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Social Work with Muslims: Insights from the Teachings of Islam

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Abstract

Social work knowledge and skills are socially constructed. Professional social work was initiated in the Western world in the early twentieth century on the basis of a secular, euro-centric worldview (Graham, 2002, 2005). Thus, social work is shaped by the European and North American (hereafter the West) socio-cultural contexts in which it originates (Payne, 1997). However, multicultural sensitivity has been a value held by the social work profession for decades (e.g., Latting, 1990). Additionally, as professional social work is internationalised, its indigenisation has been gaining more acceptance lately world wide (Hokenstad, Khinduka, & Midgley, 1992; Hokenstad, Midgley, 1997). As well, as more and more models of social work emphasize the importance of understanding clients' worldview for effective social work, integration of spirituality in social work is increasingly being called for. As Van Hook, Hugen, and Aguira put it, "as wholistic, empowerment-focused, and culturally appropriate approaches to social work practice become more widely adopted, the ability to integrate spirituality and religion into practice will become a critical professional skill." (2001, p. 3). However, since Islam is a complete way of life, spirituality is viewed in Islam as uniquely comprehensive (e.g., Abdalati, 1986; Barise & France, 2004; Haneef, 1999; Lahkim, Barise, & Boukhobza, 2004; Zaid & Barise, 2004).

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Similarly, arguments have been made for localization of social work within Muslim contexts (Ragab, 1995; Hakim Sarker & Ahmadullah, 1995), particularly within the past couple of decades. Efforts have also been made to link specific aspects of Islamic teachings to social work (Al-Dabbagh, 1993; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Azmi, 1991; Barise, 2003a; Barise, 2003b; Barise & France, 2004; Hakim Sarker & Ahmadullah, 1995; Haynes, Eweiis, Mageed, & Chung, 1997; Ragab, 1995; Turner, Cheboud, Lopez, & Barise, 2002). While this worldwide literature on Islamic indigenisation of social work remains limited both in number and scope (See Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003a), even less has been written about localization of social work practice within the context of Muslims in North America (Nadir & Dziegielewski, 2001; Rehman & Dziegielewski, 2003) and Canada in particular (e.g., Barise & France, 2004). As Al-Krenawi and Graham put it "This research also lead us to identify the need for more comprehensive work on Islam, as we found that most Muslim clients constructed problems and their solutions with strong reference to religion" (2003a, p. 79). Therefore, there is a