

CAN ISLAMIC SPIRITUAL SCALE BE USEFUL

By Nazila Isgandarova

PhD student, Muslim College, London, UK

Resident Chaplain, St. Joseph's healthcare Setting, Hamilton, ON

In Western society spirituality is a prominent concept which is discussed in various professional fields. This is a sign of holistic approach to the system. The spiritual care givers, such as chaplains, pastoral counselors, and clinically trained clergy are usually professionals who help people to identify and deal with spiritual problems.

Muslims in the Western society are not completely familiar with the term of spiritual care giver. However, number of Muslim chaplains and counselors are increasing. I am happy that especially recent years they could organize themselves. In Canada Muslim care givers are very rear represented in CAPPE (Canadian Associations for Pastoral Practice and Education), which is a national multifaith organization and is committed to the professional education, certification and support of people involved in pastoral care and pastoral counseling. In the USA spiritual caregivers are represented in the organizations according to their faith group and denomination. Muslims do not have such an organization in the USA, however, Dr. Ingrid Mattson's Islamic Chaplaincy Program within Hartford Seminary can be considered first step towards such organization and will help community and professionals to gather and work on important projects such as spiritual assessment or scale, methods of therapy, multifaith prayer, etc.

In this article my intention is to shed a light on spiritual assessment/scale methods in my chaplaincy experience.

As we know, Christians very often use spiritual and religious scale. The purpose of the scale is to see client's and congregations' well-being. The method used in the scale is to ask questions which need accurate and honest respond, and careful thought. The chaplains, pastoral counselors give their clients written inventories, or ask brief verbal inquires, or use various other kinds of surveys. Such scale help the professionals identify spiritual or religious problems.

The Spiritual scale is usually a general indicator of spiritual or religious well being which also involves psychological well-being. Such assessment can be used in individual and congregational level. It helps to measure the perception of spiritual and religious quality of life. The questions in the scale provides a self-assessment of one's relationship and love with God, or Higher Being, the sense of one's life purpose and satisfaction, and also one's spiritual and religious character.

In recent years there is increasing interest in spiritual scales/ assessments. It became more attractive with an interest in and awareness of spiritual issues. The people more often began to use such scales, because the worldly and countable side of the life bored men and it seized to become the life quality measurement.

Muslims have also non-formal scale in five daily prayers and sense of the level of their faith in spiritual or religious reflection times. However, I found out that it would be helpful to work on such a project in community. Theologically, this idea is not controversial or judgmental. Practically, it can be applied. For the most Muslims a quality of life, or level of life satisfaction is not through the measuring tangible and countable worldly goods and services. For them, the quality of life indicator is one's spiritual and religious well-being, which nurtures one's feeling of gratification.

The general questions used in almost every spiritual assessments/scales are about the things which give life meaning, the source of joy and fulfillment, resources during times of stress and disappointment, source of a sense of peace and serenity, resources to cope with boredom and daily living, one's use of leisure time. The idea is not to control the clients' beliefs and creeds, rather than to reveal mental state of clients, and help them according to the results.

Of course, there can be debates in the community about the possibility to measure one's spiritual and religious well-being and the reliability of such assessment. It can sound puzzling. However, we should also consider that every field deals with the reliability of scales, assessments and research, including mathematics, medicine, chemistry, etc. However, it is more difficult in the professions which deal with human mind and emotions. It should not discourage us. Those who have an experience in this field understand that to measure spiritual and religious well-being is useful, which helps the professionals to sense the general picture of one's spiritual well-being and religious practices. In my personal experience, I used such scales which helped me to understand clients' spiritual and religious issues and draw upon their spiritual and religious resources and facilitate clients to use them.

In community, the mosques and Islamic centers can use the spiritual or religious assessments to assess the religious or spiritual well-being of individuals who use their service, because increases or decreases of well-being can happen over time due to implementation of religious or spiritual programs and activities.

Generally, the scales may or may include items we experience. However, I'm sure that spiritual and religious assessments may present an important way to examine religiousness and spirituality in different fields of life and facilitate individuals and congregations to use them in coping with practical issues of life.