about the politics of like U.S. imperialism and it’s like, that whole dynamic was really frustrating to me.”

Subtheme Two: Individual Religious Practice. Eleven participants emphasized the importance of religious practice in their response to and ability to overcome adversity. Participants reported using *salah* (prayer), *dua* (supplication, an intimate conversation with God), and *hadith* (religious guidance, teachings, and traditions) to cope with the consequences of adversity (e.g., worry or sadness). For instance, Farah (Case 10) used religion to reduce worry and guide decisions around acculturation difficulties. She stated, “We always go back to the religion.” Similarly, Aiysha (Case 1) stated that her family’s main strategy for addressing adversity is religious practice. She used *dua* as a form of coping. Similarly, other participants exemplify the importance of prayer in their resilience mindsets. Mariam (Case 9) said, “So now praying both me and my mom and Rose to make a home,” and Fatima (Case 2) echoed a reliance on prayer stating, “*Alhamdulillah*, although we have these problems, I pray hopefully we’ll make it.” Throughout these interviews, participants described how religious practice eased their emotional pain.

Subtheme Three: Self-Protection. Nine participants described strategies for self-protection including pursuing better opportunities, dismantling stereotypes, and being a “model Arab” (3 participants). Although diverse, these strategies were all aimed at resisting oppression, prejudice, or discrimination. For instance, when discussing the prejudice he faced in school, Zahid (Case 10) stated, “I was taught to stand my ground and to be strong to not back down when you see hardships in front of you, and I think that really did help me growing up.” Likewise, Mariam (Case 9) shared that she encourages her daughter to defend herself against prejudice. She also modeled this behavior saying, “I encourage myself. I have to be brave enough. I have to defend myself.” Mariam used multiple strategies to address prejudice such as positive self-talk, ignoring comments, and reporting discrimination. Others described pursuing opportunities as a form of self-protection because this improved their

social standing. For instance, Cedar (Case 5) shared that his family remained resilient by, “Adapting to new opportunities and experiences, because they really had to do that when they came here.” Likewise, Rose (Case 9) shared how pursuing opportunities removed her from conflict, “It [migrating] was really difficult, but at the same time, Syria was going through a war. So, it was the better choice.” Participants protected themselves by being a “model Arab” or dispelling stereotypes by teaching others about Arab people. For example, Cedar (Case 5) shared, “I always felt the need to explain myself and like kind of be a representation of like, ‘the good Arab.’”

Reflexivity Statement

Analysis of the primary researcher’s analytic memos, journal reflections, and research notes revealed themes of connection to participants, familiarity with experiences of identity integration, noting differences in cultural upbringing, pride in a shared heritage with participants, empathy toward participants’ experience of oppression, and a desire to understand and share participants’ voices accurately. Bracketing these themes mirrored the participants’ descriptions of collectivist values, identity, and resistance through perseverance.

Discussion

The current study addressed two questions: “How did AMENA migrants in the United States describe their lived experience of resilience?” and “How did AMENA migrants describe the impact of mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem factors on their resilience?” Regarding the first research question, participants described their lived experience of resilience through interactions between themselves and their environment. Overall, they described a complex process of navigating their way to needed social and tangible resources. AMENA migrants shared that their capacity to be resilient was dynamic such that within a single day they might find themselves in spaces that fostered as well as hindered resilience. Findings demonstrated the contextual nature of resilience and how resilience capacity is impacted by interconnected ecological systems. As boundaries between systems are diffuse, the interconnection between the individual and their environment was described through participants’ own actions and subsequent outcomes that were tied to environmental factors. For example, participants would share how they applied for healthcare (exosystem), met their child’s teacher (mesosystem), or used cultural values (macrosystem) to foster resilience. The AMENA migrants described their lived experience of resilience as using available resources to cope with past and ongoing adversities. As such, participants described their resilience as a “long process” that is ongoing and a “fight” that they continue to endure. Their description highlighted the

connection between resilience and trauma which are often described as separate sequential processes. Yet, these findings show that AMENA migrants experienced them simultaneously. Finally, and most importantly, participants described a collective experience, in which the resilience process included themselves, family, and the community. Resilience was not experienced as an individual action, process, or trait.

