

**MENTAL HEALTH AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL
PRACTICE IN THE UNITED
ARAB EMIRATES**

EDITED BY CARRIE YORK AL-KARAM
AND AMBER HAQUE



Mental Health and Psychological Practice in the United Arab Emirates

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-56752-9

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First published 2015 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of Nature America, Inc., One New York Plaza, Suite 4500, New York, NY 10004-1562.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

ISBN 978-1-349-56652-5 ISBN 978-1-137-55823-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137558237

Distribution in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world is by Palgrave Macmillan®, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mental health and psychological practice in the United Arab Emirates / edited by Carrie York Al-Karam and Amber Haque.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-349-56652-5 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Mental health—United Arab Emirates. 2. Mental health services—United Arab Emirates. 3. Clinical psychology—United Arab Emirates. 4. Psychotherapy—United Arab Emirates. I. York Al-Karam, Carrie, 1978— editor.

II. Haque, Amber, editor.

RA790.7.U4M46 2015

362.19689'140095357—dc23

2015019237

A catalogue record for the book is available from the British Library.

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Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is located at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula bordering Oman and Saudi Arabia. In 2013, the country's population was 9.2 million, of which only 1.4 million were Emirati citizens. The UAE boasts some 200 nationalities and is perhaps one of the most multicultural societies on the planet. Established in 1971, it is a federation of seven emirates including Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah. With its capital Abu Dhabi and its most well-known city Dubai, the UAE is considered a powerhouse in the region due to its solid economy, tax-free status and high standard of living, low crime rate, and unparalleled multicultural lifestyle.

Despite being an Islamic country whose laws are based on Sharia, the UAE is quite liberal and open, with individuals enjoying a relatively high level of personal and social freedom. In terms of language, although it is officially Arabic, English is also widely spoken. Strolling on the beach, one will see everything from bikinis to burkas. In the malls, one can see Emirati traditional clothing, Western-style jeans and T-shirts, Pakistani shalwar kameez, flowing African attire, and everything in between. Western fast-food chains are mixed in with local and international cuisine. Local clothing and household goods shops are interspersed with a host of international name-brand chains. Camels roam alongside the Range Rovers and Rolls-Royces of their owners, deserts sprawl outside of indoor ski centers and skating rinks, mosques coexist next to five-star hotels that house glitzy nightclubs—the UAE is truly unique.

The UAE also has the second largest economy amongst Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries after Saudi Arabia (*Khaleej Times*, 2013) as well as the most advanced and developed infrastructure in the region (The Prospect Group, 2012), with the Dubai International Airport beating Heathrow in 2014 as having the most passenger traffic in the world (Anderson, 2015). The presence of world-renowned institutions such as the Guggenheim, the Louvre, the Sorbonne, and New York University has further solidified the UAE as a modern, dynamic, and world-class nation. It is also famous for being home to a number of man-made wonders such as the world's tallest building (Burj Khalifa), the world's largest shopping

mall (Dubai Mall), an indoor ski center (Ski Dubai), the first and only seven-star hotel (Burj al-Arab), and the man-made, palm-shaped island in the middle of the Arabian Sea (The Palm Jumeirah)—less than a decade ago all of these were only a figment of imagination.

The rapid development that the UAE has enjoyed is mirrored in the dynamic and growing professional field of psychology. The short period of time in which the profession has developed is further testament that psychology in the UAE is as vibrant and dynamic as the country in which it operates. The presence of important elements such as academic programs, professional bodies, licensing laws, and international conferences demonstrates that the foundation of the field has been laid.

However, there are still pockets of society in the UAE where psychology is misunderstood and stigmatized. This is due in part to the fact that psychology is a recent arrival and further that it is a science rooted in Western assumptions of human mental and behavioral processes and does not take into account Islamic norms, values, and worldview.

Despite these challenges, the evidence suggests that the psychology that is developing and being practiced in the UAE takes into account these issues by addressing relevant questions such as:

- Are psychological assessments that were developed for and calibrated on Western populations valid and reliable when translated into Arabic, and are they cross-culturally relevant?
- Can Islamic treatments and practices be incorporated into psychotherapy? If so, what are these treatments, and how can they be incorporated?
- Is Islam a resource from which new psychological approaches, concepts, and theories can be developed? If so, how can these developments add to the growing field of scientific psychology at the global level?
- How is the UAE experience relevant to other Gulf countries—the Middle East in general—other Islamic countries, or even other countries where contemporary scientific approaches to psychology are also new and developing? In other words, what can be learned from the UAE experience?
- What can be done to ensure that the growth of psychology in the UAE is both organic and sustainable?

