EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Islamophobia is the unfounded fear of Islam and resulting hostility that Muslims experience as a religious minority in the U.S. For a marginalized community in the U.S., this increases the risk for poor mental health outcomes and further compounds stigma around help-seeking behaviors. In this case study, a family unit presented for counseling with stress resulting from life cycle stressors. However, the intersectionality of their religious identity affected how the individuals experienced transitions as well as microaggressions. This case study includes a counselor’s application of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, treatment interventions, and extensions for further professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the September 11th attacks on the United States, Muslims around the world have experienced increased discrimination and bigotry. In 2004, Kofi Annan, the then-Secretary General of the United Nations, held a conference on confronting Islamophobia. There he stated, “it is a sad and troubling development” when “the world coins a new term.” He continued, “Too many people see Islam as a monolith and as intrinsically opposed to the West… [The] caricature remains widespread and the gulf of ignorance is dangerously deep” (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007, pp. 135-136). While the 2001 attacks did not ignite a new discourse an Islamic identity in the U.S, they were a catalyst for revising Muslim identity in America (Abdo, 2005). Unfortunately, Gallup poll results indicated that nearly a quarter of Americans who were surveyed would not want a Muslim neighbor, and less than half believed that Muslim Americans are loyal to the U.S. (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). There are numerous implications for counselors that can be explored within the intersectionality of the marginalized and oppressed identity statuses of Muslim Americans. In this chapter, we describe a family unit who presents for counseling with concerns as a unit, issues among subsystems, and individual issues. We select and describe specific issues about faith that are salient in family counseling. We introduce a family counselor and provide a conceptual framework for counseling that includes systems theory, acculturation, and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). We describe a course of treatment with counseling outcomes and conclude with extensions and resources for professional development.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Muhammad, immigrated to the U.S. in college and is an engineer. He volunteers at the weekend school at the local mosque. Nadia, his wife, is U.S.-born to immigrant parents and is a pharmacist. They have an arranged marriage, and both identity as the same nationality and Muslim denomination. Omar is their 16-year old son in 10th grade. He performs well academically and competes year-round in a local swim league. His parents expect him to pursue a career in the medical field. Fatima is an 11-year-old girl in the 6th grade. The family resides in a suburban area where the persons of color make up 40% of the population, a vast majority of the population identifies as Christian, and less than 5% are foreign-born.

The family sought counseling after Omar was involved in an underage drinking incident where law enforcement intervened. On the night of the incident, Omar was supposed to be studying with a group of peers; instead decided to attend a party