

Intergenerational Resilience in the Context of Historical and Ongoing Trauma

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Today there are about one billion migrants worldwide and about 40 million migrants in the United States. Of these migrants, 3.5 million are of Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African (Arab/MENA) descent. The Arab/MENA community in the United States has been exposed to historical, premigration, perimigration, and postmigration trauma and stress. Despite the considerable research on migrants' trauma exposure, much remains to be known about their resilience. More recently, the resilience literature has expanded beyond the micro (individual) level to explore resilience across the ecological system. Yet the chronosystem (time, intergenerational trauma, and resilience) and the process of passing on resilience within the context of oppression remain understudied. Thus, there is a need to understand intergenerational resilience, in the context of intergenerational trauma, defined as the transmission of resilience across generations for Arab/MENA communities. This study explored the lived experiences of intergenerational resilience for first- and second-generation Arab/MENA migrants ($N = 19$). Data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Three superordinate themes emerged including maintaining culture, cultivating resilience, and outcomes of resilience. Eight subthemes emerged including collective practices, intentional teaching, observational learning, firsthand experience, opportunity, positive identity, sense of belonging, and connection from a distance. Findings add to the literature by illuminating some processes for intergenerational resilience, identifying constructs for future empirical studies (e.g., family communication, cultural maintenance), and providing direction for intervention with this population. Implications for future research and practice are provided.

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What is the significance of this article for the general public?

This study responds to the call for a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of resilience and culture within the context of ongoing and historical trauma for people of color. Arab/MENA migrants living in the United States foster resilience across generations by intentionally maintaining culture through practices of teaching the next generation, observing family and community members, and learning to cope with their experiences of adversity. As such, interventions that help Arab/MENA migrants identify and use cultural strengths may foster resilience by connecting with self and community in the context of trauma and oppression.

Keywords: intergenerational, resilience, migrants, Arab, Middle Eastern North African

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An estimated 3.5 million, and growing, Arab/MENA people live in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). The U.S. diaspora comes from the MENA region, which spans southwest Asia and northern Africa and includes people of diverse ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Arab, Persian, Assyrian, Amazigh). Arab/MENA people have resided in the United States since their first wave of immigration in the late 1800s (Zarrugh, 2016). In the last few decades, an influx of Arab/MENA migrants has come to the United States because of economic strain, conflict, loss, and identity-based persecution in the region (G. H. Awad et al., 2019). Discrimination and oppression in the United States exacerbate the harmful impact of these premigration stressors, driven by imperialism, occupation, and Western politics (G. H. Awad et al., 2019). Arab/MENA persons in the United States often endure cumulative trauma (i.e., the additive experience of chronic adversities; Myers et al., 2015) because of institutional and interpersonal discrimination (e.g., xenophobia), hostile national context (e.g., the “Muslim Ban,” and historical trauma (e.g., Nakba, the 1948 war that displaced more than 700,000 Palestinians; (G. H. Awad et al., 2019). Such adversities happen at single, repetitive, and chronic rates as Arab/MENA persons experience macro and micro-level forms of oppression (G. H. Awad et al., 2019). We use migrant to refer to first- or second-generation Arab/MENA persons in the United States regardless of their immigration status. Within this context, we explore

intergenerational resilience for Arab/MENA migrants.

Individual Trauma and Stress

The psychological and physical consequences of trauma exposure are well documented. A range of emotional (e.g., fear, shock, irritability) and physical (e.g., trouble sleeping and eating) reactions are common immediately after trauma exposure. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition, trauma exposure includes actual or threatened death, serious injury, and sexual violence, which distinguishes it from other nonlife-threatening stressful events. Trauma exposure can lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), characterized by persistent reexperiencing, avoidance, negative cognitions and mood, and hyperarousal symptoms. PTSD is highly comorbid with other mental health disorders and associated with poor physical health outcomes (Sareen, 2014). Trauma exposure is common in the general population, with an estimated 70% of adults globally exposed to trauma (Benjet et al., 2016), yet only 4% develop PTSD (Koenen et al., 2017). Migrants, particularly forced migrants, (e.g., refugees, asylum seekers) face repeated, severe trauma exposure premigration, during migration, and postmigration (Theisen-Womersley, 2021). This places them at greater risk for developing PTSD, with prevalence rates as high as 47% (Bustamante et al., 2018). In comparing exposure rates and PTSD prevalence, scholars conclude that resilience is the

dominant trajectory (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024). Thus, identifying intergenerational factors that may promote resilience among migrant communities is a critical area of research.

Intergenerational Trauma (IGT) and Stress

IGT is a distinct form of trauma, whereby the effects of trauma are transmitted across generations of families and communities (Isobel et al., 2019). Through IGT, trauma negatively affects individuals in ways that result in problems for their descendants (Kirmayer et al., 2014). Consequences of IGT include descendants of trauma-exposed parents/communities experiencing mental health sequelae of PTSD, anxiety, and depression (Sangalang & Vang, 2017), or chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and cardiovascular problems, despite not being directly exposed to the trauma (Lefler & Belt, 2009). Further, postmigration conditions may confer risks for future generations. Postmigration stressors, such as poverty and inadequate housing (Hynie, 2018) may have lasting impacts on descendants' health. The psychological, biological, and structural processes by which IGT is transmitted from one generation to the next is a growing area of study (Flanagan et al., 2020). Mechanisms of IGT include parental symptom severity, family stressors (Flanagan et al., 2020), parenting and family relationship quality (Sangalang & Vang, 2017), and epigenetic transmission of chronic stress (Lewis et al., 2021). These mechanisms are believed to transmit IGT through psychological, sociocultural, family systems, and biological processes (see Kellerman, 2001 for further detail).