These are just some of the issues that contributors to this volume attempt to address in their chapters, from which emerge two critical ideas vital to the growth of psychology as a whole. First, despite the criticism that psychology is a Western/secular science relevant mostly to Western societies, we believe that non-Western countries can benefit from it, even ones that

are rooted in religion, provided that psychology is tailored to the specifics of the culture in which it is being applied. Second, knowledge generated through this process of tailoring has the potential to enrich contemporary scientific approaches to psychology by taking into account a fuller range of human experience. In that sense, not only is this work important for the Gulf and broader Middle East, it also has relevance and implications for the growth and development of psychology as a profession and scientific discipline at the global level.

The scope and rationale for this book is to paint a broad picture of what the various subfields of professional psychology look like on the ground in the UAE, including academic, clinical/counseling, research, educational, industrial/organizational (I/O), and school psychology. Although the coverage is by no means comprehensive and does not address other related fields such as psychiatry and social work, we hope to give insight into the sorts of activities that psychologists are engaged in as well as the challenges they face professionally in such a rapidly developing and multicultural society. This is important because until now there is virtually no cohesive scholarship coming out of the UAE or Gulf region on psychology as a profession. Bits and pieces can be found, such as in the recently established *Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology* as well as research articles from the region published in various international scientific journals. There is also the recent book by Justin Thomas, *Psychological Well-Being in the Gulf States: The New Arabia Felix*. That being said, this book has been written and put together in a way that is accessible to the general reader in the UAE, the segment of the society that needs to better understand what psychology is and what psychologists do. We also envision it as an important textbook in psychology classes across the UAE, one that will give students an idea of what a career in the field could look like since misunderstanding and stigma is still very much associated with this profession. Last, it is poised to be an important and useful work for professionals, academics, and students of cross-cultural or international psychology, providing a snapshot of the profession in a country and region that is largely unrepresented in the literature, thereby contributing to the body of knowledge of psychology in a more global context.

Part I contains chapters that provide a base of understanding. Authors discuss a number of issues including the social responsibility of psychology as a professional field within a highly diverse and multicultural society. A brief history of the development of the mental health system in the UAE as well as the difficulties and challenges faced in conducting psychological research is covered.

Part II raises questions about culture and diversity. For example, how does ethnic stereotyping, which is quite common in a country as diverse as

the UAE, affect the society as a whole? What happens to the cultural identity of Emirati students who study abroad and then return home and reintegrate into their culture of origin? What is the role of traditional healers, and how can an indigenous understanding of mental health inform and potentially improve contemporary approaches to psychotherapy? How can indigenous beliefs be incorporated into a Positive Psychology framework so that a new “Indigenous Positive Psychology” can emerge? Finally, what challenges does the expatriate community face when retiring from jobs in the UAE, and what strategies can be offered to make this transition easier?

Part III deals with issues related to clinical practice in the UAE, including an overview of both the counseling profession, marriage counseling and the diverse problems couples face, as well as substance misuse and the work of National Rehabilitation Center in prevention, treatment, and policy development. Other topics that are addressed include an intervention program for teenagers’ personal development, telepsychology and its relevance to a society where clinical care is highly stigmatized, and, finally, a chapter that discusses an Islamic therapy and its use on non-Muslims.

Part IV explores the areas of both educational/school and I/O psychology. The chapters on educational psychology present a brief overview of the profession as well as how educational psychologists can help the UAE to achieve its Vision 2021 as it relates to quality education for all. Other issues that are addressed are how cultural and language barriers affect educational psychology assessments as well as how bilingualism and creativity can facilitate overall linguistic, intellectual, and creative competencies. Further discussions include an introduction to a social skills training program for children as well as a pilot program in mindfulness that was implemented in a school in Abu Dhabi. The sole chapter on I/O psychology discusses the difficulty in translating Western human resource assessment tools, used to measure capabilities and performance, for the UAE workforce.

