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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAMOPHOBIA USING A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Due to the events of 9/11 and subsequent conflicts centered on countries of the Middle East, stigmatism and discrimination based on one's religious beliefs and supposed Muslim heritage have become prevalent occurrences across the globe. This research looks at the health perceptions of Islamophobia in the West, and its effects on Muslim individuals, their families and the surrounding communities. The following systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted by inputting the keywords, Islamophobia and Perceptions into the databases of Social Work Abstracts, ERIC, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, and Social Work Index. The hope of this research is to build a greater knowledge of the effects of Islamophobia on the health and well being of Muslim immigrants and those of Middle Eastern descent in communities of the West.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, several rural counties in the south were informed that they needed to prepare for several hundred Syrian and Muslim refugees. This sent a wave of fear and distrust throughout the community. The topic of Islamophobia has been around for hundreds of years, yet due to terrorist attacks involving the 911 incidents in which Americans were attacked on US soil by Islamic radicals over 15 years ago in New York, NY and Washington, DC, this topic has probably caused a number of rumors and panic from the community members. As community leaders, social workers wanted to prepare the community, schools, and agencies for new community members who may appear different to them to help them be welcoming to vulnerable refugees. With the current influx of Syrian and Muslim refugees across the US, health educators and social workers are challenged to provide leadership and professional information in their communities. Islamophobia is defined as, "a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the

maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, health, social, and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve 'civilization rehab' of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise)" (University, 2015). In recent years Islamophobic ideology has begun to grow exponentially throughout the countries of Europe and in the United States. Effects of Islamophobia are not limited to only those who follow Islam, but are felt by anyone perceived to be Muslim and can include discrimination, violence or the threat of, withholding civil rights, open discontent of Muslim culture, religion, physical and mental health care of Muslim families and children, sharia law and accepted health traditions, and other traditions such as men and women wearing Muslimgarb and the construction of mosques outside of the middle east as well as other stigmatized treatment. Perhaps by using the professional literature to dispel rumors in the community, the refugees may be more easily assimilated into the community. Success in the community can then be shared with countries experiencing similar issues. Researchers who are also practitioners in the communities chose a systematic review to explore their research question What is the current status of professional literature regarding perceptions and fears of Islam: specifically, "How many articles are in the professional

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literature regarding the perceptions of Islamophobia?" The researchers studied and systematically reviewed 20 scholarly articles using Cochrane Systematic Literature Review. During this review, researchers identified, assessed, produced, and presented results of previously researched studies (Yegidis, Weinbach, & Myers, 2012, p. 92). Variables included in this research include the number of articles (dependent variable) and search engines used to produce results (independent variable).

Search Methods

Initially, the research team was interested in the professional literature, specific to the United States, to better understand the effects of Islamophobia in rural southeastern schools. However, the researchers expected an influx of immigrants of Islamic descent in their rural schools and communities within the next three years. Given this expectation, the researchers conducted a systematic literature review using two key words, *Islamophobia* and *perceptions*. Using the following search engines; *Social Work Abstracts*, *ERIC*, *PsychINFO*, *PsychARTICLES*, *Academic Search Complete*, and *Social Work Index* they obtained articles for this review. In keeping the focus on articles published in the United States articles excluded from the review were based on foreign language barriers (the inability to obtain a foreign language article in English) and perceptions of ethnicities and religions other than Islam.

The researchers used an online systematic review using the keywords, *Islamophobia* and *Perceptions*. Articles were collected via the search engines: *Social Work Abstracts*, *ERIC*; *PsychARTICLES*; *PsychINFO*; *Academic Search Complete*; and *Social Work Index*. Specific articles were chosen by researchers for review using limiters of scholarly, peer reviewed, duplicates and face validity. The information was reviewed and added to literature reviews sheets and a literature review matrix and examined by the research themes for commonalities using a content analysis. After limiting the results to scholarly and peer reviewed articles, researchers used face validity to assess the quality of the studies found. During the search, researchers found several articles that were not relevant to the research question and were not included in the results. These articles included perceptions of ethnicities and religions other than Islam and several that were not available in the English language.

RESULTS

The results of this search yielded less than 10 articles that were not useful as they were not relevant to the K-12 school systems in the rural south. Because of this, members of the research team decided *not* to limit the search to K-12 schools in the rural south. They decided to conduct a broader search on *Islamophobia* and *perceptions* within the United States, in a general sense.

