

12-2023

From the Arab World to the United States of America: The Wellness of Arab Graduate Women Studying in the U.S.

Mariam Mostafa
University of Arkansas-Fayetteville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>



Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Commons](#), and the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#)

Citation

Mostafa, M. (2023). From the Arab World to the United States of America: The Wellness of Arab Graduate Women Studying in the U.S.. *Graduate Theses and Dissertations* Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/5160>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact scholar@uark.edu.

From the Arab World to the United States of America: The Wellness of Arab Graduate
Women Studying in the U.S.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education

by

Mariam Mostafa
Cairo University
Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature, 2011,
The American University in Cairo
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2015,

December 2023
University of Arkansas

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

Michael T. Miller, Ed.D
Dissertation Director

Michael S. Hevel, Ph.D.
Committee Member

John W. Murry, Jr., Ed.D
Committee Member

Abstract

The pursuit of higher education symbolizes a profound and transformative journey, particularly for international students who embark on the path of studying abroad. This dissertation undertakes an in-depth exploration of the well-being of Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the United States (US), emphasizing four crucial dimensions of wellness: social, mental/emotional, physical, and financial well-being. Employing a qualitative research methodology, this study delves into the multifaceted experiences of this specific student population and investigates how these experiences impact them. Through a series of interviews and rigorous qualitative analysis, we illuminate the distinct challenges and opportunities that Arab graduate students encounter in both their academic pursuits and personal lives as they navigate the educational system and life in the US.

The research engages with a group of seven participants, each contributing a unique perspective to our exploration of Arab women graduate students' wellness in the United States. These participants, who will be referred to by pseudonyms throughout the study, come from various educational backgrounds and regions of the Arab world, including Kurdistan, Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco.

The findings uncover key insights into the factors that significantly contribute to the overall wellness of Arab women graduate students. These insights include the critical role of cultural adaptation, the importance of robust social support networks, the pivotal role of mental health resources, providing health system awareness, the significance of access to culturally appropriate food, and the need for awareness about the financial systems. These elements collectively influence and shape the well-being of these students in their academic journey.

This dissertation did not only provide an understanding of the wellness dynamics experienced by Arab female graduate students and the strategies they employ for adaptation but also offers insights for academic institutions, policymakers, and student support services. By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges and needs of this student demographic, institutions can work toward enhancing the overall well-being and success of international students in their academic pursuits.

In summary, this research illuminates the transformative journey undertaken by Arab female graduate students in the United States. It underscores the importance of considering holistic wellness and provides a roadmap for cultivating a supportive and enriching academic environment for international students.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Mike Miller, for his unwavering support, guidance, and mentorship that began long before the formation of the dissertation committee and even before my entry into the program. Dr. Miller's invaluable expertise, dedication, and unwavering commitment to my academic and personal growth have been instrumental in my academic journey. He has been a pillar of support, a source of inspiration, and one of the major reasons behind my ability to persevere and persist through the challenges of being an international student. He has consistently shown genuine care and understanding, going above and beyond to ensure my success. His guidance and support have shaped my research, my development as a scholar, and my mental wellness as a student. These verses from the poem by the Egyptian poet Ahmed Shawky beautifully convey his worth:

قُمْ لِلْمُعَلِّمِ وَفِيهِ التَّبَجِيلَا كَادَ الْمُعَلِّمُ أَنْ يَكُونَ رَسُولَا
أَعْلَمْتَ أَشْرَفَ أَوْ أَجَلَ مَنْ الَّذِي يَبْنِي وَيُنْشِئُ أَنْفُسًا وَعُقُولَا

Which means: Stand up to honor the teacher and show respect, the teacher is almost like a prophet. Do you know anyone more noble or more honourable than the one who builds and nurtures minds and souls?") His dedication to nurturing ideas and minds aligns perfectly with these verses. Therefore, I can confidently assert that he is among the most noble and respected individuals I have ever had the privilege of knowing.

I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Murry, a member of my dissertation committee, for his care, kindness, and invaluable contributions to my research. His insightful feedback and thoughtful suggestions have significantly enhanced the quality of this work. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude that he taught me my very first course and created an atmosphere that allowed me to settle and transition smoothly. Dr. Murry's genuine and

sincere approach as a professor has been truly inspiring. Working with him has been an absolute pleasure and honour.

I am equally appreciative of Dr. Hevel, another esteemed member of my committee, for his invaluable input and constructive feedback. His keen insights consistently highlighted aspects that enhanced the quality and significance of my work, adding substantial value to my research. I'm also deeply grateful to him for reaching out as the first point of contact from the department back in April 2018 for the interview. The timing of his email couldn't be any better, as I was already in Fayetteville, visiting the place and the people I hold dear.

I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Kate Mamiseishvili for her invaluable support and guidance during my candidacy phase and throughout the entire program. Her guidance has been instrumental in my academic journey, and I deeply appreciate her dedication to my success.

I would like to express my gratitude to the entire faculty and staff in the Higher Education program for their collective contribution to my academic journey. Their knowledge, expertise, and commitment to education have played a vital role in shaping my experience. In particular, I cannot miss thanking Dr. Dave Gearhart for his exceptional kindness and support. While I would have been honored if he had remained on my committee, I selflessly hope that he is enjoying a well-deserved retirement after years of dedicated service and leaving behind a lasting legacy.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Leyah Bergman Lanier, who has been not only a mentor but also a motherly figure, a remarkable role model, and a steadfast backbone throughout my academic journey. She has been there for me during my most challenging moments, providing unwavering support and guidance. Without her generous assistance, I might

have found myself forever stuck in the ABD phase, and my entire life course would have taken a different trajectory. Her generosity, dedication, and genuine care have made an immeasurable impact on my academic, professional, and personal growth, and for that, I am sincerely thankful.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the dedicated members of the International Student and Scholars (ISS) office who were the first to welcome me and provide me with a sense of family here. Their support and guidance, especially from Michael Freeman and Audra Johnston, have been instrumental in helping me navigate the challenges of being an international student. I also can never forget to mention the lifelong friendships I made with some of the best people in the world like Cameron Caja, a friendship I will always cherish! I am truly lucky to have started my first job with them in ISS. Additionally, I want to express my gratitude to the Occupational Therapy (OT) team, particularly Sherry Muir, for their unwavering support and valuable contributions to my journey. Their assistance and encouragement have made a significant impact on my academic and personal growth. To all of them, I offer my sincere thanks for being pillars of support on this remarkable journey."

Lastly, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my support system in Fayetteville, my friends and family, who have been by my side through thick and thin. Your unwavering encouragement, support, and belief in me have been a source of strength and motivation throughout my journey. I also want to express my appreciation to the city of Fayetteville and its people for their kindness and welcoming spirit. Your warmth and hospitality have made my time here truly special. Thank you all for being an integral part of my academic and personal life.

Dedication

To my beloved Mama, Eng. Amal Hashem and Papa Dr. Mohsen Mostafa,

This work is dedicated to you with my utmost gratitude for your unwavering belief in me and for creating a space where I could authentically be myself. Your love, acceptance, empowerment, and genuine embrace of who I am, have been the cornerstone of my life. Thank you for the immeasurable support you've provided and the sacrifices you've made on my behalf. Your selflessness and determination have paved the way for my pursuit of dreams and aspirations. Above all, I wish to honour your remarkable patience. Your calm and understanding presence have been a guiding light, offering strength during both the challenges and joys of my journey. With this dedication, I acknowledge that it's your love, support, and sacrifices that have brought me to this point. Your presence in my life has been a true blessing, and I cherish every moment of it.

To my awesome sisters, Marwa, Mona, and Mickey,

This one's for you! With all the love and gratitude in the world, I dedicate this work to my favourite trio. You've always had my back and made me feel like I can be my true self. Your love, support, and the way you've cheered me on – it's like having a personal fan club! Thanks for being there through thick and thin, and for the sacrifices you've made along the way. Your patience? Legendary. You've been my calm in the storm. With this dedication, I want to shout from the rooftops that it's your love, support, and your "you got this" attitude that got me here. Having you in my life is an absolute blessing, and I treasure every moment with you. Cheers to the dream team – Marwa, Mona, Mickey, and Mariam.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study.....	1
A. Context of the Problem	2
B. Statement of the Purpose.....	6
C. Research Questions.....	7
D. Definitions.....	7
E. Assumptions.....	9
F. Limitations and Delimitations	11
G. Importance of the Study.....	12
H. Conceptual Framework.....	13

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature.....	16
A. Intersectionality of identities and Wellness.....	17
B. Wellness.....	18
C. Social, Mental, Physical, and Financial Wellness	20
D. Student Wellness	21
E. College Student Wellness.....	25
F. Wellness Among International Students	28
G. Wellness Among Arab Students.....	36
H. Challenges of Arab Women Studying in the U.S.....	41
I. Academic Stress and Coping Strategies.....	42
J. Chapter Summary.....	44

Chapter 3

Methodology.....	45
A. Design.....	46
B. Participants.....	48
C. Instruments.....	50
D. Interview Protocol Piloting.....	52
E. Collection of Data.....	54
F. Data Analysis.....	55
G. Positionality.....	56
H. Chapter Summary.....	59

Chapter 4

Findings.....	61
A. Summary of the Study	63
B. Results of Interviews	64
C. Data Analysis	67
D. Chapter Summary	123

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Discussion	125
A. Summary of the Study.....	126
B. Conclusions.....	131
C. Recommendations	135
D. Limitations.....	138
E. Discussion	140

F. Chapter Summary	144
References.....	145
Appendix A.....	159
Appendix B.....	160
Appendix C.....	161

List of Figures

Figure 1.....	23
---------------	----

List of Tables

Table 1.....	67
--------------	----

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

The United States (US) is home to some of the world's most prestigious universities and attracts students who seek a diverse array of academic programs and degrees. These individuals are commonly referred to as international students (Todoran & Peterson, 2020). According to Abualkhair (2013), international students are the ones who cross a territorial border for the purpose of enrolling in any kind of educational program leading to a recognized qualification or credential in the host country. The total number of international students in the US is 948,891, per the Institute of International Education (IIE) 2021/2022 Open Doors report. This figure includes both degree-seeking students and those on optional practical training (OPT) who are in the US on F1 or J1 visas. These international students face unique adversaries and cultural barriers as noted by McGarvey et al. (2015).

Despite the growing, general body of literature on international students in American higher education, there is relatively little that describes, identifies, and informs their unique and specific needs and experiences (Le & Wismer, 2016). This shortage is particularly apparent in studying the intersectional identities of international students, including topics like race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). Given their upbringing and cultural backgrounds, women coming, from the Arab world to study in the U.S experience more unique challenges when studying abroad, predominantly related to cultural and gender differences and expectations (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013).

Although the majority of international students face various challenges with different levels of intensity when studying abroad (Martinez-Ruiz et al., 2015), certain populations

encounter greater difficulties and handle them differently than others. This includes but is not limited to, international students from non-English speaking countries who may struggle with language barriers, and those from countries with distinct cultural norms who may experience cultural shock that affects their ability to adapt to new surroundings and social situations (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Furthermore, students from low-income backgrounds may encounter financial stress as they try to cover tuition and living expenses. Also, students from marginalized communities may also encounter additional obstacles related to discrimination and lack of support (McGuire et al., 2016).

These challenges are augmented and directly observable in graduate Arab women students in the US who face various difficulties due to their gender, cultural background, and immigration status. These challenges include gender discrimination, cultural and language barriers, lack of social support, and financial pressure (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Therefore, this research will focus on Arab women students, utilizing intersectionality to understand the challenges encountered by this population with multiple marginalities of race, gender, and religion; with particular emphasis on graduate students because of both their unique place in higher education and due to the absence of literature and reports of best practices about students enrolled in graduate programs (Lynch et al., 2020).

Context of the Problem

The number of Arab students from the 22 Arab countries participating in the Arab League, formally The League of Arab States, as per the (IIE) 2021/2022 Open Doors report, is 36,275 accounting for approximately 4% of the international student population; 21,317 of which are undergraduate students and 14,958 graduate students. These Arab students face challenges that can have serious consequences. These challenges can affect their academic performance,

mental wellness, and overall well-being and may include cultural and religious barriers, language barriers, discrimination and stereotyping, family expectations, financial hardships, and political instability (Saggie & Sanford, 2010).

Some of the challenges that can hinder their academic progress and unfavourably affect their well-being are often those stemming from cultural and religious differences that hinder their integration into the new environment. Their attire, language, or customs may highlight their racialized religious identity, making them feel misunderstood and isolated. In addition, social norms like refraining from drinking alcohol and eating pork, performing five daily prayers, and abstaining from intimate relationships may contribute to their sense of difference and alienation (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010).

Further features related to their ethnicity, such as accent, skin color, and modest way of life may also lead to feelings of isolation. Even before the terrorist attacks in New York on 9/11, Muslim women students experienced self-consciousness due to such visibility, which led some to reconsider and abandon veiling practices for example (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). Research conducted after 9/11 has substantiated the experiences of exclusion and marginalisation of Muslim students, both domestic and international (Ali, 2014; Seggie & Sanford, 2010).

Challenges such as these faced by Arab students in a new environment can result in a significant struggle and decrease the chances of their academic success. According to Shamma (2009), Arab international students in the United States experience feelings of social isolation and loneliness, which negatively affected their physical health, mental health, and consequently academic performance. Cultural and linguistic differences can result in misunderstandings and miscommunication, which can also cause frustration and conflict with teachers and peers; and

discrimination and prejudice against Arab students, particularly after the events of 9/11, can lead to further social alienation and decreased self-confidence (Seggie & Sanford, 2010).

Overall, students may feel overwhelmed by the power of their new community and the student self-identity versus the community's collective self-identity. For instance, these Arab students may feel out of place in a town where the entire community is passionate about football, and how the community projects certain expectations of value, while Arab students do not share the same interest or even knowledge and have trouble relating to or understanding the community norms and expectations (Miller, 2019). There are many other challenges that comply with the concept of self-identity versus the community's collective self-identity. These can result in serious consequences beyond academic struggle and dropping out of school. Inexperienced students with low resilience may develop severe mental illness, depression, physical ailments, self-harm, or even entertain suicidal thoughts (Goodwill & Zhou, 2020; Rice et al., 2012).

The extent of the problem was vividly described in the book "*Halfway Heaven: Diary of a Harvard Murder*" by Thenstrom (1997). Thenstrom told the story of two high-achieving international women who were accepted to study at Harvard, which they saw as a halfway point to achieving their dreams. However, one of the girls struggled to adjust to the new environment and fell into a cycle of mental distress, loneliness, and depression. Her academic performance suffered, and she ultimately committed murder-suicide, killing her roommate and herself. The author portrayed her not as a villain, but as a victim of a negligent community that failed to provide adequate care and guidance. The book raises important issues related to mental health, academic pressure, cultural assimilation, and the challenges of acceptance in elite academic institutions.

Focusing on the wellness of graduate students in research is crucial because graduate education can be a highly demanding and stressful experience. Graduate students face a plethora of challenges, such as navigating the research process, dealing with academic pressure, and balancing multiple responsibilities, including coursework, research, teaching, and other commitments. Graduate students also face increased isolation and lack of social support compared to undergraduate students, as they often work independently on their research projects or dissertations and do not often engage in extracurricular activities. This can lead to feelings of loneliness, burnout, and mental health issues, for instance, anxiety and depression (Posselt, 2021).

Furthermore, graduate students may also have additional stressors such as financial constraints, family obligations, and job responsibilities. This can create additional pressure and make it difficult for them to prioritize their well-being. By focusing on the wellness of graduate students, universities can create a supportive and inclusive environment that prioritizes the physical, mental, and emotional health of their graduate students. This can help to reduce stress, increase academic performance, and foster a sense of community and belonging. Moreover, prioritizing graduate student wellness can also lead to long-term benefits for society, as graduate students are more often than not future leaders and innovators in their fields. By supporting their well-being, universities can ensure that their graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge to make meaningful contributions to their communities and society as a whole, as well as other communities (Golde & Dore, 2001; Hyun et al., 2007). In summary, focusing on the wellness of graduate students is essential because it supports their academic and personal success, promotes a supportive and inclusive learning environment, and fosters long-term benefits for society.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceived wellness of Arab women who are international graduate students in the US, with a particular focus on the social, mental, physical, and financial dimensions of wellness. The investigation aims to contribute to the limited literature on the wellness of this specific population, with intersectional identities, of graduate Arab women international students and shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities they face in navigating their academic and personal lives, in a new cultural and social environment, and the strategies they use to navigate those challenges. In addition, the study should inform the development of effective interventions and support programs that promote their wellness.

The study employed a qualitative research design to examine the topic at hand. To achieve the study's purpose, the research questions delved into the dimensions of social, mental, physical, and financial wellness that are relevant to Arab women international students at the graduate level. The study explored the challenges and opportunities that arise from studying in a new cultural and social environment and how it impacts their wellness. In addition, the study examined the coping strategies that this population, with intersectional identities, uses to navigate academic and personal challenges and the support systems and resources that are most helpful for promoting their wellness. By addressing these themes, the study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the wellness needs of Arab women international students at the graduate level in the US and consequently inform ways to better help them. The study was situated at one US university of approximately 30,000 students situated in the mid-south, heartland region of the country.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered to address the purpose of the study.

1. What role, according to Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the US, do social support networks, including peers, mentors, campus programs, and community organizations, play in promoting holistic wellness?
2. What are the experiences of Arab women graduate students in terms of mental wellness during their academic journey in the US, and how do they access and utilize mental health support resources on campus?
3. How do Arab women graduate students maintain and promote their physical wellness during their academic journey in the US, and what are the barriers and facilitators to maintaining their wellness?
4. What are the financial challenges and stressors that Arab women face as graduate students in the US, and how do they manage their finances?
5. What kinds of help and services do graduate Arab women students in the US perceive as necessary and helpful for supporting their overall wellness on campus?

Definitions

Arab: is an ethnolinguistic category that identifies people who speak Arabic as their mother tongue or immigrants whose parents or grandparents spoke Arabic as their native tongue (Arab, middle eastern, and Muslim? what's the difference?! TeachMideast, 2017). For the purpose of this study, only students whose country of origin is one of the 22 member states in The League of Arab States will be included. These countries are Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros,

Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Cultural Adaptation: The process of adjusting to a new culture, including changes in behaviors, values, and beliefs, to effectively function and thrive in the host environment (Berry, 2007).

Graduate student: A graduate student is an individual who has completed an undergraduate program and is currently undertaking further studies in a particular area of interest. (*What is a Graduate Student?* 2015). For the study graduate students will be any Arab women who came to the US recently to pursue their master's, doctorate, or postgraduate studies, with the exception of medical students.

Financial Stress: the psychological and physiological responses to financial difficulties that can include anxiety, depression, and physical health problems (Lusardi & Tufano, 2009).

Intersectionality: A conceptual framework that recognizes the complex and intersecting nature of social identities (e.g., race, gender, class) and how they combine to shape individuals' experiences and opportunities (Crenshaw, 1989).

Mental Health Stigma: the negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors directed toward individuals with mental health conditions that can result in discrimination and marginalization (Corrigan, 2004).

Mental Wellness: is when an individual realizes personal abilities and copes with the normal stresses of life without faltering in their productivity and is consequently able to make a positive contribution to the community (World Health Organization, 2014).

Physical Wellness: A state of physical health and well-being that is fostered and maintained through a balance of diet, regular physical activity, and getting sufficient rest. (Hettler, 1986).

Social Support: the resources and assistance that individuals receive from social support networks that typically include family, friends, peers, and community organizations. (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Social Wellness: the strength of a person's social relationships and how deeply the person is involved in a supportive community that responds to their needs (Myers et al., 2000).

Student Wellness: includes both physical, mental, social, and emotional state of being that can be fluid, corresponding to different situations and stimuli. The state is multidimensional and is present throughout a student's academic career (McDaniel et al., 2021).

Wellness: is more than the absence of illness and includes the balance of the spirit, mind, and body (Adams et al., 1997; Dunn, 1959; Harari et al., 2005; Hettler, 1980). The concept is a multidimensional state of being that implies the existence of positive health as exemplified by a sense of well-being and strong quality of life (Corbin & Pangrazi, 2001).

Assumptions

In order to establish a solid foundation for the research study, certain assumptions were made, serving as guiding principles throughout the investigation.

1. Arab women studying in the US and living independently most likely for the first time can face internal or self-constructed barriers that contribute to negative emotions and deteriorated wellness.
2. Expectations from family and society members can impact the well-being of Arab women in college, especially during this time of identity formation.

3. Social isolation can occur as a result of microaggressions experienced by Arab women rather than blatant harassment.
4. Arab women often arrive in the United States with a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem, which can turn to frustration when they are faced with academic, communication, and social barriers.
5. Language barriers can result in withdrawal from classroom activities and interactions, which can add to the pressure and negatively impacts mental wellness.
6. Common themes shared among Arab women college students may include homesickness, values re-evaluation, religious identity, financial management, academic achievement, excessive concerns over physical wellness, food insecurity, and balancing multiple roles and expectations.
7. Arab women may encounter difficulties in utilizing healthcare and mental health services as a result of cultural incongruence and fear of the stigma associated with seeking help, rather than solely due to language barriers.
8. Cultural shock and acculturation stress can impact the well-being of Arab women and their ability to navigate academic and social environments in the U.S.
9. Addressing the wellness needs of Arab women international students requires a holistic approach that considers the interplay of individual, interpersonal, institutional, and societal factors that influence their health and well-being.
10. Graduate students face unique and difficult challenges, and although the women involved in the study all completed a bachelor's level degree, they still can face unique barriers that can impede their academic success.

Limitations and Delimitations

Possible limitations and delimitations of the study include:

Limitations

1. Limited generalizability of findings to other populations or contexts due to the small sample size and the fact that qualitative research aims to explore in-depth experiences and perceptions rather than to generalize to a larger population.
2. Participants were limited to graduate students at one university in the middle of the US with a relatively low percentage of international students. They make up around 4.4% of the student body ("University of Arkansas International Student Life," n.d.).
3. The trustworthiness and completeness of the data collected in this qualitative research depended on how far participants were willing to disclose their experiences.
4. There was potential for bias or subjectivity in data collection and analysis, as the investigator's interpretation and understanding of the data, can influence the findings.
5. Due to the fact that interviews were conducted in English, which is not the native language of the participants or the interviewer, there was a potential for miscommunication or misunderstandings that could potentially affect the accuracy of the data collected.
6. The limited time and resources available for this qualitative study might have affected the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of both data collection and analysis.

Delimitations

1. The study focused only on Arab women graduate students, excluding other groups or individuals who may have different experiences and perspectives.

2. The study only explored certain aspects of wellness, such as mental, social, physical, and financial wellness, and did not examine other factors that may impact overall wellness, such as occupational or spiritual wellness.
3. The study focused on graduate students at the University of Arkansas, which excluded undergraduate students at the same institution and all Arab students from other universities across the US.

Importance of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the experiences and perceived wellness of Arab women graduate students in the US with a particular focus on the following four wellness dimensions: mental wellness, physical wellness, social wellness, and financial wellness. Despite the increasing presence of this population in higher education, this topic remains understudied, while it needs our attention, given the unique challenges that they face and their consequences.

Individuals from this vulnerable population may encounter difficulties and receive no support or recognition, as they are away from home and in most cases living alone. Their compromised well-being can lead to a lack of focus on their studies, resulting in lower academic performance and decreased achievement. This can also affect their ability to continue their education and, in extreme cases where mental health is severely impacted, may lead to tragic outcomes.

The findings of this study will provide a rich and in-depth understanding of this population, by shedding light on their experiences and wellness. This understanding can be of help to counselors, student affairs personnel, professors, and students. In addition, future directions for research and practice related to the wellness of Arab women graduate students can

be identified, based on which future research can be conducted, based on the results of this study, to fill these knowledge gaps and inform the development of interventions and campus policies that better support this population.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study on the wellness of graduate Arab women studying in the US is based on the social-ecological model. This model is a theoretical framework used in public health and social sciences to understand how various factors can affect health outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This model recognizes that health is not just an individual issue but is influenced by multiple layers of factors including individual, interpersonal, community, societal, and policy levels. At the individual level, factors such as age, gender, and health status can impact health outcomes. The interpersonal level includes close relationships with social support networks including family and friends (Uchino, 2006). The community level includes access to resources, social norms, and the physical environment (Elder et al., 2007). Finally, the societal level includes policies and laws, cultural norms, and economic systems (Link & Phelan, 1995). Therefore, the model highlights the importance of considering the complex interplay between various factors, in other words, intersectionality, that can influence health outcomes, and the need for multi-level interventions to address these factors.

In the context of the study on the wellness of graduate Arab women studying in the US, the social-ecological model can be used to examine how various individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors can impact the health and well-being of these students. By considering the intersectionality of various factors, interventions, and policies can be developed that address the unique needs of this student population (Bubar et al., 2016).

At the intrapersonal/individual level, the study includes individual factors such as personal values, beliefs, and coping mechanisms that may impact the mental health and wellness of graduate Arab women. For example, a student's sense of cultural identity and belongingness may impact mental health and well-being. A study by Jibreel (2015) found that having a strong sense of cultural identity was associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and positive affect among Arab college students. The study findings also included the role of social support networks, including family, peers, mentors, and community organizations, in promoting wellness. Research has shown that social support can have a protective effect on mental health and well-being, particularly for individuals from minority groups who may experience discrimination and marginalization (Crutcher, 2015).

At the institutional level, the study includes the extent to which universities provide adequate resources and support services for graduate Arab women studying in the U.S., such as mental health counseling, healthcare services, and academic advising. For example, a study by Rabia and Karkouti (2017) found that Arab American college students were less likely to seek mental health services compared to non-Arab-American students, suggesting that universities may need to provide targeted outreach and support for this student population. At the community level, the study can examine the influence of the wider community and cultural norms on the wellness of graduate Arab women studying in the U.S.

Moreover, it is effective in exploring resilience factors that promote the wellness of graduate Arab women students (Ungar, 2011). For example, the model can be used to identify protective factors such as social support networks, coping mechanisms, and cultural strengths that promote resilience and well-being. By identifying and building upon these protective factors, interventions and policies can be developed that promote the resilience and well-being of this

student population. This can help identify future directions for research and practice related to wellness; wellness of graduate Arab women students in our case (McLeroy et al., 1988).

In conclusion, the social-ecological model is a beneficial structure for comprehending the diverse elements that affect the health and well-being of Arab women graduate students in the US. Implementing this model in this research helps in gaining a holistic comprehension of the intricate interrelationships among individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

The study is focused on a specific population in the higher education system in the United States. This sub-population is comprised of individuals with intersectional identities, including Arab ethnicity, people of color, Arabic-speaking, African, legal aliens, women, graduate students, and mostly traveling alone. The literature on the transitional experiences of women from the Arab world who came to live and study in the US is limited, and even more so on their health and wellness. Therefore, the chapter will provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature on this topic in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of these women's experiences.

A literature search was conducted using the following databases: Academic Search Complete, APA PsycInfo, APA PsycArticles, CINAHL Complete, ERIC, PubMed, and Wiley Online Library. Several search terms were combined to conduct a Boolean search. Initially, the following terms were used: “intersectionality,” “social ecology,” “multidimensional identities,” “diversity,” “wellness,” “health,” “well-being,” “holistic wellness,” “mental wellness,” “physical wellness,” “financial wellness,” “social wellness,” “international students,” “cross-cultural adjustment,” “social support,” “Arab women students,” “Arab women,” “Middle Eastern students,” “graduate students,” “women graduate students” and “cultural adjustment.” The search was limited to articles published in the past 10 years, peer-reviewed articles, and only those written in or translated to the English language. No full-text delimiters were applied due to the availability of the University of Arkansas (UA) libraries.

The chapter addresses several important themes related to the wellness of the population of Arab women graduate students. Specifically, the chapter reviews the existing literature on the

intersectionality of identities and wellness, as well as the following dimensions of wellness: social, mental, physical, and financial. The chapter also focuses on wellness among international students, with particular attention to the challenges faced by Arabs and Arab women who are studying. This includes a discussion of cultural and social adjustment, academic stress and coping strategies, and campus resources and support services.

Intersectionality of Identities and Wellness

Intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of various identities, including race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, among others (Crenshaw, 1989). In the context of wellness, intersectionality highlights the complex ways in which these identities intersect and impact an individual's health and well-being. For example, an individual's experiences of discrimination and oppression may be influenced by their intersecting identities, which can contribute to physical and mental health disparities (Bowleg, 2012).