Importantly, scholars caution against focusing solely on trauma when conceptualizing problems for marginalized communities. This can homogenize the varied experiences within migrant communities, creating a blanket narrative of victimology (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012), and may contribute to a deficit perception rather than attending to the systemic conditions of oppression. Knowledge of trauma's psychological impacts is limited by narrow diagnostic criteria (i.e., the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition) for PTSD. Despite calls to the contrary (i.e., Holmes et al., 2016), the trauma of oppression, including IGT, does not meet PTSD's diagnostic criterion A. This limits research on resilience in the context of oppression-based trauma. Thus, it is important to recognize both trauma and resilience for marginalized people and

to do so from a historical, political, and ecological perspective (Kirmayer et al., 2014). Though resilience is the most common trajectory following trauma exposure, scholarship is (a) unclear on what facilitates resilience, (b) limited to an individualistic perspective, and (c) absent of cultural factors especially for marginalized communities (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024).

Resilience

There is growing consensus that resilience is a nuanced multidimensional construct that cannot have blanket application across instances of trauma (Ungar et al., 2013). Resilience has been studied as a personal trait, process, and outcome (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024). Most research has focused on microsystem (i.e., individual and family) traits or characteristics that promote resilience (Ungar et al., 2013). Several individual traits have been studied in the resilience literature such as ego-control, goal orientation, and adaptive behaviors (Ungar et al., 2013). The focus on individual traits places undue responsibility on the marginalized to overcome adversity, rather than acknowledging the root historical, political, and ecological causes of oppression (McLean et al., 2024). The interplay between context (e.g., family support), protective factors (e.g., cognitive ability), and risk factors (e.g., trauma exposure) is increasingly recognized, although it remains understudied in resilience research (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024). Thus, extant understandings of resilience are limited in the context of ongoing and historical oppression and trauma. Further, though resilience research often focuses on marginalized communities, the concept was created by White researchers in the United States and may not capture the realities (e.g., resilience in response to oppression), of marginalized people (McLean et al., 2024) such as the Arab/MENA diaspora in the United States. Qualitative research that elucidates the lived experiences of Arab/MENA persons is needed to fill this gap and uplift the voices of this community. This is especially important considering that the worldwide refugee population is largely from the Arab/MENA community (i.e., over 40%; Cohen, 2023).

Intergenerational Resilience

There are compelling reasons to study intergenerational resilience or the "positive adaptive

capacities or knowledge that has been meaningfully transferred to the ‘recovery repertoire’ of the next generation, equipping and empowering them with vital tools to overcome future adversity” (Denov et al., 2019, p. 26). Resilience has been associated with marginalized populations surviving in the face of ongoing oppression and in the context of historical trauma (Stanley & Atari-Khan, 2024). Though experiences of trauma and oppression differ across generations, these adversities underscore the need to preserve and pass on skills that help descendants survive and even thrive. Intergenerational resilience literature is in its early stages. To date, it has largely focused on the family’s socialization of children to function adaptively (Isserman et al., 2014). In a review of 54 studies, Stanley and Atari-Khan (2024) found that a core theme of resilience research with U.S. racial/ethnic marginalized groups is racial identity development, which is facilitated by a socialization process in which family members teach children about their racial/ethnic group (Leath et al., 2023). Other processes associated with resilience include family communication patterns (e.g., discussing how parents engage in resistance, telling stories of home), visiting the home country, and continuing cultural traditions (Atallah, 2017). Research on IGT and resilience has largely focused on South Asian migrants, Indigenous communities, Holocaust survivors, and Black Americans (French et al., 2020; Sangalang & Vang, 2017). This leaves major research gaps on other communities that experience collective and ongoing trauma such as Arab/MENA persons.

Socioecological Perspective of Trauma and Resilience

Scholars have called for a socioecological approach to resilience (Alshabani et al., 2023) that includes Indigenous ideologies and meaning-making systems grounded in culture (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory describes how levels of the environment including microsystem (e.g., family), mesosystem (e.g., schools), macrosystem (e.g., culture), and chronosystem (e.g., time) interact to influence childhood development. This theory has been applied to resilience such that interactions between systems like family (microsystem) and school (mesosystem) influence one’s ability to adapt to stress (Alshabani et al., 2023).

The socioecological perspective necessitates incorporating cultural variables into conceptualizations of trauma and resilience that may have racial or ethnic components (Barber, 2013). This is particularly relevant for Arab/MENA migrants, as trauma associated with political violence and war often has racial and religious dimensions of oppression (G. H. Awad et al., 2019). Within the socioecological framework, culture is a macrosystem factor that influences values, beliefs, and behaviors and interacts with other levels of the socioecological system like the chronosystem (i.e., time) as sociopolitical history influences cultural beliefs (Alshabani et al., 2023). For people of color, knowledge of community history and stories of overcoming adversity may be associated with resilience in the next generation, as many Indigenous communities value family, collectivism, and the passing down of strengths (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024).

Culture and Resilience

Culture is inherently linked to resilience, as expectations for appropriately coping with adversity are embedded in culture (Ungar et al., 2013). Most resilience research is Eurocentric in nature, limiting our understanding of Indigenous cultural variables and resilience (Ungar et al., 2013). Indigenous cultures describe healing with collective terminology that prioritizes self and community well-being (French et al., 2020). The radical healing model for coping with racial trauma, based on Black, liberation, and ethnopological psychology, asserts that collectivism, critical consciousness, radical hope, cultural/self-knowledge, and resistance are crucial to healing from oppression and trauma (French et al., 2020). Thus, Arab/MENA values of collectivism, storytelling, and community action may facilitate resilience. For instance, Atallah (2017) identified three ways Palestinian families practice *sumud* (a value of steadfastness to land and community): (a) resisting oppression with activism and political engagement, (b) honoring family history to reclaim dignity and belonging, and (c) addressing collective trauma within family and community. *Sumud* asserts that resistance is central to resilience in the context of oppression (Hammad & Tribe, 2020). Stanley and Atari-Khan (2024) call for a communal understanding of resilience to foster resistance to oppression, hope, and radical healing. This framing may fit

the experience of Arab/MENA persons as resilience is culturally bound (Awayed-Bishara, 2023).

