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# **ADAPTATION OF ARAB IMMIGRANTS TO AUSTRALIA: PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the psychological problems that were overcome, and the social and cultural adaptations which were made, by Arab immigrants in the process of settling in Australia. The introduction explains the background of Arab core values of Islam and Druze religious beliefs and practices, as well as reviewing the history of Arab migration to Australia. It also discusses the ways in which Western societies have perceived Arabs, especially women. The research was based on a group of forty participants, sixteen of whom migrated to Australia between 1973 and 2004. The other twenty-four were all of Arab descent and born in Australia. The age group of the participants ranged between 14 to 66 years of age. The methodology for undertaking this research utilized humanistic sociology principles for the collecting and analysis of qualitative data. The research strategies that were used for this thesis consisted of interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and access to people's private journals and memoirs. As far as possible in the discussion of data, the respondents' thoughts and feelings have been presented verbatim as quotations from the interviews, questionnaires and their personal writings.

This investigation takes the form of a portfolio of studies, divided into 3 sections; each one discusses the questionnaire and interview data related to a specific topic. The first part focuses on the psychological issues that emerged out of migration and adaptation to Australia. The second section concentrates on socio-cultural factors especially the maintenance of traditional Arab religious practices, family values, language and personal identity. The third and final part analyses the respondents' perceptions of the ways the Anglo-

Australian host society had responded to Arab immigrants and their children. It focuses in particular, on the changed attitudes and actions which they have experienced since the event of the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2001. It also considers the respondents' views on educating Australians of other backgrounds about Arab peoples, their religion and their culture.

The findings indicate that Arab immigrants faced many challenges when having to adapt to a new culture. They had to adjust to its values and morals, which were new and alien to them, and learn to integrate the old with the new culture so they could live comfortably. Such adaptation was not done overnight and the time of adjusting was often very depressing, exhausting. For some it took many years before the adjustment was accomplished.

The major finding of this portfolio of studies is that the Arab immigrant families did adjust to the new country wholeheartedly, even in the first generation, partly by maintaining the core values of their Arab home culture. The adaptation to mainstream Australian culture was more pronounced in the second generations. Nonetheless, there was an equal enthusiasm from younger people of Arab descent who had been born in Australia to retain and express the values of their family elders' culture and to explain and share it with Australians of other backgrounds. The respondents agreed on the importance of other Australians having the opportunity to learn about Arab peoples and their cultures, as a means of increasing understanding and minimizing suspicion and discrimination.