

IMPLEMENTATION OF AN IRAQI WOMEN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUPPORT GROUP: LESSONS LEARNED IN A PRE AND POST US ELECTION CLIMATE

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The Colorado Refugee Wellness center is an integrated primary and behavioral health care provider for newly arrived refugees resettling in the City of Aurora, CO. In the Spring of 2016, behavioral health staff responded to a need identified by Iraqi Muslim women clients to come together to share experiences and get support in light of the rise in anti-Muslim and anti-refugee rhetoric, and so a therapy group for Iraqi women was created.

Topics addressed in group included cultural considerations related to communication styles, generational hierarchy, respect of authority, religious values, physical health and building community as well as psychological issues of losses, cultural conflicts, fear and safety, and achieving health goals in the face of adversity. The Iraqi patient navigator served as an invaluable cultural broker in the recruitment and retention of clients, as well as provided cultural insight into conducting ongoing program evaluation to revise the goals and purpose of the group.

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International Journal of Whole Person Care
Vol 5, No 1 (2018)

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election climate
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In this presentation, we share clinical and cross-cultural experiences, as well as lessons learned on the creation, implementation, and adaption of an Iraqi women's behavioral health support group in the political climate of the 2016 US election year and approaches to flexible program development and evaluation.

We discuss the limitations of applicability of Western core group therapy interventions and recovery models based on the insights from the Iraqi women's group. In particular, we focus on the crisis debrief session with group members on the day following the election via a process of reciprocal healing. ■