Part V starts with a chapter on regulating the practice of psychology including the challenges and benefits associated with establishing an ethical code. This is followed by a discussion of the challenges faced in building a cohesive, professional community that brings together disparate expatriate and Emirati psychologists. Last, the importance of having strong academic psychology programs to serve as the foundation for an applied psychology community in the UAE is also discussed.

Throughout the various chapters the authors have shed light on some of the challenges the profession faces, dispelled misconceptions, and addressed concerns. It is our hope that the information contained in this book encourages and inspires professionals, policy makers, service users, and the general public in the UAE to give this professional field the attention it deserves so that it can grow in a way that is solid, organic, and sustainable.

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Part I

Setting the Scene

Thinking and Practicing Psychology in a Kaleidoscopic UAE: Notes from a Social Responsibility Perspective

Shaima Ahammed

The UAE: A Uniquely Cosmopolitan Society

Among many images and symbols that typically cross one's mind when one thinks of the UAE, one is the popular tagline that the nation uses to promote tourism—"Global Village: Where the World Comes Together." Tourism aside, for anyone who has visited or lived in the UAE even for a short period, this slogan represents a very familiar and overarching theme that fittingly describes the multicultural landscape of the UAE. For those of us with a fascination for numbers and data, the term "multicultural landscape" represents eight million people who live in the UAE, of which only about one million are UAE nationals. The remainder comprises nonnational residents (United Arab Emirates-National Bureau of Statistics, 2005). According to the 2005 population census, a majority of the nonnational residents of the UAE consists of immigrants from countries including India, Pakistan, and the Philippines—to name the most dominant groups—with about 70% of the population consisting of males. Expatriates from Europe, Australia, Northern America, Latin America, and other Asian and Arab countries make up the rest of the expatriate population, most of whom live in metropolitan cities such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah, where the spirit of diversity and multiculturalism is most palpable. Indeed, these numbers and descriptions paint a picture of

a multicultural UAE—one which is formed from a mosaic of different cultures and ethnicities, all with different languages, values, norms, beliefs, traditions, attitudes, morals, behavioral patterns, and worldviews.

While the UAE is certainly not one-off in its multicultural fabric, what sets it apart from other melting pot cultures like the United States and Canada is the social and psychological segregation that is characteristic of the resident communities of the UAE. Hence, even as the society seems to represent and uphold an exalted ethos of multiculturalism and diversity, members of different cultural groups retain their distinct cultural identities and maintain close ties with their ethnic values and traditions. This differs greatly from immigrant cultures, such as those in the United States, Australia, and Canada, where immigrants intentionally or reflexively are assimilated into the dominant culture, thereby relinquishing to a great extent their indigenous cultural and ethnic traditions. Hence, while some general and preliminary assumptions can be safely drawn about the social and psychological processes that impact the mental health of those living in other immigrant societies, the same is not possible about the residents of the UAE. While it is true that multiculturalism implies the prospect of a society living up to nobler values of tolerance, solidarity, social cohesion, integration, oneness of humanity, and so on, however, it poses real problems for the practice of psychology, which may be captured by questions such as:

- How can psychology best respond to the zeitgeist of “diversity” that represents principles of relativism and pluralism?
- What challenges constrain psychology’s responsibility to society as it operates in a multicultural environment represented by a diversity of worldviews?
- How can psychology engage in meaningful research and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in a multicultural environment which relativizes morality, embraces subjectivity, and rejects universal “truths?”
- What value positions can psychology identify with as it tries to be both universal and culturally inclusive?
- What constitutes nondiscriminatory and ethical practice in psychology when operating in a multicultural environment represented by differing moral and ethical values?

Finding answers to these questions calls for a deeper appreciation and understanding of psychology’s place in a globalized and multicultural world. It requires us to take note of the complex socioenvironmental dynamics that can potentially impact individual well-being and mental health. These questions render it necessary to reiterate the position that

human minds cannot be studied without taking into account the sociocultural context in which they exist. What this calls for is “socially responsible” psychology that can engage in social advocacy and address the macro as well as the micro sociocultural determinants of well-being. In the following sections, the need, relevance, and appropriateness of a socially responsible form of psychology in the UAE will be discussed, and recommendations toward promoting this agenda will be made.

