Somali Families and Early Childhood Education

A. Attitudes - Children are a gift from God. Great care goes into naming, feeding, carrying them. In early childhood they are breastfed, carried on the mother’s body and cuddled.

B. Environment - Families are used to open spaces and no electricity. When they come here they worry about children being lost or stolen. Because of the political problems children are taught to fight at a young age. They may be more physical than children born in the US. Sharing is not taught, they take care of themselves. There was no structure in the camp. Girls are taught to cook, clean and care for little ones.

C. Health Care - Where do you take them when they are sick? There is a high infant mortality rate, most families lose a child. There are some herbal medicines. Here families go to health clinics.

D. Education - Many traditional songs are learned from the mothers along with lullabies. The children memorize the songs. Oral tradition is that information is passed down through family members especially extended family. Religious education starts young, children at age seven will learn the Quran, prayers and Eids. After puberty they begin fasting.

E. Family Routines - Birthdays are not celebrated. Elders must be respected. Food is served on a large platter and eaten with the right hand. There are not many rules at home parents don’t have discipline strategies.
I. INTRODUCTION

The origin of Somali culture is from Islamic tradition and from the ancestors. If the culture is coming from the Islamic tradition it is unchangeable especially when it is related to the faith. If the culture, however, is related to the ancestor’s customs, and is harmful to the life of person this tradition is changeable. In this essay, I will be discussing how Somali students can be successful students in the American education system without rejecting their culture. In my discussion, I will try to build a home that can peacefully meet and live in both the American education system and Somali culture. I am going to talk about traditions that create barriers that can affect the life of the Somali students. In other words, traditions, which may have impact on the success of Somali students in this new environment. In my essay, you will read that most of the elements of Somali cultures do. All my discussion will be based on my knowledge and experience of both Somali culture and the American education system. In my essay, I will also address the meaning of dress, food, prayer, greeting in Somali culture and other important elements of the tradition. I will talk about how Somali students see the American schools. I believe understanding the Somali culture, related to the behavior of Somali students will be very helpful tools to the American school staff who want to help Somali students reach their educational goal.

II. DRESS IN SOMALI TRADITION

In Somali culture, the form of dress is important for both women and men. This culture about how to dress has roots from Islamic religion that Somalis believe in. For example, women should wear HIJAB, which is a dress that covers her body, except their hands and faces according to the Islamic tradition. Men should also wear a dress that covers between waist and knees according to the tradition. They should both start dressing this way when they are seven or nine years old. Somali parents teach their kids how to dress before they reach the age of maturity or puberty. Based on these beliefs, Somali families have the following expectations from the American schools:

a) The schools will separate the girls from the boys when they have mixed or body-touch activities such as swimming class.
b) The schools will allow the Somali girls to dress in uniforms that reflect their culture if the school has uniforms.
c) The schools will give options to the students, especially girls, about any activity related to dress, for example, playing baseball or going to the school gym with sports dress. This will not be obligatory for the girls who do not want to do it.
Appendix 5B

d) The schools will consult with student’s parent regarding any conflict related to dress.

The families have a high expectation from the American schools especially with things relating to the culture and religion. Somali parents believe that the schools will consult them about their children’s activities and education in schools.

III. FOOD IN SOMALI TRADITION

Like the dress, food is important in Somali culture and religion. Because of the Islamic tradition, it is prohibited to eat any food related to pork and alcohol. Therefore, parents expect the school to listen to the following advice.

a) The school should send home the school’s menu for the month.
b) The school should know basic information about student’s cultural food in order to serve them better.
c) The school should give out a Somali translated menu, that can help students understand the meaning of some American food.

For example, the meaning of ‘hot dog’ should be translated to the Somali language. One time, in our school, we had Somali student who wouldn’t have her lunch in the school for almost one week. When a teacher asked the student why she didn’t eat the school lunch, she answered that, “American students eat dogs and I don’t!” Then, the teacher called me for help. I found out that the student’s brother read on the menu, “hot dog,” and told his sister not to eat the school lunch because American students eat dogs. This misunderstanding and ethnocentrism from both cultures could cause students and their families to have many concerns about anything related to the school lunch. Therefore, it is good to have a translated menu if it is possible.

IV. PRAYERS

Like other Muslims, Somalis pray five times every day wherever they are. Back home, all schools have a place for prayer in order to help student’s continue their education without interrupting their daily school program. Most Somali students and their parents have questions about where their children can pray and how the American schools can meet the needs of their students related to prayer. In terms of prayer, the following are the expectations of the Somali families in America:

a) Their children will have a room for prayer in schools.
b) Their children will be allowed to go to the Friday prayer or will have group-Friday prayer in schools.
c) The schools will have resources or basic information about prayer in Islam, school year-prayer-schedule and how it is different from other faith’s prayers.
d) The schools should take seriously any advice about prayer coming from students and their parents. Because of the culture clash about the time and the place of prayer, students will not concentrate their study. Instead, they think about solving the problems of the new culture.

V. APPULTION AS REQUIREMENT OF THE PRAYER

The students should make appultion before they pray. Appultion is to wash the face, arms, and legs in the bathroom. This tradition is new in the American culture and it may create a clash between two cultures. The American student may take offence when he uses the sink to wash his face and Somali student uses it to wash his legs. The solution is that Somali students should have their appultion at home before they come to school. If the appultion is invalidated during the school hours, the school should give a place for appultion to Somali students or explain to American students why the Somalis are doing this. In addition to that, students should clear their private parts with water before they go to the process of the appultion. It is the student’s responsibilities to clean up the bathroom floor before and after the appultion. Finally, the schools and families should have agreements and guidelines about the prayer issues. Then, the agreed guidelines will help reduce the cultural clashes in the school site.

VI. RAMADAN IN SOLMALI TRADITION

Ramadan is the most important month for the Moslem people around the world. It is the month when the Moslem holy book, the Quran, was revealed. Therefore, all Moslems fast a whole month to follow the guidance of the Quran. In the second chapter of the Quran, Allah (God) prescribed fasting for Ramadan to all Moslems. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar based on the lunar system. This month is observed as sacred with fasting practiced daily from dawn to sunset. No eating or drinking is permitted during those hours. Muslims fast twenty-nine or thirty days depending on the moon sight. Like all Moslems, Somali people fast and celebrate this holy month full of inspiration. Somalis prepare many things before this month starts. For example, they beautify their homes with flowers and different lights. They also buy different foods such as more diets for breakfast. Not only adults but also children who have reached puberty practice fasting in this month. Unlike the adults, the children who have not reached puberty can fast half day if they can’t finish their full day. However, once puberty starts the young adult should fast all month in the same manner as adults do from dawn to sunset.

Afur is Somali term for breakfast and it is an important time that all family members sit and eat together to break the fast. This happens at sunset every day of Ramadan. Children are very happy because they eat with their family and play around with other kids. Kids like to play outside with other kids while their families are breaking the fast although the weather in the USA has its own count. Somalis eat special food at breakfast time such as dates, Bur and Sambusi,
which is Somali food. After the breakfast people go to the mosque or prayer place for Tarawih. Tarawih is the prayer that takes place every night of Ramadan after the breakfast. The tarawih prayer contains at least eleven rakat (bowing down for worship), which also could be physical exercise after the big feast. Tarawih prayer isn’t obligatory but it’s recommended. All family members can participate in this Tarawih gathering regardless of their age or gender. There is also Suhur food, which is the food that Somalis eat between midnight and close to dawn. Suhur is another important time to eat food in order to fast next morning. Back home, in Somalia, there was a system that helps Somalis wake up and eat their Suhur. This Islamic announcement is called Adan, which is the same as calling for prayer. In addition to that, in Somalia, Somalis use drums to wake up people. Volunteers of the village do all those announcements. However, in the United States, Somalis use alarm clock for Suhur time. Some families call each other by phone for Suhur time. Then all members of the family wake up and eat together again. At Suhur time, they usually eat a big meal such as rice or corn. The Suhur may take one to two hours to finish eating and cleaning up. Suhur is also important for kids in order to keep them strong while they are in school during the day. Therefore, the American school system, especially food service department should know all this in order to know how much food they serve to their students during the month of Ramadan. This fasting will not affect the student’s daily activities except the first two days. In Somalia, all Somali students went to schools while they were fasting and they did fine. During Ramadan, Como High School is a good example to follow because they have the following activities: a) a room for students who fast; b) an announcement the beginning and the end of Ramadan; and, c) a description of Ramadan and its meaning in its school newsletter.

VII. SOMALI TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY

At the end of Ramadan, Somalis celebrate the first holiday. They come together at a big place where they can hold a prayer and big festival. This normally happens the next morning after the last day of Ramadan. This big holiday is expected on 29th or 30th of January 1998. It depends on the moon sight again. It is one of the biggest holidays for Moslems. Somalis take a day off from their jobs and schools for Id celebration. It is for three days of eating and drinking all types of traditional foods. Those days, every member of the family should wear new and beautiful clothing and feel happy for their completion of Ramadan. Families and friends bring different types of gifts and visit each other. They say to each other “ID Mubarak” which means have a happy and blessed holiday. Parents bring their children to children’s places and buy toys for them. During these days, even poor people will be happy and wear new and beautiful clothing. During the month of Ramadan each family member should pay Fitri, which is an amount of seven dollars to the poor families. So, poor families can also have happy holiday after Ramadan.
Appendix 5B

The second holiday is the 10th day of the last month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Somalis have a big feast in these holidays. The Somali students do not go to school these days because they are special days for them. Schools should be aware of these days in order to help Somali students have happy holidays.

VIII. TRADITIONAL GREETINGS

Every culture has its own way of greeting. Like other Muslims who practice Islam, men don’t shake a women’s hand for greeting except if they are spouses. The Somali women don’t shake men’s hands either. Therefore, some students and their parents have difficulties when they meet Americans who don’t know this tradition. They can’t explain this matter because of language barriers. So, they prefer not to come to any meeting. Again, this culture clash could be avoided if each cultural group educates the other group in order to have a platform that can meet both cultures in positive way.

IX. FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

Somali girls go through the process of female circumcision after they are born. This custom came originally from Egypt and it is one of the bad sides of Somali custom. After 1980, the old government tried to outlaw this practice but people were still practicing it underground. In short, this practice means to remove clitoris and surrounding part of girl’s private parts. This practice doesn’t relate to the Islamic tradition at all. Now in many places, many Somali families fight against this practice. This practice has impact on the life of Somali girls especially the period time. Not only do they miss classes but also they become sick about seven days in every month. Therefore, schools should consider the situation of circumcised girls.

X. PETS AND SOMALIS

In Islamic tradition, Muslims are prohibited to touch the saliva of dogs. Once the person’s hand touches the saliva of a dog, he or she should wash his or her hand seven times before they pray. Although one can touch the body of dog, Somalis do not even like to be close to dogs as custom. Somali people may escape from dogs in order to protect their appultion for prayer, otherwise it is invalidated. They avoid dogs as much as possible.

IX. THE SOMALI STUDENTS AND HOW THEY SEE THE AMERICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

First of all let me divide Somali students into two groups:
A) Students who knew and experienced the school system in their country
B) Students who are new to the education system.
The first group has positive eyes for the American schools although they have language problems. For this group, the success of their education depends on how far the school programs meet their needs as new Americans. This group will have fewer problems in the American school system compared to the other group except for the cultural problems, which I mentioned above.

The second group will have more problems coping with the American education system because of the following reasons.
1. They have never been in any school system before.
2. They have never spoken any language other than their native language.
3. In their daily life, most of them have never lived in big and sophisticated cities like Minneapolis and St. Paul.
4. They have never experienced a culture other than their home culture.

These four and other reasons will cause group “B” to have a hard time adjusting to the American education system. The question is whether they can survive in their new home. How can they get step-by-step help until they cope with the new education system? At first, this group will have a negative impression of the American education system. They think that everything is against them. For example, one day I met a Somali student in the TESOL office, who had just come to America. When I finished her school processing, she told me that she wished she could go back to the refugee camps. When I asked her why, she told me that nothing is helpful in this new life and everything is against her. She said, “Why do they ask me questions in English when I don’t even know the difference between pen and pencil in Somali language?”. This is a classic example that gives an idea about their feelings as new students in American schools. In Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools there are very large number of TYPE B students. Hence in my opinion, this group should get an American education program that fits their needs in order to help them have success in their education.

In conclusion, these components which relate to the Somali tradition and the Somali student’s background will help the staff of the American schools get a suitable successful education system for the new Americans.
Appendix 5C

THE NAMES OF SOMALI PEOPLE

Most Somali names have a certain meaning. Some names have Arabic origins and others have Cushtik or Somali origins. Here are some examples:

**CUSHTIK NAMES:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GIRL'S NAME</th>
<th>ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cadey</td>
<td>Adey</td>
<td>Fair-skinned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haweeya</td>
<td>Haweya</td>
<td>The elevated one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hodan</td>
<td>Ho dan</td>
<td>Well-to-do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sagal</td>
<td>Sa gal</td>
<td>Morning star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubax</td>
<td>Ubah</td>
<td>Flower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOY'S NAME</th>
<th>ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awaale</td>
<td>Awale</td>
<td>Lucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samakaab</td>
<td>Samakab</td>
<td>Supporter of right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samatar</td>
<td>Samatar</td>
<td>Doer of good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guuleed</td>
<td>Guled</td>
<td>The victorious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geedi</td>
<td>Gedi</td>
<td>The traveler</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ARABIC NAMES:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GIRL'S NAME</th>
<th>ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caisha</td>
<td>Asha</td>
<td>Long living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faaduma</td>
<td>Faduma</td>
<td>Weaned early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fawziya</td>
<td>Fawzia</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyl</td>
<td>Laila</td>
<td>Night (long dark hair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shukri</td>
<td>Shukri</td>
<td>Thankful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOY'S NAME</th>
<th>ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cali</td>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>The high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabdullahi</td>
<td>Abdulahi</td>
<td>The slave of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumar</td>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>The long living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaalid</td>
<td>Kalid</td>
<td>The lasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xasan/Xuseen</td>
<td>Hassan/Husein</td>
<td>Handsome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## USEFUL SOMALI EXPRESSIONS WITH ENGLISH TRANSLATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOMALI</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADIGA KALIYA SAMEE</td>
<td>DO IT YOURSELF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAHADSANID</td>
<td>THANK YOU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHAQO FIICAN (shako fi an)</td>
<td>GOOD WORK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISKU DAY MAR KALE</td>
<td>TRY AGAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAYA</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I KAALMEE, FADLAN</td>
<td>HELP ME PLEASE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I SOO FIIRI</td>
<td>WATCH ME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIIRI</td>
<td>LOOK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TARTIIIBSO</td>
<td>SLOW DOWN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCO (so o')</td>
<td>WALK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HADDA</td>
<td>NOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUG</td>
<td>WAIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOOGSO</td>
<td>STOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARIISO</td>
<td>SIT DOWN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISKA WARAN</td>
<td>HELLO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBAX WANAAGSAN (subah Wanagsan)</td>
<td>GOOD MORNING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FADLAN</td>
<td>PLEASE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Significance of Ramadan

- Muslims are required to fast during the month of Ramadan, from dawn to sunset as one of the five pillars of their faith.
- Fasting became mandatory for Muslims in the year 624 A.D.
- The common greeting Muslims use to welcome the month is to say "Ramadan Kareem," or Noble Ramadan.
- Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The beginning of fasting shifts every year by about 10 or 11 days.
- Muslims fast 29 or 30 days during the Month of Ramadan.

People Exempt from Fasting

- Children who have not reached the age of puberty are not required to fast. However, many children start fasting at a young age to practice and also be part of the festive family atmosphere.
- The sick until they recover.
- Pregnant and breast feeding women.
- Travelers.
- Elderly seniors who are unable to withstand the demands of the month.
- Women and girls during their menstrual cycle.

What Happens during Ramadan

- Families break the fast together at the mosque or in their homes.
- The meal for breaking the fast at sunset is called Iftar.
- The fasting is usually broken with dates, water, juice, oatmeal and other light food. Then people have heavier meal later.
- Muslims also pray together an extra prayer called Taraweeh at night. This prayer lasts up to an hour and half each night of Ramadan.
- Muslims eat a pre-dawn meal called Suhur before sunrise.

What Schools Should be Aware of during Ramadan

- Major tests should be planned around the month if working with students who observe the fast.
- Some students’ sleep time may change during the month as they wake up for the pre-dawn meal or perform the Taraweeh prayers at night.
- Students should be held accountable to the same standards as other times except in extreme physical activities.
- Younger students may fast some days and not fast others depending on their ability.
- Mature female students do not fast during their monthly period.
- Students may feel more thirsty and hungry in the first days of the month.
- Avoid major family or school events during this month if Muslim families are involved.
- It is recommended to set space for fasting students to stay during meal times.

If you have questions or concerns, please, call Abdisalam Adam at (651) 767-8388.

Thank you.
Disabilities in the Somali community
Personal story #1:
Sharif Farah

- Sharif will share his personal experience in US, including barriers and successes
Q: What are common health beliefs and practices regarding disability in the Somali community?

• Disability is God’s will, therefore, unquestionable.

• Disability is generally perceived as permanent, non-preventable and untreatable.

• *Disability is then accepted without the need for treatment.*
Q: To what extent do religious beliefs influence this?

- Role of Islam
- Stigma
- Name calling
Q: What are attitudes toward mental health and utilizing resources among Somalis?

- Perception: Mind, body, and spirit are seen as a whole and undivided.

- Mental Illness [MI] is not easily accepted and is denied as long as possible.

- MI person is considered violent, such as taking off one's clothes in public, beating or screaming at someone else randomly and unpredictable behavior.
Expressions of Mental Illness

- **Buufis**: Mostly common used term. Person in this stage wonders around, sleepless, unable to eat, talking to themselves...literally means, inflating a balloon to the point of bursting!

- **Murug/Welwel**: An everyday sadness, stress, disappointment.

- **Gini or Jinni**: Supernatural beings or spirits that exert influence over human beings.
Causes of Mental Illness

- Spirit possession: Spirits reside within the individual.
- Moral transgression: Result of a divine will.
- Evil Eye: Caused by other people. Less fortunate person may evil eye a healthy and wealthy person.
- Curses by ill treated or disregarded parents are the most dreadful ones.
- Witchcraft: throwing spell on someone intentionally.
- Gini/Jinn: Supernatural spirits or ghosts possessing someone.
Treatment of Mental Illness

- **Spiritual Healing:** Sheik or Imam recites the Koran on an MI person.
- **Traditional healing:** Animal sacrifices, spirit experts diagnose the patient and conduct their rituals through dances, music, songs, herbs, etc.
- **Medication:** when all other options are exhausted.
- **Incarceration:** Last resort. When behavior is threatening to self and others.
Barriers to Treatment

- Stigma and Shame: Fear of labeling & gossip. People are named after their physical defects.

