“My Child is a Gift from Allah”

Presented by: Dr. Katie Bonawitz
Associate Professor & Director of SPED Graduate Programs, Bethel University
BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

ISLAM

ISLAM RELATING TO DISABILITY EFFECTS ON PARENTING

FAITH OR CULTURE DIFFERENCES/SIMILARITIES

TIPS FOR EDUCATORS
Questions guiding this qualitative doctoral research:

- How do Muslim parents in the UK and the US make sense of having and raising a child with a disability within their cultural and religious meaning systems?
- How might Muslim parents desire that the schools work with them?

United Kingdom – Pakistani Muslim Parents of Children with Disabilities

United States – Somali Muslim Parents of Children with Disabilities

Interviews were conducted with 5 Questions – additional prompts as necessary

- Re: Child’s education; community experiences; positive and negative experiences; faith or culture
The Need for Research

- Limited information on religion and special education (Ault, 2009)
- Islamic belief systems not taken into account for educational planning (Jegatheesan, Miller & Fowler, 2010)
- Professionals’ limited understanding of religious beliefs other than their own
- Growing numbers of Somali immigrants in Minnesota
- The critical role Islam plays in Muslims’ daily lives
OTHER RESEARCH

- Ethnographic study of three South Asian Muslim immigrant families making sense of the experience of having sons with autism from within their cultural perspectives (Jegatheesan, Miller, & Fowler, 2010).

- “Islam permeated daily life and provided the primary framework within which they understood the meaning of having a child with autism. Their Islamic faith informed their acceptance that their child had autism, their expectations for their sons, and their own parenting behavior” (p. 101).

- Jegatheesan, Miller and Fowler “hoped that these findings [would] provide a culturally valid starting point for future studies of Muslim immigrant families in other communities” (p. 105).
ISLAM

- Definition
- Perspectives of Disabilities
- Parenting Practices
Definition of Islam:

- Islam is derived from the Arabic root "Aslama": peace, purity, submission and obedience. In the religious sense, Islam means submission to the will of (Allah), the Arabic term for "God," and obedience to His law.

- Muslims believe that Islam is the final religion sent from heaven and the last law on Earth. In Islam, the primary sources of knowledge come from the Prophet Mohammed, The Qur'an and traditions. Mohammed’s life is considered as being the perfect example of putting the verses of the Qur'an into practice (Darwish, 2012).
Islam’s Perspectives on Disability

- Islam provides a great importance and keenness to all groups of society. Those with disabilities are especially and clearly mentioned in many of our Quran verses. A common example is: “There lies no obligations on those who suffer a disability or on those who are sick.”

ليس على الأعرج حرج ولا على المريض حرج

Darwish, 2012
Islamic Views About Disabilities

- Islam recognizes that all children have the right to have equal life chances regardless of...being abled or disabled; and a parent who does not recognize this equality is accused of committing injustice (Morad, Nasri, & Merrick, 2001, p.68).

- Prophet Muhammad’s involvement with people with disabilities exist throughout many hadith. The thoughts and actions of Muhammad are often the standard for Muslims’ everyday living (Miles, 2002)

- Bazna and Hatab (2005) provide further insight: “In Islam, humans’ original nature is essentially good. The Islamic teaching holds that people are born pure and,... potentially perfect” (p. 11).
THE EFFECT ON PARENTING PRACTICES

- The majority of Muslim parents see their child with a disability as a gift from Allah (Bonawitz, 2012)

- South Asian parents desire that professionals first look at their child’s gifts rather than their deficits since their child is a gift from Allah (Jegatheesan, Miller & Fowler, 2010)

- Common for parents to take on complete responsibility and not seek help from others as their initial response (Bonawitz, 2012)
## 3 Facets of Parenting Practices Affected by Parents’ Views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community/Family Involvement</th>
<th>Islamic Faith</th>
<th>Educational Decisions</th>
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| • May keep child hidden from other Muslims because of negative attitudes  
  • Siblings watch out for one another  
  • Family members in home countries have very negative attitudes towards my child | • Other children at Mosque treat child poorly  
  • Limited teachings of faith – Arabic is too difficult; behaviors prevent child from being at the Mosque  
  • Simple prayers are taught | • Special School or General School (dependent on country and level of disability)  
  • IEP decisions for home involvement may be limited unless faith is considered  
  • Transition needs should consider faith practices |

