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The role of the mosque and its relevance to social work

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Abstract
This article examines the significant role of the mosque in the Muslim community. In addition to being a place of prayer, the mosque provides educational, political welfare, and conflict resolution services in times of dispute between groups, families, couples, and individuals. Practitioners, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists from Western cultures lack the informal information that can provide a full understanding of the ways in which Muslims cope in times of crisis. We suggest that social workers should expand their knowledge of the mosque and the Imam and acknowledge the vital role they play in the Muslim community. We believe that the mosque and Imam can work together with the social workers and supply the cultural and social knowledge that is required for the proper assistance to be given. This approach will help bridge the gap between local-religious and Western models of intervention.

Keywords
Clergy, Imam, mental health, Mosque, social work

Religion and social work

Despite the advance of secularism, religious and spiritual belief, regardless of form, remain strong (Leavey et al., 2007), as religion and spirituality are of great concern to social work research, education, and practice. Despite the growth of religion/spirituality and social work over the last 15 years, many practitioners, students, educators, and researchers remain apprehensive about spirituality-based social work (Canda and Furman, 2009). In spirituality-based social work, the social worker must disregard their own religious values, especially if they conflict with that of the client. In order to promote the health of the clients, social workers use their own awareness of feelings, attitudes, and biases to facilitate a relationship with the clients. In the same way, exploring the clients' religious beliefs and spiritual practice is not about what social workers do or do not believe and practice as religion (Streets, 2008b).

Next, social workers working with religious clients must discern and clarify the underlying values of the conflict. This step is crucial as well for religious social workers working with either

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non-religious clients or clients of other religions. The way religious issues are addressed in social work practice can have a drastic effect on the wellbeing and identity of the clients as individuals, groups, and communities and also on the integrity of the social work profession. Attending to the religious/spiritual needs of clients can help social workers put clients' challenges and goals within the context of their deepest religious thoughts and highest spiritual aspirations. Social workers are already committed to the perspective of viewing the whole person in the environment; however, it is beneficial to advance to a bio-psycho-social-spiritual view of the individual, the group, and the community (Canda and Furman, 2009). The results of addressing religion in the context of social work have far reaching ethical and moral implications for clients and practicing social workers (Streets, 2008a).

Social workers are obligated to focus on the religious life and spiritual practices of the client. Ben Asher (2001) explains how the lives of his and other practitioners' clients revolve around their religious and spiritual beliefs. Their first organizational loyalty is to their church, whether for religious, spiritual, social, cultural, educational, political, or economic reasons. It is interesting to note that loyalty to the church goes beyond belief and spirituality and implies more than simply the religious practices of the individual. Being 'religious' may also mean belonging to a community, despite the religious practices or beliefs. Religion is so meaningful to clients because it encompasses all aspects of life: individual identity, peers, and community. Many practitioners are ignorant about what religion means both to themselves and to their clients, making it near impossible for these practitioners to be helpful in assisting their clients (Ben Asher, 2001). Religion is also a social function and has long been viewed as a community resource to affirm and reinforce religious identities by providing a system of shared meanings. In the United States, the African-American churches have long generated a force of political mobilization, in addition to being a major provider of welfare (Leavey et al., 2007).

Social workers must realize the importance of religion in the lives of their clients and then search for new and more inclusive methods of intervention. Interventions will be more effective when this holistic view of religion is taken into consideration (Ben Asher, 2001). These interventions need to be created for individuals, groups, and communities. Social workers must address clients' religious and spiritual interests in order to realize the clients' capacity regardless of whether the client is an individual, couple, family, organization, community, institution, or even a society (Ben Asher, 2001). Addressing the spirituality and religion in a person's life can be a constructive method to help them face life's challenges; therefore, it is incumbent upon social workers to recognize that a person's values, perceptions, and feelings are connected to their religious, philosophical, cultural, ethical, and life experiences (Campanelli, 2008).

Islam

Few articles have appeared in social work literature orienting practitioners to the Islamic community (Hodge, 2005). In order to improve interactions with Muslims, it is imperative for social workers to become acquainted with the tenets of the Islamic worldview. The Islamic value system is very distinct and therefore at least some knowledge of Islam is required for effective social work practice with Muslims. This is recognized by the NASW *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 2000, Section 1.05(c)), which states that workers should attempt to procure knowledge in the area of religious diversity (Hodge, 2005).

