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**WHAT FACTORS ARE IMPORTANT IN HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELLORS'
ENGAGEMENT WITH MUSLIM STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES?**

**A thesis presented for the partial fulfilment for the requirements of
Master of Educational Psychology**

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Abstract

This qualitative exploratory study investigated the perceptions of high school counsellors of their knowledge about Muslim culture and practices and the methods that could be used to improve counselling services for Muslim students. Muslims are the most rapidly growing religious group in New Zealand and comprise approximately 1% of the population. School counsellors play an important role in helping Muslim students integrate into New Zealand society. The research used a focus group approach to collect data from counsellors at two schools in Auckland in two focus group sessions. The data from the focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the themes and patterns discussed by the focus group participants. The findings of the study identified the types of knowledge that school counsellors are seeking about their Muslim students. Some of the main areas of perceived needs were specific cultural knowledge about the countries of origin of Muslim students, information about refugee Muslims, and greater understanding of Muslim culture to understand intergenerational conflict. The findings also indicated that counsellors were seeking specific skills they believed would help them provide more effective counselling services to Muslim students. Some of the skills were methods for dealing with personal beliefs about Muslims, methods to help students mediate between traditional Muslim culture and New Zealand culture, and approaches to culturally appropriate interactions with family members. The findings of the study also identified various methods to assist school counsellors in obtaining knowledge about Muslims and applying culturally appropriate skills with Muslim students. Some of these methods included continuing education, contact with the Muslim community, and adaptation of the ka awatea model of Māori student success for use with Muslim students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Topic

Many Muslim families are immigrating to New Zealand with their children attending schools. As a result of immigration, Muslims are the most rapidly growing religious group in New Zealand. The 2013 census found that approximately 46,000 New Zealanders practice Islam while only 26% of practicing Muslims were born in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Among Muslims in New Zealand, 29% identify as Indian and 21% are from Middle Eastern nations such as Saudi Arabia and Iran (Ward, 2011). The increasing number of Muslims both born overseas and in New Zealand as the children of immigrant parents creates a special set of issues to allow schools to accommodate the needs of this population.

The school is one of the first institutions that children of immigrant families encounter in the process of settling into their new environment (Garcia-Sanchez, 2014). The children of immigrant families, however, face substantial difficulties in achieving academic success in schools because of factors such as cultural and language difficulties (Stuart, 2012). In general, there is a social expectation in schools that immigrant children will adapt and assimilate the cultural norms of the adopted country (Alba, Sloan, & Sperling, 2011). At the same time, however, parents may place pressure on immigrant children to retain the traditional beliefs and practices of the family's homeland. In this type of situation, immigrant children as well as native born children of immigrant families can experience significant stress in schools with academic performance and in developing relationships with peers. In some cases, immigrant children disengage from the academic process as a means of protecting themselves from failure and to avoid social stigmatization (Motti-Stefanidi, Masten, & Asendorpf, 2015). Evidence also exists that the nation of origin can affect academic performance of immigrant students, with non-Western students often exhibiting

poor performance in tasks requiring language skills (Jensen & Rasmussen, 2011). The issue with language skills in schools primarily affects immigrant students migrating to a nation that uses a language different from the students' native language. The student has the additional burden of learning a new language in addition to the need to make general cultural adjustments (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010).

Immigrant Muslim students as well as Muslim students born in New Zealand face additional difficulties with integrating into the school environment because of both religious and cultural differences. While Muslim students from other nations face the same language and cultural issues as other immigrant students, they also have to deal with perceptions of their religious practices, which often set them apart from other students in the school. Muslim students often wear religious symbols such as the headscarf or *hijab* worn by women to preserve modesty and the skull cap or *taqiyah* worn by some Muslim men during prayer. The religious symbols inherently set the student apart from others in schools where the majority of students do not have external symbols of their religious beliefs (Guo, 2011). The parents of Muslim students may also request exemptions from certain classes that they believe may conflict with religious beliefs and practices, such as exemption from some types of physical education classes for girls that may involve activities that are considered immodest (Walseth, 2015). The efforts to maintain a separate cultural and religious identity conforms to the belief among many Muslim immigrants that it is desirable to maintain traditional practices while assimilating into New Zealand society (Ward, 2011).

At the same time, the perception of Muslim beliefs and practices as alien from Western values and norms can create a significant barrier to adaptation and assimilation among young people. Despite general tolerance for immigrants in New Zealand, students from Muslim nations visibly emphasize their differences can face prejudice from peers.

Evidence from research examining approaches to assimilation suggests that many young Muslims in New Zealand attempt to balance the demands of their religion and traditional culture with the demands of adaptation and assimilation (Stuart & Ward, 2011). Strategies to achieve the cultural balance include minimizing differences and alternating orientations by adopting one identity in school and another identity outside school. The success of Muslim students with using these strategies depends on their resilience and ability to adapt to new circumstances (Motti-Stefanidi, Masten, & Asendorpf, 2015).

In the process of integrating into the academic and social life of school, the Muslim student can seek assistance from the school counsellor. The role of school counsellors is to function as an advocate and facilitator for the student during the educational process (Griffin & Steen, 2011). The school counsellor in New Zealand also helps students build resilience, foster conditions to allow the student to grow as a person, and promote awareness and respect for differences among students (PPTA, 2014). In the case of Muslim students, the school counsellor can provide various types of support to help the student with the steps necessary to feel connected to school and the learning process.

To be effective in their role with students from different cultures and with different religious practices, the school counsellor should have a good understanding of the values, norms, and beliefs of the student (Luke et al., 2013b). In addition, school counsellors should be familiar with the strategies that Muslim students use to accommodate cultural and religious differences in the school environment (Stuart & Ward, 2011). Many school counsellors, however, are not familiar with Islamic beliefs or the native cultures of Islamic students in New Zealand schools (Stuart, 2012). The lack of knowledge about Muslims can lead to incorrect assumptions about students' values and beliefs that can undermine the effectiveness of the counselling process (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The specific problem examined in this study is the difficulty that school counsellors may have in dealing with Muslim students when they do not have a sound understanding of students' norms, values, and practices. Such a lack of understanding could lead school counsellors to adopt unfounded and negative stereotypes concerning Muslims, which can influence their interactions with Muslim students and their ability to provide effective counselling to the student (Pederson, 2012; Cooper, 2011). New Zealanders tend to have a favorable opinion of immigrants in general, but have a less favorable opinion of Muslim immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries (Stuart & Ward, 2011). Even if the counsellor does not have negative stereotypes concerning Muslim students, the lack of understanding of cultural and religious practices can undermine the ability of the counsellor to promote resilience among Muslim students. This need for understanding about Muslims among counsellors is particularly acute in relation to Muslim students born overseas who have to contend with both religious and cultural differences within the general population in New Zealand (Stuart, 2012).

Perceptions and attitudes of educators and school counsellors towards Muslim students often reflect social understanding of Islam and individuals from Islamic cultures (Sharpe & Shou, 2014). When there is a lack of general understanding of Muslim values, beliefs, and norms, counsellors have an obligation to remedy any deficit in understanding to support adequate performance of their task of counselling Muslim students. Because of the relatively small number of Muslims in New Zealand society, a problem that school counsellors face is determining the optimal approach to acquiring knowledge and skills necessary to provide effective counselling for Muslim students.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this qualitative exploratory research is 1) to examine perceptions of high school counsellors about factors that are important for engagement with Muslim students and their families and 2) to identify methods to allow school counsellors to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to allow them to provide appropriate counselling services to Muslim students.

Research Questions

Based on the aims of the study, the research questions are:

RQ1: What factors are important in high school counsellors' engagement with Muslim students and their families?

RQ2: How can high school counsellors acquire relevant knowledge and skills to increase engagement with Muslim students and their families?

The research questions are qualitative and exploratory in nature. The research questions focus on identifying among school counsellors their knowledge and skills about Muslim culture and practices and the methods necessary to improve counsellors' ability to provide services to Muslim students

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study relies on humanistic theory, which proposes that the school counsellor helps students overcome problems or difficulties by providing them with new ways of understanding or perceiving a problem (Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011). The theory presumes that all students have the innate potential to achieve in the educational environment. A variety of factors, however, can mediate the ability of the student to realize the potential to achieve. Some of the factors include social circumstances and personal issues that affect skills. The school counsellor facilitates the

ability of the student to overcome barriers to realizing potential by applying specialized knowledge and skills to develop solutions appropriate for the student's situation. The theoretical framework is used to structure the interpretation and discussion of the findings of the study.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study may have significance for school counsellors in New Zealand by increasing their understanding of the difficulties they face when providing services to Muslim students. The information could help school counsellors develop a structured approach to acquiring skills and knowledge appropriate for working with Muslim students. The findings of the study may also have general importance for increasing the understanding of some of the difficulties that Muslim students face when assimilating into New Zealand society.

Outline of the Study

The following chapter contains a review of related literature, which examines past research concerning issues related to the adjustment of immigrant children, the issues faced by Muslim students in schools, and the role of school counsellors in the adjustment process. The third chapter of the study discusses the methodology used to collect and analyze data, which involves focus groups for data collection and thematic content analysis to analyze the data. The fourth chapter presents the results of the analysis, which consists of the major themes and patterns found in the focus group data. The fifth chapter contains a discussion of the results, and relates the findings to the literature. The sixth and final chapter of the study contains conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature examining school counselling for immigrant children generally takes a qualitative approach by investigating the perceptions of counsellors and immigrant children of the process. The literature review is divided into sections focusing on different aspects of the issues associated with counselling. These sections include: immigrant children, school counsellors, immigrant children in schools, ethical decisions and mental health, adolescent Muslim females, and Muslim beliefs and school counsellors. Each section contains literature focusing on the specific situation of Muslim students in New Zealand. The literature review concludes with a section developing the research questions of the study based on gaps in the literature.

Immigrant Children

Adult immigrants face a unique set of challenges during the period of adjustment to their host country, but the children who accompany them often face a different, more complex set of social challenges. Children must navigate the same unfamiliar cultural terrain as their parents within the social context of assimilating to a new school, which can be a difficult experience even when children are not attempting to adapt to life in a foreign country. Immigrant students may suffer social effects of isolation, anxiety, grief, and homesickness. These effects may become even more pronounced in immigrant situations where unfamiliarity with the language or customs of the host community complicate interactions with peer groups and the pressure to assimilate into the social dynamics of the school setting (Berry, 2006). Even when children are received well by their new peers they often experience profound isolation, anxiety, and depression (Igoa, 2013). Often, however, children entering a new culture that is dramatically different from their own may suffer poor self-esteem due to comparisons between their own struggles and the ease and apparent

happiness of the dominant culture. Igoa (2013) cites several studies which indicate that when immigrant children in the United States from China or the Caribbean are shown two dolls, one which resembles their own cultural group and one which resembles the dominant culture, a majority will select the doll which resembles themselves when asked to choose which doll is “bad” or “ugly.”

Together, these issues can cause problems with a student’s education, which should be the core aim of attending school. Research shows that transferring schools at any point in a child’s scholastic career causes emotional distress, alienation, and anxiety (South, Haynie, & Bose, 2007). Those effects also negatively impact the academic performance of students struggling to acclimatize to a new school (Oppedal & Røysamb, 2008; Cooper, 2011). For immigrant students attempting to learn new languages and adapt to social situations, these effects become even more pronounced. According to Burkard, Martinez, and Holtz (2010), immigrant children adapt to their new country more quickly than their parents, meaning that they must often resort to navigating the disorienting and unfamiliar school on their own. They may be unaware of aid offered by the school or local community, including counselling and tutoring services (Burkard et al., 2010). If an immigrant student’s teachers are not specifically trained in culturally sensitive instruction methods, which are not currently required in New Zealand public high school systems, these problems can become even more serious, opening an achievement gap that could potentially limit the student’s further educational and economic prospects (Howard, 2010; Marks, 2005).

