

A process evaluation of the Family Links Islamic Values course for Muslim fathers

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Summary

Background

Amid concern about the reach and inclusivity of parenting interventions, attempts have been made to culturally adapt programmes for specific ethnic or linguistic groups. This paper describes a novel approach of the religious adaptation of a parenting programme, namely the Family Links Islamic Values course.

Methods

A small-scale qualitative process evaluation was conducted of one Islamic Values course for Muslim fathers in the South of England, in order to describe the intervention as implemented and its theory of change, as well as the acceptability of the programme to participants. The data consisted of thirteen semi-structured interviews (ten with parents and three with staff), 25 hours of observation and reading of programme manuals.

Results

A logic model is presented to describe the theoretical basis of the intervention. The programme was highly acceptable to fathers, who valued the integration of religious teachings and were generally very positive about their experience of attending the course. Post-course interviews with both fathers and mothers mentioned some positive changes in fathers as a result of their attendance.

Conclusions

It is important to be responsive to the needs of some British Muslims for religiously credible interventions. This small-scale process evaluation needs to be followed by a robust evaluation of programme outcomes for parents and children.

This report presents the findings of a small-scale process evaluation of the Family Links Islamic Values course for Muslim fathers. The programme is of wider interest in the family welfare field as an example of adaptation of a parenting intervention for a religious group, rather than for an ethnic group which is the more familiar approach to cultural adaptation.

Background

Cultural adaptation of parenting programmes

There is considerable interest amongst policy-makers and practitioners in preventative 'early intervention' programmes to improve children's well-being. These programmes are usually focused on changes to parenting style and some approaches are quite strongly evidence-based (Barlow *et al.*, 2011; Furlong *et al.*, 2013). Despite a generally optimistic climate surrounding early intervention (some prefer 'early help'), there has been some concern expressed about the extent to which parenting programmes are inclusive (Davis *et al.*, 2012). One aspect of this lack of inclusiveness relates to minority ethnic populations, with concern that they have not always been included in the development of evidence-based interventions and calls for those interventions with a good evidence base for majority populations to be culturally adapted for specific cultural groups (Castro, Barrera and Holleran Steiker, 2010).

This is complex terrain, with many pitfalls, such as assuming ethnic homogeneity, and an ongoing dilemma about how to balance cultural relevance with fidelity to the intervention's core principles (Castro *et al.*, 2010). An example of a parenting intervention which has seen quite thoroughgoing cultural adaptation is the Strengthening Families Programme, designed to prevent substance misuse in children but also aiming to improve some aspects of family functioning. This programme has been adapted for minority groups within the USA - e.g. Hispanic, native American and Pacific Islander families - and also adapted for international use - e.g. with Dutch, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Thai families (Kumpfer *et al.*, 2002; 2008).

The assumption of cultural adaptation is that programmes will be more effective if culturally relevant to participants. Castro *et al.* (2010) summarise the evidence on the effectiveness of cultural adaptation of psychological interventions, noting that there is no clear consensus, with more and less optimistic results found in the reviews by Griner and Smith (2006) and Huey and Polo (2008) respectively. Griner and Smith's review was wider in scope and more inclusive of a range of interventions. They found stronger effects for intervention participants who were less acculturated to their majority context; for example those who are not fluent in the dominant language.

There are many different levels at which programmes can be adapted. Cultural adaptation can be surface – i.e. addressing aspects of culture such as language, food and dress - or deep – i.e. serious attention is paid to 'cultural, social, historical, environmental, and psychological factors that influence the health behaviors of members of a targeted population' (Castro *et al.*, 2010, p.216, with reference to Rescinow *et al.*, 2000). Falicov (2009) has helpfully identified three levels of depth in the adaptation of programmes. The strongest incorporation of a distinct cultural context is what Falicov terms 'culturally informed' interventions. These put the cultural context to the fore, possibly prioritising it over fidelity to the original intervention. A slight weaker modification is 'culturally adapted' interventions where much of the original intervention is maintained. And weaker still is where interventions are 'culturally attuned', that is, some minor changes are made to remove any obviously off-putting elements of the original intervention.