Worldwide, as well as in Europe, Islam is the second largest religion after Christianity. A total of 1.57 billion people in the world today follow Islam, according to the latest comprehensive estimate. In Europe, the number of Muslims has tripled in the past 30 years, and demographers expect a higher rate of growth in the coming decades (Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life

(CFRPL), 2009). In the United States, the number of Muslims is growing, and it is projected that soon Islam will be the second largest religion in the United States (Ali et al., 2004). Although Islam is often associated with the Arab world and the Middle East, fewer than 15 percent of the world's Muslims are Arabs (Al-Krenawi, 2012). Popular misconceptions about Islam include that all Muslims are Arabs, all Arabs are Muslims, all terrorists are Muslims, and all Muslims are terrorists. These mistaken beliefs result in negative emotions, for example, the assumption that Islam is at the root of all terrorist activity results in fear and discrimination. Another negative emotion, Islamophobia, is a barrier to acculturation and fuels hate crimes against Muslims, in addition to breeding extremism among Muslims themselves. Many in the West are uninformed about the Muslim population and rely on stereotypes portrayed in the Western media for information (Al-Krenawi, 2012). It is vital not to generalize and judge one Muslim as being representative of the entire Muslim population.

It is important to note that Islam has two main streams: Sunni and Shiite. Sunnis make up approximately 90 percent of Muslims worldwide. Shiites form the remaining 10 percent and are the overwhelming majority in Iran, and to a lesser extent, in Iraq. Sunni Islam places an emphasis on a direct, unmediated relationship between the Muslim and Allah. Shiite Islam has a hierarchical structure of authority, where legal scholars interpret the word of Allah. The authority of the legal scholars is based on the consensus of the Shiite community (Hodge, 2005).

The Quran, the holy grail of Islam, is understood to be the word of God (Allah) as revealed to the Prophet Mohammad. The literal translation of 'Quran' is recitation. The Quran is the primary source of Islamic Law (Shari'a) that regulates all life affairs for devout Muslims (Al-Krenawi, 2012). Devout Muslims believe in the existence of angels, the devil, destiny, hell, heaven, and the Day of Judgement, and they must practice the five pillars of Islam (Ali et al., 2004; Al-Krenawi, 2012; Hodge, 2005). Among individuals who self-identify as Muslim, a variety of beliefs and values are evident (Hodge, 2005).

Social workers should combine knowledge of the five pillars and the three foundational values, and this will allow the social worker to understand the Islamic values of their Muslim clients. It may be a challenge for some social workers to avoid imposing their own secular Western values and to respect Islamic values. Islam provides a concrete lens from which to view reality, and this reality is a drastically different narrative than the secular, liberal narrative (Hodge, 2005). Therefore, a better understanding of the Islamic values will better contribute to the social workers' ability to engage in effective interventions.

The role of the mosque

The building of a mosque is a prophetic, Islamic tradition. The importance of building a mosque is seen when almost immediately upon arriving in Medina, the Prophet Mohammad was instructed to build a mosque. It is important to note that Mohammad personally took part in the construction of the first mosque, thus emphasizing how important the mosque is (Muhammad, 1996). It is an essential part of Islam that Muslims should build mosques all over the world (Muhammad, 1996). The idea of the mosque is to assist Muslims on their mission of purifying the world. In essence, the mosque is related to all aspects of the life of devout Muslims and is the vehicle by which Muslims engage in the affairs of the world, both as individuals and as communities.

The building of the first mosque was also the beginning of the development of Islam; Mohammad built the first mosque as soon as he founded the Islamic state. This first mosque served as the starting point for the establishment of Islam within both the state and the society. Similarly, the mosque of today serves the same function and instigates the development of Islam in the Muslim community and in its relations with society.

Traditionally, mosques have not performed the same function in Islam as the church does in Christianity (Hodge, 2005). The use of the mosque for religious services is optional, as expressed in the five pillars. Muslims are permitted to pray outside a mosque, as the whole earth is pure and can serve the function of a mosque. Prophet Mohammad (Muhammad, 1996) decrees,

> I have been granted five things which were not granted to any other prophet before me: I have gained victory with awe from the period of one month (before the battle); *the Earth has been made sacred and pure and a Mosque for me, so whenever the time of prayer comes for anyone of you, he should pray wherever he is*; the spoils of war have been made lawful for me and these were never made lawful to anyone before; I have been granted shafa's (intercession on the Day of Judgment); and every Prophet was sent particularly to his own people, whereas I have been sent to the whole of mankind.

