

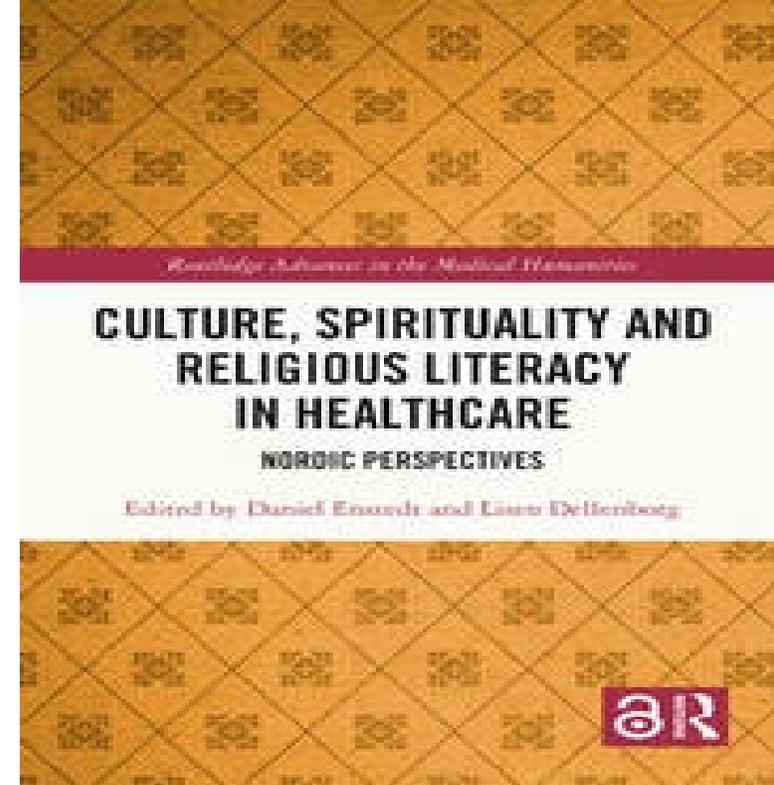
Muslim Caregivers in Finland: Cultural and Religious Challenges in Elderly Care

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GOLTC, 28th of November, 2025. “We are not all the same, and care should not be the same for all”(Culturally safe care) on 28 November.



Introduction & Background



- Fastest-growing religious group: Muslims
- Finland: Increasing number of foreign-born care professionals in elderly care
- Research gap: Understanding Muslim care professionals' needs and challenges

Research Questions & Objectives

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- What religious and cultural considerations affect Muslim caregivers?
- What forms of discrimination do they face?
- How do they negotiate cultural and religious norms at work?
- Examine values and issues for Muslim professionals in elderly care
- Identify forms of discrimination against Muslim caregivers
- Understand the role of cultural interaction and religious values

Cultural & Religious Literacy in Elderly Care

Cultural competence refers to understanding and respecting cultural differences in the workplace. This includes knowledge of religious beliefs, customs, and practices that can affect caregiving. The concept emphasizes the need for healthcare professionals to be aware of cultural and religious norms to avoid misunderstandings and discrimination.

Title: Cultural Competence & Rights in Elderly Care

Cultural competence in elderly care requires awareness of diversity and the ability to respect different cultural norms. Human rights, including the right to culture and religion, are foundational. In intercultural settings, caregivers must respect these rights while providing quality care, balancing the needs of diverse clients with the practical requirements of caregiving.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural competence theory

The **Cultural Competence Theory** emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting cultural differences, and it plays a significant role in various fields, such as healthcare.

Here's an overview of key aspects of the **Cultural Competence Theory**:

- 1. Cultural Awareness**
- 2. Cultural Knowledge**
- 3. Cultural Skills**
- 4. Cultural Sensitivity**
- 5. Cultural Safety (in some versions of the theory)**

Methodology

- Qualitative approach: Semi-structured interviews
- 21 informants from 6 different areas in Finland
- Participants: Muslim and non-Muslim care professionals
- Age range: 22-52 years
- Data collection: April-May 2022

List of interviewees.

<i>Name and age</i>	<i>Selection criterion (Muslim, non-Muslim)</i>	<i>Degree/contract</i>	<i>Difficulties, challenges and expectations</i>
Farhana, 34	Finnish Muslim	Apprenticeship contract	Language barrier (LB), awareness of rights, better salary (BS)
Ripa, 42	Muslim	No degree, practical nurse (PN) assistant	Gender preferences (GP), friendly environment (FE), respect for culture (RC)
Rubina, 45	Muslim	No degree, PN assistant	LB, GP, FE, RC
Nadia 42	Muslim	PN assistant	LB, GP, RC
Omi, 32	Muslim	Student, apprenticeship contract	LB, GP, work pressure (WP), RC
Shorna, 37	Muslim	Doctor	LB, lack of self-respect, strong motivation
Lana, 41	Muslim	PN, permanent contract	LB, GP, RC, BS
Johora 41	Muslim	PN, permanent contract	LB, GP, WP, BS, RC
Jhumur, 43	Muslim	PN	LB, GP, RC

Key Challenges in Elderly Care

- Self-Respect, Motivation, and Language Barriers
- Challenges with communication Impact on job opportunities and performance
"We have to make our position clear in terms of religion and culture, love the work and remain aware of our responsibilities. For the most part, immigrants cannot get the real message across because of language barriers." - Shorna, 37, Muslim immigrant doctor
- Key Findings - Cultural and Religious Considerations
- Importance of self-respect and motivation
- Need for cultural awareness among all care professionals
- Quote: "Self-respect and motivation are important for quality work." - Shorna, 37, Muslim immigrant doctor

Pious Nature of Care Work

Elderly Care as an Act of Worship!