All of these issues may be more pronounced in the context of Muslim students migrating to secular Western nations. The cultural difficulties experienced by their parents, adapting to life in a culture which may not share or respect their fundamental religious values, can be more pronounced in the schools, which are institutions at least partly devoted

to propagation of cultural values. Muslim students attending secular educational institutions in Western nations such as Australia, Europe, and New Zealand may experience conflicting attitudes towards their host nation, their own heritage, and themselves (Bisin, Patacchini, Verdier, & Zenou, 2010). “This group is trapped between two often conflicting sets of values, those of their parents on one hand and American peers on the other” (Swanson, 1996, p. 242). All of these problems can be exacerbated by negative attitudes and preconceptions regarding Islam and Muslims in general, which are prevalent in many Western secularized nations. Suspicion of Muslim immigrants in Western nations, especially Europe and the United States, can present particular challenges to the efforts of young people to engage with and assimilate into their host nation’s culture (Peek, 2005; Bigelow, 2008). Teasing and bullying by classmates, for example, can lead to long-term psychological harm and difficulty in school for any students (Wessler & De Andrade, 2006). For Muslim students, name-calling and religiously motivated bullying can be doubly destructive because they reinforce negative stereotypes and attitudes which are already prevalent in the dominant culture. In cases where Muslim students are the victim of bullying and teasing, Wessler and De Andrade (2006) recommended that counsellors intervene with attempts to educate other students on the damage their biased behaviour can cause. In many cases, the authors found that sensitivity training for teachers and students can decrease instances of bullying and prejudice among teenage students. This suggests that, in addition to pursuing multicultural sensitivity training of their own, counsellors of diverse student bodies should be prepared to administer this training to others (Wessler & Da Andrade, 2006).

School Counsellors

High school counsellors tasked with aiding students experiencing difficulties in school may experience additional complications when attempting to work with immigrant

student populations. As the demographics in industrialised nations becomes more diverse, accepting and absorbing different populations, the tasks expected of school personnel has shifted (Howard, 2010). In culturally homogenous areas, teachers and counsellors could confidently assume the worldview and cultural values of the students with whom they worked. In the 21st century, however, with its movements of large immigrant populations, the cultural awareness required of school staff has increased dramatically (Burkard et al., 2010). As school counsellors often come in to the lives of students at very difficult times and often have to establish rapport with families and other school personnel before any issues any can be resolved (Bevan-Brown, 2003), cultural competency is a core skill for counsellors working in countries such as New Zealand (Code of Ethics, 2014). Cultural competence begins with self-awareness of the culture being brought to the sessions by the school counsellor, the culture of the school and the culture of the students, and then taking care to reduce any barriers these differences create for effective counselling (Bevan-Brown, 2003). Bevan-Brown (2003) has published a framework to support schools in reviewing their cultural dimensions that includes three steps towards cultural competence for teachers:

Step one: Increase understanding of your own culture and the influence it has on you and your teaching practice.

Step two: Understand how the mainstream culture of the country influences its education systems.

Step three: Learn about the cultural background of the learners, how this influences them, and how to use that knowledge to make learning relevant, meaningful, affirming and effective.

Although the framework was designed specifically with school teachers in mind, this framework can also be appropriate for school counsellors to become conscious of how cultural lenses can have an impact in professional practice.

Burkard et al. (2010) also pointed out that these programs and trainings are not motivated solely by a spirit of generosity, but also serve the important function of narrowing the gaps between immigrant populations and the host nation. In countries such as Canada, which hosts a sizable population of immigrants as well as liberal policies towards their social integration, officials in public high schools are specifically trained to cope with issues endemic to immigrant populations (Feuerverg and Richards, 2007). For example, since Canada officially declared multiculturalism to be a fundamental element of its national identity schools have enacted a series of reforms designed to mitigate the difficulty of immigration. They have installed welcome centres in schools to familiarise newcomers with the process and have embedded social workers in the schools specifically trained to manage the specific issues encountered by immigrant students (Asanova, 2008). While not all ethnic groups fare equally well in Canadian schools, many of these programs have been “extremely successful” (Asanova, 2008, p. 65).

Many of the examples drawn from Canada, other nations, and other immigrant populations can serve as useful models, but to date there is a paucity of research specifically investigating the experiences of high-school age Muslim immigrant students in New Zealand, where much of the research on minority groups in public school systems has concerned issues encountered by Māori children (Howard, 2001; Bigelow, 2008). While there may be significant areas of overlapping experience, there may also be significant culturally specific issues of which counsellors should be aware. Some research has been

conducted on Muslim students in other countries, but the unique nature and diversity of New Zealand's Muslim population may show up substantial differences between issues faced by adolescents acculturating to New Zealand culture and immigrant experience in other nations in the Western world (Stuart, 2012). In addition, little research seems to have been conducted on the experiences of guidance counsellors and therapists who work with Muslim students on a daily basis. The literature does offer, however, insights that throw light on issues for the situation in New Zealand.

Immigrant Children in Schools

Igoa (2013) reports considerable success helping younger children from a variety of countries work through the difficulties of assimilation within the context of school in the United States. While studies of high school students are less frequent, and perhaps more difficult due to the other variables which influence social acceptance in adolescence, the techniques Igoa (2013) employed with younger children to establish communication and help these immigrant children to adapt to their host country may be instructive. Igoa (2013) describes an emotional process in which children withdraw from their own identity but seem to lack a language to communicate the particular distress caused by immigration. Her research focused on elementary school teachers, but the techniques she describes may be equally applicable to high school counsellors. Consideration of this application may begin with the difference in her definition of the words "assimilation" and "acculturation," which scholars sometimes use interchangeably. "Assimilation" describes a process through which an immigrant discards their previous cultural expressions and exchanges them for those of the dominant culture in which they now find themselves. "Acculturation," on the other hand, allows for the continuation of the immigrant's original cultural identity, adapted and modified to fit their new cultural context (Tsolidis, 2008). People in Western materialist

culture, which Igoa (2013) describes as commodity driven may implicitly view cultural values and identity as something which a child could easily discard and replace. Whereas coming from other cultures in which tradition constitutes an integral aspect of an individual's identity, children can find attempts to get them to "fit in" to be disturbing, painful, and alienating (Igoa 2013; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006).

Igoa's (2013) techniques involve encouraging immigrant children to express their inner realities and bring out the inner conflicts they feel between the past and their host culture, between the value systems of their parents and those they are attempting to adopt, and express their confusion regarding the new cultural spaces which they must navigate. Igoa's (2013) descriptions of her processes and results are first-hand accounts of work with immigrant children rather than controlled qualitative studies, but children seem to respond positively to her self-expression exercises. Simply being allowed to express their anxieties and inner conflicts helped children from a variety of different countries acculturate to the American school system. While the concentration of these efforts was on the children's inner lives and emotional health rather than on scholastic achievement, several students did show marked improvement in their schoolwork. These findings on the importance of self-expression may be applicable to immigrant students in any country and could possibly be applied in a slightly modified format for the older high school age demographic.

Though anecdotal, Igoa's (2013) attempts to understand and illuminate the interior reality of immigrant children in American schools met with positive results from the students. Students from such diverse origins as Uruguay and China responded to the opportunity for self-expression in an understanding environment. One fact which may be of particular interest when discussing the issues of immigrant children in school is the diversity of students with whom Igoa worked. For the most part, the particular points of conflict

between the identity of their home country and the expectations of their host nation were not as powerful or relevant as the presence of the conflict itself. Even for Muslims, problems with navigating their new school stemmed mostly from language barriers and unfamiliarity with American cultural practices, such as preparation of food (Garcia-Sanchez, 2014). In one case, simply providing food acceptable to the Muslim diet was validating enough to ease a young boy's acculturation to the United States (Igoa, 2013).

When working with more mature students, however, solving both internal and external conflicts may not be as simple as making allowances for student's religiously informed dietary needs. Points of cultural conflict become more pronounced with age, resulting in difficult situations with which many high school counsellors may be poorly equipped to handle. For example, issues revolving around romance, marriage, and sexuality will very likely be framed very differently in an immigrant student's home culture and the host nation, especially for Muslim students from more conservative backgrounds (Luke, Goodrich, & Gilbrade, 2013a; Smerecnik, Schaalma, Gerjo, Meijer, & Poelman, 2010). If, for example, a high school counsellor in a Western nation with a liberal 21st century dating script discovers that parents of a sixteen-year-old female student have arranged for her to marry an older man in their traditional home nation upon her graduation, that counsellor may feel ethically compelled to disrupt the situation. The authors note that occasionally these concerns may involve intervention in the adolescent's life in cases where traditional cultural practices do qualify as abuse under the laws of the host nation. Cultural practices which involve sexual interaction with minors and harm to other people are not protected under religious freedom laws in most Western nations, including New Zealand (Ahdar & Leigh, 2013). New Zealand lacks an absolute guarantee of religious liberty in its bill of rights, granting primacy instead to international human rights law, under which the human rights of

children take precedence over the religious beliefs of others, including their parents (Ahdar & Leigh, 2013). This feature may simplify some ethical quandaries in which high school counsellors may find themselves. Similarly, counsellors should abide first and foremost by the precepts of the professional code of ethics, which may compel them to “seek to increase the range of choices and opportunities for clients” (New Zealand Association of Counsellors, 2012, para. 4). At times, these legal and ethical obligations may position the counsellor in opposition to an immigrant student’s traditional cultural practices.

In other instances, however, traditional beliefs regarding gender roles and family structure derive from the heart of an immigrant adolescent’s cultural identity. As Igoa (2013) noted, for many people from non-Western societies, cultural markers are an integral part of individual identity, so attempts to impose Western value systems on immigrant youth may be harmful and ethically improper. Luke et al (2013a) recommended that high school counsellors who work with immigrant populations apply the Intercultural Model of Ethical Decision Making to identify their responsibility when providing support to students whose worldviews may conflict with those of the counsellor. According to Sue & Sue (2012), monitoring these potential clashes may make the difference between successful counselling and inadvertently offending a client by devaluing their cultural perspective.

Ethical Decisions and Mental Health

The Intercultural Model of Ethical Decision Making is an instrument developed by Luke, Goodrich, & Gilbrade (2013b) to navigate the particular ethical dilemmas which inevitably emerge for counsellors working in multicultural communities such as New Zealand. The authors noted that surprisingly little research has been conducted on the unique position of school counsellors, who often do not have the option of referring students to other specialists when a problem stemming from conflicting worldviews has been identified.

They present the new Intercultural Model of Ethical Decision Making as a promising tool for dealing with conflict between “equally valid, mutually exclusive” value systems or ethical imperatives, and to expand how counsellors think about conflicting worldviews (Luke et al, 2013b; Sue & Sue, 2012). Counsellors in these situations are confronting the expanding role of the school itself in increasingly multicultural societies. As school is “one of the first institutions involved in the settlement process,” schools have become “important vehicles for social inclusion” (Garcia-Sanchez, 2014, p. 128).

Unlike Igoa’s (2013) work with children, the ethical decision-making model presented by Luke et al. (2013b) requires familiarity with the specific elements of the student’s culture which presents conflicts for the counsellor. This level of cultural sensitivity requires a competent understanding of the student’s culture and an awareness of common sources of conflict. After identifying the source of the conflict, Luke et al. (2013b) advise counsellors to consult proper cultural authorities to verify the cultural conflict, and keep those factors in mind when working with students from different cultural backgrounds.

Although the Intercultural Model of Ethical Decision Making was developed by American researchers for use by American researchers, its guidelines are broad enough to apply to any counselling situation in which conflicting worldviews play a part. A small study involving use of this model found that application of the model resulted in a heightened sensitivity to these types of ethical dilemmas (Luke et al., 2013b). The study surveyed a sample of students on their ability to identify cultural issues in specific vignettes and their willingness to consult legal and cultural sources for information on navigating these areas. They found that students failed to internalize the lessons of consulting cultural and legal experts during the course of their decision-making, indicating that further development of the program is required. While the decision-making model proposed by Luke and colleagues

(2013a; 2013b) was not specifically designed for counsellors working with Muslim students, it does provide a framework through which counsellors and teachers could learn to approach issues they will encounter working with adolescent-age Muslim immigrants.