Since its inception, mosques have developed into institutions that provide Muslim communities with an extensive array of services, both religious and cultural. The mosque is the focal point of discourse for the political, social, cultural, and ritual life. The mosque is the center of leadership of the Islamic State, from which all of the State's affairs are run. For example, Mohammad used his mosque to meet envoys, sign agreements, and rule his court. There are records of the mosque being used in the following capacities: a Judiciary Court, as a platform for oratory eloquence and poetry; a detention center for prisoners of war, the place where spoils of war were divided; a hospital; a home for the poor and travelers, a place where the pleasure of 'Allah' (God) and good reputation is sought; a soup kitchen; and a place of socializing and celebrations (Muhammad, 1996).

It is recommended to pray the obligatory prayers in the mosque as Mohammad said that praying the communal prayer is 27 degrees better than the individual prayer (Muhammad, 1996). The communal prayer is the perfect way to understand the function of the mosque, because even though a Muslim is permitted to pray on his own, he is encouraged to be with the community thus bringing people together. Communal prayer allows one to socialize and enjoy oneself in the company of other Muslims and also provides the opportunity to engage in the study of Islam. Another indication of the great importance of the role of the mosque in Islamic society is that all study and discussion should take place there. Groups and meetings for communal study of Islam take place in the mosque, thereby disseminating the message of Islam (Muhammad, 1996). No one is allowed to prevent the study of science or the discussion of the current affairs of Muslims in the mosque. This custom demonstrates the critical importance of the mosque in all aspects of daily life.

The role of the mosque in different contexts

Due to unique contexts in different countries, one can see different relationships between congregants and their mosques and Imams. The role of the mosque can be impacted by the local economic conditions, as seen in Afghanistan, where the main role of the mosque is running the mosque school. Since the beginning of Islam, education has been spread through the Muslim world via the mosque, which traditionally educated the people and held classes, taught either by a mullah, one who has completed Islamic learning but has not devoted his whole life to Allah, or an Imam hired by the villagers to work at the mosque and teach the children. The first mosque school was established in Medina in 653, and since then, it has become an important addition of every mosque to establish an elementary school to educate the local children (Zaimeche, 2002). These schools help the children, as a recent study discovered that children who attended these schools received higher scores on literacy tests than those who did not attend (Karlsson and Mansory, 2007). This tradition is currently seen in some parts of the world more than others. In Afghanistan, a country with poor economic conditions, the role of the mosque is impacted by the local economic context and focuses on child education.

Another context, a political one, impacts the role of the mosque in the United States. Muslim advocacy groups run voter registration drives and mosque outreach campaigns. They encourage voting and in 2000, succeeded in producing a significant unified Muslim bloc vote (Jamal, 2005). Jamal (2005) discovered that for Arab Muslims, mosques tend to encourage civic participation, political involvement, as well as group consciousness, while for Arab and African Americans, the mosque elucidates common struggles for Muslims in mainstream society in America. Mosques only enhance civic participation for South Asian Muslims, but had no impact on group consciousness or political involvement.

Imam

The position of Imam is a central role in the spiritual and communal life of Muslims, as a great deal of respect and trust is placed in the Imam (Siddiqui, 2004). Imams are part of the clergy sector, analogous to priests and rabbis, and assume their role within the community by virtue of being knowledgeable with the laws and ways of Islam. Any knowledgeable Muslim can fulfill the role of Imam. Knowledge signifies power, and this power of knowledge is recognized by the community (Al-Hibri, 1995). The position of Imam is granted by the community, as Imams do not derive their legitimacy from any centralized spiritual authority. The absence of a hierarchical clerical structure makes it possible for every Muslim to have a voice in religious debates.

Every Muslim is obligated to worship Allah directly and therefore the role of the Imam is to be a spiritual teacher and an example to the community (Siddiqui, 2004). The Imam's duties consist of leading prayers and providing advice and assistance to the community. As Imams are faced with many demands and constantly evolving roles in Muslim communities, qualities other than religious knowledge are essential to qualify as an Imam. Imams are charged not only with spiritual leadership and guidance but are also called upon to counsel, mediate, and resolve conflicts. The Imam must map the needs of their community and try to address these needs on all counts, in order to provide psychological relief, as well as a sense of community. In addition, the Imam must lead a life that other Muslims can look up to and try to emulate. The Imam leads by example, both in matters of religion and the world. Imams have ethical, legal, and professional responsibilities associated with these multiple roles (Siddiqui, 2004).