Intersectionality has its roots in Black feminist scholarship, and although the term was coined by Crenshaw in the 1990s, it has been present in historical works such as Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech in 1851. Despite being a staple topic in women's and feminist legal studies, intersectionality remains relatively scarce in mainstream public health, as evidenced by a limited number of search results for the term in PubMed and the American Journal of Public Health. Current research often focuses on individual systems, which limits the understanding of the health of individuals who are affected by multiple and intersecting systems (Bowleg, 2012).

A qualitative study conducted by Karaman and Christian (2020) examined the experiences of Muslim women students in higher education in the US and how they were impacted by intersectionality and racialization. The author argued that Muslim women were

subject to intersectional oppression based on their gender, religion, and race. The study drew on interviews with Muslim women students and found that they experienced discrimination and marginalization based on their religious and cultural identity as well as their race. The author noted that Muslim women have often been racialized as "other" which impacts their mental wellness. The author also argued that universities and educators should provide support and resources to Muslim women students to address these challenges and promote their academic success and well-being.

Wellness

The definition of health has transformed from merely the absence of illness to a comprehensive state of physical, mental, and social well-being (Corbin & Pangrazi, 2001). Dunn (1959) introduced the concept of wellness, defining it as "an integrated method of functioning, oriented towards maximizing an individual's potential" (p. 4). Wellness encompasses a multidimensional state of being, including mental, physical, social, spiritual, intellectual, and financial aspects. These dimensions are interrelated, and if one is affected, it can influence others. Before wellness took its present form, John W. Travis, a scholar, elaborated on Dunn's explanation of wellness. He created a Wellness Continuum that was interpreted as a clear indication that wellness is not static, but rather a dynamic process moderated by people's choices. Hence, moving towards balanced wellness is the responsibility of each individual. Since then, Travis' continuum has undergone several modifications (Dodge et al., 2012).

Koo et al. (2021) noted that historically, the concept of health has been associated with negative attributes, focused on illness rather than positive ones. However, in the 1940s, the definition of health shifted to view it more positively. Originally, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as the absence of ailment. But in 1946, the International Health

Conference adopted the WHO's Constitution, which provided a more global definition of health: "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (Corbin & Pangrazi, 2001, p.3). Later, in 1974, the Surgeon General of the United States presented a major paradigm shift by changing the orientation from illness to wellness (Myers et al., 2000).

Dunn (1959) coined the term "Wellness," which relied on the WHO constitution and was propagated as a preventive measure rather than a healing measure. He discussed the need for health practitioners to redirect their focus from disease combat to wellness promotion. He defined wellness as "an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable" (p. 4), where people are encouraged to mindfully work toward attaining wellness by maintaining harmony between mind, body, and spirit. Wellness encompasses the individual as a whole (Crutcher, 2015). Ever since Dunn's ideas were expanded upon and tweaked, more scholars studied wellness, formulating new definitions and wellness models to relay to the public (McDaniel et al., 2021).

Dunn's explanation of wellness and created a Wellness Continuum that demonstrated that wellness is a dynamic process moderated by the people's choices. Since then, Travis' continuum has undergone several modifications (Dodge et al., 2012). Hettler (1986), known as the father of the modern wellness movement, contended that wellness is the process of becoming aware of a more successful existence. He discussed a holistic approach to wellness that highlighted effective day-to-day decision-making. To him, wellness is "an active process through which the individual becomes aware of and makes choices toward a more successful existence...a positive approach to living – an approach that emphasizes the whole person," (p. 27). Hettler (1980) agreed with other scholars that wellness is a multidimensional phenomenon involving the mental, spiritual, and

environmental aspects of an individual. He introduced seven dimensions of wellness: social, emotional, physical, intellectual, occupational, and spiritual.

Recently, Brown and Applegate (2012) developed the "Holistic Wellness Assessment" as a new tool to measure overall wellness in young adults. The assessment combines traditional wellness dimensions with a new dimension of financial wellness. The authors conducted a thorough analysis of existing wellness instruments to ensure the assessment reflects the relevant dimensions of wellness for today's young adults.

They developed a holistic wellness model specifically for college students, which includes financial wellness - an area that has been overlooked in the literature, according to the authors. The Holistic Wellness Assessment provides a means for college students to self-assess their own health status by evaluating wellness dimensions that are relevant to this particular population. The wellness model comprises of eight dimensions, namely self-regard, self-awareness and responsibility, sustainability, relational, risk prevention, spirituality, physical health, and healthcare maintenance. The financial wellness dimension is incorporated into the self-regard, self-awareness and responsibility, and sustainability dimensions.

Social, Mental, Physical, and Financial Wellness

Social wellness, as identified by Hettler (1980), is influenced by an individual's relationships with individuals, groups, and communities and is correlated with their level of satisfaction with their role in society. Koo et al. (2021) suggest that social wellness is impacted by various factors, such as the quality of communication, sexual and non-sexual intimacy, and the level of connectedness and integration of an individual into society. Social wellness is associated with positive effects on individuals, such as a sense of belonging, assertiveness, and altruism, while decreasing social anxiety, violence, and isolation.

Emotional wellness, defined by McDaniel et al. (2021), centers on self-esteem, where individuals who have a positive sense of self and a secure identity are considered emotionally well. It is an ongoing process of self-awareness, a positive outlook on life, and the ability to assess conflicts, challenges, and risks while using them as opportunities for growth. Emotional wellness is closely linked with mental wellness, as identified by Hettler (1980).

Physical wellness, according to Hettler (1980), pertains to maintaining overall health through activities such as maintaining good flexibility, physical activity, strength, and a healthy diet. Adams et al. (1997) view physical well-being as a positive perception of overall physical health, where individuals who are physically healthy are considered physically well.

Financial wellness is the ability of an individual to manage their financial resources to meet their needs, reduce financial stress, and achieve financial goals. It involves having healthy spending habits, the ability to save for the future, and an understanding of financial products and services. Mandell (2008) defines financial wellness as a state of balance and control over financial affairs. Financial wellness is multidimensional and encompasses various aspects of financial well-being such as financial knowledge, behavior, attitudes, and access to financial resources (Garman, Leech, & Grable, 1996; Huston, 2010). Achieving financial wellness is essential for overall well-being, and it has been linked to positive outcomes such as reduced stress, improved physical health, and greater life satisfaction (Lusardi, 2019).

Student Wellness

The definition of student wellness is based on the general notion that wellness is a multidimensional state of being that is primarily associated with positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which has given rise to the positive education movement. The field of wellness research and practice draws upon two historical traditions of wellness: hedonic and

eudaimonia, both rooted in Greek philosophy. Hedonic wellness pertains to individuals' subjective feelings about their life. It encompasses their overall life satisfaction, experience of positive emotions, and the absence of negative emotions (Diener & Lucas, 1999). On the other hand, eudaimonic wellness can be understood as how individuals thrive and function in their life. It involves "flourishing" and self-actualization, which are fostered through personal growth, engaging in meaningful activities, and establishing meaningful connections with others (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Hedonic and eudaimonic wellness combined represent individuals' overall wellness. In the context of education, learner wellness can be seen as a holistic, multidimensional state of being that encompasses all these different aspects. It encompasses a student's satisfaction with their academic journey, their experience of positive emotions, their pursuit of personal growth, and their sense of connectedness with others (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Hence, the different dimensions of wellness.

Student wellness can be seen light of Maslow's (1943) Theory of Human Motivation, individual growth can be conceptualized as a hierarchy of different stages, each representing specific well-being "needs." Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs (see Figure 1) suggests that to fulfil growth such as self-actualization, personal growth, and cognitive growth aka. "Higher-order" individuals must have their "lower-order" needs met first, such as physical well-being, safety, and belongingness. As such, this can be implied to education, as research indicates a significant association between learners whose lower-order needs are successfully addressed and their academic achievement. Hence, based on the notion that achievement is contingent upon the fulfilment of foundational needs or lower order needs, it would be of great benefit if educational institutions to consider if student's lower order needs are met to understand educational and behavioural outcomes (Noltemeyer et al., 2012).

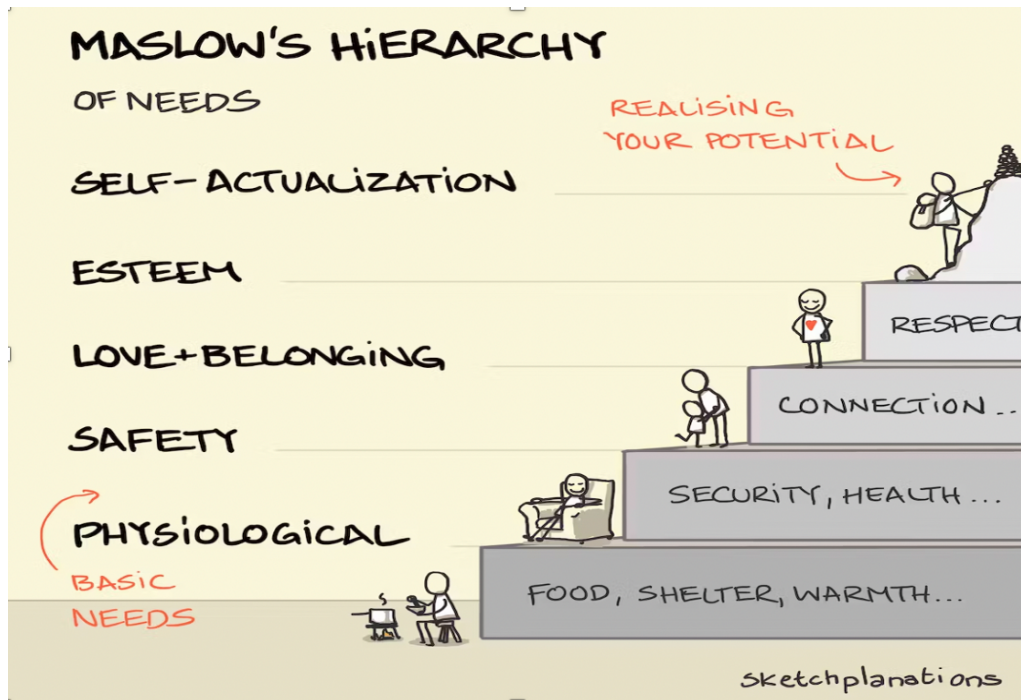


Figure 1. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs (Source: Sketchplanations)

There are universal similarities and distinct differences in how students experience well-being across cultures. It has been advocated as a central goal of education by scholars since ancient times. For instance, Confucianist philosophy emphasizes self-improvement in order to become an upright moral person. Well-being is also emphasized in the writings of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, a Japanese educator from the 19th century and founder of Soka (value-creating) education. Makiguchi argued that happiness should not be confined to an individual level but should be a goal of education encompassing the school, home, and community (Rees & Dinisman, 2015).

Well-being within education has received increased interest this century, largely influenced by economists growing movement of measuring adult well-being instead of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for evaluating the success of an economy. As a result, international organizations such as the United Nations and The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) began measuring students' well-being alongside their academic outcomes (OECD, 2019; UNICEF, 2007). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), for example, introduced the measurement of students' well-being alongside academic outcomes in 2015. The OECD now employs a multidimensional measure of learner well-being, which includes the social, physical, and psychological well-being sub-constructs.

The purpose of the study focuses on the social, mental, physical, and financial dimensions of wellness as experience by Arab women doing their graduate studies in the US. Each one of them fall under one of the first four points of the hierarchy from the bottom. Physical and financial wellness fall under the two lower order points physiological and safety, whereas social comes next under love and belonging and finally mental wellness falls under esteem. By examining these dimensions of wellness within the context of Arab women pursuing graduate studies in the US, the study aims to explore how the fulfillment of lower-order needs influences their overall well-being and subsequent ability to strive towards higher-order needs. Understanding the experiences and challenges faced by Arab women in these dimensions can provide valuable insights for developing targeted interventions and support systems that promote their holistic well-being, academic success, and self-actualization.

Promoting learner well-being is not only recognized as a significant educational objective in its own right but also has been documented to have positive associations with higher academic achievement (Kirkcaldy et al., 2004; Suldo et al., 2011). Conversely, research suggests that lower learner well-being is linked to an increased risk of academic underachievement (Van Batenburg-Eddes & Jolles, 2013).

Furthermore, high learner well-being is positively correlated with other important academic characteristics, including self-confidence, a growth mindset, and the adoption of

mastery-approach goals. Mastery-approach goals, which involve striving to improve understanding and skills, are considered adaptive, unlike performance- or avoidant-approach goals, which are maladaptive. These academic characteristics, in turn, have been linked to higher levels of achievement (as cited in: Arslan & Renshaw,2018). Research has shown that learners with higher life satisfaction at school tend to have more positive academic experiences, whereas learners with lower well-being are at a greater risk of school drop-out and behavioral difficulties (Arslan & Renshaw, 2018).

College Students' Wellness

College is perceived as an exciting time for young adults as it resembles independence and new experience. On the other hand, it is also the time where students face different challenges and stressors, probably for the first time as many college students are for the first time away from home. Some of the stressors are, but not limited to, high academic expectations, social anxiety, having to take responsibility, and the accessibility of alcohol and drugs. Individual differences play a role where some students succeed in their transition, but others struggle with the adjustment (Brook & Willoughby, 2015).

According to McDaniel et al. (2021) the college phase is the time where students have foundation for lifelong wellness, where they learn to balance most of life's demands independently. Also, they experience balancing academic, financial, social, and their health. The individual's ability to succeed in creating this balance is directly proportionate with their level of wellness. On the other hand, some students do not have the ability to handle the different incidents going on in their lives, hence they experience psychological, physiological, and social difficulties, which in some cases lead to the development of unhealthy lifestyle behaviours, for

instance, smoking, alcohol and binge eating. They develop unhealthy habits to avoid facing the different stressors in their lives, as a coping mechanism (Xiaoqiao Zhang et al., 2022).

In their study, Radcliffe & Lester (2003) concluded that transitioning from high school to college and having to cope with a different lifestyle was a stressful stage for most students. Other transition related issues like experiencing new levels of freedom, having to make new friends, and dealing with the pressure of competing with people of greater intellectual ability. Young adult entering college carry with them different values, attitudes, and beliefs, regarding health and wellness, that they have developed as they were children and adolescents (McDaniel et al., 2021). As they progress in the academic years, some students get over their unhealthy habits as they learn to navigate the new environment. On the other hand, some face more stressors that are different in nature. Up until graduation college students can face threats to their well-being, such as sleep difficulties, stress, anxiety disorders, common infections, and concern for friends or family (Gibbs & Larcus, 2015).

Graduate Students Wellness

Graduate school can be a challenging and stressful time for students, with high demands on their time and energy, and significant pressure to perform at a high level, in addition to their own personal life events and concerns (Yan & Cardinal, 2013). It is important to understand the factors that contribute to graduate students' well-being. This section will furnish the current research on graduate student wellness in the US.

Research has identified a range of factors that can impact graduate students' mental health and overall wellness. One major factor is the academic demands of graduate school, including high workloads, rigorous expectations, and intense competition for resources such as grants, publications, and job opportunities (Koo et al., 2021; Radcliffe & Lester, 2003). Other stressors

can include financial pressures, such as student debt and the high cost of living in many urban areas (Koo et al., 2021). Graduate students may also face social isolation, as they often spend long hours working alone or with a small group of peers (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). In addition, discrimination and harassment, particularly on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, or disability status, can be a significant source of stress for graduate students (Koo et al., 2021; Hermanstyne et al., 2022).

In return there has been a growing body of literature on interventions for promoting graduate student wellness, with a particular emphasis on prevention and early intervention strategies. One key approach is providing mental health services and support, such as counseling and therapy, to graduate students (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Klein & McCarthy, 2022; Radcliffe & Lester, 2003). Universities can also offer wellness programs and resources, such as mindfulness meditation, stress reduction workshops, and physical exercise programs. In addition, peer support and mentoring programs, which provide opportunities for graduate students to connect with each other and receive support from more experienced students, can be an effective strategy for promoting well-being (Koo et al., 2021).

Wellness Among International Students

The United States has been the top destination for international students (Stuen et al., 2012), and is still a preferred country destination with 914,095 international students in 2020-2021 studying in the US (IIE Open Doors, 2021). Although this number indicates a 15% drop from 1,075,496 in 2019-2020, the US remains the largest host of international students in the world. The decline in numbers before 2020 can be attributed primarily to difficulties in obtaining visas, the shift in the political climate, and the increase in university attendance costs. In Fall

2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic led to a 15% decline in students studying in the US, with an estimated 40,000 international students deferring enrollment (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2020).

Attending college in the US is a dream come true for many foreign students; for many, it is not just a degree that would help them move forward with their careers; it is a personal achievement, a source of pride for the entire family, and a tool for social mobility (Sibley et al., 2015). With these dreams come very high expectations. The students who are able to make it to the US are often the top-performing students in their communities, schools, and families. However, when many international students arrive and experience the reality of life as an international student in the US, they experience what has been termed acculturative stress which influences their health and well-being (McDaniel, 2021). Acculturative stress is defined as the process of facing challenges in a culture other than one's own. This type of stress represents a growing threat to the of many student populations, especially international students (Koo et al., 2021; Leong, 2015). Research shows that acculturative stress impedes international students' ability to maintain a high level of wellness, and many develop physical, psychosocial, and behavioral problems (Leong, 2015). According to McDaniel et al. (2021), international students may be more prone to experiencing health and wellness problems than their domestic peers.

International students also face several challenges, with each of these challenges corresponding to one of the dimensions of wellness. For instance, they may struggle to adjust to a new setting, culture, and academic environment, face financial constraints that impede their ability to sustain their basic needs, struggle with poor English language skills that affect their social and academic lives, feel pressure from their own expectations and those of others, experience homesickness, and face racial discrimination (Gautam et al., 2016; Han et al., 2013; Hirai et al., 2015; Xuesong et al., 2013).

Li and Zizzi (2018) conducted a case study with 2 women participants to study international students' friendship development, social adjustment, and physical activity. Several challenges appeared to be a concern for the participants in the study. They reported barriers to socializing with American students, either due to an inability to communicate well in English or an incapacity to fit into the culture. They found it particularly difficult to understand American students' conversations, not only in social settings but also in classes.

Acculturation stress can have significant negative impacts on the mental and physical health of international students. Research by Leong (2015) found a positive correlation between the length of time spent away from home and a decline in health status. Despite showing interest in physical activity, studies have shown that 47% of international students reported gaining excessive weight after arriving in the United States, which can be attributed to factors such as lack of leisure activities, relaxation time, malnutrition, and lack of sleep (Ellis-Bosold & Thornton, 2013; Leong, 2015).

Overall, adjusting to a new community can be hard for international students, both academically and socially. This adjustment process can be uncomfortable and disorienting, which can hinder their ability to maintain a high level of wellness. To gain more insight on this issue, the following sections provide information on different aspects of international student wellness.

Social Wellness

Hettler (1986) suggested that individuals are intrinsically linked to one another and their surroundings, and those who possess stable social wellness generally feel satisfied with their societal role. Greater social wellness is associated with an improved quality of life, including reduced social isolation and anxiety, and an enhanced sense of belonging and security.

Conversely, insufficient social wellness can impact students' academic performance, with international students potentially struggling to adapt to a new culture.

Wang et al. (2015) found that Chinese students studying in the US turn to social support during times of stress and that social connectedness was correlated with emotional wellness. Chinese international students who reported stronger social connections with either Chinese or American peers experienced less severe mental health effects from perceived discrimination. Additionally, social connectedness with American students diminished the negative impact of discrimination on mental health, while social connections with students from their home country alleviated the effects of depression from language discrimination. Similarly, Rabia, and Karkouti (2017) found that Arab students who valued friendships reported that establishing connections and receiving support from friends sharing the same culture was the most effective form of friendship assistance, positively influencing persistence, cultural adjustment, and academic success.

All international students experience some level of culture shock when they come to the US, with food and language adding to the complexity of the adjustment process. However, individual differences ultimately impact social wellness. The level and quality of support provided by campus resources and the host community's attitudes greatly influence international students' social wellness and adjustment efforts (Leong, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated social anxiety, with social distancing and isolation measures affecting the mental and physical well-being of international students. Isolation, separation from family during unprecedented events, and the death of loved ones have all impacted social wellness levels among international students, with some experiencing changes in their family roles, modes of grieving, interpersonal challenges, coping techniques, and addictive

behaviors (Coffey et al., 2021; Gao et al., 2022; Gruber et al., 2020). At the onset of the pandemic, social distancing measures were deemed necessary, and international students faced greater susceptibility to feelings of isolation and distress due to the unclear nature of these measures (Veerasingam & Ammigan, 2022). International students who experienced wellness issues prior to the pandemic may have experienced further difficulties due to the stress associated with the virus, elevated fear, and loneliness. Additionally, instability in residential arrangements, when students were forced to move out of residence halls, triggered feelings of hopelessness and weakness (Gao et al., 2022; Xiaoqiao Zhang et al., 2022). Conversely, Aguilera-Hermida (2020) found that COVID-19 also brought positive changes, such as developing new skills, pursuing new hobbies, and enhancing tech savviness.

Social wellness is crucial for international students' academic achievement, mental health, and adjustment to a new culture. Social connectedness and support are particularly essential for their well-being, especially during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Although campus resources and the host community's attitudes play a significant role in supporting international students' social wellness, individual differences ultimately impact the adjustment process. Therefore, it is important to promote social connectedness and support for international students to enhance their social wellness and overall well-being.

Mental/Emotional Wellness

Hettler (1986) proposed emotional wellness as an ongoing process of self-awareness and emotional regulation. Emotional wellness involves accepting one's emotions and integrating them into behavior while managing expression. Hettler (1980) suggested that emotionally well individuals possess traits such as resilience, openness to learning, assertiveness, and self-awareness. Hettler (1987) and Adams et al. (1997) linked emotional wellness and social

relationships, suggesting that emotionally well individuals establish healthy relationships based on trust, respect, and mutual commitment. McDaniel et al. (2021) endorsed Hettler and Adams' views, arguing that emotional wellness depends on the level of awareness of oneself and others.

Numerous recent studies have examined the emotional wellness of international students, both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with the majority focusing on the dimension of mental/emotional wellness. Some of these studies have explored the triggers that lead to emotional imbalances, while others have investigated students' experiences.

One of the major triggers of emotional imbalance among international students is homesickness, which can lead to loneliness, melancholy, and depression (Baba & Hosoda, 2014). Homesickness has also been found to result in decreased self-esteem and adjustment difficulties (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Bofo-Arthur, 2013). To overcome loneliness, many international students use social media and networking websites to connect with their families, which has been found to reduce loneliness levels (Binsahl et al., 2015). Discrimination experienced by some students contributes to higher levels of homesickness, reduced academic success, and heightened stress (Baba & Hosoda, 2014).

Another major trigger for mental and emotional wellness is the lack of linguistic skills. This deficiency has been associated with lower academic achievement and reduced social functioning, leading to deep anxiety and reluctance to communicate in the target language (Ching et al., 2017; Effiong, 2016). Lacking linguistic skills can also negatively affect academic performance, and Academic pressure is another leading cause of stress among international students (Ching et al., 2017; Prieto-Welch, 2016). The pressure to perform well to families meet expectations set for them at home before they left for their international studies, and the need to impress others can exacerbate anxiety levels (Glass & Westmont, 2014).

Financial stress is another cause of emotional instability, with obstacles to finding a job on campus and language barriers preventing international students from landing certain jobs (Gautam et al., 2016). International students may struggle to pay their monthly expenses, tuition, and textbooks, which can add to their overall feelings of stress (Leong, 2015). Recent studies have shown that the sudden shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic had further increased stress and demotivation among international students who felt deprived of their social outlets, potentially affecting their mental health. Therefore, emotional wellness has been identified as an important part of the international student experience, and institutions can play a significant role in combatting these feelings that have the potential to negatively impact student performance.

Physical Wellness

Hettler (1980) defined physical wellness as an individual's capacity to maintain flexibility, strength, and overall health through proper nutrition and consistent physical activity. This requires self-care, physical activity, and balanced nutrition. As Msengi et al (2011) found, many international students do not participate in physical wellness programs. Some of the rationale for this is the lack of understanding about how to use specific kinds of equipment, and for others it is a cultural mindset that does not value physical activity in the same way. With the pressures of academic performance, many international students have also reported that they prioritize other things, particularly academic work, over what might be considered something less important (Yan & Cardinal, 2013a).

Yan and Cardinal (2013b) found that acculturation is positively correlated with increased physical activity. Their case study about Asian women indicated that physical activity is a break from work and a way to spend quality time alone while providing a possible sense of

accomplishment. The participants in their study, however, also mentioned feeling embarrassed and disoriented when using exercise equipment, which made them reluctant to engage in physical activity. Additionally, the lack of social support discouraged them from participating. Results of the same study also showed that Asian and African students exhibited relatively low levels of physical activity, and Asian women were less likely to participate than their male counterparts.

Another element of physical wellness is good nutrition, which is particularly important for college students and can improve overall mental and physical wellness (Alakaam & Willyard, 2020). Depending upon the country of origin, many international students tend to develop unhealthy eating habits when immersed in a new culture. For example, research has found an increased intake of fat and carbs, including salty snacks, junk food, and instant noodles (Martinez Ruiz et al, 2015). Students have also reported that fresh, healthy foods can be expensive, and that junk food is more affordable (Martinez Ruiz et al., 2015).

In a study conducted by Leong (2015), food was identified as one of the most significant cultural changes students encounter, particularly for Chinese students. They found it challenging to get used to American food, especially 'junk food.' Even the available Chinese food options are Americanized and do not taste similar to the Chinese food that many of the students are accustomed to. Some students express dissatisfaction with unhealthy American food, while others appreciate the variety of cuisines offered in the US (Li & Zizzi, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic made it more challenging for many people, especially international students, to engage in physical activity as they were restricted to their homes. Some international students have experienced obesity, mental health problems, and other physical health-related issues impacted by the inability to socialize and be mobile during COVID, and this

in turn, has been reported as a factor impacting socialization, health and wellness, and academic success (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2020).

Physical wellness is essential for the overall well-being of international students, and physical activity and good nutrition play a crucial role in achieving it. However, many international students face challenges in maintaining physical wellness due to various factors such as lack of time, cultural differences, and limited resources. Addressing these challenges and promoting physical wellness can contribute to the academic success and overall well-being of international students.

Financial Wellness

Financial wellness is the ability of an individual to manage their finances effectively and maintain a healthy financial status (Brüggen et al., 2021). This aspect of well-being is particularly crucial for international students studying in foreign countries who may experience financial stress when managing expenses such as tuition fees, housing, food, and transportation (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

To support their education and living expenses, many international students in the US work part-time (Kwadzo, 2014). However, this can also pose challenges to academic performance as students may struggle to balance their work and academic commitments (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). In a study of international students, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) found that international students face various financial challenges including managing expenses, lack of financial support, and limited access to financial resources. Choudaha and Chang (2012) also found that these international students struggle to navigate the complex financial aid system in the United States and obtain scholarships or grants.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated financial stress for international students (McDaniel et al., 2021). Many have lost their part-time jobs or experienced reduced work hours, resulting in financial instability. Additionally, unexpected expenses such as flight cancellations and quarantine costs have arisen (Xiaoqiao et al., 2022).

In conclusion, international students face complex challenges concerning physical, social, mental, and financial well-being. Adapting to new cultural norms, navigating healthcare systems, coping with homesickness, and managing the financial burden of studying abroad are all important challenges that they face that set them apart from other students and provide a rationale for further study.

Wellness among Arab Students

Numerous studies indicate that the majority of Arab international students who come to the United States are not adequately equipped for the typical cultural conflicts and language barriers that international students often face. The American culture, language, religion, and geography are all new and unfamiliar to these students which can negatively impact their educational journey (Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Al Anazy, 2013; Moraya, 2013).

Culture shock, as defined by Macionis and Gerber (2010), is the disorientation and stress an individual may experience when encountering a new lifestyle due to immigration, travel, or transitioning between different social settings. Rajasekar and Renand (2013) also describe culture shock as the tension or anxiety arising from exposure to an unfamiliar environment lacking the recognizable signs and symbols of one's home country. Fourteen factors contributing to culture shock have been identified, encompassing communication, attire, ethics, individualism/collectivism, cuisine, language, structure, perception, power distance, religion, rules, time orientation, customs, and climate.