To contextualize participants, a brief review of Arab/MENA cultural values is presented. Among the diverse Arab/MENA diaspora, shared cultural values include an emphasis on family, hospitality, morality, and generosity (G. Awad et al., 2022). Arab/MENA persons come from collectivist cultures (Rasmi et al., 2015). For many Arab/MENA migrants' religious beliefs and practices are central to cultural identity and coping (Davenport, 2017). Religious practice, strong ethnic identity, and social support from family and community are factors that improve psychological well-being (Atari & Han, 2018). Research with Syrian refugees has found that faith, community support, maintaining hope, and reliance on family are sources of strength, and that connection to culture may contribute to resilience (Atari-Khan et al., 2021). Yet, research on resilience and culture within the Arab/MENA community remains limited (Marie et al., 2017).

Current Study

In this study, we investigated the process of intergenerational resilience in the context of ongoing trauma and oppression for Arab/MENA migrants in the United States. This study engaged socioecological theories on family resilience based on research completed as part of Nuha Alshabani's doctoral dissertation (Alshabani et al., 2023). The guiding research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: How do Arab/MENA migrants describe intergenerational resilience?

Research Question 2: What is the process by which resilience is passed down through generations of Arab/MENA families?

Method

Research Design

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was used to gather rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences with intergenerational resilience in the context of trauma (Alase, 2017). As intergenerational resilience is a complex and understudied concept, IPA is appropriate as it intends to reveal the meaning of

a particular experience for a specific group (Smith, 2009). In IPA, the researcher makes sense of the participant's meaning-making by acknowledging the interpersonal and interpretive nature of qualitative research (Alase, 2017). To incorporate traditional storytelling found within Arab/MENA cultures, the story circle method (Behrman & Spickard-Prettyman, 2017) was utilized. Participants were asked to reflect on family stories in response to interview questions and to share narratives in their responses.

Participants

Researchers

Nuha Alshabani is a second-generation Palestinian and Italian-American woman. She has expertise in qualitative research. Laura B. Godfrey is a clinical psychology doctoral student and second-generation Italian-American woman. Joelle T. Taknint is a second-generation multiethnic voluntary immigrant of Amazigh (Indigenous North African), Middle Eastern (Lebanese and Armenian), and European (Dutch, Scots-Irish) descent with family in the United States, Algeria, and France. Warda Sahib is a counseling psychology doctoral student and a first-generation MENA (Iraqi Assyrian) American. Rawan Atari-Khan is a second-generation Palestinian woman born and raised in the United States. Kathryn Price was born and raised in the United States and identifies as White.

Study Participants

The sample included 10 cases of Arab/MENA families. Although a minimum of two and a maximum of four participants (individual family members) were requested per case, in cases four, five, and six only one participant was interviewed because of confusion about the interview format, a withdrawal from the study, and unforeseen schedule conflict, respectively. Initial data analysis and consultation with qualitative experts informed whether these three cases would be included in the final analytic sample. It was determined that these three cases provided rich and descriptive data that answered research questions; thus, all three were retained. The final sample consisted of 19 participants with a minimum of one and a maximum of four individuals per case. Most participants ($n = 14$) self-identified as first-generation, Muslim

($n = 15$), women ($n = 11$), and having a bachelor's degree ($n = 9$). Age ranged from 18 to 80 years ($M = 40.21$, $SD = 18$). All participants reported national origin within the Middle East. Common trauma/adversity exposures included war ($n = 14$), poverty ($n = 14$), and racial discrimination ($n = 9$; see [Table 1](#)).

Procedures

The recruitment flyer and email invitation were shared online through Nuha Alshabani's

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (N)
Generation status	First	14
	Second	5
Migration status	Forced	11
	Voluntary	4
	Born in the United States	4
Gender identity	Women	11
	Men	8
Religious identity	Muslim	15
	Atheist	3
	Agnostic	1
National origin	Syria	4
	Palestine	7
	Jordan	2
	United States/Palestine	3
	United States/Jordan	1
	United States/Lebanon	1
	Palestine/Jordan	1
Racial identity	Arab	6
	Middle Eastern	5
	Biracial (White/Arab/ Middle Eastern)	3
	White	1
	Arab/Middle Eastern	4
	High school	1
Education level	Some college	2
	Associate's degree	1
	Bachelor's degree	9
	Graduate degree IP	6
	\$26–35,999	3
Family income	\$36–69,999	6
	≥\$70,000	5
	Left blank	5
	Armed conflict/war	14
Adversities	Poverty	14
	Displacement	10
	Racial/ethnic discrimination in the United States	9
	Religious discrimination in the United States	9

Note. Age ranged from 18 to 80 years ($M = 40.21$, $SD = 18$); IP = in progress.