Imam and mental health

Congregants are turning to their religious communities when help is needed, regardless of whether clergy are the ones best suited to help. There is a considerable amount of evidence that community-based clergy have significant contact with people who suffer from mental health problems (Leavey et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2000), many of whom prefer the help of clergy over that of mental health professionals. Clergy often serve as the first line of mental health care for members of their communities, particularly in minority communities. A study by the National Comorbidity Survey found that clergy provide more mental health care than psychiatrists, including treating people with serious mental illness. The nationwide cross-sectional survey was conducted with imams from mosques throughout the United States (Ali et al. 2005).

Leavey et al. (2007) conducted a study about the functionality of religious leaders as a resource for mental health. They discovered that Muslim and Jewish religious leaders reported that in many cases the mosque and synagogue were the first stop for families when a member of the family experienced emotional and psychiatric problems. This illustrates the great importance placed on the function of the mosque within Islam and why it is crucial for social workers to have a much better understanding

of the culture and practice of Muslims. Social workers will be able to connect with and assist Muslim clients only once they fully understand their culture, as the social worker's response has to take into account the wholeness of the client, which in this case includes the culture of the individual Muslim, the group, the community, and how they each relate to the religion of Islam.

The religious leaders responding to Leavey's et al. (2007) study demonstrated difficulty in recognizing and understanding differences between psychotic illness and more common mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety, as religious leaders can be poorly trained in aspects of counseling and/or in the management of a mental illness. Religious leaders also appear to respond to demands for mental health support with caution and sometimes rejection. This lack of training emphasizes how vital it is for social workers to learn about the Muslim culture in order to be able to assist the Imam.

Muslims are seeking help for problems relating to mental health at the mosque, from the Imam. The Imam is also the main provider of counseling to their congregants, as seen in the Mosque in America study. This nationwide, cross-sectional study describes the structure and functioning of 416 mosques and the role of the mosque leadership and found that 74 percent of mosques provide marital and family counseling services directly to their congregants (Ali et al., 2005). In addition, Arab-American communities wanted additional counseling on discrimination issues, although there is a lack of training in this field. Imams are less likely than other clergy to have formal training in counseling, which likely affects their ability to address the diverse mental health needs of their congregants. Out of 55 respondents, no Imam had a degree in psychiatry, 5 percent had a degree in psychology, 9 percent a degree in social work, and 7 percent a degree in counseling. In addition, 13 percent had undergone formal clinical pastoral education, 21 percent a counseling course from an Islamic origination, and 25 percent had consulted with or worked under the supervision of a mental health professional.

Imam education

In Europe, most Imams have come from another country, due to a lack of adequate training programs in the home country. For example in France, a country with 1300 Imams in 1555 mosques and 2147 places of prayer, and 4,155,000 followers, most Imams are from Turkey and Africa (Hussain and Tuck, 2014). The governments in Europe believe that imported Imams incite radicalism, and in light of this fear, they are proposing state Imam training programs to impede the importation of Imams from outside countries. In the past in France, there have been some programs that privately trained Imams, such as The Shâtibî Centre in Lyon. The government is now interested in state Imam training programs with strict academic requirements (Hussain and Tuck, 2014).

Congregants are also unhappy with outside Imams, as they display a lack of familiarity with the modern problems faced by their congregants. In the Netherlands, young Dutch Muslims do not believe that their non-Dutch Imams have the answers for current religious problems they face, specifically regarding their confusion on how to combine the Dutch culture they know as second and third generation Dutch youth with their Muslim religious identity in today's world. These young people tend to turn to the Internet for help, a poor substitute for an Imam who speaks Dutch, recognizes the Dutch culture, and understands the problems they face, for example, premarital sex and polygamy. The Dutch government has recognized this need and established three new Dutch Islamic theological training programs (Bowlby and Van Impelen, 2006).

