

# Working with People from the Middle-East

Savannah Holbrook, Student; Erin Keir, Student; Samantha Kimball, Student; Gina Fe G. Causin, Ph.D, Faculty Mentor  
HMS 485, Hospitality Administration, School of Human Sciences, James I. Perkins College of Education

## Abstract

People from the Middle-East encounter a lot of issues in American society. They encounter public humiliation, religious oppression, and violence in many ways. In this assignment we looked at the cause, effect, and resolution of integrating Middle Eastern people into the hospitality workforce. Within our research, we want to look at what the common misconceptions of Middle Eastern people are, what the culture entails, and how businesses in the United States can be more inclusive to Middle Eastern workers.

## Culture

- The Middle East has four distinct culture areas: Arab, Turkish, Iranian and the newly evolved Israeli culture.
  - The Middle East is known as the “cradle of civilizations”.
- Middle Eastern - Food / Beverage Options**
- Grains - wheat and rice (major and preferred sources of staple foods)
  - Flavorings - butter and clarified butter (the tradition and preferred medium of cooking)
  - Meats - lamb and mutton (favored meats of the Middle East)
    - Pork is prohibited in both Judaism and Islam.
  - Vegetables - Cabbage, Spinach and Chard (widely used)
  - Beverages - Turkish coffee ( the most well known beverage of the region), Arak (an alcoholic drink nicknamed “the milk of lions”)

### Etiquette in the Middle East

- Standing when someone enters the room and acknowledging them is a sign of respect in Middle Eastern culture
- Men should always offer their seat to women or elderly people
- Give attention to the right person. Ex. when meeting a man for the first time, the attention should be paid to him and not his wife.
- Do not show the soles of your feet
- Always share your food

### Proper Dress in the Middle East - Men

- Thawb
- Bisht - also known as a mishlah
- Keffiyeh
- Tagiyah
- Agal

### Proper Dress in the Middle East - Women

- Thawb
- Salwar
- Abaya - also known as a chador in Iran
- Hijab
- Niqab
- Burqua

## Issues in the Workforce

- Religious Oppression
  - A lot of muslim practising employees feel ashamed of their religion. This then causes internal conflict.
- Uniform
- Pre-Salah
  - Employees struggle to have multiple breaks in the day to pray and to also have access to running water so that they can wash their feet.
- Salah
  - Muslim employees are facing accommodations to get permits to allow them to leave for Salah on Fridays at Mosques. Most Muslim employees request to either come in early or work late to make up the time they would use for prayer. Most of the time, the request is denied.
- Nutrition
- Discrimination
  - Not long after the 9/11 attacks there were an increase in reports and complaints to the EEOC regarding religious discrimination within the workplace.
- The Hijab
  - There have been multiple court cases where businesses have unlawfully fired or refused to hire women because of their hijab. some businesses have stated that wearing a hijab or khimar violates the dress code, therefore, they cannot be worn.
- No pork
  - For Muslims, even touching pork violates the tenet of Islam. This is a very important part of the religion and when Muslims apply to work in meat processing plates, they are forced to sign a page stating that they will not refuse to handle pork.

### These are “problems” for non-Muslims because:

- some people feel like Muslims are privileged if they are being granted these special requests.
- Non-Muslim practising people do not believe that they should be given multiple breaks to pray, should not be able to wear things out of dress code, and should not have special job preferences because of their religion.
- Employers also don’t like to grant these special privileges because they feel like they must grant special privileges to everyone.

## Stereotypes

- “All Arabs are Muslim.”
  - This is actually the biggest misconception about Arabs. The majority of the Muslim population is actually outside of the Arabian culture. A lot of Arabs actually practice Judaism or Christianity.
- “Arab women are oppressed.” / “Arab men are oppressive and violent.”
  - It is true that many Arab countries are behind on the issues of women’s rights, however, a lot of women are actually successful and educated.

With these stereotypes, Arabs and Middle Eastern people are faced with a lot of negativity.

- Name calling
  - Racial slurs
- violence
  - Womens hijab being snatched off in public
- Discrimination
  - Treated poorly in public setting
- Religious oppressions (Muslim Practicing)
  - Aren’t able to pray adequately or fired because of religious dedication

## Conclusion

The things that can be resolved are:

- Have lower designated sinks in bathrooms - Middle Eastern people wash their feet prior to prayer. Having regular height sinks creates a workplace hazard because of sinks ripping out of walls and causing spills.
- Allow longer breaks for prayer - Prayer on Friday takes longer than any other day of the week therefore employees need a longer lunch break on Friday’s.
- Allow pre-prayer - This includes letting employees take breaks to pray several times a day
- Allow for work in other parts of meat packing plants - Middle Eastern workers cannot work with pork. They also cannot work with any type of meat unless it is Halal.
- Have on-site prayer rooms designated for employees
- Have a no tolerance policy for islamophobia - This can include a uniform policy.
- Be more inclusive of employees wearing hijabs and/or any other traditional dress
- Allow for more Middle Eastern people to hold higher positions



## References

- Chang, K. K. (2016, March 15). What Companies Can Do When Work and Religion Conflict. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2016/03/what-companies-can-do-when-work-and-religion-conflict>
- Gosseen, R. I. (n.d.). Accommodating Islam in the Workplace: A Work in Progress | Primerus. Retrieved from <https://www.primerus.com/business-law-articles/accommodating-islam-in-the-workplace-a-work-in-progress-332011.htm>
- Harr, J. (2017, October 24). 11 Surprising Etiquette Rules to Understand Before Visiting an Arab Country. Retrieved from [https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/united-arab-emirates/articles/11-rules-of-etiquette-important-in-arab-culture/introduction-to-the-middle-east-\(n.d.\)](https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/united-arab-emirates/articles/11-rules-of-etiquette-important-in-arab-culture/introduction-to-the-middle-east-(n.d.)). Retrieved from <https://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Introduction-to-the-Middle-East.html>
- Middle Eastern cuisine. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle\\_Eastern\\_cuisine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Eastern_cuisine)
- Middle Eastern Dress Vocabulary. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.csames.illinois.edu/documents/outreach/Middle\\_Eastern\\_Dress\\_Vocabulary.pdf](http://www.csames.illinois.edu/documents/outreach/Middle_Eastern_Dress_Vocabulary.pdf)
- Podikunju-Hussain, S. (n.d.). Working With Muslims: Perspectives and Suggestions for Counseling. Retrieved from <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/vistas/working-with-muslims-perspectives-and-suggestions-for-counseling.pdf?sfvrsn=4>
- Sharif, A. (2017, October 9). Here Are 11 Stereotypes All Arabs Hate. Retrieved from <https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/articles/11-stereotypes-all-arabs-hate/>
- U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream. (2017, July 26). Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/findings-from-pew-research-centers-2017-survey-of-us-muslims/>
- Voilmer, S. (2015, January 1). How to mind your manners in the Middle East. Retrieved from <https://www.journalofaccountancy.com/issues/2015/jan/middle-east-business-culture.html>
- Working with Muslim Employees. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://ing.org/working-with-muslim-employees/>