contacts, Arab/MENA professional listservs, and by contacting personnel at Arab/MENA-serving institutions. Eligible participants were first-generation (not born in the United States) or second-generation (born in the United States and had a parent born outside of the United States) migrants. A Qualtrics survey, available in English or Arabic, was emailed to potential participants to obtain informed consent and collect demographics. Nuha Alshabani conducted all interviews using Zoom. Interviews were offered in English or Arabic, yet all were conducted in English. Each case was provided with one electronic \$40.00 gift card for their voluntary participation. Funds were provided by Nuha Alshabani's department. All family members were present during the interview. Following the story circle method, after a question was asked each participant had 3 min to respond before moving on to the next. Participants were able to share a story or pass during their turn. After each person had an equal opportunity to answer, participants were then invited to further discuss what was shared as a group before proceeding to the next question. Following a semi-structured format, interviews began with open-ended questions such as "Thinking back to these adversities, how has your family overcome these experiences?" Followed by questions about intergenerational resilience, "Could you share your understanding of how resilience is passed between generations in your family?", (see [Table S2 in the online supplemental materials](#) for the interview guide). Topics from each interview were included in the research journal. Data collection stopped at saturation (i.e., when no new topics emerged); data comparison within and between interviews confirmed saturation ([Smith, 2009](#)).

Data Analysis

Interviews ($n = 10$) ranged from 54 to 96 min. NVivo (Version Release 1.5) was used to analyze the 227 pages of text. The unit of analysis was each interview transcript. [Smith \(2009\)](#) IPA coding procedures were used. Nuha Alshabani analyzed transcripts by comparing incidents of data within and between transcripts to allow core categories to emerge. The coding team, Nuha Alshabani and Laura B. Godfrey, read and reread each transcript and added notes to the list of themes. Notes included content (i.e., what

participants said), linguistics (i.e., metaphors, phrases, fluency), and concept (i.e., researcher's meaning-making) for each transcript. The coding team met regularly to compare notes from each transcript and finalize an exhaustive list. Analytic memos were integrated with data to determine themes and subthemes of the final codebook. The codebook was then applied to all transcripts by both members of the coding team, who continued to meet regularly to compare code applications, resolve discrepancies, and ensure consistency. Following data analysis, participants were sent findings and encouraged to provide feedback on data interpretation. Three participants responded. All agreed with the data interpretation and made minor quote changes, such as clarification (e.g., a location or year). Themes were then shared with all authors for feedback. All authors met to reach a consensus on the final themes.

Methodological Integrity

The researchers had a mix of insider and outsider positionality. For instance, some researchers identified as Arab/MENA while others did not. As such, the authors relied on literature and peer debriefing to supplement their knowledge. In IPA, reflexive writing and peer debriefing are used to bracket personal views and maintain a focus on participants' voices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Bracketing through analytic memos and reflexive writing was used at each step of the study. Peer debriefing enhanced the trustworthiness and credibility of findings (Janesick, 2015) by utilizing qualified (e.g., research and methods expertise) colleagues to review methods and assess emerging and final themes. Joelle T. Taknint, Warda Sahib, Rawan Atari-Khan, and Kathryn Price served as debriefers. They provided feedback on the data analysis process and themes. A final technique to increase trustworthiness was the use of rich quotes to illustrate themes (see Table S1 in the online supplemental materials).

Findings

We organized the following themes to represent how participants made meaning of the cultivation of resilience across generations. Three superordinate themes emerged: maintaining culture, cultivating resilience, and outcomes of resilience (see

Table S1 in the online supplemental materials for quotes). Maintaining a culture is the context in which cultivating resilience is enacted and leads to outcomes of resilience (see Figure 1). With each direct quote, the case number out of 10 is provided to reveal relationships between participants and interview order. For example, quotes from Sarah and Zainab (Case 9) include the notation to illustrate that they are in the same family and were the ninth family to be interviewed.

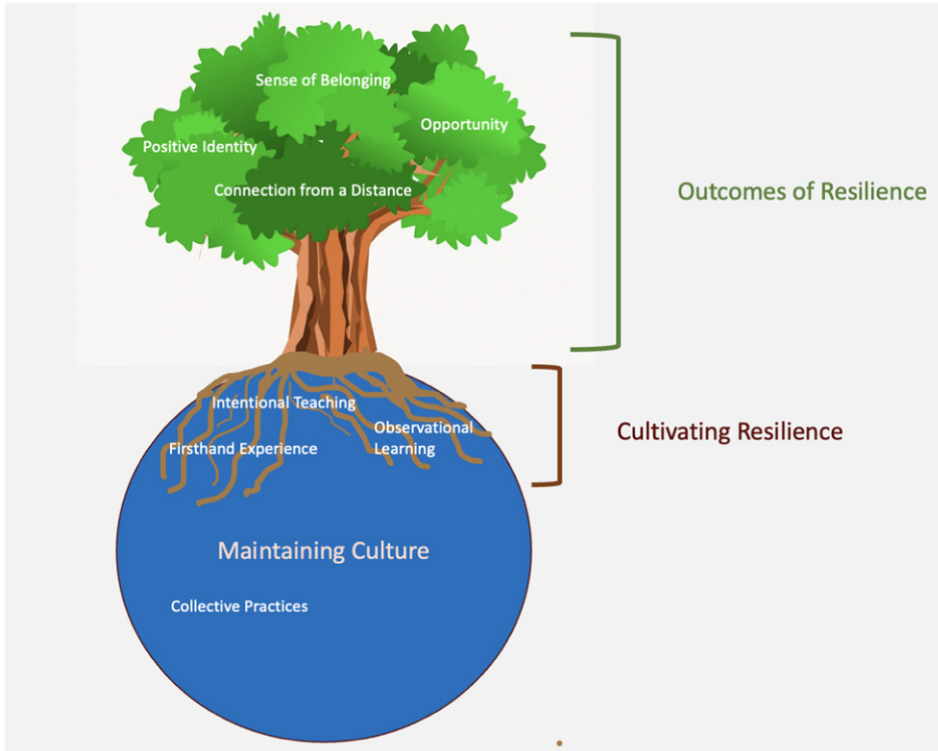
Superordinate Theme 1: Maintaining Culture