While European Imams are imported, this is not the case in America. When looking at congregants of Arab and south Asian descent in the United States and African-American congregants,

the African Americans reported help-seeking behavior more often (Khan, 2006). This is due to the fact that the Imams also grew up in America, so they were able to identify more closely with the African Americans. In this instance, Imams of different backgrounds could be an asset to the community.

One of the main flaws with current Imam education programs is the lack of counseling training. At the Khalil Center in Chicago, they realized the need for Imams to be properly trained in counseling and their aim is to provide Imams who are also certified in counseling. They offer a certification in the basics of counseling where they study four segments: (1) the integrative model, forming counseling relationships, mental illness, and mental status according to Islamic law; (2) examining emotions, cognitions, and behavioral reformation; (3) marital and pre-marital issues and couples counseling; and (4) youth, psychological trauma, and substance abuse. As well, Maqsood (2005) suggests that in France's state training programs, training courses in counseling offering diplomas should be provided.

English Imams face a more basic problem. Here, Imams can be uneducated, ignorant of Western culture, and feel at odds with England. There is therefore a need for the empowerment of Imams, as there are many educated and respected congregants that it is difficult for the Imam to stand up against.

Collaboration between the Imam and social worker

There is a great need for Imams and social workers, as well as other mental health professionals, to work together to improve the ability of each professional to facilitate effective interventions with their congregants or clients (Ali et al., 2005). Imams and mental health professionals have much to gain from collaboration, with the congregants or clients benefitting the most. On one hand, the Imam can improve counseling skills, and on the other hand, social workers will benefit by learning that conversing with clients about spirituality is a key aspect to the recovery process for mental health (Gomi et al., 2014). Social workers from Western cultures lack the informal information that can provide a full understanding of the ways in which Muslims cope in times of crisis. It is essential that social workers and other mental health professionals show sensitivity and acquire knowledge about individual congregants' cultural and religious Islamic background (Ali et al., 2005).

The Imam and the social worker should assist each other in gaining knowledge of the other, which will help them better serve their clients or congregants (Abu-Ras et al., 2008). If either an Imam or a social worker lacks accurate information and are not familiar with the world of the other, they may inadvertently provide counsel or advice that is unsound and contrary to the law of either Islam or the land (Siddiqui, 2004). Hall and Livingston (2006) suggest collaboration between the two fields by having social workers consulting with an Imam or Muslim social work professional and Imams consulting with a social worker. Gilbert (2000) adds to this with the suggestion that the Imam assist social workers with their interventions by helping them recognize Islamic concepts or to explore the client's beliefs and religious practices. Another way collaboration can be done is through formal education by incorporating social work training into Imam education and Islam education into social work training:

> Both the Imam and the social worker are required, and expected, to know and understand the culture of the congregation in which they serve in order to be responsive to the particular needs of their community. This method of working together will help bridge the gap between local-religious and Western models of intervention. Despite the demand for greater collaboration between clergy and mental health professionals, little is known about them partnering together. (Leavey et al., 2007)

Conclusion

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, with 1.57 billion people stating that they follow Islam, according to the latest comprehensive estimate. With such a large population, it is essential for social workers to consider the unique culture of this community. In Muslim communities, the mosque is considered not only a place of prayer but rather the center of all Islamic life. The mosque is the vehicle by which Muslims engage in the affairs of the world, both as individuals and as communities. Muslims also have a spiritual leader for the community, the Imam, who is granted this position because of his immense knowledge with the laws and ways of Islam. When congregants are experiencing a social or mental health problem, they will turn to the Imam, their religious leader, for help. The social worker has much to learn before being able to the help multicultural and diverse Muslim community. Only with a culturally competent view will social workers be able to connect to and assist Muslim clients. The social worker must learn to be culturally aware and sensitive in order to help this community. There is a great need for collaboration between the Imam and the social workers and mental health professionals. The Imam is whom the congregant will turn to for help, but the professional is the one who has been specially trained to assist in times of crisis. It is necessary for Imams, social workers, and other mental health professionals to work together in order to provide more effective interventions for their congregants or clients. We suggest that social workers should expand their knowledge of the mosque and the Imam and acknowledge the vital role they play in the Muslim community. We believe that the mosque and Imam can work together with the social workers by supplying the cultural and social knowledge that is required for the proper assistance to be given. This approach will help bridge the gap between local-religious and Western models of intervention. The results of addressing religion in the context of social work have far reaching ethical, as well as practical implications for clients and practicing social workers.

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