Although a religious world view may form part of the cultural context that programme adaptations try to allow for, we are not aware of examples in the academic research literature of the deliberate religious adaptation of a parenting programme. Previous adaptations have focused on ethnic and linguistic communities, rather than religious ones. For a parenting programme based on psychological theory to be adapted for a specific religious group is therefore a novel approach. The intervention being studied is adapted for a multi-ethnic religious group rather than a specific ethnic-linguistic group, which reflects how many Muslims see themselves, prioritising religious identity over ethnic or national identity (Roy, 2004).

Islamic social welfare

Islam is a growing religion worldwide (Roy, 2004). There are substantial Muslim minorities in many European countries. For example, in England and Wales, the Muslim population was 2.7 million in 2011, having grown between the censuses of 2001 and 2011 from 3% of the population to 5% (ONS, 2013). There have been some attempts to provide Islamically-sensitive services, developed from a faith-based position. The existing literature tends to describe an Islamic approach to services in theory but there is a lack of evidence about how this plays out in practice. An isolated recent example of research evidence is Warden's (2012) study, describing an organisation in one multi-ethnic British city with the pseudonym 'the Islamic Welfare Organisation', whose services include advice, counselling, a youth group and a women's group, all from an Islamic perspective, as well as Islamic divorce (*khula*). Warden describes an ethos which is very similar to that of the mainstream secular voluntary sector, but with an additional Islamic tone where appropriate.

Scourfield et al. (2013) have recently argued, with reference to research with British Muslim families, that although there is of course diversity in the Muslim population, there is also a broad agreement about some aspects of child-rearing which have implications for family welfare services. These aspects include a strongly monotheistic world-view and traditions of formal religious education. One of their conclusions is that parenting programmes may need to be offered from a faith perspective if Muslim parents are to be successfully engaged.

The Nurturing Programme

The Family Links nurturing programme is a British adaptation of a programme originally devised by Steven Bavolek in the US. It can in theory be used as a universal programme, though in practice it is used with families in need, at least in deprived areas. The logic model for the family of nurturing parenting interventions (Bavolek, undated) sees the prevention of child abuse and neglect as the main aim. The intervention is based on psycho-educational and cognitive-behavioural approaches to learning. There is an emphasis on parents learning self-care as well as changing the way they interact with their children. The UK programme is based on four main constructs: empathy; positive discipline; appropriate expectations; and self-awareness and self-esteem. This Family Links Islamic Values course is for all parents, but single-sex groups are offered as this is in keeping with Islamic traditions. Only the fathers' group was studied in this small-scale research project, which formed part of a programme of research on social interventions for fathers.

Research methods

The study was a process evaluation, designed to explore intervention acceptability to both fathers and their wives; to describe the intervention as implemented, including the practical

working out of the religious adaptation; and to describe its theory of change. Of the seven key process evaluation components described by Linnan and Steckler (2002), particular attention is paid to three, namely dose received, fidelity and implementation. This was a small-scale qualitative study. Data collection consisted of studying the programme manuals; about twenty-five hours of participant observation, which focused on intervention delivery and participants' interaction before and after group meetings; and thirteen semi-structured interviews. Interview participants consisted of five fathers who had completed the course we observed (seven had started, with two drop-outs); five women who were the wives of the five men interviewed and were themselves attending the Family Links programme in a mothers' group; and two staff members, one of whom was a senior staff member with Family Links and the other of whom (interviewed twice) was heavily involved in the adaptation for Muslim parents (Arifa Naeem). Arifa's identity cannot be concealed, as she is publically identified with the Islamic Values course, but other professionals are identified only by job role and parents are all given pseudonyms.