Participants shared that connection to their culture resulted in personal well-being and growth. This connection became especially important when living in the United States. Participants prioritized maintaining culture for their children. For instance, Hanan (Case 6) described putting effort into sharing her culture with her children through sounds such as the *Adhan* (prayer call), food such as "dates and Arab coffee," and media such as "Arab movies, Arab shows, or Arab cartoons." Amir (Case 2) discussed maintaining traditions such as large family gatherings after *Jumu'ah* (Islamic Friday prayer). Sarah (Case 9) revealed how culture was maintained in daily life: "There's a lot of connection to Palestine, even though we never visited ... you're constantly reminded about being Palestinian... when you continue to cook the food or wear the clothes." Others understood the connection between culture and resilience as cultural values translated into skills, such as hospitality, that led to resilience through building a social support system. As Zainab (Case 9) put it, "We support each other. We visit each other. We keep the same culture."

Collective Practices

Across the sample, 14 participants provided insight into collectivist practices, which helped them maintain their cultural values. They described putting community needs ahead of their own, working as a group, supporting each other, and the centrality of family. For example, Naji (Case 5) reported that Arab Americans have a communal way of life, explaining that, "If someone needs a place to sleep, or they really need financial support, or you need to drop off your kids somewhere for a little bit of time or something, you know, those like physical emotional support systems were there." Several participants described

Figure 1
Superordinate Themes and Subthemes



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

helping their community. For example, Hayet (Case 10) described collective practices to transmit resilience across generations: “We know how important it is to share what you have with others. Also, this kind of was inherited [to] our children. This is part of resilience.” Participants shared how collectivism resulted in an expectation to contribute whatever you can to the family’s well-being. Likewise, Badia (Case 1) described how after “losing everything” during the Syrian conflict her father received “support from his family.” Lastly, these collectivist practices included sharing resources and emotional support without question as Fatune (Case 2) explained: “it’s [resilience] through watching out for people, taking care of your family.”

Superordinate Theme 2: Cultivating Resilience

This theme revealed the process of intergenerational resilience for Arab/MENA families

including intentional teaching, observational learning, and firsthand experience.

Intentional Teaching

Across all 10 cases, participants shared that teaching through direct instruction (i.e., explicitly telling children how to overcome adversity), advice, cultural narratives of resilience, and family stories transmitted resilience from one generation to the next. Phrases such as “like my dad used to say” (Yasmin, Case 3), reveal how invoking the advice and language of elders fosters resilience. Hayet (Case 10) stated that her father “prepared” her and her siblings for adversity and his teachings “helped us to be strong.” A recurring theme in Naji’s (Case 5) and others’ interviews was the importance of teaching children to protect their rights to fostering resilience. For instance, Naji (Case 5) explained that his “mother’s stories of [combatting discrimination] gave [him] a new perspective,” demonstrating

how his mother's handling of discrimination taught him to stand up for himself. Cultural narratives connected participants to MENA culture and narratives of resistance. Amir (Case 2) shared stories about what happened in Syria with his children to maintain the heritage and pass down knowledge, stating that he tells them "What happened [in Syria] they understand it. They [children] don't remember the way they lived their lives in Syria, so I tell them." Participants also described the transmission of resilience as "inheriting" a strength from their cultural narratives. Iyad's (Case 4) father told him stories of Palestine and described how he uses his stories to instill values of protecting your rights and the narrative of Palestinian resistance in his children. Similarly, Hayet (Case 10) explains that she is "Trying to teach [her] kids to learn whatever they can to survive this life."

Stories of one's community persevering for generations were empowering to participants. Stories led to a shared sense of resistance and persistence that participants draw strength from to address their challenges. Within this theme, participants described intentional storytelling from elders and community to youth, elders (i.e., parents and grandparents) narrated family histories and stories of the country of origin so that the younger generation would "remember" (Amir, Case 2). These stories also came with lessons learned (advice, direct instruction) from hardships that taught youth how to keep persevering. For example, Karam (Case 10), shared "If they [parents] saw me struggling with something, they would encourage me to do it and just keep working hard." The community also disseminated lessons on resilience. For example, Rana (Case 8) shared that the community perpetuated ways of handling hardships such as being "tough." Likewise, Hayet (Case 10) recounted her father's advice that "life is not soft" and "you need to toughen up for it." Finally, participants shared that youth carried on these stories from elders and the community while also adding new perspectives.

Observational Learning

All 10 cases described the transmission of resilience through modeling resistance strategies for children, observing how family members address challenges, and integrating strategies that they observed. Participants watched their families use

resilience strategies. Samar (Case 3) shared that "seeing" her parents overcome challenges was a powerful way for her to learn about resilience. Alternatively, some shared that their family had modeled unhelpful behaviors, which motivated them to try something different. For example, Rana (Case 8) stated that observing silence about emotions was unhelpful "[His] father was masking or shutting down his emotions, or maybe not showing them, I'm not sure if this helped." Participants described integrating resilience strategies that they observed from their families into their lives. For instance, Hayet (Case 10) observed her father use values (e.g., hospitality) to be resilient. Hayet used these skills to build resilience by developing a social support system in the United States. Yasmin (Case 3) shared that observing and learning about resilience has been going on for generations, explaining that, "[Resilience] really is more so like cultural just because I just see that we kind of like mirror a lot of things that like our parents do and teach us." Finally, Abbas (Case 3) shared that watching his father work hard to support his family taught him resilience strategies.