Ethical conflicts are not the only potential source of friction between western-trained counsellors and Muslim students. Apart from the specific issues confronting adolescents, immigrant communities may have very different beliefs regarding spirituality and mental health. Immigrants from collective societies may place greater importance on the role of family and social environment than Western society, which typically prizes individuality and control of the environment. Attempting to impose the worldview of Western psychology onto an immigrant whose perspective is built on fundamentally different values runs the risk of offending the client and causing further alienation (Sue & Sue, 2012). Counsellors should be aware of negative stereotypes affecting Muslim populations in western countries and make an effort to understand their patients' conceptions of mental and emotion problems (Pederson, 2012; Cooper, 2011). While Pederson (2012) noted that this is true of any immigrant community, it is especially true of Muslims because of the depth of the Islamic worldview and the number of areas of life which it encompasses. Mental health practitioners, including school counsellors, should also learn to avoid the mistake of considering Muslims as a single monolithic group. Significant differences between ethnic groups, nationalities, and sects may have a powerful influence on an individual's conception of self and understanding of the world (Pederson, 2012).

In the case of Muslims, especially those who belong to traditional communities, the Western concept of mental health and understanding of mental health problems may especially be met with resistance. Utz (2012) described the Islamic understanding of mental

and physical health as “a bounty from Allah and a trust that should be preserved” (p. 16). In this worldview, illness and mental issues are considered to be tribulations designed to test a believer’s patience and willingness to rely on religion during periods of difficulty. To many within the Muslim world there is no real difference between physical and mental illness, although “it is not uncommon in the Muslim world to find psychological ailments manifested as physical symptoms” (Utz, 2012, p. 16). Many Islamic communities accept the biological and physical source of some psychological disorders, but also incorporate elements which may be unfamiliar to some Western counsellors. Spiritual deficiencies, for example, are considered by some to contribute to the existence and severity of mental illnesses including anxiety and depression, since weak faith can increase the difficulty a person experiences during stressful life events (Utz, 2012). Depending on other cultural factors, Muslims may also attribute mental illnesses, especially mood disorders, to supernatural activity (Hodge & Nadir, 2008). There is considerable justification in the Quran to explain these beliefs, and many Muslims may still attribute their symptoms to supernatural entities even after exposure to evidence of biological or other naturalistic causes (Utz, 2012). Many clients will be reluctant to discuss these views with non-Muslim mental health workers, but counsellors should be aware of the possible framework under which their patients operate. The worldview of modern western psychology does not fit neatly into this system. This can also be said for Māori as the traditional Māori worldview of well-being is holistic, viewing spirituality and mental health as one in the same (Durie, 1994). While slightly modified Western counselling techniques are just as effective for Muslim individuals as they are for populace, presenting and framing them in a context which is compatible with a Muslim outlook will likely increase the individual’s willingness to participate and improve treatment outcomes (Ahmed, 2012).

Muslim adolescents face these myriad difficulties, with the added complications which stem both from cultural biases of their host country and conflict with the expectations of their native culture. Adolescence is a period of self-definition for any teenager, when they begin to explore their own identity ask basic questions of themselves such as “Who am I?” and ‘Do I matter?’” (Ahmed, 2012). Psychologists note that while interacting with cultural heritage plays a large part in how young adults go about answering these questions, identity is also formed through interactions with the cultural environment. Young people in this period also commonly begin to experiment with various social personae in an effort to “try on” various slightly different personae. This life phase, already difficult for most teenagers, may be even more so for Muslim teenagers attempting to establish an identity and differentiate themselves from their parents and cultural traditions (Cooper, 2011). For Muslim students, their religious values, thoughts, and beliefs may become one of these identities while they explore those of their adopted culture and seek methods for integrating them into a cohesive identity (Ahmed, 2012; Swanson, 1996).

Situated as they are in the area between childhood and adulthood, high school students are likely to internalize and accept many aspects of their host nation’s culture, especially western gender norms and attitudes regarding sexuality. Ahmed (2012) notes that the western suspicion of Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 and the global War on Terror is especially difficult for teenage boys and young men, as they are often stereotyped as potential terrorists. While there is currently scant scholarly evidence available on the acculturation process of Muslim teenage boys, Ahmed (2012) cites evidence that young Muslims, especially those from Arab ethnic groups, may react to the sense of isolation and suspicion by rejecting their ethnic identity, and in some cases Islam altogether. Peek (2005) describes an opposite reaction in which exclusion by the dominant culture leads young

Muslims to adopt religion as a more fundamental component of identity. In either case, young men in traditional Muslim families are generally less closely monitored than teenage girls and receive less intense religious socialization, so they may attempt to fully assimilate into western society (Ahmed, 2012). Counsellors working with this population need to cultivate awareness not only of Islam in general, but also of the specific manner in which young people occupy a point of friction between opposing worldviews in which they are attempting to define themselves.

Adolescent Muslim Females

Young women face difficulties of their own, as the onset of puberty in Islam marks the period upon which religious obligations become mandatory, including gendered expectations such as wearing the *hijab*. For some sects of Islam from traditional cultures, wearing the headscarf is obligatory, but in many others it is optional. Young girls may experience inner conflict attempting to reconcile their identification with permissive western cultural norms and the traditions of their homelands, while for others it represents reclamation of Islamic identity (Ali, 2005). Ahmed (2012) notes that this decision is not trivial, as these external symbols of cultural identification are markers of individual identity (Igoa, 2013). Of course, the *hijab* and difficulties encountered in adopting it are only one example of the cultural conflict which take place within adolescent girls in western societies. Acquiescing to the expectations of their parents and the shared culture of the immigrant community, if it exists, means alienating themselves from the host nation's culture, with which they may have come to identify. However, acculturating too much or too rapidly, especially regarding significant cultural or religious symbols, can inspire feelings of guilt and lead to conflicts at home (Eisenlohr, 1996; Lee, 2005). Ahmed (2012) describes a dynamic in which parents, suffering through an inability to adjust their parental expectations,

attempt to limit their children's interaction with what they perceive as negative influences. As they begin to feel their children drifting away from the Islamic identity as they understand it, parents may impose strict limits on their children, curtailing social interaction without providing viable alternatives. Parental misunderstanding of the acculturation process can result in several maladaptive behaviors in immigrant children, the roots of which may not be obvious to some counsellors (Ahmed, 2012). In this context, counsellors can show understanding of the sources of these conflicts and help students navigate these decisions. In fact, school counsellors are often ideally suited to provide this service because students may have nowhere else to turn for support (Ahmed, 2012). Understanding the intricacies of these cultural issues will help high school counsellors offer support which addresses those issues unique to the individual student's situation.

Even for adolescents within the dominant culture, sexuality is one of the most difficult and confusing areas of life to navigate. Learning to understand and navigate sex and romance in this formative period is a period in which many students will face emotional and psychological distress. For Muslim youths attempting to reconcile Islamic conceptions of morality and human sexuality with western behavioral standards, these areas present even more complex problems for which a counsellor's standard training might not adequately prepare them. In Islam, women's sexuality is considered as a temptation which must be controlled (Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2006). Most traditional Muslim families forbid sexual activity before marriage, on the basis of their beliefs about the role of sexuality within marriage. The relative sexual liberation in most western societies places most Muslim teenagers in a difficult position. They may wish to please their parents and protect their identities as Muslim, but also identify with and wish to explore western values regarding sexuality and experimentation (Eisenlohr, 1996; Smerecnik et al., 2010). Ahmed (2012) cites

studies which reveal that “almost half” of Muslim students in American universities have had sexual intercourse at least once (p. 253). However, many of these students may suffer from gaps in knowledge due to their parent’s unwillingness to discuss sexuality, safety, and health issues with their parents, due to discomfort with the topic or the belief that their children don’t need that information. Counsellors dealing with Muslim students can provide more in-depth sexual education services for students who approach them for information (Smerecnik et al., 2010). In many schools, dissemination of sexual health information in private is already a component of the counsellor’s job. When working with immigrant populations, however, counsellors can check their assumptions about student’s existing knowledge base regarding sexuality because they may not have been exposed to the same information sources as other students (Ahmed, 2012). When interviewing a client, Ahmed (2012) advises that counsellors attempt to take the student’s sexual history without the parents present, and explore the religious, social, and familial ramifications of this behaviour.

Other cultural practices of some immigrant populations’ present issues specific to adolescent girls. Ayyub (2007) describes the practice prevalent among some South Asian communities within the United States of sending teenage daughters back to their countries of origin to participate in marriages arranged by family members. While some girls enter these marriages willingly, others succumb to familial pressure or are tricked or threatened into them. In some communities, if they attempt to change their minds they risk ostracism and may not be allowed to leave the arranged marriage without the consent of their husband or religious leader (Ayyub, 2007). In many respects, accepting an arranged marriage means accepting the entirety of the women’s role in the family, so counsellors may encounter high school girls struggling with this decision or fearing for their own futures. Difficult ethical

issues emerge in cases such as these, as noted above. An arranged marriage does not automatically involve the counsellor in an intervention effort, as noted above, if the young woman is participating willingly. Situations such as this can present a difficult case for counsellors because students must be evaluated on an individual basis to determine whether the family is pressuring the student, or whether the student in the case is even aware of her legal rights. In New Zealand, laws are drafted to protect the rights of ethnic groups who may still carry out the practice of arranged marriages, but pressuring young women between the ages of 16-18 is illegal (Davidson, 2012). Many counsellors may never encounter such a specifically ethically charged situation, but as immigrants continue to arrive from South Asia and other areas where traditional familial arrangements are common, scenarios such as this may become more frequent.

Counsellors should also educate themselves on another, more harmful practice which can seriously damage young Muslim women. Female genital mutilation is a common practice in some parts of Africa in which a young woman's external genitalia are cut or removed entirely, depending on the culture. Worldwide, two million girls are subjected to this practice annually (Turillazzi & Fineschi, 2007). Naturally, this practice is illegal in Western nations, but continues to be carried out in insular immigrant communities in Europe. Demand for the procedure in insular immigrant communities remains strong, so the procedure is carried out privately. Estimating the frequency of the procedure is difficult (Matthews, 2011), but the Melbourne Royal Women's Hospital in Australia has "reported seeing between 600-700 affected women annually" (Matthews, 2011, p. 139). In the United Kingdom and the United States, immigrant families often send girls back to their home countries to undergo the procedure, although in both nations such trips have been declared illegal (Topping, Laville, & Mason, 2014). Some estimates claim that thousands of girls,

some as young as six, are sent from Western nations back home to undergo female genital mutilation. While this is another issue which counsellors in New Zealand school environments may rarely or never face, it still demonstrates the necessity of becoming familiar with the cultural practices of the various ethnic and religious groups which constitute the Muslim community. Unlike other industrialized nations, New Zealand's Muslim population is composed largely of Malays and Indians, who do not include genital mutilation in their tradition (Ward, 2011). However, in many African areas it is considered a rite of passage into adulthood, with up to 98% of women undergoing ritual mutilation (Matthews, 2011). In the past twenty years, roughly two thousand Somali refugees have settled in New Zealand, particularly in Auckland (Shepard, 2006). Genital mutilation is very common in Somalia, so counsellors working with Somali students should watch for signs of this ritual being carried out (Matthews, 2011).

Muslim Beliefs and Counsellors

While many adolescents attempt to modify or adapt the tenets of Islam to better reflect their individual identities, many are affected by cultural differences which present difficulties for counsellors attempting to help these students. For example, high school counsellors are often trained to detect signs of self-damaging behavior, especially suicidal tendencies which can result from the alienation and identity confusion to which Muslim teenagers are typically prone. However, most sects of Islam strictly forbid self-harm in any form, considering life and the body as a gift from Allah to be carefully tended (Ahmed, 2012). Due to the religious stigma attached to these symptoms, Muslim students may be less likely to take advantage of available mental health resources, including counsellors, and attempt to conceal their emotional issues. Ahmed (2012) reports that, even among college-age immigrant students who sought help from anonymous Muslim peer support services,

interviewers found it necessary to rephrase questions to make callers comfortable admitting to suicidal ideation and self-harm. Rather than ask, “do you ever think of hurting yourself?” counsellors instead asked “do you ever wish Allah would take your life early?” This may even be true of students who have rejected the traditional Islam of their parents and follow a hybridized, westernized version of Islam. The unconscious cultural aversions can remain and influence how an individual feels about him or herself. Counsellors who are unfamiliar with Islamic understanding of mental health issues may be unable to frame questions in a manner which makes students willing to provide honest answers (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010).