Current State of Psychology in the UAE

Psychology is a young and relatively lesser-known field in the UAE. In a sociohistorical context, where traditionalism and modernism coexist, it is a discipline that awaits much-needed attention from a wide spectrum of stakeholders such as educators, media, policy makers, government, and so on, before it can seep into the community psyche and answer its call to play a meaningful role in the society. As a new discipline, it is confronted by many challenges, and its wide scope and application are often not given due recognition and consideration. Although the discipline is well poised to address the many issues that plague society, the general public is largely unaware of the role of psychologists and the potential contributions psychology can offer to the fields of education, health, forensics and law, marketing, human resources, business, sports and so on. Among these many fields of application, the relatively better positioned remains “clinical,” although even clinical psychology appears to be overshadowed by the emphasis placed on the biomedical perspective. Given these contexts, it is not surprising then that psychology remains limited in its scope and funding. Despite having some of the highest per capita incomes in the world, there is very little funding and resources dedicated to mental health in the public domain. What is more lamentable is the lack of governmental regulation of mental health practices and practitioners, as can be evidenced by the few public policies focused on mental health. Unlike in many other advanced societies, psychology’s role in policy analyses and advocacy in the UAE is not a well-formulated strategy. Indeed, a random review of people in governance or leadership positions will scarcely spot a psychologist among the many professionals who serve on various government bodies, research institutions, commissions, agencies, associations, nongovernmental organizations and so on. An enterprise that provides some hope in this rather bleak scenario is the Emirates Psychological Association (EPA), which was established in 2003. While its stated mission is to enhance the role of psychology in Emirati society, it is quite young and still in its developing stages. However, it is important to recognize that

being the pioneering professional association of psychology in the nation, it carries with it a critical responsibility to guide, direct, advance, and promote the discipline.

The lack of any established regulatory bodies, professional organizations, and responsible leadership that can monitor and steer the discipline toward fulfilling its commitment to the betterment of human life is not the only challenge that confronts psychology in the UAE. There are a number of cultural deterrents that play a role in placing it in a rather marginalized and disadvantageous position. The most critical of these is the stigma and taboo associated with the term “psychology” among the Arab community. Although there have been great strides made toward overcoming the myths, stigma, and adverse meanings and perceptions associated with “psychology,” it continues to be represented by “craziness” or “insanity,” at least among a minority of the aged or rural Arab population. Questions of whether the principles and assumptions of psychology are antithetical to Islamic teachings often plague the minds and narratives of those who show some ambivalence or readiness to make positive shifts in their attitudes. This mistrust and perception of threat have been largely due to the import of mainstream Western theories and assumptions that have blindly adhered to logical positivism and empiricism. The mindless adoption of Euro-American conceptual jargon, psychotherapy that relies on an individualistic model of “self,” disregard for the cultural conceptions of psychopathology, and failure to incorporate spirituality and the Islamic worldview along with the tacit wisdom embedded in the Arab knowledge systems—such as oral sources of knowledge like proverbs, folklores, and practices—are only some of the reasons for the misperception and lack of recognition that the discipline has long suffered. Many of the different expatriate communities in the UAE share some of these concerns, such as the negation of an interdependent self-construal, taboo and stigma associated with seeking help, cultural conceptions of psychopathology, and so on.

For the expatriate population from North America and Europe, however, the picture is slightly different. Although they are more familiar with and disposed to understanding and acknowledging the relevance of psychology, their concerns center around fewer choices in therapy or a lack of availability of experts and trained professionals, the limited presence of psychology in educational curriculums, and so forth. Perhaps, of all the different communities represented in the UAE, the most disadvantaged is the large percentage of socioeconomically deprived migrant unskilled workers from Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. With no access to psychological support or therapeutic services, they often suffer in silence or deny their mental health concerns. Language barriers, separation from family and friends, exhausting work environments, and lack of community

networks are only some of the factors that intensify their vulnerability to mental health issues. They are also prone to psychological issues such as substance abuse and a host of other social and structural disadvantages such as social exclusion, structural, social, and cultural barriers to mental health care, discrimination, and violation of their rights, all of which make their psychological effects difficult to address and overcome. The crisis is well reflected in the increasing number of suicides that are reported every year from among these communities. Despite these numbers, the impassive manner in which the system responds to such issues testifies to the woeful state of the discipline in the society.

