



Enhancing Responsive Care of Children: Culturally-Specific Implementation Strategies for Muslim Parents in the UK

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore Muslim parents understanding of responsive care and its impact on the emotional and cognitive development of their children, with a specific focus on the strategies they use for implementation. Responsive care refers to a caregiving approach that is adopted to meet changing needs of children. To achieve this, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with six parents, four focus groups were conducted with eight Muslim parents and ten children studying at one local mosque in Midlands were observed. The findings of the study revealed that parents who have good understanding of faith believe that faith is a significant factor in the development of their children's emotional intelligence and multilingual abilities. Additionally, it was found that parents believe that learning a second language is good for children's cognitive and social development. Furthermore, they found their children improved literacy and higher level skills. Based on these findings, recommendations have been proposed, including the establishment of mosques offering classes for parents to enhance their understanding of responsive care. Furthermore, language classes for children from other faith traditions or no faith to develop understanding, and overall, this study highlights the importance of understanding responsive care in shaping children's emotional, social and cognitive development in their early years.

Keywords: Responsive Care; Muslim Parents

Introduction

The emotional, cognitive and social well-being of children is greatly influenced by the role of their parents and guardians [1]. Responsive care, which involves understanding and fulfilling children's needs in a timely and appropriate manner, is widely recognized as a crucial aspect of promoting positive development and adjustment [2]. Despite the importance of responsive care, there is limited research on Muslim parents' comprehension of this concept and the strategies they use to develop emotional, cognitive and social well-being of their children. Thus, this study seeks to bridge this research gap by examining the beliefs and practices of

Muslim parents related to responsive care and exploring its effects on children's emotional and social well-being. To accomplish this objective, the study employed qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and experiences of Muslim parents [3]. Six interviews and four focus groups were conducted with a diverse sample of Muslim parents from different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic status living in Midlands. These parents were asked about their understanding and implementation of responsive care, as well as any challenges or barriers they may face in providing responsive care to their children. Their children are also observed especially how they interact with their peers, and express their emotions

within the classrooms.

The researcher examined the associations between parents' understanding and practices of responsive care and their children's emotional and social well-being. It was expected that the findings from this study would contribute to the existing literature on responsive care by specifically addressing the unique experiences and perspectives of Muslim parents [4-6].

The insights gained from this research can inform the development of culturally sensitive interventions and programs targeting Muslim parents to promote the emotional and social well-being of their children. Overall, this study seeks to fill the research gap regarding Muslim parents' understanding and implementation of responsive care and its impact on the emotional and social well-being of their children. The findings have the potential to provide valuable information for parents, educators, and policymakers to enhance support and resources for Muslim families in promoting the optimal development and adjustment of their children. Following research questions guided the study:

- How do Muslim Parents understand their faith and its teaching in relation to the development of their children?
- What strategies they use for supporting the development of emotional, social and cognitive development of their children?
- What is the impact of these strategies on the development of their children?

Literature Review

The Concept of Responsive Care

Responsive care is an approach to caregiving that prioritises the emotional, social, and developmental needs of an individual, typically a child, in order to promote healthy growth and development [6]. It involves actively engaging with the individual and adapting care practices to meet their unique needs and preferences. Responsive care is characterized by sensitivity, warmth, and attunement to the individual's cues and signals Gonzalez-Mena & Eyer [7].

One important component of responsive care is consideration, which refers to the caregiver's ability to accurately perceive and interpret the individual's signals, needs, and emotions. A considerate caregiver is attuned to the individual's cues and responds promptly and appropriately, providing comfort and support when needed. Consideration helps to build a secure attachment between the caregiver and the individual, which is crucial for their emotional well-being Gonzalez-Mena & Eyer [7]. Another important part of responsive care is providing physical care tasks such as

feeding, dressing, and bathing, as well as providing emotional support, offering opportunities for play and exploration, and creating a safe and stimulating environment.

