

Armenian Parenting Seminar Project Report

Presenter: Avo Soltanian, LMFT

Organization Name: Anchor Counseling Group, Inc.

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Introduction

Background: Over the past 20 to 30 years, many Armenian immigrants have settled in Southern California. The Armenian community faces significant gaps in mental health services, and many immigrants encounter challenges related to acculturation, mental health, and other issues. These difficulties often contribute to struggles with parenting and a lack of understanding regarding their children's mental health needs. Therefore, this presenter requested The Underserved Cultural Committee (USCC) Capacity Building program to approve this project, and the committee, with a majority of votes, approved the Armenian Parenting seminar to be presented to the Armenian community, which is focused on providing parenting support for the Armenian community to address these challenges.

Purpose: The Armenian community is currently facing significant mental health challenges, particularly concerning parenting and understanding mental health issues. Many Armenian families living in Southern California are new immigrants, and due to a lack of acculturation and education, they often struggle to recognize and address their children's mental health needs. In the post-COVID era, many Armenian parents feel helpless about how to tackle these challenges and are urgently seeking guidance and mental health education from professionals within their community.

The seminars aimed to assist Armenian parents in understanding the current dynamics and challenges of parenting. Participants learned essential communication skills and effective parenting techniques. They also gained knowledge about various mental illnesses and how to recognize these conditions in their children. Additionally, the seminars provided information about community mental health resources available to them.

Target Audience: The target audience includes parents of school-aged children, as well as teachers, coaches, and counselors.

Project Description

Planning: Since the beginning of this year, we have been reaching out to various schools and organizations to identify potential hosts for our seminar. This task was quite challenging for several reasons. Initially, we focused on private schools, assuming they would be interested in our offering. However, we quickly realized this was not necessarily the case. We then began contacting public school districts and other organizations.

We contacted 27 Armenian private schools in Glendale, Pasadena, North Hollywood, Encino, Van Nuys, and Montebello. Many schools brushed off our inquiries and only provided general contact emails. Some schools appeared more interested, leading us to connect directly with the directors and principals. Out of the schools we contacted, seven explicitly stated they were not interested, while three were intrigued and engaged in scheduling a date. Most private schools did not yield positive responses despite our frequent follow-ups, with most remaining uninterested. However, the private Armenian schools that agreed to host us for this seminar are Rose and Alex Pilibos Armenian School, Armenian Mesrobian School, and Merdinian Armenian Evangelical School.

We approached some non-Armenian private schools in Glendale in addition to Armenian private schools. We managed to arrange a parenting seminar at Grandview Elementary School.

We also reached out to public schools, which proved to be more challenging since the schools themselves have no control over the events that take place. We needed to go through the school districts. We contacted four districts with the highest Armenian populations: Glendale Unified School District, Burbank Unified School District, Pasadena Unified School District, and Los Angeles Unified School District. We spoke with representatives and emailed our information; however, Glendale USD was the only district that responded. We were able to schedule a couple of seminars with schools in that district. The public schools that agreed to host us for this seminar are as follows: Glendale High School, Glenoaks Elementary School, R D White Elementary School, and Mark Keppel Elementary School. However, it should be noted that due to a lack of parent registration for the seminar, the seminars were canceled for R D White School and Mark Keppel Elementary School.

In addition to schools, we contacted 21 other Armenian organizations, such as dance studios, libraries, different immigration foundations, and sports clubs (such as Homenetmen, Glendale Ararat, and Sepan). The dance studios were not interested. We tried calling a few of them, but they all gave us the same answer. We hoped the sports clubs might be interested but could not speak with them. We left many voicemails and sent our information to the emails provided on their websites but received no response. Most other places did not pick up our calls, so we never got to speak with many organizations. However, we were able to contact some organizations, and we were able to present the Armenian Parenting Seminar at the Armenian Society of Los Angeles, IMX Auto Buying Center, Glendale Community Center (For Cal-Works students), and Anchor Counseling Center.

We soon realized that it was difficult to contact Armenian organizations. Therefore, we contacted Glendale community libraries and secured three for the seminar presentation. We conducted seminars at Montrose Library and Grandview Library. Unfortunately, we had to cancel the Pacific Library presentation and our second presentation at Montrose Library due to a lack of participation.

