

Working with Muslims

Best practice guidelines for social
workers



Session Outline

- Introduction to the topic
- Irish Muslim Community
- Dissertation overview
- Social Work values and working with Muslims
- Tips for Best Practice
- Questions

Interest in the area

Experience as a Muslim social care worker

Interest in advocacy & social justice issues

Lived experience as a Muslim accessing services

Work with ethnic minority families

Irish Muslim Community

- Over 60,000 Muslims in Ireland (as of 2016 census)
- Diverse community: European, African, Asian, Arab descent – cultural and religious factors can both influence lifestyle choices
- Islamophobia in Ireland; verbal abuse, physical assaults
- Collectivist society; differs from Western/individualistic societies
- Core principals of Islam (i.e., fasting/praying/charity etc)



Dissertation: *“Working with Muslim families involved in Child Protection systems”*

Three research questions:

- *1) What are the experiences of Muslim families involved in child protection services?*
- *2) How do child protection social workers currently work with Muslim families?*
- *3) What are best practice guidelines for working with Muslim families involved in child protection services?*

Dissertation: *“Working with Muslim families involved in Child Protection systems”*

1. Experiences of Muslim and ethnic minority families: Key themes

- Religious and cultural influences on child-rearing not considered by social workers
- Pressure from professionals to rear children in ways that are deemed the ‘norm’
- Power imbalances: Muslim and ethnic minority families were unaware of their rights, or the social work role
- Reluctance to engage due to fear of experiencing religious or cultural discrimination or the fear of having their children removed

Dissertation: *“Working with Muslim families involved in Child Protection systems”*

2. How do child protection social workers currently work with Muslim families: Key themes

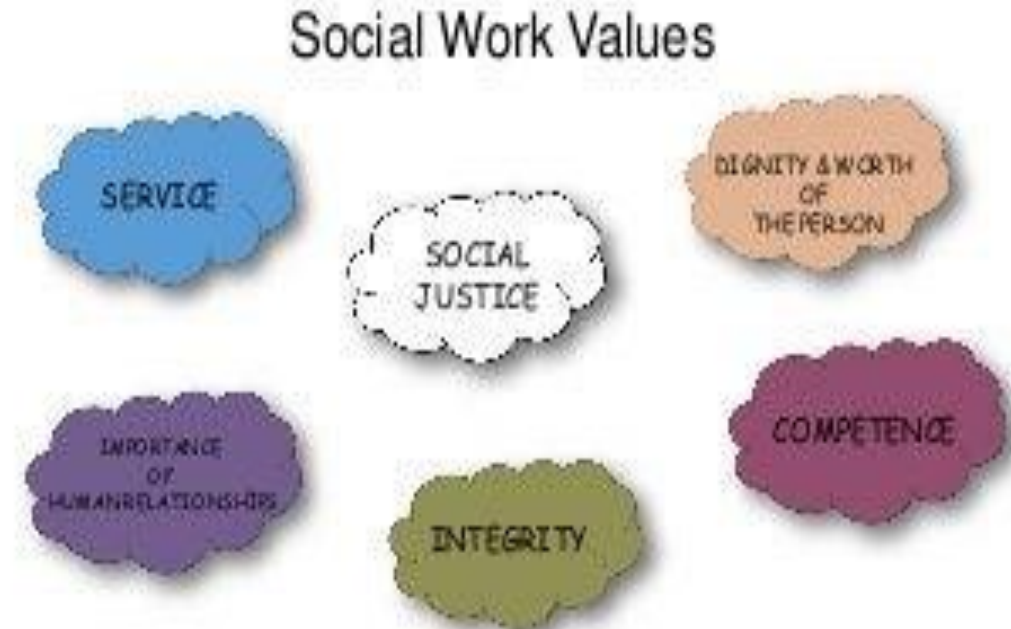
- ❑ Practice informed by theories that do not consider cultural factors; e.g., attachment theory
- ❑ Religious-blind approach to practice (Gilligan, 2009); fear of overstepping or insulting clients
- ❑ Limited formal training on how to work with Muslim clients
- ❑ Social workers who were religious, tended to apply a more religious-aware approach to practice -

need to be able to work with different client groups regardless of our own beliefs

Social Work Values

General social work values should underpin our practice with Muslim and other ethnic minority families/clients

- Reflective practice & identifying what our own values are – do these help or hinder our practice?



Best Practice with Muslims



Dissertation:

- Localization as a method to enhance engagement of Muslim families (Graham et al., 2009)
- Client-led practice to reduce power imbalances, i.e., placing ourselves as learners/ not experts
- Cultural awareness in practice: Reflection on awareness of stereotypes about Muslims and own biases
- Religious-aware practice; starting from organizations through policies and procedures, rather than on an individual basis – reduce inconsistencies in practice (Gilligan, 2009).

Best Practice with Muslims



Personal insight:

- Get to know your Muslim clients – not all of us practice our religion to the same extent
- Be open to learning about our religion; ask questions but also reflect on these questions and think about if you would like to be asked this?
- Be accommodating to your Muslim colleagues and clients: Prayer spaces, fasting, Eid celebrations etc.
- Explain things to clients, especially in a child protection context; utilize services like the Amal's association if you can, to help guide and inform practice.