These findings inform the ongoing debate regarding how resilience should be defined.

Definitions of resilience have moved from outcome-based (e.g., bouncing back and recovering after trauma) to process-based (e.g., the process of human adaptation; Masten, 2016). More recently the literature has accounted for environmental and systemic factors (Roberto & Moleiro, 2018). This study supports a definition that includes the cultural, subjective, and dynamic components of resilience. Regarding culture, resilience was fostered through values and beliefs that informed how participants made meaning of their adverse experiences. Regarding subjectivity, participants understood resilience through personal adversity, their cultural narrative of perseverance, and their connection to their home of origin and a new home in the United States. Thus, their understanding of resilience is nuanced, individually specific, and inherently connected to their identity, history, and social location. Regarding the dynamic process, findings show that socioecological factors were both barriers and facilitators for fostering resilience. Although some reported benefiting from interacting with neighbors, schools, or peers, others described these interactions as barriers.

Macrosystem System and Resilience

For the second research question (“How did AMENA migrants describe the impact of mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem factors on their resilience?”) resilience research has been critiqued for focusing on the microsystem with limited attention to other levels of the socioecology (Vesely et al., 2017). Findings revealed that at the macrosystem level, cultural values and beliefs guided coping, informed meaning-making, and relieved emotional distress, which participants viewed as meaningful routes to resilience. For example, AMENA hospitality values guided behaviors that led to building relationships with the host community and subsequently resulted in increased access to resources such as knowledge of U.S. systems. Previous research has reported that macrosystem factors (e.g., culture, beliefs, and values) were associated with resilience through informing expectations for coping with adversity (Ungar, 2013). The current study revealed that values go beyond expectations and lead to actions aimed at overcoming adversity. Further, the current study may provide insight into measuring macrosystem variables. The macrosystem is defined as the level of the socioecology that is most distal to

the individual. Yet, measuring culture, values, beliefs, and attitudes may provide insight into macrosystem factors that influence resilience.

Exosystem System and Resilience

A barrier to addressing exosystem factors in research may also be measurement issues.

Participants shared how neighbors, community groups, and social services impacted their resilience. Environments with accessible resources and a welcoming host community provided access to relevant advice, practical resources, and support to maintain one's culture of origin while adapting to the new environment. This fostered a sense of safety, comfort, and belonging which aided the integration process (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017). Environments that lacked or had barriers to accessing resources and were not welcoming to migrants created new challenges (e.g., isolation or discrimination) and drained migrants' resources, hindering resilience. Consistently, research has indicated a sense of connection, support, and safety increase capacity for resilience as migrants can focus on other needs when they feel safe (Kumar et al., 2015). Overall, participants' stories revealed the importance of having connections to their host and home culture as well as access to basic resources that reduced their post-migration stress. As such, insight into exosystem factors may be gained by measuring experiences of systemic discrimination (e.g., in social services), sense of belonging or safety, and availability of or access to resources.

Mesosystem System and Resilience

All the mesosystem subthemes in this study centered on integration (e.g., integrating into the U.S. school system, language proficiency's impact on connection to others or resources, integrating AMENA and American identity). Of note, only one subtheme, integrating culture, differed by generation. First-generation participants described integrating values from AMENA and U.S. culture. Second-generation participants described how experiences of oppression impacted their identity development and integration. Consistent with previous findings (Fedi et al., 2019; Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017) participants shared that maintaining both AMENA heritage and culture while adapting to American culture fostered resilience. Thus, the integration acculturation style (i.e., orienting to both the host and heritage culture), was associated with more positive adjustment for migrants (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017). First, participants used resources from both cultures to address adversity. Second, integrating cultures reduced negative emotionality (e.g., shame, confusion) and led to increased positive emotional experiences. Notably, current findings expand the individualistic view of

acculturation (i.e., the individual chooses to orient to the origin culture, host culture, or both) to include the environment. For example, parents may have chosen to integrate into their child's school system, but they may have experienced discrimination or other barrier preventing them from integrating. Migrants' integration success was influenced by the environment. Many reported Whitewashing their identity and assimilating rather than integrating to avoid prejudice. Considering the racialization of AMENA migrants is therefore important to understand their resilience experience. Thus, further insight into mesosystem factors that impact resilience may be gained from a socioecological perspective. Overall, the findings are consistent with [Ungar et al.'s \(2013\)](#) conclusion that strong relationships between microsystems allow for the exchanging of resources that enhanced resilience through integration.