Bonawitz, 2012
A Pakistani mother says:

“My friends adore him. BUT (emphasis from parent), I choose only people who are comfortable with him.”
# 3 Facets of Parents Dealing with Services for Their Child With a Disability

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Special Schools in UK</th>
<th>Special Education - US</th>
<th>Paperwork - Process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+Great services</td>
<td>+Many services; County and School can work together</td>
<td>+OK – as long as things are explained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Positive relationships</td>
<td>+Positive relationships make a big difference</td>
<td>- Confusing; consideration of home is missing</td>
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<tr>
<td>-No involvement with non-disabled children</td>
<td>-Teachers do not understand the importance of parents’ faith</td>
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FAITH OR CULTURE
5 out of 6 Pakistani parents believe their faith plays a much greater role in raising their child with a disability.

4 out of 5 Somali parents believe faith plays a bigger role; 1 parent believes science and faith work together.

Leaders in the Somali community believe many Somalis cannot separate the two.
Muslim parents speak about faith or culture:

Pakistani Mother: “...completely two different things...the culture here is Indian, Chinese, and others, but faith...whatever it says is completely different than culture. This was the strength I had – my faith because it is what’s written in the Qur’an.”

Somali Father: “I am a man of science, but I get my strength from my faith. I can understand why my child does what she does because of science, but I am strengthened by my faith.”
Differences & Similarities
## Differences/Similarities Between the 2 Countries

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<th>Pakistani/UK</th>
<th>Somali/US</th>
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<tr>
<td>Discovery of child's disability</td>
<td>Accept what is; Gift from God</td>
<td>Gift from God; scientific knowledge important and helpful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Then what...</td>
<td>Need to process things – need a period of understanding</td>
<td>Want to know the bottom line – what kind of needs does my child have – don’t sugar coat things</td>
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<tr>
<td>Available resources</td>
<td>Accept the resources provided – don’t ask for more</td>
<td>Seek multiple resources for help with the child – if things are not working, ask for more</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
<td>Limited or no involvement by Imams</td>
<td>Imams accept child with a disability</td>
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## Differences Across Spectrum of Disabilities

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<th>Mild-Moderate</th>
<th>Moderate – Severe</th>
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<td>Judgment</td>
<td>Limited judgment from community</td>
<td>Significant judgment from community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family’s role</td>
<td>Raise child in a similar manner as other siblings –</td>
<td>Family helps with needs – child often remains hidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>Regular involvement in family and community events</td>
<td>Limited or no involvement with family and community events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Thoughts</td>
<td>Have future goals for the child (ie: marriage)</td>
<td>Fear about the child’s future (ie: no marriage)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future Thoughts</td>
<td>Limited worries about who will take care of the child when parents have died</td>
<td>Significant worries about who will take care of the child when parents have died</td>
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<td>Access to Islam</td>
<td>Faith involvement is similar to other children in family</td>
<td>None or limited involvement at Mosque</td>
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## Moving Forward with Support

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<th>Building Relationships</th>
<th>Special Considerations</th>
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<td>Focus on students’ strengths</td>
<td>ECSE</td>
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<td>PACER</td>
<td>Assessment steps</td>
<td>Transition, 14-21</td>
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<td>Local Mosques</td>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
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<td>Muslim handbooks</td>
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**Faith Considerations**

- Imams
- PACER
- Local Mosques
- Muslim handbooks

**Building Relationships**

- Focus on students’ strengths
- Assessment steps
- Focus Groups

**Special Considerations**

- ECSE
- Transition, 14-21
A Pakistani Mother says:

“How I understand my religion... he’s like an angel.”

“The prayer I taught him – ‘Allah is great!’ He can understand that. He can pray that. God understands.”
QUESTIONS?
REFERENCES