Responsive Care in Islam

Islam, derived from the Arabic word "surrender" or "submission," is a religion founded by the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century CE [8]. As one of the world's major religious traditions, and the second largest in the UK, it holds a significant impact on the day-to-day lives of Muslims. Its teachings and principles of responsive influence various aspects of personal conduct, social interactions, and cultural practices [9]. Islamic teachings of responsive care guide Muslims parents in all facets of child development, including spiritual, moral, ethical, and emotional development of Children [1]. The Quran, regarded as the literal word of God, serves as the primary source of guidance for Muslims. It provides a comprehensive framework for believers, offering divine commandments and instructions on how to support people around them. Additionally, Muslims also adhere to the Hadith, which are collections of sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, offering further insights into religious practices and traditions [10]. One example of how Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encourages Muslims to show kindness to their family and children, is as he stated, "Indeed among the believers with the most complete faith is the one who is the best in conduct and the most kind to his family" [1]. Furthermore, Jabir Ibn Abdullah reported that Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Whoever has three daughters and he accommodates them, show mercy towards them, and support them, paradise is definitely guaranteed for him". Additionally, Qadri argued that Islamic principles shape Muslims' moral and ethical conduct, influencing their interactions with their children and families. Islamic ethics promote honesty, integrity, compassion, justice, and respect for others, which are key principles of responsive care and engagement with the children.

The Duty of Caring for Children in Islam

The role of parents in developing children's emotional, social, and cognitive skills is crucial in Islam. Parents play a significant role in shaping their children's development in these areas [11]. Ghamdi [12] argued that Islam emphasizes parents to provide a nurturing and loving environment that allows children to feel safe and secure. They can teach and model appropriate emotional expression, empathy, and understanding. Furthermore, (l-A`lâ, et al. [13] stated that Muslim parents have duty also help children develop emotional intelligence by encouraging them to label and understand their emotions, and by teaching them healthy coping mechanisms for managing stress and conflicts.

Muhammad, the prophet of God, laid huge stress on teaching children positive social behaviours, such as sharing, taking turns, and showing kindness towards others. Through everyday interactions, parents can help children develop important social skills like communication, active listening, and cooperation. They can also guide children in navigating social situations, resolving conflicts, and developing friendships.

Methodology

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of Muslim parents' understanding of responsive care, a purposive sampling strategy were adopted [14]. Participants included Muslim parents from different demographics including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender living in a small town in Midlands, to capture diverse perspectives. The selection criteria prioritised parents currently raising children aged 5-14 years old, living in Midlands, attending local mosque to support their children education and take interest in children' development by meeting teachers regularly and discussing their children's progress. Eight parents from African, Pakistani and Iraqi background were chosen for semi- structured interviews. These parents were recommended by the head teacher, as he thought they take keen interest in children upbringing and development.

The interviews were conducted privately to ensure participants feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences [15]. The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions that cover topics such as parental expectations, communication styles, emotional resilience, and discipline practices. Four focus groups were organised at a local mosque to promote discussions among Muslim parents, allowing for the exploration of shared experiences and diverse perspectives in a mosque setting. These group discussions provided a platform for participants to engage with one another, validate or challenge each other's experiences, and generate a rich pool of data. These sessions were facilitated by researcher himself who ensured that all participants had an equal opportunity to contribute. The researcher also observed children attending mosques from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM for learning Quran and Islamic studies. The researcher obtained informed consent from parents, and gatekeepers from mosques and children. Furthermore, the researcher attended the mosque from 26th June, 2023 to 30th June, 2023 and observed children, whose parents participated in the Interview.

The collected data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. A qualitative thematic analysis allowed for the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and commonalities across the dataset [16]. To ensure rigour, the analysis process involved researcher worked

independently and coded interview transcripts and focus group recordings worth out using a software but Nvivo was used to manage data and making nodes for themes [17]. This research study adhered to BERA ethical guidelines to protect the rights and confidentiality of participants. Informed consent were obtained, and anonymity was guaranteed by assigning unique identifiers to participants. Moreover, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequences. All data was securely stored and accessed only by authorised research had the access.