Other issues commonly encountered by counsellors can be similarly impacted by Muslim beliefs and cultural practices. Just as teenagers may be unwilling to admit to suicidal ideation, studies show that many Muslim students are reluctant to admit to substance abuse problems because of the complete prohibition of drugs in most Islamic sects, including cigarettes and alcohol. Ahmed (2012) reported that the range of high school Muslim students who drink ranges from 47% to 71%, with most first experimenting with alcohol before they reach university. Research by Arfken, Arnetz, Fakhouri, Ventimiglia, and Jamil (2011) supported these findings. While the causes which lead a young adult to drink (such as stress, peer pressure, internal conflict, or a rejection of the value systems of their parents) are the same for Muslims as any other group, the sources of these conflicts may be different to other students (Ahmed, 2012). Counsellors working with this population should be aware that, due to a deep-seated cultural stigma surrounding substance abuse, Muslim students may be less forthcoming regarding possible drug use and questions may have to be framed differently to put the student at ease.

During the course of investigating self-injurious or other maladaptive behavior, Ahmed (2012) recommends that counsellors investigate the personal meanings behind

rebellious or self-injurious acts. The causes of stress, anxiety, anger, and repression which plague many Muslim immigrant students may differ from those of average students in the general population, and extra attention should be paid to family dynamics, religious obligations, and cultural expectations. Without a firm grasp of underlying causes, a counsellor's suggestions and advice may prove less effective and could possibly exacerbate the problem (Ahmed, 2012).

Further complications can arise when dealing with children of immigrant families who did not voluntarily elect to relocate to a foreign country and who come from dramatically different cultures. Parents of refugee families may not be as willing to accommodate or understand their children's attraction to their host culture, since often these families may choose to view their relocation as a temporary situation until conditions in their home country stabilize (Desouza, 2011). While these families do sometimes embrace western culture as a safe environment compared to the situation which caused them to flee their homeland, they may be less psychologically prepared for the abrupt culture shock and rely more than other immigrant communities on ethnic and religious heritage as a major component of identity formation (Ahmed, 2012). The stress and internal conflict between parents and children over cultural issues and identity can be more pronounced in these families. Furthermore, refugees must often cope with traumatic experiences and a more profound sense of the loss of their old lives than other immigrants, which may leave them "unable to structure and integrate their experiences, which may manifest... as lack of trust, social isolation, maintaining peer relationships, developmental delays, and academic difficulties" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 261). Counsellors and mental health workers should weigh possible experiences of refugee families when exploring the roots of a student's symptoms

and attempt to understand the family dynamics which may exert a unique experience on populations with a high incidence of traumatic experiences (Desouza, 2011).

As part of the natural course of their duties, counsellors should always vigilantly look out for signs of domestic abuse. This is particularly true of students from first-generation Muslim immigrant families. Although her research was conducted on South Asian immigrant families in the United States, Ayyub's (2007) research may be instructive in this case because New Zealand also hosts a sizable population of immigrants from these countries. In the course of her own studies, the author discovered that up to 25% of South Asian immigrant women suffered intimate partner violence in their marriages. Ayyub (2007) is careful to point out that the prevalence of this problem stems from accepted cultural norms in nations such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, where social norms regarding the rights of women and their roles are much more restricted. As mentioned previously, many Muslims from traditional families view the western conception of femininity with suspicion, as a threat to the fundamentals of the family, and attempt to enforce the cultural practices of their homelands in their new context. This problem can be more pervasive in insular and supportive communities, which often support the husband and father in these situations. According to Ayyub (2007), many immigrant women are unaware of social services available in cases of abuse or are sometimes actively discouraged by the local community to avoid using them.

The fact that physical or emotional violence is viewed as acceptable within the community does not mitigate the psychological damage it inflicts upon children (Springer, Sheridan, Kuo, & Carnes, 2007). Depending on the circumstances, Muslim adolescents living in abusive homes may be more reluctant to discuss it with non-Muslim counsellors because they may feel it shames their family, or they may discuss it as a normal occurrence

within marriage (Ayyub, 2007; Haboush, 2007)). However, these children are not immune from the long-term effects of living in a home in which abuse occurs, and may be victims themselves. Children growing up in homes where domestic abuse is normalized often learn to replicate this behavior later in life (Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl, & Moylan, 2008). Counsellors are often trained to monitor troubled students for signs of abuse at home, but when dealing with Muslim populations they may encounter unique forms of resistance to discuss or even acknowledge the problem (Ayyub, 2007; Haboush, 2007). Fathers may consider controlling the family as their right, while mothers may regard complaining of even extreme abuse as a shameful failure to put the interests of others before her own. In instances where counsellors suspect abuse, counsellors must weigh their ethical responsibility to their profession and the law against sensitivity toward the cultural mores of immigrant students' families. Furthermore, Haboush (2007) recommends that counsellors preparing to report suspected abuse in an Arab Muslim family "should also develop a strategy to address potential rejection of the child" by the extended family (189). Because of the importance of familial relations, especially in Arab cultures, this consequence can be especially traumatic (Haboush, 2007).

Some other issues which arise in the course of counselling Muslim youth are not specifically related to Islam, but to the cultural norms influencing the parent's level of involvement. Ahmed (2012) pointed out that in Muslim families parents expect to exert a considerable degree of control over their children and may not fully understand the right to confidentiality. They may expect the counsellor to report to them, which risks damaging the relationship between the counsellor and the patient (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). While counsellors do have an ethical responsibility to educate themselves on the cultural and religious aspects of their clients' lives and respect diversity, their primary

responsibility is to operate within the ethical guidelines of their profession and institution (Crocket, Agee, & Cornforth 2011; New Zealand Association of Counsellors, 2002). Ahmed (2012) advises counsellors to adopt a non-adversarial role in situations such as this, as “cultural brokers, helping parents and children understand each other’s perspective, assist families in negotiating new rules and setting appropriate expectations, and providing education as needed”(p. 81). Immigrant parents may be unaware of mental health and social resources available to them and be unfamiliar with the legal processes and power structures of their new country. To mitigate these difficulties in acculturation, counsellors may educate themselves regarding public programs and immigrant aid options open to immigrant families, especially if local religious groups offer services designed specifically for Muslims (Meah, 2007).

While much of the international body of research is applicable to the Muslim community, a great deal of the impact that ethnic and cultural conflict will manifest in adolescents has to do with the status of the community to which that individual belongs. Ahmed (2012) noted that adolescents living in Western countries within a culturally homogeneous immigrant neighborhood may have difficulty exploring the culture of the host nation or acculturating successfully. Bigelow (2008) also writes that the problems encountered by Somali Muslim immigrants specifically “seem to appear and reappear over time and across multiple settings” (p. 28). Even though students may successfully acculturate and face a less pronounced sense of individual isolation due to the support network provided by their immigrant community, they may experience feelings of alienation shared by that community (Swanson, 1996). Adolescents who live in these types of communities may experience “increased pressure to conform to ethnic... standards without proper exploration and understanding (Ahmed, 2012, p. 266). On the other hand, Muslim

students living in an area without a significant existing population may acculturate more quickly, but experience more extreme intergenerational conflict (Ahmed, 2012).

In many countries, the place allotted to Muslim immigrants within the wider culture indicates other issues that Muslim adolescents may experience. These issues, which may especially impact students' grades and their interaction with authority figures, are dependent on socioeconomic issues and the immigration laws of the country in question. Many Muslim immigrants in most European countries, for example, are refugees and arrive into economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Students in these communities often attend underfunded schools which lack adequate support for helping the Muslim high school student develop a degree of cultural literacy regarding their new homeland (Pauly, 2013). Because parents may have difficulty adjusting, these communities often lack economic opportunities, leading them to feel hopeless and neglected by the government (Ahmed, 2012). Immigrants, especially young people, may blame and lash out at authorities and openly rebel against the perceived injustice, as French protesters did in 2005 (BBC, 2006). Specific to high school students, the apparent lack of economic opportunity may lead some younger students to abandon their schoolwork and adopt a defiant stance towards teachers and administrators. While these attitudes may not be uncommon amongst adolescents, in the context of counselling Muslim students it is important to remember that such behavior may have a different source which may require additional resources to address. In the United States, in contrast, Muslim immigrants tend to be wealthier and better educated than the general population, which mitigates these problems (Ahmed, 2012). The diverse nature of New Zealand's Muslim immigrant population implies that some students will be subject to these feelings of hopelessness and societal oppression, while the financial status of others may smooth out the process of acculturation and make economic opportunity easier to attain.

Ajrouch and Kusow (2007) brought up another salient feature of immigration which is only tangentially related to the immigrants' religious identity. The culture of New Zealand maintains an entirely different set of cultural assumptions and biases regarding race with which individuals must not only familiarize themselves with, but which also defines them. In their study, Lebanese and Somali immigrants emigrating to the United States and Canada encountered very different acculturation experiences due to the imposition of a racial definition on them which did not exist in their home countries. While adult immigrants may retreat into their ethnic identity to escape the dominant narrative on their race, younger immigrants may attempt to identify with the existing subculture to which they have been assigned (Kusow, 2006). Counsellors can arrange for extra academic support to immigrant students to foster an inclusive environment and increase the likelihood of future economic and academic success (Kusow, 2006; Marks, 2005).

Another issue which many writers describe when confronting the problems of Muslim students is to assume the problems are specific to Muslims. Due to all of the sources of conflict described above, counsellors may weigh the religious and ethnic dimensions of a student's life too heavily and begin with the assumption that there is a specifically Muslim dimension to every problem. Ahmed (2012), for example, noted that the causes of teen drug and alcohol use do not significantly differ between Muslim groups and non-Muslims. In many other instances, conflict between a Muslim youth and his or her parents may indicate nothing more than the familiar process of self-definition and identity formation (Swanson, 1996). While often there may be a religious-specific dimension to issues faced by Muslim high school students which should be considered, at times these are merely different dimensions of common problems faced by teenagers around the world. While effort needs to be made to account for the religious, ethnic, and moral ramifications of these conflicts and

evaluate the extent to which the differing worldview gives them greater or unexplored significance, it is important to avoid pathologizing Islam when offering counselling services to Muslim students. While, in many cases, understandings of the roles and responsibilities of children towards their elders, conceptions of mental disorder, and identity formation may differ, many of these issues can be addressed with only slight modifications to existing counselling techniques. Furthermore, Ward (2011) found that Muslims did not report a substantially different experience than other immigrants, therefore issues common to the immigrant experience should be explored before looking into culture-specific factors contributing to a student's difficulty.

Ahmed (2012) discussed case studies in which traditional western therapeutic practices have been applied to young women dealing with issues stemming from childhood sexual abuse. Other patients are treated for substance abuse problems stemming from a failure to identify fully either with the cultural traditions of their parents or that of their adopted nation through application of traditional intervention therapy, coupled with familial involvement. Because Muslims occupy a wide range of ethnic groups with dramatic cultural differences, it may be best to apply a therapeutic technique suited to their level of individuation and Westernization (Dwairy, 2006).