In order to research this topic, the keywords *Islamophobia* and *perceptions* were inputted into the search engines, *Social Work Abstracts*, *ERIC*, *Psych INFO*, *Psych ARTICLES*, *Academic Search Complete*, and *Social Work Index* to collect articles written between the years 2004-2015. The research team answered the research question of how to develop effective interventions in rural public schools in three steps: (1) to systematically choose articles related to the key words; (2) to conduct a content analysis to theme the articles to determine commonalities; (3) to develop appropriate implications regarding the key words and research question. As shown in Table 1, the researchers chose the keywords based on their relevance to the topic and the search yielded 106 articles. Next, the team use specific limiters: The first limiter was for *peer reviewed* articles (n=85); The next limiter eliminated the *duplicates* (n=55); and Finally, the team conducted a *face validity check* to compare key words with key words and titles of articles in the designated search engines (n=20).

The general themes of the selected articles (n=20) included the origins of *Islamophobia* in relation to political gains, consequences of *Islamophobia* for the physical and mental health and health care of Muslim families and children, the increase of *Islamophobia* in Western cultures due to lack of education on Islam and Muslim culture as a whole, and the assumption by Western citizens of Muslim stereotypes perpetuated by Western mainstream media. With a number of Muslim immigrants and refugees placed in the community and expected in the immediate future, school social workers, health educators and related agencies must be prepared to provide appropriate services to all members of their communities; thus, this study of the impacts and implications of *Islamophobia* is of high importance for effective health educators, social workers' and other professional helpers' practice. The researchers' goal for the systematic review was to provide the schools and community a subsequent literary compass for anyone seeking to research and practice within communities in which *Islamophobia* and its *perceptions* by the cultures of the West may be impacted.

A search using the keywords *Islamophobia* and *Perceptions* yielded the following results. Articles written between 2004 and 2015 using the two keywords yielded 106 articles (N=106); 85 (n=85) were scholarly peer reviewed articles. Of the 85 peer reviewed articles, 30 were duplicates leaving 55 articles (n=55). Twenty articles (N=20) were retained using face validity. As a result of reviewing the 20 articles, researchers found that over 50% were qualitative in design. Other designs found were commentary and exploratory in nature. Over 50% of the articles were questionnaires/surveys. Approximately 20% of the articles were structured as interviews and approximately 25% were commentary. The findings of the 20 articles that were located can be organized into several bodies of information; political gain, increase in

Table 1. Synthesis of Keywords Perceptions of Islamophobia

Years	Keywords	Limiters	Number of Articles
2004-2015	Islamophobia + Perceptions		N=106
2004-2015	Islamophobia + Perceptions	Scholarly peer-reviewed	n=85
2004-2015	Islamophobia + Perceptions	Duplicates	n=55
2004-2015	Islamophobia + Perception	Face Validity	n=20

Search Engines: Social Work Abstracts, ERIC, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, Social Work Index.

Table 2. Synthesis of Key Articles for the Systematic Literature Review for Perceptions of Islamophobia

