

Love across borders and travel bans

FOR THE LOVE OF HER AND LOVE OF THE UNITED STATES

The effects of political injustices on mental health
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PURPOSE

I examined the effects of sanctions and travel bans on the mental health of people trying to immigrate to the United States. Through this study, I aimed to answer the question, “Is there a relationship between public policy and immigrant mental health?”

*“The tools of democracy work or they fail. If those tools fail, we all fail.”
-M*

PROCEDURE

Through qualitative research methods, I was able to interview an Iranian, University of Wyoming student and his wife—both of whom have been directly impacted by Iranian sanctions and travel bans imposed in 2017. After hearing the couple’s story, I wanted to look at immigration through the lens of mental health. Psychology articles were reviewed, in addition to constructing a timeline of immigration legislation, in conjunction with the couple’s story over the past five years. **Please note: research is more focused on legislation that specifically impacted the subjects of the qualitative interview.*

KEY THEORIES

Propaganda-systematic forms of purposeful persuasion that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions, and actions toward specific targeted audiences for ideological, political or commercial purposes prepared by governments, activists groups or media.

“We assess that most foreign-born, U.S. based, violent extremists, likely radicalized several years after their entry to the United States, limiting the ability of screening and vetting officials to prevent their entry because of national security concerns.”

-Department of Homeland Security Intelligence Assessment, March 2017

It’s not the ways of vetting an immigrant, but rather, the psychological stressors immigrants face within the first three to five years after entry to the United States that could contribute to forms of radicalism.

Mental health studies suggest that assimilation, in the various forms it can take—can itself be a traumatic process, rather than a simple solution to the traumas of immigration.

Migration, a stressful life event, can influence mental health. The psychological stress associated with immigration tends to be concentrated in the first three years after arrival in the United States (Vega & Rumbaut, 1991).

Participants in a 2008 study published in *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* (Vol. 3, No. 2), —all but four of the participants Muslim—revealed fear of hate crimes and threats to their safety, anxiety about the future, isolation and loss of community and stigmatization.

“I talked to my wife and said, ‘Honey, I’m sorry, but you’ll have to stay there.. We have no choice.’”

FUTURE RESEARCH & IMPLICATIONS

More longitudinal studies, across other cultures impacted by United States immigration legislation, would need to be analyzed. Additionally, studying terror attacks or other federal crimes committed by immigrants after their move to the United States, to prove more validity between migration, psychological triggers and its relation to public policy shaped as propaganda.

By carrying out studies and having conversations such as these, it can be a basis for lawmakers to consider laws that help implement preventative health and mental health care for recent immigrants, during their migration transitions. Every day citizens can also begin to think about ways providing support against discrimination.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

M & HIS WIFE

M leaves behind his fiancée in Iran to pursue a PhD in Petroleum Engineering in the United States at University of Wyoming. His fiancée will stay in Iran to finish her studies, then join M in the United States.

M and his then fiancée, decide to get a proxy marriage because the new sanctions would not allow M to go back to Iran to marry his fiancée. An immigration attorney advised that as soon as they got married, M’s fiancée could apply for a tourist visa, because the United States does not recognize proxy marriages.

M’s wife, then began applying for her tourist visa at the Armenian Embassy. Two attempts were made at the Armenian Embassy, two at the Dubai Embassy-- getting denied four times, respectively. She then went to the Turkey Embassy to try applying for her F-2 visa and again, was denied.

M and his wife, upon speaking with other Iranian students going through similar situations, realize M’s wife is likely getting denied for her visa because of M’s degree. He had already been with the department for over two years, but knew he had to make some sort of career change, in order to give his wife more credibility to obtain her visa and come to the United States. M begins to independently study entrepreneurship in his free time.

An opportunity arises for M to become a business counselor at a Wyoming business incubator. The organization was looking for someone with a masters degree and background in science or engineering to work with international students at University of Wyoming. This opportunity would allow for M to obtain his H1B (international worker) visa, which would allow for his wife to apply for an H4 visa.

M walks away from his PhD, after his fourth year in the program, in order to qualify for the job opportunity and declares a masters degree instead. Soon thereafter, M is hired on at the Wyoming business incubator as a Business Counselor.

M receives his H1B visa in December. Soon after, M’s wife goes to apply for her H4 visa, at the Cyprus Embassy on December 27, 2016

January 25-27: On the 25th, M and his wife receive notification that her H4 visa was approved. M’s wife drops her passport off at the Cyprus Embassy on Friday, January 27, while it is technically still the 26th in the United States. Within the next few hours, M’s wife’s visa, fails to get approved because of the executive order.

February 9-11: M’s wife obtains her visa when the executive order was blocked by federal judges. She promptly caught a flight from Istanbul to the United States. **After five years, M and his wife are reunited at DIA.**

LEGISLATIVE

President Obama signs into law, **“Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Human Rights Act of 2012”** which states: “The Secretary of State shall deny a visa to, and the Secretary of Homeland Security shall exclude from the United States, any alien who is **a citizen of Iran that seeks to enter the United States to participate in course work at an institution of higher education [...] to prepare the alien for a career in the energy sector of Iran or in nuclear science, nuclear engineering, or related field.”**

The campaign trail for the 2016 presidential election starts. Donald J. Trump becomes the Republican Party nominee, promising, along the campaign trail, to invoke a “Muslim Ban”, if elected to the presidency. **In November, Trump is elected 45th president of the United States.**

President Trump signs, **“Executive Order #13769: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,”** which banned entrance for 90 days by citizens from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

On February 3, U.S. District Court Judge, James Robart, blocks the ban nationwide. The Ninth Circuit Courts of Appeals rules against reinstating the travel ban on February 9, in the case, **State of Washington v. Trump.** Page 25 of the court ruling states, **“The states argue the Executive Order violates the Equal Protections and Establishment Clauses, because it was intended to disfavor Muslims.”**

To view the entire story and sources, please see handout.