- Mistrust & Fear: Providers, Psychotropic medications & misdiagnosis.

- Lack of Information: No awareness of needs & possibility of treatment.
Beliefs regarding palliative care, death and dying in relation to health and health care

- Fatalism
  - Imams or Islamic elders are called upon to recite the Koran on the dying.
  - Imams remind the fatally ill to remember that there is only one God.

- Death is considered God’s will.
Q: What role do the clans and subclans play in receiving care and using resources, specifically Somali community resources?
Personal story #2 - Child

- Disabled children are always with their parents.
- Only parents make the health decisions for disabled children.
- Parents don’t mention their disabled children unless with a physician.
What are the gaps in resources, including healthcare, in the Somali community?

- Gaps:
  - Cost/Access
  - Language
  - Transportation
  - Understanding of Western medical model
  - Etc.
The Disabled Immigrant Association [DIA]
The Disabled Immigrant Association

- **Mission:** To improve the lives of immigrant people with disabilities in the Twin Cities.

- **DIA supports disabled immigrants and their career development through the provision of information, referrals, education regarding rights, peer support, and guidance in navigating through complex barriers to receiving support services and jobs.**

- **DIA is dedicated to empowering immigrants with social, mental, and physical disabilities.**
DIA Goals

- Improve access to social services, benefits, healthcare and jobs.

- Address cultural biases both in the mainstream cultures and in African cultures

- Build the self esteem and sense of empowerment of our constituents.

- Help mainstream systems, e.g. healthcare, employment, and social services better understand the needs of this population.
DIA Services

- Information and referral
- Informal case management
- Peer supports
- Outreach
Tips on developing cultural awareness

- Become aware of our own cultural background.

- Become aware that there are no wrong or right cultural beliefs.

- Establish personalized contact with families and their children.

- Learn about the people that you serve. [like today! 😊]
Tips (cont)

- Educate the community’s culturally diverse leaders.

- Develop and use vocabulary of greetings and key phrases in patient’s primary language:
  - Iskawaaran = hello/greeting
  - Nabadeey = have a good day
  - Mahad senid = thank you

- Be sensitive to patient’s cultural perception of disability.
Mahad senid [thank you]!
Questions?
Appendix 5G

An Asian View of Cultural Differences
(With Thanks to Dr. Mai Van Trang)

We live in time. You live in space.
We are always at rest. You are always on the move.
We are passive. You are aggressive.
We like to contemplate. You like to act.
We accept the world as it is. You try change it according to your plan.
We live in peace with nature. You try to impose your will on her.
Religion is our first love. Technology is your passion.
We delight to think about the meaning of life. You delight in physics.
We believe in the freedom of silence. You believe in freedom of speech.
We lapse into meditation. You strive for articulation.
We marry first, then love. You love first, then marry.
Our marriage is the beginning of a love affair. Your marriage is the happy end of a romance.
Marriage is an indissoluble bond. Marriage is a contract.
Our love is mute. Your love is vocal.
We try to conceal love from the world. You delight in showing it to others.
Self-denial is a secret to our success. Self-assertiveness is the key to your success.
We are taught from the cradle to want less and less. You are urged everyday to want more and more.
We glorify austerity and renunciation. You emphasize gracious living and enjoyment.
Poverty to us is a badge of spiritual elevation. It is to you a sign of degradation.
In the sunset years of life, we renounce the world and prepare for the hereafter. You retire to enjoy the fruits of your labor.
Appendix 5H

Social/Cultural Customs
Similarities and Differences between Vietnamese, Cambodians, Hmong and Lao

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VIETNAMESE</th>
<th>CAMBODIAN</th>
<th>HMONG</th>
<th>LAOS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. General</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The family is the basis of society, not the individual.</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Up to 3 or 4 generations live together in one home.</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Within the family, the wife deals with all household matters. The husband deals with the outside world.</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The elderly (parents) are supported by married or unmarried children until they die.</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Family name is placed first as an emphasis on the roots of a person. Names are written in this order: e.g. Nguyen Van Hai</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese E.g. ChanSa Moi Family Name (first) – Chan Middle Name – Sa First Name – Moi</td>
<td>Names are written in this order: For men: Lor Tong Khu Family Name (first) – Lor Middle Name (if any) – Tong Given name – Khu</td>
<td>Names are written in this order: Given name, first then last name. Example: Thonedy Sourivong For women: Changh Sourivong. Given name: Chanh Family name when married Sourivong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Family members cannot use the same first name.  

7. Small families are now encouraged. Parents are proud of a large family.  

<table>
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<tr>
<th>VIETNAMESE</th>
<th>CAMBODIAN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. As a tradition (not law) a marriage must be approved by parents from both sides. This is true for persons of all ages.</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. First cousins and their children cannot marry each other up to three generations.</td>
<td>First cousins can get married to each other, but an uncle or aunt cannot marry a niece or a nephew.</td>
<td>First cousins cannot marry each other if they belong to the same clan. However, the children of the brother can marry those of the sister because they belong to the same clan.</td>
<td>First cousins can marry each other, and an uncle can marry a niece from a royal family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The couple prefers to celebrate their wedding at the home of either side, not at the church or temple.</td>
<td>Same, but only at bride’s house.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 12. Legally, women keep their own names after marriage. Formally, married women use their husband’s first name.  
Example: Husband’s name: Nguyen Van | After marriage, a woman keeps her first name and adds her husband’s last name officially. Informally, she can be called by either her first name or husbands’ last name.  
Example: | Same as Vietnamese  
Example: Husband’s Name: Lor Tong Khu  
Wife’s Maiden Name: Her My  
Wife’s Married Name: Her My | Same as Cambodian. |
Hai
Wifes' Maiden Name: Le Thi Ba
Wife's Maiden name: Ek Sam Hang.
Wife’s Married Name; Mrs. Chan Sa Oi.
Wife’s Informal Name: Mrs. Sam Hang
Husband’s Name: Chan Sa Noi
Wife’s Informal Name: Mrs. Lor Tong Khu
13. After marriage, the wife lives with her husbands’ family. Form that day, she belongs to her husband’s family.
After marriage, the couple can live with either the wife’s family or the husband’s family.
Same as Vietnamese. Usually after marriage, the couple lives with the wife's family.
14. Before 1959, Vietnamese men could have more than one wife. Ranking in order of responsibility:
Cambodian men can have several wives, but written consent of the first wife is compulsory. All other wives are considered to rank second. If the first wife dies, one of the second wives, the oldest in marriage date or in age, can gain promotion to first rank.
Hmong men can have several wives and may not need to have the first wife’s’ consent. The husband must treat the wives equally. However, the first wife has more authority, is the one who knows how to take care of the husband and becomes the favorite
Before 1945, same as Vietnamese.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>VIETNAMESE</th>
<th>CAMBODIAN</th>
<th>HMONG</th>
<th>LAOS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. No such custom (See Hmong)</td>
<td>No such custom (See Hmong)</td>
<td>For reasons of family solidarity, if a man dies, his younger brother (not older) can marry his widow if she consents. Otherwise, she can marry another man.</td>
<td>No such custom (See Hmong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Divorce is legal but is not common. Both sides of the family handle family conflict.</td>
<td>Divorce is legal and is encouraged when necessary, to avoid discord between families.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Childbirth and Children</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. In the countryside, Vietnamese prefer a mid-wife to deliver the</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
child at home. She is often aided by female relatives. (Men, unmarried women, girls, and the husband are not to be present)

18. (See Hmong) NO time limit for Vietnamese woman, but usually she stays in for one (1) week. She stays home for seven (7) days, but may wish to extend this period from one to three (3) months. After delivery, a woman cannot go out to visit relatives or friends. She must stay inside the house for one (1) month.

19. In the country, a woman may deliver at her home. Same as Vietnamese, except a woman who is not married cannot deliver that baby in her parent’s home. After the baby is born, she and her baby can come back at any time. When a girl becomes pregnant, the parents will build a temporary shelter for her outside of her parents’ house where she can deliver the baby. During the first month after delivery, she cannot enter any house, but must stay in the shelter. This is for religious reasons.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>VIETNAMESE</th>
<th>CAMBODIAN</th>
<th>H.MONG</th>
<th>LAOS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. No such custom. (See Cambodian)</td>
<td>A baby pig is raised when a girl is born. The pig's progeny will be used for the girl's wedding feast.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. When a child is born, he/she is counted as a one (1) year old.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. In general, an infant is breast-fed up to two (2) years.</td>
<td>An infant is breast-fed up to three (3) years.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Sons are valued more than daughters.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. The eldest son has a duty to perform the ancestor's worship at home.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Brothers and sisters never touch or kiss each other.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
26. Boys and girls are not free to do what they want. Girls are under strict supervision. Sex segregation is common social rule.

27. No such custom. (See Cambodian)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>CAMBODIAN</th>
<th>HMONG</th>
<th>LAOS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. Death/Mourning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. When a person dies, his/her body will be buried underground. If cremation is preferred, the family will comply.</td>
<td>When a person dies, his/her body will be cremated and the ashes will be kept in a pagoda or in the family home.</td>
<td>Burial underground.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Elderly love their homes and land. They want to die at home, not in a hospital or somewhere else.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese. Hmong are attached to their home. The elders want to die in their own homes to be near their family.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. If one of the parents dies, the children must traditionally wait for (3) years to marry.</td>
<td>If one of the parents dies, the children must traditionally wait only (1) year to marry. A son may become a monk to repay a moral dept from one week to a year.</td>
<td>Children can marry at any time after the day of the funeral.</td>
<td>Same as Hmong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. If the husband dies, the wife must traditionally wait for three (3) years to remarry.</td>
<td>If the husband dies, the wife must traditionally wait for one (1) year to remarry.</td>
<td>If the husband dies, the wife can remarry at any time.</td>
<td>Same as Hmong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIETNAMESE</td>
<td>CAMBODIAN</td>
<td>HMONG</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. No such custom. (See Cambodian)</td>
<td>If the wife dies the husband can remarry at any time.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. No such custom (See Cambodian)</td>
<td>If one of the siblings dies. The others must wait one (1) year to marry.</td>
<td>If one of the siblings dies, the other can marry at any time.</td>
<td>Same as Hmong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. For mourning, Vietnamese wear all-white clothes up to 14 days. After this period, the men wear a white or black headband</td>
<td>Cambodian use white clothes. They also shave their head for up to three (3) months. After that, they use a black armband or black clothes as long as Is desired and maybe forever.</td>
<td>Hmong wear a white headband for mourning until the body is buried. However, this practice is not generalized.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. The seventh day after the funeral, the family will celebrate a special mass for the dead at a pagoda. This is repeated every seven (7) days for seven (7) consecutive weeks. After forty-nine (49) days, the celebration will take place yearly at home or at a pagoda if the family can afford it.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
<td>Thirteen days after the funeral, the family organizes a ritual ceremony to “free” the soul of the deceased person, which will take a new cycle of reincarnation.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. The date of the anniversary of the death is set according to the lunar year.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. On the third anniversary of the death, there would be an exhumation ceremony during which the remains of the body will be cleaned with rice wine and stored in a small pottery jar to be buried again.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
<td>No such custom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
38. The commemoration of the dead is celebrated every year up to the fourth great grandparents (ancestor worship). Fifth great grandparents are believed to have been reborn elsewhere on earth or admitted to the permanent bliss of Heaven. The eldest son is responsible for the ancestor worship. If there is no son in the family, then the eldest daughter will take this responsibility.

E. Social Hierarchy

39. Traditional Caste System:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>VIETNAMESE</th>
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<th>HMONG</th>
<th>LAOS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>King</td>
<td>Dignitaries</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer/Fisherman</td>
<td>Monk</td>
<td>Elders</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Clan Leaders</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Technician</td>
<td>Family patriarch</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmer/Fisherman</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40. Traditionally, teachers are more respected than parents for their knowledge and moral virtues.

<table>
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<th>HMONG</th>
<th>LAOS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents are more respected than teachers.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VIETNAMESE</strong></td>
<td><strong>CAMBODIAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>HMONG</strong></td>
<td><strong>LAOS</strong></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. To show their respect, Vietnamese will bow their heads in front of a superior or an elderly person.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. To show their respect, Vietnamese use both hands when passing something to a superior or an elderly person.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. To salute, Vietnamese join both hands against their chest.</td>
<td>Cambodians join hands at different levels to salute:</td>
<td>Do not join hands or salute. They just bow their heads.</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Chin level: To a stranger or older person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Nose level: To uncles, aunts, teachers, and parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Overhead: to a monk or royalty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. While talking, Vietnamese should not look steadily at respected people’s eyes.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Women do not shake hands with each other or with men. (Shaking hands has become acceptable in the U.S.)</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Ladies should not smoke in public.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese (up to 35 years old.)</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese (up to age 22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Special ranking clothes according to hierarchy.</td>
<td>Same Vietnamese. King, monk, high civil servant.</td>
<td>No such custom (See Vietnamese)</td>
<td>No such custom (See Vietnamese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Special ranking clothes according</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese. King, monk,</td>
<td>Special clothes according to the</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hierarchy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
49. Vietnamese never put their feet on a desk when talking to others nor do they touch each other's head (only the elderly can touch the head of young children.)

50. Calling with a finger up is only toward an animal or an inferior. Between two equal people, it means a provocation. To call a person use whole hand with fingers facing down.

51. No different value between right and left hand, although left-handed people are generally believed to be more clumsy.

52. Traditionally, a child is not allowed to write with his left hand.

53. Kissing in public is not acceptable.

54. Persons of the same sex may hold hands in public, sleep in the same bed, and are not considered to be homosexual.

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<th>LAOS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55. Incest is punished by law and strongly resented by society.</td>
<td>Incest is taboo, except in the royal family. Incest is punished by local law as well as supernatural being. Social blame of incest often leads to suicide. The corpse of the suicide victim is to be buried no cremated as usual.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
<td>Same as Vietnamese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. Traditional Vietnamese women</td>
<td>Cambodian women can have any</td>
<td>Hmong women always have their</td>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
keep their hair long.

style of haircut or hairdo.

hair long. (Their hair is never cut.)

57. To eat, Vietnamese use chopsticks and bowls

Cambodians use forks and spoons.
City dwellers also use chopsticks.
Villagers use palm leaves as spoons.

Same as Cambodian.

58. Lunar year. There are many holidays in a year. New Year is similar to the Chinese calendar, January or February.

Same as Vietnamese. New Year is April 13 each year.

There is only one holiday for the whole year. “New Year’s Day”, following the lunar calendar after the harvest between December and January.

59. Time is flexible. There is not need to be in a hurry or punctual except in extremely important cases.

Same as Vietnamese.

Same as Vietnamese.

F. Religion

60. About 90% of the population practices ancestor worship or a loose form of Buddhism.
(Mahayana School prevails).

99% of the population is followers of Buddha. (The Theraveda Buddhist sect prevails.)

From 1956 on, American and French missionaries brought Protestantism to the Hmong. About half of the population is now Christians. The other half practices ancestor worship.

Same as Cambodian.

VIETNAMESE | CAMBODIAN | HMONG | LAOS
---|---|---|---
61. Besides Buddhism, Animism is also popular.

Same as Vietnamese.

Same as Vietnamese.

Same as Vietnamese.

62. Belief in the theory of Karma, i.e., one’s present life is pre-determined by his good or bad deeds in his previous life. The cycle of life and rebirth for an individual will only cease when he has finally been able to get rid of his earthly desires and achieve the state of spiritual liberation.

Same as Vietnamese.

Same as Vietnamese.

Same as Vietnamese.

63. Man is supposed to live in

Same as Vietnamese.

Same as Vietnamese.

Same as Vietnamese.
64. Spirituality is dominant in the Society.

| Institution of swearing to prove innocence (e.g., if accused of wrongdoing, a person may swear innocence before the statue of a saint, in the company of the accuser and witnesses. This avowal is often accepted by local law as confirmation on innocence. In some instances, a stronger demonstration, such as sacrificing a chicken, is added. |
|---|---|---|
| Same as Vietnamese. | Same as Vietnamese. | Same as Vietnamese. |

65. No such custom. (See Cambodian)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Same as Cambodian.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Same as Cambodian.</td>
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</table>
Hmong Families and Early Childhood Education

A. Attitudes
The Hmong highly value their families which include the extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Within one traditional household there may be as many as three or more generations living together. The Hmong family structure is complex and each family member is labeled according to their birth order and relation. For example, a father's older brother is called “hlob” or “tij laus” while the father’s younger brother is called “txiv ntxawm” or “kwv”. Every family belongs to a clan based on the last names and each person within the clan is considered family. There are 18 Hmong clans within the United States.

When children are born, they are viewed as a valuable expansion of the family. Married couples are encouraged to have many children and encouraged to have sons for carrying on the family name and traditions as well as daughters to help with chores and to take care of the parents. In traditional Hmong homes, children are often compared with their siblings or relatives in order to mark milestones. For example, a two year old who is not talking yet may be compared with his or her siblings when they were two years old or with a current related two year old. Often times, children are not expected to excel beyond their peers but are expected to meet the same level of development as their peers.

B. Environment
Hmong children are expected to be independent and contributing members to the family. Some core values expected from Hmong children are care for elders, obedience, consideration for others, learning and hard work, and respect. Hmong children are encouraged to play independently or with others but are seldom expected to interact with parents or adults.

In many traditional households, boys and girls have different roles. Boys are allowed to play and are only expected to learn traditions while girls are given little chances to play and are taught how to do chores from a very young age.

C. Health Care
Hmong parents and grandparents rely on herbal or spiritual remedies when their children are sick. When children are sick with minor aches and pains, herbal medicines are sought from family elders. In animist Hmong families, they may even consult with a shaman and seek the advice of a shaman or family elder during a ritual or ceremony. In the instances in which the sickness becomes more serious, families may seek medical help from doctors. Overall, the general trust in western medicine is just beginning to form.
D. Education
In Hmong families, the older siblings are expected to teach the younger siblings and the younger siblings are expected to follow their older siblings. Hmong people place education as a high value for measuring success and achievement. When young children are in school, they are expected to perform at the same level as their non-Hmong peers and they are expected to make progress from year to year. Hmong children face high expectations from their parents in regards to education and to being self-sufficient when they are grown. The older siblings are charged with the responsibility of being a positive example for the younger siblings and of taking care of the younger siblings.