Author/Date	Type of Study	Purpose	General Comments	Strengths and Limitations
Abbas, T., & Siddique, A. (2012)	Qualitative Interview	Exploring the perceptions of British South Asian Muslims and the struggle of the community to de-radicalize the population	Engagement in the Muslim community is an integral part of understanding, appreciating and evaluating the community	A strength of this study is that it includes many different segments of the Muslim community. A limitation is that the study only utilized a small group of Muslims in Britain.
Achinger, C. (2012)	Commentary	Discuss how literary studies inform popular thinking.	There are many connections between the perspective of anti semitism and modern anti-Muslim discrimination.	Discusses the various forms of discrimination felt by Jews and relates that in a number of ways to those felt by Muslims in modern society. Many examples from easily recognized pop culture.
Bassiouni, M. C. (2015)	Commentary	Focus on the misconceptions regarding the Islam on the use of violence and role of western culture and states in developing negative perceptions about Islam	This paper include abhorrent practices committed by Muslims, which have resulted in negative perceptions about Islam.	The author of this article may have biases depending on his origin. Strengths is that there is a large quantity of historical data in the article
Bevelander, P. & Otterbeck, J. (2010)	Qualitative, Survey	To clarify and examine young people's attitudes towards Muslims, and relationships between these attitudes and a number of background factors.	Results revealed that many variables have significant effects on young people's attitudes towards Muslims.	
Brown, L. M., Awad, G. H., Preas, E. J., Allen, V., Kenney, J., Roberts, S., & Lusk, L. B. (2013).	Qualitative A 2x2x2 Between-subjects design	Investigates negative views in the United States of people perceived to be Muslim	Possible factors in prejudice toward Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims were investigated. Specifically cues of foreignness that may communicate threat	The majority of the participants were European American and reported being Christian. The results from this study generally confirm the hypothesis that perceptions of Muslims are related to certain cues of foreignness (i.e. name and dress).
Çakı, F. (2012)	Qualitative /ethnographic research of 30 volunteers	Exploration of European youth's perceptions of religious life in Turkey and can those perceptions change if the youth lived in Turkey for a year	This paper offered insight into how a young person's perceived notions about a culture can change when immersed in said culture	Limits are size and method of sampling both too small for broad generalizations. The study is based only on perceptions of EVS volunteers and not their behaviors. The study reflects only one side of the issue: How European youth perceive religious culture in Turkey. Strengths are most volunteers had significant changes in their perceptions of religion and religious life in Turkey.
Chahuan, E. (2005)	Commentary	To explore the history and origin of Islamophobia.	The West wants to be supreme. The conflict between East and West started to become more about politics and culture and less about religion.	The author of this article may have biases depending on his origin.
Choma, B., Charlesford, J., Dalling, Leah., Smith, Kirsty., (2015)	Qualitative Survey Viewing of media clips	To investigate whether viewing Sept 11 footage affected people's perceived distress spanning past, present, and anticipated future	The present study demonstrated that viewing 9/11 footage, even 10 years after the attacks, can have negative repercussions for perceptions of distress, Islamophobia, and sociopolitical attitudes	Strength the present study demonstrated that viewing 9/11 footage, even 10 years after the attacks, can have negative repercussions for perceptions of distress, Islamophobia, and sociopolitical attitudes. Limitations include the fact that participants were university students from United Kingdom who were mainly women. Participants would have only been 10 yrs old during the Sept 11 attacks, the United Kingdom is close allies with USA

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Ciftci, S. (2012)	Quantitative questionnaire	To explain the sources of rising anti-Muslim sentiments in the West.	This paper offered insight on the growing feelings of Islamophobia in Western Europe and the USA	Limits: the results do not support social identity theory, as the effect of national and Christian identity is not statistically significant in most models. Strengths the analysis showed that fear of Muslims and perceived threats accounts for much of the variation in the realm of attitudes Results are highly contextual and difficult to generalize.
Fontaine, H. A. (2010).	Quantitative Questionnaire/ Survey	To explore the negative effects of the movie Hidalgo on the perceptions of Muslim on Pre-service teachers	The author used the viewing of the movie Hidalgo to explore the feelings of pre-service teachers and found that their perceptions are likely to dictate how they teach their students	The authors sampling base was small only three individuals who viewed the film. Limited also to the same geographical area for those who viewed the film. Strengths evidence that some of tomorrow's teachers may look at their Muslim and minority students with fear, suspicion, contempt, and pity. This truth needs to change
Hussain, Y. & Bagguley, P. (2012)	Qualitative Survey	Development of Muslims as a "suspect community" in London after the 7/7 bombings.	Consensus of research blame the media rather than non-Muslim individuals for the source of any discrimination.	Interviews may have been subject to bias considering where interviewees were chosen.
Lee, S. A., Gibbons, J. A., Thompson, J. M., & Timani, H. S. (2009)	Quantitative Questionnaire	To develop a psychometrically sound self-report measure of individuals' fear-related attitudes toward Muslims and their religion	This paper offered a look at how the IS or Islamophobia Scale was created, implemented, and its results interpreted	The results of the study may have limited generalizability. The sample was relatively homogeneous-consisted of White Christian college students another limitation is the breadth of the measure itself; a final limitation is the relatively low internal consistency of the measure of general social desirability. Strengths: It provides preliminary support for the reliability and validity of a multifaceted measure of Islamophobia
Meer, N., & Modood, T. (2009)	Exploratory Interviews	Identifying the reasons why the idea that Muslim minorities subjected to racism are seen with less sympathy than other religious minorities, particularly Jewish groups	While Muslims are frequently the subjects of hostility, discrimination, racial profiling, surveillance and targeting of intelligence agencies, their status as victims is ignored or denied.	Interviews are structured and include deep questions that are very pointed in their seeking of information. Although Interviewees are of varying ethnicities, there may be a hint of bias based on their personal backgrounds.
Pratt, D.(2011)	Commentary	To contribute to the task of countering Islamophobia. Examine what is meant by and what is the effect of, such ignorance and outline and analysis of the process of imaging Islam.	The issue of Western perceptions of Islam, together with concerns about Islamic ideology and the relation of Islam and Muslims to the West.	Holistic, all-encompassing, presentation of data concerning Islamophobia paired with possible ways to counter the phenomena.
Savelkoul, M., Scheepers, P., Tolsma, J., & Hagendoorn, L. (2011)	Qualitative Survey	Explanation of anti-Muslim attitudes in the Netherlands using ethnic competition theory and intergroup contact theory	The results of the study show that perceived threat increases with outgroup size and, in turn, increases the level of anti-Muslim attitudes	Survey is formatted in a way that is easy for the reader to understand and encompasses all areas of anti-Muslim attitudes in citizens of the Netherlands. Broad participant base.