As you noticed above, our primary marketing tool has been calling the Armenian organization and sending emails. In addition, we utilized Facebook to advertise for these seminars, which yielded overall positive results. For one month, we tried to advertise Armenian Parenting seminars on the US Armenia television station but did not get many positive results.

Content Overview: The following are topics that we covered in our seminars:

- Traditional Armenian Family
- Armenian American Family
- Effects of immigration on Armenian families
- The acculturation gap
- Parentification
- Healthy boundaries, healthy family
- Helping your children to become independent
- How to bond with your child
- Three parenting styles
- Permissive parenting
- Authoritarian parenting
- Authoritative parenting
- Common mental health conditions in children and adolescents
- Mental health conditions in Armenians
- Intergenerational trauma
- Reactive mind
- Bullying
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Depression in children
- Anxiety disorder
- Internet Addiction Disorder
- Drug abuse in adolescents
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- What is the cost of not talking openly about mental health
- Parenting yourself

Methodology: The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Underserved Cultural Committee's (UsCC) Statement of Work (SOW) required us to present 12 in-person and two virtual Armenian Parenting Seminars. We exceeded this requirement by delivering 17 seminars, 13 of which were in-person and four virtual—the presenter aimed to facilitate the workshops in a way that encouraged more interaction with parents and participants.

Each presentation began with an introduction of the presenter and an explanation of UsCC's goals and intentions for the Armenian community. Before each presentation, we administered a pre-test to measure participants' confidence and knowledge regarding parenting issues. At the end of each seminar, we provided a post-test to assess any changes in their understanding.

Additionally, participants were asked to fill out an evaluation form for the workshop and received a community resource list for mental health.

Implementation

Locations, Dates, and Number of Attendance:

Date	Venue	In-person/Virtual	# of Participants	# of Armenian Participants	# of non-Armenian Participants
02-08-24	IMX	In-person	20	18	2
04-11-24	Armenian Society	In-person	19	16	3
04-15-24	Mesrobian	In-person	6	4	2
04-26-24	Merdinian	In-person	6	6	0
05-16-24	Armenian Society	In-person	11	9	2
05-03-24	Merdinian	In-person	9	9	0
05-09-24	Glendale High	In-person	13	12	1
05-13-24	Glenoaks Elementary	Virtual	11	8	3
05-29-24	CalWORKs	Virtual	19	15	4
05-30-24	Montrose Library	In-person	7	2	5
06-20-24	ACG	Virtual	13	8	5
09-23-24	Grandview Library	In-person	11	4	7
9-26-24	Merdinian	In-person	11	11	0
10-17-24	Grandview Preschool	In-person	23	16	7
10-18-24	Merdinian	In-person	10	10	0
10-24-24	Mesrobian	Virtual	23	23	0
10-29-24	Pilibos	In-person	15	15	0
	Total		227	186	41

Facilitator: Avo Soltanian, LMFT, is the Director and founder of Anchor Counseling Group, which provides counseling services to hundreds of Armenian families annually. He has been practicing psychotherapy in Southern California for 20 years and has extensive experience

treating psychological disorders and counseling Armenian families. He has also trained many clinicians to work with the Armenian underserved population.

He has worked for organizations such as College Hospital, Glendale Adventist Medical Center, MCLA Psychiatric Medical Group, and The Walt Disney Company. Avo Soltanian earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees from UCLA and his Master of Science in clinical psychology from California State University of Fullerton.

In collaboration with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, Avo Soltanian is dedicated to assisting Armenian families in overcoming today's parenting challenges. He staunchly believes that mental health and mindful parenting are the cornerstones of any harmonious family.

