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# The Role of Occupational Therapy in Supporting the Enculturation and Acculturation Process for Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Immigrants

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## BACKGROUND

The Egyptian Coptic Orthodox population in America has grown around 30% since 2013 due to religious intolerance in Egypt (Wallace, 2013). Many Copts move to the U.S. and experience feelings of helplessness because of the stark difference in American lifestyle compared to the culture they had left behind in their homeland (Awad, 2010; Moradi & Hassan, 2004). OT is a profession that can impact the Copts due to the focus on helping people gain independence and meaning in all aspects of life through meaningful occupations [American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), 2020].

## PROBLEM

Research on occupational therapy as a community integration strategy for immigrant populations is limited within the Coptic community. Furthermore, the occupational needs of this population are under-researched in and outside of occupational therapy.

## PURPOSE

This qualitative research study was designed to answer two parts of the research question: (a) what is the current state of occupational engagement for recently immigrated Coptic Christian immigrants, and (b) how can occupational therapy make a difference? The results from the research were meant to identify the occupational needs of the Coptic population. The Ecology of Human Performance (EHP) and Recovery Models built the framework for future implications in OT.



References

## RESULTS

Overarching Theme	Subtheme	Example Quotes
Lack of time to complete meaningful occupations	-No time to socialize -Time reduced here due to work -No time to go to church due to work	"Work dominates 90% of my time" "time has become very tight".
Positive feelings about American life and culture	-Feeling safe in America -opportunity to grow -Culture is open and attractive	"Excited and challenged" "Everything is kinda better here" "Feeling safe"
Starting a new life is challenging	-Starting from scratch -challenged in different way than Egypt -New life will start hard -Exciting to move but still challenging - Assistance with occupations	"New challenges, and starting new life from scratch" "I feel ok about moving although it is challenging, but life in Egypt is challenging in different way" "yes new person needs help to understand life here"
Negative feelings about American lifestyle and culture	-New life in America is bad -American culture is too extreme -Too much freedom	"I Was excited but now I am not" "I do not suffer from what I suffer here." "too much freedom might lead to nowhere good depends on ones values and standards" "I dislike over freedom which contravere my culture and religion"
Socialization affected negatively with peers still in Egypt	-Socialization ties to Egypt -Isolation to other Egyptians -Ties to family back home	"It's hard to keep in touch with anyone with everything that's going on day to day" "Great negative impact on all family and social relationships" "less communication with them. The communications decreased with the people in Egypt due to the busy life"
Religious participation declined	-COVID -no transportation -not as many activities -Churches here not as spiritual -language barrier	"Yes, I am little bit confused between English and Arabic, so I am not regularly participate" "I would say yes, time has become very tight to participate. Also, churches here are not as spiritual as in Egypt." "In Egypt i gave been participating more in services and Liturgies."
Achieving balance between acculturation and enculturation	-Not all of American culture is good -Egyptian culture still fresh -Too much freedom is bad	"Good but off course with keeping someone of good Egypt habits In our Minds " "America has a mix culture with different nationalities . Some of these habits and matching with our culture and some of them is strange for us" "Disturbed feelings but I try to adopt" "I enjoy it and try to be more like it. Only the good things at least "

## METHODS

Eighteen participants filled out the 9-question open-ended survey discussing overall feelings and perceptions about moving to America. The survey data was analyzed and organized based on thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke (2006). All Arabic responses were translated into English by an Arabic translator before thematic analysis.

## DISCUSSION

The seven overarching themes that emerged in the data were consistent with the literature review conducted about the immigrant experience; participants stated that their experience moving to the US was challenging, and that connections to Egyptian culture are still strong. Only one participant stated that services to ease transition into American lifestyle would not have been beneficial. The COVID-19 pandemic was a common subtheme stated as a disruption to occupational performance.

## FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study would allow for OTs to expand knowledge about the occupational impact of immigration to the US for minority groups such as the Copts using evidence-based practice. Findings would also allow for increased cultural intelligence of OTs working with this population. OTs can facilitate the enculturation of the Copts by re-establishing daily occupational routines and educating them on new cultural norms (Gupta, 2012). Following the framework of the EHP and Recovery Model, implications for practice include

- Adapting, modifying, creating, establishing, and/or restoring occupation-based interventions
- Empower the client to become independent in occupations, all while understanding the underlying trauma the Copts have.