

Chapter 23

Situational Analysis of Muslim Children in the Face of Islamophobia: Theoretical Frameworks, Experiences, and School Social Work Interventions

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ABSTRACT

Islamophobia is a reality today that finds its manifestations at different levels of society and has been researched through diverse gendered, ethnic, and regional perspectives. The sensitivity of the topic has resulted in limited work around exploring consequences of Islamophobia on Muslim children. As religiously charged crimes against Muslims in the West continue to grow, Islamophobia has crept into the schools, classrooms, and playgrounds of many countries and needs to be recognized and effectively mitigated. Based in a child rights-based context, this chapter is a review of empirical literature that attempts to characterize and theorize Islamophobia to understand why and how it affects the lives of Muslim children. It accounts for varied Islamophobic experiences that children encounter in regions of North America and Europe. It is inferred that educational institution cannot be isolated from global incidents of Islamophobia and become sites for further propagating racist sentiments. The chapter ends with school social work model directed towards prevention and reduction of Islamophobia.

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Western liberal democracies in Northern America and Europe have been witness to ongoing demographic transitions of their population and a constant change of their socio-cultural milieu (Simon, 2008; Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2012; Voas & Fleischmann, 2012; Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015). This racio-ethnic diversity and multicultural societal set up often becomes ground for social integration and cohesion (Larsen, 2013). But it has also resulted in subordination of minorities by agents of white hegemonic supremacy in these countries (Solorzano, 1997). Over the decades, Western discourses on racialized minorities have changed their focus from 'color' to 'race' to 'ethnicity' to 'religion' in the current socio-political climate (Peach, 2005).

Critical race theorists explain how any form of racism has four dimensions; it has micro and macro components; it takes on institutional and individual forms; it has conscious and unconscious elements; and it has a cumulative impact on both the individual and group (Lawrence, 1987; Solorzano, 1997). The post 9/11 era has seen expression of all four dimensions in the rise of anti-Muslim racism in the Western world, exhibiting itself in the form of Islamophobia (Sirin & Balsano, 2007; Elkassem, Csiernik, Mantulak, Kayssi, Hussain, Lambert, & Choudhary, 2018).

Islamophobia implies having indiscriminate adverse and negative feelings towards Islam and followers of Islam i.e. Muslims. The term covers hostile feelings, discrimination, exclusion, fear, suspicion or anxiety directed towards Muslims adults and children alike (Runnymede Trust, 1997; Hassan & Martin, 2015). Islamophobia or anti-Muslim ideologies, actions and thought processes is a reality today, which finds manifestations at different levels of society (Bleich, 2011). The effect of Islamophobia has been explored through the voices and experiences of different gendered, ethnic and regional identities. However, due to the sensitivity of the topic, little work has been done around exploring Islamophobia and its consequences on Muslim children, especially in a contemporary global context. Like any other form of stigmatization and discrimination, Islamophobia also finds its effects and adversities in the life of children (Grewal, 2003). As religiously charged crimes against Muslims in the West continues to grow, Islamophobia has found its way into the schools of these countries (Bonet, 2011) and hence, needs to be accounted for, be recognized, and thereby effectively mitigated.

Child Rights and Islamophobia

The United Nation Convention on the Rights of a Child, 1989 provides a framework of 'protection rights', which particularly safeguards children from any form of harm, including macro or micro aggressions caused by Islamophobia. Article 2 talks about non-discrimination in extension of rights of the Convention to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. Article 19 of the Convention, further, states that the governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from physical and mental violence, abuse and neglect. Article 30 puts forward that minority or indigenous children have the right to learn about and practice their own culture, language and religion in a safe environment (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). However, when seen through the lens of Islamophobia, all these protections, developmental and safety rights of a Muslim child in North America, Europe and elsewhere, are being blatantly compromised upon.

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