Evaluation

Feedback Collection: We collected pre-tests and post-tests to measure participants' knowledge and confidence regarding parenting, and we surveyed the evaluation of the seminar. Below is a sample of the survey:

Armenian Parenting Seminar Pre-Post Test

Please answer the following questions:

What is your name? _____

How old are you? _____

Are you: _____ Male _____ Female

1. I am feeling confident about my parenting skills:

1	2	3	4	5
None		Some		A lot

2. I am knowledgeable regarding childhood mental health:

1	2	3	4	5
None		Some		A lot

3. I am aware of how our immigration to the United States affected my family:

1	2	3	4	5
None		Some		A lot

4. I am aware of today's parenting challenges:

1	2	3	4	5
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5. I am confident in how to talk to my children so they feel understood:

1
None

3 Some

A lot

5
A lot

6. I am confident in how to deal with my child's behavior problem:

1
None

3 Some

5
A lot

7. I am aware and knowledgeable of how to bond with my child:

1
None

3 Some

5
A lot

8. I am knowledgeable and aware of how to get help regarding parenting issues and my child's mental health:

1
None

3
Some

5
A lot

Seminar Title: Armenian Parenting Seminar

Seminar Date: Click here to enter text.

Location:

Please take a few minutes to fill out this seminar evaluation form. Your comments will be used to improve future offerings of this seminar.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
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1. Overall, I was satisfied with the seminar presentation.

1 2 3 4

2. SEMINAR CONTENT:

a. The seminar met the stated objectives.

1 2 3 4

b. The information I received was helpful.

1 2 3 4

c. I would recommend this seminar.

1 2 3 4

3. **SPEAKER EVALUATION:**

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| a. The speaker presented the information clearly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. The speaker responded well to the participants. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. The speaker was knowledgeable on the subject. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
4. What part(s) of the seminar did you like best, and why?
5. What part(s) of the seminar did you like least, and why?
6. What other seminar topics would interest you?

Outcomes: A total of 227 people participated in the Armenian Parenting Seminars. We collected 135 pre-and post-surveys, indicating that 40% of participants did not complete the pre-and post-test surveys. The reasons for this will be discussed in the Lesson Learned section. Scores from incomplete or blank surveys were not entered.

The pre-and post-test consisted of 8 questions designed to measure parents' confidence in their parenting skills and their knowledge of parenting and mental health issues in children. The questions were on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with one being "strongly disagree" and five being "strongly agree." Therefore, the total score for the eight questions ranged from 8 (indicating the lowest score in parenting skills and knowledge) to 40 (indicating the highest score in parenting skills and knowledge). The mean pre-test score for the 135 participants was 29, and the mean post-test score was 33. The increase in scores from 29 (pre-test) to 33 (post-test) is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that the seminar had a measurable positive impact on participants' knowledge and confidence regarding parenting.

We also surveyed participants' evaluations of the seminar. They were presented with seven questions on a Likert scale from 1 to 4. They measured their overall satisfaction with the workshop, whether the seminar met its stated objectives, its helpfulness, whether they would recommend the seminar, and the speaker's responsiveness and knowledge. One hundred forty-seven participants completed the seminar evaluation forms, meaning that 65% of participants completed this form. When we combined all seven questions, the average score was 3.93. Therefore, most participants strongly agreed that the seminar was satisfactory and met its objectives.

In the evaluation form, we asked participants what parts of the seminar they liked best and why. Below are the participants' responses, which are very heartwarming and encouraging. They indicate that the workshop had a positive impact on participants.

“Overall parenting guide about breaking a cycle”
“Parentification relates to many people.”
“The slide show was helpful.”
“I learned much about parenting.”
“Parentification”
“Examples of real-life situations”
“I like the slides on different parenting styles and the importance of parenting yourself.”
“Intergenerational trauma, not everyone thinks about trauma.”
“Parentification slide was great.”
“Overall, it covered a lot of topics.”
“Learning about how a parent's mental health can affect a child's well-being.”
“How being a supportive parent has a positive impact.”
“Parenting yourself, allowing yourself to make mistakes and be comfortable correcting them.”
“I liked where it talked about how parenting doesn't start with the child but ourselves, the parent.”
“The idea of mental health in children but also the middle ground of authoritative parenting”
“Discussion on parentification”
“How to talk to kids about internet addiction.”
“Parenting myself to be more connected.”
“Interactive”
“Emphasis on parent impact”
“How to better communicate with my child.”
“Parenting skills”
“Parenting yourself”
“Everything”
“How to handle issues with teens and how to respond.”
“I liked how the speaker talked about helping children become independent.”
“Parentification”
“About mental health.”
“Parenting skills”
“Connecting with Kids”
“Parenting styles, how to give responsibilities, boundaries with your kids, because this information helps me on improving my parenting and be a better parent for my kids.”
“Bonding with your child”
“How to make the bond with children.”
“Three styles of parenting”
“The topic of parenting styles and children's mental health. The importance of finding the beauty in yourself, to take care of others, you need to take yourself.”
“Everything learned so much.”
“The insight of family dynamics in Armenian culture and similarities in my culture”
“Seemed very knowledgeable and personable.”
“Discussion of different issues that can impact children and reminder to step back and come back”
“I like discussion and interaction.”
“All of them”
“All of the seminar”

“All information presented in the seminar was helpful.”