All observation and client interviews were conducted by Qurratulain Nasiruddin through medium of Urdu. Fieldnotes were written in English and interviews were translated into English by Qurratulain. The only aspect of intervention content which could not be observed was the session on sexuality, which was a single-sex session so the researcher and female facilitator left the room. The three staff interviews were conducted in English by Jonathan Scourfield. Of the five fathers interviewed, four had Pakistani ethnic origin and one Indian. One father was referred as a child protection case; two were referred through the Common Assessment Framework process and were identified as not meeting the threshold for 'children in need' services; a further two were self-referred and their wives had already done the programme. These two women were interviewed, in addition to three others who were doing the Family Links Islamic Values course for mothers which was running alongside the fathers' group. Family size ranged from two children to six children. The men were unemployed or self-employed in retail or taxi driving. Two were described by the facilitator as 'more educated'. Another two could not complete the English language evaluation forms. Two could speak English and three could not, but all five understood Urdu and Punjabi well. One of the facilitators was not fluent in Urdu, so was there primarily as a support for Arifa.

Data were thematically analysed, using what Coffey and Atkinson (1996) term a 'code-and-retrieve' approach. Data were initially sorted (using Microsoft Word) under thematic headings which were linked to the purpose of the process evaluation and then a commentary was developed for each theme in order to present an overview of responses.

Findings

The distinctiveness of the Family Links Nurturing Programme

The Nurturing Parenting Programmes developed by the US parent organisation are many and various (see <http://nurturingparenting.com/>). The UK version for which Family Links is the sole licenced provider consists of two-hour sessions over ten weeks, with an additional introduction session. There is a rather crowded market in parenting programmes and it can be very difficult to tell them apart. Each programme naturally proclaims itself to be the best. When asked about what marked it out as different from other programmes, the Family Links staff member interviewed compared it with Incredible Years, a programme which is based on social learning theory and targeted on behaviour management. In characterising the Family Links programme, she said:

The emphasis is not just on the behaviour of children but on the family functioning as a whole, relationships in the family as a whole and the emotional health of the family as a whole. So it has a much stronger emphasis on the self-efficacy of the parent, the emotional health of the parent. (Interview with Family Links staff member)

She went on to explain that the problem with programmes focused exclusively on behaviour management is that whilst ‘the strategies may be fantastic’, parents are ‘not necessarily in the place to take on board any of those strategies so nothing really changes’.

Developing the Islamic Values course

The Family Links Islamic Values course was developed by Arifa Naeem, a family support worker from Berkshire. Arifa was very enthusiastic about the Family Links Nurturing Programme after being trained to facilitate it but was concerned about a lack of take-up from Muslim parents.

It was really difficult to engage Muslim parents in parenting programmes because they wouldn’t get engaged, and they would say ‘this is a kind of a programme which is just for British way of living, it is nothing to do with our belief system’. (Interview with Arifa Naeem)

Arifa herself saw the Family Links Nurturing Programme as completely compatible with Islam. She was well-informed, having done a degree in Islamic history and Islamic studies. It was felt that Muslim parents often struggled to distinguish ethnic culture from Islam. This religion-culture distinction is commonly made by Muslims in the West (Roy, 2004; Bolognani and Mellor, 2012). Arifa’s view was that even some aspects of the programme that are not usually associated with Islam, because of the cultures of Muslim countries rather than the teachings of religious texts, are in fact fully compatible with Islam. The examples she gave in this regard were openness about sex, children’s rights and women’s rights. Discussion of sex tends to be a challenge because Muslim parents often think it is shameful, but it is not unIslamic if there are some limits, such as that discussion of body parts should take place in single sex groups.

The whole course is in fact run via single-sex parenting classes, as this was thought to be more acceptable to the target population. The fathers’ group is facilitated by Arifa herself and a male Islamic counsellor. For the session when sex is discussed, Arifa absents herself for part of the time, returning for the discussion of keeping children safe from sexual harm. From Arifa’s perspective, the aspects of the programme that are most effective with Muslim parents are empathy and self-awareness, because the parents she has worked with tend not to think about the importance of these aspects, whereas other elements of the programme are more familiar to some.