Microsystem System Level Resilience

Finally, as documented in previous research the AMENA migrants used individual and internal strategies to foster resilience ([Atallah, 2017](#)). For example, engagement in religious practices were coping strategies that increased hope and emotional resources. To promote resilience migrants also dismantled harmful AMENA stereotypes, reported discrimination, and stood up for their rights. These strategies protected against prejudice and are similar to [Atallah's \(2017\)](#) findings that resistance activities (e.g., defending dignity and standing up for oneself) were associated with resilience among Palestinian families living in the occupied West Bank.

Implications for Advocacy

Resilience is constructed through interconnected socioecological factors including education, employment, social networks, religious institutions, cultural values, and contextual factors such as policy and environmental resources ([Ungar et al., 2013](#)). As such, CP can intervene across ecological systems to increase migrants' resilience. At the macrosystem level, AMENA migrants are in a context in which many in the United States, including policymakers, may view them as hostile outsiders ([Awad et al., 2019](#)). Within the exosystem, current policies may increase stress such as limiting resources for asylum seekers ([Vesely et al., 2017](#)). CP can advocate for migrants by consulting on immigration policy and bias training for policymakers. Further, CP's expertise in multiculturalism, trauma, and mental health can make important contributions to immigration law and court proceedings. At the mesosystem, CP can build connections between microsystems, support AMENA organizations, collaborate with AMENA leaders, educate host communities on migrant needs, and support Islamic institutions.

Implications for Practice

At the exosystem level, CP have the knowledge and skills to implement diverse services across levels of care and multiple systems. Multi-tiered community-focused service models—including outreach or interventions at family and group levels—may better suit AMENA migrants. CP may improve social services by providing local schools, organizations, and healthcare systems with trauma-informed antiracist knowledge and skills to better serve migrants. Finally, CP may also encourage local systems to recognize Islamic holidays, support AMENA-owned businesses, and include AMENA persons in local governing bodies. At the mesosystem, consultation in schools may strengthen resilience capabilities for AMENA migrants by increasing communication between schools and parents, addressing cultural considerations for students, and implementing outreach to families. CP can be an integral part of community-based agencies, which may improve access, availability, and usefulness of these resources. At the microsystem level, facilitating strengths within the community such as caring for the collective and utilizing religion for meaning-making may foster resilience. Therapy can empower AMENA clients to make meaning of their migration experience and to move towards celebrating their identity (Kia-Keating et al., *in press*). Lastly, CP can increase migrants' skills in finding, utilizing, and understanding resources that connect them to their host and origin community.

Implications for Research

Findings revealed that culture and religion were used to foster resilience in both tangible (guided action) and intangible (meaning-making) ways. Yet, there remains limited research on the process of fostering resilience through culture (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2020). Thus, the process of fostering resilience through culture and religion should be quantitatively assessed. The development of culturally-specific measures could illuminate how AMENA worldviews inform resilience. Participatory action research is needed for research to elicit a nuanced understanding of how culture influences resilience across socioecological levels. Direct questions informed by the AMENA community, may elicit more complete descriptions of cultural factors that foster resilience (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2020). Encouraging migrants to utilize their values may build resilience. However, the impact of such interventions has not yet been researched. Future research should investigate the efficacy of interventions that empower migrants to use culture to foster resilience. Previous research called for a socioecological approach to resilience that

addressed the meso- and exo- systems (Vesely et al., 2017). Findings from this study answered this call. Future research is needed to quantitatively assess relationships between socioecological factors and resilience. Understanding the unique effect of social support, community resources, employment, policies, housing, and other relevant resources on resilience is warranted. Research should explore how the exosystem strengthens or weakens specific mesosystem relationships. Such research may be used to support increased funding of exosystem resources (e.g., social services; Vesely et al., 2017).