“Overall, it was a good interaction.”

“All the parts of the seminar were helpful.”

“Armenian parents need more education regarding parenting. Most of us are in denial. We hide our childhood issues and problems. A seminar like this is mind-opening as our children are second or third-generation.”

“I really liked the parentification slide.”

“I liked learning about parenthood struggles and strategies to overcome those struggles.”

“Focus on family values and parenting/Importance of communication.”

“Learning about parentification and reflective listening.”

“Review of parenting styles, parentification”

“Topic and presentation style”

“It was really refreshing to have this course offered by the school. I wish more parents would come. It would improve the caliber of the kids that attend the school. Many of the topics discussed are things we already know, but hearing it again is helpful and reassuring.”

“Relatable to culture.”

“Examples, it was helpful.”

“Complete openness”

“Extremely relevant for Armenian parents.”

“Use of personal experiences”

“Parentification and boundaries, particularly emotional parentification”

“Parentification was very important for me.”

“Parentification, Reactive Minds, Bonds”

“All of them”

“Parenting style. It helped me understand my parenting style and how I can improve it.”

“Parenting styles”

“Emotional parentification because I didn’t know about it.”

“How to react to child's feelings.”

“Instructor”

“Different parenting style”

“Examples given”

“Examples”

“Interesting points of view were covered.”

“Very easy to understand subject, well presented.”

“Open dialog”

“Parentification, trauma”

“Discussion on parentification, authoritative parenting, great speaker, clear”

“Authoritative and examples”

“Parenting styles”

“Parenting is not about kids, but your parents.”

“Overall approach, cultural understanding, examples that were provided”

“Soltanian’s personal history helped inform his presentation.”

“It was very relatable.”
“Examples about parenting with boys/how to engage children to help them to open up.”
“At the end, hearing the quote ‘The greatest burden a child must bear is the unlived life of its parents.’”
“Parenting yourself, anxiety, childhood disorders.”
“The excellent real-life examples”
“Learning about our cultural traumas”
“All questions were answered clearly.”
“Every part”
“The last part is about trying to understand ourselves first.”
“How to encourage children to communicate.”
“I liked the whole seminar.”
“Totally all parts”
“The whole seminar was wonderful.”
“Speaking about boundaries and parenting styles.”
“The part that talks about parenting relationship with kids”
“How to manage and transform parents’ challenges and save our kids to avoid traumas.”
“All parts are exciting.”
“All the important topics”
“Boundaries and how to approach”
“Seminar was incredibly informative.”
“The importance of taking care of our trauma and anxiety to help us be a better parent.”
“Really enjoyed the information on parenting styles and depression and anxiety in children.”
“I liked the scenario examples that were discussed.”
“Parentification”
“Social media overview”
“Setting boundaries”
“Bonding with children”

Challenges: The main issues we faced in presenting the Armenian parenting seminar were the stigma associated with receiving mental health support from professionals and the mistrust of Armenians from others. Armenians are a collectivist culture, and their identity is deeply rooted in their family. Therefore, family honor is significant, and receiving mental health support can bring shame to the family's honor. Mental health topics are usually taboo in traditional Armenian families, and they often hide any family member who has a mental illness. This stigma around receiving mental health support from professionals was one of the main obstacles we faced.

For example, at a seminar held at Pacific Park Library, there were no participants initially. One of the librarians went to the waiting room where five to six Armenian parents were waiting for their children's Armenian classes to end. While waiting, the librarian invited them to the parenting seminar, but all six women declined, stating they did not need the service. Consequently, the presenter canceled the workshop due to a lack of participants.