According to Lysgaard's (1955) four-stage model of acculturation, international students typically experience culture shock in stages, which include the honeymoon stage, culture shock, adjustment, and mastery. Lysgaard emphasized that the acculturation process is not linear and may be experienced in different stages multiple times. The adjustment process may initially seem easy, but it can lead to a crisis in which one feels less adjusted, lonely, and unhappy. However, eventually, one begins to feel more adjusted again, resulting in a more integrated individual.

Arab international students likewise undergo the four stages of acculturation previously mentioned, as they are unacquainted with American culture and the appearance and lifestyles of American students surrounding them. The obstacles Arab international students encounter in the United States, such as culture shock, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with American culture, can adversely affect their well-being. Adapting to a new setting can be taxing and overpowering, resulting in disorientation, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. These challenges can also influence academic performance, social connections, and overall wellness (Sweileh, 2021).

Arab international students face significant challenges when they arrive in the US, particularly when it comes to adapting to a new environment without the support of their families, which are often crucial sources of support in their home countries (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Without a strong support network, these students may experience extreme feelings of isolation and helplessness (Abu Khattala, 2013; Al Zubaidi, 2012). Culture shock can lead to a range of negative emotions, including anxiety, uncertainty, confusion, and isolation, which can then manifest as homesickness, loneliness, depression, and other symptoms (Komiya & Eells, 2001; Oberg, 1960). Arab students find it particularly challenging to adapt to US culture due to differences in values, behaviour rules, and communication styles (Shattuck, 1964). Studies have also found that students from non-western and less-developed countries may face more

challenges adapting to the academic work and culture in the US. Conversely, the greater the cultural similarity between a student's background and their host community, the smoother the adjustment process tends to be (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005).

An additional considerable challenge for Arab international students is their limited English proficiency, coupled with the different instructional practices employed in American universities. These students may struggle with class participation and note-taking methods, which are emphasized more in US institutions. Even those who have taken preparatory English language courses before arriving in the US may still be limited in their English proficiency (Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010). In addition, Arab international students may have difficulty adjusting to the US education system, which may differ significantly from the system in their home countries (Abu Khattala, 2013).

A qualitative study conducted by Rabia (2017) on Arab international students revealed that these students experienced culture shock, which manifested in the form of physical, psychological, and behavioral reactions. This occurred when they were trying to live, work, or study in unfamiliar cultural contexts. The participants reported that adjusting to a new and foreign environment, both inside and outside the classroom, was the biggest trigger for culture shock.

Additionally, the participants faced language barriers, which proved to be the most common challenge faced by Arab international students. This resulted in writing and communication obstacles, as they encountered difficulties in keeping up with discussions and lectures, which were dominant in American classrooms. Despite completing English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, many participants found that their English skills were still insufficient for regular courses.

Furthermore, the cultural differences between the participants' home countries and the US created challenges for them. They felt a clash between their cultural norms and values and those of the US. For instance, some participants found it challenging to adjust to the individualistic atmosphere of American universities, which contrasted with the collectivistic nature of their home cultures.

Arab students tended to remain insular, concentrating on academic adaptation and primarily engaging in social interactions with other international students who shared similar backgrounds and cultures. These students often refrained from interacting with members of their host society, citing fear as a primary reason for their avoidance. They believed that American students had different ways of thinking and living, which made it challenging to build friendships outside of class. The students prioritized their academic success over socializing and making friends with Americans.

It is true that isolation can be more common among Arab women who are doing their studies, particularly when they struggle to adapt to the mixed-gender environment in the US due to cultural differences. Alzahrani (2018) explains that gender role refers to behavioral cues that individuals perceive as appropriate for their gender based on interactions with their environment. While the feminist movement expanded women's roles in the US, traditional gender roles continue to shape women's roles in the Arab world. This can pose challenges for women from the international student population in the US, who may struggle to interact with male classmates and faculty in US universities due to gender segregation being a cultural norm in their home countries. Research has shown that Saudi women studying in the US, for example, may find it difficult to interact with male classmates and faculty in US universities and may prefer to interact with Saudi men instead.

Additionally, the literature review highlights the relationship between stress and poor academic outcomes in college students. Boyraz et al. (2016) found that women are more likely to drop out of college due to stress, and Dusselier et al. (2005) discovered that women experience more academic stress than men. They also found that stress can negatively impact learning and academic performance. Stress is defined as an individual's psychological response to a situation that taxes their capacity or resources (LePine et al., 2004). Factors contributing to stress among college students include academic challenges, and social, health, financial, and adjustment issues (Dusselier et al., 2005).

International students often experience acculturative stress, a challenge faced by immigrants, refugees, and indigenous individuals when interacting with members of a dominant cultural group (Kuo, 2014). Middle Eastern students, such as Saudi women studying in the US, are considered a population with high acculturative stress compared to their European counterparts (Bai, 2016). This applies to other Arab women at the University; they frequently exhibit elevated anxiety and depression levels, placing them at a higher risk for adverse mental health outcomes (Sullivan, 2010; Hwang, 2014; Kwadzo, 2014).

In conclusion, Arab international students face numerous challenges when studying in the US, particularly Arab women who face additional challenges due to gender norms in their home countries. Limited proficiency in English, cultural differences, and difficulty adjusting to the US education system are just some of the challenges these students face. The literature review also highlights the negative impact of stress on academic outcomes, with women students being more vulnerable to stress-related academic problems. It is crucial for universities and policymakers to be aware of these challenges and develop interventions to support Arab international students, particularly Arab women, to ensure their academic and overall well-being while studying in the

US. Such interventions could include academic and social support programs, resources to improve English proficiency, and culturally sensitive mental health services.

Challenges of Arab Women Studying in the US

Women Arab students' experiences align with the overall experiences of international students, they face significant challenges in their academic and personal lives due to cultural differences and discrimination (McDermott-Levy, 2011). The nine Omani women participants in the qualitative study by McDermott-Levy (2011) discussed strategies for coping with these challenges, including seeking social support, maintaining cultural traditions, and developing resilience to be able to keep up. Overall, the study highlights the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment for women Arab-Muslim nursing students in the US.

Al-Anazy (2013) examined the perceptions of women Saudi students studying in the US about their participation in online and face-to-face discussions in a qualitative study. The study reveals that the participants face several challenges in participating in discussions, including language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of confidence which impacts their ability to participate and perform academically.

Cultural adjustment, language barriers, time management, lack of confidence, and feelings of isolation are the common challenges faced by women Arab student and those challenges are accompanied by consequences (Le et al., 2016; Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2013). Al-Qahtani and Higgins (2013) note that cultural differences in the US, such as communication styles, social norms, and values, can impact the academic performance of Arab women studying in the US. Language barriers are another significant challenge for them. Even students who are proficient in English, they may still struggle with academic language or technical terms specific to their field of study (McDermott-Levy, 2011).

However, there are far worse challenges that lead to more problematic results. Arab women may experience discrimination or prejudice due to their race, religion, or nationality. Discrimination can lead to feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, these students may feel isolated from the broader university community and their local community (Alreshoud & Koeske, 1997; Al-Amrani, 2011).

Academic Stress and Coping Strategies

Coping strategies employed by international graduate students in dealing with academic stress and examining interventions that can be implemented to alleviate stress differ. There are five common coping strategies: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, social support, cultural intelligence and adaptation, and religious coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Problem-focused coping involves actively addressing the stressor by seeking information, time management, or problem-solving (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). International graduate students often engage in problem-focused coping by seeking academic assistance, enhancing their language skills, or participating in study groups (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, aims at regulating emotions associated with stress, such as seeking emotional support, venting, or engaging in self-care activities (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). International students use emotion-focused coping strategies like meditation, exercise, or journaling to manage stress (Li et al., 2013).

Social support has been identified as a significant protective factor against academic stress (Nemati et al., 2020). International students benefit from emotional and informational support provided by friends, family, peers, and faculty members (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Cultural intelligence, the ability to function seamlessly in diverse settings (Earley & Ang, 2003), is essential for international students.

Developing cultural intelligence helps students adapt to new academic and social environments, reducing stress (Ward et al., 2001). Religious coping involves seeking solace, support, or guidance from religious beliefs or practices (Pargament, 1997). For some international students, religious coping provides a sense of comfort, resilience, and meaning in dealing with academic stress (Nemati et al., 2020).

Higher education institutions can offer support services such as academic advising, counseling, and financial aid to international graduate students (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Cross-cultural training and workshops can enhance students' cultural competence, helping them understand and navigate cultural differences in academic and social settings (Pang & Wang, 2020). Language support services, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, writing centers, or tutoring services, can help international students develop essential language and academic skills (Mamiseihvili, 2012). Mental health services, such as counseling and therapy, can provide psychological support to international students struggling with stress, anxiety, or depression (Lindsay et al., 2020).

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed suggests that there has been some effort to investigate the wellness of international students, with a particular focus on their challenges, acculturative stress, and coping strategies. Research on the wellness of Arab students is relatively limited, however, and there is a significant gap in research on Arab women students specifically. Although there are some studies that address the challenges faced by Arab students, such as difficulties in developing social networks and communicating effectively with peers and tutors, there is a lack of research that explores the specific wellness needs and experiences of Arab women students. This is particularly disturbing given the unique challenges and experiences that

Arab women face, both in their home countries and in the host countries where they are studying. Further research is needed to better understand the wellness needs and challenges of these students and to develop effective strategies for promoting their health and well-being while they pursue their education abroad. Therefore, the specific aim of the study was to explore the wellness experiences of Arab women international graduate students in the US, focusing on social, mental, physical, and financial dimensions. Addressing the gaps in existing literature, the study uncovered challenges, opportunities, coping strategies, and support systems within their academic and personal journeys. The findings aim to guide the development of effective interventions and support programs for enhancing their wellness. Using qualitative research, the study examined their wellness needs within the context of a culturally diverse environment at a specific US university.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of conducting this study was to explore the experiences and perceived wellness of Arab women international graduate students in the US, with a particular focus on the social, mental, physical, and financial dimensions of wellness. The findings identified the unique challenges faced by this population and the strategies they use to navigate those challenges. The study also provided insights into how universities can better support Arab international women in their academic and social environments. Ultimately, the research may help to inform policies and practices that promote the academic and personal success of Arab women studying in the US.

The study used a qualitative research methodology, specifically semi-structured interviews, to collect data. Participants were Arab women pursuing their graduate studies and enrolled as international students. The study was conducted at one university located in the mid-west/mid-south of the US. Data analysis identified patterns and themes across participants to develop answers to the research questions.

The current chapter describes the research design, including the participants, data collection methods, instruments, piloting, data analysis techniques, and positionality considerations. As a qualitative study, the research focused on describing the experiences of Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the US in relation to their physical, mental, social, and financial wellness. The study utilized a purposive sampling technique to recruit participants who met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews which were audio-recorded and transcribed. Before proceeding with all the interview, the interview protocol was piloted with one participant. Thematic analyses were

employed to identify themes and patterns in the data. Additionally, positionality was considered throughout the research process, including the researcher's identity and potential biases, to ensure the research is conducted ethically and responsibly.

Design

Given the complex and multidimensional nature of wellness, the unique cultural context of Arab women international students in the US, and the practical considerations of studying a geographically dispersed population, a qualitative research paradigm was particularly well-suited to exploring the social, cultural, and academic adjustment experiences of these students and how these impact several wellness dimensions (Thoits, 2011). Using open-ended questions and allowing participants to speak in their own words, qualitative research methods can provide rich, detailed data on the experiences and perspectives of Arab women graduate students. This approach can address gaps in the literature on the wellness of this population and provide practitioners with data that they can rely on to design programs and approaches that better support the needs of Arab women international students in the US.

The Arab culture may have unique perspectives on wellness that may not be captured by traditional Western measures. Qualitative research can allow for a deeper understanding of the cultural context in which wellness is experienced and may provide insights that quantitative research cannot. Qualitative research allows for the collection of rich, detailed data on participants' experiences and perspectives which can be valuable when studying a population that has not been extensively studied (Braun & Clarke, 2019). By using interviews investigators can gather detailed and rich data on the experiences and perspectives of Arab women graduate students and gain a deeper understanding of their perceived wellness. Overall, the use of a qualitative research paradigm to study the wellness of Arab women graduate students may be

justified by its ability to provide a nuanced, in-depth understanding of the topic and its relevance to the cultural context.

The study employed phenomenology to explore the experiences and perspectives of Arab women graduate students in the US regarding wellness. Phenomenology is an appropriate design for the study because it emphasizes the subjective experiences of individuals and the meaning they attach to their experiences (Van Manen, 2016). By using a phenomenological approach, I was able to uncover the essence of the participants' experiences and how they make sense of them. This approach helped me gain a deep understanding of the participants' lived experiences and perspectives and provided insight into how they view wellness. As noted by Padilla-Diaz (2015), phenomenology is particularly useful for exploring complex and unique phenomena, such as the experiences of Arab women doing their graduate studies in the US, in terms of wellness, which may not be easily quantified or measured using traditional research methods. Therefore, the phenomenology design was a suitable approach to exploring the wellness of Arab women doing their graduate studies in the US.

One of the key reasons why phenomenology is used is its ability to uncover the hidden meanings and structures of subjective experiences. According to Gallagher and Zehavi (2012), phenomenology helps to reveal the lived experience of individuals and allows researchers to examine the ways in which these experiences are structured and organized. By studying subjective experiences in this way, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which individuals perceive and interact with the world.

Another important feature of phenomenology is its ability to provide a framework for understanding the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. According to Tschannen-Moran (2000), phenomenology offers a way of bridging the gap between subjective experiences

and the objective world, by uncovering the ways in which subjective experiences are structured and organized. This can help to provide a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the world and can be especially useful in areas such as psychology, where understanding subjective experiences is crucial. Hence, phenomenology offers a unique approach to understanding subjective experiences and their relationship to the objective world. Through its rigorous methodology and focus on uncovering the essential features of human experience, phenomenology provides a powerful tool for exploring the complexities of human consciousness.

Participants

Polkinghorne (1989) suggested that 5-25 individuals typically share similar phenomena or experiences. In addition, Creswell and Poth (2016) mentioned that the number of participants in phenomenological studies can range from 1 to 365, but Duke (1984) recommended selecting 3 to 10 participants. Based on this, I recruited seven participants for this study, with the caveat that more individuals might be included should data saturation not be achieved by the tenth interview.

A purposeful sampling method was employed to select participants who met the following criteria: (a) Arab, (b) currently enrolled full-time graduate student status at either the masters or doctoral level, (c) women, and (d) international students in the US on F1 or J1 visas. The criteria for inclusion in the study was Arab women currently enrolled in a graduate program at a North American university. Participants were recruited through personal contacts and snowball sampling.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research question (Palinkas et.al.,

2015). This sampling technique was appropriate for the study because the purpose was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of a specific group of individuals, and selecting participants based on specific criteria ensures that the sample is relevant to the research question.

The process started by reaching out to individuals who meet the inclusion criteria through the researcher's personal network or the networks of potential participants. They were either approached on campus, via phone calls, or via email (Appendix A). Once the alpha participant(s) was identified, snowball sampling followed. Snowball sampling involves asking participants to identify other individuals who meet the inclusion criteria and who are interested in participating in the study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). These sampling methods were fitting for the study because they enable the researcher to access a hard-to-reach population and allow for the recruitment of participants who may not have been identified through other sampling methods.

The sample size was determined by data saturation, which is the point at which no new themes or ideas emerge from the data collected. This means that the researcher will continue to collect data until there is sufficient information to answer the research question. This ensures that the sample size is suitable for the research question and that the data collected is of high quality. The sample size, seven, was determined iteratively, as the researcher collected and analysed data, and was based on the point at which no new information is obtained. This point was reached after the fifth interview, given that all the participants.

Participants were given the option to choose between in-person or Zoom interviews. The goal was to provide a comfortable and confidential environment for the participants. For in-person interviews, locations that were convenient and offered privacy and space for social distancing were chosen. Participants were given a variety of location options for their

convenience, including a reserved private room on the university's campus, a conference room in a public setting, an office, or a campus location. During the interview, only the researcher and the participant were present to ensure privacy and comfort.

Instrumentation

Data collection involved a combination of semi-structured interviews and follow-up phone interviews, when needed, following the recommendations of Creswell and Poth (2016) and Merriam (2015). Individual participants partook in semi-structured interviews. Additionally, follow-up phone interviews were resorted to as necessary to clarify or expand on initial findings, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Qualitative research often employs methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions for data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In the study, interviews to delve deeper into the perspectives and experiences of Arab women graduate students studying in the United States, capturing a rich and detailed understanding of the population's unique experiences.

The semi-structured interview protocol used in this study was designed to explore the experiences and perceptions of Arab female graduate students regarding their well-being and overall adjustment during their academic journey in the United States. The protocol consisted of eight sections, covering various aspects of their transition, cultural navigation, social support networks, mental and physical wellness, financial challenges, coping strategies, and perceived needs and services (Appendix C).

The interview began with an introduction where the researcher briefly explained the purpose of the study, emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, and assured the

confidentiality of the information provided. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before proceeding with the interview.

Section 1 focused on the transition to the US, exploring the initial feelings, challenges, and expectations these students experienced upon arrival. Section 2 delved into cultural navigation, aiming to understand the similarities and differences between their home culture and the US culture, as well as how they adapted to these differences.

Section 3 explored the students' experiences with social support networks, such as peers, mentors, campus programs, and community organizations, and how these networks contributed to their overall wellness. Section 4 investigated the participants' experiences related to mental wellness during their academic journey, including the availability and utilization of mental health resources on campus.

In Section 5, the focus shifted to physical wellness, addressing the strategies employed by the participants to maintain their physical well-being and the challenges they faced in doing so. The relationship between food security and physical wellness was also explored, including the challenges and strategies used to ensure access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food options.

Section 6 delved into the financial challenges and stressors faced by Arab female graduate students in the US, as well as their management strategies. Section 7 explored the coping strategies employed by participants to maintain their physical, mental, social, and financial wellness. Lastly, Section 8 aimed to gather insights into the perceived needs and services that participants believed would be helpful in supporting the overall wellness of Arab female graduate students on campus.

The interview concluded with a closing segment, where the participants were thanked for their time and contribution to the study. The researcher reiterated the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation, provided information about any potential follow-up, and informed them about the possible dissemination of the study's findings. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or provide additional information before concluding the interview.

Interview Protocol Piloting

Prior to using the interview protocol to collect the data for this study, it was pilot tested on one participant. Data collected from piloting were not included in the study findings. The following paragraphs outline the piloting process for the interview protocol designed to study the wellness of Arab women graduate students in the United States. This phase aimed to evaluate the effectiveness, clarity, and relevance of the interview questions and to identify any potential issues or improvements before conducting the main study. The piloting phase of the interview protocol is of utmost importance in research, as it allows for the evaluation and refinement of the interview questions before conducting the main study (Majid et al., 2017).

Objectives

The specific objectives of the piloting phase were as follows:

- a) To assess the comprehensibility and relevance of the interview questions.
- b) To identify any potential challenges or ambiguities in the wording or structure of the questions.
- c) To evaluate the appropriateness and sensitivity of the interview questions in capturing the wellness experiences of Arab women graduate students.

d) To gather feedback from participants regarding the length, flow, and overall quality of the interview protocol.

e) To refine and enhance the interview questions based on the feedback received.

Participants

The participants for the piloting phase included one Arab graduate student who was currently studying in the United States. The selection was based on convenience sampling, taking into consideration factors such as availability and willingness to participate.

Procedure

Prior to the interviews, participant was provided with a brief explanation of the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participants were then guided through a semi-structured interview process using the interview protocol. I encouraged the participant to provide detailed responses and sought clarification whenever necessary. The interview was audio-recorded with the consent of the participant to ensure accuracy and facilitate analysis. After the interview, the participant had the opportunity to provide feedback on the interview experience, including her perceptions of question clarity, relevance, and any suggestions for improvement. The interview was transcribed and anonymized for further analysis.

Analysis

The data collected during the piloting phase were subjected to thematic analysis. The primary focus was identifying recurring themes and patterns related to the wellness experiences of Arab women graduate students. Additionally, the feedback received from participants was carefully reviewed to identify common suggestions, concerns, or areas for improvement regarding the interview protocol.

Refinement of Interview Protocol

Based on the analysis of the piloting phase, the interview protocol was refined and revised as necessary. Questions 4 and 6 got some wording adjustment to enhance relevance and avoid redundancy. Question 12 was broken down into two questions to clarify its ambiguity. The refined interview protocol was then used for the main study.

Collection of Data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual participants, which will allowed for an in-depth exploration of their experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies. The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions (appendix C), which was developed based on the research questions and objectives of the study and refined based on the piloting results. The questions provided a general direction for the interview, but the interviewer will have the flexibility to probe and explore the participants' responses in greater depth.

All interviews were audio-recorded, with the consent of the participants. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, which means that the spoken words were converted into a written format. This process ensured that the data is accurately captured and allowed for analysis and interpretation of the data. The transcripts were carefully reviewed and analysed to identify themes, patterns, and variations in the data, which helped answer the research questions posed for the study, they were also shared with the participants to validate the data.

In addition, I maintained an audit trail throughout the data collection process. This trail includes detailed records of all data sources, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and research decisions. By keeping an audit trail, I was aiming to ensure transparency and accountability in my research and to enable other researchers to verify the rigor and validity of my findings. The trail included field notes with a detailed account of the setting, observations,

and research and participants' reactions throughout the interview. In addition, memos were written right after the interview to analyse and interpret the data from each interview, identifying points that need further exploration, biases, and themes. Journaling was used alongside field notes and memos to keep track of the researcher's emotions, personal reflections, and biases.

Data Analysis

The data analysis adhered to the eight stages proposed by Rose and Loewenthal (2006). I chose to employ thematic analysis due to its flexibility, compatibility with various theoretical frameworks, and its capacity to generate rich, detailed, and intricate data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Thematic analysis entails a continuous process of navigating between individual transcripts and the entire data set, meticulously searching for meaningful patterns (Patton, 1990).

The data analysis employed a thematic analysis, a method that focuses on recognizing patterns, themes, and categories within the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This analysis was carried out through several phases, such as acquainting oneself with the data, creating preliminary codes, establishing themes, revising themes, and defining and labelling themes. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research analysis method used to identify patterns, themes, and categories within data. The purpose of the analysis is to identify and interpret recurrent patterns of meaning within data to answer the research questions proposed in the study (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The first stage of the thematic analysis involves becoming familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts. This allows the researcher to get a sense of the overall content of the data and begin to identify potential patterns or themes that emerge.

Next, initial codes were generated based on the identified patterns and themes. The researcher created a codebook that outlined the codes and their definitions to ensure consistency

in coding throughout the analysis. After initial coding, similar codes were grouped into categories to develop themes. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately reflect the data and were relevant to the research questions.

Finally, the researcher defined and named the themes, creating a clear and concise summary of the findings. This process involves interpretation and critical reflection on the data, as well as consideration of the researcher's own positionality and biases. The analysis was conducted with rigor and transparency, using peer debriefing and member checking to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

To ensure the credibility of the analysis, the researcher adopted a rigorous approach to the interpretation and synthesis of data. This involved referring to the researcher's memos and journals and consulting with a trusted colleague who is an expert in qualitative research to help verify the themes and ensure the accuracy of the findings. The researcher also carefully considered their own positionality and biases, acknowledging the potential impact on the analysis in addition to the aforementioned peer debriefing and member checking. Overall, this rigorous and transparent approach helped to ensure the credibility and rigor of the study's findings.

Positionality

To offer a transparent view of my background and potential research biases within the context of this dissertation, I wish to introduce myself. As an Arab doctoral candidate embarking on research concerning the wellness of Arab women in U.S. graduate academic settings, I feel it is essential to clarify the personal experiences that have shaped my perspective.

I have personally grappled with emotional distress, which necessitated medical intervention and pharmaceutical support. Financial constraints have led to the accumulation of

significant debts, and these financial challenges are a salient part of my personal journey.

Conversely, I have been fortunate to enjoy a robust social network comprising a diverse and supportive community of friends, which has enriched my social life. However, maintaining my physical health has presented challenges, primarily due to the cost of access to nutritious food and the time-intensive nature of food preparation.

My cultural identity as an Arab woman hailing from Egypt is foundational to my research. It provides a unique lens through which to understand the complex interplay of cultural and social factors that influence the well-being of Arab women. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that my personal experiences and potential biases may inadvertently influence the research process. This self-awareness will be maintained throughout the dissertation.

Additionally, the power dynamics inherent in my role as a graduate student researcher must be considered. Participants in this study may potentially perceive me as an authority figure or as a person who can judge them and hence a threat, which could impact their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives. As a result, I am committed to approaching this research with humility, openness, and profound respect for the voices and viewpoints of the participants.

Furthermore, a conscientious consideration of the broader social, cultural, and historical context within which this research unfolds is essential. Arab women have often faced marginalization and misrepresentation in mainstream media and academic discourse. Therefore, I am dedicated to conducting this research with sensitivity and respect, ensuring that the findings neither perpetuate detrimental stereotypes nor contribute to the marginalization of Arab women.

In conclusion, my positionality as an Egyptian/Arab woman graduate student conducting this research allows me to bring a valuable perspective to the understanding of the wellness

experiences of Arab women in U.S. graduate academic settings. I am unwavering in my commitment to uphold the principles of research integrity, transparency, and inclusivity throughout this endeavour. My ultimate goal is to utilize the research outcomes to advocate for the wellness needs of Arab women within the academic milieu.

Ethics

Prior to conducting my study, I took the Collaborative Institution Training Initiative (CITI) social and behavioural research certification and review the code of ethics from reputable associations, like the ethical standards published by the American Educational Research Association (AERA). In addition, I will familiarize myself with the policies and guidelines set forth by the US Department of Health and Human Services and the Belmont Report. Finally, the recruitment process will not start until I receive IRB approval. Each participant's consent was sought before officially participating and they were given the right to opt out of the process.

The Rigor of the Study

A significant challenge in qualitative research is that the issues of validity and credibility are considerably more complex than in quantitative research (McLeod, 2001). To address this concern, a comprehensive analysis and a thorough description of the analyses will be conducted (Ambert et al., 1995). This approach will offer the reader a clear understanding of the numerous complexities and variations in the participants' experiences. Further, various strategies, such as participant feedback and reflexivity, will be employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Johnson, 1997). As such, the experiences and perspectives of participants will be reflected accurately.

Obtaining participant feedback is crucial for eliminating the possibility of miscommunications and for accurate interpretations that reflect the participants' experiences

(Johnson, 1997). Participant feedback will be conducted during follow-up phone interviews. These interviews will provide an opportunity to collect additional information and discuss the findings with participants,

Reflexivity should involve a critical examination of the self and reflecting upon the process as it pertained to the research. To do this, I document my experiences and identify my biases during the research process. I will make sure to journal my thoughts immediately following the interviews. I will also point out my assumptions to uncover how my biases may affect the results.

Reflexivity entails a critical self-examination and reflection on how one's experiences and biases related to the research process (Johnson, 1997). I will document my experiences and identify my biases throughout the research to achieve this. This will involve maintaining an audit trail of my thoughts immediately after conducting interviews to capture my impressions and potential biases.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter provides an overview of the research methodology, participants, and procedures that were used to achieve the purpose of the study which is to explore the experiences and perceived wellness of Arab women international graduate students in the US, with a particular focus on the social, mental, physical, and financial dimensions of wellness. This chapter outlined the research design, including the participants, data collection methods, instruments, data analysis techniques, and positionality considerations.

Participants in this qualitative study were Arab women international students studying at the graduate level at one university located in the mid-west/mid-south of the US. The study used purposive sampling to recruit participants who meet the inclusion criteria, which included being

an Arab women international student enrolled in a graduate program at the university.

Participants were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in person or remotely, based on the participant's preference. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis purposes.

The semi-structured interviews focused on exploring participants' experiences and perceived wellness in the US, particularly in relation to their social, mental, physical, and financial well-being. The interviews included open-ended questions and probes to encourage participants to share their experiences and perceptions freely.

Data analysis for this study was conducted using a thematic analysis approach. The data was analyzed inductively to identify patterns and themes across participants, and coding was used to organize the data into categories. The themes will then be analyzed in-depth to understand their meaning and significance in relation to the research questions.

Positionality was considered throughout the research process. The researcher's identity and potential biases were acknowledged and reflected upon throughout the study to ensure the research is conducted ethically and responsibly.