Due to increased rates of immigration around the world, and the steady influx of Muslim immigrants into New Zealand, issues that high school students face during the acculturation and integration process are a worthwhile area for future study. Other countries with larger immigration issues, and perhaps more friction between the native populations and immigrant communities from Muslim countries, have documented methods which may be applicable to the New Zealand context. While it may be true that students from predominantly Muslim ethnic groups integrate easily into their host nation due to the

existence of supportive communities, high school is a specific context which could benefit from the experience of counsellors who have dealt with these issues. As internationalism and globalism continue to develop and change New Zealand society these intervention techniques may actually become less necessary due to successful integration of generations of Muslim immigrants (Stuart, 2012). However, for individual students, immigrating to a new host country with a wholly unfamiliar culture is still a difficult time which could be made easier with the application of specialized support techniques. There are several questions which could benefit from application of future research, including identifying specific traits of New Zealand's Muslim populations and whether those traits require special attention from high school guidance counsellors. Further research should also be conducted on the experiences of New Zealand immigrant high school students themselves, whose voices are currently almost completely absent from scholarship on the subject. While considerable work has been published regarding the specific causes of interfamilial and personal conflicts experienced by students acculturating to American, Canadian, and European culture, little has so far been written on New Zealand. These gaps in current scholarship present significant and exciting possibilities for future study. The following chapter discusses the research method used to collect and analyze the data necessary to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What factors are important in high school counsellors' engagement with Muslim students and their families?
- 2) How can high school counsellors acquire the knowledge and skills to increase engagement with Muslim students and their families?

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

This chapter describes the qualitative research design using a focus group approach to obtain data concerning factors that are significant for the engagement of high school counsellors with Muslim students and their families. A qualitative research design is suitable when the research questions require an understanding of the topic under investigation from the perspective of participating individuals (Flick, 2006). The present study examines counsellor experiences of engagement with Muslim students and their families.

The focus group approach to qualitative research is useful when the purpose of the research is exploratory. The focus group is also an appropriate data collection technique for information related to participants' beliefs, opinions, and thoughts about the topic under investigation (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). The focus group technique relies on the premise that group dynamics and interaction assist people to explore and to clarify their views in a manner that makes the information more accessible to the researcher. The focus group is fundamentally a group interviewing technique (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The approach treats the participants as co-researchers that have the capacity to take the research into directions not anticipated at the outset of the study.

Participants and Setting

Participants

The sample population consisted of six counsellors who agreed to participate in the research and attend the focus group session. One male and three female participants were from School A while one male and one female participant were from School B. Both schools are situated in Auckland. Table 1 presents a summary of the demographic information provided by the participants.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of Participants.*

Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Years Experience as Counsellor	Years at Current School	Previous Experience	Engagement with Muslim Students	Qualification
62	M	Euro	20	11	Teacher	Infrequent	Diploma
64	M	Euro	24	18	Teacher	Quite a Bit	Post. Dip.
61	F	Euro	10	3	Teacher	No answer	M. Ed.
60	F	Euro	20	9	Teacher	No answer	Diploma
53	F	Euro	8	1	Teacher	Infrequent	Bachelors
63	F	Euro	18	7	Teacher	No answer	Post.Dip.

Note: Demographic characteristics of the total six participants of this research study.

Schools

A purposive sampling approach was used to select the setting for the research, which involves selecting a venue for the study based on likelihood that it will be suitable for providing the information necessary to answer the research questions (Patton, 2014). The purposive sampling included schools in central Auckland presumed to have a high Muslim population. Both School A and School B have a decile rating from the Ministry of Education of 7. The decile rating is an indication of the proportion of students attending the school from low socio-economic backgrounds. A decile rating of 1 is the highest proportion of students from low-socio-economic backgrounds while a decile rating of 10 indicates the lowest proportion. The decile rating of 7 suggests that the two schools have a relatively low proportion of low socio-economic students (Education Review Office, 2015).

Both schools are situated in central Auckland, which has the highest concentration of Muslims in New Zealand, which was a significant factor for selecting the schools for the research. The most recent census data indicates that the number of individuals affiliating

with Islam has increased by 27.9% between 2006 and 2013, with the total number at approximately 46,000 (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). The Education Review Office (2015) does not provide data on the religious affiliations of students. As a result, the proportion of Muslim students to the total student population in the schools is not known. A Muslim presence exists in the schools, however, as evidenced by the existence of Muslim Student Associations and prayer spaces for Islamic worship. In addition, the participants in the study indicated that there was a Muslim presence among their students, even participants who did not interact extensively with Muslim students indicated this.

Procedure

The data collection procedure began with identifying high schools willing to allow staff to participate in the study. The researcher sent e-mails and courier mail to the principals of six high schools in central Auckland presumed to have a high Muslim student population to solicit participation in the study (see Appendix C and D). The process resulted in acceptance by two schools. The other schools either declined to participate or failed to respond. After securing permission for the study from the two schools, the head counsellor in each school was contacted to arrange for the focus group sessions and for participation of members of the staff.

Two focus groups were held to collect data, with one focus group taking place at each of the two schools. Both schools are in a suburban environment with the residents enjoying a moderately high socio-economic position. The participants selected the specific location at the schools where the focus groups were held. The participants believed that the location was suitable because they were familiar with the schools and believed they would be more likely to feel secure enough to disclose information candidly. The decision to use

these two schools was also based on factors such as close geographic proximity, which was convenient for the participants and reduced their travel time.

Measures

The research relied on two types of measures that functioned as data collection instruments. The first measure consisted of the initial open-ended questions to stimulate discussion of the topic under investigation (see Appendix A). The second measure was a demographic questionnaire provided to the study participants before commencing the focus group (See Appendix B). The demographic measure provided information about participants to allow the researcher and readers to “determine to whom research findings generalize and allow for comparisons to be made across replication of studies” (Hammer, 2011, pg. 261).

The process of developing the initial open-ended questions to stimulate discussion relied on the recommendations of Kruger and Casey (2014) for using a structured process to identify topics and to formulate the questions. The topics of the questions were based on both the research questions and the literature review for the study. The main research question for the study was: What factors are important in high school counsellors' engagement with Muslim students and their families. The main research question created the anticipated boundaries for the focus discussion, with all focus group questions related to the main research question. The literature review provided additional data for structuring each of the questions used in the focus groups. The questions were open-ended, which was intended to encourage the participants to control the direction of the discussion. In addition, the questions were designed to evoke information from the memory of the participants concerning past events and subjective impressions about interactions with Muslim students. The research advisors provided guidance to ensure that the questions were understandable to

the anticipated focus group participants and would form a starting point for eliciting the information necessary to answer the main research question of the study.

In contrast to the open-ended questions for the focus group, the measures for the demographic questionnaire were of the closed type. The purpose of the demographic questionnaire was to obtain information about the characteristics of the members of the focus group. The demographic questionnaire also contained one open-ended question to obtain additional information that the participants deemed relevant. None of the participants added any information based on the final open-ended question.

Ethical Considerations

The research posed no risk of physical or psychological harm to the participants in the study. The interview topics did not contain any material that is harmful or distressing for the participants. The primary risk to the participants is breach of confidentiality in which the members of the focus group could disclose adverse information or opinions that could affect their positions as counsellors in high schools. The Massey University Human Ethics Committee approved the research as low risk to human subjects and granted formal approval to conduct the study.

The researcher cannot guarantee the anonymity of the participants because the identities of the school counsellors in the focus groups will be known to the researcher, the school principals where the counsellors are employed, and the other members of the focus group. The researcher, however, took steps to preserve the confidentiality of the participants during and after the study. The names of the two participating schools were not noted in any recordings or transcripts of data. In addition, all participants were identified solely by a fictitious name and not by their actual names. In addition, any information that could identify a participant by innuendo was removed from the data. The participants were

encouraged not to name students or to provide any information that could be used to identify a student, with the researcher removing any inadvertent disclosure of a student's identity. The researcher also kept all data provided by the participants in a secure location accessible only to the researcher.

All participants in the study were given a written informed sheet that outlined the purpose of the study and their role as members of the focus group in the data collection process. The information sheet emphasized that the risk of harm was minimal and that all data would be confidential. The form also noted that participation in the research was purely voluntary and that consent to participate could be withdrawn at any time without adverse consequences to the participants. In addition, the form indicated that participants would not receive any compensation or other type of reward for participating in the study. The form explained that the researcher's purpose for conducting the study was solely academic and there was no conflict of interest in terms of financial or any other type of gain from the study. The informed consent form noted that the focus group sessions would be audio recorded for the purpose of facilitating the transcription of the data. The researcher read the informed consent form to the participants and ensured that any questions they may have had were answered. All participants had signed consent forms.

Focus Group Approach

Prior to holding the focus groups Guest, Namey, and Mitchell's (2013) 'Collecting Qualitative Data' resource was used to provide a structured approach to conducting the sessions. The researcher acted as moderator for the focus group and maintained as neutral a demeanor as possible to avoid biasing the participants. The guide required that the researcher make no comments concerning responses of participants and would attempt to maintain impartiality. In addition, the guide required the researcher to ensure that all participants

contributed to the discussion. The guide also required the researcher to function as a facilitator to encourage the participants to express their ideas and their memories concerning Muslim students. The guide also contained reminders of various techniques appropriate for stimulating discussions in a focus group setting such as word associations. While cross-discussion among the participants was permitted, the researcher intervened if the discussion strayed significantly from the central topic under investigation. The guide also contained reminders to provide refreshments for participants appropriate for the time of day and to ensure the privacy of the focus group meeting space.

Focus Group Setting

Two focus group sessions, one in each school, were held that lasted approximately two hours. One session had two participants while the other session had four participants. The focus group sessions took place in the office of head counsellor in each of the participating schools with the participants sitting in a circle around the office desk. The recording device was a mobile telephone, with the participants aware of and consenting to the recording.

Focus Group Process

At the start of the meetings the researcher attempted to build rapport with the participants with brief discussion of general topics. In addition, the researcher attempted to create a relaxed atmosphere by stressing informality and that the participants would not be required to disclose personal or particularly sensitive information. At the same time, the researcher was wearing a Muslim head-covering, which was a clear indication of religious identity. To ensure that the participants felt comfortable criticizing aspects of Muslim culture, the researcher stated: 'I want to mention that just because I am coming from a Muslim faith and background, I don't want anyone to feel as though you can't criticize and

be open and honest as we go through our discussions. Please make yourselves at home, comfortable - feel free to eat and drink'. In addition, the researcher noted that there were certain aspects of Muslim culture that she did not fully agree with, which further validated the ability of the participants to criticize Muslim culture without offending the researcher.

During the course of the focus groups, the participants often asked the researcher questions about Muslim culture. An example of the questions is: 'I don't know, I mean is that a cultural thing? Is it a sign of weakness to seek help?'; and 'I guess that's a question for you, what would I need to collect?' To avoid biasing the participants, the researcher indicated that she could not answer such questions until after the end of the session.

At the end of the session, the researcher asked the participants if they had anything additional to add to the discussion. The researcher then thanked the participants and provided them with a small chocolate box as a token of appreciation. The researcher also provided the participants with an e-mail address to be used if they desired to express in private any other information concerning the topic under investigation. The researcher, however, did not receive any such further responses.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure followed the recommendations of Liamputtong (2013) for the use of thematic analysis methods for focus group data. Thematic analysis is an iterative process that examines the content of the data to identify central themes in the data as well as the patterns relevant to the themes. The process consists of an initial stage of preparing the data, followed by open, axial, and descriptive coding of the information (Babbie, 2013).

The initial step in the process was to transcribe the recordings from the focus group sessions. The transcriptions were verbatim and included gaps, pauses, and inaudible

comments by the participants. Once the data were transcribed, the researcher became familiar with the data through several readings of the material

Open coding decomposes the data provided by the focus group participants to identify the themes noted by the participants. The open coding process is iterative in that it requires multiple examinations of the data. During the open coding process, careful attention is given to the different uses of language to express similar ideas. The open coding names each major theme in the data. Themes are subsequently used to organize data. To reduce the possibility of researcher bias influencing the findings of the study, an inclusion criterion was established prior to the outset of the study. Discussion and acceptance of the same perception, experience, or situation by four of the six participants in the focus group was sufficient to consider the information as a major theme found in the data. In addition, the researcher made a record of the rationale for the decisions concerning the interpretation of the data and the determination that there was sufficient information for identification of a theme.

Axial coding involves re-examining the data to identify patterns related to the themes (Liamputtong , 2013). The process fundamentally reintegrates the data by making a connection between the theme, which is a major category, and patterns within the themes, which function as sub-categories. The axial coding process focuses on the analysis of one theme at a time, with the theme as the axis for organizing the information. The criterion for identifying a pattern within a theme during axial coding was mention or discussion by half of the participants in the focus group.