Firsthand Experience

Across all 10 interviews, participants shared their personal experiences of resilience to conflict, displacement, economic hardship, discrimination, and acculturation stress. Descriptions of resilience included the various strategies (e.g., sharing resources) they personally used to overcome hardship and the lessons they learned (e.g., connecting with the community) from these personal adversities. For instance, Farah (Case 7) described how she learned resilience from her experience in a refugee camp. She stated, "You got to be part of the community wherever you are. This is what life in the Shatila camp taught us that in life, you cannot live alone." Sarah (Case 9), described developing resilience to acculturation difficulties, explaining that, "Small difficulties add up to, to be, you know, just a longer period of difficult things. But once you're familiar with it, it gets a lot easier." For her, "time" as well as learning English and U.S. culture was helpful. Similarly, Badia (Case 1) shared that she started to overcome her isolation and acculturation difficulties when she connected with others and "be the one who tried to make friends." Some of these strategies

of resistance were culturally specific such as the belief in destiny (see Alshabani et al., 2023). Other strategies were not culturally specific and included “workouts” (Rana, Case 8), reading self-help books (Naji, Case 5), and working many jobs to make ends meet (Iyad, Case 4).

Some direct experiences were navigated as a family. For example, Badia (Case 1) described how the family overcame economic hardship together through strategies such as sharing financial resources. She shared, “We were suffering, he [father] asked his cousin to lend us money.” Participants also believed that the experience of visiting the MENA region transmitted resilience by connecting them with culture, heritage, and place. Eight participants described how returning home taught them to learn cultural values (e.g., hospitality) later used for resilience. For instance, Rana (Case 8) explains how parents “decided to go to Jordan for their kids to learn the language and the religion.” Fatune (Case 2) described taking her children for “two months in Damascus.” This helped her children to connect with Syria. Finally, Sarah (Case 9) revealed how culture was connected to resilience through resisting discrimination and the processes of assimilation or erasure of the Arab/MENA culture, i.e., promoting enculturation: “A lot of people change when they come to a new country. You have a shift in values or opinions or even religion. So, it’s about standing up for yourself, and making sure that discrimination can’t change you.”

Superordinate Theme 3: Outcomes of Resilience

The third superordinate theme revealed the outcomes of intergenerational resilience in Arab/MENA families living in the United States. Four subthemes were revealed including opportunity, positive identity, sense of belonging, and connection from a distance.

Opportunity

All 19 participants described access to educational and employment opportunities beyond the proceeding generation as an outcome of intergenerational resilience. Naji (Case 5) described education opportunities as empowering. For many families, the hope of better opportunities combined with refuge from war resulted in migrating to the United States. For

example, when asked about how resilience is passed across generations Naji (Case 5) shared “adapting to new opportunities and experiences because they really had to do that when they came here.” Furthermore, Naji (Case 5) disclosed that their family “find knowledge and education to be very empowering.” Similarly, throughout his interview, Ismail (Case 7) discussed several instances of assisting others to complete their education. His wife Farah (Case 7) described how her parents did not finish elementary school and ensured that their children had a good education. Education was a big theme throughout Ismail’s (Case 7) and Farah’s (Case 7) interviews as they described how collective practices in the family helped them pursue education. For instance, after the Nakba, Ismail’s (Case 7) family fled to a village with no school, and his brother “took care of me in the sense he got books, and he started teaching me to read.” He did this for his children and other family members to ensure social mobility for the family in each new generation. For example, Ismail (Case 7) stated, “I was in charge of many [people’s] educations, of Farah’s, (Case 7), education, of two of my sisters, my parents.” After sharing that he paid college tuition for a friend he stated, “I mentioned this is part of the resilience. I mentioned this as a part of how people could help support [each other] and make a better life for everybody.”

Positive Identity

Twelve participants shared that maintaining culture, connecting to family, and learning about their community fostered a positive racial/ethnic identity. For the first-generation, (e.g., persons who moved to the United States) a sense of pride was garnered from sharing their Arab/MENA values and culture with their children. For example, Samar (Case 3) described being proud of her cultural values and how she “highlighted and capitalized all the wonderful aspects of being Arab and Palestinian.” Similarly, Abbas (Case 3) felt proud watching his daughters enact Arab/MENA values of generosity with their friends. Others felt a positive sense of identity when reflecting on the adversity their family had overcome. Upon reflecting on her family’s experiences, Hayet (Case 10) explains that “it doesn’t make [her] sad, it makes [her] proud.”

Second-generation participants shared that they developed a positive sense of self from these intergenerational practices that maintained culture. Rania (Case 3) described how connecting with her culture helped her to accept her identity which she had struggled to do in the context of anti-Arab discrimination. Naji (Case 5) and Rania (Case 3) both shared that processes such as maintaining culture, connecting with family, and visiting the MENA region helped them develop this sense of positive identity.

Sense of Belonging

Nine participants understood their resilience through their ability to make a home for themselves in the United States. Coming from a context of marginalization, displacement, and violence, participants felt they were resilient to this adversity when they “belonged” in the United States. When describing what resilience means to her, Sarah (Case 9) added resilience includes gaining “citizenship.” Iyad (Case 4) shared that sense of belonging helped him defend against discrimination: “Then [you] gain confidence and courage and realize, you know, you have as much right to be here as anyone else. So, you’re more likely to defend yourself.” Similarly, Karam (Case 10) stated that viewing most Americans, even those who were “racist” as immigrants (non-Indigenous) helped him to counter discrimination and feel he belongs in the United States.

