Counseling Muslims: Understanding the impact of 9/11 on the wellness of Muslims in the US

Presenter

Irmak Basaran, M.A., PCCI

irmakbasaran@gmail.com

Abstract

Muslims are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States (U.S.) with an estimated 7 million people and they have increasingly been targets of discrimination and hostility since 9/11 (Abu-Ras, Gheith, & Cournos, 2008; Ahmed & Reddy, 2007; Padela & Heisler, 2010; UC Berkeley & CAIR, 2010). Despite the growing needs for mental health services, Muslim individuals in the U.S. avoid seeking professional support from counselors due to the cultural taboos about therapy and skepticism about counselors' cultural competency (Abu-Ras et al., 2008; Ahmed & Reddy, 2007). Muslim clients are also underserved by mental health professionals because of counselors' lack of knowledge of and experience with empirically supported interventions and Muslims' issues (Ahmed & Reddy, 2007). Given the challenge of a limited number of empirical studies on the needs of Muslims and the treatment methodologies (Abdel-Khalek, 2010; Ahmed & Reddy, 2007; Ali, Milstein, & Marzuk, 2005; Padela & Heisler, 2010), this roundtable session is designed to foster multicultural awareness, familiarize counselors and trainees with Muslim identity, cultural influences and their impacts on clinical issues, introduce participants to culturally responsive interventions (Ibrahim & Dykeman, 2011), and consequently encourage further work in that vein. The objective of the proposed session is to initiate a critical review of the literature, with the intention of examining the vignettes that best exemplify the impacts of Islamophobia on Muslims in the U.S. and counseling (e.g. transference and countertransference issues) and the roles of cultural competency and advocacy in helping Muslim clients.

This session will include a review of the terminology around the Islamic faith and its reflection in American society; an analysis of Muslim identity; an examination of the common issues of Muslims, concentrated on Islamophobia and forms of discrimination against Muslims,

supported with statistical data; and an identification of the mental health needs of Muslim

individuals in the U.S. Suggestions and discussions around counseling Muslims, advocacy and

cultural competency will be integrated throughout the session and participants will be provided

with handouts that present counseling and advocacy tips. The exercises based on vignettes will

focus on developing empathy for Muslim clients, unpacking therapists' own biases, assumptions

and values, fostering competencies in addressing biases, building skills and attitudes for more

effective work with Muslim clients, and promoting advocacy.

Session Agenda

- Welcome and Introduction
- Muslim Identity and Muslims in the United States
- Why is it important to learn how to support Muslims?
- Counseling Muslims
    - Assessment and conceptualization of Muslims
        - Cultural Identity and Worldview Assessment
            - Ethnicity, race, or culture
            - Gender
            - Sexual orientation
            - Age and life stage
            - Generation in the United States
            - The environment the client lives in and grew up in
            - Ability/disability
        - The role of religiosity and spirituality
        - Level of acculturation
        - Negative experiences
    - Common presenting issues of Muslims
    - Islamophobia and its effects on the mental health of Muslims
    - Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvIDqgyK8fw&feature=related
    - Advocacy Suggestions
- Vignettes
- Q&A

References

Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2010*). Quality of life, subjective well-being, and religiosity in Muslim college students. *Quality of Life Research: An International Journal of Quality of Life Aspects of Treatment, Care & Rehabilitation, 19*(8), 1133-1143.

Abu-Ras, W., Gheith, A., Cournos, F. (2008). The Imam's Role in Mental Health Promotion: A Study at 22 Mosques in New York City's Muslim Community. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 3:155–176.

Ahmed, S. & Reddy L. A. (2007). Understanding the Mental Health Needs of American Muslims: Recommendations and Considerations for Practice. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *35*(4), 207-218.

Ali, O. M., Milstein, G., & Marzuk, P. M. (February 2005). The Imam's Role in Meeting the Counseling Needs of Muslim Communities in the United States. *Psychiatric Services. 56*(2), 202-205

Ibrahim, F. A., & Dykeman, C. (2011). Counseling Muslim Americans: Cultural and Spiritual Assessments. *Journal Of Counseling & Development*, *89*(4), 387-396.

Padela, A. I.& Heisler, M. (February 2010). The Association of Perceived Abuse and Discrimination After September 11, 2001, with Psychological Distress, Level of Happiness, and Health Status Among Arab Americans*. American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 100, No. 2, 284-291.

UC Berkeley & CAIR. (December 2010). *Islamophobia and Its Impact in the United States: Same Hate, New Target.* Washington, DC: CAIR