Descriptive coding is the final stage of the process, which focuses on presenting a narrative of the results of the analysis. The resulting narrative provides an explanation of the understanding of the participants of the school counsellors' interactions with Muslim

students. Descriptive coding is selective in nature because of the need to choose a means of presenting a summary of the themes and patterns found in the data. All themes and patterns meet the inclusion criteria for the analysis will were included in the results.

Chapter 4: Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of the data collected from the counsellors in the focus group identified two major themes that corresponded to the two research questions. These were: counsellor's engagement and professional development. Within the two major themes were patterns that involved specific situations or circumstances related to the themes. The chapter is divided into a separate section for each theme.

Research Question One: Counsellor Engagement

The first theme identified from the analysis of the data was counsellor engagement, which was their general knowledge about Muslim beliefs and practices. Within the theme of counsellor engagement were patterns of: 1) competing worldviews, 2) gender roles and interactions, 3) parenting styles, 4) religion and cultural practices, 5) intergenerational conflict, 6) positive impact of faith and culture, and 7) war-torn and refugee backgrounds. The following sections examine each of these patterns.

Competing Worldviews

Competing worldviews was a pattern found in the responses of several participants and particularly among the female participants. The issue of competing worldviews focused particularly on differences in understanding of Muslims about the role of men and women in society as compared to cultural views about men and women found in New Zealand. One of the female counsellors explained that they see mostly female students:

We female counsellors saw more females than males. Yep. Not so much males, but I think that the males and females hold very different roles within the Muslim family don't they? Males to be strong, show leadership, and rada rada all those things (*in a masculine voice*) and for females to be nurturing.

Another female participant explained that she tried to interact with Muslim girls in a way that respected their particular culture:

I have to be very careful how I sit with that when I am working with young people who have different beliefs. I have to be very careful and put it aside. You know I have gone to supervision and am very careful about that. It is about hearing what they are saying and I always hear, usually, that there is respect there and that has to be you know work within the constraints of what your culture is.

Overall, several of the participants indicated that they had to be careful to withhold their own opinions and judgments regarding major cultural differences, such as gender roles and norms, when interacting with Muslim students. Both male and female participants explained that they had to look past the cultural differences of the Muslim students to provide guidance and support that would show respect rather than judgment of those cultural differences.

Gender Roles and Interactions

Another pattern in the data obtained from the participants in the focus groups related to counsellor engagement was their perception of the interactions of Muslim students with the opposite gender. One of the male counsellors explained that Muslim male students were typically seen by the male counsellors, while female Muslim students were seen by the female counsellors. The gender segregation in counselling services was reported because students felt more comfortable to see a counsellor of the same gender. One focus group participant noted that some male Muslim students did not interact as well with female teacher authority “Would be anger, frustration, uhm, often appears as anger. Disrespect to female teachers and then again anger as a result of getting into trouble because of that”. Counsellors mentioned that in previous years female students did not want to take part in physical education with male students. The issue of gender differences and separation of genders was salient among the Muslim students. However participants noted the issue had not arisen as much in recent years.

In addition, a male counsellor noted that differences in cross-gender interactions were not only apparent among the students. The counsellor explained that he recognized differences in male and female interactions among parents when he asked them to come to the school and talk to him about their child:

The mother and father come in, the mother usually takes the back seat, but you can tell that the mother is still 'wearing the pants' if you like in kiwi terminology. But she is being very quiet but being very attentive, and the male is doing his thing because it often seems that it is a patriarchal society.

These comments indicated that gender roles in Muslim families differed significantly from the expected gender roles in New Zealand society.

Parenting Styles

A pattern related to the theme of counsellor engagement was the parenting styles of Muslim families. The pattern is interrelated with patterns of competing worldviews and opposite gender interactions. Participants in the focus group explained how the parenting styles of the Muslim parents did not always fit well into the Western culture. For example, one of the female participants provided an image of the difference between how children's home routines are viewed in New Zealand as compared to Muslim cultures:

We Pakehas think that for kids to do well at school we need routine and time for kids to go home and study and do your chores and focus on your school work but [in Muslim households, it is] quite chaotic, even sleeping late as you might find the whole family staying up until midnight and watching something on TV and they will all lie down and go to sleep in the lounge.

In addition to parenting routines, other participants raised the issue of outward displays of affection and love from Muslim parents to their children. A female counsellor explained that in Muslim households, "their love showing to their kids was strict, tight around boundaries, no flexibility what so ever. No negotiations, no compromise, no nothing". The counsellors were of the opinion that abuse was common in Muslim homes,

with the abuse unreported because of reluctance to involve non-Muslim authorities. One counsellor explained that “There are different cultural understandings and expectations of family abuse and parenting. Students and families are often reluctant to disclose such personal information”. A counsellor also noted the potential for mental health issues arising from the strict parenting styles of Muslim parents.

Religion and Cultural Practices

Some participants in the focus group feel uncertain about differences in religious and cultural practices. One of the male counsellors explained that he lacked a great deal of understanding about Muslim religious and cultural practices. He added that he generally allows the Muslim students to be his guide about religious and cultural practices when their parents come in to meet with him: “Usually the students are the guide . . . I would probably be guided by the kid and say you know what shall I do and what shall I not do”. The counsellor suggested that this uncertainty was the result of insufficient information about both the religious practices of Muslims and the cultural practices of Muslims from different nations.

A female counsellor shared information about situations in which Muslim parents and students had the expectation that there would be prayer rooms and other facilities in the schools that would allow male and female students to engage in traditional Muslim prayer rituals. The counsellor also commented on her lack of understanding of this at the time:

That father was really angry that we provided no toileting/washing facilities for her, for her prayers. And I know that there is still one for the males and there was this expectation that there should be prayer rooms and washing rooms that is separate from the boys which was simply not possible. I didn't know much about ablutions and that.

The counsellors also provided examples of other Muslim practices that were new to the school. The problem was particularly significant for the Muslim students as they became

older and were expected to take part in more religious rituals and obligations. For example, one of the counsellors explained that a girl suddenly showed up to school wearing a head scarf because her age dictated the use of the scarf. Another example was male Muslim students in the senior years who wanted to leave school during lunch on Fridays so that they could attend Mosque.

Intergenerational Conflict

The participants in the focus group mentioned a pattern of intergenerational conflict between Muslim parents and their children, which had an effect on the behaviors of the children and their ability to adapt to the school environment. A female counsellor explained that there was an intergenerational conflict between Muslim children and their parents because their parents viewed New Zealand culture as too permissive yet Muslim children wanted to adapt to New Zealand culture at least in some ways. The counsellor stated that Muslim children were essentially living double lives:

Students are living double lives and having to hide from their families – must put such a burden on these young people. Also, what I respected in that too was that there was still love and respect for their families but also they wanted to uhm be able to have some of the same freedoms as their peers. Students asking ‘where do I fit in?’

Another counsellor perceived that the Muslim students faced problems coping with the conflict between the love for their own families and their desire to be part of the culture of New Zealand:

Yeah, I think probably challenges dealing with students brought up in kiwi culture and coping with parental values that are different to their peer group. And students comparing their lives with those of their peer group and sort of straddling both worlds.

Internal Conflict

Another counsellor provided a similar perspective about the conflict and anger that Muslim boys feel about living in the Muslim world with its strict norms and values, while also living in the much more permissive Kiwi world:

The boys want to join the kiwi world, but they live in a more formal Muslim world and environment at home and when they come to school they are surrounded by kiwi kids and observe kiwi kids and you know doing stuff that may be abhorrent to their parents probably and I think that therein lies a lot of the frustrations and anger surfaces.

One of the counsellors noted that it seemed as if Muslim parents were in conflict with Kiwi culture because they were concerned about their children adopting Western traditions and norms to replace Muslim traditions and norms. She stated that Muslim parents display “very strict and rigid parenting styles to ensure children don’t become too westernized. Muslim parents may even be stricter than they would be if they were in a Muslim-dominated culture because of the fear of their children losing their Muslim values”.

Muslim students face internal conflicts about how much of the Western culture they should embrace as compared to the more strict Muslim culture. One counsellor recounted the story of a Muslim boy from Somalia who enjoyed rapping and was good at it, but who also believed that such music was not allowed by his religious values.

The young lad coming in who was very good at rapping. But from his own perspective, the Quran said that music wasn’t really good. That it excited the senses or whatever it was, but he was extremely good at what he was doing.

At the same time, the counsellor faced his own conflict when providing advice to the boy about continuing with rapping or putting it aside because of his religious beliefs. The counsellor was initially intent on advising the boy to continue with rapping, which was a reflection of Western values concerning self-determination. After some consideration, however, he realized that the advice to continue rapping was based on a Western culture and

a Western way of thinking, which did not take into account the boy's own culture. The issue of the type of advice to give to Muslim students with regards to the internal conflict that those students feel between Western culture and Muslim culture was important to these counsellors. One counsellor stated that she has had Muslim students who "are self-harming and feeling really guilty that they are committing a sin doing something that is unlawful in their religion".

Another counsellor explained that internal conflict and intergenerational conflict for Muslim students often collided because multiple generations of people were living in their homes. The counsellor stated that some of the Muslim students believe "that you know in order to honor their parents they had to do things in a certain way till they finished their studies". At the same time, Muslim students may live in homes in which their parents understand the internal conflicts of their children, but grandparents do not recognize the conflict:

Then there was the intergenerational thing where often if extended family members are living at home it complicates the situation even more. The parents would understand how their children felt and it was the grandparents that sort of you know - complicates.

The issue of dating was also mentioned in the focus groups. For example, a male counsellor discussed an incident in which a female Muslim student had begun to date a Hindu boy. The girl's mother was quite unhappy, and agreed to meet with counsellor and her daughter. The counsellor described the very negative interaction that occurred on the part of the Muslim mother and the outcome for the girl:

She was merciless to her daughter. Disowned her. And spoke about in her religious view about generations of Muslims who had already died, ending up going to hell if this relationship continued. In her mind it wasn't just an issue for her family living, but also an issue for the dead. Uhm, she was a Muslim woman of little education I understand from Fiji. What ended up happening was, her relationship stopped or went underground but the girl was sent off to

Fiji away from NZ. That was the worst. I have never seen a parent so unloving to a child.

The same counsellor shared another story in which a Hindu boy who had been born as a result of an affair his Hindu father had with a Muslim woman in Fiji. The boy began dating a Muslim girl. The father, however, disapproved of the relationship rather than expressing happiness. The counsellor perceived the actions of the father as hypocritical. “The Hindu boy had a Muslim girlfriend. And his father was saying to him ‘you can’t have a Muslim girl’. You can see the hypocrisy in this whole story”.

Postive Impact of Faith and Culture

The counsellors made positive comments about the impact that the Muslim religion had on the Muslim students. One of the counsellors directly related what he believed to be a positive aspect of the religious traditions of the Islamic faith for the students:

Their religion, and the mosque is a positive experience. Students who are memorizing the Quran and visiting religious events – you can see that being part of a larger community and family can have a positive impact on well-being.

Another counsellor stated that Muslims have a strong family culture, which is something that many other people do not have in their lives:

There are many things, like learning about the structure of the family and the extended family. And you know, there are many good things about that like being part of a strong family group, a group that you know a lot of people don’t have that.

A female counsellor related the positive aspects of the Muslim faith and culture regarding a Māori student who converted to Islam. The counsellor explained that when the female student converted to Islam, she stopped drinking and doing drugs. Several of the counsellors noted that while many people in New Zealand do not fully understand the Muslim faith and culture, attitudes and perceptions are slowly changing. More schools have

specific places in which Muslim students can take part in prayers and ablution. One counsellor communicated that negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in general are much more than just about their specific traditions and culture. He stated that “it just seems though the Muslim brand is not necessarily a healthy one in terms of talking about religion. It’s generally much much deeper than religion.” The counsellor also noted that “All of this stuff is not about religion at all, it is about understanding different cultures and practices. Now religion will be part of that but it’s not what mostly is the issue”.