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Victoroff, J., Adelman, J. R., and Matthews, M. (2012)	Commentary	Research the hypothesis that being a victim of anti-Muslim discrimination coincides with pro-terrorist sentiments.	Correlation between young age and perceived discrimination to the belief that suicide bombings are justified.	Multiple limitations in the studies. However all of which are discussed in the text so as to keep the reader informed.
Zainiddinov, H. (2013)	Quantitative Questionnaire/ Survey	To explore the effects of race on attitudes towards Muslims; evaluate the extent to which the racial differences were mediated by psychological and religious factors; and assess whether the race effects differed significantly by gender	The Author takes an in-depth look at how Blacks and Whites view Muslim and their religion. Does the culture and attitudes, and perceptions of a race change the way one would view Muslims or their level of Islamophobia	Limitations are that Muslims were researched only once in 04 unlike the three other major religious groups in 86, 88, 89 and 04 therefore a longitudinal or repeated cross-sectional study could not be conducted. The accuracy of the self-reported data is questionable. The author's full models explained only 3.6 and 4.4 per cent of the variance in anti-Muslim attitudes in multivariate and moderation analyses respectively.

Islamophobia in western culture due to lack of education on cultural differences and assumptions of Muslim stereotypes as a result of media exposure. The researcher's findings regarding the 20 articles revealed that Islamophobia causes mass hysteria (Archinger, 2012), prejudice (Meer & Modood, 2009), and desire for political advantage (Hussain & Bagguley, 2012). That Muslims are viewed as "one" regardless of their geographical differences. Lack of education (Pointing, 2008) leads to increased instances of anti-Muslim attitudes (Savelkoul, Scheepers, Tolsma & Hagendoorn, 2011). Lack of defense for Multiculturalism increases Islamophobia as does bias (Choma, Charlesford, Dalling, & Smith, 2015), discrimination (Archinger, 2012), ignorance (Ciftei, 2012; Coon, 2006), unconsciousness (Martin-Munoz, 2010) and interaction (Pratt, 2011). Research also revealed that Islamophobia decreases with education (Lee, Gibbons, Thompson & Timani, 2009) but increases when individuals base their beliefs on fear (Bassiouni, 2015), media experiences (Choma *et al.*, 2015; Fontaine, 2010). Research regarding youth discrimination follows the same pattern (Brown, Awad, Preas, Allen, Kenney, Roberts, & Lusk, 2013; Caki, 2012; Victoroff, Adelman & Matthews, 2012; Bevelander *et al.*, 2010). Researchers found that the results were accumulated from surveys, interviews, and questionnaires using subjects including Muslims from America and the Middle East, school children, young adults, college students and Christian Americans. These subjects were from multiple countries around the world as well as the United States. Researchers found several limitations within these results. These limitations included the personal views of authors in the commentary articles, sampling selections for surveys, interviews and questionnaires and the inability to conduct longitudinal or cross-sectional studies in some of the articles.

Conclusions and Developing Practice and Policy Context

An initial search of the keywords, Islamophobia and perceptions, generated (n=106) articles for possible inclusion to the review. After several limiters were introduced, including peer-reviewed articles, duplicates, and face validity by the research team, the final number of articles (n=20) was reached for relevant inclusion to the review. Out of the articles produced by the systematic literature review 50% were qualitative in design. Other article designs were commentary and exploratory in nature.

Of these designs, approximately 50% included questionnaires and surveys, approximately 20% included structured interviews, and approximately 25% were strictly commentary about the topic. As was the intent of the research, findings gathered centered around Islamophobia and perceptions of it found in Western culture. Of the 20 articles collected, general themes examined origins of Islamophobia related to political gains, the increase of Islamophobia in Western cultures due to lack of education on Islam and Muslim culture as a whole, and the assumption by western citizens of Muslim stereotypes perpetuated by Western mainstream media. Specifically, their recent immigration to America, health indicators among Middle Eastern Americans are different from those of the general population. The literature attributes the fact that many Middle Eastern Americans share a culture influenced by Islamic behavior religions that may affect their health.