Chapter 4

Findings

The pursuit of higher education has become increasingly globalized, attracting students from diverse cultural backgrounds to universities around the world and the US comes on top of the list of sought-after educational systems. In this context, Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the United States represent a significant and growing demographic. The transition from their native countries to an unfamiliar educational system can present a myriad of challenges that may impact their wellness. As they navigate through the challenges and opportunities of academic life, it is crucial to understand and address the unique factors that influence their overall wellness. Factors such as language barriers, cultural adjustments, and the pressure to excel academically can contribute to stress, anxiety, and a sense of isolation.

Understanding the specific needs and concerns of Arab women graduate students is crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive academic environment. Arab culture emphasizes the importance of family, community, and social connections which play a significant role in individuals' overall well-being. However, the geographic distance from their support networks back home can intensify feelings of homesickness and increase the need for alternative sources of social support. Moreover, the cultural and religious backgrounds of Arab women shape their worldview and perceptions of wellness which may differ from the dominant cultural norms prevalent in their host country. By exploring these multifaceted dimensions, we can gain valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by Arab women in their pursuit of graduate education in the US, and subsequently develop strategies and interventions that promote their holistic well-being.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation focuses on presenting and analyzing the research findings specifically pertaining to the wellness of Arab women pursuing their graduate degrees in the United States. Serving as the cornerstone of the study, the chapter showcases the outcomes of the research efforts and offers an all-encompassing analysis of the gathered data. Through the presentation of raw data from interviews, detailed descriptions of participants' experiences are brought to light.

The analysis of the data in the chapter is a critical step, involving a comprehensive exploration of patterns, themes, and trends that directly impact the wellness of Arab women in their pursuit of higher education. This study of the concept of wellness enables a thorough understanding of its various dimensions, including social, mental, physical, and financial aspects, while also uncovering other emergent factors crucial to their overall well-being.

Additionally, Chapter 4 addresses the research questions set forth at the inception of the study. Through data analysis, it evaluates whether the research questions have been adequately addressed and if the findings align with the original assumptions.

The analysis and presentation of research findings in the chapter contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field. By shedding light on the wellness experiences of Arab women graduate students in the US, this research enriches the academic understanding of their unique challenges and triumphs throughout their academic and personal journeys.

The practical implications of these findings are extensive, as they have the potential to influence educational institutions, policymakers, and support services for Arab women graduate students. Based on the analysis, the findings can offer valuable recommendations to improve wellness and support systems for these students, ultimately fostering a more conducive environment for their academic success and overall well-being.

This chapter begins with a summary of the study followed by the findings of the study, the results from interviews, and data analysis.

Summary of the Study

The study explored the experiences and perceived wellness of Arab women international graduate students in the United States. The study focused on the social, mental, physical, and financial dimensions of wellness and aimed to identify the unique challenges faced by this population and the strategies they employ to navigate those challenges. Additionally, the study provided insights into how universities can better support Arab international women in their academic and social environments. The research may contribute to the development of policies and practices that promote the academic and personal success of Arab women studying in the United States.

To collect data, the study utilized a qualitative research methodology, specifically semi-structured interviews. The participants were Arab women pursuing their graduate studies and enrolled as international students at a university in the mid-south, heartland region of the United States. The interview questions were designed to capture the experiences and perspectives of the participants regarding their physical, mental, social, and financial wellness. The interview protocol underwent a piloting phase to ensure its comprehensibility, relevance, appropriateness, and overall quality.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the collected data, identifying patterns, themes, and variations that emerged across the participants. The research process considered the researcher's positionality as an Egyptian/Arab woman graduate student and the potential biases that could impact the study. Rigorous measures were implemented to ensure the credibility and

trustworthiness of the findings, including obtaining participant feedback and practicing reflexivity.

Data Collection

Following the successful approval of the research protocol by the University of Arkansas IRB (see appendix D), the study commenced its implementation phase. To identify suitable participants, individuals within the university community were approached through personal contacts, seeking their assistance. Ultimately, a diverse group of seven individuals from the University of Arkansas agreed to be interviewed, representing various academic classifications. Among these participants, four were actively pursuing a master's degree and three were engaged in doctoral studies.

Each interview was carefully planned with a duration of 45 to 60 minutes in order to gather comprehensive and in-depth information. However, it is worth noting that the actual duration of the interviews varied. The interviews lasted the following lengths of time: 1) 77.49 minutes, 2) 93.51 minutes, 3) 74.36 minutes, 4) 48.57 minutes, 5) 43.08 minutes, 6) 84.15 minutes, and 7) 68.23 minutes. When considering all the interviews together, they had an average duration of approximately 69.9 minutes.

Once the interviews concluded, care was taken to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. I made up and assigned pseudonym to each individual to safeguard their identities. The next step involved transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews, which were then compiled into a word-processing file. These transcripts underwent a process of coding and analysis to discern and extract significant themes and patterns inherent in the data. Furthermore, in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the gathered information, a preliminary exploratory analysis was conducted. This involved creating written memos that captured pertinent details

extracted from the transcripts, along with incorporating field notes taken during each interview and journal entries written after the completion of each session. In order to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the interview transcripts, a further step was taken to involve the participants in the verification process. Specifically, two of the interview transcripts were shared with the respective participants to allow them to review and confirm the accuracy of the transcripts, offering them an opportunity to provide feedback or make any necessary corrections. By involving the participants in the verification of the transcriptions, the study aimed to uphold the principle of participant-centered research. This collaborative approach not only ensures the fidelity of the data but also respects the participants' perspectives and empowers them to contribute to the accuracy of their own narratives. However, due to time constraints, not all participants were able to verify the transcripts.

The feedback provided by the participants during the transcript verification process was carefully considered and incorporated into the final versions of the transcriptions. This additional step bolstered the credibility of the study's findings, as it involved the participants as active partners in the research process. The thoroughness and attention to detail in verifying the transcript with the participants further enhanced the trustworthiness and validity of the study, as it upheld the participants' rights to have their voices accurately represented. In order to enhance the rigor and credibility of the study, I sought the assistance of a trusted colleague from the University of Arkansas, who possesses a Ph.D. in Public Policy. This colleague conducted a confirmatory check of open coding.

The following paragraphs provide the descriptions of each participant and a summary of their demographics in table 1. The first individual interviewed was Marwa. She enrolled in an Education and Curriculum Design master's program and subsequently secured admission to

pursue her Ph.D. Marwa's Kurdish background adds a unique and valuable perspective to the study, enriching its overall context and depth of understanding. The second interview Participant, Mona, originally from Iraq, embarked on her academic journey by pursuing a doctoral degree in Physics. Currently, she is actively engaged in her postgraduate studies.

The third subject was Nadia from Tunisia a master's student of Economics Analytics. Nadia's inclusion in the study brought a significant and valuable perspective, as she identifies as an Arab woman lesbian. This aspect of her identity added a unique layer of understanding and insight to the research. Nadia's participation broadened the scope of knowledge gained from the study, contributing to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of this multi-faceted and intersectional population. By sharing her experiences and perspectives, Nadia's involvement highlighted the importance of recognizing and embracing diverse voices within academic research.

Mai, the fourth participant in the study, is a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature. Mai is from Egypt who has been residing in the United States for five years. The fifth participant, Hadeer, came from Saudi Arabia and initially came to the US as an undergraduate student. Subsequently, she pursued her master's degree in biomedical engineering. While in the US, Hadeer chooses to keep wearing a veil, a practice she upholds due to family-related obligations. However, she personally identifies as agnostic.

The sixth participant is Yosra, originally from Egypt. Like Hadeer, she also arrived in the US as an undergraduate student and continued her academic journey by pursuing a master's degree in biomedical engineering. Yosra hails from a rural city in Egypt. Throughout her experience, she has shown great enthusiasm and excitement for everything she encounters.

The seventh and final participant is Yasmine, who comes from Morocco. Yasmine decided to follow in her brothers' footsteps and came to the same university in the US to pursue her master's degree in supply chain management. Her aspirations include obtaining an Optional Practical Training (OPT) opportunity after finishing and eventually settling down in the United States.

Table 1. *Summary of Participants Demographics*

Pseudonym	Degree	Education	Country
Marwa	PhD	Education and Curriculum Design	Kurdistan
Mona	PhD	Physics	Iraq
Nadia	MA	Economics Analytics	Tunisia
Mai	PhD	Comparative Literature	Egypt
Hadeer	MA	Biomedical Engineering	Saudi Arabia
Yosra	MA	Biomedical Engineering	Egypt
Yasmine	MA	Supply Chain Management	Morocco

In the study focusing on the wellness of Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the US, all seven participants willingly participated by signing consent forms, granting permission to have their interviews recorded. Each participant also expressed their agreement to be part of the research. To accommodate their preferences and comfort, the interviews were conducted through the tool of their choice, ensuring a convenient and suitable means of communication. Additionally, the interviews took place in locations preferred by the participants, fostering an environment conducive to open and honest dialogue.

Data Analysis

This section of the study is dedicated to analyzing the data collected to investigate the wellness of Arab female graduate students in the United States, with a specific focus on the four dimensions of social, mental, physical, and financial well-being. In adherence to rigorous academic principles, the section employs a systematic approach, involving careful coding and analysis of data gathered from semi-structured interviews. By discerning meaningful patterns,

themes, and trends within the collected information, the analysis aims to provide comprehensive insights into the unique wellness experiences, challenges, and aspirations of these participants. With an emphasis on the social, mental, physical, and financial aspects of their well-being, the study sought to offer a nuanced understanding of the holistic factors shaping the academic journeys and overall wellness of Arab women studying in the US. The findings are expected to contribute substantially to the existing scholarly literature while holding the potential to inform practical interventions and further research.

The data analysis adhered to the eight stages proposed by Rose and Loewenthal (2006), with thematic analysis being chosen due to its flexibility, compatibility with various theoretical frameworks, and ability to generate rich, detailed, and intricate data. Thematic analysis, a qualitative research analysis method, focuses on recognizing patterns, themes, and categories in the data, and was employed in this study to identify and interpret recurrent patterns of meaning in response to the research questions (Vaismoradi et al, 2013).

The process involved several phases starting with familiarization with the data through reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify potential patterns or themes. Subsequently, initial codes were generated, and a codebook was created to ensure consistency. Similar codes were then grouped into categories to develop themes, which underwent review and refinement to accurately reflect the data and align with the research questions. Finally, the researcher defined and named the themes, engaging in interpretation and critical reflection, while considering her own positionality and biases.

The subsequent section will be presented to address the five research questions. Each research question is followed by a thematic presentation of the relevant data, accompanied by a detailed analysis of each theme. This approach ensures a systematic exploration of the research

questions, allowing for the organized presentation of data and comprehensive theme-based examinations. This structure aims to facilitate a clear understanding of the research findings.

Research Question 1: What role, according to Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the US, do social support networks, including peers, mentors, campus programs, and community organizations, play in promoting holistic wellness?

The data collected from the in-depth interviews with the seven Arab women provides a rich and insightful exploration into the impact of social support networks on promoting social wellness and subsequently holistic wellness. Through a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, a range of themes emerges, shedding light on the participants' experiences, challenges, and the transformative influence of social support on their social wellness and, in turn, their overall well-being. By delving into these narratives, we gain a deeper understanding of how social support networks, comprising peers, mentors, campus programs, and community organizations, play a pivotal role in shaping the academic and personal journey of Arab women graduate students in the US.

In the context of social support networks, participants mentioned several categories of actors: professors and academic advisors, peers, Spring International Language Center employees, and campus programs. The participants acknowledged that the relationships they built with these networks impacted their wellness. Interaction with professors and advisors provided academic and emotional support, helping them overcome challenges and feeling valued as a student. Engaging with peers, particularly fellow international students, facilitated the sharing of experiences and offered emotional support. Involvement in campus programs and events provided opportunities for socializing and participating in extracurricular activities, leading to a sense of belonging and community engagement.

Theme #1: Social Eco-system of Support and Resources. This theme encapsulated the intricate web of relationships, interactions, and resources that surround Arab women graduate students as they navigate their academic journey in the United States. Within this dynamic ecosystem, students found themselves immersed in a network of individuals, groups, and institutional structures that collectively contributed to their well-being and academic experiences. This theme examines the multifaceted nature of their social connections, ranging from the pivotal role of professors and academic advisors who offer guidance and mentorship, to the cultivation of friendships who foster feelings of safety and belonging. Additionally, the theme delves into the significance of campus offices, programs, and associations that extend resources and services aimed at enhancing the student's academic success and overall mental wellness. By exploring these aspects, the theme underscores the essential synergy between personal relationships and institutional resources, highlighting how these elements intertwine to shape the students' journey and contribute to their holistic development.

Professors and Academic Advisors as Social Support Networks. The interviews with the seven Arab women revealed a prominent sub-theme surrounding the pivotal role of professors and academic advisors as crucial social support networks during their pursuit of graduate studies in the US. The participants spoke with profound appreciation for the guidance and encouragement they received from their academic mentors, highlighting the profound impact of these relationships on their personal and academic growth. Mona recounted, "My professors were not just professors... they were much more they became my mentors and .. (eeeh) I sometimes felt they are friends, you know?" This sentiment was echoed by Marwa, who remarked, "I was fortunate, and I was very grateful for having my academic advisor who cared about my success. She cared about me, my family, and my studies."

These positive interactions extended beyond the boundaries of the classroom and academic settings, nurturing a profound sense of belonging and empowerment. As Hadeer said, "My professor sometimes invited me to have dinners and spend time with his lovely family. Another professor took me to campus and off-campus events and always wanted ..she was interested in attending cultural events with me." Yasmine also shared a touching experience, saying, "During this hard period, my academic advisor's concern and empathy helped me to keep going. I thought I can no longer do it, Mariam. She made me feel I can do it and that she understood what I've been through." Marwa also spoke fondly of her advisor and professors even though their support was purely academic, she found significant support from her professors, academic advisor, and the department, "They encouraged me, helped me and took me step by-by step in the program. My advisor always helped me in choosing my courses. He also encouraged me to explore different opportunities."

On the other hand, while the participants highlighted the positive impact of supportive professors and academic advisors, one of the participants pointed out that an over-demanding and unempathetic approach from these figures can evoke stress and anxiety. Mai recounted,

My advisor had exceedingly high expectations, I like that and I have no problem, but she only talked only about tasks. I don't ever ever remember answering "how are you?" She pushed me to work only. I often found myself overwhelmed and anxious and I always felt bad, very bad, on the days of our meetings.

This sentiment was echoed by Yosra who stated, "My academic advisor was hard to talk to. He seemed hard to talk to and I always felt he thinks I am weird. I avoided him, always. But I never knew who should I go to."

The participants' accounts highlight the important role professors and academic advisors play as social support networks for Arab women in graduate studies. These relationships went beyond traditional academic guidance, proving to be helpful in fostering social wellness and

enhancing the participants' overall well-being. The emotional and intellectual support provided by these mentors equipped the participants with the resilience and motivation needed to overcome obstacles and excel academically. Other accounts also showed the need for empathetic and understanding guidance from professors and academic advisors. A lack of emotional support and an overemphasis on performance can negatively impact the well-being of Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the US. As mentors, fostering an atmosphere of empathy and providing a balanced approach that acknowledges the unique challenges of international students can play a vital role in promoting holistic wellness among these individuals.

Friendships and Feelings of Safety. Another prominent sub-theme that emerged from the data was the significance of having a group of friends and feeling safe within that social network. For Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the US, finding a supportive community of peers who share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences was essential for their social wellness. Mona expressed the importance of such connections, stating "I had a group of friends in the department we did everything together, we went to class together, and solved problem, and had study groups, and we also went to the gym."

Belonging to a group provided participants with a sense of identity and helped them navigate the hardships of living in a foreign country. Yasmine shared "We would celebrate Eids, Ramadan, and other events. These are times that really made me feel I am home ..and that ..that I am not alone."

Participants also talked about feeling safe. One of the most prominent common fears for all seven students was getting sick alone. Especially since it is hard for most of them to navigate health insurance and the health system in the US. However, having a group of friends made several of them feel safe. This sense of security enabled feeling less anxious and lonely. Nadia

highlighted this aspect, stating "My friends took care of me. I once got very very sick and had a fever, very high. Every day one of my friends would come check on me and bring food."

The friends group not only offered emotional support but also provided practical assistance during challenging times. Participants often exchanged academic resources and study tips, which enhanced their academic performance. Yosra explained "Studying together was helpful. I was productive when I worked with them."

However, participants also acknowledged the need for balance in their social networks. While having a group of friends from the same reference group was beneficial, it was equally essential to interact with a diverse set of people to broaden their perspectives and cultural understanding. Yasmine reflected on this aspect, saying "I loved having Arab friends, but I also tried to make friends with other cultures. I loved learning from them and knowing their cultures."

Most of the participants' peers provided them with strong emotional support during difficult times, offering help and encouragement. They collaborated academically, working together on challenging problems and sharing knowledge, which they appreciated. Some of them regularly met with peers to study, discuss ideas, and collaborate on homework. Their support not only aided them academically but also helped them adapt to their new academic environment and culture. Mona for one, acknowledged that maintaining mental wellness during her academic journey was likely challenging due to long hours, insufficient sleep, and rigorous demands. However, her supportive peer group played a crucial role in alleviating some of the stress and pressure she faced. According to her, "Nothing is easy, studying isn't, the situation is hard, and I can't get enough sleep, but my friend made it easy for me to stay sane."

In conclusion, having a group of friends and feeling safe within that social support network played a pivotal role in promoting the social wellness of Arab women. The sense of

belonging, mutual understanding, and practical assistance offered by such a community contributed positively to their overall well-being.

Campus Offices, Programs, and Associations. A noteworthy aspect that emerged from the data was the transformative role of the Spring International Language Center (SILC) and its staff in the lives of the participants. Four out of the seven interviewed Arab women began their academic journey at the University of Arkansas by attending SILC, and their experiences highlighted the center's significant impact on their social wellness and overall well-being.

SILC successfully fostered a sense of belonging and support among its students. Hadeer described her initial days at SILC, saying,

When I first arrived in the US, everyone at SILC was there for me. I felt like home. Dr. Lanier, the staff, and all the teachers were so welcoming. It made me feel like I belonged here. And also, I made a lot of friends.

The center's inclusive and supportive environment created a safety net for the students, allowing them to navigate the challenges of living in a foreign country with more confidence. As Mona shared, "SILC became my second family. They were first people I contact when I have problems. They helped me with literally everything, understanding the academic system, finding jobs on campus, and setting up a bank account. I felt safe." Marwa had a story to confirm this. Two weeks after she arrived in the US she got scammed. The scammers pretended to be police officers, targeted international students, and manipulated their fear of authority in a foreign country. They got Marwa to transfer \$3,000 to a Nike gift card, believing it was for safekeeping until a social security officer called. Marwa lost all the money provided by Fulbright for rent, daily expenses, and books, leaving her shocked and devastated, questioning the conscience of those who would prey on vulnerable students in such a way and her first reaction was to communicate with SILC. According to her,

The first one I called was Emilia because she was with SILC, so she was taking care of us. She didn't reply. I called Philip. I emailed him actually, and he said, Oh, you have to come to SILC! And when I told Dr. Lanier immediately, she cried. I cried. She hugged me. It was so difficult. Actually it was very difficult. And then we reported to police. I showed them all the evidence, the badge number, the phone call. How like the the hours that, they were with me for 3 hours over the phone?

The sense of belonging and support offered by SILC had a profound positive impact on the participants' emotional well-being. They felt more stable, confident, and content in their experiences in the US. Mona expressed her gratitude, saying, "I can't imagine my life here without SILC. I don't think I would have ever come to the Fayetteville if not for SILC."

SILC also played a vital role in easing the participants' transition into the academic environment at the University of Arkansas. The English language instruction and cultural orientation provided by SILC proved invaluable in preparing them for success in their graduate studies. As Yosra explained, "At SILC I improved my language and gained confidence to speak. I also learned about the culture."

In conclusion, Spring International Language Center (SILC) played a significant role in promoting the social wellness and overall well-being of Arab women. By creating a nurturing and inclusive environment that instilled a sense of belonging and support, SILC helped its students navigate the complexities of studying abroad and allowed them to approach their academic journey with greater confidence and happiness.

Participants also mentioned various campus programs, such as International Cultural Team (ICT) and offices such as the International Students and Sponsored Programs office (SSP), and International Students and Scholars office (ISS) that offered support and guidance for international students, making their lives easier. They emphasized that these were counted as part of their social support networks and that they positively contributed to their overall wellness by providing opportunities for socializing, making friends, and improving their language skills.

Participants also shared their experiences of being involved in various social support networks, including the African Association, Fullbright Association, International Students Association, and the National Association of Business Economics. These networks allowed them to connect with professionals, other students, gain valuable insights for her career, and build a strong support system. A couple of participants believed that the networks they created through these associations contributed positively to their wellness, particularly in terms of their career orientation and future prospects.

Answer to Research Question 1. Therefore, the answer to question one based on the experiences of Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the US, is social support networks, including peers, mentors, campus programs, and community organizations, play a vital role in promoting holistic wellness.

Through their accounts, it became evident that these social support networks contribute to various aspects of well-being. Mentors, professors, and academic advisors in most cases provided guidance, encouragement, and a sense of direction in navigating the challenges of graduate studies. Peers also offer emotional support, create a sense of belonging, and help in adapting to the new cultural and academic environment.

The formation of close-knit groups fosters a collaborative learning environment. This environment facilitates knowledge-sharing, intellectual growth, and mutual assistance in overcoming academic hurdles. Moreover, social support networks act as a buffer against stress and isolation. As international students, Arab women often face unique challenges such as cultural adjustments and homesickness. However, the presence of supportive peers and mentors helps mitigate the negative impact of these challenges on their mental well-being.

Additionally, campus programs and community organizations offer resources and opportunities for personal and professional development. They provide platforms for networking, skill-building, and engagement in extracurricular activities, which contribute to a more enriching academic experience.

Social support networks play a multi-faceted role in promoting holistic wellness among Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the US. They contribute to emotional, physical, and financial well-being. In addition to the role social support networks play in their academic success, and overall satisfaction with the academic journey. These networks not only help students cope with the demands of graduate studies but also enhance their sense of belonging and connection to the academic community.

Research question 2: What are the experiences of Arab women graduate students in terms of mental wellness during their academic journey in the US, and how do they access and utilize mental health support resources on campus?

The data from the interviews with the seven participants provide valuable insights into the experiences of those Arab women graduate students regarding their mental wellness during their academic journey in the US and their utilization of mental health support resources on campus. Through their unique perspectives and narratives, valuable data about the challenges they faced, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the support systems that shaped their mental well-being as they pursue higher education in a foreign land.

Theme # 2: Cultural Influence on Mental Wellness. Cultural influences emerged as a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Participants expressed how cultural norms impact their attitudes toward seeking professional help for their mental health. This theme underscored the need to understand and address cultural factors when providing mental health support to Arab

women graduate students as the pursuit of higher education, particularly in international settings, presents a unique set of challenges that extend beyond academic rigor. The experiences of Arab women graduate students in terms of mental wellness during their academic journey in the US were varied and influenced by cultural, personal, and academic factors. Some of these students faced challenges such as academic pressure, work responsibilities, and feelings of isolation being away from their families and familiar cultural environments. These challenges can lead to moments of stress, burnout, and anxiety. This section on mental wellness in this context delves into their coping mechanisms, strategies for stress management, and the role of cultural practices, family support, and friendships in maintaining their emotional well-being. By examining the unique experiences of Arab women, this research aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of mental health considerations in international graduate studies.

Cultural Identity and Mental Wellness. Arab culture, characterized by its deep-rooted values, intricate beliefs, and traditions, can influence mental health. Within this cultural milieu, mental health assumes a multifaceted dimension, subject to the interplay of various perspectives and attitudes. The perception of mental health within Arab culture is nuanced and shaped by an array of factors. These factors include the dichotomy between collectivism and individualism, where communal welfare often takes precedence over personal concerns. As a result, mental health struggles could be concealed to avoid burdening the family or broader community, reflecting the collective ethos ingrained in Arab societies. This was evident in Mai's words when she said

I felt lonely and that my support system was not there anymore. The distance made me feel on my own, which was the case. What made it even more.. bad is that I had to show I'm okay to not worry my family and this was very hard.

Further, the dynamics of collective behavior within Arab culture can occasionally give rise to a distinct form of pressure that Arab women graduate students encounter. This pressure emerges from the enduring sense of responsibility these students carry for the well-being and needs of their family members. The enduring ties of collectivism dictate that personal obligations to family persist. This can manifest as a continuous and often demanding commitment to the familial unit, wherein the student must balance personal pursuits with responsibilities toward family. The imperative to attend to the needs and concerns of relatives can create a pronounced tension between self-focus and the communal obligations intrinsic to collectivism. Consequently, Arab women graduate students might find themselves navigating a challenging path, where they grapple with striving for their academic aspirations, attending to their own well-being, and meeting familial expectations that are closely tied to their cultural identity. This intricate interplay of individual aspirations and collective obligations significantly contributes to shaping their mental wellness journey. Nadia for example, mentioned that she had to take care of her sister who is an undergraduate student, and had to take her in and have her live with her in the same room in an apartment shared with others to support her financially. She also felt obliged to cook for her and make sure she was doing well.

So, the thing is, I had to find a house that would host me me and my sister because I knew she was coming like. 2 weeks after I moved I had to help her. She she was coming for the first time to go to school here, and my parents were like, Okay, your sister. You have to figure out how to feed her, how to host her, how to pay for rent, and people that will accept if we 2 girls live in the same room, and it's not coming like for Americans. I don't like that. So I had to find like people that know me that know that it's okay. And so my friend Carlos said it like it was renting with 3 other 2 other guys. So we ended up living living with 3 other guys and both of us.

Nadia's narrative powerfully captured the responsibility she undertook when faced with the task of not only navigating her own living situation but also that of her sister's. The complexity of her situation becomes apparent as she described the urgency of securing a suitable

accommodation to host both herself and her sister. The practical concerns she needed to address, finding housing that would accept two sisters sharing a room, reveal the intersection of her commitment to her family's well-being and the nuances of her cultural identity. However, Nadia indicated that this was extremely pressuring and that having to take care of her sister made her feel “drained.”

Another burden imposed by the tenets of collectivism is the persistent concern that accompanies Arab women graduate students who are living away from their familial homes. This concern revolves around the well-being of their family members back in their home countries. As these students strive to pursue their academic aspirations, the weight of collectivist values can translate into a constant preoccupation with the welfare of their loved ones. The responsibility to ensure the family's collective stability, coupled with the geographic distance that separates them, causes a heavy emotional burden. This burden not only encompasses health challenges and personal growth but also extends to maintaining familial bonds and safeguarding the emotional equilibrium of those left behind. In this context, the traditional sense of duty and interconnectedness inherent in collectivism can create a jammed web of obligations, magnifying the challenges faced by Arab women graduate students and profoundly influencing their mental wellness during their academic pursuit. Mona for example mentioned that she had to call her mom and siblings every day to make sure they were okay; “My biggest fear was that I would call one day and one of them will not be in good health.”

Yosra echoed the sentiment recounting the challenges she encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her experience of being stranded in the United States during the global crisis highlighted a distressing aspect of the collectivist burden. As borders closed and uncertainty rose, the disconnect from her family and the lack of information from her home

country intensified her worry and concern. The inherent responsibility embedded in collectivism amplified her apprehensions, as she was unable to physically be there for her family during a critical time. The pandemic underscored the far-reaching impact of cultural norms, illustrating how the interconnectedness of family and the responsibility to protect and support loved ones can transcend physical boundaries.

When the pandemic hit, I was going crazy, Mariam I was really going crazy I was scared, I was worried, and my brain gave me weird thoughts and I was afraid that I will never get to see my family again. I called the embassy and begged to go home, but I couldn't afford the ticket back home.

Yosra's reflection on her experience during the pandemic captured the emotional upheaval that many individuals faced during those uncertain times. Her candid admission of feeling like she was "going crazy" underscored the intense psychological toll of the situation. The overwhelming fear and worry that consumed her, compounded by the barrage of unsettling thoughts, highlighted the profound impact the pandemic had on her mental well-being. The depth of her connection to her family was demonstrable in her concern about not being able to see them again, reflecting the agonizing weight of the collective responsibility ingrained within her cultural identity. The desperate plea to the embassy to return home revealed the depth of her longing for a sense of security and familiarity amidst the turmoil. Yosra's account not only unveils the emotional turmoil caused by the pandemic but also offers a window into the intersection of cultural values, personal fears, and external challenges that shaped the unique mental wellness concerns of Arab women like her.