If knowledge advancement and research discoveries are any indication of a discipline's development and growth in a given societal context, then the enterprise of scientific psychology in the UAE presents a less promising picture. Given the lack of research programs and projects in the discipline and comparatively less research investment and funding, the psychology community in the UAE seems to hold little appreciation for the value of research as a foundation for psychological practice and applications. Indeed, the UAE has a long way to go before it can claim a strong record of research-based or evidence-based practice in psychology. Critically lacking in the present context are some of those important elements that foster a research environment, such as journals with a regional focus and clear research agendas, psychological science conferences, community-driven or policy-driven research priorities, institutional funds and grants that promote scientific publications, training programs in alternative research methodology and measurements, a reliable channel and mechanism for disseminating psychological knowledge to the public, and the like. One of the major obstacles impeding meaningful research has been the excess of superficial validation research that attempts to replicate or validate popular Western conceptualizations, measures, or researches. A random exploration of the database will reveal that a great majority of psychological studies published from the UAE are descriptive studies, which have limited potential to offer solutions or lead to policy recommendations. Notwithstanding the minority of scholars and researchers who do undertake relevant research projects that apply contextually appropriate methodology, most studies rely on the dominant quantitative methodology, which discounts the local conditions and sociocultural factors as mere extraneous variables. Arguably, a major reason for this is researchers' propensity to yield to institutional pressure to publish in international journals. This often causes the real issues and problems worthy of exploration to be marginalized and dismissed. More importantly, the failure to represent the multicultural context of the UAE in research results in insufficient attention to the differential realities and experiences of people

belonging to different cultural, ethnic, and social class groupings. What is promising in this scenario, however, is that the increasing number of validation studies has resulted in a rich reserve of Arabic translations of psychological tests and measures often credited to scholars from the UAE.

So, what can possibly set off a research revolution for the psychology community in the UAE? Perhaps, a good starting point is the revival of “social interest” that the famed psychologist Alfred Adler considered to be a key indicator of one’s psychological well-being. A social interest that brings forth a sense of identification with one’s community is what may inspire psychologists to seek research-driven knowledge toward addressing the many social concerns that impact people’s well-being. It is what may enable psychologists to be active agents and advocates of well-being and mental health in a society and, to borrow Adler’s words, “social interest” is what is “fundamental to the practice of psychology” (Rudman & Ansbacher, 1989).

From this preceding discussion, it is somewhat clear that in order for psychology to grow and develop as a discipline and a profession, there are a few critical changes that are necessary. Many of these changes are those that ought to be initiated at a governmental level. As a first step, regulatory bodies with consistent policies need to be established to oversee the education, training, practice, and research in psychology. Indeed, educating and training more individuals seems to be an essential mission that will help us respond to the rising mental health needs of the community. Such training programs may do well to target students representing the different dominant expatriate groups in the UAE. Despite recognizing the heavy undertones of cultural influences on the human mind, culturally sensitive practice remains a challenge in a socioculturally diverse society. Hence, while designing such programs and curricula, a great deal of attention must be paid to issues of cultural sensitivity, multiculturalism, and ethics. Since culture is not a visually apparent trait, there needs to be an intentional focus on training psychologists to be able to interpret values, norms, worldviews, beliefs, and attitudes as functional adaptations to the cultural context of which they are part. The general public also needs to be educated about the role that psychology plays in a society, and this may help to dispel the community’s misconceptions regarding the discipline. In such awareness-building programs, it is necessary to emphasize that the practice of psychology does not endeavor to replace or disregard personal belief systems; rather, it is a science that enhances well-being and mental health. As research is a vital part of any discipline, funding for research, as well as access to grants, needs to improve if psychology is to be properly equipped to provide the best possible services to society. Such research endeavors are also to ensure that the needs of immigrant groups are included in research agendas, and that any studies performed are culturally sensitive.

Promise of Psychology for a Society like the UAE

Psychology's emergence as one of the most successful disciplines, in a short span of 150 years, is typically identified with its unique value of being able to respond to just about any conceivable human crisis or concern. Undoubtedly, its wide range of applications in fields such as education, health, law, business and organizations, the military, and so on, is well recognized in many societies worldwide. However, its role in the Emirati society seems to be limited to "Clinical Psychology," as represented in academia and professional positions. While the demand for clinical psychology has certainly been rapidly increasing in recent years, the need to address the community's concerns in many other realms such as education, medicine, organizations and businesses, law, and the military cannot be overlooked. Hence, the goals and foci of psychology are to be cast in roles that are more diverse if its potential value is to be harnessed well. To start with, three priority areas that require the greatest attention from psychology in a globally connected, multicultural UAE are discussed herewith.