Parents often share oral stories of family history, lineage, and folktales with their children. Most oral stories told are either true recounts of history or folktales that have been passed from one generation to the next. In families with parents with limited literacy in English and Hmong, books are scarce within the home. Parents rely on educators to provide the books and tools for children to bring home to further their learning in the home.

E. Family Routines
In many traditional Hmong families, the idea of building family routines is a fairly new concept. Hmong families are flexible in their schedules and can easily adapt to new routines as well as easily let go of routines. Children in many families are not supervised during their time in the home and may watch a lot of television or play video games. Families with grandparents as the childcare providers may not set routines or limit the amount of television and video games that children can access. In addition, many Hmong parents are faced with the responsibility to respond to calls from their extended family or clan leaders and may often feel frustration from not being able to enforce routines with their children.
Handbook for Teaching Hmong-Speaking Students

Oral Language Development

The Hmong have always placed an emphasis on oral skills, as there were no writing skills to fall back on. People in the Hmong society achieved high social status not only because of wealth or education, but also because of the ability to speak well during social occasions/religious ceremonies, and other political and legal events. In traditional Hmong society it was necessary to learn from elders how to speak in the correct manner for these types of occasions. This more formal mode of conversation, while of course being in the Hmong language, nevertheless, was different and considered a “higher level of speaking” than everyday language. It made use of some special vocabulary that was not understood by everyone. Regional, village, clan and family leaders could only become such if skilled in this method of communication; thus, families encouraged their youth, particularly boys, to become proficient in oral skills.

Learning how to create verses as a way to communicate with others was considered an important part of the Hmong culture. As an example, during the Hmong New Year season, which is also a courtship period, girls and boys line up in a field and toss balls to each other, all the while exchanging verses as a way to get to know each other and begin romantic alliances. From as early as the first year of life, Hmong children begin to learn how to create verses from their parents, grandparents and older siblings. Girls in particular try hard to become proficient in this skill as the society considers this a very desirable attribute. Boys also learn to create verses that are sung during marriage, naming, religious and funeral services, which in the Hmong society are the responsibilities of the males. Girls’ skills are to sing and to speak well in order to attract a husband and create a harmonious household, whereas for the boys it is to represent the family and the clan to the outside community, to assume leadership and to be able to defend their clan in court.

The Lao school system reinforced the Hmong traditional belief that in order to succeed in life one had to be able to speak well in front of the teacher and class, in front of the family and clan, in front of village members and most important of all, in front of visiting dignitaries and/or government officials. The schooling system in Laos placed a great emphasis on memorization and the recitation of set texts.

Implications for Educators

Familiar techniques can be readily transferred to assignments in American classes. There is a great deal of pattern to the speaking done within the society; a person learns the appropriate structure, vocabulary and “flower words” then varies the text to give it a personal signature. Students will fare better in preparing speeches, reports, letters or essays if they are given a specific
circumstance and personal style. This technique runs counter to American technique for learning public language, whether oral or written.

This same strategy can be applied to other kinds of learning. Any memorization should pair auditory with tactile or visual channels. Math facts can be learned by recitation; mnemonic devices are helpful; any kind of patterned, rhyming, rhythmic speech will parallel traditional ways of learning information. (It should be noted that rhyming in Hmong is different than rhyming in English; words rhyme when they contain the same vowels and the same tone, rather than the same vowels and end sounds. Pa/ and vaj rhyme.)

When learning by auditory means is impractical, visual patterning as in charts or grids may be helpful for learning. Drawing on shapes, symbols and colors from traditional Hmong costume may aid the discrimination and memory when paired with visual material.

In general, learning is accomplished by “seeing and doing”. Whenever possible, teachers should employ this traditional learning strategy. Demonstrate what is to be done, let the student try, correct the errors and then let the student try again.

**Traditional Child-Rearing Practices**

Traditional Hmong society placed a great emphasis on having many children. Parents devoted most of their time and energy to providing for and fostering their children. Since Hmong society places family values above individual concerns, most Hmong parents spent the majority of every day in close physical proximity with their children. The children would accompany their parents to and from the rice fields, to fetch water from the river and around the village. In general, Hmong parents carry and fondle their children more than is common in Western cultures. Thurs, it is a frequent sight to see either a Hmong mother or father with a baby tied to his or her back in a gaily-embroidered baby carrier. Up until about the ages of three or four, most Hmong children would never be out of sight of at least one of their parents and would spend much of their time playing while their parents worked. As early as five or six years of age, some children would be assisting their parents with simple tasks around the house and in the fields.

Most Lao schools allowed children to enter first grade at age seven. Since many Hmong families did not keep formal records of when infants were born, many did not know at what time a child became seven years old. It was common folk practice among the Hmong that a child was ready to attend school if he or she could touch his or her left ear with his or her right hand, with the right arm lifted up over the head. As children turned six or seven, parents would have to decide whether the child would be selected to go to school. In general, if unable to send all their children, parents would select one or two sons to go. These sons were selected because they seemed, in their parents’ judgment, most likely to succeed academically. Daughters were rarely selected to go to school. Families who had
very limited resources had to invest them wisely; investing in a girl’s future earning potential would benefit the in-laws, not the birth parents. Those children selected to go to school would be expected to devote the majority of their time to excelling scholastically. Students were treated with respect and were given many special privileges within their families. In general, students were expected only to study hard and to pass their exams. Other family members would take on the students’ share of chores, family responsibilities and economic burden. Within the Hmong community at large, students were admired and coveted as future sons or daughters-in-law. Hmong parents who invested in their children’s education hoped that these students would eventually be able to qualify for, take, and pass the civil service exams and thus become employed in high status government jobs.

The children who did not go to school remained close to their parents. They continued to follow their parents to and from the fields, hunting, fishing, and gardening. As they grew to be between ten and twelve, the children would take on a few more responsibilities. Boys would help with such things as the heavy fieldwork and feeding and caring for the farm animals. Girls would begin cooking simple meals, help with the vegetable garden and do needlework. By the time children reached their teens, most knew at least basic living skills and were ready to start their own lives.

Marriage age for most Hmong was very young compared to modern-day Western standards. Most Hmong parents hoped to see each of their children married and started upon their own lives before dying. Since life spans were short in Laos, children were encouraged to marry early. Marriage age of girls was between 13 and 17 and for boys between 15 and 20. Sons were expected to bring their wives home to live in their parents’ home until they had one or two children. At that point, the couple would be permitted to build a residence of their own on a nearby plot. By the time he reached the age of 35 or so, many of the responsibilities of heard of household for the family would be transferred to the oldest or most educated son. At this time the parents would go into semi-retirement.

**Implications for Educators**

Teenage girls are often caught in a conflict between the cultures of home and school. The factors that are involved in early marriage are complex and interrelated, between birth clan, marriage clan, mother and mother in-law, and social definitions of age, desirability, and worth. The daughter’s birth parents raise her to a certain point, and the mother and father-in-law will “finish” her preparation for fulfilling roles within the husband’s clan. The birth parents may see that is inappropriate for them to encourage or suggest plans for their daughter’s future education, as that is the province of the in-laws.
Appendix 5J

Educators who are drawn into the situation should take care not to exacerbate the difficulties facing the young girl, but rather help her find ways to combine traditional and emerging roles in a manageable way. For example, marriage and pregnancy does not mean that high school graduation is out of the question. Many districts offer programs for adolescent parents, and with encouragement, Hmong girls can complete a diploma program. Involve the mother and father-in-law, who may have expectations of their own that make the daughter-in-law’s school attendance and work impossible. Before the social expectations change, the older generation needs to see examples of success, and there needs to be a situation of “being like the others” – more important in Hmong society than individuality. School districts within an area can help this process by locating examples of success, and arranging of an exchange of information and ideas.

Physical disciplinary measures were considered acceptable in Hmong society. Children were spanked when necessary and scolded by both parents. However, because of the strong emphasis on family ties in the Hmong culture, grudges were almost never held. Within a few minutes, or a day at the most, peace would return to the household after even the most severe physical punishment. Offenses considered serious enough to justify spanking included disobedience to parents, unwillingness to help with chores, fighting with siblings, breaking utensils and so on. Since many Hmong parents knew very little about formal schooling systems, many did not keep abreast of their children’ progress at school. Thus, there was rarely any disciplinary action taken with students who did not do well scholastically. The children who were unable to continue on to higher levels were scolded by their parents briefly and then expected to return to their previous lifestyle of helping around the farm.

Formal Education in Laos

Prior to the 1850’s, the only formal education available in Laos was that found in the Buddhist temples (Berval, 1959). This was available only to limited numbers of males, Hmong children were generally not sent to Buddhist temples to receive their education. This was due to differences in religious beliefs between the Hmong and Lao. Hmong follow traditional beliefs based on a combination of ancestor worship and animism or have converted to Christianity, while most Lao are Buddhists. Another reason Hmong children did not attend Buddhist temples was that Buddhist temples supported by Lao village or towns were usually not in close proximity to the mountain villages of the Hmong.

Under French domination, starting around the middle of the nineteenth century, secular schooling began to grow and eventually predominated (Roberts et al. (1966). Due to limitations such as lack of teachers, school buildings and school supplies, education was available to only a few. It was in 1939 that the first village school for Hmong children was established in Nong Het, an area inhabited by Hmong people and located in the northern part Laos. It offered a beginning class and involved nine students. Before that date, a few privileged Hmong
children had gone to Xieng Khouang City, the provincial capital or to Vinh, in Central Vietnam, to receive a formal education.

After World War II, in response to pressure from the Hmong leaders of Xieng Khouang plateau, the schooling system started to extend to other Hmong-inhabited mountainous areas of Xieng Khouang province. An increasing number of the Hmong youth began to move from their traditional school of nature to an academic system of education. In 1960, the number of students totaled 1,500 in 20 village schools. In 1969, there were 10,000 students distributed in seven elementary school units and more than 100 village schools overseen by 450 teachers, of whom the majority was Hmong. About 50% of Hmong children of school age attended these village schools, established in the south of Plain of Jars in Xieng Khouang province, in October 1969. Progressively, the elementary education extended to other Hmong villages in other provinces in North Laos, where the schooling rate among the Hmong children had remained generally very low, close to zero.

In 1971, Hmong educational progress was evidenced by the presence of 340 Hmong students at the high school level in France, the United States, Canada and Australia. The number of Hmong students continued to increase until the takeover of Laos by the Pathet Lao in 1975. Once in school, the students began to learn how to deal with the Lao alphabet and the Lao language, required for their elementary education. It generally took them two or three years before they were able to write and speak correctly their second language. Then they studied mathematics, social sciences, ethical behavior and French; the latter was absolutely necessary to enter high school, which was conducted almost entirely in French and generally offered in the cities, far away from Hmong villages.

**Implications for Educators:**

When hiring bilingual aides, one should keep in mind this background. If the aides had up to three years of school in Laos, then they probably can read and write Lao. Aides who are required to translate for the sciences, government, history or higher level math would need to have had 4-6 years, or more, of school. Even with that background, translating without adequate dictionaries will be difficult. Young adults probably had neither Lao schooling nor sufficient American education to allow them to translate for junior high or senior high classes. A better alternative is to find an older adult who had more than three years of Lao schooling but whose English may not be as clearly spoken as younger Hmong. The primary purpose of bilingual aides is to re-teach concepts in the primary language.

Only a very small number of Hmong children were able to attend schools recognized and supported by the Royal Lao government. Reasons for this were manifold and various. A major cause of low attendance of Hmong children in schools was that along with Buddhist schools, these schools were also located
far away, meaning the Hmong family would have had to be able to pay for room and board for each student. Secondarily, most Hmong families supported themselves by subsistence farming. In such an economy the family could not easily spare the child’s labor. Another reason why relatively small numbers of Hmong students succeeded in passing through the formal education system was that it was difficult for Hmong children to compete with the predominantly Lao students and overcome the language and cultural barriers. Hmong students had to be extremely patient and persevering to pass and to excel in the Lao and French schools. Only the wealthier Hmong families could afford to send their children to lowland schools and usually for only three or four years.

**Implication for Educators**

Hmong have been a minority group throughout history, and many of the proverbs and adages teach how to get along successfully with the majority group, while maintaining Hmong independence and identity.

During the decade prior to 1975, a number of private schools not officially recognized by the government appeared and offered curricula taught in Lao, French, English, and Chinese. Some of the better-educated Hmong adults now in the U.S. attended Catholic Schools run by French missionaries. Young men would attend schools such as these in hope of being prepared to take civil service or military entrance exams. However, again, only the wealthy could afford to educate their children in this way.

During the period of American involvement in Laos, General Vang Pao assigned some of the officers to become teachers. He would send them out to Hmong villages, and there they would set up a little hut and call it a school. It was not mandatory, but, if a family wanted to and could afford to, they could send their children there. These were not accredited schools, nor were they voluntary activities, because a soldier could get more pay by becoming a teacher. These schools were taught in Lao, even though the teachers were Hmong.

In Laos, prior to 1975, graduates of the nationally recognized schooling system were assured civil service jobs by the government. The level of the job and the pay scale were dependent upon which certificate or diploma had been achieved. Thus, those with tenth grade diplomas received higher pay than those with sixth grade certificates, and those with high school diplomas received even more. No matter what level of work, the Hmong traditionally regarded any government employee as having very high social status.

Little is known about changes in the educational system in Laos under the Communist government after 1975. It is reported that the system of grade levels has changed. First through sixth grades remain the same, followed by a secondary sequence of seventh through tenth grades. There is a strong
emphasis on technical schooling. The eleventh to thirteenth grades have been eliminated.

THE HMONG IN LAOS WERE DIVIDED INTO 19 CLANS:

1. TSAB/TSAB
2. TSHEEJ
3. TSWB
4. FAJ/FAAJ
5. HAM/HAAM
6. HAWJ
7. KHAM/KHAAB
8. KOO
9. KWM
10. LIS
11. LAUJ
12. MUAS
13. PHAB/PHAAB
14. TAJ/TAAJ
15. THOJ
16. VAJ/VAAJ
17. VWJ
18. XYOOJ
19. YAJ/YAAJ

1. CHANG
2. CHENG
3. CHU or CHUE
4. FANG
5. HANG
6. HER, HERR, or HEU
7. KHANG or KHA
8. KONG
9. KUE
10. LEE or LY
11. LO, LOR, or LAO
12. MOUA
13. PHANG or PHA
14. TANG or TA
15. THAO or THOR
16. VANG, VA, or WANG
17. VUE
18. XIONG or SONG
19. YANG or YA
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- The clans that have the most members are: Vang, Lee, Yang, and Xiong.
- The second: Her, Lor, Moua, and Vue.
- The third: Kong, Kue, Hang, and Phang
- The fourth and fewest: Chue, Cheng, Chang, Fang, Khang, and Tang
  (these are only assumptions based on the more socialized Hmong in America)

Common Clans found in Minnesota are:
- Hang, Her, Kha/Khang, Lee/Ly, Moua, Thao/Thor, Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang

Hopefully this will help to further explain why the Hmong always collectively live their lives just so everyone could depend on each other.
Appendix 5L

Vietnamese Families and Early Childhood Education

A. Attitudes-The attitude is patrilineal due to the Chinese influence. Children with special needs are accepted because of a belief in Karma related to cause and effect. There may be a bad stigma inside and outside of home that has caused it. Parents are shamed or faulted due to previous life’s actions. In Vietnam they’re kept at home.

B. Environment- Children are precious families are limited to two children. Children are age conscious; the younger should respect the older. Teasing is common. Interaction with adults is to be deferential to adults, not make eye contact and fold arms in front to show respect.

C. Food/Diet-Rice is the main staple along with leafy vegetables. Proteins/meats are consumed moderately or sparingly—not the main dish and little or no dairy products.

D. Education- It is very important in life as a means for social mobility. Teachers are considered as parents outside of the home and are respected and honored by families. Children learn by rote, three year olds know the alphabet. Corporal punishment is accepted and common.

E. Family- Routines are an important part of daily life. Parents buy educational materials for their children from preschool on through college. Obedience is more important than grades. Extended family also raise the children. Faith and values may be tied to ancestral worship, animist, Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant. Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and others.
Latino Families and Early Childhood Education

A. Attitudes-Nuclear and extended family is valued. Cohesion is valued as well as respect for tradition and traditional family and social roles. The father is generally the authority figure and may be the breadwinner. The woman cares for the family. This is changing as more women are employed outside of the home.

B. There is a flexible sense of time.

C. Environment- Health Care- Some traditional folk medical practices may be used along with professional care from clinics. Many families do not have health insurance.

D. Education-children are encouraged to be independent learners through observation. Teachers are highly regarded and educational decisions are the school's job. The importance of being educated especially in social skills is stressed. Girls may not be encouraged to continue their education and pursue a career.

E. Family Routines- hospitality is whole–hearted (mi casa es su casa). Religion may be part of the family culture. Discipline ranges from scolding, issuing a time out and removing privileges to physical discipline measures. Food and meals are a time for family and extended family to come together. Recipes for traditional foods are passed down.

F. Values-families may be more indulgent and permissive with young children and may not push them to achieve in the same way Anglos do or encourage their children to become independent from the family. More emphasis is placed on being interdependent than being independent. Social behavior development may be stressed before general behavior development. Children are taught to be respectful to and care for elders or extended family. Values are passed down through families.
Working with Recent Immigrants from Russia:  
Some Observations

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February 2002

DURING THE 1990s, I took a number of American groups to Russia to work with their counterparts in parent associations, pedagogical universities, agencies, city governments, and the Ministry of Education. When first interacting with people in Russia, it is easy to imagine that they are just about like people in the United States. In some ways this is true; in other ways, it is not. Over time, I have developed some impressions about the differences. I have discussed these with friends in Russia who have verified these perceptions and have also helped me to describe them more accurately. Therefore, one purpose of this paper is intended to share some observations that might be helpful to Americans who welcome Russian immigrants into their schools and communities, and would want to make them feel at home. This information is offered with some caveats.

