Chapter 2
A Primer on Substance Use and Islam

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ABSTRACT

There is a paucity of research on the rates of alcohol and drug use among Muslim peoples. Many of the publications on substance use and abuse among Muslims tend to focus on the Qur’an’s explicit prohibition against the use of mood-altering substances. Epidemiological studies of use, if they show lower use in a specific country, tend to ascribe the lower rates of use to the religious prohibitions in Islam. Such models are overly simplistic in that the perceived outcome is ascribed to a single variable: religion. This chapter will explore the value of the ecological model of substance use/abuse in understanding, assessing, and treating Muslim clients. The ecological model helps move Muslims from a unidimensional characterization to a fuller and nuanced understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Any study on alcohol and drug use among Muslims is handicapped with the relatively small amount of English language research. The existing literature ranges from high-quality large-scale studies to small opinionated pieces. A quick review reveals the diversity of academic literature on the subject. Many of these studies have been sponsored by the United Nations, with a few epidemiological studies of specific countries as is the case of the UN-sponsored study of Pakistan. There is some literature on specific countries and a specific drug, for example, Turkey and opiate use (UNODC, 2019). There are a collection of small articles dealing with small sample sizes. A study of Malaysian women admissions to substance abuse treatment facilities is an example of such literature (Wickersham et. al. 2016). Given the many smaller articles, it is challenging to attempt to create a comprehensive picture of regional and national epidemiological information. The religious perspective of Islam toward substance use and abuse appears present in many articles.

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Adding to the complexity of the existing literature there are different types of Muslim communities studied. Some are Islamic nations, some are Muslim minority communities, and some focus on Muslim immigrant communities. Anyone doing research on the relationship between substance abuse within Islam is often challenged by the lack of comprehensive research and the collection of existing research with so many different foci. The eclectic nature of the research on Islam and substance use makes any comprehensive review difficult. In an attempt to organize the eclectic range of information this chapter will use the ecological model of alcohol and drug use. We hope the reader will see the diversity and complexity of substance use and abuse within the Muslim community. Understanding the diversity and complexity of the Muslim community is essential for Western providers to offer culturally relevant services.

BACKGROUND

Introduction to Islam

Islam, like any world religion, cannot be limited to a few stereotypical images of Hijab wearing women, weapon carrying terrorists, or billionaire oil sheiks. The face of Islam, like the face of all world religions, is multiracial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and economically diverse. According to the Pew Center, there are approximately 1.8 billion Muslims in the world today (Pew Research Center, 2015). Islam is the second largest religion in the world and is currently the fastest growing religion in the world. Islam is a world religion with adherents located throughout the globe. Stereotypically, Islam is often ascribed to middle eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. However, Indonesia has the largest number of Muslims in any given country. While only 11% of the people of India are Muslim; India contains the second largest population of Muslims. By the year 2050 India will have the largest Muslim population at approximately 311 million followers; followed by Pakistan at 273 million (Pew Research Center, 2015). The number of Muslims in the United States will continue to grow over the coming decades. Currently, there are approximately 3.5 million followers and that is expected to double by the year 2050.

As with other world religions, the exact Islamic beliefs and practices vary. Within Islam, there are two branches and within each branch there are sects. The two branches within Islam are Shia and Sunni. Following the death of the Prophet Mohammed, a debate over the legitimate successors developed within Islam. Sunnis accept that the first four caliphs (leaders) were the proper successors to the prophet. Sunni is the largest grouping, representing nearly 90% of all followers. Shia or Shiite is the second branch. During the debate over the proper inheritors of Islam, those who believed Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed, was the only legitimate successor became the Shia. Within each branch, there are several sects. Within the Sunnis are four main branches; Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanbali. In addition, there are The Wahabi follow the strict orthodox teachings of Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulawahab. The Nation of Islam is a unique branch of Sunni Islam developed in the United States in the 1930s that spread through the African American community. Other sects within Islam include the Ibadis, Kharijites, Ahmadiyya, Qurrīyya, and the Nukkari to name a few (Aslan, 2006).

Muslims follow the Qur’an (Koran) and the book of actions and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed (Sunnah and Hadith). As with all religious books, the Qur’an is a complex and diverse collection expressing a complex set of practices and beliefs. According to Muslims beliefs, the Qur’an was origi-