Another manifestation of cultural identity is the cultural emphasis on strength and resilience, deeply rooted in the notion of preserving dignity and saving face which might discourage open discourse about mental health challenges, compelling individuals to internalize their struggles as a sign of strength. Marwa for instance, preferred to face challenges on her own

and refrain from seeking social or professional help due to cultural influences. She mentioned, "I want to make myself so strong to deal with everything and overcome all the difficulties by myself rather than talking with someone about my problems or anything like that."

Marwa's perspective on facing challenges and internalizing struggles as a manifestation of cultural identity brings to light a significant aspect of the mental health of individuals influenced by such cultural norms. Her inclination to project strength and resilience as a way of preserving dignity and saving face resonates with the cultural value of maintaining composure and not burdening others with personal difficulties.

Her sentiment highlights the internal conflict that can arise when cultural expectations clash with the desire to prioritize one's mental well-being. In many cultures, including Arab culture, seeking help or openly discussing personal struggles might be perceived as a sign of vulnerability, potentially leading to a loss of face within the community. Marwa's preference to tackle challenges alone underscored the intricate balance between personal needs and societal expectations.

While the determination to overcome difficulties independently showcases Marwa's determination and tenacity, it also raises questions about the toll this approach might have on her mental well-being. Suppressing emotions and eschewing support systems can potentially lead to increased stress, isolation, and emotional strain.

Further, the presence of spirituality and religiosity deeply embedded within Arab cultural norms significantly shapes how mental health is perceived, adding a layer of complexity to the journey of well-being. This intertwining of spiritual and mental well-being is a cornerstone of the Arab cultural mindset. Within this framework, mental health challenges often take on the

character of spiritual trials, a perspective that stands in contrast to prevailing Western paradigms.

This can be seen in Mona's discourse when she said

So I would say (counting on fingers), my religion being close to my God ... You know there's something in our country, Mariam, that we find it so difficult because we're not used to it to go to any psychological clinics to say, I have this problem or this stress.

Obvious from her words is the idea that in the Arab context mental health challenges are often viewed as spiritual tests that individuals must navigate as part of their life's journey. This perception imparts a dual significance to the experience, where the struggle itself becomes an opportunity for spiritual growth and resilience. This distinctive viewpoint can greatly influence the coping mechanisms adopted by Arab women graduate students when faced with mental health challenges. Instead of solely focusing on clinical approaches, these students may draw on their spirituality to find strength, solace, and meaning in the face of adversity.

Navigating the intricate realm of mental wellness, Arab women graduate students stand at a stage where their cultural identity and religious beliefs converge. The interplay between these forces molds their perceptions and responses to mental health challenges. The intersection of these cultural dynamics significantly shapes their experiences, influencing how they approach seeking help, interacting with support systems, and interpreting the symptoms they might be encountering.

The engagement with mental health support systems is profoundly influenced by these cultural dynamics. The intertwining of spirituality with mental health perceptions may lead some individuals to prioritize seeking solace within their faith communities, relying on spiritual leaders or practices as sources of comfort and guidance. Others might be inclined to adopt coping strategies rooted in religious rituals or the recitation of sacred texts to alleviate emotional distress. As per Marwa

we are brought up to depend on God, to be close spiritually to God, and whenever we have any problems we ask God to make it easy for us and guide us and make it easy to go through this difficult thing. Yeah, that's that's the that's the first thing.

On a different note, the cultural distinctions of Arab women can often place them in situations where they experience pressures that stem from their unique identity and beliefs. The religious and cultural backgrounds of most participants significantly molded their encounters in the US. As Muslim women, they grappled with misconceptions and misunderstandings that surround their customs and beliefs. Addressing questions about dietary restrictions, abstinence from alcohol, and the choice to wear the hijab have become intrinsic to their daily interactions. Each participant faced the delicate challenge of harmonizing their commitment to their faith, honoring their cultural heritage, and adapting to the culture they've chosen to embrace.

Mai shared her perspective, stating "Being a Muslim woman in the US has been (mmm) I guess hard, but good. I now want to be more myself. People often ask me about my dietary choices, and I simply said its less Omega-9 and fats." This underscores that their choices extend beyond religious obligations; they reflect conscious decisions aligned with personal well-being. Similarly, the decision to wear the hijab or not is an individual choice that encapsulates a complex interplay of faith, culture, and autonomy.

Another participant recounted conversations where she was questioned about her virginity by some Americans. She recalled

Another thing from Americans, they told me, I am an adult. I don't know if it's appropriate to say that. How am I still a virgin? (Laughing) It's just, I said, well, it's just we are Muslims. We are just keeping ourselves for our husbands. And this is my body. I don't want to just do things like these kinds of things.

The dialogue revealed how cultural norms on sexuality and relationships differ across regions, reflecting the internal conflict of adhering to their beliefs while encountering contrasting cultural norms.

Similarly, Mona highlighted the contrast in dress norms between Iraq and the United States. The prevalence of traditional garments like the hijab in Iraq diverged from the greater freedom of attire choice in the US. This difference in dressing practices mirrored the cultural and religious norms of both countries. She recounted that "Here you don't see something like everyone is okay wearing whatever they prefer when it's hot. You could meet many wearing very little clothes."

However, Mona also noted an undercurrent of microaggressions that accompanied these differences. She recounted instances where her choice of wearing the hijab led to subtle questioning glances, subtly implying that her attire was somehow "foreign" or incompatible with American society. These microaggressions, though often subtle, can have a cumulative impact on their confidence and self-perception. The constant need to negotiate their cultural identity within a different cultural context can give rise to a sense of alienation or even self-doubt, ultimately influencing their mental wellness. It highlighted the intricate interplay between cultural identity, external perceptions, and emotional well-being, shedding light on the nuanced challenges Arab women graduate students navigate as they seek to balance their heritage with their present circumstances.

These intricate dynamics can cause pressures stemming from the convergence of religious and cultural expectations with the external environment. The substantial significance of religion in the lives of Arab individuals often gives rise to a methodical examination of even minor religious choices. Yet, the constraint on openly discussing opinions or questioning aspects of faith can give rise to internal tension, as illustrated by Hadeer's experience. "I felt that everything and everyone is unfair, why did God put us through this what's the logic? I wanted a lot of answers, but I wasn't allowed to ask."

Her endeavor to harmonize these constraints prompted her to embark on an exploration of her beliefs, ultimately leading her to identify as agnostic “until further notice.” This journey stressed the profound influence of cultural and religious norms on the mental well-being of Arab women graduate students, underscoring the internal conflicts they navigate while reconciling deeply ingrained values with their evolving understanding of faith.

The contrast in the freedom of religious expression between the Arab world and the US was a significant distinction. The US offers an open platform for discussions, fostering an environment where individuals can explore and question their beliefs without fear. Hadeer's experience underscored the transformative nature of this newfound freedom in the US, enabling her to embark on a religious exploration unburdened by prior constraints.

In summary, the interplay between spirituality, religiosity, cultural identity, and mental wellness among Arab women graduate students in the US is an intricate tapestry. Their unique cultural backgrounds significantly shaped their perceptions and interactions, often subjecting them to various pressures as they navigate the complex junction of faith, culture, and societal expectations.

In conclusion, the experiences of Arab women graduate students in the US illuminate the intricate interplay between cultural identity and mental wellness. The fusion of collectivism, spirituality, and cultural expectations shapes their navigation of challenges and coping mechanisms. While cultural ties offer strength and connection, they also impose pressures that can impact their mental well-being. The clash between cultural norms and Western freedoms underscores the need for inclusive support systems that acknowledge their unique struggles. Ultimately, fostering an environment where these individuals can embrace their cultural identity while prioritizing their mental health is essential for their holistic well-being.

Intersectionality and Mental Health. The concept of intersectionality highlights the interconnected nature of various aspects of an individual's identity and how they intersect to shape their experiences and challenges. When considering the mental health of Arab women graduate students, recognizing and understanding the influence of intersectionality is imperative. These students navigate a complex web of identity markers, including but not limited to gender, culture, religion, and sexuality, each of which plays a pivotal role in shaping their perceptions of mental health and well-being. Intersectionality goes beyond acknowledging these individual identity components; it underscores the intricate ways in which they interact and compound, resulting in unique experiences and challenges.

Cultural norms around gender roles and identity can profoundly influence how Arab women perceive and address their mental health needs. In Arab societies, deeply ingrained gender norms often prescribe specific roles and expectations for women, emphasizing qualities of strength, resilience, and self-sacrifice. This societal framework places a premium on maintaining composure and embodying stoicism, often presenting vulnerability as a deviation from the expected norm. As a result, Arab women might find themselves in a precarious position when it comes to acknowledging their mental health challenges. Expressing emotions or admitting the need for help could be perceived as a deviation from traditional ideals of unwavering strength, potentially leading to feelings of shame or inadequacy. The prevailing gender norms, which have been cultivated over generations, can inadvertently create barriers to open dialogue about mental health concerns. As Yasmine stated, “I was never able to express frustration or anxiety, I had to remain strong while I was on depression meds.”

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that some Arab women find themselves in a position where they feel compelled to consistently project strength, defying the

prevailing notion, also present in the Arab world, that they are weak or incompetent. This counter-narrative reflects a conscious effort to challenge stereotypes and overcome societal biases that can adversely impact their mental well-being. These women endeavor to shatter the misconception that they are inherently fragile or incapable due to their gender, thereby reclaiming their agency and advocating for their own empowerment. Moreover, they are driven by the desire to portray a positive image in front of their American peers, actively working to counteract any preconceived notions of their abilities. By showcasing their resilience and competence, these individuals strive to shift the discourse surrounding gender roles and capabilities, emphasizing that their gender does not determine their capacity to thrive academically, professionally, and emotionally. This determination to defy stereotypes and create a favorable impression underscores the intersection of cultural norms, gender expectations, societal perceptions, and mental well-being, shedding light on the intricate and multifaceted experiences of Arab women graduate students as they navigate their identity in diverse sociocultural contexts. Hadeer mentioned that she stays away from her “own people” to avoid their judgements

I keep my self-distance from them, because without knowing me, they got so judgmental, and I didn't love that because I don't know you, how could you judge me? And this is my life. You have your own life. I don't know you, and I don't want to intervene your life. Do whatever you like and leave me alone. Who are you to judge me (eyes rolling)?

The intersection of gender and identity plays a pivotal role in shaping how Arab women view themselves within both their cultural and host environments. Straddling two distinct worlds, these women must navigate the juxtaposition of their cultural heritage with the societal norms of their adopted country. This duality can intensify the pressure to conform to idealized standards of womanhood and mental wellness, compounding the challenge of reconciling cultural expectations with individual well-being. The desire to both honor their heritage and find agency

within a new cultural context can lead to complex internal conflicts. The hesitancy to seek mental health support might stem from these conflicts, as voicing their struggles could be seen as challenging cultural norms on multiple fronts.

Further, for LGBTQ+ individuals, such as Nadia who identifies as lesbian, the intricate interplay of cultural norms and sexual orientation introduces an additional layer of complexity to their mental health journey. Coming out as LGBTQ+ can lead to a conflict between their authentic selves and traditional cultural values, potentially stimulating feelings of isolation, rejection, and internal tension. These intersecting facets deeply influence how Arab women graduate students perceive, access, and experience mental health support resources. As expressed in her own words, Nadia's experience sheds light on this

Finally for the first time, I've been experiencing being out ... it's so different. I never thought I would, because I thought it would affect my career... my family don't know and I don't think I will tell them...I still worry about that stuff because you're growing up 20 years, you had to hide it. And yeah, it's not that easy to be okay.

Nadia's candid reflection clarifies the internal struggle faced by LGBTQ+ Arab women graduate students as they navigate the delicate balance between their authentic identity, cultural expectations, and professional aspirations. This intersection highlights the complexities of cultural norms, sexual orientation, self-expression, and mental well-being, underscoring the diverse array of challenges and triumphs that shape the experiences of these individuals as they seek to reconcile their personal truths with societal expectations.

This sort of intersectionality underscores the importance of culturally sensitive mental health services. It's not enough to consider these individuals as merely "Arab" or "women." Recognizing the nuances of their identities, experiences, and struggles within the broader cultural context is crucial for providing effective support.

Theme # 3: Academic Environment and Mental Health. The academic environment plays a pivotal role in shaping the mental health experiences of Arab women graduate students. The pursuit of higher education in a foreign land entails not only academic challenges, but also a myriad of cultural adjustments and social adaptations. The pressure to excel academically, coupled with the demands of adjusting to a new cultural context can contribute to heightened stress levels and feelings of isolation. The competitive nature of academia, the expectation to perform exceptionally well, and the rigorous workload can amplify these stressors. Moreover, the academic environment might also be less familiar with the cultural nuances and specific challenges faced by international students, potentially making it harder for these students to find support. As these individuals strive to excel in their studies, they also grapple with maintaining their cultural identity, navigating language barriers, and forming new social connections. All of these factors intertwine to impact their mental wellness, highlighting the importance of fostering a supportive academic environment that recognizes and addresses their unique needs.

The academic journey undertaken by Arab women in pursuit of their graduate studies is filled with challenges that intertwine with their emotional well-being. The weight of academic demands, as portrayed by most of the participants, underscores the complex relationship between rigorous coursework, unfamiliar subjects, and the toll it takes on their emotional state.

Yosra's description of grappling with challenging subjects and feeling overwhelmed by unfamiliar topics speaks to the intensity of the academic demands that Arab women face during their graduate studies.

And another thing, if I found an assignment so difficult..., because whenever we are stressed we go to family and take a break, we spend long time in one place, and you are away from your family. You will..yeah, like emotionally, you are detached... I would try and find something else to take my mind off and let stress away.

This sentiment is not uncommon in the world of academia, where the pursuit of advanced degrees often demands intense focus, research, and engagement with complex concepts. However, for Arab women navigating these academic challenges, the emotional toll can be particularly pronounced due to a variety of factors, including cultural expectations, gender roles, and the pressure to excel academically.

Mona's experiences further illuminate the emotional toll that academic demands can exact. Her account of experiencing burnout and anxiety as a result of the high stress associated with pursuing a PhD underscores the impact that the pursuit of advanced degrees can have on mental well-being. The expectations placed upon these women to excel academically, both by their families and communities, can lead to feelings of inadequacy, imposter syndrome, and heightened anxiety.

yeah, grad school is very high stress... truly. And if it's kind of unfair, all my other peers like they were only 3 internationals then...it is harder for us. They can also take one semester off, but for us that's not an option, unless you want to be deported and face family with failure.

Therefore, the emotional toll of academic demands is compounded by the unique challenges faced by Arab women in foreign academic environments. These women often find themselves in unfamiliar cultural contexts, where the norms and expectations of academia may differ significantly from what they are accustomed to. The need to adapt to new methodologies, language barriers, and academic standards can intensify the emotional strain. As a result, the academic journey becomes not only an intellectual challenge but also an emotional one.

Theme # 4: Access to and Utilization of Campus Resources. Accessing and utilizing campus resources for mental health support is not a sought-after aspect of fostering the well-being of Arab women graduate students. Navigating the complex intersection of cultural norms, academic pressures, and personal challenges, these students encounter a range of barriers that

influence their engagement with available resources. Therefore, in addressing the landscape of accessing and utilizing campus resources for mental health support, it is crucial to delve into the perceptions of international students, specifically focusing on the cultural competence of the available services.

The experiences surrounding the utilization of campus resources for mental health support unfold in a nuanced manner, with some participants reflecting on instances where these services proved to be less effective than desired. In this subset, a recurrent sentiment emerged that the counselors did not entirely grasp the depth of their personal experiences. As a result, their interactions with the counselors sometimes felt more akin to discussions aimed at prompting them to independently navigate their challenges. In terms of the quality of campus resources for mental health, Nadia summarized, “So the quality is, it's okay. Honestly.” Yasmine perceived the services to lean more towards social work than professional therapy, with an emphasis on self-directed solutions ‘It was more like social workers. I felt like I was talking to myself’. Both Nadia and Yasmine shared that they discontinued counseling due to a lack of comfort or opting for medication as a more concrete and direct intervention.

When these services demonstrate an understanding of the cultural nuances, religious sensitivities, and gender dynamics that Arab women navigate, students are more likely to view them as relevant and effective. Cultural competence can manifest in various ways, such as providing materials in multiple languages, employing counselors who are knowledgeable about Arab culture, and organizing workshops that address culturally specific stressors. Arab women's perceptions of support services are often filtered through the lens of their personal and cultural values. If they perceive these services as conflicting with their cultural norms, religious beliefs, or family expectations, they may be hesitant to engage with them. On the other hand, if the

services are designed to be inclusive and culturally sensitive, they are more likely to be seen as valuable tools for maintaining mental well-being. This can be depicted in Hadeer's words when she said, "The counselor is excessively sympathetic or empathetic which, I felt uncomfortable she was overreacting, and her reactions made me feel she cannot relate."

Based on the insights gathered from participants who have sought professional help on campus, it becomes evident that cultural sensitivity holds a pivotal role in establishing an environment that fosters a sense of safety and ease for those seeking assistance. The presence of counselors well-versed in Arab culture, who possess an acute awareness of cultural subtleties, emerges as a significant factor in alleviating potential discomfort and ultimately increasing the inclination to seek support.

Theme #5: Resilience, Adaptation, and Well-being. In response to the complex demands of graduate studies, the seven Arab women participants in the study adopted a range of coping strategies to navigate the pressures and challenges they encountered. These strategies encompassed various dimensions, reflecting the diversity of approaches taken by participants to manage their mental well-being. These coping mechanisms included turning to spirituality and faith, finding solace in socializing with friends, engaging in self-care practices such as makeovers, seeking temporary relief through activities like drinking and clubbing, exploring the potential benefits of CBD consumption, and occasionally seeking solitude. The subsequent elaboration on these coping strategies provides insights into how Arab women graduate students sought to balance the demands of their academic pursuits with their mental and emotional well-being.

A notable aspect is the diverse spectrum of coping strategies these participants turned to, stemming from their own preferences and experiences. From seeking solace through spirituality

and connecting with their faith to dedicating time to socialize with friends, engaging in regular exercise routines, exploring the potential benefits of CBD, partaking in social activities like drinking and parties, and even embracing makeovers as a form of self-care, these individuals exhibited a multifaceted range of approaches. Such personalized and often culturally infused mechanisms underscored the ways in which Arab women graduate students navigate their mental well-being. Ultimately, this showcases the significance of individual preferences and the pursuit of pragmatic solutions while also spotlighting the intrinsic intersection between cultural norms, personal beliefs, and the quest for mental equilibrium.

Spirituality and Faith. For some Arab women graduate students, turning to spirituality and their faith was a profound coping strategy. Engaging with religious practices, prayers, and seeking guidance from religious texts can provide a sense of purpose, comfort, and resilience. The connection with a higher power was seen as potentially helping them navigate challenges and find meaning in difficult situations. It also deterred them from seeking professional help because they relied on God. Marwa and Mona, both, found solace in resorting to God as stated by Marwa, “when I am tired and I feel like I have no place to go, no one talk to I pray and talk to God.”

Socializing with Friends. Socializing and spending time with friends served as an important way for Arab women to cope with the stresses of graduate studies. Building and maintaining relationships with peers provided an outlet for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and finding emotional support. This social interaction was viewed as alleviating feelings of isolation and fostered a sense of belonging. Among the participants, there were those fortunate enough to discover friends who provided genuine support and motivation to do well and develop and healthy lifestyle. Mona expressed

My friend used to live in Bentonville. But she is a PhD here... Every day, she drives from Bentonville to the university. But then she is a morning person... Her work is started, I guess 7am. So she would say, hey, Mona, do you want to go to the gym at 5am? Fine, because the university here the gym used to be open like 530 or 5am. Now they they change the schedule? And I would say yes, why not? So she would drive from Bentonville to my apartment, ... reach me by %:00. And we would go to the gym to the exercise, like at 530 ...exercise...take showers and start our day. Now, at seven. It's like, you know, I'm fully energetic. And I already had my breakfast. I already you know, did my work out, you know, had my coffee, ready to go.

Conversely, some participants underwent a distinct experience where their friends swept them down unfamiliar paths, engaging in activities that previously lay outside their comfort zones and often clashed with the values of their cultures and behaviors that might be frowned upon within their societal norms. In Yasmine's case,

My only fun distraction was going with ...and... to VIP or C4 and dance the night away. At first I didn't drink or smoke Hasheesh (hash) like them but one time after the other I started by smoking and I got used to it. I tried drinking but I don't like, don't handle it. Also, I felt it was more haram (forbidden) than anything else.

Therefore, seeking social support can be a double edged weapon based on who they chose to socialize with.

Makeovers and Self-Care. Participating in self-care rituals, including indulging in makeovers, following meticulous grooming routines, and embarking on shopping sprees. Allocating time to prioritize their physical appearance not only amplified their confidence, but also cultivated a favorable self-perception, ultimately contributing to an overall sense of self-empowerment.

For instance, Marwa and Nadia chose to channel their energies into sports, finding empowerment through physical activity and athleticism. On the other hand, Yosra, Hadeer, and Yasmine sought solace in regular visits to the coiffeur (hairdresser's), a practice that allowed them to maintain a polished appearance and bolster their self-assurance. Meanwhile, Mai discovered her source of joy in shopping at Dillard's, indulging in the purchase of perfumes.

These activities were not only to improve their outer appearance and boost their morale, but they also symbolized their resilience. An example of that is what Yusra did when she got a haircut and died here hair pink. She told me while laughing, ‘You know Nickelback song “rockstar,” I’m gonna trade this life for fortune and fame and even cut my hair and change my name.’”

Medication and CBD Consumption. Two of the participants went to the Pat Walker the health center on campus to seek professional help to take care of their mental wellbeing. However, both of them eventually discontinued their visits to the health center while continuing to rely on the prescribed medication. Additionally, one of these participants also decided to explore CBD (cannabidiol) products as an option for relaxation and stress relief. CBD is frequently marketed as a natural remedy for alleviating anxiety and tension.

Further, a third participant from the outset, turned to CBD as a means to address their mental well-being. Their different choices emphasized the diverse coping strategies they employed when navigating the academic and mental challenges, they encountered.

Answer to Research Question 2. Arab women graduate students in the US experience varied mental wellness journeys influenced by cultural, personal, and academic factors. Cultural norms impacted their attitudes towards seeking mental health help, necessitating an understanding of these factors in providing support. Challenges like academic pressure, isolation, and familial responsibilities can led to stress and burnout. Cultural identity plays a significant role. Collectivism vs. individualism influences mental health perception, often concealing struggles due to communal welfare concerns. Cultural expectations can create tension between personal aspirations and family obligations. The responsibility for family well-being, even from afar, adds emotional burden. The pandemic intensified these challenges, emphasizing the impact of collectivist values. Strength and resilience are culturally valued, leading some to internalize

struggles. Spirituality and religiosity intertwine with mental health perceptions, offering coping strategies. Cultural distinctions as Muslim women create unique pressures. They navigate cultural preservation, faith, and adaptation to a new culture.

Arab women graduate students have limited access to culturally relevant mental health facilities due to a variety of factors. Many avoid seeking help altogether due to unfamiliarity with the concept or the stigma surrounding it. Some believe they can manage on their own, while others who have sought help often report not feeling comfortable or benefiting from the experience. This reluctance to utilize mental health resources further underscores the need to consider cultural influences when designing and providing support for their mental well-being.

Research question 3: How do Arab women graduate students maintain and promote their physical wellness during their academic journey in the US, and what are the barriers and facilitators to maintaining their wellness?

This thematic data analysis aims to explore how Arab women graduate students maintain and promote their physical wellness while pursuing their academic journey in the United States. The research question focused on understanding the strategies they employed to stay physically healthy and the barriers and facilitators they encounter in this process. The analysis draws on the responses of the seven Arab women graduate students who were interviewed, to gain comprehensive insights into their experiences. The data collected reflected the obstacles as well as the facilitators to student wellness.

Theme #6: Limited Access to Healthy and Culturally Appropriate Food. Despite their efforts to prioritize healthy eating, participants face barriers related to limited access to nutritious and diverse food options. Nadia mentioned that she “can’t afford buying organic healthy food and fresh produce.” As an international graduate student with limited financial

resources, she relied on the campus food pantry as the main source of her groceries. However, Nadia noted that the food pantry often lacked food variety and mostly offered canned food, which may not align with her preferences for fresh and healthy ingredients. "The campus food pantry doesn't always have a food variety. They have mostly canned food."

Yosra echoed a similar sentiment, particularly concerning the availability of halal food. As a Muslim student, finding halal food options becomes a challenge for Marwa, and when available, they tend to be more expensive compared to other choices. This limited access to halal and culturally appropriate food options can impact her ability to maintain a balanced and nutritious diet. According to her, "Finding halal food is hard and generally way more ...expensive...costly."

The lack of healthy food options on campus and in nearby areas posed a significant barrier to the participants' efforts to promote their physical wellness. The absence of affordable fresh produce and limited food variety can make it challenging to adhere to a balanced diet and may lead to a reliance on less nutritious options.

Developing Unhealthy Eating Habits. The data analysis revealed a prominent theme among Arab female graduate students studying in the US: the development of unhealthy eating habits. This theme highlighted the significant impact of cultural, environmental, and lifestyle factors on the dietary choices and overall physical wellness of these students.

The transition from their native countries to the US exposed Arab female students to a new food environment that contrasts sharply with their traditional diets. As they navigate the American food landscape, they often encountered obstacles in adhering to their preferred eating habits. This challenge is reflected in Mai's statement, "I never had that much junk food in my life. (laughing) I used to take our food for granted, but you know Mariam, not anymore." Mai's

realization highlighted the initial shock many students experience upon encountering an abundance of processed and fast-food options, which can contribute to weight gain and the formation of unhealthy eating patterns.

All seven students' perspective further reinforced the theme of developing unhealthy eating habits. They acknowledged the financial implications of prioritizing nutritious food, stating, "I can only buy healthy stuffs maybe once a month. As Yasmine pointed out. "I always buy the cheapest and the cheapest is usually the un.. healthier option." Yasmine's recognition of the cost associated with healthier choices show the financial challenges Arab female students face in accessing desired ingredients. This financial constraint may lead them to opt for more affordable but less nutritious options, ultimately impacting their physical well-being.

The lack of halal options in the US also presented a unique challenge for students adhering to religious dietary guidelines. Hadeer said

We have requested halal food in the cafeteria many many times and we get invited to meetings where they want to survey students' needs from the cafeteria. They never did it. We even said during Ramadan only. I stopped responding to them. I also stopped eating at the dining hall.

This highlights the struggle to find halal-certified meals that align with cultural and religious practices. The limited availability of halal foods can result in students compromising on their dietary preferences or opting for unhealthy alternatives that don't meet their nutritional needs.

The academic demands of graduate studies contribute to time constraints that discourage students from preparing home-cooked meals. Yosra shared "I thought knew how to manage time well, but when I started my MA, no. I can't find to sleep. I eat fast cheap options" Making food generally takes time and traditional Arabic and Middle Eastern food can take much longer, making them less feasible within the tight schedules of graduate students. This challenge can

push students towards quicker, less nutritious options that contribute to the development of unhealthy eating habits.

Access to Nutritious Food. The study revealed that Arab women studying in the US faced various challenges in accessing culturally appropriate and nutritious food options. Many participants expressed concerns about the availability of ingredients essential to traditional Arab diets, contributing to difficulties in maintaining familiar dietary patterns. This lack of access to foods that align with their cultural norms and preferences can lead to feelings of isolation and hinder their ability to maintain a balanced diet.

Financial Constraints and Nutritional Choices. Financial constraints emerged as a key barrier to food security among Arab female students. Limited budgets often lead to compromises on food quality and nutritional value. Participants shared experiences of opting for cheaper, less nutritious options due to financial limitations, impacting their ability to maintain optimal physical health. The trade-off between affordability and nutritional value underscored the need for targeted support to ensure that these students can access adequate and nutritious meals.

Impact on Physical Well-being. The lack of access to or expense of nutritious food can have adverse effects on the physical well-being of Arab women studying in the US. Participants reported experiencing fatigue, low energy levels, and difficulties in concentration due to inadequate diets. Some participants also noted weight fluctuations and changes in their body composition, which can negatively affect self-esteem and body image.