Although part of this paper compares and contrasts Americans and Russians, it is obvious that neither all Americans nor all Russians are alike. While many Russians and many Americans may generally be characterized in some ways, there are also, of course, individual differences. This paper is intended only to point out some things that might help Americans to relate to new immigrants from Russia. My comparisons describe perceived differences in our cultures, not superiorities or inferiorities. You should test the validity of these ideas to see whether any of them will help you to communicate more effectively with students and parents who are new to the United States.

I have great admiration and fondness for the hundreds of people I know in Russia. I hold these friends in great respect for their intelligence, their resourcefulness, and the very impressive progress they are accomplishing. Moreover, I have found Russians to be tremendously interesting, humorous, generous, and altogether enjoyable companions. Some sections of this paper describe aspects of earlier and contemporary history that have shaped their views and their endurance.

History and Geography To Think About

Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians are Slavic peoples who share common cultures. To some extent, the thoughts in this paper may, therefore, apply to people from Ukraine and Belarus, although I have only passed through these
countries at train stations and cannot say. Russians also have Slavic kinships with people in several Eastern European countries.

European Russia extends from the Ural Mountains westward and covers a huge area that includes Moscow, Saint Petersburg (formerly Leningrad), Ekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk), Volgograd (Stalingrad), Nizhny Novgorod (Gorki), Voronezh, Rostov, and other cities, villages and collective farms that were ravaged in World War II. Along with the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), this area has historically been a geographic transition area between East and West. East of the Urals lies the even more huge area of Siberia and a much more Asiatic culture. The confluence of these Asiatic-European influences has been significant in shaping Russian culture and thought.

The western part of Russia has been assaulted and overrun again and again throughout history by invaders from the West, from the East, and from the south (the Huns, Byzantium, Turkey, Japan, Germany, and others). The significant influence of the 20th century has been Soviet domination, including reigns of terror in the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s; a short-lived “thaw” under Kruchshev in the mid to late 1950s; repression from the 1960s until well into the 1980s; and isolation from the outside world from 1918 until nearly 1990. From the October 1917 revolution until the end of World War II, it has been estimated that at least 40 million Russians perished, including 27 million killed in the war and the rest executed or dead in the prison camps of the Gulag Archipelago (as described in books by Alexander Solzhyznitzen). Every family I have ever met in Russia has had one or more of these things in its history. Although now young children do not have this experience, it has impinged on many of their family members. Both the Soviet system and the empires of the Czars were hierarchical in the extreme, and people have long been accustomed to depending on (and fearing) the State. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was followed by corruption, instability, and economic fluctuations, which the current administration is making efforts to correct. A middle class has been emerging, but much of today's Russian population is composed of a few wealthy people and a majority who are economically disadvantaged.

**Who Are the Russians?**

The first step should be to determine who is actually Russian in your community and who is not. Some school districts are identifying immigrants from all over the former USSR as Russians because they are speaking the Russian language when they arrive. In reality, these immigrants may come from Kazakhstan, Georgia, Armenia, and many other places in the former USSR. But they will usually be speaking Russian, because the Soviets did not allow other languages, and schools in newly independent countries have only recently begun to teach in the native language. When school districts classify immigrants only on the basis of language, this can lead to misunderstandings about immigrants’ true culture and values.
Some Russian speakers come from countries with cultural and religious roots that are not at all the same as those of Russians. Most Russians are of the Russian Orthodox faith (the Eastern branch of Catholicism), a few belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and some are of the Jewish faith. All of these have long been assimilated within Russian culture. People from some of the other former USSR countries, however, are of the Muslim faith and culture. Moreover, people in some of these countries may resent Russia, because of the Soviet oppression, because whole communities of Russians were sent to work and govern in these locations, and because of historic conflicts that endure today. You can imagine that an immigrant from Chechnya would not wish to be called a Russian, even though that person might be a Russian speaker.

Manners and Friendly Customs

Despite their isolation of 70 years, Russians have become surprisingly well informed about the rest of the world in recent years. According to a former British ambassador, Russians have had an "obsession" with the United States, far beyond their interest in other countries. U.S. cable and network programming are now available in Russia, and major chunks of our culture and technology have moved into Russia fast.

On nearly any holiday, I receive faxes or cards or emails from friends in Russia, with good wishes. This shows not only awareness of our holidays, but manners and sensitivity; take heed. When guests are arriving, Russians bring them flowers. When visiting a Russian home or school or business, you will always be given refreshments, and sometimes a complete meal or party, arranged exquisitely. Therefore, people who are welcoming Russian parents to meetings at school would be wise to put coffee or tea and cookies on the table, give mother a few flowers on her first visit, and inquire about the health and progress of the family during first and future contacts.

Russians are adaptable, having had to adapt throughout ancient and recent history to more situations that most people could imagine. They can be expected to acculturate rapidly. Nonetheless, you might be interested in showing sensitivity and courtesy by using a few of their customs, such as the following.

*The way names are expressed shows the level of respect or intimacy. There are always three names. The first is the given name (e.g., Alexander, Natalie). The middle name is the father's first name, with a masculine ("ovich") or feminine ending ("a" or "ova" or "ovna"); if the father's first name is Ivan, for example, the children's names would be Alexander Ivanovich or Natalie Ivanovna. A person's last name is the father's or husband's last name, with a feminine ending for women: Alexander Ivanovich Oserov or Natalie Ivanovna Oserova. If you wish to show respect to Alexander or Natalie as recognition of their professional status or as an elder, you would use both the first and middle names when addressing
them (whereas Americans would show respect by using Mr. or Dr. with the last name). This would be a good thing to do in recognizing the contribution of parents at school meetings. "Alexander Ivanovich, please tell me about your son's achievement in Russia" is the way it would be done in Russia to show respect. If you wish to express friendly and equal terms, use the first name only. If you are really close to a Russian, you might someday begin to use the diminutive or nickname that the family uses: Alexander = Sasha; Natalie = Natasha.

In giving a few flowers as a welcome or for a happy occasion, give an uneven number of flowers (3, 5, 7). For a sad occasion, give an even number of flowers (2, 4, 6). This should never be reversed; superstition is not uncommon.

Forgiveness for misunderstanding is there if you just ask for it. In Russia, if you make a mistake, Russians are inclined to tell you about it. If it was your mistake (or even if it wasn't), just say "Please forgive me" (using the word "forgive," rather than "sorry"). This is better than to argue or become defensive. The request for forgiveness is what is wanted.

**Russian and American Cognitive Styles**

**Associative thinking.** Americans seem to be generally more linear in their thinking than are Russians. Russian people tend to be more associative in their thinking, so that they do not always move cognitively in a straight line from beginning to end, from concept to result or decision. Russians may engage in discussion from more angles, with more complementary and reflective material, than is common in American professional or business discussions. This is very interesting and is a learning experience for both sides.

**Monologues and dialogues.** In a one-to-one or small group discussion in the United States, someone may present some information while we inject our views and questions in a give-and-take manner while the presentation of the topic is in progress. In my experience, however, a Russian in such a situation will expect to speak without interruption until the conclusion of his/her presentation of information, and may be annoyed by interruptions. In the case of parents who are new immigrants, they may prepare for a meeting at school and take it quite seriously. My suggestion is to allow them to hold forth uninterrupted while they deliver their information so that can they convey it as a whole, not in fragments. Instead of interrupting to clarify, add, and explain, it is better to make notes of these points and bring them up when parents have completed their own presentation.

**Emotion and science.** Russians tend to be emotionally intense and to express their feelings more openly than Americans do. Their responses will be heavily influenced by their feelings about a person or idea. When we present ourselves as very businesslike, can-do, directive, and non-affective, I have heard Russians
remark, "That one is too American for me." The best advice I have is: show your heart. All else being equal, school personnel should be selected to work initially with Russians on the strength of that quality. It will definitely make a difference. The Russians I know are easy to be with, entertaining, great fun. Being relaxed and expressive with them is good. A sense of humor is good. Being yourself as a real human being is good.

Co-existing with the emotional dimension is an orientation toward the scientific. Russians like to know the 'scientific' basis for an idea or a method -- the "why" as to the "what." This may be an artifact of the heavy "scientific" emphasis on everything during the Soviet regime. In working with parents on educational planning for their children, it is useful to explain how the system works, the rationale for the plans, why the placement or methods can be expected to benefit the child, what they should expect of their child in schoolwork and progress, and the basis for these recommendations.

Attention to detail. Much in Russia is characterized by great detail, even embellishment. You see this in the art, the architecture, and the literature. You see it in the lovely way that tables are laid for a party. You see it in the sensitive and personalized gestures that occur in human interactions. In working groups where charts are developed, you will see complex and detailed visual depictions of plans that are made or the system that is described. It has been explained to me that this attention to detail comes partly from Russian perfectionism; greater detail may add to the greater perfection of a thing.

Attention to detail takes a lot of time. Whereas I shop for Russian souvenir gifts in a typically American way (just buy 10 lacquer pins quickly in one swoop), a Russian would take time to think about which pin Nadya would like best, which would look best on Vera's (Verushka's) blue dress, and other details. Besides thinking a lot about the recipient of a gift, a Russian would also examine the goods quite carefully. They are extremely critical consumers, because for so many years the domestic merchandise has been of such poor quality (and more recent imported merchandise is beyond the means of many). The quality and durability of things is another detail to which they give attention.

Process and product. In the United States, we may set forth a plan, modify it until everyone around the table has agreed to it, and walk away with an inferior version of the plan but a sense of accomplishment because everyone has been accommodated in the process. This kind of thing does not happen much in Russia. In the longstanding rigid, hierarchical, centralized command system of Russia, people did not have opportunities for decision-making, much less cooperative decision-making in the democratic manner. The historic lack of experience in group process probably contributes to the Russian propensity to factionalize.
Russians seem to have two primary ways of participating in working groups: a) to perceive the situation as authoritative, where they will listen quietly to a presentation and then raise candid questions and good comments; or (b) engage in multiple, simultaneous arguments about the topic, often ending in some set of people winning in the final decision and the others losing. I have also observed that Russian groups will often bypass any group process that may be introduced and get directly into the end product that is desired. It would appear that the American aim is that everyone be satisfied in the end, whereas the Russian aim is that the product be perfect and the satisfaction of the participants is less important.

Educators should explain group processes used in meetings with recent Russian immigrant families and support them in participating in these processes. At the same time, we should observe and accept the ways that new immigrants may interact at meetings. Training in group dynamics should be part of any adult education program offered to Russian immigrants, and attention should be given to orienting older students to American-style group dynamics and processes.

Schools in Russia

The Soviets brought universal education to a country where most people outside of major cities were illiterate. In doing this, they prescribed an entire national curriculum and textbooks. Many subjects, notably science and history, were greatly politicized. As one official said to me, "We thought we were studying geography, but we were really studying communism."

All of this began to change in early 1990s. New leadership in the Ministry of Education began genuine change in education. A massive World Bank project focuses on developing new curricula and performance standards, and on the development of textbooks that incorporate curricula and standards. At the same time, there is an effort to decentralize education, to give a great deal of autonomy to local and provincial school districts, and to encourage creativity and innovation in the schools.

These changes are very difficult for teachers who were trained and socialized to follow the former government's prescriptions on what and how to teach and when to teach it. Even as late as the 1980s, teachers faced serious punishment if they deviated from the national curriculum, procedures, sequence, and scheduling of lessons. A major challenge today is to encourage these teachers to break out of that psychological confinement, to try new ideas, and to improve their practice. Steps are also occurring to change teacher education programs. Many students immigrating from Russia will have experienced this rigidly controlled kind of public education. On the other hand, they will also be familiar with American teenage culture as portrayed in movies and television.
The arts are quite important to most adult Russians, and have been always emphasized in education and the culture. Russians want their children to appreciate the arts and to engage in music, dance, literary or visual arts to a high level of performance. Parents are interested in their children's ability "to make a thing," to turn out a fine product.

**Environment and Health Care**

Over many years, natural and human resources in the former USSR were exploited and sometimes exhausted. This has brought about extensive ruin and infrastructure breakdown, and there was little consideration for human needs or pleasures. So much that we take for granted has only recently become available for the first time to people in these countries, but often at a prohibitive cost.

The level of environmental toxins and pollution is high. The Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and most of the waterways are seriously polluted, some with radiation, and it is unsafe to drink the water anywhere outside of Moscow. The Aral Sea has disappeared as a result of faulty irrigation operations. Air pollution is at dangerous levels in many locations, and has worsened in the 1990s because automobile production has increased and more people own cars (as opposed to the long waiting lists of the past). The sequallae of the Chernobyl nuclear accident affect a great deal of Belarus, some of Ukraine, and parts of southern Russia. Belarus alone has reported that 800,000 children have been exposed to the Chernobyl radiation. Around the 87 "secret cities" of Soviet Russia (where chemical and biological weapons were made, nuclear tests were conducted, and toxic wastes were dumped), it is believed that the incidence of congenital birth defects may be elevated by 30 to 40 percent above what could be expected under normal conditions. In some heavily industrialized areas, the air pollution is so heavy that school children are given oxygen during the day.

Except for the decrepit cottages on former communal farms in the countryside and mansions now being built by the newly rich, virtually everyone in Russia lives in nearly identical decaying high-rises, with very similar Soviet-issue furniture, in nearly identical buildings that show decay and lack of public maintenance. There is a housing shortage. People may wait for years to get their own apartments; several generations often live together in one small flat; and communal apartments continue to be prevalent. Even couples who have divorced may continue living together because there is nowhere else to go. There are many homeless people (particularly street children who have drifted away from poor homes and orphanages) and tent cities.

The USSR's socialized system of medical care lagged behind that of advanced countries by about 40 years. This situation has been exacerbated in recent years by the flight of professionals in health, medicine, social sciences, and higher education to other countries and into private business ventures in Russia, because of the very low professional salaries. Although private medical practice
and private hospital care are slowly emerging, the cost is out of reach to most of the population, which must rely on public services. Because medical care was formerly administered by the government of the USSR, there has been no health insurance although in 1996 Saint Petersburg became the first pilot site for health coverage under a model that appears similar to an HMO.

Sanitary conditions surrounding medical care are often substandard. Many parents no longer have their children immunized because they fear unsafe vaccines or needles. Many hospitals in rural areas have no sewer connections and even more have no hot water. Many drugs and much medical equipment commonly used in the United States and elsewhere are still not widely available in Russia. In the USSR, dentists did not use novocaine when drilling teeth, and so many people did not get their teeth drilled. You will see highly educated people who have missing teeth, and gold teeth are not uncommon.

An elevated proportion of infants are born with health problems or disabilities, and a high percentage of them develop health problems during the early years of life. There is also an elevated proportion of individuals who have disabilities because of medical malpractice, and malpractice laws are only now being developed. The incidence of HIV and AIDS has expanded rapidly since the fall of the USSR, and is currently at the level of AIDS in Africa, which is the highest in the world. The life expectancy of Russians is one of the lowest in the world.

**Education for Students with Disabilities**

The diagnosis of disabilities in Russia and other former USSR countries has been problematic. In 1936, Josef Stalin prohibited psychological testing, and this prohibition endured until the 1990s. In the interim, psychologists continued to use the tasks of intelligence tests and other assessments, but could not use the scoring system, and so diagnosis and assessment devolved into an instinctive, rather than a scientific, process. The identification of disabilities in children was in the hands of local Soviet commissions, who lacked the instruments and often the expertise for a task that was also politicized. These commissions were encouraged to delay as long as possible in diagnosing a disability so that the State could delay making the required compensatory ("pension") payments to families of such children. The delay of identification and intervention often exacerbated disabilities.

The Soviet system separated individuals with disabilities from society, as if they did not exist. Children with disabilities were generally sent to large categorical boarding schools (internati), which were centralized throughout the USSR. While the Ministry of Education has administered boarding institutions for children and youth with mild and moderate disabilities, the Ministry of Social Protection has administered institutions for children with severe retardation and other very severe disabilities, whose education has been minimal. The USSR imposed uniform curriculum and instruction on the boarding institutions, just as it did for
the mass general schools. Although their quality varies, it is important to acknowledge that some of the boarding schools have offered good instruction. For example, the former USSR's one boarding school for students who are deaf-blind, south of Moscow (in formerly Zagorsk), is outstanding and produces very capable graduates.

In a society that is basically very child-oriented and family-oriented, a system of inducements and intimidations led parents to relinquish or reject their disabled children. The onus placed on parents who produce children with disabilities remains great. Public attitudes toward, and misinformation about, disabilities continues to be a problem. Because individuals with disabilities were hidden from society, nothing was done to provide public accessibility. Some modifications are now being made within an infrastructure where much else is being upgraded, repaired, or replaced.

Other progress is occurring. During the 1990’s, work has been in progress to develop new procedures for diagnosing disabilities and assessing the strengths and needs of children with disabilities (based on the highly respected work of Vygotsky in the early 1930’s). The World Bank project on curricula and textbooks includes the task of developing standards for special education. In the early 1990’s, the Ministry of Education supported pilot schools for including students with disabilities and institutionalized orphans at 26 sites across Russia, and there are continuing initiatives to reorganize teacher preparation. A new law for education of students with disabilities, enacted in late 1995, has many similarities to the Individuals with disabilities Education Act and was developed through consultation and review of similar laws in many countries (but national laws are not carried out uniformly across the broad expanse of Russia’s provinces). Active parent associations in major cities are developing alternative community schools and services for children with disabilities, some governments are supporting inclusive education, and more children with disabilities in these locations are living at home with their families. These are among many great advances on many fronts within a country that has been experiencing a turbulent transition and the instability that accompanies dramatic changes of such historic dimensions.

**Conclusion**

When I first went to Russia, I had the sensation of having seen certain things before. After a time, I realized that I had seen these things in the well illustrated fairy tale books of my childhood… haunting towers and ancient monasteries far away in the mist; ornate palaces, tiny huts, in the countryside in disrepair but painted in every color, with gingerbread trim; the sense of mystery in the overcast sky. In these ways, Russia remains the land of the Baba Yaga. At the Bolshoi Theatre performance of the opera Faust, all of this was captured in the scenery, including the gray sky with demons peering through the threatening clouds. The demons in the sky are the sense of danger that prevails when one is never sure
what might happen tomorrow. This feeling of apprehension has perhaps always been part of Russian consciousness.