The primary theme of Islamophobia in relation to political gains was discussed in a number of articles throughout the review. Bevelander & Otterbeck discuss the so-called power-threat hypothesis, which states that negative perceptions of specific groups come from the idea that these groups are economic competition and challenge the social and political power of another group (2010). Hussain goes on to discuss Islamophobia in politics by proposing the idea that "the securitization of Muslims is reflected in the widespread questioning by politicians and in the media of whether Muslims can be integrated into European society" (2012). Despite the fact that as a minority population, Middle Eastern Americans are, on the whole, better educated, more affluent and more likely to own businesses compared to the general United States population, primarily due to cultural practices, Middle Eastern Americans tend to be less healthy than other Americans in similar educational and financial demographics. Articles included in this review also discuss the confusion surrounding Islam, its teachings and practices and explains that this type of unawareness from people is what creates an uneasiness towards Muslims, causing the root of Islamophobia. Zainiddinov discusses education as a tool to combat Islamophobia as he presents the finding that based on data collected from multiple sources there is a high correlation between education and positive feelings towards Islam (2013). The theme of education is also discussed by Abbas as the author proposes that engagement in the Muslim community is integral to understanding and appreciating the community and

its citizens (2012). While the Muslim religion does not pertain to race, the line between religion and race is often blurred. Racial discrimination and social marginalization have an adverse effect on people's health. There seems to be a generalization that all Arab Americans are similar to the terrorist of 9/11. The assumption by citizens of Muslim stereotypes perpetuated by Western mainstream media is exemplified by Martin-Munoz. Key points discussed in the article center around the public opinion of Muslims in Western cultures. Western media depicts the mass rather than separating individuals and extremists as representative of the Muslim ethnicity. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 on America and 7/7 in London have converted stereotypes of Muslims and people perceived as Muslim to include suspicion and fear (2010). Inconclusive evidence suggests that there is any link between Middle Eastern Americans and an increase in stress/mental health related health issues post 9/11. Perhaps this suggests that prejudice towards manifest themselves in specific social context where prejudices are more likely to be expressed. For example, Middle Eastern Americans who wear turbans might be more prone to racial discrimination than Middle Eastern Americans who do not.

Limiters utilized to aid in the collection of articles for this review were unavoidable in order to create a pool of scholarly articles for which to base the research team's data on. The criteria of peer reviewed articles ensured that all articles included were based on facts. Omitting duplicate articles saved time by not presenting the same pieces multiple times. The limiter of face validity allowed each member of the research team to review the article for relevance to the chosen topic of study (perceptions of Islamophobia) and discard those that did not comply. Keywords were decided upon due to their direct relevance to the topic and specific demographic with which the research team intended to study. In all, the research presented in the following literature reviews encompasses a deep understanding of United States perception of Islamophobia from cultures of the West. Articles included in this review discuss what may have stimulated negative perceptions of Islamophobia, Implications of having those perceptions and possible ways to reverse those perceptions to create a more accepting and considerate world community. This review's implications on the policy and practice in the field of health education and social work have the potential to be great. Due to the events of 9/11 and subsequent conflicts focused on countries of the Middle East, Islamophobia is beginning to become more prevalent in many western countries throughout Europe and in the United States. As these countries witness an influx of refugees from the Middle East hoping to escape their current conditions, more work needs to be done to help curb the onset of Islamophobia in order to foster a neutral, welcoming environment. No doubt this will aid in the transition of displaced refugees as well as the in the transition of western citizens to life alongside their Muslim counterparts creating a more peaceful world for all. With the information provided in this review community leaders and policy makers will find the knowledge with which to implement programs and teaching strategies to foster this peaceful transition and clinicians will gain a deeper understanding of the Islamic culture in order to better counsel Muslim clients. The international community may benefit from an understanding of United States perceptions as a comparison with their own in an attempt to prepare their population to manage the immigration. Until there is a resolute emphasis on the health of Middle Eastern. Americans there are few tangible conclusions drawn

from the data. Finally, the researcher-practitioners call for significant cultural and institutional adjustments in health care settings and further research studies to provide specific data to address health disparities for these growing and diverse populations. By using the professional literature, perhaps social workers and other helping professionals throughout the world may dispel the fears and anxieties of and quell rumors in the community members to begin to accept refugees who are looking for a safe place to live and raise their families.

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