Education

Psychology has long held a place in understanding the dynamics of learning processes. Education is a field that is heavily indebted to psychology for many reasons, the most important being the field's reliance on testing, measurement, assessment, evaluation, and training to enhance educational programs and learning processes. It also intersects with many realms that psychology holds dear, such as individual differences, personality, intelligence, self-concept, motivation, and the like. All said, what particular implications can psychology legitimately have for educational practice in the UAE? To begin with, it has to be understood that, unlike many other societies, structured education in the Emirati society does not have a historical context of intellectual revolutions and philosophical deliberations; rather, it was a practice of self-refinement, character building, and spiritual awakening that can be traced back to the system of informal classes on Islamic principles held by veteran teachers (*al-Mutawwa*), in corners of mosques. Thus, as it has been with many other social structures, education was instituted as a necessity to complement the rapid progress and modernity that followed the discovery of oil.

However, since its inception it has been considered one of the UAE's highest priorities, and that still continues with the Ministry of Education recently adopting the "Education 2020" vision designed to introduce advanced education techniques, improve innovative skills, and focus

more on the self-learning abilities of students. While all this has led to great strides in literacy rates and progress, as has been evidenced in the state of educational programs and institutions the world over, many gaps are noticeable, reflective of an ahistorically deployed system of education. Some of those gaps are gender disparity in educational achievements, low rankings on worldwide educational indices such as *PISA*, lack of employability skills, high dropout rates, and lower teacher satisfaction. Given this background, the potential role of psychology cannot be overlooked in addressing the many problems plaguing the field. Apart from its application in instructional design, educational technology, curriculum development, organizational learning, student motivation, special education, classroom management, and so on, it can also be used to address many psychological issues that students face, such as abuse, grief, addictions, conduct issues, development disorders, to name just a few. The role of school psychologists and school counselors is indeed very crucial in a societal context such as the UAE's. In fulfilling their roles and responsibilities, they act as facilitators, advocates, and leaders of the much-needed change from which the educational system in the UAE can benefit. At least two needs may emerge as paramount if one were to prioritize the goals for immediate action by psychologists and counselors—tailoring curriculums to suit specific student populations and shaping and expanding teaching practices for teachers to improve their classroom instruction and enhance communication with and learning for students.

Human Resources

The field of “Organizational Behavior” is perhaps nowhere more relevant than it is in the UAE, considering that over 80% of the resident population constitutes expatriates who arrive solely for employment and entrepreneurship. Thus, psychological dynamics associated with work, employment, and career are often central to their lives, a good percentage of those who have left their family and home to pursue a career or employment. Apart from the typical challenges that concern any organization, big or small, such as absenteeism, employee performance, turnover, job satisfaction, training, and the like, the work environment in the UAE also presents issues related to cross-cultural interactions between different cultural groups, and makes for a melting pot of cultures within organizations. Such interactions often give rise to subtle yet grave issues such as stereotyping, cultural discrimination, adjustment issues, gender discrimination, culturally contingent management and leadership practices, and a score of other issues related to equality and diversity, all of which potentially

impact productivity, performance, satisfaction, and wellness of employees. Hence, employee assistance programs (EAP) and counseling, risk analysis for employees, addressing workplace stressors, and support groups for expatriate employees are all essential in any organization that employs a multicultural workforce. Indeed, the UAE's organizations may do well to mandate programs to enhance employee involvement, employee growth and development, health and safety, work-life balance, and employee recognition, all toward creating a psychologically healthy workplace as prescribed by the American Psychological Association (APA).

Community Support

As it is in any other society, mental health is a key area of concern in the UAE. However, while many other societies have recognized the importance of establishing clear community-based policies, plans, and initiatives to promote psychological well-being and improve access to mental health services, the UAE largely continues to rely on institutionalized care and pharmacotherapy to confront the challenge. Hence, community-based mental health care or the larger domain of Community Psychology is a field that is yet to make its presence felt in the society. What makes community support especially important in the UAE is the unique cultural, environmental, and social challenges in understanding and responding to the mental health needs of a diverse community. As one delves deeper into the issue, it becomes clear that to be effective, mental health policies and initiatives need to be targeted at different cultural groups. This is often due to many complex factors such as culturally prescribed meanings and assumptions of mental health held by the different expatriate groups, the different belief systems that influence the utilization of mental health services and effectiveness of mental health treatment programs, the stigma and taboo associated with mental disorders, socioeconomic characteristics that make certain groups more prone to certain psychological conditions, and so forth. This context provides a good fit between the UAE's society and community psychology, for community psychology holds the central tenet that behavior cannot be decontextualized from the sociocultural milieu in which it is embedded.