This history, these conditions and uncertainty, and the new freedom to leave the country are the reasons that some districts in the United States have been receiving sizable Russian immigrant populations. Their life experiences have been markedly different from our own. These families carry the difficult legacy of the Soviet era, the complex legacy of the rich Russian culture. We can know them and understand them if we try, and we can also learn from them. The Russians are a unique people, most worthy of the opportunities that America offers, and certain to enrich our own schools and society.
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Resources for Somali Patients

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PART 1

Resources for Professionals Serving Somali Clients

Introduction

This guide will provide you with some information about the culture and traditions of your clients. Please keep in mind that not all individuals within Somali culture are the same. To learn about your clients' specific beliefs, practices, and customs, it is important to talk with them. Showing respect and openness towards your clients' traditions can help you build better relationships with them and provide more effective services for them (“Somalians, 2009).

Where is Somalia?

Somalia is located in Eastern Africa. It wraps around the Horn of Africa. The capital and largest city of Somalia is Mogadishu.


Somali Culture

History and Politics: Since 1991, with the collapse of the Siad Barre government, various militias have been fighting one another in an attempt to control the country. There has been no successful government and the infrastructure has deteriorated. Many civilians have endured rampant violence. Food supplies have been controlled for political gain resulting in famine, starvation, and death. From 1992-1994, US and UN forces tried to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis. The country remains devastated by inter-clan disputes (Lewis, 2008).

Somali refugees have been immigrating to the United States to escape the widespread hunger, rape and death. Many fled to neighboring countries where they stayed in large refugee camps. Resettlement programs have helped families move to the United States and parts of Europe. In the United

Nationality: People from Somalia are referred to as Somali(s) (“Africa: Somalia, 2009).”

Religion: >99% of the population identifies as Sunni Muslims, and most Somalis demonstrate a strong faith.

Languages: The official language spoken is Somali, with two dialects: Somali and Barawe. It is fairly common for Somalis to speak more than one language such as Arabic and Italian (“Africa: Somalia, 2009, Lewis, 2008; “Somalians,” 2009).

Education: In America, Somalis participate in Western-style primary education, and typically attend secondary and post-graduate schools. Many children are additionally educated in Islamic studies at home or at religious schools. (Lewis, 2008; “Somalians,” 2009).

Literacy: Somalis use alphabetic characters (those used in the English language) in their written system. In the total population, 37.8% of those aged 15 and over are literate, with the rates almost twice as high for men than for women (“Africa: Somalia, 2009).

Time Orientation: Somalis do not view being on time in the same way that Westerners do. They do not view tardiness as a sign of disrespect, and may therefore miss specific appointment times. They may give vague estimated times of arrival, such as “this afternoon,” leaving a large timeframe open (Lewis, 2008; “Somalians,” 2009).

Food and Diet: Religious Somalis are forbidden to consume pork products and alcohol. Even non-religious Somalis will typically adhere to the dietary restrictions on pork consumption. Breastfeeding is the most common form of nutrition for children under 2 years of age (Lewis, 2008; “Somalians,” 2009).

Family and Relationships

Gender Roles and Family Dynamics: Somali men and women fulfill different roles in Somali culture. Men serve as the head of the household, and women are included in decision-making for important decisions (“Somalians,” 2009). It is culturally unacceptable for a man to be perceived as not being in charge of his home (Lewis, 2008). Men are traditionally the bread-winners, and women typically take care of the home, children, and finances (“Somalians,” 2009). However, many women now work outside of the home, and
may experience difficulties balancing homemaking and childcare responsibilities in addition to outside work. Women carry their own surname even after marriage (Lewis, 2008).

Family is viewed as extremely important in Somali culture, with the family seen as more important than the individual. Money will often be pooled in times of sickness or marriage. Somalis live with their parents until they get married (Lewis, 2008). Elderly family members are rarely sent to nursing homes (“Somalians,” 2009).

When in the United States, it is considered disrespectful to refer to “clans” or “tribes”, as it is a very sensitive issue. Many view them as reinforcing prejudices produced by the civil war and some may deny their existence. Many Somalis in the United States aim to unite and ignore tribal lines (Lewis, 2008).

**Showing Respect:** Somalis can be opinionated but will often reconsider their views if presented with adequate evidence to the contrary (“Somalians,” 2009).

**Gestures and Customs:** When speaking with Somalis, it is considered polite to maintain eye contact and smile. It is considered impolite to rush when speaking or gesture to someone with the index finger. Shaking hands with members of the opposite sex should be avoided, as should unnecessary physical contact (“Somalians,” 2009).

**Bereavement and Grief:** Somalis accept death as God’s will and excessive emotion may at times be interpreted as interfering with God’s will. Friends and family members may receive comfort from passages in the Qur’an. (Lewis, 2008).

**Health and Wellness**

**Health Beliefs:** Somalis believe that poor health and illness are acts of God (Allah). Consequently, they do not typically practice preventative care. Chronic diseases are often undetected and untreated. Somalis will usually avoid visiting health care providers unless they are very sick or required to visit. Somalis typically associate nurses, doctors, and hospitals with poor care (“Somalians,” 2009). The idea of using the medical system to keep people healthy is unfamiliar to Somalis (Lewis, 2008). High blood pressure and diabetes are common health problems in this population (“Somalians,” 2009). Before going to doctors, patients often self-diagnose or consult a pharmacist or traditional healer first for advice and treatment. Most doctors are male. Traditionally, Somali patients ask few questions and will provide short answers. Spirituality is an important consideration when making decisions regarding health care.
Mental health: Mental health care also is a concept new to many Somalis. Traditionally, mental illness is believed to be caused by spirit possession or as a punishment from God. Spiritual healing is required for mental illness. As with many other refugees, depression and anxiety are common to many Somali in the U.S. Many have lost family members or are separated from them. An estimated 30 percent of all Somali refugees have been victims of torture (“Culture Matters", 2007). Additionally, as these individuals are refugees, further counseling should be provided, addressing emotional pain and post-traumatic stress.

Delivery of Bad News: It is important to deliver bad news in a compassionate way. In Somalia, no confidentiality laws exist, and rather than informing the patient of bad news, the family is informed instead. The family of a patient may feel distrustful of clinicians if they are not informed of their family member's prognosis. Somalis view it as important to tell the immediate family members of a poor prognosis so they can work together to comfort the patient. They may also prefer not to tell the patient in order to prevent him/her from becoming scared and losing hope (Lewis, 2008).

Life Support: Somalis may have differing opinions about life support. While it is viewed as important to make every attempt to preserve life, life support may also be viewed as interfering with God's will by extending life unnaturally. However, once life support has been put in place, it may be difficult for family members to opt to remove it, since this would also be interfering with God's will (Lewis, 2008).

References

Useful Terms to Know

Family
Abo          Father
Gabada       Girl/daughter
Hooyo        Mother
Wiil         Boy/son

Greetings
Salaamu alaykum   Typical Somali/Islamic greeting; translates to mean “peace be upon you”
### Religious terms/sayings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AlhamduliAllah</td>
<td>Praise be to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InshaAllah</td>
<td>God Willing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijabi/Garbasaar</td>
<td>Refers to a woman’s head covering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MashaAllah</td>
<td>It is as God has Willed it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QadrAllah</td>
<td>It is God’s Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SubhanAllah</td>
<td>Glory be to God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following are a list of words which maybe useful for assessment of a non-English speaking child. It is important to note that there are several words in the English language, which don’t exist in Somali, another important consideration for evaluation.

### Animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Somali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bird</td>
<td>Shimbir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>No Somali translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>Mukulaal/Yanyuur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Boolonboollo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Ey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Mallaay/Kalluun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giraffe</td>
<td>Geri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>Faras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion</td>
<td>Libaax*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig</td>
<td>Khaansiiir/Doofaar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger</td>
<td>Shabeel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zebra</td>
<td>Dameer-farow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Colors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Somali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Guduud/Casaan **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Madoow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Buluug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Baraawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>Grey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Cagaar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Oranji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>No Somali translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Berbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Cadaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Jaalle/Huruud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Prepositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>Somali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In</td>
<td>Gudahe gaali/Ku dex rid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out</td>
<td>Dibadda saar/ Ka bixi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On</td>
<td>Kor saar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off</td>
<td>Ka gaad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beside/next to</td>
<td>Agtiisa diig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In back of</td>
<td>Gadaal diig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In front of</td>
<td>Hortiisa diig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under</td>
<td>Hoos diig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shapes

Circle  Wareeg
Rectangle  No Somali Translation
Square  Afar-gees
Triangle  Saddex-gees

* /X/ represents a sound in the Somali language, which doesn't exist in English. It's often represented with /h/.
** /C/ represents a sound in Somali, not found in English. It's often replaced with /aa/.

Outreach tips

• Do not assume Somalis can read Somali or English. The Somali script was only introduced 30 years ago, and social upheaval severely disrupted education.
• Remember that some Somali patients maintain Islamic traditional norms about handshaking, limiting physical contact between the sexes etc.
• When possible, attempt to match female patients with female interpreters. This is especially important when performing physical exams (e.g., an oral mechanism exam).
• Educate yourself on Ramadan (Islamic month of fasting) and adapt your treatment sessions accordingly. For example, it may not be possible to use food when working with patients with dysphagia.
• Provide opportunities and a location for prayer (at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and in the evening). Do not interrupt prayer, as Somalis believe it is a time during which the divine is present.
• Keep in mind that many Somali refugees have experienced horrific events and may be experiencing posttraumatic stress. Many also may be stressed by financial constraints or overcrowded housing. Somalis have no word in their language for stress.
• It is important for clinicians to build trusting relationships with Somali clients. If possible, the same clinician should meet with a Somali client for each visit. Somali clients will feel most comfortable with same-sex therapists and interpreters (“Somalians,” 2009).
• Introduce oneself to all family members and identify who the family spokesperson(s) is/are.
• Ask what they know about their family member’s condition and what feelings they may have.
• Listen! This is the most important to understand where the family is coming from, and what their fears and worries are.
• Address the emotional aspects first, then the cognitive aspects of the family leader’s concerns with empathetic responses.
• Give a clinical update. If you need to request permission for a clinical procedure, give the rationale behind it.
• Realize that other factors may be at play, including a belief in God and possible denial of the condition, probably out of fear (Siegel, Chan, Willies-Jacobo, & Stein, 2009).

• There is a sense in the Somali community that there is no need to worry if a child is non-verbal, even if there are 3 or 4 years. There is a widespread belief that the child will catch up. It's very important to consider this when working with Somali children with speech/language delay. Clinicians should underscore the importance of speech/ language milestones and typical speech/ language development with parents.

• Standardized tests in English are not normed on individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The use of criterion referenced and dynamic assessments provide a better gauge of whether a patient has a language difference or disorder. Criterion-referenced measures use culturally appropriate developmental benchmarks. Dynamic Assessments, such as test-teach-retest, task/stimulus variability and graduated prompting strategies can determine how a patient learns a task and what level of assistance they need to perform correctly (Laing & Kamhi, 2003).

References

Diagnostic tests
There are presently no diagnostic tests for assessing Somali patients, with the exception of an Aphasia assessment (see below). Clinicians have made use of alternative means of assessment such as dynamic assessment, with the aid of Somali interpreters. Adaptations of common tests are starting to surface, especially from speech-language pathologists working in areas with large Somali populations. Here is an adapted version of the English Boehm Concepts prepared by special education staff in Minnesota.
### English word | Somali translation
---|---
Widest | Biggest
Between | Middle Through= Middle
Center | Middle
Beginning | Starting
Below | Under
Matches | Same
Medium sized | Middle
Above | Over
Pair | Two
Skip | Jump over
In order | (No word/phrase in Somali)
Least | Smallest amount

Listed below, are the aforementioned Aphasia assessments.

Resources for Somali Clients

Introduction

There are presently few research materials available related to assessment, diagnosis or treatment of communication disorders in Somali adults. One exception is Michel Paradis's Bilingual Aphasia Test (see above). In meeting Somali patients for the first time, it is really important to take the time to explain who were are, and what are roles are as Speech-Language Pathologists. Further, it’s important to take the time to really explain what the patient's diagnosis is, as there is a chance that this may have not been conveyed well by the diagnosing doctor. Not only did Speech Pathologists not exist in Somalia, many speech/language deficits and disorders were unknown in Somalia. Further, diagnoses such as Autism are completely foreign to Somalis, and as such many misconceptions exist. Really taking the time to explain to the families what these disorders are, and what you can do to help can go a ways to establish rapport with the family. Here are some terms which can be translated by your Interpreter department.

Terms to Know

What is a Speech-Language Pathologist?

A speech-language pathologist is a person who tests and gives treatment to people with speech, language, and swallowing disorders. Information about speech-language pathologists and the disorders they treat can be found at http://www.asha.org.

What is aphasia?

Aphasia is a disorder that results from damage to the parts of the brain that contain language. Aphasia causes problems with any or all of the following: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Some people with aphasia have trouble using words and sentences (expressive aphasia). Some have problems understanding others (receptive aphasia). Others with aphasia struggle with both using words and understanding (global aphasia). Aphasia can cause problems with spoken language (talking and understanding) and written language (reading and writing). Typically, reading and writing are more impaired than talking or understanding. Aphasia may be mild or severe. The severity of communication difficulties depends on the amount and location of the damage to the brain.

What are swallowing disorders (dysphagia)?

Swallowing disorders can be caused by medical conditions or physical damage. They can impact nutrition and cause lung infections. Swallowing can be affected at many levels, from the mouth to the stomach. People with swallowing disorders may have difficulty chewing, may choke and cough during meals, may have pain during swallowing, pressure in the throat, or may have lung problems. Make sure the person is
upright before and after eating. Be sure that they have swallowed before they take another bite. Have
them tuck their chin when swallowing to protect their airway. See a speech-language pathologist to take
images of the swallow to find out what can be done to help.

What are motor speech disorders (dysarthria)?

**Dysarthria** is a **motor speech disorder**. The muscles of the mouth, face, and respiratory system may
become weak, move slowly, or not move at all after a stroke or other brain injury. The type and severity of
dysarthria depend on which area of the nervous system is affected. A person with dysarthria may
experience any of the following symptoms, depending on the extent and location of damage to the nervous
system:

- “Slurred” or “mumbled” speech; may also sound soft
- Slow or rapid rate of speech
- Limited tongue, lip, and jaw movement often causing drooling or difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Abnormal intonation (rhythm) when speaking
- Changes in vocal quality (nasal, stuffy, hoarse, breathy)

References


Medical Resources for Somali adults


This website contains documents related to health and preventative care that have been translated into
Somali. Articles of interest to speech pathologists include: Alzheimer's Disease, an Appointment
Reminder, Bottle Feeding your Baby, Breastfeeding, a Communication Sheet, CT Scan, Dry Mouth with
Cancer Treatment, Feeling Sad, Health Needs Assessment Flip Chart, Hearing Loss, Hearing Test for your
Baby, How to Quit Smoking, Middle Ear Infection, Modified Barium Swallow, Mouth Care with Cancer
Treatment, Parkinson's Disease, Pneumonia, Stroke, Swallowing Problems, Types of Brain Injury and
Dementia.
The Minnesota International Health Volunteers publishes a pamphlet for healthcare providers that discusses Concepts in Culturally Competent Health Care, Background on the Somali Community and the Somali Community in Minnesota, Greetings and Gestures, and other Resources as well as specific information about reproductive health. They also provide a collection of research reports about care for Somali patients, peer-reviewed articles about care for Somali patients, and health education videos.

http://ethnomed.org/
This website contains a profile of Somalia and Somali culture that discusses topics including the country of origin, the language, interpersonal relationships, marriage, family, and kinship, reproduction, infancy, childhood, and socialization, adolescence, adulthood, and old age, nutrition and food, drinks, drugs, and indulgences, religious beliefs and practices, death and end of life, bereavement and grief, traditional medical practices, experience with Western medicine, community structure, common acculturation issues, and references. The site also contains patient education materials, and articles about clinical topics such as Overfeeding of Somali Infants.

**Working with Somali children**

In the next few pages you will find examples of informational sheets on speech and language disorders which may be of use when working with Somali children. In particular, autism has unfortunately become a common disorder in Somali children in Minnesota. Again, this information is presented to give you an idea of information you want to get translated for Somali parents.

**Information for Somali Parents about childhood language disorders**

**What is IDEA?**

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): According to IDEA, every child has a right to free and appropriate education. This means that children who have disorders and disabilities that make it difficult to learn have the right to services that will make it possible to learn. IDEA, along with the No Child Left Behind Act, also ensures that children who do not speak English as their native language have the right to services that will help them to learn English as well as have opportunities to learn the same academic knowledge as English-speaking peers.

**References**


**What are reading disorders?**

People with reading disorders have average intelligence but have difficulty with the sounds, letters, speed, and understanding in reading. Children with reading problems usually show difficulty when giving the names and sounds of letters. Their difficulty with sounding out words affects school performance and vocabulary growth. People with reading disorders need structured, multisensory training for sounding out written words with speed and accuracy. See a reading specialist for formal testing and therapy.

**What is autism?**

Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by impaired social interaction, lack or delayed communication and restricted/repetitive behavior.

Xanuunka Autisimka Isbektiram (Autism Spectrum Disorders ama ASD)

Autisimku waa naafannimo wax u dhinta ilmaha kobaciisa iyo dabcigiisa iyo habka ay ula xiriiraan dadka iyo dunida ku hareersan.

Saddex meelood ayaa ugu badan meelaha ay dadka autismka qaba dhibaatooyinku ka qabsadaan. Saddexdaa meelood waxaa lagu magaabaa “dhimmanaanta saddex geeska ah”.

- Dhibaatada la xiriirta fahamka iyo adeegsiga luqadda lagu xiriiro.
- Dhibaatada la xiriirta dhexgalka bulshada iyo xiriirka dadweynaha.
- Dareenada ay ka mid yihiin codka, iftiinka ama taabashada oo dhiba.

**What are the symptoms of autism?**

Some of the symptoms of autism are: lack of eye contact, pre-occupation with certain subjects or objects, wanting things to be the same and insisting on routines, absence of delay of imaginary and social play, preferring to play alone, over or under sensitive to smell, touch and sound sensory.

**Diagnoses**

Autism can be educationally identified by education professionals. However, it is very important to get a medical diagnosis. Ask your child’s pediatrician to refer you to a specialist. As of today, no one knows what the cause or cure for Autism is. However, what all medical professionals advise is early intervention. The earlier a child is taken to appropriate therapy, the better their outcome and future.