Connection From a Distance

Lastly, eight participants described that home is carried within them. For example, Nasser (Case 7) stated he “carries his home” within him. Likewise, Mahdi and Fatune (Case 2) described that they “keep Syria” within them. Others reported having a home within the heart. Iyad (Case 4) explained he “keeps Palestine in [his] heart and it will never go away” as an act of resistance to the occupation and “defending his right” to home. Together these quotes reveal the dynamic experience of home for Arab/MENA migrants. As they work to create a new home in the United States, they carry with them a connection to a lost home, hope for a future home, and a longing for a return home. As described in Theme 1, participants intentionally worked to foster this connection to home for the next generation.

Discussion

This study investigated intergenerational resilience in Arab/MENA Americans by addressing two research questions: “How do Arab/MENA migrants describe intergenerational resilience?” and “What is the process by which resilience is passed down through generations of Arab/MENA families?” Participants’ conceptualization of intergenerational resilience is depicted through a metaphorical illustration of a tree with roots (Figure 1), where their intentional maintenance of culture is depicted as the foundation for resilience processes and outcomes.

Culture as the Building Blocks of Resilience

Regarding the first research question, participants described their understanding of intergenerational resilience within the framework of cultural preservation for themselves and their descendants. The culture was described as important to resilience, enabling participants to maintain their values, sense of self, and connection to home despite historical and ongoing violence separating them from home. For instance, Sarah (Case 9) noted that “inside the house nothing really changed and it’s only the outside society that did [change].” Arab/MENA people in the United States contend with various stressors including cumulative trauma, racism, and the erasure of their identity (G. H. Awad et al., 2019). Participants relied on culture and community to deal with stressors (i.e., acculturation and discrimination), suggesting that cultural continuity may stem from a desire to pass down resilience tools to future generations. Efforts to maintain culture also fostered critical consciousness of oppression as families shared stories of “what happened” so their children may “remember” cultural history to work toward return/justice for the community.

Oral storytelling, known as *hakawati*, is an ancient tradition in the Arab/MENA world. Initially a form of entertainment, storytelling now also serves as political resistance and a way to preserve culture (Nassar, 2006). Our findings align with a previous study that highlighted how family narratives foster resilience within Palestinian families living under occupation (Atallah, 2017). Further, culture transmitted resilience through collectivism. Participants’

regard for family and community well-being is not surprising as support for family and community are shared values across Arab/MENA cultures (G. Awad et al., 2022). Participants consistently prioritized communal needs over individual ones and underscored the importance of “sharing what you have with others” (Hayet, Case 10). Much of how resilience was discussed focused on community resilience, alluding to the idea that a resilient community makes a resilient individual. Collective practices such as sharing tangible resources and unwavering emotional support were instilled throughout generations and underscored the importance of community in fostering resilience in the face of marginalization. Several participants discussed family, friends, and neighbors who assisted them in their time of need (e.g., when relocating) and expressed a desire to do the same for others. For instance, Abbas (Case 3) explained that he “like most people from that part of the world, had someone [help me], either relatives, or neighbors, or somebody they knew, that left before them.” Our findings validate calls to expand resilience theory to include collective and communal-level processes (Stanley & Atari-Khan, 2024). Collective practices were identified by participants as components of resilience in and of themselves. While these were categorized under the theme of maintaining culture, there is some conceptual overlap with the theme of cultivating intergenerational resilience. Collective practices in this study were focused on content, whereas the subthemes under cultivating resilience discussed processes of cultivating resilience, which may employ collective practice content. Certainly, resilience may be cultivated through children’s engagement in observational learning (i.e., process) of collective practices (i.e., content), for example.

Cultivating Intergenerational Resilience

This study adds to psychology’s limited understanding of intergenerational resilience in Arab/MENA families. We conceptualize intergenerational resilience as preparing future generations, whether intentional or not, by providing them with critical consciousness as well as tools to handle adversity stemming from racial and ethnic injustices. Regarding the second research question, the process by which this occurred across generations included

intentional teaching, observational learning, and firsthand experiences. Parents and elders purposefully taught children about their culture and resilience/resistance strategies through narratives, remembrance, direct instruction, and sharing adaptive skills connected to the sociopolitical context (e.g., how to respond to discrimination, defend their rights). When parents shared with their children how to solve problems, narratives of community resistance, and direct instruction of collective practices, resilience was transmitted across generations. By modeling (parents/elders) and observing (children) other strategies for resilience were inherited. Rana (Case 8) explains that because “they have a role model of a resilient person,” her children “might learn how to be resilient too.” Participants watched their families navigate challenges and use successful strategies in their lives. As participants reflected on lessons learned from their families, they also noted how their direct experience of adversity and oppression taught them how to be resilient. As Abdul (Case 1) puts it, “my dad, my mom, my community, they are my teachers.”

These findings converge with the literature on socialization within families. Similar to Atallah’s (2017) findings, parents in this study intentionally engaged in activities (e.g., teaching, modeling) that maintained culture across generations. As in other communities (Leath et al., 2023), socialization was related to developing a positive connection to Arab/MENA identity. Current findings support the notion of remote enculturation (Ferguson et al., 2016). Enculturation is a process of racial socialization and occurs through direct interaction with family and peers. Remote enculturation describes learning about one’s culture from afar through indirect (food, art, language) or intermittent (visit to home country) exposures (Ferguson et al., 2016). Our findings differ from prior work that separated remote enculturation from other socialization processes such as preparing for bias and promoting social equity (Ferguson et al., 2016). In our study, remote enculturation had an indirect effect of preparing the next generation for oppression (i.e., intentionally teaching history including experiences of oppression) and promoting collectivism. Remote enculturation may have fostered critical consciousness (e.g., learning about the oppression of one’s people), hope (e.g., learning about resilience and resistance), and direct action (e.g.,

practicing skills learned from family). Thus, this study's findings support the conceptual framework of radical healing proposed by French et al. (2020) which asserts that resilience/healing for marginalized people requires social support, cultural authenticity, self-knowledge, critical consciousness, and radical hope.