Findings and Data Analysis

Theme one: Parents' understanding of their faith and their role in Responsive Care

Muslim Parents demonstrated their belief that Islam, is not just a religion limited to worship but it's a way of life. It offers guidelines for parents and children upbringing and emotional and spiritual development. For example, parent 1 stated, "We view Islam as more than just a religion; it is a complete way of life. In this way of life, It is our responsibility as parents to ensure that our children's needs are met", when asked which needs she stated, "all sorts of needs, I mean their emotional needs, their needs for safety, and being listened, valued and loved". Similarly, parent 4 stated, "Children needs to be listened, and understood, and appreciated. Whenever my child does good in the mosque or school, she comes to me and talks about it, Hurrah! I won stickers, or Dojos etc. and always asks, if I am happy with her achievement, and I assured her, Yes, you made me proud". She jumps and expresses her happiness, but I do channelize her emotions by reminding her phrases like " al-hamdulillah (All praise belong to God". Parent 3 mentioned that "She used to sing to her children while breastfeeding, and it is a beautiful tradition in Islam, and I noticed my children knew many rhymes when they were only four, even before starting mosques. It not only provides comfort and nurtures a strong bond but also exposes them to the melodious verses of the Quran, instilling a love for recitation". Here the parent emphasises on the role of music and singing to develop a strong relation between a child and mother for emotional and cognitive development of children in their early childhood development.

When asked about their role as a parent in Islam, one of the parents during the group discussion shared a tradition of prophet Muhammad who said, "Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader of people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects. A man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband's home and his children and she is responsible for them. The servant of a man is a guardian of the property of his master and he is

responsible for it. No doubt, every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock (Al-Bukhari, 7138, Muslim, 1829). When asked, how it relates to their role for children development, another person mentioned, "It reminds us about our duty of care and their upbringing and creating a safe space for them". Faith is often an integral part of a family's values and beliefs, and when parents have a deep understanding of their faith, it impacts their parenting style and approach to raising their children [12]. Qadri [1] argued that Faith can provide a moral compass for parents, guiding their decision-making and shaping their perspectives on parenting. It can instill values such as love, compassion, forgiveness, and empathy, which are essential for nurturing a child's emotional and social development Hermansen, et al.

Parents who understand their responsibility of providing responsive care are more likely to create a nurturing and secure environment based on mutual respect and understanding. They may emphasize teaching their children about empathy, kindness, and acceptance, fostering their emotional well-being and social skills. Additionally, an understanding of faith can offer parents a sense of purpose and meaning in parenting. It can provide a framework for setting boundaries, discipline, and teaching values. Parental consistency in applying the teachings of their faith can contribute to a child's emotional development and sense of identity. However, it is important to note that the impact of parental understanding of faith on children's well-being can vary depending on how faith is understood and practiced. It is crucial for parents to foster an open and non-judgmental environment that allows children to question, explore, and develop their own understanding of faith as they grow. When asked about challenges, "parents pointed out lack of timing and their own limited understanding of faith sometimes hinder their ability to support children in language learning".

Theme Two: Strategies for Socio-Cognitive Development of Children

During the research conducted, it was identified that many Muslim parents prioritise and emphasise on their children learning Arabic, alongside their parents' native language. This commitment to language learning is manifested through their active participation in sending their children to local mosques to learn Arabic. These efforts have proven to have a significant impact on children's cognition and language development. During the focused group conversation one of the parents stated and others agreed by nodding that "for Muslim families, Arabic holds great significance as it is the language of the Quran – the holy book of Islam. Arabic is considered to be the language through which divine messages are conveyed, leading many parents to naturally express a desire for their children to learn and understand it". Furthermore, parents expressed