- If your child is not talking ask his doctor to refer you to a speech therapist.
- If your child is not showing age appropriate self care skills, ask his doctor to refer you to an occupational therapist.
- If your child is having difficulty with eating, ask his doctor to refer him to a feeding therapist.
Bilingualism

What is it? Should I raise my children as bilinguals in the U.S.?

Bilingualism is the ability to speak and/or read and write in two or more languages. Some people learn both languages from birth or as young children while other people learn another language after they have mastered their first language. You may be worried that speaking Somali as the primary language at home might make it difficult for your child to learn English and have a thriving life in the United States. However, in general, research has shown that bilingualism does not have long-term negative effects on language development. Research has shown that there are in fact linguistic and cognitive benefits to being bilingual, such as a greater ability to think about language, and mentally juggle many different thoughts at once. By continuing to provide continuous, consistent, and rich exposure to Somali at home and in the community, while your child receives formal education in predominantly English-language classes in the U.S., you may in fact help your child reap the benefits of knowing more than one language.

Ways to support consistent, continuous, rich exposure of language in Somali at home as my child learns to read and write in English at school:

Text-only version (easy to read online)
http://cehd.umn.edu/ceed/publications/questionsaboutkids/readsomali.htm

Print-out version (in color and with pictures)

References

http://cehd.umn.edu/ceed/publications/questionsaboutkids/

Additional resources for parents of Somali children


This resource provides information about language milestones for children ages 0-3 in Somali.
This website contains information that is of specific interest to clinicians practicing in Washington State, such as translations of grade level expectations, graduation requirements. It has some documents that could be used by clinicians around the country, such as an informational poster about homeless children and youth, a notice about Special Education procedural safeguards, an internet safety brochure, information about foundations for early learning, and documents about parents’ and students’ rights.

This website contains information about school, special education and disabilities translated into Somali.

Each state has slightly different definitions and methods of carrying out the mandates outlined by IDEA. However, the following website has information about the special education process translated into Somali that will give you a general sense of what the process is like in your state. Specifically, the site has documents for parents about behavioral assessment, IEP meetings, school accommodations, assistive technology, Prior Written Notice, and more:
http://www.taalliance.org/publications/somali.asp

This website contains documents in Somali about Early Childhood Health and well-being, Kindergarten, English as a Second Language, and Privacy, among others.

This website contains Somali special formats for state assessments in Ohio.

This website contains translations of common terms in special education.

8. Educating Somali Children in Britain by Mohamed H. Kahin.
This book discusses topics such as the historical and political background of Somalia, the Somali community in the UK, Language, the educational needs of Somali children, and Somali girls in school.
This document contains information and guidance for schools about children of Somali heritage.

This website provides Somali parents tips on reading to their children and is translated into Somali.

Early intervention information provided to Somali parents by the Minnesota Public Schools, translated into Somali.

12. [http://statefed.mpls.k12.mn.us/MPSI.html](http://statefed.mpls.k12.mn.us/MPSI.html)

This screening tool was developed for use with children ages 3 years to 5 years, 11 months. Items address gross and fine motor, language, literacy, and perceptual development. The revised version also has a social-emotional subtest. Versions of the MPSI-R are available in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish and local norms for CLD children are provided based on samples from Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Saint Anthony, Cambridge, Fridley, North Branch, and Woodbury (Minnesota).


13. "On the Go" materials include 14 activities designed to be used outside the home: in the car, while walking, during bus rides, etc. The activities encourage early language and literacy development from birth through preschool. They are appropriate for children with disabilities as well as children who are developing typically. The above link contains a Somali translation of these materials.

The Somali Folktale Project

Goals of this project include using bilingual texts to promote literacy in both English and Somali, and developing readings skills and comprehension of basic concepts through bilingual support.

Resources about insurance

Why is health insurance important?

Health insurance helps people pay for medical care. If someone in your family becomes seriously ill, health insurance can help protect your family's money. Medical bills differ greatly from year to year, and having health insurance keeps you covered if costs of treatment are high. Studies have shown that people with health insurance get more consistent care and are more likely to get help when they need it.

How do you get it?

Usually, people get group health insurance from their jobs. The type of coverage depends on your job; some let you choose between different insurance packages while others only have one insurance plan. Some jobs also offer dental and vision along with medical care. A benefit to group insurance is that your boss often pays a part of your premium, which must be paid too keep you covered. It is important to compare the types of insurance offered in your job to you and your family's medical needs.

If your job does not have health insurance, or you are self-employed, you may buy individual insurance from a company. Unlike with group insurance, you must pay all fees personally to keep your insurance going. There are many different individual insurance plans. Compare your family's health needs to what each insurance policy covers for the price.

Which type of insurance is best for me?

This depends on your family's needs and the money you can spend. Make sure you consider the amount you have to pay monthly, as well as the "copays" for each doctor visit, what medical care the policy covers, what access you would have to doctors and hospitals, what emergency care you can get after-hours, and whether there are any limitations on the policy you select. Also, whether your insurance is group or individual, you should ask whether you would need approval from the company before having certain procedures and whether the insurance company requires you to send in claims.

Medicare, federally funded health care, is available through for elderly, disabled and blind humanitarian immigrants. Humanitarian immigrants include refugees; asylees; Cuban/Haitian entrants; Amerasians; trafficking victims; and those granted withholding of deportation or removal. Humanitarian immigrants are eligible for Medicare for the first nine years after immigration to the states. People who are in the process of becoming US citizens at the end of nine years may receive a third year of benefits.
Most people in America use managed care. These plans cover many different health services. People under managed care pay less when they see the few doctors that are part of their insurance plan. Forms and claims are not usually necessary under managed care. Every time you see a doctor or get a prescription you have to pay a “copay,” which is usually $10-$30. There are 3 main kinds of managed care.

Medicaid gives healthcare to people who are disabled or who don’t have much money. Each state has its own rules about who can qualify. If you can’t afford the care you need, you should apply for Medicaid whether or not you think you’d qualify. You can find more information at: http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicaidgeninfo.

The State Children’s Health Insurance Program is similar to Medicaid, but is meant for kids whose families have enough money to not qualify for Medicaid, but don’t have enough money for private insurance. Each state has its own rules about who can qualify. You can find more information at: http://www.insurekidsnow.gov.

Long term care insurance is for people who need help in daily activities such as dressing and bathing, or for those who have mental impairments. This care can be given at the person's home, the least expensive, or the person can be cared for at a nursing home or assisted living facility. This type of care tends to be expensive without help from insurance. The sooner long term care insurance is applied for, the less expensive it will be; however, the rates tend to rise over the years.

If you get a long term illness or injury and can’t work, disability insurance helps cover your income for needs including rent and groceries, but does not cover the cost of rehabilitation.

Insurance for refugees

Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) in Massachusetts (RMA) offers short-term health insurance to newly arrived refugees to Massachusetts who are not eligible for MassHealth Standard. Health insurance benefits are equal to MassHealth Standard. Refugees can get Refugee Medical Assistance during their first eight months in the U.S. as long as they meet the following requirements. You must have immigration documents that prove you are a refugee, asylee, Amerasian, Cuban/Haitian Entrant, or victim of a severe form of human trafficking. If you are a refugee but your children are not, your children may still be eligible for MRRP services as long as they live with you. Some benefits are available to refugees for only their first eight months in the U.S.; other benefits are available for a longer period of time.

What benefits will I get?

You will get health coverage that is the same as MassHealth Standard. This includes health care services from doctors, clinics, hospitals, pharmacies, and other medical providers. For details, see MassHealth Standard. Once you have been in the United States for eight months, you are no longer eligible for Refugee Medical Assistance. You will be notified 30 days before your coverage will end. Your case
manager will help you find other health coverage if you do not have other health insurance by that time. If you are getting Refugee Medical Assistance and your income goes above the limits for the program, you will get a four-month extension of coverage. The extension cannot go beyond your eight months of eligibility.

References/Resources
Questions and Answers about Health Insurance
Overview of the US Healthcare System

Information about Interpreters
You can ask to have an interpreter present during a medical appointment if you have difficulty understanding and speaking English. Even if you can understand and speak some English, you can choose to have an interpreter present so that you can use accurate information to make the best decisions about your health and your family's health. When possible, such as non-emergency scheduled appointments, let the hospital know ahead of time that you would like to have a Somali interpreter present at the meeting.
You can also ask to have an interpreter present during important school meetings such as Individual Education Plan meetings in order to make decisions regarding your child's education. Again, contact the school ahead of time so that arrangements can be made for an interpreter. A form may have to be filled out to request an interpreter in both medical and school settings.

References
  http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/health_equity/best_practices.doc
Parental and guardian right to an interpreter. Retrieved June 21, 2009
  http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a49/Take_Action/fact_sheets/FactSheet_AB1510_jrt.pdf

Future Research Needs
1. Adaptation of developmental norms for Somali children.
2. Development and adaptation of current standardized assessments for culturally and linguistically diverse clients, including Somali patients.
3. Aside from education about autism and education about preventative care and rehabilitation, information about the Somali community’s central needs related to communication disorders.
4. Identifying effective mediums to educate Somali patients about healthcare issues (e.g. newspapers, videos, mosques, flyers)
5. Identifying effective means to train clinicians who are competent to work with Somali patients.
Disability in the Qur’an: The Islamic Alternative to Defining, Viewing, and Relating to Disability

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this study is to seek a firsthand understanding of the Islamic position and attitude towards disability by examining the primary sources of Islamic teaching—the Qur’an and the life example of the Prophet Muhammad as preserved in his sayings and teachings (Hadith). We search the Qur’an for references to such terms as blind, mute, deaf, lame, weak, orphan, destitute/needy, and wayfarer. We attempt to understand the intent of these terms by examining the roots of the Arabic words and investigating their possible synonyms; cross-referencing the Qur’anic verses containing the same terms; and confirming the meaning with the Hadith. We conclude that the concept of disability, in the conventional sense, is not found in the Qur’an.

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The authors would like to thank Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf for his generous gift of time and expertise; Beth Ferri for the encouragement to start this work and her insightful feedback; Mohammed H. S. Al-Turaiqi for providing a wealth of resources; Edyth Stoughton and the reviewers for their kind words and for their thoughtful comments that helped improve the paper.

Journal of Religion, Disability & Health, Vol. 9(1) 2005
Available online at http://www.haworthpress.com/web/IRDH
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Digital Object Identifier: 10.1300/J095v9n01_02
Rather, the Qur'an concentrates on the notion of disadvantage that is created by society and imposed on those individuals who might not possess the social, economic, or physical attributes that people happen to value at a certain time and place. The Qur'an places the responsibility of rectifying this inequity on the shoulder of society by its constant exhortation to Muslims to recognize the plight of the disadvantaged and to improve their condition and status.

KEYWORDS. Disability, disadvantage, Qur'an, Hadith, Islam

INTRODUCTION

Islam, the third of the Abrahamic religions, is the faith of about 1.2 billion people in the world today (Rauf, 2003). They can be found spread over a large portion of the global map, from the Atlantic into China and from Southern Europe well into Africa, not to mention their relatively recent presence, mainly through immigration, in Western Europe, the Americas and Australia. In this paper, we explore the attitude and position of one of the major spiritual and thought systems in the world towards an issue of critical importance in this day and age, that of disability.

Because we seek a firsthand understanding of the Islamic attitude and position, we examine the original sources of Islamic teaching, which are the Qur'an and the life example of the Prophet Muhammad, as preserved in his sayings and teachings (Hadith). We also examine the stories of the companions and the contemporaries of the Prophet to seek an understanding of how people closest to the origin, both in time and place, comprehended and carried out the Islamic attitude towards people with disabilities.

The Qur'an

As in the case with Judaism and Christianity, Islam has as its source a divine revelation or scripture, the Qur'an. Qur'an, derived from the Arabic verb qara'a (meaning read or recite), is to be understood as the reading of excellence. The Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muham-
mad over the 23 years of his mission, starting in the year 610 AD and ending with his death in the year 632 AD (Asad, 1980).

To Muslims, stretched over 14 centuries, the Qur'an has always been God’s direct, personal and unadulterated address to mankind, which he revealed, in the Arabic language, through his last prophet, Muhammad. To Muslims, the Qur'an represents “the ultimate manifestation of God’s grace . . . , the ultimate wisdom, and the ultimate beauty of expression: in short, the true word of God” (Asad, 1980, p. ii). It also, to Muslims, is a message appropriate for all human beings, times, and places.

Muslims take great care in ensuring that the Qur'an remains in its original form and language without any revision, editing, or addition. The Qur'an exists only in its Arabic form. Interpretations and translations to other languages, while numerous, are considered to only represent the interpreter’s understanding of the Qur’an and are, therefore, neither the Qur’an nor a translation of it (Lang, 1997).

The Qur’an is not a compilation of individual injunctions and exhortations. It is not arranged, despite its 114 chapters, in the form of a thesis. It is, as Asad (1980) states:

[An exposition of an ethical doctrine in which every verse and sentence has an intimate bearing on other verses and sentences, all of them clarifying and amplifying one another. Consequently, its real meaning can be grasped only if we correlate every one of its statements with what has been stated elsewhere in its pages and try to explain its ideas by means of frequent cross-references, always subordinating the particular to the general and the incidental to the intrinsic. (p. vii)]

Moreover, while it contains many historical references and numerous allusions to phenomena of natural science, the Qur'an is neither a historical account nor a science textbook. “[N]o part of the Qur’an should be viewed from a purely historical [or scientific] point of view” (Asad, 1980, vii). Any reference to historical circumstances or scientific aspects “must be regarded as illustrations of [and for] the human condition and not as ends in themselves” (Asad, 1980, vii). Instead, emphasis should always be placed on the underlying purport and the ethical teachings of the Qur'an.

As stated before, the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic. Its style and form are of the highest literary quality. Muslims assert that the Qur’an succeeds in reconciling two problematic premises: that its message is
universal, in both time and place, and that it is clear and concise in itself when it was revealed to seventh century Arabs. The Qur’ an uses the language of the Prophet’s milieu and reflects their intellectual, religious, social and material customs. At the same time, it employs allegory, parables, and other literary devices to reach a wide audience. The Qur’an says: “He it is who has bestowed upon thee from on high this divine writ, containing messages that are clear in and by themselves—and these are the essence of the divine writ—as well as others that are allegorical” (3:7). Therefore, “the Qur’an itself insists on its use of symbolism, because to describe the realm of realities beyond human perception [whether in time or in place] would be impossible otherwise” (Lang, 1997, p. 11).

Muslims believe that the Qur’an, owing to its timeless and universal nature, must contain layers upon layers of meaning. Interpretation of the significance of Qur’anic terms must, therefore, consider the widest and deepest possible meaning in order to fully understand the divine message. The Qur’an says: “And if all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink, with seven [more] seas yet added to it, the words [and their meaning] of God would not be exhausted: for, verily, God is almighty, wise” (31:27). Muslims are commanded, by the Qur’an itself, to read and recite the Qur’an constantly and to strive to comprehend its meaning, each to his or her intellectual capacity: This injunction seems to intend for Muslims to develop a firsthand knowledge and understanding of the tenets of the Islamic message (Lang, 1997; Rauf, 2003).

The Hadith

To Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad is much more than the conduit of God’s revelation. He is its exemplar and living manifestation. The Qur’an says: “Verily, in the Apostle of God you have a good example” (33:21). It also says: “An apostle from among yourselves to convey unto you Our messages, . . . and to impart unto you revelation and wisdom, and to teach you that which you knew not” (2:151). And, when asked about the Prophet’s manners, his wife Aisha replied: “The Qur’an was his manners” (Muslim, 746).2

For these reasons, Muslims have always sought to learn and follow the Prophet’s sayings and deeds. These sayings and deeds, collectively known as Tradition or Hadith, were meticulously collected by the contemporaries of the Prophet and related to others. Later, these traditions were painstakingly scrutinized and verified by scholars (such as Al-Bukhari and Muslim), who
then compiled them in collections of Hadith that continue to be studied and examined by all Muslims to this day (Asad, 1934/1999).

These Hadith collections provide interpretation, elaboration, and illustration by the Prophet of the meanings and purports of the Qur'an, and how the Qur'anic tenets should be understood and put into practice. It is, therefore, not possible to attempt a full interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an without examining the Prophet's traditions or Hadith regarding the subject.

**METHODOLOGY**

We, the authors, were born Muslim and were raised in Arabic-speaking countries where we received education that included only basic and elementary knowledge about Islam. As we grew up, we found it difficult to accept many of the religious notions and practices espoused by the majority of Muslims. After several years of reflection and research, we arrived at a renewed understanding that the common Muslim has a duty and responsibility to examine the original sources (Qur'an and Hadith) and reach his or her own conclusions rather than relying entirely and uncritically on secondhand interpretations made by religious scholars several centuries ago (a practice known as "Taqlid"). Accordingly, we base our exploration of the attitude and position of Islam towards disability on the Qur'an, in its original Arabic form, and the Hadith.

We do not compare Islam, in this respect, to other religions, philosophies, or disability models (Eastern or Western), nor do we examine the popular notions or current practices towards people with disabilities in Muslim countries—an issue that has been undertaken in other studies (such as Al-Abdulwahab & Al-Gain, 2003; Bazna, 2003; Dols, 1987; Hoffman, 1995; Legand-Mourcy, 2003; Miles, 1995; Morad et al., 2001; Tumusani, 2001; Williams, 2001). We expect that the findings of this research might not coincide with many of the practices in Muslim countries, for we believe, like many other Muslims, that the practices of the current day Muslims have been tainted by their local cultures and influenced by outside factors, and their understanding of Islam has been calcified by the accretions of centuries of decay and the stagnation of the scholarship and industry that mark the early period of Islam (Abdu & Reda, 2002 version; Asad, 1934/1999, 1987/2000; Rauf, 2003).

Our sources for this study include the Arabic text of the Qur'an; the two most reliable and thoroughly corroborated compilations of Hadith,
which are Bukhari and Muslim (Al-Nawawi, 1998 version; Sabiq, 1946/1993; Shah, 1999); the stories of the companions of the Prophet (Khaled, 1994; Shah, 1999); Lisan Ul-Arab, which is an expanded 18-volume dictionary that contains the root, origin, variations of words and their usage (Ibn Mandhooor, 1986 version); and several Qur’anic exegeses, both classical (Abdu & Reda, 2002 version; Ibn Kathir, 1885/1886) and modern (Ali, 1996; Asad, 1980; Malik, 1997; Pickthall, 1992).