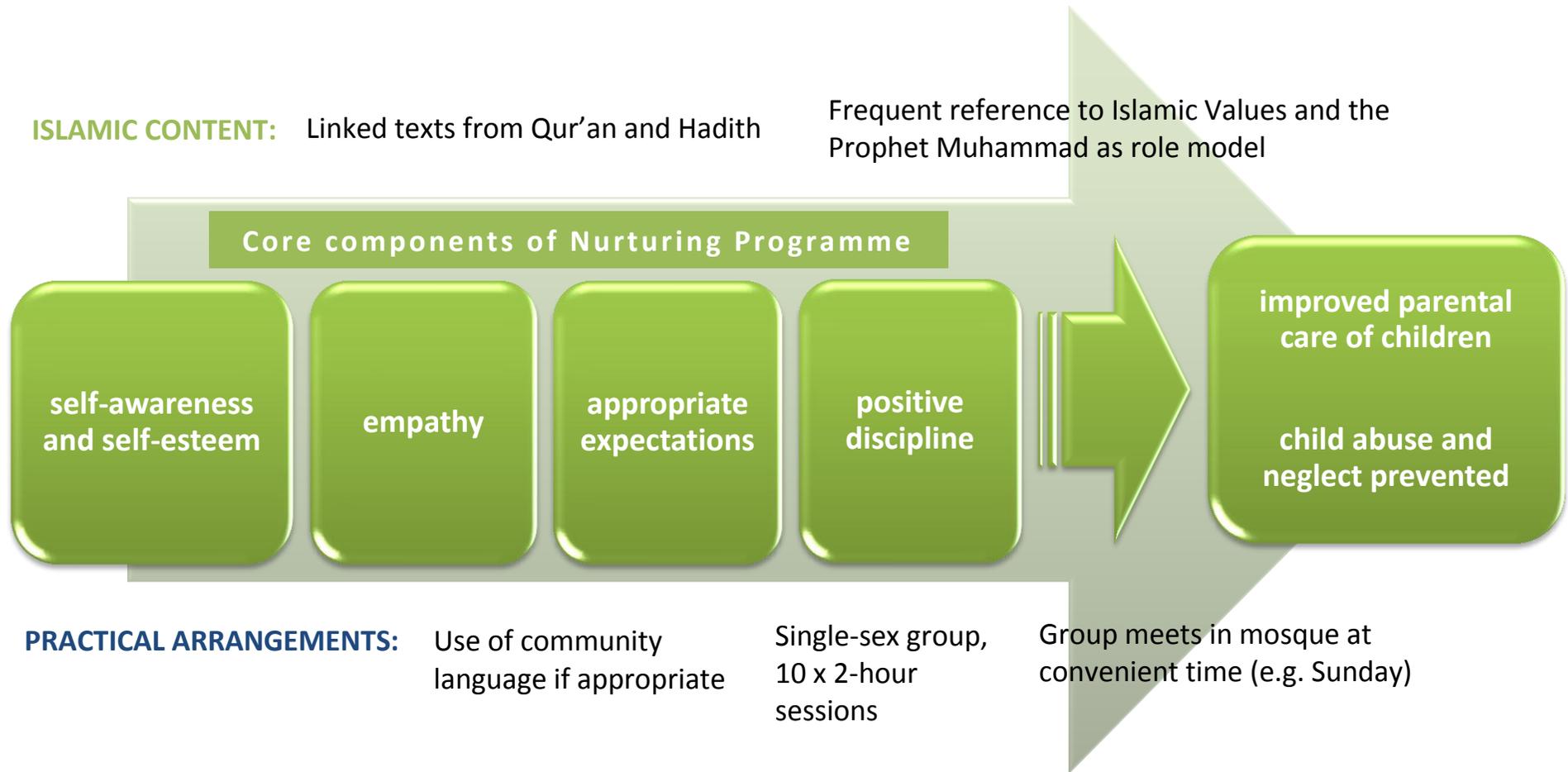
The process of adaptation was that Arifa herself identified texts from Qur’an and Hadith which gave an Islamic justification for the messages of each programme session; this was piloted with a group of Muslim mothers who were studying the Qur’an; the content was then checked with Muslim scholars, a local Sharia council and the Muslim College of London. This process took a year. Before publishing the Islamic Values booklet for parents, which contained these religious texts in English translation, the eminent scholar Tariq Ramadan was approached to write the foreword for the booklet. The programme is now being rolled out through the training of women volunteers recruited via the UK Islamic Mission. These are lay people, rather than trained professionals, although some may in fact have a