Cultural Significance of Food. Food carries cultural significance and emotional ties for Arab women. Participants expressed the importance of sharing traditional meals with fellow students and maintaining connections with their cultural heritage through food. The inability to

access familiar ingredients and recipes can contribute to feelings of homesickness and cultural disconnection.

Theme #7: Health Awareness and Financial Constraints. The participants' responses shed light on a prevalent theme among Arab female graduate students studying in the US: the significant struggle with maintaining a regular sleep schedule. This theme unveiled the profound impact of academic commitments and irregular study hours on the participants' ability to establish a consistent and healthy sleep routine.

The demanding nature of graduate studies often leads to irregular and extended study hours, which consequently disrupt the participants' sleep patterns. The acknowledgment of this struggle highlights the challenge of prioritizing both academic pursuits and self-care. As Nadia put it, "I have very little sleep every day. I study all night and talk to my family at night. I can only call his time because it's morning there."

The consequences of irregular sleep patterns extend beyond mere inconvenience, significantly affecting the physical and mental wellness of the participants. The interplay between disrupted sleep and physical well-being is augmented by the realization that inadequate sleep hinders their ability to effectively cope with the demands of graduate studies. As a result, participants experience heightened stress levels and persistent fatigue. The participants' experiences echoed the broader literature on the detrimental effects of sleep deprivation on cognitive functions, mood regulation, and overall health.

A cycle emerged as participants navigated the challenge of insufficient sleep. The academic responsibilities that demand their time often lead to compromised sleep routines. This compromised sleep, in turn, impairs their cognitive abilities and emotional resilience, hindering their capacity to effectively meet academic demands. The loop of disrupted sleep patterns and

compromised academic performance creates an environment of stress and fatigue, ultimately affecting their overall well-being.

Hadeer's remarked jokingly, "Melatonin doesn't work for me anymore." Her joke still shows the struggles faced by participants in managing their sleep schedules. The use of sleep aids, such as melatonin, underscored their attempts to regulate their sleep patterns, which became less effective due to the persistent challenges they encountered. This sentiment emphasized the ongoing struggle of Arab female graduate students in trying to balance their academic commitments with their sleep needs.

Among the challenges faced by Arab women graduate students in maintaining their physical wellness, financial constraints emerged as a notable barrier. Several participants pointed out how limited financial resources hinder their access to necessary medical care and nutritious food, impacting their overall well-being. As explained by Hadeer, "As an international student, medical expenses and insurance can be costly, and this sometimes prevents me from seeking proper medical attention."

Mona shared a similar sentiment regarding the financial implications of seeking medical care. She recounted an instance where she avoided going to the emergency room despite feeling unwell, solely due to worries about the associated costs. She recounted, "I avoided going to the emergency room once because I was worried about the cost and I don't even know how the insurance work or if it does." This decision reflected the challenging position that Arab women graduate students find themselves in, as they must navigate healthcare systems in a foreign country while considering the financial implications.

Beyond medical care, financial constraints also impact their access to nutritious food options. Limited budgets may restrict their ability to purchase fresh produce or opt for healthier

food choices. Instead, they may be compelled to prioritize more affordable but less nutritious options, potentially compromising their dietary habits and physical well-being.

The interplay of financial constraints and physical wellness is a complex and multifaceted issue.

The financial burden faced by Arab women graduate students can act as a deterrent to seeking necessary medical care, leading to potential health risks. Additionally, it can influence their dietary choices, affecting the quality of their nutrition and overall health.

Lack of Health System Awareness. Among the challenges faced by Arab female graduate students studying in the US, a distinct theme emerged concerning the lack of awareness about the health system. This theme underscored the participants' experiences of navigating a foreign healthcare environment and the resulting impact on their physical wellness.

Navigating the US healthcare system proved to be a complex task for Arab female graduate students, often resulting in a lack of awareness about available healthcare resources. The participants' accounts revealed the challenges they encounter when seeking medical care, which is compounded by the unfamiliarity with the intricacies of the US healthcare system. Nadia mentioned, "I didn't know where to go or what to do when I got sick. It's not like back home."

This lack of awareness was not only limited to the healthcare infrastructure but also extends to health insurance coverage. The participants shared their experiences of uncertainty and confusion when it comes to understanding their insurance plans and coverage. As Mai expressed, "Health insurance is confusing. I'd rather do everything to stay healthy than sorry." This lack of clarity contributes to a sense of vulnerability and hesitation in seeking necessary medical care.

The repercussions of this lack of awareness are evident in the participants' narratives of delayed or avoided medical treatment. The unfamiliarity with healthcare processes and insurance details leads to apprehension and, in some cases, a reluctance to access medical services altogether. Mona vividly reflects on her experience, stating, "I waited for days, hoping I would feel better, because I didn't know where to go or if I could afford it."

The emotional toll of navigating a foreign healthcare system further compounds the participants' challenges. The uncertainty and anxiety associated with seeking medical care while lacking familiarity with the system weigh heavily on their well-being. As one participant emphasizes, "Being sick is stressful enough, and then not knowing how to navigate the healthcare system here just adds to it."

The lack of health system awareness also intersects with other themes identified in the data. For instance, the financial concerns that participants face contribute to their reluctance to seek medical care due to worries about costs. This intertwining of themes underscores the tightly weaved web of challenges Arab female graduate students encounter when it comes to their physical wellness.

Theme #8: Facilitators for Physical Wellness. Amidst the challenges, certain facilitators contributed to the physical wellness of Arab women graduate students. Nadia explained, "Yoga and biking are my ways of coping with the stress of graduate school. It helps me feel more balanced and focused." Marwa also pointed out the importance of a supportive social network, stating, "Having friends who also prioritize physical wellness motivates me to stay on track and lead a healthier lifestyle." Mai added, "I try to be resourceful and find affordable options for healthy food, like buying in bulk or shopping at local markets." The

presence of coping mechanisms, social support, and resourcefulness act as facilitators in promoting their physical wellness.

Despite the challenges Arab women graduate students face in maintaining their physical wellness, several facilitators play a crucial role in promoting their overall well-being. Participants shared their experiences of utilizing coping mechanisms, social support, and resourcefulness to overcome obstacles and prioritize their healthy.

Alternatives to Fast Food. The preference for home-cooked meals as a strategy for promoting physical wellness was evident from the data. Many of the participants shared their experiences of gaining weight upon arriving in the US, which prompted them to take action and make healthier choices. Mona said, "I gained 4kgs and I told myself, stop! I have to do something, and the first thing was to cook at home."

Marwa also emphasized the importance of cooking at home and buying healthy ingredients. She acknowledged that it may be more expensive than other options, but she recognized the long-term benefits it offers in terms of overall health and well-being. This sentiment was echoed by other participants who also emphasized the importance of being mindful of their food choices and taking control of their diet by cooking their own meals. She mentioned "I buy healthy ingredients and cook at home. It's expensive, but better than getting sick."

Cooking at home not only allowed the participants to control the ingredients they used but also enabled them to tailor their meals to meet their specific dietary preferences and nutritional needs. This approach enabled them to avoid unhealthy additives, excessive oils, and high-calorie dishes often found in fast food or restaurant meals; and to use halal meat and poultry. By switching to home-cooked meals, they were able to make conscious decisions about

their food consumption, leading to improved physical wellness and better weight management. Mona shared that she lost the weight she gained. “I lost them all again when paid.. paid attention to what I eat.”

Cooking at home also served as a way for the participants to reconnect with their cultural food traditions and maintain a sense of identity while being away from their home countries. Preparing traditional dishes provided them with a sense of comfort and familiarity, which contributed to their overall well-being during the challenging academic journey. Nadia mentioned that she only cooks at home, “ I can’t afford to eat out and I want to eat what I am used to eating.” Yasmine mentioned craving “lahm barkook” meat with plum all the time, but she only cooks it when there’s a celebration.

While acknowledging the cost and time investment required for cooking at home, the participants recognized that the benefits far outweighed the challenges. They understood that investing in their health through home-cooked meals was a proactive and preventative measure against potential health issues. Overall, the preference for home-cooked meals emerged as a powerful theme in the participants' pursuit of physical wellness during their academic journey in the US.

Physical Activity as a Coping Mechanism. The students emphasized the significance of incorporating activities like yoga, biking, sports, walking, and finding time to sleep as coping mechanisms to manage the stress associated with graduate school. Engaging in regular physical activities provides them with a sense of balance and focus, allowing them to navigate the demands of academia more effectively. According to all seven students, these activities not only contributed to their physical wellness but also had positive effects on their mental and emotional well-being, helping them cope with the challenges of academic life. As Nadia said, “Yoga and

biking are my ways of coping with the stress of graduate school. It helps me feel more balanced and focused."

All seven participants opted for the adoption of regular physical activities as part of their routine to maintain physical wellness. Each participant emphasized the importance of incorporating exercise and physical activity into their daily lives to achieve and sustain a healthy lifestyle. This theme highlighted the significance of staying active as a key component of their overall well-being during their academic journey in the US.

Regular physical activities serve as a means to manage stress for the participants. Marwa mentioned how exercise helped her stay mentally and physically fit during the demanding academic journey. The pressures of graduate studies can be overwhelming, and engaging in physical activities provided them with an outlet to release stress, tension, and anxiety. According to her, she "can't let one day go with no exercise. If I can't exercise I just go walk on the trail."

Most of the participants indicated that staying active was not just about managing stress but also about promoting physical fitness. Mona explicitly mentioned going to the gym regularly for the sake of losing weight she gained upon coming to the US. Nadia also chose to exercise; she decided to bike and do yoga in the mornings and focus on staying fit and active. She also loved playing a sport, rode a bicycle for her commute. The participants recognize the importance of physical fitness in enhancing their overall health and well-being.

Regular physical activities contributed to increased energy levels and improved focus, as highlighted by Mai. The demands of graduate studies can be physically and mentally draining, but maintaining a routine of physical activity helped them stay alert, focused, and more productive in their academic pursuits. Mai mentioned "Sometimes I realize I didn't get off my desk for 6 hours without noticing, I stop everything and go for a walk."

Social Support. Several students mentioned that having a supportive social network that valued physical wellness became a motivating factor in maintaining their own health. Surrounding themselves with friends who shared similar priorities encouraged them to stay on track and adopt a healthier lifestyle. The companionship and encouragement provided by peers create an environment where healthy habits were reinforced, making it easier for students like Marwa to sustain physical wellness goals. “I like having friends who also take care of their physical wellness. This motivates and makes me enjoy better.”

Self-care and Preventive Measures. A recurrent idea in the responses of all the participants is the importance of prioritizing self-care in maintaining physical wellness during the demanding journey of being a graduate student in the US. They highlighted their proactive approach to ensuring well-being by undergoing regular check-ups and seeking medical care when needed. They acknowledged the challenges of limited financial resources and balancing the demands of academia as Mai said, “I can’t afford to get sick” and this sentiment was echoed by all other participants.

Some participants appreciated the services provided by the university, such as university recreation and health counseling through the Pat Walker Health Center, which serve as facilitators in maintaining their physical and mental wellness. These resources offered opportunities for fitness and health support, contributing to their overall well-being during their academic journey.

One of the significant fears faced by the participants and which they expressed in vulnerability is the fear of not finding someone to take care of them when they became ill, as they are away from their home country and loved ones. This challenge added to the stress, especially considering potential medical expenses.

Resourcefulness. Amid challenges in accessing nutritious food, some participants resorted to utilizing the campus food pantry as a means of supplementing their dietary needs. However, it was noted that the options available in the food pantry often lacked fresh produce and primarily consisted of canned goods. Yosra visited the food pantry weekly to get whatever she found suitable.

They they have good things. They have a lot of things, but it's very heavy mostly carbs, and if you have like grain allergies like, if you I, for example, I don't eat rice. I'm not supposed to eat the gluten, but I do eat beans. And so if you don't eat both of these things, you're not going to really find anything. They're very sugar and carb oriented, so they need to maybe do more with fruits and veggies and like different meats.

While the food pantry served as a valuable resource, its limitations in providing a diverse range of healthy foods pointed out the need for more comprehensive support. The experience was not smooth for all students either. Nadia for example had an unpleasant experience as she recounted,

It started being a little bit like there were some people that were coming from, not from the university, like older people, and they were very aggressive sometimes in terms of like...So I used to like, wait for my sister in line. I would like go, and then she will come in to help me carry like the the bags and stuff. and so my sister will like I would like hold the space for us, and then it used to be fine if she just comes, and like Help me pick up. But this lady one time like she like got physical like she literally like pushed me, and like was like, no, this is my turn.

Resourcefulness emerged as a common trait among the participants, reflecting their determination to overcome food security challenges. Despite financial constraints, these students demonstrated a proactive approach to ensuring their nutritional well-being. They exhibited strategies such as purchasing food in bulk or seeking out local markets that offer affordable, fresh, and nutritious options. This resourceful mindset empowers them to expand their choices beyond the confines of their immediate circumstances. Mai exemplified this resourceful approach. She shared, "I try to be resourceful and look for affordable options for healthy food,

like buying in bulk or shopping at local markets." Mai's perspective mirrors the sentiments of many participants who actively sought ways to optimize their food choices within their financial means.

The combination of utilizing available resources, such as the campus food pantry, and demonstrating resourcefulness in seeking out alternative options highlights the resilience and adaptability of Arab women students in the face of food security challenges. It emphasized the importance of fostering an environment that supported their resourceful efforts while also addressing the limitations of existing resources to ensure their access to a well-rounded, nutritious diet.

These facilitators represent important strategies employed by Arab women graduate students to overcome challenges and prioritize their physical well-being during their academic journey in the US. By incorporating coping mechanisms, they find ways to manage stress and maintain a sense of balance. The presence of a supportive social network creates an environment that encourages healthy habits, fostering a sense of community and motivation. Furthermore, their resourcefulness in finding affordable and nutritious food options demonstrates their determination to take charge of their health despite financial constraints.

Answer to Question 3. This question delves into the experiences of Arab women graduate students as they navigate their physical well-being during their academic journey in the US, while also investigating the factors that either hinder or facilitate their efforts. Through thematic data analysis and insights from interviews with seven participants, the study illuminates significant themes that provide insight into their experiences.

One prominent theme centers around the challenge of accessing healthy and culturally appropriate food, which has a direct impact on their dietary habits. Financial constraints often

compel these students to rely on less nutritious options, as they grapple with affording fresh, organic, and halal food. This can contribute to the development of unhealthy eating patterns due to the scarcity of diverse and familiar ingredients. Additionally, another crucial theme emerged in the form of disrupted sleep patterns, driven by the demands of their academic pursuits. Irregular sleep schedules contribute to elevated stress levels, persistent fatigue, and difficulties in maintaining concentration, all of which collectively undermine their physical and mental well-being.

Furthermore, the research reveals that finding time to exercise is another significant challenge these Arab women graduate students face in their pursuit of physical wellness. The demanding academic workload and irregular study hours often make it difficult to prioritize regular exercise routines. The struggle to allocate time for physical activity compounds their challenges in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Alongside these obstacles, the participants' lack of awareness about the US healthcare system added another layer of complexity. This deficiency in knowledge results in delayed or avoided medical treatment, amplifying their vulnerability and anxiety. Financial constraints further impeded their access to medical care and nutritious food, with concerns about costs discouraging them from seeking necessary assistance.

Research question 4: What were the financial challenges and stressors that Arab women faced as graduate students in the US, and how did they manage their finances?

Navigating the difficult landscape of higher education, the financial challenges and stressors encountered by Arab women pursuing graduate studies in the United States served as a critical narrative that deserves exploration. The analysis aimed to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of their financial experiences, shedding light on the complexities they navigated as they balanced academic aspirations with economic realities. Through the following analysis, we

gain insight not only into their financial constraints but also into the strengths and strategies that defined their pursuit of higher education.

Theme #9: Financial Strain and Navigating Economic Pressure. This section provided an in-depth understanding of the financial hurdles that Arab women graduate students encounter while pursuing their studies in the US. Marwa's testimony brought to light the inadequacy of the stipend provided to cover her monthly expenses. She emphasized the stark reality by stating, "Actually, what we get is not enough, it hardly gets us to the end of the month."

Hadeer echoed that by illuminating a specific financial constraint faced by many students: the exorbitant cost of textbooks. She elaborated

You know, for the first one or two semesters I bought new books, but they were crazy exb - expensive and I did not have money all month to buy something else. Later, I knew about buying used books, they were not as expensive.

Also, Yosra narrated that

Sometimes I would get my salary, pay rent and utilities, and after paying it I only have \$180 left to pay for my phone and food and anything else. I was never happy on the day of getting my salary, I feel anxious.

These sentiments resonated with all participants, highlighting the trade-offs they must make due to limited funds and the decision-making process this population underwent when prioritizing educational needs in tight financial limitations.

Another aspect of their financial struggles was managing utility expenses. Marwa shared, "We have to be very careful because the utilities are so expensive." This illustrates her day-to-day efforts to economize and manage resources to ensure that she can meet even the most basic living costs.

Nadia's account complemented Marwa's by adding a layer of complexity to the financial challenges. As an international student, Nadia sheds light on the intricacies of fees associated with her educational journey. She reveals, "I had a debt. So you know how GA's work they give you like \$1100 or \$1200, and they had to pay \$500 as fees. So, I technically had 500 or something left like they were paying me to pay... So like the fees were not waived, because we're international students. Fees are higher." This quote underscores the difficult financial realities these students face, where stipends are offset by fees and other financial obligations, leaving them with limited resources to cover essential expenses.

Nadia went further talking about the lengths she had to go to manage her financial situation. She acknowledged, "I recently applied for a debt relief scholarship. I didn't get it, but I will look for other ones that could maybe help." This admission highlighted her active pursuit of external financial aid to alleviate the burdens she faces. Additionally, she mentioned taking a loan from Tunisia's Ministry of Education to support both her and her sister's expenses. This revealed one of the approaches students opt to take to secure funding, combining scholarships, loans, and other sources to meet their financial needs.

Yosra on the other hand used the credit card. She ended up creating 8 credit cards and accumulating a debt higher than \$10,000. Her reliance on this financial tool eventually led her down a dreaded path. Yosra's situation took a concerning turn as she found herself deeply engrossed in credit card debt. This illustrates the extent to which she was willing to go to manage her financial obligations. This desperate measure highlighted the lengths that some students might go to navigate the complex landscape of academic expenditures.

I could not have survived without credit cards. On the months on which I don't pay university fees, after paying all rent, utilities, phone, and internet, I have less than \$100 for the entire month. In months when I have to pay fees I have negative \$200. I had to buy food and go out see people. I spend a lot over the weekend.

However, Yosra's reliance on credit cards came at a significant cost. Over time, the accumulation of expenses, high-interest rates, and the challenges of repayment resulted in a debt that exceeded \$10,000. This is an example of the potential pitfalls of using credit cards as a financial solution without a clear plan for repayment. Yosra's experience served as a cautionary account, shedding light on the potential risks and long-term consequences of relying heavily on credit cards to meet the demands of academic and daily life expenses.

Together Marwa, Nadia, and Yosra's situations not only expose the financial strain that Arab women graduate students face but also highlight the importance of providing adequate financial support and resources to ensure their success. Yosra's story in particular further emphasizes the need for comprehensive financial education and guidance for students, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about managing their finances responsibly while pursuing their academic goals.

In conclusion, the data addressing financial wellness exposed several financial challenges and stressors faced by Arab women graduate students in the US. All 7 participants described how their stipends were inadequate to cover their expenses, leading them to make compromises in purchasing books and managing utility costs. Navigating fees and loans, as well as external responsibilities, and credit card debts further added to their financial stress

In answering the question about how they manage their finances, some narratives provide examples of cutting off all the extra spending and trying to explore being frugal, something they are not used to. They tried to find ways to reduce costs, like buying used books for example. Also, some of them developed the skill of creating a budget. Other participants resorted to seeking additional financial support and even venturing into part-time work during the summer to supplement their income. Other participants' accounts showed resorting to temporary

solutions like getting a loan or relying on credit cards, even though they were not aware of the American financial system which is far more complicated than those in the Arab world.

The Answer to Question 4. Navigating the complex landscape of higher education, Arab women pursuing graduate studies in the United States encounter a multitude of financial challenges and stressors that significantly impact their academic journeys. These challenges, as voiced by our participants, offer a perspective on the intersection of academic aspirations and economic realities, shedding light on both the difficulties they face and the strategies they employ to manage their finances.

One of the most blatant financial challenges is the inadequacy of stipends provided to cover living expenses. This reality places immense financial strain on these students, compelling them to make difficult choices and compromises in their daily lives. The struggle to make ends meet is a constant hardship in their pursuit of higher education, influencing everything from their housing choices to their ability to afford nutritious meals.

Textbook costs add another layer of financial pressure. Hadeer's experience of initially purchasing expensive new books, only to later opt for more affordable used versions, highlights the trade-offs students must make. The high cost of course materials can lead to sacrifices in other areas, affecting their overall well-being and academic experience.

Utility expenses are a lesser-discussed yet impactful facet of their financial difficulties. Marwa's observation that "utilities are so expensive" underscored the need for careful budgeting and resource management to cover basic living costs. These everyday expenses further strain their limited financial resources.

Additionally, international students face unique financial stressors related to fees associated with their educational journey. The fees often offset the stipends they receive, leaving

them with meager resources to cover essential expenses. Nadia's description of how fees essentially canceled out her stipend illustrates the complexity of their financial realities as international students.

To cope with these challenges, participants employed a range of strategies. Some adopted frugality, cutting back on non-essential expenses and seeking cost-effective alternatives, such as purchasing used textbooks. Budgeting becomes a crucial skill, that allowed them to carefully allocate their limited resources and prioritize essential needs.

Others actively sought external financial support, as demonstrated by Nadia's pursuit of debt relief scholarships and reliance on loans from Tunisia's Ministry of Education. These actions reflect their determination to find ways to mitigate financial challenges through additional funding sources. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all coping strategies are equally effective. Yosra's reliance on credit cards, while initially a means to manage expenses, led into significant debt, underscoring the potential pitfalls of such financial tools when not used sensibly.

Research question 5: What kinds of help and services did graduate Arab women students in the US perceive as necessary and helpful for supporting their overall wellness on campus?

Within the complex environment of academic life, the quest for overall wellness among graduate Arab women students in the US is ripe for exploration. Hence, this section seeks to dive deep into their perceptions of essential support and services on campus, offering a comprehensive view of the factors that contribute to their holistic well-being in the academic environment. By delving into their perspectives, we uncover valuable insights that can inform institutions in their efforts to support the support systems available to this unique student population, ensuring their successful navigation of higher education in the United States.

Theme #10: Holistic Support Services and Wellness Facilitators. Several participants emphasized the importance of personalized support and wellness services for Arab women graduate students on campus. Nadia highlighted that wellness services should consider individual preferences and needs. She mentioned that various physical and mental wellness facilities are available, but their effectiveness depends on each student's willingness to engage. This indicated that offering a range of options to cater to different preferences could be beneficial. "I went but then I did not feel that she understands me. I talked to myself and got no reaction. I decided not to go.. maybe save the money." Other Arab females who are in need of professional mental support opt not to go, conforming with the cultural taboos and stereotypes associated with these visits. Marwa, who acknowledged that she would not go seek any counseling services, both because she wants to rely on herself and also because of the stereotypes, said, "I think there are a lot of physical and mental wellness facilities available... but it really depends on how much we are willing to engage."

For international students it is not only a matter of availability of mental wellness facilities. While these services might exist, engagement with them can vary. This implies that universities need to not only offer these services but also actively encourage international students to utilize them. Furthermore, the willingness to engage can be influenced by various factors, including stigma around seeking mental health support and the perception of cultural insensitivity.

Free Mental Wellness Support Services. Offering free mental wellness services to international students, especially Arab women graduate students, is significant, particularly considering the financial challenges they often encounter. This initiative plays a crucial role in ensuring their overall well-being and facilitating a successful academic experience. It is

paramount that these services are not only available but can also be easily accessible to them, acknowledging the potential barriers they might face. Yasmine said, "I think universities should have more accessible mental health services... we face a lot of unique stressors." Hadeer's answer added to that when she said, "I went for the first time, but when I knew I should from session 2, I did not go again."

Even though international students bring a lot of revenue to educational institutions and to the country, they can struggle to make ends meet. Financial struggle is one of many barriers that they face which often lead to mental anxiety. However, they choose not to seek professional help, even if they wanted to because of the fees imposed. Three participants mentioned that they have sought counseling services at least once but quit for financial reasons.

Safety and Security. Safety concerns were highlighted as significant for well-being. Marwa's experience of feeling unsafe led her to explore self-defense strategies: "I started reading about self-defense... I wanted to be prepared." Her proactive approach underscored the importance of addressing safety concerns and providing resources: "Universities should maybe organize workshops about personal safety." This showed that enhancing safety measures can contribute to a sense of security and well-being.

Feeling unsafe can have profound effects on an individual's overall well-being. The constant worry about personal safety can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and a diminished sense of belonging. Marwa's experience was indicative of the broader challenges that international students, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, might encounter in unfamiliar surroundings. Addressing safety affairs is not just about physical security; it's also about promoting mental and emotional well-being.

Social and Cultural Integration. Hadeer suggested promoting social integration through cultural groups: "Maybe having a club that celebrates Arab culture would be great." Hadeer's idea of establishing a club that celebrates Arab culture was a step towards fostering a sense of belonging for international students, particularly Arab women. Such cultural groups create a space where students can connect with others who share similar backgrounds, traditions, and experiences. This sense of belonging was vital for mental well-being as it helps combat feelings of isolation and homesickness.

Cultural clubs provide a platform for students to embrace and celebrate their cultural identity. For Arab women graduate students, this is particularly important as they might be navigating a new environment while also managing cultural expectations. Participating in such a club can empower these students by allowing them to showcase their heritage, share their stories, and engage in activities that resonate with their cultural values.

Although the primary goal of a cultural club is to provide a safe space for students of a specific background, it also offers opportunities for cross-cultural interactions. By inviting students from diverse backgrounds to participate in events or collaborate on projects, the club becomes a bridge for social integration and a platform for fostering intercultural understanding. This aligns with the broader goal of universities to create inclusive and diverse campuses.

Cultural clubs can play a role in dispelling stereotypes and misconceptions that might surround certain cultures. Arab culture, like any other, is rich and diverse, and having a club dedicated to celebrating can allow for an authentic representation that counters negative perceptions. This can lead to increased cultural awareness and a more inclusive campus environment.

Being part of a cultural club offers emotional support by creating a network of peers who understand the unique challenges faced by international students, especially those from specific cultural backgrounds. These connections can become a source of friendship, mentorship, and assistance, contributing to a stronger social safety net for students.

Hadeer's suggestion aligned with the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion. By providing the resources and space for cultural clubs to flourish, universities can demonstrate that they value and respect the varied backgrounds of their students. This commitment goes a long way in creating an environment where all students feel valued and supported.

Career and Future Planning. Yasmine emphasized the value of networking and mentorship for career growth: "Networking is crucial... especially if you want to stay here for work." These insights highlight the potential importance of career advising for non-resident aliens.

She also pointed out that "Finding jobs, if you want to work after graduation," is especially hard; "it's easier when you are still studying." She emphasized the need for guidance on job searching and visas: "Career services for us would be great." This underscores the significance of providing career-related support to enhance overall well-being.

Educational Initiatives. Educational initiatives were recommended for cultural awareness. Mai suggested: "Having courses that address Arab identity... could be eye-opening." She also highlighted the importance of addressing stereotypes: "Courses about Orientalism... could help break down misconceptions." These recommendations emphasize how educational efforts can foster inclusivity, understanding, and consequently, well-being.

Theme #11: Developing Faculty Awareness. This theme focused on raising awareness among faculty members about the unique challenges and needs that international students,

especially those from Arab cultures, might face during their academic journeys. This can enhance the informed support efforts faculty can provide to Arab Women students. Faculty members play a vital role in the overall well-being and academic success of students. By educating faculty about the specific challenges faced by Arab women graduate students, universities can ensure that faculty members are better equipped to provide appropriate support, guidance, and accommodations. This, in turn can create a more nurturing environment for these students to thrive.

Arab women graduate students might encounter challenges related to language barriers, cultural differences in classroom dynamics, and unfamiliar academic norms. Faculty awareness of these challenges enables them to provide tailored support, such as additional language assistance, clarification of expectations, and flexible teaching approaches that cater to diverse learning styles.