their belief that by learning Arabic and their parents' native language, children are attuned to their cultural and religious heritage, fostering a stronger sense of identity. Parent 3 shared her perspective on the importance of Arabic language acquisition for her children. Furthermore, she stated, "I want my children to have a deep connection with their culture and heritage. Learning Arabic is a means to understand the culture and social values of Islam. It's about preserving our culture I mean our faith and passing them down to our children and future generations". The children were observed reading Quran fluently and using Arabic phrases including al-hamdulillah (Thanks Allah) and Jazak Allah (God reward you) along with Urdu or Mirpuri (the language of the South Asian parents).

Numerous studies have shown that bilingualism or multilingualism, especially when maintained from an early age, enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and creativity [18,19]. The process of learning a second language, such as Arabic, engages children's minds and expands their cognitive capacities [20]. They develop the ability to switch between languages, which has been linked to enhanced executive functioning skills, such as attention control and problem-solving [21]. Moreover, the exposure to Arabic writing and script strengthens children's literacy skills, particularly in the areas of reading and writing [22]. Through their regular attendance at the mosque, children not only develop competency in Arabic vocabulary and grammar but also become proficient in reading and writing Arabic script, enabling them to fully experience and engage with the Quran. This nurturing of Arabic writing skills positively influences their overall literacy development, as studies have revealed that bilingual individuals tend to outperform monolingual individuals in reading and writing tasks.

Parent 4, spoke about his observations of how his daughter's Arabic language learning has impacted her cognitive abilities. He shared, "I have noticed that my daughter has become more attentive and focused since she started learning Arabic. Her memory has improved, and she can process information more efficiently. I believe her Arabic language learning has played a significant role in these positive changes." In conclusion, the research demonstrates that Muslim parents' focus on their children learning Arabic and their native language, through mosque attendance, has a profound impact on children's cognition and language development, which was also observed that most of the children were interacting well with the teacher, their class fellows and the rest of students in the mosques". By learning Arabic, children not only connect with their religious and cultural roots but also experience cognitive advantages and improved literacy skills. As Muslim families continue to prioritise language learning, the potential benefits for children's overall development and future success become

increasingly evident.

The benefits of developing multilingualism in children extend far beyond their ability to communicate in different languages. The children who were selected for observation demonstrated metacognitive skills, such as self-regulation and cognitive flexibility. They demonstrated good understanding of phonetics rules and understanding of places and manners of articulation, which confirms that being bilingual or multilingual has a positive impact on children's cognitive development [23]. Language learning rewires the brain, enhancing cognitive skills such as memory, attention, and problem-solving abilities [24]. The children displayed goal-oriented behaviour and inhibitory control. They displayed and made a good use of executive functioning skills, which enable them to pay attention, switch between tasks, and maintain focus for longer periods.

Theme Three: The Strategies of Emotional Development

During the research, it was identified that Muslim parents placed a strong emphasis on teaching their children how to control and express their emotions using Arabic phrases and mannerisms grounded in Islamic teachings. This practice aims to instill a sense of gratitude, mindfulness, and emotional resilience from an early age. Some Arabic phrases commonly used by Muslim children in mosques to express emotions were "Assalam o Alaikum Wr Br", which translates to "peace be upon you and God's blessings." Parents stated during the focus group discussion that "This phrase (Asslam-o-Alaikum) is not only a simple greeting but also a way to spread positivity and peacefulness in everyday interactions". By teaching their children to use this phrase, parents hoped to cultivate a general sense of goodwill and respect for others. It was also observed that when children entered into class, they always use the phrase "peace be upon you". In addition to greeting others, Muslim parents also spoke about teaching their children to express gratitude using phrases like "Subhan Allah" (glory be to Allah) and "Alhamdulillah" (praise be to Allah). They said, "We use these expressions of gratitude and are encouraged during meals, where children are taught to recognise the blessing of having food and drink, and to show appreciation for it". Another parent highlighted that "I teach my child small prayers that she can recite throughout the day. These prayers not only help her learn how to communicate with Allah, but they also serve as a way to channelize their emotions and learn empathy and compassion. This practice aids in fostering a strong emotional bond between children, the people around and the environment [25]. By focusing on these aspects of emotional control, gratitude, and prayer, Muslim parents hope to guide their children towards leading a more balanced and centered social life. These teachings instill a sense of mindfulness, empathy, and appreciation

