

National Partnership for Community Training (NPCT)

Iraqi refugee population
Curriculum for Service Providers
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Map

Iraq



Culture and Background

- **Geography** – located in the Middle East. It borders Kuwait, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia
- **Natural Resources** – Iraq relies on 2 main resources for its economy. Oil – Iraq is estimated to have the largest Oil reserves in the world. The second resource is agriculture.
- **Social Structure** – the population is composed of 3 main social groups.
 - Well to Do class (ruling class, religious leaders, wealthy families)
 - Middle Class (Government employees, merchants, businessmen and professionals)
 - Poor class (is the largest group. Mainly unskilled and low skilled workers)

People of Iraq

- Total Population is about 26,783,383 (2006 estimation)
- 77% are Arab: they share most of the values and practices of other Arabs. Their life is dominated by religion, and were traditionally farmers until the new oil era. The Ma'dan who inhabit 6000 square miles in the south (Triangle of Amara, Nasiriya, Basra) and they depend on fishing and raising buffalo, live in hut houses
- 19% are Kurds: 3.5 million live in Northeast Iraq, Mosul , Irbil, and the most valuable oil fields are in the areas where the Kurds live. They are an Iranian ethnic group. They have their own language (Indo-European closely related to Pashto). They are mainly Muslim Sunni.

People

- 3-4% rest of the population are a variety of different groups including Turkmen, Chaldeans /Assyrians, and Armenians
- Christian Assyrians called “the first Iraqis” , long history of persecution, and still speak Syriac (Eastern Aramaic Language)
- Christian Chaldeans are mainly Catholic and concentrate in cities such Baghdad, Arbil, Mosel , and they speak Chaldean

Religious Groups

- Religion:
- Islam 97% (60 – 65% Shi'ite, 30 – 37% Sunni, 3% Christian and other)
Source: InfoPlease. com
- Chaldean and the Assyrians Christian minorities

Religious Groups

Brief Background on the division between Sunni and Shi'ite

- Tensions between both goes back to period immediately preceding the death of the prophet Mohammad
- Shi'ite believes only the direct descendants of the prophet are the legitimate custodians of the teaching , Imams are given authority and respect
- Differences of the interpretation of the Islamic Law and some practices
- Shi'ite constitute 10-15% of the global Muslim population concentrated in Iraq and Iran
- Shi'ite were persecuted under Saddam regime
- This explains the 1991 uprising , the reaction following the military defeat of the regime (the assistance they provide to the west to occupy Iraq, non resistance to occupier), and third explain the sectarian violence over the past four years

Advent of modern Iraq

- The dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire resulted in the Turkish speaking area becoming present day Turkey, while the Arabic – speaking area including Iraq was parceled out between France (Lebanon and Syria) and Britain (Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine)
- Independence in 1932 and the immediate power struggles
- 1958 a group of young military officers succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy and proclaimed Iraq as a republic
- 1963 the revolutionary regime collapsed and leader was executed. This led to the establishment of the Ba'ath party.
- Ba'ath party gained control of the government (Ahmad Hassan Al-Baker president)
- Some accomplishments included the establishment of a secular socialist society, the nationalization of oil production, and the implementation of irrigation projects (dams)
- In 1979 president Al-Baker resigned and Saddam Hussein succeeded him

Advent of modern Iraq Continued

- The overthrow of the Shah in 1979 in Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Republic precipitated the worsening of the relationship between the two states
- The war started in 1980, the Kurds supported Iran and that led to the use of chemical weapons , inflicting heavy casualties and international humanitarian uproar
- The war lasted 8 years and had much effects of the whole Iraqi society . Many lives were lost , many traumatic events witnessed by people resulted in countless psychological problems.
- 1990 invasion of Kuwait led to the devastation of the Iraqi civilians and military .
- The results of the war and the sanctions that followed imposed hardships on the Iraqi society in general with devastating consequences on their daily lives, health status and economy.

Advent of modern Iraq Continued

- The Kurds rebelled and they were persuaded to return only with international intervention and protection.
- The Shi'ite uprising in the south led to much devastation on their lives and environment.
- 17,000 Iraqis fled to Saudi Arabia Rafah camp
- They were recognized as refugees by UN and were settled globally

languages spoken in Iraq

- Iraqis speak one of fifteen dialects of Arabic.(trouble hiring the right interpreters)
- Modern standard Arabic is effectively classical Arabic (the language of Koran)
- Iraq ethnic minorities such as the Chaldean, Kurds, and Assyrians speak their own languages.
- However during Saddam era the official state language was Arabic.
- Many ethnic minorities speak and communicate in Arabic except the elderly who lived in rural areas.

Collectivist Society

- Arab culture is a collectivist culture where the individual relinquishes the self and obeys the will of the in-group (Dwairy, 1998)
- The individualistic style of living emphasizes the person's needs, it is more liberal, more practiced in the west.
- Four cultural identities (Barakat, 1993)
 - 1- Collectivist authority: the authoritative figure has the ultimate power in the decision making process (eldest male, political , and the religious leader)
 - 2- Collectivist Ruled: figures ruled in traditional collectivist cultures .They conform to societal norms and values. Women and children obeying the father, citizens obeying the government, students obeying the teacher.

Collectivist Society Continued

- 3- Individualist Authority: Those who have been exposed to western style of living (democracy and liberalization), practice individualistic style of life in the privacy of their homes but obey, respect and adopt the collectivist style outside.
- 4- Individualistic Ruled: They practice individualistic style at home yet yield to outside authority

Extended Family Structure

- Main social characteristic: the extended family or tribe is still the main unit in the Iraqi society. It yields considerable influence in the decision making process of the individual and society.
- Family is the center unit of socioeconomic activities in the Arab society. Family insures food , housing, education, healthcare , and protection of the individual

Conflict of cultures for new refugees

- Intergenerational conflict: The collectivist style of living being challenged by the new individualistic style
- They experienced multiple traumas attempting to flee their country resulted in mental health deterioration
- Three subgroups
 - 1- Hold strong to their traditional values and practices
 - 2- Adopt the best of both cultures(Bicultural)
 - 3- Completely identify with the western individualistic style

Layers of Arab Personality

- Happiness from self-actualization is not experienced. Approval from other people and society is the source of happiness.
- Repression occurs externally unlike the west where it happens internally, therefore coping mechanisms are interpersonal as opposed to intra-psychic as in the west
- Typically, Arabs use three types of social coping mechanisms :
 - 1- Mosayara; conforming to other people's attitudes and wishes
 - 2- Istighaba: the real attitude towards a person is said in his or her absence as opposed to confrontation
 - 3- Fahlawiya: using the most tactful methods possible to minimize social tension such as sense of humor or exaggerations

Layers of Arab Personality continued

- Two sides to the personality: External side which conforms to norms and values. Private layer which allows the person to express what they are not encouraged to express
- Arabs use balance of coping mechanisms to express themselves, and try to maintain traditional life style and some coping mechanisms to remove responsibility.