In addition, faculty awareness includes sensitivity to cultural nuances and differences. This is particularly important for Arab women students who may come from backgrounds with distinct social norms and expectations. Faculty members who are culturally sensitive can avoid misunderstandings, make students feel respected, and create an inclusive environment that embraces diversity. Otherwise, a barrier can be created between the students and their professors and/or advisors. As Yosra expressed, "My academic advisor was hard to talk to. He seemed hard to talk to and I always felt he thinks I am weird. I avoided him, always. But I never knew who should I go to."

Faculty who are aware of the potential mental health challenges faced by Arab women graduate students can be proactive in identifying signs of distress. They can also encourage students to seek available mental wellness services, provide extensions on assignments during

times of increased stress, and refer students to appropriate support resources when needed. As Yasmine said "During this hard period, my academic advisor's concern and empathy helped me to keep going. I thought I can no longer do it, Mariam. She made me feel I can do it and that she understood what I've been through."

Faculty awareness can help with deconstructing stigma. If faculty members openly discuss mental health and well-being, it helps reduce the stigma associated with seeking help. When students see faculty normalizing discussions about mental health, they are more likely to feel comfortable seeking support from both academic and mental wellness resources.

Answer to Question 5. Arab women graduate students in the United States perceive a range of support services as vital for their overall wellness on campus. These insights provide valuable guidance for universities aiming to enhance their support systems for this unique student population.

Personalized support and wellness services stand out as a crucial need. Participants emphasized the importance of services tailored to individual preferences and needs, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective. Additionally, the accessibility of mental wellness services, especially for international students, emerged as a key concern. Providing free and easily accessible mental health support was seen as essential, given the financial challenges many students face.

Safety and security on campus are significant factors influencing overall well-being. Participants highlighted the importance of addressing safety concerns and offering resources such as personal safety workshops to ensure a sense of security. Social and cultural integration was also emphasized, with the suggestion of cultural clubs to foster a sense of belonging and cross-cultural understanding.

Career-related support, including networking opportunities, mentorship, and guidance on job searching and visas, was deemed essential for those planning to work in the US after graduation. Educational initiatives were recommended to promote cultural awareness and dispel stereotypes, contributing to a more inclusive and understanding campus environment. Finally, developing faculty awareness of the unique challenges faced by Arab women graduate students is crucial for providing tailored support and accommodations, enhancing overall well-being and academic success. These insights collectively offer universities a comprehensive framework to bolster their support systems and ensure the well-being and success of Arab women graduate students in the US.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 delved into the experiences and wellness of Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the United States, focusing on their social wellness, mental wellness, physical wellness, and financial wellness. The chapter, serving as the cornerstone of the study, presents a thorough analysis of the research findings obtained through semi-structured interviews with seven participants. These participants, hailing from various academic disciplines and Arab countries, provided rich insights into their academic journeys, highlighting the interconnected dimensions of their well-being.

The study highlighted the significant role of social support networks, including mentors, peers, campus programs, and community organizations, in promoting social wellness among Arab women graduate students. These networks offer emotional support, guidance, and a sense of belonging, enabling students to navigate the challenges of graduate studies and adapt to a new cultural and academic environment.

Furthermore, the research revealed the complexity of their mental wellness experiences, influenced by cultural norms, academic pressures, and the stigma surrounding mental health. Arab women graduate students exhibited varied attitudes towards seeking mental health support, making it essential to consider cultural factors when designing mental health services.

In addition to mental wellness, the study also shed light on physical wellness. Participants faced challenges related to accessing healthy and culturally appropriate food, disrupted sleep patterns due to academic demands, and difficulties in finding time for regular exercise, all of which contributed to their overall physical wellness concerns.

Financial challenges emerged as a prominent concern for all participants, with inadequate stipends, high textbook costs, utility expenses, and international student fees affecting their financial wellness. Coping strategies range from frugality to seeking external financial support, highlighting the resilience and determination of these students in managing their financial wellness.

Lastly, the participants emphasized the need for personalized support services, accessible mental health resources, safety and security measures, social and cultural integration initiatives, career-related support, and faculty awareness of their unique challenges. These insights collectively provide universities and policymakers with a comprehensive framework to enhance support systems and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Arab women graduate students in the US, ultimately fostering their academic success and overall well-being across these interconnected dimensions of wellness.

Chapter 5

This chapter of the dissertation provides a comprehensive culmination of the study's findings, offering a detailed analysis of the wellness challenges faced by Arab women pursuing their studies in the United States. This chapter encapsulates the essence of the research journey, highlighting key themes and insights drawn from the data collected. Through the diverse perspectives and narratives shared by the participants, a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and needs emerges.

The chapter begins by presenting a succinct summary of the results and the major themes that have surfaced through the data analysis process. These themes shed light on various dimensions of the participants' wellness journey, encompassing their social, emotional, physical, and financial wellness. By providing the essence of the data, the summary should reflect the richness and complexity of the participants' stories.

Building upon the thematic summary, the chapter transitions into drawing conclusions from the findings. These conclusions underscore the significance of addressing wellness among Arab women graduate students, not only for their individual well-being but also for their academic success and overall university experience. The conclusions drawn from the data serve as a bridge between the empirical evidence and the broader implications of the study. Moreover, this chapter offers practical recommendations that can directly impact the well-being of Arab women graduate students. These recommendations are grounded in the participants' insights and experiences, and they provide universities and institutions with actionable steps to create a more supportive environment. The practical recommendations address key aspects such as accessible mental health services, safety measures, social integration initiatives, faculty awareness, and more.

The chapter also outlines avenues for further study. The research may open doors for more specialized investigations into specific aspects of the well-being of Arab women graduate students. These suggestions for further study contribute to the ongoing discourse on international student wellness and offer researchers potential directions for in-depth exploration.

Acknowledging the inherent limitations of the study is crucial, and this chapter provides a candid discussion of the constraints and challenges faced during the research process. By addressing limitations such as sample size, cultural diversity, and research context, the chapter maintains transparency and ensures the integrity of the findings.

In conclusion, Chapter 5 summarized the research journey, offering a synthesized view of the participants' experiences, challenges, and needs. The summary, conclusions, practical recommendations, suggestions for further study, limitations, and discussions collectively contribute to the holistic understanding of the well-being of Arab women pursuing their studies in the US. This chapter serves as a bridge between empirical exploration and actionable insights, emphasizing the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for Arab women to thrive academically and personally.

Summary of the Results

This research endeavors to delve into the lived experiences and perceived well-being of Arab women international graduate students in the United States. The focal point of the study revolves around comprehending the dimensions of social, mental, physical, and financial wellness, aiming to pinpoint the distinct challenges that these demographic encounters and the tactics they employ to navigate these obstacles. Beyond this, the study aims to furnish insights into how universities can enhance their support for Arab international women in both academic and social realms. The findings of this investigation are poised to contribute to the evolution of

policies and practices that foster academic achievement and personal growth among Arab women studying in the United States.

The research methodology adopted for data collection is qualitative in nature, centering on semi-structured interviews. The participants recruited are Arab women enrolled in graduate programs at a university situated in the heartland region of the United States. The design of the interview questions is strategically constructed to capture the breadth of their experiences and perspectives encompassing their physical, mental, social, and financial well-being. Stringent measures are taken to ensure the comprehensibility, relevance, and overall quality of the interview protocol, which undergoes a preliminary piloting phase.

The analysis of the collected data is achieved through the application of thematic analysis, an established qualitative analysis technique. This method revolves around recognizing recurring patterns, themes, and variations within the narratives provided by the participants. The research process takes into account the researcher's inherent positionality as an Egyptian/Arab woman graduate student and the potential biases that might influence the study. Stringent safeguards are implemented to bolster the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, including soliciting participant feedback and practicing reflexivity.

The research protocol gains ethical approval from the University of Arkansas IRB, marking the commencement of the study's implementation phase. The selection process involves reaching out to potential participants within the university community through personal networks. Ultimately, a diverse cohort of seven individuals from the University of Arkansas agrees to partake, representing various academic tiers, including both master's and doctoral levels.

The research underscores the principle of participant-centered research, exemplified by involving participants in the verification of interview transcriptions. This collaborative approach assures the accuracy of data representation and respects participants' perspectives, granting them agency in confirming the accuracy of their narratives. The feedback provided during this verification process enriches the credibility of the study, elevating participants to active collaborators.

To further enhance the rigor and credibility of the study, the involvement of a trusted colleague possessing expertise in public policy in higher education is sought. This collaborator contributes to the coding process, adding depth and richness to the data analysis. The culmination of efforts in coding, analysis, and expert consultation strengthens the robustness and comprehensiveness of the study.

The study prides itself on the inclusivity it exhibits, exemplified by Nadia, an Arab woman lesbian from Tunisia, who offers a unique and underrepresented perspective. Mai, hailing from Egypt, engages in multiple degrees, while Hadeer, from Saudi Arabia, maintains her veil while identifying as agnostic. Yosra, an Egyptian engineering enthusiast, and Yasmine from Morocco. Marwa, who brings her Kurdish background, to Mona, hailing from Iraq and pursuing a doctorate, represents different facets of Arab women's experiences.

Research Questions Answers

What role, according to Arab women pursuing their graduate studies in the US, do social support networks, including peers, mentors, campus programs, and community organizations, play in promoting holistic wellness?

The data from the interviews with Arab women pursuing graduate studies in the US highlights the essential role of social support networks in promoting holistic wellness. These

networks, including professors, academic advisors, peers, campus programs, and community organizations, offer emotional support, academic guidance, opportunities for social interaction, and avenues for personal and professional growth. The participants' narratives underscore the need for academic institutions to foster inclusive and diverse support systems that address the unique challenges and well-being needs of international students, particularly Arab women pursuing higher education in the US. The findings underscore the importance of nurturing an environment that promotes emotional well-being, academic success, and a sense of belonging to optimize the overall educational experience of Arab women graduate students.

Research question 2: What are the experiences of Arab women graduate students in terms of mental wellness during their academic journey in the US, and how do they access and utilize mental health support resources on campus?

The experiences of Arab women graduate students regarding mental wellness during their academic journey in the US are multifaceted and shaped by an intricate interplay of individual, cultural, and academic factors. Coping mechanisms, peer support, financial constraints, and cultural influences all contribute to their mental well-being journey. Institutions aiming to support these students must provide culturally competent mental health resources, foster an inclusive campus environment, tackle financial barriers, and recognize the diverse challenges these women face. By acknowledging and addressing these aspects, educational institutions can better facilitate the mental wellness and academic success of Arab women graduate students in the US.

Research question 3: How do Arab women graduate students maintain and promote their physical wellness during their academic journey in the US, and what are the barriers and facilitators to maintaining their wellness?

The experiences of Arab women graduate students in maintaining and promoting their physical wellness in the US are influenced by various factors including access to nutritious food, development of unhealthy eating habits, financial constraints, sleep patterns, awareness of the healthcare system, and the presence of coping mechanisms. These findings emphasize the importance of targeted initiatives to address these challenges and facilitators. Such initiatives could include culturally sensitive campus resources, financial assistance programs, health literacy workshops, peer mentorship programs, and campus health centers. By addressing these aspects, institutions can contribute to the physical wellness and overall well-being of Arab women graduate students during their academic journey in the US.

Research question 4: What are the financial challenges and stressors that Arab women face as graduate students in the US, and how do they manage their finances?

The data exposes the financial challenges and stressors faced by Arab women graduate students in the US, such as inadequate stipends, high costs of textbooks, managing utility expenses, international student fees, and reliance on credit cards. The participants' strategies for coping with these challenges vary from economizing to seeking additional employment, but cautionary accounts like Yosra's credit card debt underline the need for responsible financial decision-making. These experiences underscore the significance of providing proper financial support, education, and resources to ensure the success and well-being of Arab women graduate students during their academic journey in the US.

Research question 5: What kinds of help and services do graduate Arab women students in the US perceive as necessary and helpful for supporting their overall wellness on campus?

The participants' responses suggest that graduate Arab women students in the US perceive individualized support and wellness services, free mental health support, safety

measures, social and cultural integration initiatives, career and future planning assistance, educational initiatives, and faculty awareness as crucial for supporting their overall wellness on campus. Implementing these services and initiatives can enhance the well-being, academic success, and sense of belonging for these students.

Conclusions

1. Social Support Networks and Holistic Wellness

- Social support networks, including professors, mentors, peers, and campus programs, play a pivotal role in promoting the holistic wellness of Arab women graduate students.
- Professors and mentors provide not only academic guidance but also emotional support, contributing to a sense of belonging and academic success.
- Positive interactions within peer groups alleviate feelings of isolation and enhance participants' well-being.
- Campus programs and associations offer opportunities for skill development, social interaction, and career orientation, contributing to participants' overall wellness.

2. Mental Wellness and Support Utilization

- Arab women graduate students' experiences of mental wellness are complex and influenced by cultural, personal, and academic factors.
- Coping mechanisms, peer support, financial constraints, and cultural influences impact their mental well-being journeys.
- There is a need for culturally competent mental health resources and an inclusive campus environment that addresses the unique challenges faced by international students.

3. Physical Wellness and Strategies

- Limited access to healthy and culturally appropriate food is a significant barrier to maintaining physical wellness.
- Unhealthy eating habits often develop due to the transition to a new food environment and lack of halal options.
- Engaging in physical activities serves as a coping mechanism to manage stress and enhance physical wellness.
- Educational initiatives and resources are needed to promote healthy habits and address physical wellness challenges.

4. *Financial Challenges and Coping*

- Inadequate stipends, high costs of textbooks, utility expenses, and international student fees pose significant financial challenges.
- Participants employ coping mechanisms such as economizing, seeking part-time work, and utilizing credit cards, but such strategies can lead to risks like debt.
- Financial education and responsible decision-making are essential to address financial challenges and promote overall well-being.

5. *Necessary Services for Overall Wellness*

- Participants perceive individualized support and wellness services, free mental health support, safety measures, social and cultural integration initiatives, career planning assistance, educational efforts, and faculty awareness as necessary for supporting their overall wellness on campus.
- Comprehensive support systems and initiatives are needed to cater to the diverse needs and challenges of Arab women graduate students.

Overall, the research underscores the importance of fostering an inclusive, culturally sensitive, and supportive environment for Arab women graduate students in the US. The findings offer insights into the multifaceted dimensions of wellness and the strategies that can enhance this population's academic success, personal growth, and overall well-being. By addressing the challenges and implementing the suggested initiatives, educational institutions can contribute to the empowerment and success of this demographic in their academic journeys.

Recommendations For Practice

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations can be implemented by universities to create a more inclusive and supportive environment that addresses the holistic wellness needs of Arab women graduate students, facilitating their academic success and personal growth during their time in the US.

1. *Culturally Competent Wellness Services*

- Establish culturally sensitive mental health services that acknowledge the unique challenges faced by Arab women graduate students.
- Train counselors and therapists to understand and respect cultural nuances, enabling them to provide effective and empathetic support.

2. *Comprehensive Financial Support*

- Offer financial literacy workshops to equip Arab women graduate students with skills to manage their finances effectively.
- Create financial assistance programs specifically tailored to the needs of international students, including emergency funds and grants to alleviate financial burdens.

3. *Diverse Peer Support Networks*

- Foster the formation of diverse peer support networks that cater to both shared cultural backgrounds and cross-cultural interactions.
- Create spaces for Arab women students to connect with others who understand their experiences, providing emotional support and a sense of belonging.

4. *Promote Cultural Integration*

- Establish cultural clubs and organizations that celebrate Arab culture and provide a platform for students to share their experiences, traditions, and stories.
- Organize intercultural events and workshops to facilitate interaction between Arab women students and students from other backgrounds, promoting cross-cultural understanding.

5. *Faculty Awareness and Training*

- Provide training for faculty members to increase their awareness of the challenges faced by international students, including Arab women, and equip them with strategies to provide effective support.
- Encourage faculty to openly discuss mental health and well-being to reduce stigma and create a supportive academic environment.

6. *Career Development and Job Placement*

- Develop specialized career services that cater to the unique needs of Arab women graduate students, offering guidance on job searching, visas, and cultural integration into the workforce.
- Organize networking events and mentorship programs that connect Arab women students with professionals in their respective fields.

7. *Accessible and Nutritious Food Options*

- Collaborate with dining services to ensure a diverse and culturally appropriate range of food options, including halal choices, to support healthy eating habits.
- Promote community gardens or partnerships with local markets to improve access to fresh and nutritious foods for students.

8. *Awareness Campaigns and Resources*

- Launch awareness campaigns that promote well-being resources available on campus, including counseling services, academic support, and wellness programs.
- Develop online resources and guides specifically tailored to the needs of Arab women graduate students, addressing common challenges and providing practical advice.
- Implement courses that offer clear explanations of the US health insurance system, covering terms, coverage options, claims processes, and providers. This empowers Arab women to graduate students to navigate healthcare confidently and make informed decisions.

Recommendations for Further Study

Below are several recommendations that offer avenues for further exploration that can deepen our understanding of the challenges, needs, and experiences of Arab women graduate students in the United States and contribute to the development of more effective support systems and interventions.

1. *Longitudinal Study*

Conduct a longitudinal study to track the well-being of Arab women graduate students over an extended period, capturing changes in their experiences and challenges throughout their academic journey.

2. *Comparative Analysis*

Compare the wellness experiences of Arab women graduate students with those of students from different cultural backgrounds to identify shared and unique challenges, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of international student wellness.

3. *Intervention Effectiveness*

Investigate the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as wellness programs or support services, in addressing the challenges highlighted by Arab women graduate students and enhancing their overall well-being.

4. *Online Support Systems*

Explore the potential of online platforms and social media in fostering virtual support networks for Arab women graduate students, particularly those facing isolation or limited access to in-person resources.

5. *Institutional Policies*

Examine the impact of institutional policies and practices on the well-being of Arab women graduate students, focusing on the influence of financial aid structures, healthcare access, and housing support.

6. *Family and Community Dynamics*

Study the role of family and community dynamics in shaping the wellness of Arab women graduate students, including the impact of family support, cultural expectations, and remote connections on their experiences.

7. *Cultural Adaptation*

Explore the strategies and experiences of Arab women graduate students in adapting to a new culture, examining how cultural adaptation influences their wellness, academic engagement, and social integration.

8. *Intersectional Analysis*

Conduct an intersectional analysis to understand how various aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation, intersect with gender to impact the well-being of Arab women graduate students.

9. *Faculty and Staff Training*

Investigate the effectiveness of faculty and staff training programs that focus on cultural competence, diversity awareness, and understanding the unique challenges faced by Arab women graduate students.

10. *Healthcare Access*

Explore the specific barriers and facilitators Arab women graduate students encounter in accessing healthcare services in the US, considering factors such as language barriers, insurance coverage, and cultural competence of healthcare providers.

11. *Perceptions of Support*

Examine the perceptions of support networks, both within and outside the university, among Arab women graduate students to better understand how these networks contribute to their well-being and overall experiences.

Limitations

1. *Sample Size and Diversity*

The study's sample size of seven participants may limit the breadth of findings. The participants, while diverse in some respects, may not fully represent the entire spectrum of Arab women graduate students' experiences, leading to potential underrepresentation of certain backgrounds and perspectives.

2. *Deviating from the Operational Definition of Arab*

One major limitation of this study is that, although the operational focus was primarily on Arab countries that are members of the Arab League, due to a shortage of willing participants from some of those countries, one participant was recruited from Kurdistan. While this decision was made out of necessity to ensure a sufficient sample size, it is important to acknowledge that Kurdistan represents a distinct cultural and geopolitical context within the broader Middle East region. It is worth noting that the participant recruited from Kurdistan identified as she comes from the Iraqi region of Kurdistan. However, this inclusion, though pragmatic, may introduce some variability in perspectives and experiences, which should be considered when interpreting the findings in the context of the broader Arab world.

3. *Single Institution Context*

The study focused on Arab women graduate students at a specific university in the heartland region of the United States. The findings may not fully capture the experiences of those studying in different geographical regions or institutions with distinct cultural contexts.

4. *Self-Selection Bias*

Participants who consented to take part in the study might possess distinct experiences or viewpoints that contrast with individuals who opted not to engage. While four graduate students

were initially approached and declined participation, one participant agreed to join; however, her responses were concise, leading to the exclusion of her interview's outcomes. This self-selection bias could impact the overall range of experiences represented in the study.

5. *Social Desirability Bias*

Due to the sensitive nature of discussing mental health, wellness challenges, and personal experiences, participants might have been inclined to provide socially desirable responses, potentially leading to an underreporting of certain issues or challenges.

6. *Researcher Bias*

Despite efforts to remain impartial, my personal experiences and perspectives as an Egyptian graduate student could have influenced the study's findings.

7. *Limited Quantitative Data*

The study utilized a qualitative approach, which provided rich narrative insights but limited quantitative data. This limitation makes it challenging to quantify the prevalence and magnitude of certain experiences and challenges faced by Arab women graduate students.

8. *Language Barriers*

The study was conducted in English, which might have excluded Arab women who were not proficient in the language, potentially resulting in a limited representation of experiences among those with language barriers.

9. *Cultural Nuances*

The study recognized the diversity within the Arab identity but might not have captured the full spectrum of cultural nuances and differences among participants' countries of origin, potentially oversimplifying the experiences of Arab women.

10. *Cross-Cultural Context*

The findings might not be directly applicable to Arab women graduate students studying in different cultural contexts or non-Western countries, as cultural norms and institutional practices can vary significantly.

11. *Participant Age and Background*

The study did not delve deeply into participants' age, socioeconomic backgrounds, or familial responsibilities, which could influence their experiences and wellness challenges in nuanced ways.

12. *Single Data Collection Method*

Relying solely on semi-structured interviews may have limited the range of perspectives captured, as other methods such as surveys or focus groups could have provided complementary insights.

13. *Emotional Toll*

Delving into personal challenges and experiences could have caused emotional discomfort or distress for participants, potentially impacting the accuracy and depth of their responses.

Discussion

The culmination of this research journey offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the wellness challenges faced by Arab women pursuing graduate studies in the United States. Through the exploration of social support networks, mental wellness, physical wellness, financial challenges, and necessary support services, this section delves into the implications of the findings, their alignment with existing literature, and the broader significance for educational institutions and policies.

Social Support Networks and Holistic Wellness

The profound impact of social support networks on the holistic wellness of Arab women graduate students cannot be overstated. The narratives shared by participants highlighted the pivotal role that mentors, professors, peers, and campus programs play in creating an environment that fosters academic success and personal well-being. This aligns with existing research on the importance of supportive relationships in enhancing students' overall experience and success (Baba & Hosoda, 2014). The findings accentuate that positive interactions with faculty members can extend beyond academic guidance, contributing to emotional wellness and a sense of belonging. Such relationships serve as buffers against feelings of isolation and academic stress (Leong, 2015; Rabia & Karkouti, 2017; Wang et al., 2015). Campus programs and associations provide platforms for skill development, networking, and cultural integration, directly impacting participants' overall wellness.

Mental Wellness and Support Utilization

The complexity of mental wellness experiences reported by Arab women graduate students underscores the need for tailored support services that respect cultural backgrounds and individual preferences. The study elucidated the interplay of cultural factors, stigma, and personal beliefs in shaping their attitudes towards seeking professional help. These findings resonate with the broader discourse on the stigma associated with mental health issues, particularly within cultural contexts (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2017; Koo et al., 2021). The participants' coping mechanisms varied widely, highlighting the diversity of approaches individuals employ to manage stress and anxiety. This diversity emphasizes the importance of offering a range of support services that accommodate various preferences and needs.

Physical Wellness and Strategies

The financial constraints and the resultant limited access to healthy and culturally appropriate food emerged as a substantial barrier to maintaining physical wellness. The participants' experiences align with research demonstrating the impact of socioeconomic factors on dietary habits and health outcomes (Alakaam & Willyard, 2020; Martínez-Ruiz et al., 2015). The study also highlighted the significance of engaging in physical activities as coping mechanisms to manage stress. These findings mirror the well-established connection between physical activity and mental well-being (Mazurek Melnyk et al., 2016; McDaniel et al., 2021).

Financial Challenges and Coping

The financial challenges faced by Arab women graduate students are multifaceted, encompassing inadequate stipends, high textbook costs, utility expenses, and international student fees. The participants' strategies for coping with these challenges ranged from economizing to seeking part-time work. These findings concur with previous research on the financial strain experienced by international students (Kim, 2017). The detrimental impact of financial difficulties on students' well-being and academic performance is well-documented (Bradley & Moore, 2018). The study further highlights the potential risks associated with reliance on credit cards as a coping mechanism.

Necessary Services for Overall Wellness

The recommendations proposed by participants for enhancing overall wellness on campus provide actionable insights for educational institutions. The necessity for individualized support services, free mental wellness resources, safety measures, social and cultural integration initiatives, career planning assistance, educational efforts, and increased faculty awareness underscores the multifaceted nature of support required by Arab women graduate students. The

study's findings align with the growing recognition of the importance of culturally sensitive and comprehensive support systems for international students (Rienties & Jindal-Snape, 2016).

Implications and Future Directions

The implications of this study extend beyond its immediate focus to the broader realm of international student support and well-being. The identified recommendations offer a blueprint for institutions to cultivate an inclusive environment that caters to the diverse needs of Arab women graduate students. The study contributes to the ongoing discourse on international student wellness and offers a roadmap for policy changes and program development. Moreover, the study provides a foundation for future research that could delve deeper into specific aspects of Arab women graduate students' experiences, such as the impact of cultural integration initiatives on their sense of belonging or the effectiveness of individualized mental health services tailored to their cultural preferences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the profound impact of social support networks, mental wellness strategies, physical activity, financial challenges, and necessary support services on the overall well-being of Arab women pursuing graduate studies in the United States. The findings highlight the need for educational institutions to create an environment that not only acknowledges the unique challenges faced by this demographic but also actively addresses them through tailored initiatives. By fostering a holistic support system, institutions can empower Arab women graduate students to thrive academically, personally, and professionally during their academic journey in the United States.

Chapter Summary

This chapter of the dissertation provided a culmination of the study's findings, offering and understanding of the wellness challenges faced by Arab women pursuing their studies in the United States. This chapter encapsulates the essence of the research journey, highlighting key findings and insights drawn from the data collected. Through the diverse perspectives and narratives shared by the participants, a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and needs emerges.

The conclusions that emerged from analysing the findings underscore the significance of addressing wellness among Arab women graduate students, not only for their individual well-being but also for their academic success and overall university experience. The conclusions drawn from the data served as a bridge between the empirical evidence and the broader implications of the study. Moreover, this chapter offered practical recommendations that can directly impact the well-being of Arab women graduate students. These recommendations were grounded in the participants' insights and experiences, and they provide universities and institutions with actionable steps to create a more supportive environment.

The chapter also outlined recommendations for future research. The research may open doors for more specialized investigations into specific aspects of the well-being of Arab women graduate students. These suggestions for further study contribute to the ongoing discourse on international student wellness and offer researchers potential directions for in-depth exploration.

Finally, this chapter provided a candid discussion of the constraints and challenges faced during the research process. By addressing limitations such as sample size, cultural diversity, and research context, the chapter maintains transparency and ensures the integrity of the findings.

References

- Abdel-Khalek, A. M., & Lester, D. (2017). The association between religiosity, generalized self-efficacy, mental health, and happiness in Arab college students. *Personality and Individual Differences, 109*, 12-16.
- Abualkhair, M. E. (2013). Arab muslim international students' lived experiences in a U.S. higher education institution. Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1399993740). Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/arab-muslim-international-students-lived/docview/1399993740/se-2>
- Abu khattala, I. (2013). What Arab students say about their linguistic and educational experiences in Canadian universities. *International Education Studies, 6*(8), 31-37. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v6n8p31>
- Adams, T., Bezner, J., & Steinhardt, M. (1997). The conceptualization and measurement of perceived wellness: Integrating balance across and within dimensions. *American Journal of Health Promotion, 11*(3), 208-218.
- Aguilera-Hermida, A. P. (2020). College students' use and acceptance of emergency online learning due to COVID-19. *International journal of educational research open, 1*, 100011.
- Alakaam, A., & Willyard, A. (2020). Eating habits and dietary acculturation effects among international college students in the United States. *AIMS public health, 7*(2), 228–240. <https://doi.org/10.3934/publichealth.2020020>
- Al-Qahtani, A. A., & Higgins, S. E. (2013). Effects of traditional, blended and e-learning on students' achievement in higher education. *Journal of computer assisted learning, 29*(3), 220-234.
- Ambert, A., Adler, P., Adler, P. A., & Detzner, D. F. (1995). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 37*, 879-893.
- Al-Amrani, G. (2011). *Multiple literacies, fragmented identities: Arab students at American universities*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. 3466543)
- Al Anazy, M. (2013). Participation in online and face-to-face discussions: Perceptions of female Saudi students in the United States (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO.
- Ali, A. I. (2014). A threat enflashed: Muslim college students situate their identities amidst portrayals of Muslim violence and terror. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 27*, 1243-1261.