Another example of the stigma was evident when participants at the Armenian parenting seminars were asked to write or sign in. There was some resistance to providing their names. Interestingly, some Armenian participants did not write their names, wrote fake names, or only provided their first names during virtual seminars. These are all indications of the significant resistance within the Armenian community to receiving mental health services.

Armenians are a very traumatized nation, having experienced genocide and, more recently, many wars with Azerbaijan. According to some surveys, Armenians have higher rates of mental illness compared to other nations. Research shows that Armenians are experiencing intergenerational trauma, which causes mistrust towards others. We noticed this mistrust when marketing the Armenian parenting seminar, particularly towards the government and the Department of Mental Health.

When marketing to Armenian private schools, we found that some schools were not open to hosting the seminar because they did not know the presenter, and there was some mistrust. This issue was observed very clearly. For example, this presenter, Avo Soltanian, and the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health representative, Dr. Yaralyan, went to AGBU Armenian School to meet some of the principals in that school. There was so much resistance to meeting to discuss the seminar. After 30 minutes of waiting, they said that the school principals were too busy to meet with the presenter and Dr. Yaralyan (previously, we had sent at least four emails correspondence to the AGBU's psychologist, but we did not get any clear answer about whether they want to host us or no. There, we were compelled to go and visit them face to face). Another observation of this mistrust from the Armenian private school was that if the presenter knew some people in the school, the schools were much more open to the idea of being a host versus schools that did not know the presenter.

Another issue contributing to the resistance was the recent backlash against the Fair Education Act, which mandates teaching LGBTQ+ history in California public schools. Some Armenian private schools were very concerned that the seminar material might address sexual orientation topics. The presenter had to reassure them that no such issues would be discussed.

When we approached Glendale Unified Public School District, the Wellness Center director informed us that she would try to help us host a presentation in public schools. However, she warned us that not many people might attend due to the significant mistrust of Armenian parents towards the school district. During 2023 and 2024, there were many demonstrations by Armenian parents against the Los Angeles and Glendale School Districts regarding the Fair Education Act. Armenian parents believe that schools have no right to teach their children about sexual orientation, which contributed to their reluctance to participate in the parenting seminar.

Additionally, when we asked some parents why it was challenging to attend the seminar, they mentioned time constraints as an issue. Many parents work long hours and are very busy raising

their kids, which we believe was another obstacle preventing them from attending the free parenting seminars.

Discussion

Impact: We presented 17 seminars, in which 227 people participated. We believe these seminars helped parents learn about essential parenting topics. Participants expressed that they benefited from these seminars. However, specific issues drew significant attention and opened participants' eyes to their interactions with their children.

For example, the topic of parentification became a significant point of discussion, with many parents wanting to spend more time discussing it. Another topic that garnered much attention was different parenting styles, which parents found helpful in gauging their parenting approaches. Some parents stated that they had never heard about intergenerational trauma before. This topic brought to participants' attention how their trauma may negatively influence their parenting skills. They appreciated the explanations about different mental health disorders and how to help their children, which helped them address their children's mental health needs.

Parents were relieved to hear that everyone, including the presenter, makes mistakes in parenting. Some parents found the statement that parenting is about themselves rather than their children to be thought-provoking, prompting them to reflect on their mental health issues. Participants liked the concept of "Parenting yourself," understanding that it will burden their children if they don't live their lives to the fullest.

Participants appreciated the interactive presentation style and the live examples. Some expressed that they had strategies to handle their children's excessive internet use after the seminar. Many participants liked the video depicting the interaction between a mother and child (Still Face Experiment). They were intrigued by the idea that a child needs their parent's reflective face and communication from a very young age.

Participants expressed that these kinds of seminars should be ongoing and that more Armenian parents need to participate. Another impact of the workshop was that it helped destigmatize mental health topics and showed that receiving help or participating in a parenting seminar is not wrong. This kind of seminar can illustrate to the community the importance of being open to discussing mental health challenges and can encourage more participation in such workshops. It can also motivate mental health professionals to present these kinds of seminars without hesitation.