With its emphasis on values such as social justice, diversity, empowerment, wellness, citizen participation, a psychological sense of community, prevention of psychological problems, promotion of wellness, it also promises to overcome many of the problems that UAE society faces in the realm of psychological health and well-being. Increasing social concerns such as child and elderly abuse, domestic violence, sexual violence,

trauma, substance abuse, and so on, are only some of the challenges with dire psychological consequences that the society has been trying to address in recent times. Often, these are issues that require multi-layered solutions, including awareness, psycho-education, policy, planning, and the like. Given this background and the concerns, it seems that we cannot overlook the relevance and necessity of community psychology in the UAE.

Challenges for Psychology in a Multicultural UAE

Throughout this chapter, the unique multicultural social context in the UAE and the challenges that it presents for the meaningful practice of psychology have been discussed. As we have seen, there are several roadblocks that hinder the progress and development of the discipline. However, what precisely are those challenges that we are attempting to address here? The following paragraphs briefly outline the five most pressing challenges that impede psychology's progress in the future.

Lack of Government Support for Psychology

Perhaps the greatest challenge that professionals such as clinical and counseling psychologists face in the UAE is that practice guidelines are haphazardly communicated and executed. Until recently, psychologists were classified as technical medical staff in the licenses issued by the Ministry of Health. The standards of practice are predominantly administered by national bodies, including the Ministry of Health or the Emirate's local bodies such as DHA (Dubai Health Authority) and HAAD (Health Authority of Abu Dhabi). While general standards are laid out, these regulating bodies offer few guidelines on the scope of practice and lesser still on practice responsibilities for specific roles. What this has resulted in is a widespread misappropriation and abuse of the title "psychologist." Licensing is also a contentious issue. While recent legislature has directed a unified licensure program, thus moving away from the provincial licensing system, it remains to be seen how this may impact the field and what further issues this may present.

Translation of Psychological Theories

One of the downfalls of having limited research availability for specific populations is that psychologists are forced to adapt theories generated

in Euro-American contexts and transpose them to the populations with which they are working. However, in reality, psychological theories are not easily adapted across cultures. Adapting researched theories to a multicultural society requires an in-depth understanding of the population. With the existence of several subgroups in the UAE, this can make such translation of theories a challenge. An example is the emphasis on the sense of an autonomous individualistic self that is emphasized and exalted in many psychological theories in the realm of developmental psychology or personality. Such theories become defective and without purpose when applied to cultural contexts where the self is relational and familial/interpersonal harmony and social well-being is considered of prime importance. When applied in counseling or clinical contexts, such theoretical adaptations bring forth grave implications for the goals of psychotherapy. Cultural realities such as polygamy, patrilineal social organization, honor, and shame are just some of those experiences, to name a few, that fail to be represented in the assumptions and value positions of Euro-American psychological theories.

Prioritization of Mental Health Services

Mental health services, prevention programs, resources, and funding opportunities for those services are contingent on the mental health needs and issues presented in a given societal context. In the UAE, however, the mental health system lacks any such prioritized implementation of mental health services. No task force groups, policies, prevention programs, and the like are implemented to address the major mental health concerns or crises in the society. For instance, recently, suicidal ideation seemed to be a particularly dominant mental health issue, as was evidenced in the UAE Global School-based Student Health Survey by the WHO. The report showed that 13% of the students seriously contemplated suicide and 9.8% made a plan toward attempting it. Prevalence of suicide was also particularly high among migrant workers from India. Given such a context, most purpose-driven mental health systems in the world would consider it necessary to integrate suicide detection and prevention practices, especially for immigrants and teenagers, among whom suicide rates seem particularly high. However, such practices are not followed or given due attention. Several other issues specific to certain subpopulations also surface from time to time, such as domestic violence, child abuse, extensive reliance on fraudulent traditional healers and black magic practices for mental health treatment, issues of learning disabilities among children, elderly abuse, and so forth.