To find a suitable starting point for our research, we searched the Qur’an and Hadith for terms that are conventionally associated with disability, such as blind, mute, deaf, lame, and weak. In our initial reading of the verses in which these terms appear, we found that one of these terms (i.e., weak) had both physical and social implications. This finding suggested that we also consider other terms that were mentioned in conjunction with weak, such as orphan, destitute/needy, and wayfarer.

We located the verses and traditions that contained all of these terms, and then we sorted the verses and traditions by term. Because, as stated previously, the Qur’an was revealed in the language of the Prophet’s milieu, we looked up the meaning of the Arabic terms in Lisan Ul-Arab to help us arrive at a deep understanding of the searched terms and their various shades of meanings. Lisan Ul-Arab is a comprehensive compilation of five dictionaries that were composed before the time of Ibn Mandhooor (1233-1311 AD). One of these five dictionaries (i.e., Mu’jam Tahhidh Al Lughah) was composed by Abu Mansur Al-Azhari (852-980 AD) who lived among the early Bedouin Arabs and spoke their language, and wrote his dictionary based on his knowledge of the Bedouins’ older way of using Arabic words.

Abdu and Reda (2002 version) believe that the Qur’an explains itself by itself and that the best proof for the meaning of a term is its agreement with the meaning of the same term in other places in the Qur’an. Therefore, we cross-referenced the verses containing the same term. And, since the Prophet’s tradition and Hadith provide clarification of and elaboration to the Qur’an, we cross-referenced the verses with the Hadith. The Qur’an, being of the highest literary quality, uses every term, word, verb, and so on in the most deliberate manner and for a very specific purpose (Abdu & Reda, 2002 version). Therefore, we studied the meanings of each and every word in the selected verses and investigated their possible synonyms and their various shades of meanings in Lisan Ul-Arab in an attempt to reach the full meaning and to glean an insight into the real intent of the Qur’an. We also consulted several classical and modern Qur’anic exegeses. All through our analysis, we were
DISCUSSION

Disability in the Qur'an

Central to a discussion on disability in the Qur'an is the concept of perfection from the Islamic perspective. Asad (1934/1999) says: "As long as we have to do with human, biologically limited beings, we cannot possibly consider the idea of 'absolute' perfection, because everything absolute belongs to the realm of Divine attributes alone" (p. 10). Human perfection, in its true physical, psychological and moral sense, must necessarily have a relative and purely individual bearing. "It does not imply the possession of all imaginable good qualities, nor even the progressive acquisition of new qualities from outside, but solely the development of the already existing, positive qualities of the individual in such a way as to rouse his innate but otherwise dormant powers" (p. 10). Because of the natural variety of the life-phenomenon, the inborn qualities of human beings differ in each individual case. It would be absurd, argues Asad, to "suppose that all human beings should, or even could, strive towards one and the same 'type' of perfection" (p. 11). He further explains: "If perfection were to be standardized in a certain 'type' men would have to give up, or change, or suppress, their individual differentiation" (p. 11). But this would violate the divine law of individual variety, which dominates all life on this earth. Human duty is to make the best of [themselves] so that they might honor the life-gift which [their] Creator has bestowed upon [them]; and to help [their] fellow-beings, by means of [their] own development, in their spiritual, social and material endeavors. But the form of [one's] individual life is in no way fixed by a standard' (p. 11-12). In Islam, humans' original nature is essentially good. The Islamic teaching holds that people are born pure and, in the sense explained above, potentially perfect.

It is said in the Qur'an: "Verily, We create man in the best conformation" (95:4). But in the same breath the verse continues, "and thereafter We reduce him to the lowest of low—excepting only such as attain to faith and do good works" (95:5-6). Thus, according to Islam, "evil is never essential or even original. . . . The Islamic teaching definitely asserts, we—everyone of us—can reach a full measure of perfection by de-
veloping the positive, already existing traits of which our individualities are composed.” (Asad, 1934/1999, p. 12-13). The concepts of perfection and imperfection in the physical sense, therefore, have little application in the Islamic view of human life. By extension, so, too, do the concepts of normalcy and abnormalcy.

The Qur’ān’s attitude towards all human beings could be drawn from this verse:

O [people!] Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware. (49:13)

All people belong to one human family; every person is created out of the same father and mother—implying that this equality of biological origin should be reflected in the equality of the human dignity common to all. This connects with the exhortation, in the preceding two verses (49:11-12), to respect and safeguard each other’s dignity. Human evolution into “nations and tribes” is meant to foster rather than to diminish their mutual desire to understand and appreciate the essential human oneness underlying their outward differentiations (Asad, 1980). According to the verse, the noblest of human beings in the sight of God is the most deeply conscious of Him. God’s measure of a human being’s worth relies not on physical attributes or material achievements, but on spiritual maturity and ethical development. The Prophet most explicitly communicates this message when saying: “Verily, God does not look at your bodies or your appearances, but looks into your hearts” (Muslim, 2564).

The Qur’ān and the Hadith take an extra step to stress the necessity of applying the above-stated attitude towards people with disabilities. For example, what could be seen as a minor act of discourtesy on the part of the Prophet towards a person who was blind caused a “sharp Qur’ān rebuke” (Asad, 1980, p. 930) to further stress lessons that expand beyond the verse’s immediate cause.

As recorded in many well-authenticated traditions, some of the most influential chiefs of pagan Mecca were sitting in the Prophet’s assembly. The Prophet was earnestly engaged in trying to persuade them, and through them the community in Mecca at large, to accept Islam. At that very point, the Prophet was approached by one of his followers, who was blind, to seek explanation on certain passages of the Qur’ān. An-
noyed by this interruption of what he considered a very important endeavor (i.e., spreading the message of Islam) the Prophet frowned and turned away from the blind man. Right then and there, the following 10 verses of the Qur'an were revealed:

He frowned and turned away because the blind man approached him! Yet for all thou didst know, [O, Muhammad], he might perhaps have grown in purity, or have been reminded [of the truth], and helped by this reminder. Now as for him who believes himself to be self-sufficient—to him didst thou give thy whole attention, although thou art not accountable for his failure to attain to purity; but as for him who came unto thee full of eagerness and in awe [of God]—him didst thou disregard! (80.1-10)

Our initial reading of these verses indicated that people with disabilities are to be treated with full regard and to have the same subject-to-subject relations that are granted to the non-disabled. A deeper analysis, however, revealed even more. Considering the timing of this incident (at a very early stage of the Prophet’s mission) and Muhammad’s apparent keenness to gain followers among the wealthy and powerful members of society, the verses indicate that the value of a sincere seeker of God; even though weak and/or disabled; is more than that of one who is heedless of God, no matter how wealthy or powerful.

The above-stated examples comprise Islam’s position and attitude towards evaluating mankind: the real merit of people lies in the degree with which they seek the truth. Following are more specific findings of our research.

Blind (A’ma). Our search for the word blind and the derivatives of the root amiya resulted in 32 occurrences. According to Lisan Ul-Arab, Arabs used the verb amiya to mean not seeing, or not being able to see. The passive voice of the verb amiya was used in at least nine verses to mean was not able to see the spiritual guidance. Only three times the word a’ma was used in the Qur’an to refer to a person who has lost his or her eyesight (24:61; 48:17; 80:2.) Interestingly, when referring to this person, the Qur’an uses the word a’ma, but not the word dhareer, which is another word that was and is still used to mean blind in a physiological sense. According to Lisan Ul-Arab, the word a’ma has many usages, one of which is the person who is physiologically blind, whereas the word dhareer has a much more limited usage and was mainly used to refer to the person who has lost his or her eyesight. The word dhareer is derived from the root dha-ra-ra, which implies harm or disability,
whereas the word a’ma is derived from the root amiya, which means not see. In other words, unlike dhareer, the word a’ma did not carry a negative connotation for the seventh century Arabs. It merely referred to the specific condition of not seeing.

In all of the rest of the verses (20 verses), derivatives of the verb amiya are used to refer to the loss of spiritual insight and not the loss of vision or eyesight in the physiological sense (Ali, 1996; Asad, 1980). The Qur’an clearly states: “Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth, letting their hearts gain wisdom, and causing their ears to hear? Yet, verily, it is not their eyes that have become blind—but blind have become the hearts that are in their breasts!” (22:46).

The following verse was revealed in conjunction with fighting in the cause of God—a duty on all Muslims:

No blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for staying away from a war in God’s cause]; but whoever heeds [the call of] God and His Apostle [in deed or in heart], him will He admit into gardens through which running waters flow; whereas him who turns away will He chastise with grievous chastisement. (48:17)

The verse provides permission to people with physical conditions not to fight. The second part of this verse, “but whoever heeds [the call of] God and His Apostle [in deed or in heart], him will He admit into gardens through which running waters flow,” stresses that despite permission, it is still better for those exempted to participate within their power, that is, “heed [the call]” in whatever form they can, as by providing help and consultation (see 9:91).

The following tradition narrated by one of the Prophet’s companions helps illustrate what it means to participate within their power:

A blind man came to the Apostle of God and said: “Messenger of God, I have no one to guide me to the mosque” [Muslims are required to perform the five daily prayers in the mosque]. He, therefore, asked the Apostle of God permission to say prayer in his house. He [the Prophet] granted him permission. Then when the man turned away he called him and said, “Do you hear the call to prayer?” He said, “Yes.” He [the Prophet then] said, “Respond to it.” (Muslim, 312).
The implication here is that if the man could hear the call to prayer, then he must be close enough to the mosque, in which case the permission to say prayer at home does not apply. All people are expected to constantly do the best they can within their powers, and people with certain conditions are no exception.

As reported by Shah (1999), Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum was a companion of the Prophet and he was blind. Ibn Umm Maktum is the person about whom God revealed verses 80:1-10 admonishing Muhammad (See page 13). Upon migrating from Mecca to Medina, Ibn Umm Maktum was given the important position of calling Muslims to prayer. On more than 10 occasions, the Prophet put him in charge of Medina when he, the Prophet, was out of town. In spite of being excused from fighting, Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum was not content with staying among those who remained at home while others had to fight. He fixed a role for himself on the battlefield saying: “Place me between two rows and give me the standard. I will carry it for you and protect it, for I am blind and cannot run away” (Shah, 1999). He took part in several battles before he was killed on the battlefield clutching the flag of the Muslims.

Mute (Abkam). Our search for the word abkam (conventionally known to mean mute) pointed to six occurrences in the Qur’an: According to Lisan Ul-Arab, the word abkam was used to refer to a person who can speak, but cannot speak well because of ignorance, cannot reason his answers, or cannot turn to his or her heart for guidance. Interestingly, we learned that, at the time the Qur’an was revealed, the word used to refer to a person who was born mute or who lost the physiological ability to speak was not abkam, but akhras. The word akhras is not mentioned in the Qur’an.

In all of the six verses (2:17-18; 2:171; 16:76; 6:39; 8:22; 17:97), the Qur’an uses the word bukm (the plural form of abkam) in a parable to those who strayed from the way of God (Ali, 1996; Asad, 1980). The context in which the word bukm appears in these verses stresses that the parable is not intended to be with people who are physiologically mute. For example, the Qur’an describes those who stray from the way of God in verse 2:18 as “bukm” who “cannot turn back.” In verses 2:171 and 8:22, they are described as “bukm” who “do not use their reason,” and in verses 6:39 and 17:97, they are “bukm” who “do not go the straight way.” Cross-referencing these verses leaves us with the conclusion that the word abkam in the Qur’an is intended to signify one who is spiritually, ethically, or morally bereft.

Wher asked by one of his companions: “[F]rom what do we give sadaqah if we do not possess property? [Sadaqah is a collective term
that typically signifies giving of material possessions. It is something to
be performed by each Muslim everyday for her or his own good and re-
ward in this life and the life hereafter.] Muhammad replied, "The doors
of sadaqah are: guiding the blind; listening to the deaf and mute until
you understand them; guiding a person to his object of need if you know
where it is; hurrying with the strength of your legs to one in sorrow who
is appealing for help; and supporting the weak with the strength of your
arms" (Sabiq, 3.98), thus laying down the responsibility of everyone to
treat the deaf and mute with patience and courtesy.

Deaf (Assum). According to Lisan Ul-Arab, the word assum has nu-
merous meanings and usages. For example, an assum rock means a
solid crack-less rock, and an assum month signifies a period of time dur-
ing which there was no war. Only one usage of the word assum implies
loss of the sense of hearing. Interestingly, Arabs of the time employed,
exclusively, the term atrash to refer to a person who was born deaf or
was hard of hearing.

Our search revealed 14 Qur’anic verses that contain the word assum
or its plural (summ). We found no mention of the word atrash in the
Qur’an. By examining the verses, we found that assum was not used to
mean deaf in the physiological sense. To illustrate, the Qur’an says:
“And there are among them such as [pretend to] listen to thee: but canst
thou cause the [summ] to hearken even though they will not use their
reason?” (10: 42). If the word summ were intended to mean deaf, then
the verse would have read “even though they will not hear” not “use
their reason.” For the Islamic treatment of the deaf, please refer to the
Prophet’s Hadith (Sabiq, 3.98) mentioned in the previous section.

Lame (A’raj). We found two verses containing the word lame. The
Qur’an says:

[N]o blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the
lame, nor does blame attach to the sick, and neither to yourselves
for eating [whatever is offered to you by others, whether it be food
obtained] from your [children’s] houses, or your fathers’ houses,
or your mothers’ houses, or your brothers’ houses, or your sisters’
houses, or your paternal uncles’ houses, or your maternal aunts’
houses, or your maternal uncles’ houses, or your maternal aunts’
houses, or [houses] the keys whereof are in your charge, or [the
house] of any of your friends; nor will you incur any sin by eating
in company or separately. But whenever you enter [any of these]
houses, greet one another with a blessed, goodly greeting, as en-
joined by God. In this way God makes clear unto you His message, so that you might [learn to] use your reason. (24:61)

This verse explicitly mentions the lame, alongside the blind and the sick, and removes any superstitious notions that people might attach to people with disabilities, often leading to their exclusion. By doing that, the Qur'an reverses many of the prevailing customs, even to this day, towards people with disabilities and urges their inclusion in the society. Verse 48:17 (see page 14) removes any blame from, and grants permission to, the person who is lame for not going to war. As stated earlier, even though permission is granted to certain people, they are still advised to heed and obey the call of God as much as they can.

Amr Ibn Al-Jamuh was already an old man when Islam reached Medina. He was also partially lame in one leg. After adopting Islam, he felt strongly about joining his three sons who were preparing to fight in the Battle of Uhud. The sons were against their father’s wish given that he was excused from the duty to fight because he was old, weak and lame. Amr took his case straight to the Prophet who told the sons to let their father have his wish. Amr and one of his sons were close to the Prophet during the battle, they defended the person of the Prophet when matters got really dangerous, and they fell on the battlefield and died within moments of each other.

Weak (Da’if). The Arabic word for weak is da’if from the root da-‘a-‘a-‘a. The word da’if (weakness) means, in Lisan Al-Arab, the opposite of strength, and the meaning applies equally to physical, mental, spiritual, and moral attributes. We searched the Qur'an for words from the root da-‘a-‘a-‘a such as da‘f, da‘if, du‘afa’ (weakness, weak, weak in plural, respectively). We counted 22 mentions of words that belong to this root.

Verses 4:28 and 8:66 seem to explain the Qur‘an’s position towards humans in general; that humans have been created weak (both in the physical and moral sense) and that God wants to lighten their burden both in the temporal, as well as spiritual and religious matters.

The Qur‘an says:

It is He who creates you out of dust, and then out of a drop of sperm, and then out of a germ-cell; and then He brings you forth as children; and then [He ordains] that you reach maturity, and then, that you grow old—though some of you [He causes to] die earlier—and [all this He ordains] so that you might reach a term set [by Him], and that you might [learn to] use your reason. (40:67)
And it also says: "It is God who creates you [all in a state] of weakness, and then, after weakness, ordains strength [for you]. and then, after [a period of] strength, ordains [old-age] weakness and grey hair" (30:54). Cross-referencing these two verses leads us to conclude that childhood and old age are two of the Islamic definitions of weakness to which the Qur'an alludes.

Another meaning of the term *da'if* came out of the story of Shu'ayb, who was an early prophet sent by God to the people of Madyan (as narrated in verses 11:84-91). Shu'ayb was confronted by the haughty and powerful from his people who rejected his message. They told him that they saw him as *da'if* (weak) among them. This, to us, indicates that low social status is considered a source of weakness from the Islamic perspective. Our interpretation was confirmed in a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad where he warned his people: "O' people, the nations before went astray because if a noble person committed theft [a crime in general] they would let him go, but when a weak person from among them stole [committed the same crime] they exacted legal retribution on him" (Al-Bukhari, 8.779). The contrast between noble and weak explains our point.

An interesting term appeared in our search, that of *mustad'afun*. According to LisanUl-Arab, *mustad'afun* denotes those who are deemed or seen to be weak and, therefore, oppressed or exploited. The Qur'an makes a distinction between *du'a'a*, those who are weak, and *mustad'afun*, those deemed weak. The Hebrews of Egypt at the time of Moses are described in the Qur'an as having been *mustad'afun* by Pharaoh and his ilk. It seems to us, since the Hebrews were not few in number nor were they any weaker, physically, than any other group in society, that their weakness was in their low standing in the Egyptian society, which was the basis for their oppression and humiliation at the hands of Pharaoh's people.

The term *mustad'afun* appears several times in the Qur'an and encompasses men, women and children without distinction. For those described as such, the Qur'an urges extreme help and protection of rights. Interestingly, however, the Qur'an says:

 Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against themselves [the angels] will ask, "What was wrong with you?" They will answer: "We were [mustad'afun] on earth." [The angels] will say: "Was, then, God's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?" For such, then, the goal is hell—and how evil a journey's end! But excepted shall be the truly
helpless [mustad’afīn]—be they men or women or children—who cannot bring forth any strength and have not been shown the right way. (4:97-98)

These verses seem to imply that one who has an option to flee the condition of oppression or weakness cannot label herself or himself truly mustad’af. This term is reserved for those who have no recourse and can find no way out of their condition.