for the blessings in their lives. Moreover, by incorporating Arabic phrases into their everyday speech, children learn to embrace their cultural and religious heritage from an early age. As research suggests, this approach in parenting has shown positive effects on the emotional intelligence and overall well-being of Muslim children. It helps them establish a solid foundation rooted in their faith, while also promoting positive values and qualities that can benefit them throughout their lives Khan.

The development of emotional and social skills in children is crucial for their overall well-being. Teaching children patience and gratitude has a significant impact on their emotional well-being. Emotionally intelligent children tend to regulate their emotions effectively and communicate their feelings and needs in a more appropriate manner, leading to healthier relationships and decreased behavioral issues [26]. When children are taught emotional intelligence skills, such as recognizing and understanding their own emotions and those of others, they are better able to navigate social interactions effectively [27]. The children demonstrated empathy, showed respect towards teachers and their peers and built positive relationships with peers. The research also shows that such children experience less isolation, loneliness, and conflicts, leading to improved mental and emotional health [28]. Moreover, teaching emotional and social manners prepares children for challenges they may face later in life. It equips them with being calm in the process of problem-solving or conflict-resolution and the ability to cope with stress and adversity. Children who are emotionally competent are more likely to handle academic setbacks and bounce back from failures [29].

Recommendations and Further Research

To enhance parenting skills within the Muslim community and create a safe environment for children's social, emotional and cognitive development following recommendations are made.

Recommendations for Muslim Parents

- Instill the importance of gratitude in your children's lives and help them understand that everything comes from God. Encourage them regularly express gratitude and repeatedly remind them of the blessings in their lives.
- Create a loving and supportive environment at home. Show affection, offer praise, and provide emotional support for children. Encourage healthy communication, active listening and open dialogue.
- Teach your children the value of empathy and compassion towards others. Encourage them to talk about their feelings and provide them with guidance on how to cope with different emotional states.

- Teach your children second language or even a third language. It is helpful in children cognitive and problem solving skills.

Recommendations for Mosques and Faith Schools

- Mosques should offer programmes for Muslim parents that emphasise the values of empathy and compassion towards others. These programmes can include activities like community service, charitable initiatives, and workshops on understanding responsive care.
- Should offer Arabic classes for Muslim parents, who may support their children at home and reinforce learning using Arabic expressions.
- Should start parent support group, which may provide advice and support to those parents who have a little or no cultural or faith capital in terms of providing responsive care to children.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

- Mosques can be utilised as centres of language development and has a good number of teachers who speak Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and Mirpuri.
- Schools and Mosque should collaborate with each other and can develop bilingual or multilingual courses both for children and local communities
- Mosque should open themselves and the services can be extended to other communities who may benefit from language and parenting programmes.
- Mosques should laisse with charities working with children and families

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore parents' views on responsive care and its impact on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. The majority of the parents highlighted the significance of having a broader understanding of faith, as it contributes to comprehending their role in their child's development. Although the study focused on Muslim parents, it offers valuable insights that can be applied to parents from different faith backgrounds or even those with no religious affiliation [30-32]. One important lesson is that learning an additional language has numerous benefits for children, including improved socialization and cognitive development. To create a supportive and inclusive environment for both children and parents, the mosque can implement various initiatives. These include offering parenting classes, welcoming children from different faiths to learn additional languages, and encouraging regular conversations and emotional resilience within families. By embracing these measures, Muslim children can develop

their social, cognitive and emotional resilience for future life.

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