War-Torn and Refugee Backgrounds.

A final pattern in the general theme of counsellor engagement was the perception among the counsellors in the focus groups of the impact of war and refugee status on Muslim families and their children. The perspective was especially related to the mental health status of the children. One of the participants explained that the parents of some Muslim students did not appear to address adequately the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. As one of the counsellors explained, “the impact of war on families spills over to children, causes mental health issues”. The same counsellor also noted that “war has put stress on relationships, where parents are living together who may not necessarily be together but living together for the case of convenience.”

Other counsellors noted problems with families who were forced to move to New Zealand and begin a new life with a different social status than they enjoyed in their home country. In their native countries, they may have had a high social status, but in New Zealand they may be working low level jobs and not viewed with the same degree of respect to which they were accustomed. The change in social status also had a negative impact on both Muslim parents and students.

Research Question Two: Professional Development

The second general theme identified by the analysis of the focus group data was professional development among counsellors, which involved the acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary to provide effective counselling services to Muslim students. Within the theme of professional development were patterns of: 1) the complexity of cultural training, 2) community and external contacts, and 3) rapport with students' families. The following sections present the results for each of the patterns.

The Complexity of Cultural Training

For all of the participants in the focus group, an important theme was a lack of information about Muslim culture and faith. The participants noted that they did not know a great deal about Muslim faith and culture. One of the participants stated quite directly that she “only knows what is reported and presented in the media.” Another participant explained that she has a kit to use during therapeutic sessions, but the kit contains nothing for Muslim students. The participant explained that she “wouldn't know where to find any Muslim symbols which I could use. I've got bibles and crosses and statues of Shiva which often gets used, but yeah nothing for Muslims”.

One of the participants explicitly stated that in terms of professional development, she would like to actually learn about the Muslim culture and faith from Muslims:

I think things that Muslims themselves can tell us about their culture which could be misinterpreted by people. And also in the sort of global context too, in terms of the bad reputation Muslims get too. I would like to learn about Muslim faith, culture, family structures – from a Muslim.

Another participant explained that while cultural training is important and would be useful for a variety of school personnel, “it is hard to remember what you have learnt in one hour training or so for a long time”. Even more, one of the counsellors stated that cultural

training “would be very costly and plus just think of how Islam is integrated into the culture of Muslim majority countries. It’s all very complex”. These comments suggest that cultural training is seen as possibly too complicated for counsellors to achieve full understanding.

Community and External Contacts

Another pattern in the theme of professional development issues for the counsellors was a need for contact with members of the Muslim community. A counsellor explained that he had no contacts with local Muslims, but would like to have informal interactions with Muslims in order to receive information and guidance about how to relate to young Muslims:

I have such little contact with the local mosque, I wouldn’t know who to go to. It’s like a whole different world outside of school that I have got no contact with, it would be nice to know if there was some trendy young Muslims along there that knew how to relate to young people but if there are but I haven’t seen them.

The same counsellor explained that having contacts within the Muslim community would help him to not only know how to relate to Muslims, but also to have access to different voices with different viewpoints and opinions in the Muslim community:

I think to have resources to have people in the community that you can say ‘hey’ and go along and talk to you know Abdullah and he may have a different voice as to what it means to be a Muslim.

During the focus groups, it was mentioned that various government agencies have Muslim staff that provide support and guidance to the counsellors. One of the participants identified a significant problem with the staff turnover, stating that “these people come and go and we have no idea who to call next”. Another counsellor explained that she thought that dedicated external contacts would be helpful because of the ability “to be able to have a resource when we have a tricky thing to be able to call for help in understanding something”.

Rapport with Students' Families

One other theme that was identified in the focus group discussions was the desire of counsellors to build a better rapport with students' families. One of the participants explained about support groups that used to be conducted with community leaders of the Muslim community that were deemed to be very helpful. The support groups did not last, however, for reasons that were not fully understood:

And you know about 20 parents turned up and he introduced me and we sat down and I went 'right what do you want to know about NZ culture and NZ schools? Because you know I will ask you some questions'. And it seemed to work but it died away. They were probably getting the information from somewhere else and felt that I was... I don't know what happened. It was useful context for me and as a result of that I got quite a few more referrals.

Another counsellor stated that he would like to improve understanding of what Muslim parents want from the counsellors and the counselling sessions. He also wondered if the Muslim parents would like to be involved in helping counsellors to improve their ability to serve their students. He asked during the focus group, "Would parents appreciate being involved to resolve issues or not? How would we know this information?" In this regard, it seems that counsellors know that they need to create better rapport with the Muslim parents of their students, but are not sure how to go about achieving the outcome. All participants stated that they were not sure if Muslim parents would want to take an active role in helping the counsellors be better able to interact with them and their children.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results of the study revealed two factors of importance for high school counsellors' engagement with Muslim students and their families. These were: knowledge about Muslim practices and culture and skills in applying the knowledge to assist Muslim students. The following section discusses the results of the study and relates the findings to the literature. The discussion is structured around the research questions of the study and shows how the results answer the research questions. The chapter includes a discussion of the limitations of the study.

Research Question One: Counsellor Engagement

The first research question for the study was "What factors are important in high school counsellors' engagement with Muslim students and their families?" The results of the study indicated that knowledge of counsellors about Muslim religious practices and culture is an important factor to consider. The analysis suggested that skills in applying this knowledge in a culturally appropriate manner are important for developing rapport and effective interactions with Muslim students. The participants felt that knowledge about Muslim culture and skills in applying that knowledge were fundamental for assisting students to mediate between Muslim and New Zealand culture, and for increasing involvement by students' families.

The participants in this study said they needed more knowledge of the culture, values, norms, and practices of Muslim students. A recurring concept in the results was a need for more information about specific practices or values among Muslim students. The need for information was apparent in areas such as attitudes toward domestic abuse, the type and scope of religious practices and rituals Muslims engage in, and the degree of control that parents exercise over their children. The counsellors recognized that although religion

played a pivotal role in Muslim students' lives, cultural factors other than religion were also important. The need for information among school counsellors concerning Muslim culture largely conformed to the practices that create the sense of cultural and religious identity among Muslims (Igoa, 2013). The school counsellors in this study indicated that they would like to know more about the way Muslim students define themselves through their values, norms, and beliefs, so as to improve effectiveness of counselling when providing services to students and their families.

Specific Areas of Need

Counsellors identified specific areas in which they perceived an increase in knowledge about Muslims would be helpful for improving interactions with students and their parents. In addition, counsellors were seeking resources to help continually improve knowledge about Muslim practices and culture.

The primary focus of counsellors was on differences in religion, while understanding that religion and culture are intertwined. There were differences in the ways that various cultural groups practice Islam. While basic religious practices remain the same there are differences in interpretation as a result of the way various cultures engage in the practices. Participant felt that knowledge of the specific cultures of the students (for example Somalis, Pakistanis etc.) may be more effective for developing an understanding than increased knowledge about Islam in general.

Another area of information needed involved norms in the Muslim community concerning interactions between genders. Customs concerning gender relations among the Muslim students led to practices such as assigning students to counsellors on the basis of gender, with males especially not wanting to relate to female counsellors. According to

Ahmed (2012), gender norms among Muslim students contribute to their cultural and religious identities.

Another specific factor mentioned was dating and romantic relationships among Muslim students. The counsellors recognized that significant differences existed in the area of romantic relationships between traditional cultures in the home countries of Muslim students and norms in New Zealand. The issue of romantic relationships among high school students can be particularly sensitive in Muslim cultures, which could create complexities for counsellors when working with Muslim students. These findings about differences in Muslim courtship practices conforms to the findings of previous researchers (Luke, Goodrich, & Gilbrade, 2013a; Smerecnik et al., 2010).

The participants also indicated that another specific factor influencing their engagement was parent control. This was a barrier to closer relationships with families. An example of parent control was the request from parents for religious and cultural accommodations, which created frustration and anger for parents if the school could not meet the request. Muslim parents may be concerned that the school is undermining traditional Muslim beliefs and practices as part of the acculturation process. The focus group interviews suggested that some Muslim parents adopt a confrontational approach to dealing with students and the schools, which can create difficulties for the counsellor attempting to engage parents. Previous researchers have also noted that the degree of control expected by Muslim parents over their children hampers the child from establishing relationships with peers and counsellors outside the Muslim community (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005).

Another specific factor influencing engagement was the counselling needs of refugee and migrant Muslims. Refugees often experience trauma that has lasting effects such as post-

traumatic stress disorder. Members of a refugee family could also experience adjustment difficulties because of change in social and financial status. Participants felt the need for more knowledge about appropriate approaches to obtain information about the family and their experiences in their previous homeland. To some degree, the situation described by counsellors suggests the use of an individual approach to counselling based on the needs of the student as recommended by Dwairy (2006).

The findings also indicated that counsellors sought additional knowledge about helping Muslim students adjust to living in two worlds consisting of traditional Muslim culture represented by the family and mainstream New Zealand culture represented by the school. The counsellors recognized that many Muslim students had to balance the demands of the new culture with the demands of their traditional culture. The counsellors, however, believed they needed additional knowledge to help the Muslim student adjust and to minimize intergenerational conflict as a result of the acculturation process. The perceptions of the counsellors confirm the findings of Swanson (1996) concerning the potential for alienation among Muslim immigrant children while supporting the argument of Ahmed (2012) concerning the potential for acculturation to create conflict with traditional parents.

The findings indicated that the counsellors in this study recognized that cultural knowledge is constantly changing. As new Muslim immigrants from different nations arrive in New Zealand, specific values, norms, and practices may vary. As a result, continuous learning about the culture and practices of Muslims is necessary to ensure that their knowledge remains current.

Research Question Two: Skills and Application

The second research question of the study was: “How can high school counsellors acquire the knowledge and skills to increase engagement with Muslim students and their

families”)? The data from participants as well as the literature review indicate that the optimal approach to acquisition of skills is through a personal professional development program. Improving skills and methods used when working with Muslim students meets the ethical responsibility of counsellors to undertake appropriate professional development activities.

Participants indicated that they had to develop specific approaches or skills for applying the knowledge about Muslim students to increase their effectiveness. In their interactions with Muslim students and their families, counsellors have to behave correctly to establish the rapport and trust necessary to provide assistance to the students. As a result, counsellors have to examine their beliefs and attitudes to ensure that they do not inadvertently undermine the relationship with Muslim students.

A particularly important area noted by participants was their personal attitude toward some of the practices of Muslim students and their families. During the discussions, some counsellors seemed ambivalent (to the researcher) when discussing matters such as dating or the restrictions that Muslim families place on their children. Attitudes however, were far more positive when considering aspects of Muslim culture perceived as beneficial or helpful such as family stability and strong religious beliefs. Previous research has noted the importance of maintaining a positive attitude towards the beliefs and practices of immigrant students during the counselling process to avoid appearing negative or ambivalent (Peek, 2005; Bigelow, 2008). Counsellors need to maintain a neutral to positive demeanor when interacting with Muslim students and their families. Developing these skills are important to meet their ethical obligation to act with care and respect for the cultural differences of clients.

Another skill that the counsellors identified as necessary to provide effective services to Muslims and their families involved methods to interact with both genders in a culturally appropriate manner. They understood that there were differences in the way that Muslims interact with the opposite gender. In general, they noted that the skill was important because situations could arise when cross-gender interaction was necessary such as insufficient counsellors of the same gender as students or the need to discuss issues with families with only one parent present. At the same time, previous research suggests that customs controlling the interactions of men and women in Muslim society is a cultural factor, which compounds the problem of developing culturally appropriate skills in this area (Walseth, 2013). The cultivation of community resources could provide counsellors with additional knowledge and assistance that may be suitable for contextualizing the situation of Muslim students and could improve relationships between the counsellor and Muslim parents.

