

Epidemiologists call for more visibility of Arab Americans and their health issues

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A group of epidemiologists are advocating for the increased visibility of, and focus on, Arab Americans in discussions about mental and physical health issues in the U.S., in an article published in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*.

"There is no checkbox for Arab/Middle Eastern origin in medical and public [health](#) studies, and there is no Arab American identifier on the U.S. Census," said Boston College Connell School of Nursing Assistant Professor Nadia Abuelezam, lead author of the article "Arab American Health in a Racially Charged U.S."

The article co-authors are Dr. Abdulrahman M. El-Sayed, who served as director of the Detroit Health Department, and Dr. Sandro Galea, Robert A. Knox Professor and Dean at the Boston University School of Public Health.

"The absence of a checkbox has implications for funding," she added. "Since Arab Americans are not a part of a recognized minority group, researchers interested in studying this population cannot access grant funding dedicated to the study of ethnic minorities."

Given the current social and political climate in the U.S., a better understanding of the mental and physical health needs of the broader Arab American population is needed, according to the article's authors.

The impact of stigma, discrimination, and stress has been studied in

other populations in the U.S., such as African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans, note the authors, but not on Arab Americans.

Although there are approximately 3.7 million Arab Americans in the U.S., there has not been a single prospective study examining the health needs of this population.

Abuelezam said that recent waves of immigrants from the Middle East face compounding stressors given that many have fled areas of war or political instability. Media portrayals and foreign policies can make their acculturation more difficult than other ethnic groups.

Ensuring Arab Americans receive improved quality of care and equal attention as other ethnic minorities requires studies to understand their needs and the long-term impact of political instability and discrimination on this [population](#), say the authors. This understanding is predicated on improved identification of this group in medical [public health](#) survey and the US Census.

More information: Nadia N. Abuelezam et al, Arab American Health in a Racially Charged U.S., *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2017.02.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2017.02.021)

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