Lessons Learned: We learned that cold calls or emails were ineffective in finding a host for our seminars. Connections are essential; finding well-connected people in the community is crucial to help promote the workshops. We noticed that Armenian private school administrators were

much more motivated to help us than public school administrators. Some public school administrators appeared apathetic and discouraged, mainly due to the backlash from the Armenian community and other communities against LGBTQ+-mandated education in public schools over the last two years. There was a noticeable tension between public school administrators and parents. Therefore, we should focus more on Armenian private schools for similar future projects.

Regarding marketing, we found that Facebook is an effective tool, whereas Armenian TV stations did not yield good results. It is important to use marketing tools and strategies that make the seminar more attractive and playful rather than serious. We noticed increased interest when we changed the seminar's name from "Armenian Parenting Seminar" to "Raising Resilient Children." The new name was more inclusive and shifted the focus from parents to children. This marketing strategy is essential to attract more participants, considering the Armenian community's strong resistance to seeking help and discussing mental health.

Recording all seminars is essential for using these videos as learning tools for the presenter and uploading them on YouTube or other social media platforms for a wider audience. Many Armenians in the diaspora or Armenia could have benefited from these seminars. Unfortunately, we could not record them due to logistical issues and a lack of proper equipment. In the future, we must consider purchasing or renting the necessary equipment to upload these seminars on social media.

As mentioned, many participants did not fill out pre-and post-tests and evaluation forms. In some seminars, the presenter was not assisted in collecting the surveys. Many participants did not want to complete the forms due to privacy issues and stigma. In the future, we need to implement a system, perhaps using a numbering system, to assist in collecting more surveys.

Broader Implications: These seminars are crucial for the Armenian community for several reasons. Many Armenian parents are new to this country, and such seminars can help bridge the cultural gap between parents and their children. They teach parents the cultural norms of their newly adopted country and address potential cultural misunderstandings that can arise between parents, children, and schools.

Additionally, these seminars help immigrant parents understand the educational and healthcare systems. To support this, we provided parents with a list of community resources for mental health at the end of each seminar.

Furthermore, these seminars play a vital role in reducing the stigma around mental health. They create safe spaces, educate families about mental health, destigmatize seeking help, and offer culturally sensitive resources. By learning about mental health, parents will be better equipped to recognize mental health issues in their children.

Conclusion

The Armenian Parenting Seminar successfully met its statement of purpose. We conducted 17 seminars, including 13 in-person and four virtual sessions, reaching Armenian parents in various settings such as Armenian private schools, public schools, Armenian societies, and public libraries.

In these seminars, we addressed crucial topics related to parenting and mental health issues in children. The presenter covered essential subjects, including the struggles of Armenian immigrant children and how parents can support them. We discussed the acculturation gap between parents and their children and how parents can engage their children in bi-cultural discussions and explore their identities.

Parents showed great interest in understanding the adverse effects of parentification and the importance of setting appropriate boundaries to protect children from emotional parentification. They were educated on the significance of bonding with their children and how secure attachment contributes to a child's healthy sense of self. The three parenting styles—permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative—were presented, helping parents gauge their styles relative to these models.

We also delved into mental health issues within the Armenian community and the impact of intergenerational trauma on Armenian parents. The presenter discussed common mental health issues in children, teaching parents how to recognize these conditions and understand available treatments. Parents were encouraged to reflect on how parenting is not just about their children but also about themselves. They were urged to parent themselves and gain self-awareness to raise healthy and resilient children.

Our quantitative survey, including pre-and post-tests, indicated statistically significant improvements in parents' confidence and knowledge regarding parenting issues. Additionally, qualitative feedback, such as participants' testimonies, demonstrated the seminar's positive impact on parents.

These seminars have brought the Armenian community one step closer to destigmatizing and discussing important topics like parenting and mental health. Armenian parents, private school teachers, and administrators have expressed the need for continued meaningful discussions within the community. The presenter and his assistants are humbled to have presented this seminar to the Armenian community. Encouraged by the positive response, we plan to offer more workshops on parentification, setting boundaries regarding electronics, and other relevant issues.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all Eastern European and Middle Eastern subcommittee members for their support and kindness. We especially thank Dr. Anna Yaralyan for her consistent assistance and advice. Special thanks also go to Cierra Serrano and Alphina Holovchenko for their tireless assistance in this project.

Best regards,

Avo Soltanian, LMFT