Participants also talked about the need for skills in negotiating with the families of Muslim students to take a more active role in counselling when necessary. Negotiating with families requires some degree of dialogue, with the counsellor required to ensure that the exchange is relevant to the needs of the family and culturally appropriate. Some methods noted by participants for developing skills for negotiating with Muslim families included the use of support groups conducted in conjunction with Muslim community leaders and asking Muslim parents about their desired expectations for the outcome of counselling sessions. Both of these approaches involve communication with parents. Increased communication also brings more knowledge about Muslim culture and the conflict that students experience from the perspective of the family when attempting to integrate into New Zealand society. The literature, however, suggests that language barriers can interfere with the communication process for any immigrant group (Garcia-Sanchez, 2014). Approaches such

as involving community members in a general dialogue can help meet the ethical responsibility of counsellors for providing culturally appropriate care to students.

Ka Awatea Model. An implication of the analysis of the data is the possibility of adapting the Ka Awatea model for Māori student success to the situation of Muslim students in the schools. The model is based on the assumption that education is an aspect of the present world that creates a connection between the ancient world of the past and the future world in which people will eventually live (MacFarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox, & McRae, 2014). The model is based on cultural assets and draws initially from the cosmological beliefs of the Māori. It also includes the mythology concerning the beginning of things and the way that the world is structured. It was during this past or ancient period that the Māori culture developed its norms and values. The cosmological events and mythology developed in the past belongs to the ancient world. At the same time, the past has an indelible effect on the present because of the intergenerational transmission of traditional norms and values. The model also considers the way in which the traditional values of the Māori have application in the current world with the educational process guiding the student in the way to apply these values. For example, the traditional value of well-being translates into healthcare and fitness in the current world with education demonstrating the way that the traditional value can be applied. The educational process is necessary to help carry traditional norms and beliefs into the future world.

The modification of the Ka Awatea model for Muslim students can lead to a similar approach in which education is the vehicle that allows the student to learn how to apply traditional values and norms in the current world and to transmit their values and norms to the future world. The ancient world represents the past homeland of the Muslims who come to New Zealand and includes the religious beliefs and practices associated with Islam as well

as cultural values and norms. The traditional beliefs and values have a substantial impact on the perception of students and their parents of the nature of the current world in which they live, which is New Zealand society. The role of the educational process is to show the student how their religious practices as well as their cultural norms and values are compatible with their current environment and can carry them into a future world in which they achieve their goals and objectives.

The Ka Awatea model is useful for professional development of counsellors because it provides a psycho-educational framework to help counsellors understand the way they can present the educational process as supportive and compatible with Muslim practices and traditions. Implementing the approach requires counsellors to increase their understanding of Muslim practices, values and norms. The model shows high school counsellors how they can apply knowledge about Muslim practices to increase both student and parental engagement. The approach can also assist high school counsellors in reducing some of the intergenerational conflict that Muslim students experience by showing parents that the educational process is compatible with Muslim beliefs and practices.

Professional development. The analysis of information provided by the focus group participants suggests that professional development programs covering topics raised in this study could assist school counsellors to acquire relevant information for successful engagement with Muslim students. Information from the focus groups as well as the literature indicate that school counsellors can adopt various approaches to increasing knowledge and developing skills necessary to improve their interactions with Muslim students and their parents. Counsellors, however, have to take responsibility for professional development to obtain cultural competencies necessary to provide services to Muslim students.

Cultural awareness training can improve general understanding of school counsellors of the specific cultural values and practices of various Muslim groups. Cultural awareness training is generally used as part of multicultural training for educational professionals (Jones, Sander, & Booker, 2013). To provide required information to counsellors, however, cultural awareness training has to be specific to the culture found in the homeland of each Muslim immigrant group. Creating connections to communities in which the student lives can help the school professional in obtaining correct information about the culture and practices of students. This approach to developing cultural competency skills, however, is separate from formal cultural awareness training and would be the personal responsibility of the school counsellor. The approach is based on the assumption that closer connections with Muslim communities sending their children to schools will lead to improved knowledge for the school counsellor as well as a better understanding of the most appropriate method for interacting with Muslim students and their families.

Limitations

The study has several limitations that impact the application of the findings. A first limitation of the study was the use of a focus group approach to obtain the data. Because of the focus group format in which many people are present, it is not possible to guarantee confidentiality of all statements made by participants. The lack of confidentiality raises the possibility that the participants self-censored some of their responses. As a result, there is no certainty that participants provided truthful and accurate information about their attitudes toward and perceptions of Muslim students. In addition, interviewer responses and demeanor could have influenced the responses of individual members of the focus group despite efforts to minimize their influence (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

A second limitation was the use of a qualitative research approach, which inherently limits the ability to generalize the findings of the study to a larger population. As a result, the findings are specific to the two schools whose counsellors participated in the study. Nonetheless, the findings of the study are suggestive of challenges that counsellors may encounter in other schools when providing services to Muslim students. A third limitation of the study is the small number of schools from which the counsellor population was drawn. In particular, given the ages and years of experience among the participants in the study, with most having had almost 20 or more years of experience, their cultural knowledge and resource base could have been more limited than those who had more recently graduated from counsellor education programmes. As a result, the findings may not be representative of conditions found in other schools (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

Conclusions

The study was able to identify challenges that school counsellors have in dealing with Muslim students in regard to Muslim students' norms, values, and practices. The present study collected qualitative data from high school counsellors from two schools in Auckland with a high Muslim population. The data from the focus groups were analyzed to identify themes and patterns among participants that were pertinent to their relationships with Muslim students and their families.

The findings of the study suggest that cross-cultural counselling of students in New Zealand will involve specific knowledge about the culture of the student and methods to apply the knowledge in the cultural context of Muslim students. A general conclusion supported by the findings of the study is that school counsellors need further knowledge of the customs and practices of Muslim students. This cultural knowledge is more than merely knowledge about the beliefs of Islam because of the different ways that various Muslim

cultures engage in practices related to religion. The findings also support the conclusion that school counsellors in New Zealand would like to know more about how to apply knowledge about Muslim culture in practical situations. The adaptation of the Ka Awatea model for use among Muslim students could be an approach to facilitate the application of skills to the situation of Muslim students.

The conclusions of the study generally conform to the findings of previous researchers. Because of the expectation that schooling will assist immigrant children with the process of acculturation, the school counsellor can play an important role in helping students adjust (Garcia-Sanchez, 2014; Howard, 2010). To be effective in their role, counsellors must have sufficient knowledge about the specific culture of students, which is a conclusion drawn by both this study and previous research (Igoa, 2013; Smerecnik et al., 2010). Both the findings of the study and the literature have identified particular areas in which cross-cultural knowledge about Muslims is critical, such as the expected behavior of adolescent girls (Ayyub, 2007), religious and cultural practices, dealing with the confusion and ambiguities of adolescence (Ahmed, 2012), and the possibility of the student concealing Western behaviors from parents (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010). Although counsellors can access programs that provide information about Muslim culture in general, such programs may not provide sufficient information (Burkard et al., 2010). As a result, counsellors will have to rely on other methods for increasing their knowledge of Muslim culture and practices, such as talking with students themselves, and creating positive contacts with parents and the wider Muslim community.

The findings and conclusions of the study have implications for the practice of school because of the increase in the number of Muslim students attending schools in New Zealand. Counsellors may not have sufficient accurate knowledge about this population and

particularly about specific customs and beliefs of Muslim students and their families. Because of variability in practices and norms among Muslim immigrants from different nations, school counsellors can seek knowledge about the culture of the students they intend to counsel. The method that the counsellor uses to obtain this knowledge can include communication with parents or members of the general Muslim community. When acquiring knowledge about Muslim culture, the school counsellor can ask questions that can increase their knowledge about students' culture.

The need for counsellors to acquire additional knowledge about Muslim culture reflects an international trend in which counsellors are seeking cross-cultural training. As society becomes more diverse, counsellors are faced with the need to provide services to people from many different backgrounds, including Muslims. Universities are now routinely including cross-cultural training for counselling students at all levels (Kagnici, 2014). In addition, professional development courses are now offered in many nations for counsellors working in schools to improve cross-cultural competencies (Jones, Sander, & Booker, 2013). Moreover, further investigation into effective ways of working with and supporting Muslim students, not only involving counsellors but also teachers, as part of enhancing the wider pastoral care system within schools need to be looked into.

A strong understanding of Muslim religious and cultural practices will allow the school counsellor to provide necessary support for the student and to interact more effectively with their parents and their community. The study had two key findings of importance for high school counsellors' engagement with Muslim students and their families. Firstly, that culture is key and religion is a part that is to be incorporated and secondly, counsellor knowledge of culture and access to cultural knowledge and experience is crucial when supporting Muslim students and their families.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Open-Ended Questions

- Please tell me about the experiences that you have had with Muslim students and their families in terms of the issues that were brought to the counselling sessions.
- What were some of the common ways in which you responded to the issues raised by the students? What were the outcomes? What went well and what could have gone better? In the cases where there was family involvement, how did you engage with the family?
- Where there any challenges? If so, what were they, and how did you respond to the challenges?
- What knowledge do you already have of Muslim culture, beliefs, and practices?
- What would you like to know more about Muslim culture, beliefs, and practices that you think might help you in the future when engaging with this population? What professional development would you like on this topic?

Appendix B: Participant Demographic Questionnaire

- Age (roughly, if you would rather not be precise):
- Gender:
- Ethnic background (e.g. European, Māori, Asian, Pasifika):
- Number of years of experience as a school counsellor:
- Number of years of experience as a school counsellor at current school:
- Previous experience (before counselling):
- How much engagement have you had with Muslim students and their families:
- Qualification/s (e.g. Diploma, Bachelors, Postgraduate Dip, Masters):
- Anything else you want to mention which you think may be relevant to my study:

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet



Institute of Education | Private Bag 102904 | North Shore | Auckland 0745

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project title: Engagement with Muslim students and their families from a school counsellor perspective

Researcher information

Kia ora,

My name is Mitra Hossain and I am a student at Massey University in Albany studying towards the degree of Master in Educational Psychology. This research project is for my master's thesis. I am interested in high school counsellor's experiences of engagement with Muslim students and their families and what challenges they encounter whilst supporting this population.

Your help in this project would be much appreciated.

The focus group meeting

You are warmly invited to participate in a focus group meeting (approximately 1.5 hour duration) with a small number of school counsellors from [REDACTED]. The focus group will run at the end of November at a time convenient to everyone. It will be after school. Refreshments will be provided. During the focus group meeting, discussion will focus on your experiences of engagement with Muslim students and their families.

I am enclosing some of the focus group questions with this information sheet so that you have an idea of the planned agenda. Discussion will be around the following (but not limited to):

- Your experiences of engagement with students and their families in terms of the issues that Muslim students bring.
- Your practices: what are the common ways in which you responded to issues raised by Muslim students, what were the outcomes, what went well and what could have gone better?
- What knowledge do you have or would like to have more of in regard to Muslim students: in terms of beliefs, practices, etc.
- What professional development would you like on this topic?

I would also like to invite you to a one-on-one follow up interview if it is necessary to clarify further some of the points raised in the meeting.

How this study benefit may you

If you decide to participate in the focus group I believe it will provide a great opportunity for you to build professional development through reflection of your practice and being able to discuss and share your experiences with other professionals.

Confidentiality

- Data from the focus groups will be sound recorded and transcribed by the researcher with the permission of the group
- The recording and transcription of the meeting will be kept confidential so that the data cannot be traced back to any specific participant
- All data will be securely stored by the researcher
- All data will be destroyed (erased or shredded) after the retention time ceases
- Findings from the data will be presented anonymously as a report, no identifying information will link the report to you or your school
- If requested, a copy of the completed thesis will be emailed after completion of the study

Project Contacts

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to get in touch. I have listed the contact details of myself and both of my supervisors.

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Low Risk Notification

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix D: School Counsellor Consent Form



SCHOOL COUNSELLOR CONSENT FORM

Project title: Engagement with Muslim students and their families from a school counsellor perspective

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the focus group being sound recorded.
I agree not to disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group.
I agree to participate in this study

By writing my email address below, I ask to have a copy of the completed thesis emailed to me after the study has been completed.

E-mail address:.....

Signature:..... Date:.....

Full Name Printed:.....