Outcomes of Intergenerational Resilience

Resilience outcomes included economic and educational opportunities for descendants, positive self-identity, a sense of belonging, and a connection to a home outside of the United States. Most participants listed the pursuit of education and economic opportunities as one of the primary motivators for their family's migration. Arab/MENA communities value education and employment; success in both areas is associated with resilience (Haboush & Barakat, 2014). For instance, Hayet (Case 10) recounted her father's prioritization of their education, telling her and her siblings, "I would sell even my clothes to ensure that you and your brother and sisters receive a good education." Consequently, the attainment of these opportunities and improved generational prospects were consistently described in the current sample. Similar to prior research (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2016), findings from this study indicate that connection with family history is associated with positive identity development. First-generation participants commented on the pride they felt when seeing descendants embrace their culture. Second-generation participants shared that connecting to culture helped strengthen their sense of self. Another outcome was developing a sense of belonging in the United States, despite experiencing marginalization. Participants described learning to advocate for themselves against discrimination in relation to their "right" to belong. A final outcome was carrying their home (i.e., country of origin) within them as a source of strength. While working to establish a home in the United States, participants expressed a longing to return to their home country and hoped that connection to their homeland would continue across generations.

Clinical Implications

This study revealed that resilience is contextual to Arab/MENA participants' understanding of historical trauma and pre-/postmigration stress

(e.g., loss of home) which they addressed over time directly (e.g., teaching) and indirectly (observation) to promote communal resilience through connection to culture. First, clinicians should expand assessment and case conceptualization approaches beyond identifying discrete trauma exposures, to also consider historical and ongoing exposure to trauma and oppression in the broader socioecological context when working with Arab/MENA clients. These findings underscore the importance of adopting a strengths-based approach when working with migrant populations (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). The extensive trauma histories of clients may lead professionals to approach treatment from a deficit framework. Yet, scholars emphasize that solely focusing on the trauma discourse and related pathology in a Western medical model diminishes the extreme strength and resilience of clients in surviving and coping with these adversities (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). Clinicians should empower clients by identifying and highlighting sources of resilience in treatment as key pathways to recovery. Findings are in line with research indicating that culturally derived values and practices promote resilience (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024). Clinicians may work with patients to identify culturally derived and personally meaningful values. Effective interventions may move beyond individualistic Western treatment approaches and focus on helping clients build social support systems and connections to culture to foster resilience. Clinicians may support Arab/MENA clients with family-focused practices (Tarabay & Golm, 2024), that empower clients to use culturally specific tools (e.g., storytelling) to foster resistance to ongoing or former stress.

Limitations

Findings provide insight into the process of transmitting resilience across generations for Arab/MENA families. However, qualitative findings are descriptive and may not be broadly generalizable (Smith, 2009). Though we attended to bias through bracketing, it cannot be completely removed. Data collection difficulties also render limitations for this study. In the cases with only one participant, we were unable to reflect with family members on their experiences of resilience. At the same time, group interviews have limitations as interpersonal dynamics (e.g.,

gender, family hierarchy) may influence responses. We used the story circle method to minimize some of these limitations. There also is no direct translation of the word resilience in Arabic. In this study, we used the Arabic word *sumud* (i.e., perseverance and steadfastness), a concept researched by Arab scholars, and this term was shared with all participants. Finally, conducting interviews in English may have impacted responses.

Future Directions

There remains limited research on the process of fostering culturally specific resilience practices (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024). Incorporating culture and intergenerational factors into resilience theory may improve psychology's understanding of the phenomenon. The unique values, beliefs, and worldviews of Arab/MENA communities can inform resilience research. Future qualitative and quantitative research is needed to explore the connection between collective practices and cultivating resilience in the Arab/MENA cultural context. Researchers often wait for participants to elicit culture as a resilience factor (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2024). Asking direct questions, informed by members of the Arab/MENA community (i.e., participatory research methods), may elicit richer descriptions of cultural factors that foster resilience. Future studies should examine cultural factors associated with resilience in a more specific and nuanced manner. A socioecological model of resilience is supported (Alshabani et al., 2023) and may be better elucidated with mixed methods studies. Though future empirical studies are needed, culture may support resilience in the context of trauma as a conduit for connection, support, and self-understanding.

Though not the focus of this article, experiences of oppression and discrimination were pervasive in the sample and contextualized the experience of resilience. More information is needed on their unique experience of cultural and historical trauma. Future research should explore the intergenerational transmission of trauma for Arab/MENA persons as well as racial and cultural socialization among Arab/MENA families in the United States. Such processes may relate to intergenerational resilience, as data revealed that maintaining culture was an overarching goal for cultivating resilience over

generations. In tandem, future scholarship should address how Arab/MENA migrants specifically resist racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression.

Conclusion

This article qualitatively investigated the understanding and transmission of resilience within Arab/MENA migrant families. Our analyses elucidated much about these questions and pointed specifically to the foundational role of maintaining culture in proximally cultivating resilience (i.e., through intentional teaching, first-hand experiences, and observational learning processes) and distally contributing to the outcomes of resilience cultivation (i.e., sense of belonging, opportunity, positive identity, connection (with country of origin) from a distance). Through this work, we advance an understanding of the intergenerational transmission of resilience that is both culturally specific and contextually embedded.

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