In Islamic tradition, caring for others is viewed as a form of worship, aligning with the concept of “Sheba,” which denotes service to others with an intention for moral and spiritual reward. This religious context provides Muslim immigrants with a sense of purpose in their work, which influences how they approach their caregiving tasks.

Discrimination and Racism in the Workplace

Discrimination, Racism, and Cultural Bias

Issues related to religion, country of origin, and skin color often lead to prejudiced behaviors. Several participants shared experiences where their colleagues or clients made assumptions about their abilities or professionalism based on their appearance or religion. This highlights the importance of cultural competence in promoting understanding and respect for diversity in the workplace.

Religion, Culture, and Gender in Elderly Care

- Gender Preferences, Modesty, and Dress Codes

Many Muslim caregivers preferred to provide care to individuals of the same gender, particularly in the case of elderly patients. The discussion about hijab and dress code also surfaced, with Muslim caregivers explaining the negative biases they often faced due to their attire.

Recognized several key relevant issues

Akhi a Muslim caregivers commented when trying to balance their religious practices and the expectations of their workplace: “It’s difficult when my religion clashes with the schedule at work. There are times when I have to choose between my duty to my faith and my duty to my job. It would be easier if the work environment were more flexible and understanding of these practices.”

Regarding Ramadan, Ruhi shared her thoughts on how her fasting impacted her work schedule: “During Ramadan, I feel more tired and sometimes I cannot focus fully. It would be helpful if employers were more understanding during this time and offered flexible hours, especially during the fasting hours. A little empathy from the management would make a world of difference.”

Akhi further emphasized the importance of understanding within healthcare environments: “I wish more emphasis was placed on understanding diverse cultural needs within healthcare. It's not only about doing the job well, but also about creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels respected and valued.”

Fatima mentioned importance of the relationship between Muslim caregivers and elderly clients: “I’ve worked with elderly clients who are very understanding and respect my beliefs, which makes the job much easier. However, some clients struggle with the idea of my hijab. It’s essential to educate both staff and patients about diversity in these environments.”

Kaniz reflected on cultural differences in handling sensitive issues at work: “I think there should be ^(3Y) more cultural sensitivity training for both employees and clients. Sometimes, things are not meant to be offensive, but the lack of knowledge creates misunderstandings. A little cultural awareness goes a long way in making the workplace smoother for everyone.”

One recurring theme in the discussions was the need for awareness and proper handling of cultural and religious differences in the workplace. Several caregivers, including Akhi and Fatima, noted: “We don’t want to create issues, but it’s about having a space where we can bring our full selves to work without feeling like we’re compromising on our beliefs. That’s a big part of why we chose this profession – to help others without losing who we are.”

One key recommendation that emerged from the study is the implementation of more flexible scheduling during important religious times, such as Ramadan, and more thoughtful consideration for prayer times throughout the day: “Allowing for breaks at prayer time or adjusting work hours during Ramadan can help Muslim workers stay focused and balanced without feeling as though they are being forced to choose between their job and their faith.”

"Immigrants (both Muslim and non-Muslim) are not experts in the work, unlike Finns. Finnish workers must adhere to the professional norms, rules and regulations; most foreign workers do not." - Lana, 41, PN (immigrant)

Another aspect highlighted by the caregivers was the importance of culturally appropriate dress codes in care facilities: “Dress codes are important, but flexibility is key. The ability to wear the hijab or other culturally significant garments should be normalized, and care facilities should provide an option for workers to feel comfortable without compromising their identity.”

The issue of food practices in the workplace was another area where caregivers suggested improvements: “Ensuring that Muslim caregivers are not required to handle prohibited foods like pork, or providing alternative options, would go a long way in creating a more inclusive workplace.”

The Role of Cultural Competence in Overcoming Barriers

Addressing Challenges Through Cultural Competence

This study reveals the need for care institutions to create an inclusive environment that supports the diverse needs of both staff and patients.

Implications for Elderly Care Practices

Recommendations for Inclusive and Culturally Competent Care

Based on the findings, it is clear that integrating cultural competence into elderly care practices is essential for improving the working conditions of immigrant caregivers. Some recommendations include:

- 1. Training Programs:** Cultural sensitivity training for both native and immigrant workers to understand each other's practices and values.
- 2. Inclusive Policies:** Implementing flexible policies to accommodate religious and cultural practices, such as prayer times and gender preferences in caregiving.
- 3. Mentorship and Support:** Creating mentorship programs where experienced professionals can guide immigrants through cultural challenges in the workplace.

Conclusion - Building a Culturally Inclusive Care Environment

Moving Toward a More Inclusive Elderly Care Sector!

In conclusion, the experiences shared by the interviewees underscore the importance of cultural competence in the healthcare sector. Understanding the religious and cultural values of caregivers can lead to a more inclusive and respectful work environment. For the care sector to thrive, institutions must prioritize cultural sensitivity and create systems that allow immigrant caregivers to flourish while providing quality care to the elderly.

Recommendations

Based on the insights gathered, several key recommendations can help improve the working environment for caregivers, particularly in culturally diverse settings. These suggestions are aimed at fostering better understanding, reducing barriers, and enhancing the overall quality of care within healthcare institutions.

- 1. Clear Communication of Job Responsibilities During Recruitment:**
- 2. Comprehensive Education on Cultural and Religious Diversity:**
- 3. Raising Awareness of Discrimination and Racism in Healthcare:**
- 4. Adapting Care Practices to Cultural Sensitivities:**

These recommendations aim to create a more inclusive, understanding, and supportive work environment for healthcare professionals, especially those from immigrant and Muslim backgrounds. By incorporating these strategies, care institutions can improve both staff satisfaction and the quality of care provided to clients.

Thank You!

Thank you for your attention!

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