- Alreshoud, A., & Koeske, G. F. (1997). Arab students' attitudes toward and amount of social contact with Americans: A causal process analysis of cross-sectional data. *Journal of Social Psychology, 137*(2), 235-245.
- Alzahrani, M. A. (2018). The Learning Experience of International Students in Canada: Progressive Educational Theory and Passive Learning Styles. *English Language Teaching, 11*(7), 76-85.
- Al Zubaidi, K. O. (2012). The academic writing of Arab postgraduate students: Discussing the main language issues. *Social and Behavioral Sciences, 66*, 56-62.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.11.246>
- Arab, middle eastern, and Muslim? what's the difference?! TeachMideast. (2017, October 12). Retrieved March 5, 2023, from <https://teachmideast.org/articles/arab-middle-eastern-and-muslim-whats-the-difference/>
- Arslan, G., & Renshaw, T. L. (2018). Student subjective wellbeing as a predictor of adolescent problem behaviors: A comparison of first-order and second-order factor effects. *Child Indicators Research, 11*, 507-521.
- Baba, Y., & Hosoda, M. (2014). Home away home: Better understanding of the role of social support in predicting cross-cultural adjustment among international students. *College Student Journal, 48*(1), 1-15.
- Bai, J. (2016). Perceived support as a predictor of acculturative stress among international students in the United States. *Journal of International Students, 6*(1), 93-106. Retrieved from ERIC database.
- Berry, J. W. (2007). Acculturation strategies and adaptation. In J. E. Lansford, K. Deater-Deckard, & M. H. Bornstein (Eds.), *Immigrant families in contemporary society* (pp. 69–82). The Guilford Press.
- Binsahl, H., Chang, S., & Bosua, R. (2015). Identity and belonging: Saudi female international students and their use of social networking sites. *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture, 6*(1), 81-102. doi:101386/cjmc.6181_1
- Boafo-Arthur, S. (2013). Acculturative experiences of Black-African international students. *International Journal of Advanced Counseling, 36*, 115-124.
- Boyras, G., Granda, R., Baker, C. N., Tidwell, L. L., & Waits, J. B. (2016). Posttraumatic stress, effort regulation, and academic outcomes among college students: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 63*(4), 475-486. doi:10.1037/cou0000102
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard university press.

- Brown, C., & Applegate, B. (2012). Holistic Wellness Assessment for Young Adults: Psychometric Analysis. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 30 (4), 235-43.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11, 589-597.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Bubar, R., Cespedes, K., & Bundy-Fazioli, K. (2016). Intersectionality and social work: Omissions of race, class, and sexuality in graduate school education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 52(3), 283-296.
- Bowleg, L. (2012). The problem with the phrase women and minorities: intersectionality—an important theoretical framework for public health. *American journal of public health*, 102(7), 1267-1273.
- Brüggen, E. C., Hogreve, J., Holmlund, M., Kabadayi, S., & Löfgren, M. (2017). Financial well-being: A conceptualization and research agenda. *Journal of business research*, 79, 228-237.
- Chapdelaine, R. F., & Alexitch, L. R. (2004). Social skills difficulty: Model of culture shock for international graduate students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(2), 167-184
- Ching, Y., Renes, S. L., McMurrow, S., Simpson, J., & Strange, A. T. (2017). Challenges facing Chinese international students studying in the United States. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 12(8), 473-482.
- Choudaha, R., & Chang, L. (2012). Trends in International Student Mobility. Research Report 1. In *World Education Services*. World Education Services.
- Coffey, J., Cook, J., Farrugia, D., Threadgold, S., & Burke, P. J. (2021). Intersecting marginalities: International students' struggles for "survival" in COVID-19. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 28(4), 1337–1351. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12610>
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological bulletin*, 98(2), 310.
- Cole, D., & Ahmadi, S. (2010). Reconsidering Campus Diversity: An Examination of Muslim Students' Experiences. *The Journal of Higher Education (Columbus)*, 81(2), 121–139.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2010.11779045>
- Cole, D., & Ahmadi, S. (2003). Perspectives and experiences of Muslim women who veil on college campuses. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1), 47-66.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139-167.

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Corbin, C. B., & Pangrazi, R. P. (2001). Toward a uniform definition of wellness: A commentary. *President's council on physical fitness and sports research digest*, 15.
- Corrigan P. (2004). How stigma interferes with mental health care. *The American psychologist*, 59(7), 614–625. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.7.614>
- Crutcher, B. B. (2015). *Examining the perceptions of wellness, stress, and social support among collegiate student-athletes and non-athletes*. Michigan State University.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. sage.
- Diener, E., & Lucas, R. E. (1999). 11 personality and subjective well-being. *Well-being: Foundations of hedonic psychology*, 213.
- Duke, D. L. (1984). *Teaching-The imperiled profession*. State University of New York Press.
- Dunn, H. L. (1959). High-level wellness for man and society. *American Journal of Public Health*, 49(6), 786-792.
- Dusselier, L., Dunn, B., Wang, Y., Shelley, M. I., & Whalen, D. F. (2005). Personal, health, academic, and environmental predictors of stress for residence hall students. *Journal of American College Health*, 54(1), 15-24. doi:10.3200/JACH.54.1.15-24
- Earley, P. C., & Ang, S. (2003). *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures*.
- Effiong, O. (2016). Getting them speaking: Classroom social factors and foreign language anxiety. *TESOL Journal*, 7 (1), 132-161. doi: 10.1002/tesj.194
- El-Ghoroury, N. H., Galper, D. I., Sawaqdeh, A., & Bufka, L. F. (2012). Stress, coping, and barriers to wellness among psychology graduate students. *Training and education in professional psychology*, 6(2), 122.
- Elder, J. P., Lytle, L., Sallis, J. F., Young, D. R., Steckler, A., Simons-Morton, D., ... & Ribisl, K. (2007). A description of the social–ecological framework used in the trial of activity for adolescent girls (TAAG). *Health education research*, 22(2), 155-165.
- El-Ghoroury, N. H., Galper, D. I., Sawaqdeh, A., & Bufka, L. F. (2012). Stress, coping, and barriers to wellness among psychology graduate students. *Training and education in professional psychology*, 6(2), 122.

- Ellis-Bosold, C., & Thornton-Orr, D. (2013). A needs assessment: A study of perceived need for student health services by Chinese international students. *College Student Journal*, 47(1), 155-168.
- Gao, N., Eissenstat, S. J., Wacha-Montes, A., & Wang, Y. (2022). The experiences and impact on wellness among international students in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of American College Health*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2022.2052077>
- Garman, E. T., Leech, I. E., & Grable, J. E. (1996). The negative impact of employee poor personal financial behaviors on employers. *Financial counseling and planning*, 7(1), 157-168.
- Gautam, C., Lowery, C., Mays, C., & Durant, D. (2016). Challenges of global learners: A qualitative study of the concerns and difficulties of international students. *Journal of International Studies*, 6(2), 501-526.
- Gallagher, S., & Zahavi, D. (2020). *The phenomenological mind*. Routledge.
- Glass, C. R., & Westmont, C. M. (2014). Comparative effects of belongingness on the academic success and cross-cultural interactions of domestic and international students. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 38, 106-119.
- Goodwill, J. R., & Zhou, S. (2020). Association between perceived public stigma and suicidal behaviors among college students of color in the U.S. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 262, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.10.019>
- Golde, C. M., & Dore, T. M. (2001). At cross purposes: What the experiences of today's doctoral students reveal about doctoral education.
- Gruber, J., Prinstein, M. J., Clark, L. A., Rottenberg, J., Abramowitz, J. S., Albano, A. M., Aldao, A., Borelli, J. L., Chung, T., Davila, J., Forbes, E. E., Gee, D. G., Hall, G. C. N., Hallion, L. S., Hinshaw, S. P., Hofmann, S. G., Hollon, S. D., Joormann, J., Kazdin, A. E., Weinstock, L. M. (2021). Mental health and clinical psychological science in the time of COVID-19: Challenges, opportunities, and a call to action. *The American Psychologist*, 76(3), 409–426. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000707>
- Harari, M. J., Waehler, C. A., & Rogers, J. R. (2005). An empirical investigation of a theoretically based measure of perceived wellness. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(1), 93.
- Han, X., Han, X., Luo, Q., Jacobs, S. & Jean-Baptiste, M. (2013). Report of a mental health survey among Chinese international students at Yale University. *Journal of American College Health*, 61(1), 1-8.

- Hettler, B. (1980). Wellness promotion on a university campus. *Family & Community Health*, 3(1), 77-95.
- Hettler, B. (1986). Strategies for wellness and recreation program development. *New Directions for Student Services*, 1968(34), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.37119863404>
- Hermanstynne, T. O., Johnson, L., Wylie, K. M., & Skeath, J. B. (2022). Helping others enhances graduate student wellness and mental health. *Nature Biotechnology*, 40(4), 618-619.
- Hey, J. (n.d.). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Sketchplanations. <https://sketchplanations.com/maslows-hierarchy>
- Hirai, R., Frazier, P., & Syed, M. (2015). Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustment of First-Year International Students: Trajectories and Predictors. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 62(3), 438–452. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000085>
- Huston, S. J. (2010). Measuring financial literacy. *Journal of consumer affairs*, 44(2), 296-316.
- Hwang, T. (2014). An exploratory study into the correlations between the cultural composition of social support network and acculturative stress for international students (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.
- Hyun, J., Quinn, B., Madon, T., & Lustig, S. (2007). Mental health need, awareness, and use of counseling services among international graduate students. *Journal of American College Health*, 56(2), 109-118.
- Institute of International Education. (2021). "International Student and U.S. Higher Education Enrolment, 1948/49 - 2021/22" Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from <https://opendoorsdata.org/>.
- Indicators, O. E. C. D., & Hagvísar, O. E. C. D. (2019). *Health at a glance 2019: OECD indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Jibreel, Z. (2015). Cultural identity and the challenges international students encounter.
- Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education*, 118(2), 282-292.
- Karaman, N., & Christian, M. (2020). “My Hijab Is Like My Skin Color”: Muslim Women Students, Racialization, and Intersectionality. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 6(4), 517–532. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649220903740>
- Kirkcaldy, B., Furnham, A., & Siefen, G. (2004). The relationship between health efficacy, educational attainment, and well-being among 30 nations. *European Psychologist*, 9(2), 107-119.

- Klein, H. J., & McCarthy, S. M. (2022). Student wellness trends and interventions in medical education: a narrative review. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9(1).
- Komiya N., & Eells, G. (2001). Predictors of attitudes toward seeking counseling among international students. *Journal of College Counseling*, 4, 153-160. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1882.2001.tb00195.x>
- Koo, K., Kim, Y. W., Lee, J., & Nyunt, G. (2021). “It’s My Fault”: Exploring Experiences and Mental Wellness Among Korean International Graduate Students. *Journal of International Students*, 11(4), 790–. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11i4.2801>
- Kuo, B. H. (2014). Coping, acculturation, and psychological adaptation among migrants: A theoretical and empirical review and synthesis of the literature. *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*, 2(1), 16-33. doi:10.1080/21642850.2013.843459
- Kwadzo, M. (2014). International Students’ Experience of Studying and Working at a Northeastern Public University in the US. *Journal of International Students*, 4(3), 279–291. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v4i3.467>
- Lazarus, R. S., Coyne, J. C., & Folkman, S. (1984). Cognition, emotion and motivation: The doctoring of Humpty-Dumpty. *Approaches to emotion*, 221-237.
- Le, A., LaCost, B., & Wismer, Mi. (2016). International female graduate students’ experience at a Midwestern university: Sense of belonging and identity development. *Journal of International Students*, 6(1), 128-152.
- Leong, P. (2015). Coming to America: Assessing the patterns of acculturation, friendship formation, and the academic experiences of international students at a U.S. college. *Journal of International Students*, 5(4), 459-474.
- LePine, J. A., LePine, M. A., & Jackson, C. L. (2004). Challenge and hindrance stress: relationships with exhaustion, motivation to learn, and learning performance. *Journal of applied psychology*, 89(5), 883.
- Li, P., Wong, Y. J., & Toth, P. (2013). Asian international students’ willingness to seek counseling: A mixed-methods study. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 35, 1-15.
- Li, S., & Zizzi, S. (2018). A Case Study of International Students' Social Adjustment, Friendship Development, and Physical Activity. *Journal of International Students*, 8(1), 389-408.
- Lindsay, B. L., Bernier, E., Boman, J., & Boyce, M. A. (2023). Understanding the connection between student wellbeing and teaching and learning at a Canadian research university: A qualitative student perspective. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*, 9(1), 5-16.

- Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. (1995). Social conditions as fundamental causes of disease. *Journal of health and social behavior*, 80-94.
- Lusardi, A., & Tufano, P. (2009). Debt Literacy, Financial Experiences, and Overindebtedness. *NBER Working Paper Series*, 14808–. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w14808>
- Lynch, R. J., Perry, B., Googe, C., Krachenfels, J., McCloud, K., Spencer-Tyree, B., Oliver, R., & Morgan, K. (2020). My wellness is: An art-based collective autoethnographic illustration of doctoral student wellness in online distance education environments. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, 11(1), 73-88. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-05-2019-0049>
- Lysgaard, S. (1955). Adjustment in a foreign society: Norwegian Fulbright grantees visiting the United States. *International Social Science Bulletin*, 7, 45-51.
- Macionis, J., & Gerber, L. (2010). *Sociology*. (7th ed.). Toronto, Canada: Pearson Education.
- Mahrous, A., & Ahmed, A. (2010). A cross-cultural investigation of students' perceptions of the effectiveness of pedagogical tools, The Middle East, the United Kingdom, and the United States. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 14(3), 289-306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315309334738>
- Majid, M. A. A., Othman, M., Mohamad, S. F., Lim, S. A. H., & Yusof, A. (2017). Piloting for interviews in qualitative research: Operationalization and lessons learnt. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 7(4), 1073-1080.
- Malcolm, Z. T., & Mendoza, P. (2014). Afro-caribbean international students' ethnic identity development: Fluidity, intersectionality, agency, and performativity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(6), 595-614. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/afro-caribbean-international-students-ethnic/docview/1617933321/se-2>
- Mamiseihvili, K. (2012). International student persistence in U.S. postsecondary institutions. *Higher Education*, 64(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-011-9477-0>
- Mandell, L. (2008). The financial literacy of young American adults. *The jumpstart coalition for personal financial literacy*, 163-183.
- Martínez-Ruiz, M. P., Tirelli, C., Izquierdo-Yusta, A., & Gómez-Ladrón-De-Guevara, R. (2015). Exploring the adjustment of international university students in relation to dietary practices. *British Food Journal (1966)*, 117(12), 2947–2974. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-02-2015-0082>
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). *A Theory Of Human Motivation*. pdf.

- Mazurek Melnyk, B., Slevin, C., Militello, L., Hoying, J., Teall, A., & McGovern, C. (2016). Physical health, lifestyle beliefs and behaviors, and mental health of entering graduate health professional students: Evidence to support screening and early intervention. *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners*, 28(4), 204-211.
- McDaniel, A., Dionne, J., & Regan, E. P. (2021). Examining International Students' Holistic Wellness. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 58(2), 227–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2020.1853553>
- McDermott-Levy, R. (2011). Going alone: The lived experience of female Arab-Muslim nursing students living and studying in the United States. *Nursing Outlook*, 59(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2011.02.006>
- McGarvey, A., Brugha, R., Conroy, R. M., Clarke, E., & Byrne, E. (2015). International students' experience of a western medical school: a mixed methods study exploring the early years in the context of cultural and social adjustment compared to students from the host country. *BMC Medical Education*, 15(1), 111–111. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-015-0394-2>
- McGuire, K. M., Casanova, S., & Davis, C. H. F. (2016). “I’m a Black female who happens to be Muslim”: Multiple Marginalities of an Immigrant Black Muslim Woman on a Predominantly White Campus. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(3), 316–329. <https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.3.0316>
- McLeod, J. (2001). *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy*. London: SAGE Publications.
- McLeroy, K. R., Bibeau, D., Steckler, A., & Glanz, K. (1988). An ecological perspective on health promotion programs. *Health education quarterly*, 15(4), 351–377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019818801500401>
- Mehdizadeh, N., & Scott, G. (2005). Adjustment problems of Iranian international students in Scotland. *International Education Journal*, 6(4), 484-493.
- Merriam, S. B. (2015). Qualitative research: Designing, implementing, and publishing a study. In *Handbook of research on scholarly publishing and research methods* (pp. 125-140). IGI Global.
- Miller, M. T. (2019). Community expectancy and student mental health: The role of education and social expectations. *Journal of Social Policy and Education*, 12, 1-13.
- Moraya, A. (2013). Influence of culture and culture background knowledge on Saudi students' English language learning (Unpublished master's thesis). Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL.

- Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis. *European journal of general practice, 24*(1), 9-18
- Msengi, C., Msengi, I., Harris, S., & Hopson, M. (2011). International students: A comparison of health status and physical health before and after coming to the United States. *International Education, 41*(1), 59-75.
- Myers, J. E., Sweeney, T. J., & Witmer, J. M. (2000). The wheel of wellness counseling for wellness: A holistic model for treatment planning. *Journal of Counselling & Development, 78*(3), 251-266.
- Naidoo, P., & Cartwright, D. (2020). Where to from Here? Contemplating the Impact of COVID-19 on South African Students and Student Counseling Services in Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, ahead-of-print*(ahead-of-print), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2020.1842279>
- Nasir, N. I. S., & Al-Amin, J. (2006). Creating identity-safe spaces on college campuses for Muslim students. *Change: The Magazine of higher learning, 38*(2), 22-27.
- Kasapoğlu, F. (2020). Examining the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and spiritual well-being. *Spiritual Psychology and Counseling, 5*(3), 341-354.
- Noltmeyer, A. L., Mujic, J., & McLoughlin, C. S. (2012). The history of inequity in education. *Disproportionality in education and special education: A guide to creating more equitable learning environments, 3-22*.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology, 7*, 177-182.
- Padilla-Díaz, M. (2015). Phenomenology in educational qualitative research: Philosophy as science or philosophical science. *International Journal of educational excellence, 1*(2), 101-110.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research, 42*, 533-544.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience, 41-60.
- Pang, H., & Wang, J. (2020). Promoting or prohibiting: Understanding the influence of social media on international students' acculturation process, coping strategies, and psychological consequences. *Telematics and Informatics, 54*, 101454

- Pargament, K. I., Smith, B. W., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. (1998). Patterns of positive and negative religious coping with major life stressors. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, 710-724.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications, inc.
- Posselt, J. (2021). Discrimination, competitiveness, and support in US graduate student mental health. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*.
- Poyrazli, S., & Grahame, K. M. (2007). Barriers to Adjustment: Needs of International Students within a Semi-Urban Campus Community. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 34(1), 28–45.
- Prieto-Welch, S. L. (2016). International student mental health. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2016(156), 53-63. doi: 10.1002/ss.20191
- Rabia, A., & Hazza, M. (2017). Undergraduate Arab International Students' Adjustment to US Universities. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(1), 131-139.
- Rabia, H. A., & Karkouti, I. M. (2017). A qualitative investigation of the factors affecting Arab International students' persistence in the United States. *College Student Journal*, 51(3), 347-354.
- Radcliffe, C., & Lester, H. (2003). Perceived stress during undergraduate medical training: a qualitative study. *Medical education*, 37(1), 32-38
- Rajasekar, J., & Renand, F. (2013). Culture shock in a global world: Factors affecting culture shock experienced by expatriates in Oman and Omani expatriates abroad. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 8(13), 144-160. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v8n13p144>
- Rees, G., & Dinisman, T. (2015). Comparing children's experiences and evaluations of their lives in 11 different countries. *Child Indicators Research*, 8, 5-31.
- Rice, K. G., Choi, C.-C., Zhang, Y., Morero, Y. I., & Anderson, D. (2012). Self-Critical Perfectionism, Acculturative Stress, and Depression Among International Students. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 40(4), 575–600. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000011427061>
- Ryan, M. E., & Twibell, R. S. (2000). Concerns, values, stress, coping, health and educational outcomes of college students who studied abroad. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 24(4), 409-435.
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. (1998). The contours of positive human health. *Psychological inquiry*, 9(1), 1-28.

- Seggie, F. N., & Sanford, G. (2010). Perceptions of female Muslim students who veil: Campus religious climate. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 13, 59-82.
- Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). *Positive psychology: An introduction* (Vol. 55, No. 1, p. 5). American Psychological Association.
- Shammas, D. S. (2009). Post-9/11 Arab and Muslim American community college students: Ethno-religious enclaves and perceived discrimination. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 33(3-4), 283-308
- Sibley, C. G., Greaves, L. M., Satherley, N., Wilson, M. S., Overall, N. C., Lee, C. H., ... & Barlow, F. K. (2020). Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown on trust, attitudes toward government, and well-being. *American psychologist*, 75(5), 618.
- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(6), 699-713.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.08.004>
- Stuen, E.T., Mobarak, A.M. and Maskus, K.E. (2012), Skilled Immigration and Innovation: Evidence from Enrolment Fluctuations in US Doctoral Programmes. *The Economic Journal*, 122: 1143-1176. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2012.02543.x>
- Suldo, S. M., Huebner, E. S., Savage, J., & Thalji, A. (2011). Promoting subjective well-being
- Sullivan, C. (2010). *Predictors of acculturative stress for international students in the United States* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.
- Sweileh, W. M. (2021). Contribution of researchers in the Arab region to peer-reviewed literature on mental health and well-being of university students. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 15(1), 1-11.
- Thernstrom, M. (1997). *Halfway heaven: Diary of a Harvard murder*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Todoran, C., & Peterson, C. (2020). Should they stay or should they go? How the 2017 US travel ban affects international doctoral students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 24(4), 440-455.
- Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms Linking Social Ties and Support to Physical and Mental Health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510395592>
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2000). A multidisciplinary analysis of the nature, meaning, and measurement of trust. *Review of educational research*, 70(4), 547-593.

- Tummala-Narra, P., & Claudius, M. (2013). A Qualitative Examination of Muslim Graduate International Students' Experiences in the United States. *International Perspectives in Psychology : Research, Practice, Consultation*, 2(2), 132–147.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/ipp0000003>
- Uchino, B. N. (2006). Social support and health : A review of physiological processes potentially underlying links to disease outcomes. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 29(4), 377–387.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-006-9056-5>
- Ungar, M. (2011). The social ecology of resilience: addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct. *American journal of orthopsychiatry*, 81(1), 1
- "University of Arkansas International Student Life." College Factual, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2023.
<https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/university-of-arkansas/student-life/international/>.
- UNICEF. (2007). Progress for children: a World fit for children: statistical review.
- U.S. Department of State. (2015, December 11). *What is a graduate student?* U.S. Department of State. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://educationusa.state.gov/your-5-steps-us-study/research-your-options/graduate/what-graduate-student>
- US Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). Sex & gender. National Institutes of Health. Retrieved February 20, 2023, from <https://orwh.od.nih.gov/sex-gender>
- Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & health sciences*, 15(3), 398-405.
- Van Batenburg-Eddes, T., & Jolles, J. (2013). How does emotional wellbeing relate to underachievement in a general population sample of young adolescents: a neurocognitive perspective. *Frontiers in psychology*, 4, 673.
- Van Manen, M. (2016). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Routledge.
- Veerasamy, Y. S., & Ammigan, R. (2022). Reimagining the delivery of international student services during a global pandemic: A case study in the United States. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 26(2), 145-164.
- Wang, K. T., Wei, M., & Chen, H. (2015). Social factors in cross-national adjustment: Subjective well-being trajectories among Chinese international students. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 43, 272–298.
- Ward, C., & Fischer, R. (2008). Personality, cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptation. *Handbook of cultural intelligence: Theory, measurement, and applications*, 159-173.

- World Health Organization. (2014). Mental health: A state of well-being. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/
- Xiaoqiao Zhang, Ga Tin Finneas Wong, Cindy H. Liu, Hyeouk “Chris” Hahm & Justin A. Chen (2022). International student stressors and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative study, *Journal of American College Health*, DOI: 10.1080/07448481.2022.2068015
- Xuesong, H., Xuemei, H., Qianlai, L., Jacobs, S., & Jean-Baptiste, M. (2013). Report of a mental health survey among Chinese international students at Yale University. *Journal of American College Health*, 61(1), 1-8.
- Yan, Z., & Cardinal, B. (2013a). Increasing Asian international college students’ physical activity behavior: A review of the youth physical activity promotion model. *The Health Educator*, 45(1), 35-45.
- Yan, Z., & Cardinal, B. (2013b). Perception of physical activity participation of Chinese female graduate students: A case study. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 84, 384-396.
- Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 16(1), 15-28.

Appendix A



To: Mariam Mohsen Ma Mostafa
From: Douglas J Adams, Chair
IRB Expedited Review
Date: 06/02/2023
Action: **Expedited Approval**
Action Date: 06/02/2023
Protocol #: 2304464475
Study Title: From the Arab World to the United States of America: The Wellness of Arab Graduate Female Students
Expiration Date: 05/09/2024
Last Approval Date:

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Michael T Miller, Investigator

Appendix B

Dear

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that focuses on the wellness of Arab women graduate students. As an Arab women graduate student, myself, I am interested in exploring the experiences of other Arab women graduate students in relation to their physical, emotional, mental and financial wellbeing.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the challenges and strengths of Arab women graduate students and to identify strategies that can improve their wellness. The study will involve a one-on-one interview that will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. The interview will be conducted in English, and your responses will be kept confidential.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without consequences. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with the university or any individuals involved in the study. However, your participation in this study will provide valuable insights that can benefit other Arab women graduate students in the future.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email by with your availability and preferred mode of communication (in-person, phone, or video call). I will then contact you to schedule an interview at a convenient time and place.

Thank you for considering this invitation. Your participation is highly appreciated, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Mariam
Graduate Student, Higher Education
University of Arkansas

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction:

- Briefly introduce myself and the purpose of the study.
- Explain the voluntary nature of participation and confidentiality.
- Obtain informed consent before proceeding with the interview.

Section 1: Transition to the US

1. Can you describe your initial feelings and thoughts when you first arrived in the US for your graduate studies?
2. What challenges or difficulties did you face during your transition from your home country to the US?
3. How did your expectations about studying and living in the US compare to your actual experiences?

Section 2: Cultural Navigation

4. Can you describe some of the similarities and differences you've noticed between your home culture and the US culture?
5. How have you navigated and adapted to these cultural differences during your time in the US?

Section 3: Social Support Networks

6. Can you share your experiences with social support networks, such as peers, mentors, campus programs, and community organizations, in the US?
7. How have these social support networks contributed to your overall wellness during your time in the US?

Section 4: Mental Wellness and Resources

8. Can you describe your experiences related to mental wellness during your academic journey in the US?
9. What mental health resources are available to you on campus, and how have you accessed and utilized these resources?

Section 5: Physical Wellness

10. How do you maintain and promote your physical wellness during your academic journey in the US?
11. What challenges or facilitators have you encountered in maintaining your physical wellness?
12. In what ways do you think food security is related to your physical wellness during your time as a graduate student in the US? Can you share any challenges or strategies you've used to ensure access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food options that contribute to your physical well-being?

Section 6: Financial Challenges and Management

13. Can you describe the financial challenges and stressors you've faced as a graduate student in the US?
14. How have you managed your finances during your time in the US?

Section 7: Coping Strategies

15. What coping strategies have you used to maintain your physical, mental, social, and financial wellness during your time in the US?

Section 8: Perceived Needs and Services

16. What kinds of help and services do you think would be helpful for supporting the overall wellness of Arab women graduate students on campus?

Closing:

- Thank the participant for their time and contribution to the study.
- Reiterate the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation.
- Provide information about any follow-up and potential dissemination of the study's findings.
- Offer the opportunity to ask any questions or provide additional information.