

Study explores immigrant challenges and hopes

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Some refer to the United States as a land of opportunity for those looking to better their lives. A research team headed by a University of Texas at Arlington social worker recently asked a group of immigrants if

they agreed.

Led by Saltanat Childress, assistant professor in the School of Social Work, the researchers interviewed 24 Arab-speaking Middle Eastern North African refugees in the United States about their experiences immigrating to the country.

"Our research was driven by the expressed needs and concerns of the community and service providers. There was a strong anecdotal and community-based recognition of the challenges faced by immigrants, particularly around family conflicts and adaptation processes," Dr. Childress said.

The team's findings were [published](#) in *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*.

During the conversations, two main topics became clear: the challenges these immigrants face daily and the opportunities and hopes they have for a better future here in the U.S.

Their main challenges include the language barrier they face upon entering the country, [intimate partner violence](#) and the addressing of stress or [mental health problems](#), with some respondents downplaying the latter as a critical issue.

"Key issues on the instrumental side include language barriers, [legal status](#), [affordable housing](#), employment, transportation, and access to health care and childcare," Childress said. "On the ideological side, cultural adaptation challenges, particularly around [gender roles](#) and family dynamics and stigma of mental health issues, add another layer of difficulty to the refugee experience."

Childress says the community, including local organizations, can help

support these immigrants early in their journeys in their new homeland.

"One key recommendation is to provide more robust language support for early adaptation stages, and it's possible that all the new automated translation tools can help in this regard," she said. "Additionally, improving access to affordable housing and employment opportunities is crucial."

When it comes to opportunities and hopes, the research team found that common responses included the quality of U.S. governance, support from fellow immigrants and the quality of education for their children.

"The U.S. is seen by many immigrants and refugees as a desirable destination due to its [economic opportunities](#), political and religious freedoms, and the presence of pre-existing communities that provide support," Childress said. "These factors make the U.S. an attractive option for those seeking a better life for themselves and their children."

In the end, Childress says, it will take a team effort to help immigrants succeed in the face of the difficult issues that brought them to the U.S. in search of a fresh start.

"The key message is that refugee populations are full of wonderful, hard-working families that are silently struggling with significant challenges, and it is crucial for the profession, services, and mainstream population to be more aware, informed, and resourced to help them cope with these challenges effectively," Childress concluded.

More information: Saltanat Childress et al, Acculturative Challenges and Opportunities Among Arab-Speaking MENA Refugees in the United States, *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/10443894241236885](https://doi.org/10.1177/10443894241236885)

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