Abstract

Over the past decade, Arab society in Israel has undergone a gradual transition of the nuclear family from a traditional to a more modern family. This change also involves an increase in the number of educated people and in the proportion of women entering the labor market, both of which in turn widen the socioeconomic gaps within this society. These changes are reflected in the society's norms, values and structure. They are reflected in tensions between conflicting traditional and western regarding stability or change in existing situation (Viezer & Reiter, 2010).

Although Arab society is dynamic and changing, it still views disability and mental health problems through religious and traditional lenses, including ways of coping and treatment. Therefore, social workers and other health professionals have to consider religious and traditional perspectives in dealing with mental health and disability issues. They often have to deal with persons that still believe in supernatural forces, such as Satan, evil spirits, witchcraft, and reincarnation (Al-Krenawi, 1999, 2002).

The present study examines differences in Muslim social workers and Imams' recommendations regarding marriage/divorce and child custody Issues of persons with intellectual disabilities and mental illness. The study has four main goals: The first is to look at differences between their recommendations. The second goal is to examine the association between social workers' religiosity and their recommendation regarding marriage/divorce and child custody issues. The third goal is to examine whether social workers' inclination toward religious recommendations are related to the context and nature of the case (vignette). Marriage and divorce contexts are considered religious because they involve Sharia Courts, and therefore it seems that Muslim social workers may be free to adopt more religious recommendations. On the other hand, when the case involves child custody, a social work turf, the tendency is to adopt more secular professional than religious recommendations. Finally, the fourth goal is to examine the relationship between the variables related to the particular cases

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(vignettes) and the tendency to hold religious recommendation, for both imams and social workers.

The study was based on Berger and Luckman's social construction theory (Berger & Luckman, 1969). Berger (1969) initially believed that religion and faith lost their influence in modern society due to the secularization process that affected the Western world. However, in 1999, Berger revised his former conceptualization by adopting a more pluralistic approach, in which there are simultaneous expressions of secularism and religion (Berger, 1999). This thesis is relevant to the central research question: Do Muslim social workers consider their recommendations on marriage / divorce or child custody cases (vignettes), related with intellectual disabilities or mental illness in respect to the religious or professional perspective? The expectation is that the Sharia Court (religious authority) will be much more influential in the context of marriage / divorce cases (vignettes), whereas with regard to child custody more weight will be given to professional considerations.

The population studied consisted of the majority of the Muslim social workers (138), working in 11 social service departments in the Northern Triangle municipalities and most of the imams (48) employed by the Interior Ministry in the same region. The research questionnaire included the following questionnaires: background questionnaire consisted of demographic, employment and extended family-related data; Social Worker Religiousness Questionnaire based on the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL; Koenig & Büssing, 2010), and a questionnaire that included 25 vignettes (10 related to marriage/divorce and 15 to child custody) constructed by the researcher based on the Sharia Court rulings, adapted to the study. The research variables were divided into two groups: (1) Variables related to the classification of subjects as either Muslim social workers and or imams, and social worker's religiosity; (2) Variables related to the case description – type of disability (mental / intellectual), issue (marriage / divorce and child custody), gender of the person with disability, religiosity / traditionality of the family of the disabled person, and the inclination toward religious recommendation.

The construction of the research model based on the variables that emerged from the case descriptions. The model has been tested by CHAID (Chi-squared Automatic Interaction Detector) algorithm using SPSS v. 22.0. The CHAID algorithm was run on the case file data file which included 4650 case descriptions. CHAID was used because of the nonparametric nature of the variables.

The core finding was related to the family religiosity as described in the vignettes. When explicitly stated that the family was religious or observant, it received special attention by Muslim social workers and imams. In general, Muslim social workers inclined to make a religious recommendation when the family of a person with intellectual disability or mental

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illness was explicitly described as religious. The same result was obtained in the general analysis of the imams. On the other hand, in analyzing Muslim social worker recommendations related to vignettes of intellectual disability, it was found that the type of issue (marriage, divorce and child custody) was relevant to the recommendations and not necessarily the family's religiousness.

In a comparative analysis of Muslim social workers and imams with regard to their religious recommendations, the research found that imams more than social workers were more likely to follow religious recommendations. Furthermore, social workers' religiosity was not associated with their inclination to adopt religious recommendation. Social workers have been more inclined to consider their social work values as secular professional knowledge. Evidence of the impartiality of social workers in their recommendations on the issue of marriage / divorce was also observed in their tendency to take into account the fact that the family of persons with disabilities was religious. On the other hand, with regard to child custody, they felt less committed to religious recommendations and allowed themselves to follow professional standards even if the family of the disabled person was religious.

Future studies have to continue the research on Muslims professionals' decision making regarding family disability issues in this transitional society. In practical terms, the findings of the study support the importance of raising awareness among academics and policymakers of the fact that despite the trends that encourage modernization and secularization, the importance of religion and tradition in formulating professional recommendations should not be ignored.

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