Limitations

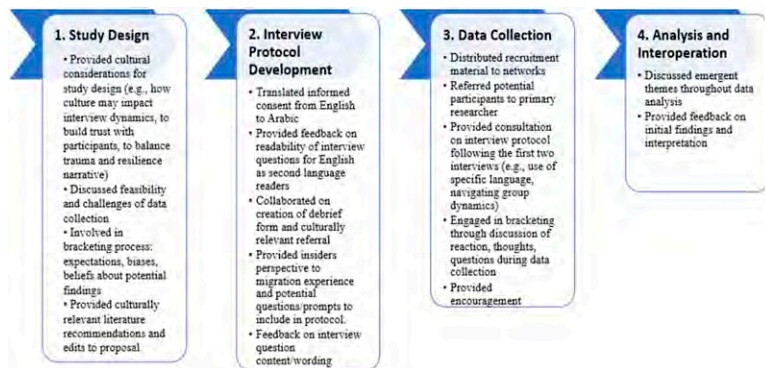
The sample provided quality data, which allowed us to reach saturation. Yet findings are descriptive in nature as qualitative research is not concerned with broad generalizability or causal inferences (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Although IPA requires researchers to attend to bias through bracketing, biases cannot be completely transcended. The study is also limited by difficulties in data collection. This research team aimed to have a minimum of two participants per interview. However, three interviews had only one participant. In single-person interviews, participants were unable to reflect on their resilience with a family member, which may have impacted their responses. Yet, the group format also has limitations as group dynamics may influence responses. Although not reported, women, adult children, and less proficient English speakers may have been influenced by the responses of family members. The story circle method was utilized to minimize some of these limitations. Finally, there is no Arabic word for resilience. A linguist translated the definition of resilience into Arabic, and this was shared with all participants (see p. 6). However, translation and conducting interviews in English may have impacted participants' responses.

Conclusion

The current study contributes to the growing resilience literature for AMENA migrants, by illuminating the ways in which individuals navigated available resources in their environment to negotiate culturally-meaningful resilience strategies. Findings offer a window into how AMENA migrants understand their experience of resilience. Although limited to the present sample, these findings inform the extant literature by amplifying the voices of AMENA migrants. Their narratives and the study's findings may advance resilience theory, ecological interventions, advocacy efforts, community-based interventions, and future research.

Appendix A

Involvement of Cultural Advisor Throughout Research Process



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ORCID iD

Nuha Alshabani  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9760-5660>

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Author Biographies

Nuha Alshabani, PhD, is the trauma in context postdoctoral fellow at Boston Medical Center. She won the American Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African Psychological Association (AMENA-Psy) 2022 Distinguished Dissertation Award. Her research focuses on trauma, oppression, and resiliency among migrant communities.

Suzette L. Speight, PhD, is a professor of psychology and director of clinical training for the counseling psychology program at The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio. Dr. Speight is a Fellow of Division 17, Society for Counseling Psychology of the American Psychological Association and in 2019 was named “Distinguished Psychologist” by the Association of Black Psychologists. Her research and scholarly interests include the psychological effects of oppression, mental health and African American women, African-centered psychology, cultural competence, and social justice and psychology.

Samsara I. Soto, PhD, is the psychology postdoctoral fellow at University of North Carolina Wilmington. Her research focuses on understanding the experiences and consequences of oppression and privilege on well-being and mental health, particularly among Latinx populations.

Kristin L. K. Koskey, PhD, is a research professor and co-director of The Methods Lab in the School of Education at Drexel University. She has 15 years of experience teaching graduate courses in research methods, statistics, assessment, and evaluation. Her research interests are advancements of design-based research and mixed-methods data integration in universal test design and evaluating initiatives connecting in and out-of-school STEM learning.

Carolyn Behrman, PhD, is a professor of anthropology and founding director of the NSF-funded Active Research Methods Lab at the University of Akron. Dr. Behrman trains and guides students and partners in university-community-engaged research. Her research interests in urban communities and health employ qualitative and quantitative data and methodological innovations like the use of the story circle method for cross-cultural research.