relevant professional background such as teaching. Programmes have tended to run through the medium of a community language (e.g. Urdu or Punjabi). So although the programme is designed to be suitable for a multi-ethnic Muslim audience, in practice the groups tend to be ethnically specific. In the Family Links staff member's view, it tends to be 'less integrated' parents who attend because this group would be less likely to attend a non-Islamic programme. Care was taken to develop a programme suitable for more or less all schools of thought within Islam. As Arifa put it:

There are 72 sects in Islam and I want to make sure that everything that we are discussing and talking is acceptable for everybody. (Interview with Arifa Naeem)

The adapted programme does not involve any elements being removed from the Nurturing Programme. The intention is to preserve all the core elements of the original (secular) programme, but to package them for a Muslim audience with Islamic teachings that are compatible. A logic model already exists for the Nurturing Parenting family of programmes (Bavolek, undated). Figure 1 shows a visual representation of the main elements of a logic model for the Islamic Values course.

Figure 1: Logic model diagram for the Family Links Islamic Values course



Delivering the programme

The delivery stuck quite closely to the manual, with all main programme elements present as well as the religious framing. Inevitably, less time is spent on activities specified in the manual as would be the case for the regular Family Links programme, since the group sessions take up the same time as the regular programme, but some of this time is needed for the religious framing. Time constraints did not allow for all the material in the Islamic values booklet to be used, just as not every detail in the Family Links manual was used. So, for example, the detail of the time-out strategy was skated over and session four had relatively little Islamic content, with religious texts read out for one of the session's themes only. Despite the constraints of time, there was little evidence of dilution of the core programme elements, even with the course lasting nine weeks instead of ten because of the availability of some of the fathers.

As noted above, the course introduces helpful perspectives and strategies in relation to parenting not because they are Islamic as such but because they are core to the original Family Links Nurturing Programme which has its roots in Stephen Bavolek's doctoral research (interview with Family Links staff member). However, participants in the Islamic Values course are given examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad to demonstrate that the proposed strategies do not contradict Islamic principles. Examples were that the importance of parents modelling behaviour for children was supported by the story of the Prophet's grand children who demonstrated the correct way of ablution rather criticising a man who was not performing it correctly. The theme of punishment and rewards was illustrated by the example of Muhammad forgiving others and showing generosity. Equally, his approach of consulting family members and neighbours rather than imposing his decision was used to underline the importance of involving family members in decisions.

Although the programme was developed for Muslim parents of any ethnic background, the particular course we observed was attended by four Pakistanis and one Indian father. The shared ethnic background of most of the men meant that there was also discussion of Pakistani culture in comparison with the UK. The programme was conducted in the Urdu language. This suited the fathers well, but the male co-facilitator struggled with this a little, understanding Urdu but not speaking it well.

Acceptability to fathers

The fathers were very positive about the programme in general, making some generally supportive comments about what can be gained from attendance:

The purpose of the programme is so good that nothing else could make it better. It's perfect. (Mr Khan)

This is a very good programme if you see it is very helpful for the development of a person as a human being not as a parent. This programme makes you a good human being. (Mr Hussain)

This programme is very helpful. I recommend this programme to most of the family members. I am not only talking about Asian people everybody can take it. It's a very good course. Especially since the government is giving funds and it's free of cost as well. (Mr Malik)

Arifa herself came in for considerable praise as a facilitator and family worker:

In my family, Arifa is working for last two years. She saved my family. She has played a vital role (...). My children went on a child protection plan, but the role played by Arifa helped us to solve issues. Today, if I am attending these courses it is because Arifa has helped us a lot. (Mr Khan)

Arifa is like my sister. We call her and ask for her advice whenever we are in trouble (...) Whatever I learn from sister Arifa, I tell to other members of my family in Pakistan (...) Sister Arifa knows everything (Mr Siddiqui)

I am very happy with Arifa. She is very good. She gives a lot of examples. Also, because she deals with cases so she is in a better position to explain (...) She will get reward on the Day of Judgment. Generations and generations will get benefit of the work that she is doing. (Mr Malik)

The male co-facilitator who played a secondary role in the group facilitation was also well regarded ('he gets all the stuff prepared and he mixes it up a little bit'), although one father commented on his lack of spoken Urdu. Specific aspects of the course that fathers spoke positively about were the timing of the meetings on a Sunday, meaning it could fit around work patterns; the interactive nature of the session, making it 'fun'; and the fact that the material gets people thinking, rather than being about 'giving information'. There were also positive comments about the relationships between the fathers built up in the group. Arifa saw this particular group of fathers as having been markedly successful in bonding with each other. One of the fathers expressed it in these terms:

Yes. It's fun because we all come here with different set of backgrounds. We are all very unique so everyone learns from one another. I do enjoy that. (Mr Ibrahim)

The fathers valued the Islamic content. Mr Khan noted that it is important to follow the 'laws and regulations of England' but it is also important that 'our values and principles in families should be in accordance to Islam'. The programme's approach of emphasising the compatibility of the parenting advice with Islamic teachings was appreciated, as can be seen in the following excerpts.

First, this programme tells that one should nurture children with love and affection. Secondly, it teaches patience. It tells that one should be patient. It is also in our religion that patience is a key. Even God likes those who keep patience and tolerance. It is highly important to be nice and kind to children. (Mr Hussain)

If you are talking to Muslims, it is very very good. We Muslims always refer to Qur'an, Hadiths and its interpretations like Sahih Bukhari (...) They provided teachings from Qur'an and Hadiths on feelings like how do you feel? what to do when you feel upset. It is very good actually. I would say that you could add more but not remove. (Mr Malik)

Like Mr Malik, Mr Hussain thought that the Islamic material 'should be increased (...) it's better to learn more about Islamic content'.

A couple of the fathers also mentioned the appreciation of ethnic culture, as well as faith. Mr Malik said 'Arifa has an Asian background so she will understand our culture and she can give us better examples'. Mr Khan spoke about not knowing previously how to express some ideas that were discussed on the course and learning new language even if the concepts were not novel to him:

Since we are Pakistani, we do not have much knowledge and we lack exact terms to communicate our thoughts and ideas. For example, I used to do 'time out' but I never used this term as I didn't know. Thus, social services thought that I should join this programme to learn about parenting. When I started the programme, I realised that I have been doing some of things but I also learnt additional things such as empathy and child psychology. I used to do before as well but I never used to say. Hopefully, I am now in a position to explain everyone. (Mr Khan)

The fathers were asked if they had ideas for improving the programme and relatively few were expressed, which in large part reflected the extent to which they were positive about their experience (Mr Siddiqui said 'I will just say that everything is perfect').

As noted above, two fathers wanted more Islamic content. One father commented on the need for all English used in the group to be translated into Urdu. Interestingly, two fathers had ideas about diversifying the style and medium of learning. Mr Ibrahim recommended using video clips or 'some visual thing to see' and a 'mini test for fun' as an aid to memory retention. Mr Malik suggested 'more interaction' and 'team-building exercises'. He mentioned that fun exercises were used as ice breakers but that the use of these declined. In observing the group we noticed that the men rather came alive when such practical exercises were used. Mr Ibrahim also thought a larger group size would 'make it more interacting and more fun'. Mr Siddiqui was especially enthusiastic about the programme and thought the programme should be made available to as 'as many people as possible' as there are many social problems that could be potentially be ameliorated.

