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Stigma Toward Persons with Developmental Disabilities Among Arab Americans: A Notional Study

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Background: Over the past two decades, previous research has examined attitudes toward persons with disabilities by sampling diverse racial and ethnic groups (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, Latin Americans, and Native Americans). Yet, despite the growing size of the culturally distinct Arab American community with estimates at more than 3.7 million in the US, their attitudes remain largely unknown and no available research has examined predictors of their attitudes toward persons with developmental disabilities. This cross-sectional study addresses this gap in the literature by identifying predictors of overall attitudes with regard to sociodemographic characteristics, acculturation, and contacts with persons with disabilities among a sample of Arab Americans.

Methods: This quantitative cross-sectional study examines the overall attitudes of a sample of Arab Americans toward persons with disabilities. A convenience sample of 372 Arab Americans was recruited from various not-for-profit Arab organizations from 30 states. Participants in the study completed an online self-administered (Qualtrics) survey that included a sociodemographic questionnaire and three validated measures: Vancouver Index of Acculturation-Modified Arab Version (VIA-A; Amer, 2005), Contact with Disabled Persons (CDP) scale (Yuker & Hurley, 1987), and Scale of Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (SADP; Antonak & Livneh, 1989). Data were analyzed using both bivariate and multivariate techniques including Pearson's *r* correlation, *t*-test, one-way ANOVA, and hierarchical regression analysis.

Results: The results provide evidence to support strong relationships between some sociodemographic characteristics and people who identify strongly with mainstream American culture, and more overall, general, and positive contacts were significantly correlated with more favorable attitudes toward persons with disabilities. The ANOVA test ($F = 21.216$, $p < .05$) was statistically significant. Overall, the hierarchical regression model shows more favorable overall attitudes of Arab Americans toward persons with developmental disabilities are accounted by length of stay ($\beta = -.30$; $t = -5.856$, $p < .05$), being Christian ($\beta = .12$; $t = 2.314$, $p < .05$), mainstream identification with American culture ($\beta = -.25$; $t = -4.772$, $p < .05$), and positive contact ($\beta = -.20$; $t = -4.075$, $p < .05$). These four variables accounted for 9% ($R = .30$), 1% ($R = .32$), 6% ($R = .40$), and 4% ($R = .44$) of the variance in overall attitudes respectively. Thus, 80% of variance in overall levels of attitudes is unaccounted for the future research.

Discussion: The results highlight the importance of understanding the attitudes toward persons with disabilities when assessing sociodemographic characteristics, social contacts, and acculturation patterns in the US among minorities, particularly when working with the Arab American community. Given the empirical results of the study, practitioners might incorporate more in-depth knowledge about the distinct Arab culture in order to enhance their cultural competency skills in working with Arab clients. Finally, the study will raise the awareness about stigma toward the disabled among Arab cultural populations and predictors that influence their attitudes toward persons with disabilities.