

*Letter to the Editor*

**Invited commentary  
on Mansour et al paper entitled:  
“Child Abuse and its Long-Term Consequences: An Exploratory Study  
on Egyptian University Students”**

I read with a lot of interest Mansour et al paper entitled: “Child Abuse and its Long-Term Consequences: An Exploratory Study on Egyptian University Students” published in current issue of the Arab Journal of psychiatry.

I am very pleased to see a research project in the Arab World by a group of Arab researchers which is in itself a big step forwards and I hope in the near future we will be able to witness serious Arab research programmes in the field of schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder as it is in Europe. I feel it is time to work hard to develop such research programmes not only for the purpose of research but also for the benefit of the millions of Arab patients and Arab Nation. In addition the study addresses an important area of mental health for young Arab generations. This area has been given lot of interest worldwide particularly in the western or so called civilized countries that have progressed in this area as part of their growing interest in human rights and prevention in the area of mental health of the new generation.

However I felt a bit reserved in accepting the study outcome as what could have been normal in certain period could be seen as an act of abuse 20 – 40 years later in the same culture. At the same time an experience or practice could be considered some type of abuse in one culture but not in another culture. This does not minimize the importance of the study especially in our current era where human rights activists are fighting hard to stop various types of abuse and violation of human rights in the Arab World.

In the abstract, the authors stated that their aim was to study the prevalence of child abuse associated psychological problems in adulthood, and I think it would be more appropriate if we put it as attributed or related but not resulting or associated as the temporal relation is relatively long and may not be considered as associated with childhood abuse and appear later in adult life.

The authors described their study as a “Child Abuse and its Long-Term Consequences: An Exploratory Study on Egyptian University Students” and I think it would have been

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more appropriate to describe the study as “Child Abuse and its Long-Term Consequences: An Exploratory Study on a sample of Egyptian University Students”

The study is a good attempt to explore the extent of abuse experienced by a sample of university students in Egypt during their childhood and study its long-term consequences which could provide clinicians with a good source of evidence based originating from an original Egyptian study rather than relying on evidence from another culture with different norms. However, the study pointed out that students from faculty of medicine tended to have higher levels of denial. This may be one way of interpretation but it is also possible that those students felt that the strict upbringing (so called abuse) may have been viewed by those students as one the factors that helped them to progress in their academic career and join the medical school. Therefore it would have been helpful if the questionnaire covered this possibility by 1 or 2 questions to cover this possibility. It is interesting that the study results show that sexual abuse is less than in international particularly western studies which is expected bearing in mind that such abuse is more likely to happen within the context of broken homes, alcohol and drug misuse which do exist in Arab culture but are less common compared with the western society.

Te authors in different areas in the article used the term “Middle East” and “Arab World” as synonymous while I think this may not be correct. Middle East is a term that has been introduced to accommodate the inclusion of non-Arab countries in the region. I hope the authors of this paper and other authors in the Arab Journal of Psychiatry would be vigilant to this in future writings.

In recognition to the authors, this is an important paper from various aspects:

1. To encourage more collaborative Arabic studies with collaboration of researchers from various Arab countries.
2. To put plans for wider Arabic studies using assessment tools that are culturally compatible and not imported.
3. To publish these studies as a model of Arabic studies that would benefit the Arabic clinician than using data or evidence from a different culture that may not suit the Arabic patients.

Finally, we must look forward for collaborative studies including academicians from various Arab universities and set plans for joint research that cover all kind of studies with emphasis on epidemiology. It is estimated that Arab psychiatrists in North America are about 1000, UK around 1000, France is around 1000 & if we consider smaller numbers in Germany, Italy, Scandinavian countries, Australia and New Zealand this may

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put the numbers of the immigrant Arab expertise in mental health to over 4000. How could a nation build up its future without benefiting from such wealth of knowledge and expertise!.

The role for the Arab Federation to lead is widely open. By this the Arab unity can be proved to be a reality at least in the field of mental health forgetting about the failed & corrupt Arabic political system.

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**COMMENTARY ON:**

**“Language, Culture and Mental Health” Published in the current issue**

This is a brief thoughtful contribution to cultural psychiatry which deals with a sector limited to the experience and expressions of emotions especially verbal expression. Non verbal expressions are also important e.g. in the face, in behaviour and through internal organs.

Culture has cognitive, emotional and behavioural contributions to the code of conduct e.g. in the patient-doctor relationship. The experience of stress and the expression of distress have terms of reference, not only in the mind and body but also in the spiritual world. Expectations of care patterns are determined by the cultures of patients and members of the caring professions integration of which has been recently dealt with in an editorial in the May 2010 issue of the Arab Journal of Psychiatry.

Broadening of the limited sector of cultural contribution to verbal expression of the emotion of sadness to the broader issue of cultural inputs in mental health and ill-health will enrich the paper and make it more worthy of publication in the Arab journal of Psychiatry.

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