Accounts of change

Mothers' accounts

When considering the views of mothers it should be noted that although they were being asked about the impact of their husbands' attendance at the programme, they were all themselves attending the course themselves or had already done so, via a separate mothers' group. Their responses therefore inevitably reflect their own direct experience of the group as well as how they perceived the results of their husbands attending. Some comments were made specifically about changes in the men, however. Mrs Khan, for example, spoke of her husband having changed towards her and the children, resulting in improvements in their behaviour:

His attitude has changed towards me. He gives more time and attention at home. He has changed a lot. He spent more time at home. He takes care of children even more. The children study more. They stay within the boundaries of house. Now they listen to my instructions. (Mrs Khan)

Two of the women interviewed specifically mentioned improvements in relation to their husbands' anger levels:

For example, he used to get angry about everything. He used to get cross over children on minor mistakes. Now, he has improved. My daughter didn't used to share anything with father, assuming that she would be scolded. I didn't like to interfere in the matters between daughter and father. Now, she is getting close to her father. I like it a lot that the children are getting better. (Mrs Hussain)

One change is with regard to anger. My husband used to get angry. Now he controls himself and does not talk to anyone when he is angry. He also has asthma which used to be exacerbated in anger, but now he has controlled it a lot. (Mrs Siddiqui)

Mrs Siddiqui went on to say that since the programme, her and her husband tried to 'always compromise so that kids do not get any negative message from us'. Mrs Ibrahim specifically mentioned her husband's demeanour with their children.

Yes. He is more empathetic with children. He listens to them, talks to them and discusses with them all their concerns. He used to do it before as well. Now he does it more nicely. (Mrs Ibrahim)

Mrs Siddiqui spoke of improvements in her children's behaviour as a result of both parents attending the Islamic Values programme:

In regard to the children, I have observed that my eldest child used to scream and talk loudly to us. We explained him to speak softly and we also speak softly with them so he has stopped screaming. (Mrs Siddiqui)

Fathers' accounts

As would be expected, since the programme addressed parenting, the fathers spoke mainly about their behaviour in relation to their children, when asked about the impact of attending the programme. Each of the five fathers highlighted a different issue which had been the main point of learning for them.

Mr Khan said he had come to realise that he had 'self-power to handle family matters' and implementing strategies such as time-out and a clear routine for children has led to clear improvements in their behaviour. Previously they would behave well when he was there and badly in his absence. He explained in the group that whilst previously he would argue with his wife every morning because things were running late, since attending the group they now distribute tasks between them, with his wife being responsible for preparing breakfast and lunch and Mr Khan getting his children ready for school. Arifa also noted that Mr Khan, whose children were on a child protection plan, had learned a lot on the course about empathy.

Mr Siddiqui said he now leaves the room if he gets angry with the children and they 'come to me, they apologize and bring me back'. He was clear about the difference attending the programme had made to him and his family:

If I had not taken this programme, I would have beaten my children, stayed in depression, been rude with wife and children. As I am taking this course, my knowledge is increasing. (Mr Siddiqui)

My children are getting better every day with what Arifa teaches us. Her way is very good. It has increased my knowledge. Those kids used to make excuses to not go school. Now, they listen to me. They win competitions and get good grades. (Mr Siddiqui)

Mr Ibrahim spoke both in interview and in the group about having learned empathy. He said that previously he would ignore the children if they came to him 'bothered or concerned', but he now tries to 'connect' and 'show them I am empathising'. The result, for one of his children at least, is an 'immediate switch in his behaviour within few seconds' which Mr Ibrahim put down to 'connecting with him at his level'. He was very struck by the change, saying 'there have been occasions where I surprised myself'.

For Mr Hussain, the most important change was learning to 'control emotions' and be 'patient'. He gave the example during the last group meeting that earlier the same day he had taken his wife and daughter to a shopping mall and although they promised to be back in fifteen minutes, in fact they took forty-five. He said 'I was very angry but I didn't say anything to them'. He also said he was now involving his children more in decision-making and giving them opportunity to share concerns, something he did not get the opportunity to do in his own childhood.