The Qur’an is replete with exhortations towards protecting the rights and dignity of the weak members of society. However, the most poignant Qur’anic statement on the issue is found in the following verse:

And how could you refuse to fight in the cause of God and the [mustad’afīn] men and women and children who are crying, ‘O our Sustainer! Lead us forth [to freedom] out of this land whose people are oppressors, and raise for us, out of Thy grace, a protector, and raise for us, out of Thy grace, one who will bring us succour!’ (4:75)

In fact, Asad (1980), when explaining this verse, wonders what is amiss with believers who do not fight for the weak, helpless, and oppressed children, women, and men. The implication here is that followers of Islam have no moral excuse for refusing to take every measure and action in order to protect those who are weak.

There are also several authentic traditions from Hadith that further elaborate how Islam accounts for those who are weak, and the position of the weak from the Islamic perspective: “If anyone of you leads people in prayer, he should shorten it for amongst them are the weak, the sick and the old; and if anyone among you prays alone then he may prolong [the prayer] as much as he wishes” (Al-Bukhari, 1.671). In another Hadith (Al-Bukhari, 2.589), a woman said to the Prophet: “O Apostle of God! The obligation of Hajj [pilgrimage] enjoined by God on His devotees has become due on my father and he is old and weak, and he cannot sit firm on the mount; may I perform Hajj on his behalf?” The Prophet replied: “Yes, you may.” The following Hadith explains the duties of the community towards its weak members: “The Prophet said, ‘If someone leaves some property, it will be for the inheritors, and if he leaves some weak offspring, it will be for us to support them’” (Al-Bukhari, 3.583). And in exhorting the community to care for the weak the
Prophet said to Muslims, “You only succeed and prosper to the extent that you treat your weak well” (Al-Nawawi, 272).

The story of Julaybib, as reported by Shah (1999), shows the extent to which the Prophet, consistent with Islamic teachings, took active steps to make the Muslim society inclusive of the weak and disadvantaged. Julaybib was described as an ugly and dwarfed man. His lineage was not known, which in the tribal society of the time was a serious disadvantage since people relied on their tribal structure and family ties to succeed. Julaybib was a good Muslim but, because of his perceived serious physical and social disadvantage, Julaybib was shunned away from society. The Prophet went to the family of the most eligible unmarried woman in Medina and asked her parents if they would marry her to Julaybib. The act of marrying Julaybib to a desirable woman would ensure Julaybib total inclusion and immersion into society in the short as well as the long term. It was also a deliberate act to remove any stigma that society might have placed on Julaybib because of his disadvantage. Julaybib fought bravely alongside the Prophet and was killed in battle. The Prophet buried him himself and said: “He [Julaybib] is of me and I of him,” thus proclaiming this disadvantaged man as being like a member of his family.

Orphan (yateem). The Arabic word for orphan is yateem from the root ya-ta-ma. The traditional meaning of the word signifies one who has lost his or her father before reaching the age of puberty. A more generic implication is the loss of backing and support (represented by the father) before attaining to strength and independence. According to Lisan Ul-Arab, yateem also bears the meaning of one who is ignored or forgotten so that help or aid never finds its way to him or her. In general, the term means the absence of a champion or an advocate during weakness and youth. The word appears in some form (singular or plural) 20 times in the Qur’an, five of which speak specifically and directly about the case of an orphan whose wealth is administered by someone else, and the duties of such a guardian to preserve and protect the wealth and turn it over once the orphan child reached maturity. However, the majority of the occurrences where yateem is mentioned just speak of an unspecified yateem, and very often in association with miskeen and ibn us-sabeel (the destitute and the wayfarer). One particular verse (4:127) enjoins that Muslims should stand firm for equity for the yateem. All this leads us to believe that Islam accorded the yateem—in the wider sense of the word—a special status.

One verse of the Qur’an says: “And they will ask thee about [how to deal with] orphans. Say: ‘To improve their condition is best.’ And if
you share their life, [remember that] they are your brethren: for God distinguishes between him who spoils things and him who improves” (2:220). The implication here is that if one shares his or her life in any form with the yateem (in the most generic meaning of the word), she or he should treat them like siblings, look for and after what is in the yateem’s interest, and not damage their interest in any way. As explained by Ali (1996), believers are urged to improve the lot and condition of life of the weak and the yateem.

The Prophet said: “‘I and the one who looks after a yateem will be like this in Paradise,’ holding out his middle and index fingers and separating them only slightly” (Al-Bukhari, 7.224). By this, the Prophet was encouraging all Muslims to take part in caring for the yateem so that they may gain this high reward.

Destitute (Miskeen)/Needy (Taqeer). We looked up the meaning of the term fajeer in Lisan Ul-Arab and found that it means one who is deficient or has a need for something and that it is the opposite of ghani, meaning one who is self-sufficient and has no need for anything or anyone. We also looked up the term miskeen, and found that it signifies one who cannot satisfy her or his most basic needs in food, shelter, clothing, and so on. According to Lisan Ul-Arab, experts have debated the difference between miskeen and fajeer as to who was in fact in a worse condition.

The Prophet described the miskeen saying, “the miskeen is not the one who goes around and asks for a mouthful or two or a date or two [begging], but the miskeen is that who has not enough to satisfy his needs and whose condition is not known to others that others may give him something in sadaqah, and who does not beg of people” (Al-Bukhari, 2.557).

Nineteen verses in the Qur’an call on Muslims to address the issue of the miskeen (which we will refer to as the destitute) and only five verses call on them to address the issue of the fajeer (which we will refer to as the needy). The calls for the destitute and those for the needy differ also in scope. For example, whereas Muslims are exhorted mainly to give sadaqah and zakat and to feed the needy, they are exhorted to show ihsan towards the destitute (2:83; 2:177; 4:36). The term ihsan is explained as the highest level of al-birr (Abdu & Reda, 2002 version), and al-birr means to do all kinds of good deeds, to fix and put things right (al-islah), and to abstain from doing harm and from withholding the rights of people (Ibn Mandhoor, 1986 version). Furthermore, God stresses the importance of carrying out his call for the destitute by link-
ing it to the most important principle in Islam, which is believing in one God:

And worship God [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And [show ihsan to] your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the [masakeen], and the neighbor from among your people, and the neighbor who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, and the wayfarer, and those whom you rightfully possess. Verily, God does not love any of those who, full of self-conceit, act in a boastful manner. (4:36)

The destitute do not ask for help or beg of people. As such, his or her condition remains unnoticed. The Qur’anic command to Muslims to show ihsan toward the destitute implies, therefore, that it is incumbent upon Muslims to seek out those in destitution and to fulfill the command of God.

The Qur’an says in verse 30:38: “Hence, give his due to the near of kin, as well as to the [miskeen] and the wayfarer; this is best for all who seek God’s countenance: for it is they, they that shall attain to a happy state.” Cross-referencing the command in this verse with that in verse 4:36 (see above) indicates that showing ihsan to the destitute (or the near of kin or the yateem as well) is not an act of mere pity or obligation on the part of the person to whom the Qur’an issues the command, but rather, a duty. Conversely, ihsan is a right due the destitute.

Wayfarer (Ibn Us-Sabeel). We had always understood the term *ibn us-sabeel* to mean the traveler. It was only after we resolved to reexamine all the terms in a wider and deeper sense that this term took on an added dimension.

The Qur’an mentions people who are in travel or on a trip by using the term *ala safar* and, with the exception of some accommodation to ease the performance of required rituals, it treats them quite casually. *Ibn us-sabeel* is repeated eight times in the Qur’an, virtually always adjoined by the terms *yateem* and *miskeen*, and always with the strong exhortation to Muslims to show kindness and to show ihsan. It became clear to us that the term couldn’t mean the casual traveler.

When we searched Lisan Ul-Arab, we found that the term literally means *son of the road* and was explained to denote the stranger whom the road brought. Abdu and Reda (2002 version) interpreted the term to apply to one who is cut off in travel and does not have a connection with kith or kin so that the road has become his mother, father and family. Asad (1980) wrote:
Maysaa S. Bazna and Tarek A. Hatab

Son of the road denotes any person who is far from his home and especially one who, because of his circumstances, does not have sufficient means of livelihood at his disposal. In its wider sense it describes a person who, for whatever reason, is unable to return home either temporarily or permanently. For instance, a political exile or refugee. (p. 36)

We add immigrant or foreigner.

Immigrants or foreigners in a land are always displaced; they might face difficulty being accepted in their new home for reasons of ethnicity, religion, appearance, or language. They, naturally, lack the social contacts and connections with family and friends to help them succeed as the native people do. The Qur’an seems to have recognized their predicament, and that might explain why the term *ibn us-sabeel* is always mentioned alongside *miskeen* and *yateem*, which represent other disadvantaged groups, and the constant exhortation to treat them with *ihsan*.

It might be telling to learn that, as narrated in the authentic tradition, Prophet Muhammad “did not leave a *Dinar* or *Dirham* [the currency of the time] or male or female slave. He left only his white mule on which he used to ride, and his weapons, and a piece of land which he gave in charity [sadaqah] for *ibn us-sabeel*” (Al-Bukhari, 5.738).

The history of several of the companions of the Prophet tells us that foreigners and immigrants reached high and exalted status in the Muslim community. Salman Al-Farisi (Salman the Persian) was one of the closest companions to the Prophet and was among his advisers. Suhayb Al-Rumi (Suhayb the Byzantine) was appointed provisional leader of the community while the process of selecting a Caliph was underway after the second Caliph, Umar, had been assassinated.

**CONCLUSION**

Our exploration of the attitude of Islam towards disability focused on terms that belong to two general groupings. The first group represents individuals with a physical condition (for the lack of a better word, we use the word *condition* to refer to a *difference*). The superstitious society associated these conditions with some divine punishment and proceeded to segregate people with such conditions and discriminate against them. The Qur’an, consistent with its view that every person is potentially perfect so long as they work on developing their innate and individual qualities to the limit of their individual differentiation, seems
to view these physical conditions as morally neutral. Consistent with Muße (2002), our findings indicate that physical conditions are viewed in the Qur’ān as neither a curse nor a blessing; they are simply part of the human condition. The Qur’ān removes any stigma and barrier to full inclusion of people with physical conditions. Consistent with the Qur’ānic tenet that “God does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear” (2:286), Islam offers relief from certain commands and requirements so as to address the difficulties that arise from the nature of the specific condition. Despite the permission, the expectation to exert oneself to the best of one’s individual ability, both in the spiritual and temporal spheres, remains the same for everyone.

The second group is composed of those who are viewed by fellow human beings as not measuring up to certain standards that are valued in society, such as society’s emphasis on family/tribal ties and origin; society’s obsession with social and economic status; and so on. People belonging to this group are taken advantage of, abandoned, ignored, discriminated against, oppressed, looked down on, and treated as the disadvantaged. It is to this group that the Qur’ān seems to devote more time and space, and for whom it reserves its most ardent call for action. Muslims, who constitute society, are constantly called upon to seek, improve the condition of, put right the affairs of, be good to, stand up for the rights of, treat as sisters and brothers those who are, and give generously of one’s property and time to, the disadvantaged.

The Qur’ān does not mention each and every physical condition or social disadvantage. There is, however, no reason to believe that the Qur’ānic view is limited to the list mentioned above. Instead, we believe that this list serves only as an example, and that the definitions of these two groups can be, and indeed need to be, expanded to cover any and all physical or social conditions as might arise or develop in different societies at different times. We base this opinion on one of the main principles of interpreting the Qur’ān, that is, the Qur’ān is valid and appropriate for every time and place.

In general, we find that the concept of disability, in the conventional sense, is not found in the Qur’ān. As a matter of fact, our search for the word disabled and its derivatives did not return any results. Rather, we find that the Qur’ān concentrates on the notion of disadvantage that is created by society and imposed on those individuals who might not possess the social, economic, or physical attributes that people happen to value at a certain time and place. Since this disadvantage is created by society, it isn’t surprising that the Qur’ān places the responsibility of rectifying this inequity on the shoulder of society by its constant exhor-
tation to Muslims to recognize the plight of the disadvantaged and to improve their condition and status.

Owing to the nature of the Qur’an, it would be presumptuous to claim that we have reached the intended meaning of the Qur’an since “but none save God knows its final meaning” (3:7). We also recognize that our research is limited by constraints of space and scope, and that, as is the case with any and all studies, this research is not final. It is, however, safe to conclude that the Islamic view encompasses physical, economic, and social disadvantages; asserts that the focus needs to be on people’s attitudes as well as actions towards the disadvantaged; promotes respect and esteem for the disadvantaged; expects personal responsibility and personal development from the disadvantaged; proclaims the right of the disadvantaged to full inclusion and full support; and affirms the responsibility and duty of society towards its disadvantaged members. And God knows better.

NOTES

1. All translations of Qur’anic verses are taken from Asad (1980). The numbers between parentheses indicate the location of the verse in the Qur’an. The first number is that of the chapter, and the second number refers to the location of the verse within the chapter.

2. The sayings of the Prophet (Hadith) are each referenced by: (a) the name of the person who compiled and authenticated the Hadith; and (b) the number of the Hadith as listed in the specific compilation.

3. Sometimes the name “Ibn Manhdoor” appears as “Ibn Manzur.”

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RECEIVED: 04/04
ACCEPTED: 07/04
Marlene Schoenberg Interviews Mr. Etaw Dwe, MN Karen Leader and Twin Cities Interpreter

by Marlene Schoenberg, Ed.M., CCC/SP

Marlene: Could you tell me a little about the Karen organization in Minnesota?
E.D.: Our mission is to help the Karen people in resettlement. We don't do actual re-settlement; we do cultural and social services to prevent youth from getting involved with drugs and gangs. We also work with employment and women's health. I am a co-founder of this organization, Karen of Minnesota, which celebrated its one year anniversary in October.

Marlene: How many Karen people are there in the Twin Cities?
E.D.: 7000

Marlene: When did they start arriving?
E.D.: In 2000, and there are a lot more coming who are waiting in resettlement camps in Thailand.

Marlene: How many Karen people are there in the U.S.?
E.D.: There are 70,000 in 42 states. Now we have to deal with secondary immigration because many of them now want to come to Minnesota. I'm not sure why. Maybe it's "Minnesota nice"?

Marlene: What do you want Americans to know about the Karen People?
E.D.: They should learn about the Karen culture. The Karen are very friendly. They are known for their hospitality. I just want to say, "Make a friend with a Karen." That is the best way you will know about the Karen people.
I see that my kids are going to school and I see that their teacher and classmates came to the Karen New Year's Celebration, which made me feel so good.
There are a lot of things to know. Make a friend with them and you will find out.

Marlene: What are some of the barriers that your community has faced in the U.S.?
E.D.: There are lots of barriers, such as the way they understand the legal system. The kids are not doing so well because they have to catch up with [ed: on] their English and the parents cannot give them homework support. We need to address that in the future. We all came here for safety and to get educated.

Marlene: Tell me about your education.
E.D.: I just had my high school education back in my country in the jungle. That was not a government school; it was a revolutionary school. After you finished that school, you had to commit that you would join the army as a revolutionary soldier. But I didn't want to be a soldier.

Marlene: So what did you do?
E.D.: I just continued with my further studies. Some of it was fun and some of it was boring. Then in 1995-6 there were 4 American lawyers who wanted to hire someone there. They picked
me and gave me some training. There were 52 people in all that they trained. I was one of the youngest ones. I worked with them for 4 years.

I gave up and went back to Burma and my family, and I was living peacefully. Later on the Burmese soldiers came. There were lots of fights and arguments and many people got arrested. I was helping out a couple of people. They liked me and they selected me to become the headman of the village. I did my best to go between the Burmese soldiers and the villagers.

Marlene: Was that a dangerous job, considering the political situation in Burma?  
E.D.: It was a very dangerous job. Many times I got into trouble and I heard that other village leaders were killed for different reasons. A lot of them were beaten and tortured because the government suspected that they were helping the revolutionary group. I was arrested and 4 of the villagers were killed in front of me, one by one.

Eventually they found out that I was involved with the Americans and with the revolutionary group. They found out that I graduated from that school and they didn't like my documentation.

They arrested me and they tortured me for 3 days and nights. I knew I was going to die. They just wanted to beat me up. Later on, an officer came to me and put his gun on my forehead. He counted to three and then asked for my gun, which I didn't have. He asked me one short question, "Yes or no?"

I just closed my eyes to be ready. I was shaking and sweating and I said to myself, "Lord, I don't know if you will welcome me but I am coming!" I closed my eyes and was ready for that. He said "1, 2, 3" and clicked the trigger but the gun wasn't loaded. I thought I was dead and everyone else was laughing.

Marlene: How did you get out of that frightening situation?  
E.D.: My wife sold her land to bribe the officer for my release. She brought a full backpack of cash to the military office. I said, "How can you do that? Are you crazy? This is your inheritance. Your parents worked hard all their lives for that land." She said, "I know that it's just land and you will get a bigger piece of land some day." In fact, we are still working on that here.

(This interview will be continued in the next newsletter.)

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Etaw Dwe can be reached through the Court Interpreter Department at Ramsey Co. Courthouse in St. Paul or the State Department of Health. His direct number is: 651-399-3143.
Films and Additional Resources About the Karen and Other Refugees in Burma

Films:

Moving to Mars http://www.movingtomarsfilm.com/
Burma VJ http://burmavjmovie.com/
Prayer for Peace http://prayerofpeacefilm.blogspot.com/
(The Karen Organization of Minnesota has several copies of the above film.)
True Life: I’m Coming to America http://www.mtv.com/shows/truelife/episode.jhtml?episodeID=130319#moreinfo

Websites:

This website is an interesting glimpse into the Karen struggle: http://karennews.org/
You can also link to a number of videos there: http://karennews.org/video/.
The Karen Organization of Minnesota: www.mnkaren.org
    Enhancing the quality of life for Karen and other refugees from Burma in Minnesota
Karen Connection: www.karenconnection.org
    A resource for cultural and situational awareness
Karen Human Rights Group: www.khrg.org
    Detailed information on human rights abuses in Karen state and Burma
Free Burma Rangers: www.freeburmarangers.org
    Situation updates in the Karen state
Karen Women Organization: www.karenwomen.org/index/html
    Resources for women along Thai/Burma border
Karen Community of Minnesota: http://minnesotakaren.blogspot.com/
    Sister organization to Karen Organization of Minnesota

Karen to English CD and Booklet:

Andrea Echelberger and her students at the MLC Arlington Hills location created a booklet and a set of two audio CDs to help Karen students practice English. Download the booklet at http://www.themlc.org/techgrants. For more information about the materials, contact Andrea directly at aechelberger@themlc.org. To order a set of the CDs contact jbrazier@themlc.org.