Mr Malik highlighted a few aspects of change. He said he is now consciously praising his wife and has observed that his daughter is now thanking them both 'for every favour they do'. He spoke in the group of the importance of giving 'time to family members - I should not only focus on work'. Since attending the programme, he is spending more time sharing concerns and feelings with his wife.

Despite these encouraging testimonies, there were also some examples of limited insight. Arifa noted that the fathers tend to start off by expecting the rest of the family to change and it takes time to 'convince them it's you, you who have to change'. One example of this we observed was that one participant had introduced a Kindness chart, as recommended in the programme, but expected his wife and children to complete the chart rather than taking part himself. Mr Hussain showed some limited insight in his interview at the end of the course. He continued to see his wife as the sole problem in terms of parenting:

I have told this thing many times to sister Arifa that my family matters are not as serious as others. My only problem is my wife. Just only my wife. My wife spoiled my daughter. Otherwise there is no problem at all. I am known to be a sincere and loyal person in my community and even within my neighbourhood. Just imagine why would I not be sincere and loyal to my children? I won't even let my daughters work. People gift a house and property in dowry to their daughters; I will gift a business instead. (Mr Hussain)

His wife confirmed that there was still some way to go in terms of his learning. She said that she herself had changed a lot since attending the mothers' group. Her husband has yet to control his anger or learn to trust her.

I think anger management as first thing. I have changed a lot. Now, he needs to control his anger. It may be in the nature of men that they do not tolerate and keep patience. Secondly, trust. He should trust that I am not hiding anything from him.

He should show some confidence on me. I won't do any harm to him or our children but he needs to trust me and control his anger. (Mrs Hussain)

Discussion

Falicov (2009) introduced three levels of cultural adaptation. The Family Links Islamic Values programme would seem to fit in the middle level, that of a 'culturally adapted' programme, as the core elements of the original secular programme are maintained, but framed with compatible Islamic teachings. A 'culturally informed' approach would involve greater adaptation, with culture being a 'more primary consideration than it is in cultural adaptations' (Castro et al., 2010: 219). This might be represented by Approachable Parenting (<http://www.approachableparenting.com/>), a parenting programme which uses mainstream psychological principles but is specifically designed for Muslim parents rather than being an adaptation of a pre-existing secular programme. A third approach, the 'culturally attuned' programme, is a weaker form of cultural adaptation. In relation to Muslim families, this might be represented by the Strengthening Families Programme (<http://mystrongfamily.co.uk/>), which initial conversations with practitioners suggest is being fairly minimally revised for Muslim families in the UK, with an emphasis on fidelity to the original programme.

Muslim fathers could be seen as doubly alienated from conventional parenting interventions, insofar as programmes may be seen as unsuitable both because they are secular and because they are dominated by mothers. Any approach which successfully engages them is therefore to be welcomed and more work is needed to assess its effectiveness. It may be that a religiously adapted programme is especially effective for parents such as the fathers attending the course we observed, because they are relatively unacculturated to the UK context, with some not speaking English. This would fit with the findings reported by Griner and Smith (2006), who found stronger effects of culturally adapted programmes for participants who were less acculturated to their majority context.

Conclusion

Muslims are clearly an important population in Western countries, since they are growing in numbers in Europe and on a global level Islam continues to strengthen (Roy, 2004). The Family Links Islamic Values course is an interesting example of the adaptation of a social intervention for a religious group rather than an ethnic group. Research is now needed into the effectiveness of such an approach. It would be important in future to study the outcomes of programme attendance in terms of family functioning and parent and child well-being. This would ideally involve more objective measures than parents' self-report, as well as a robust sample size. If possible, it would be very useful to compare Muslim parents attending a non-adapted secular parenting course with parents attending a course which includes Islamic teachings, as well having as a control group which receives only routine services.

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