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Faith and Professional Ethics in Therapy: A Qualitative Study of Muslim Psychologists in Lebanon

The integration of religiosity and spirituality into psychological practice is a challenge and an opportunity, particularly in religiously diverse and multicultural societies. While evidence-based psychology is concerned with empirically supported treatments, scientific objectivity, and strict adherence to professional guidelines, faith-sensitive approaches recognize the primacy of spiritual beliefs in clients' identity, coping, and well-being. The literature outlines therapeutic benefits of incorporating religiosity, including enhanced meaning-making, resilience, and client engagement. Concurrently, it brings to the fore the professional and ethical challenges, such as not imposing personal beliefs, upholding boundaries, and operating within institutional or secular frameworks (Plante, 2022; Vieten et al., 2016; APA, 2017). While important, empirical research from Arab and Muslim-majority contexts is limited, with a gap in understanding how therapists negotiate these tensions in practice.

This study adopts a two-streamed methodology, harnessing a systematic review of the literature combined with a qualitative study designed to investigate the integration of religiosity and spirituality in therapy and the ethical challenges that follow. The review of the literature will synthesize current knowledge regarding faith-based therapies, ethical theory, and culturally responsive practice and identify areas of consensus and areas of practice deficit. The qualitative component centres on Muslim licensed psychologists practicing in Lebanon and employs semi-structured interviews to explore their conceptualization of spirituality, approaches to integrating it into therapeutic practice, the ethical dilemmas encountered, and the strategies they adopt to preserve professional integrity. Data will be analyzed via Thematic Analysis, using Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach, with member checking to enhance credibility and trustworthiness.

By comparing the views from the literature and qualitative study results, the research will try to identify convergences and divergences between theoretical advice and everyday practice and make visible ethical, cultural, and professional factors.

The anticipated outcomes of this research are intended to inform evidence-based clinical practice, professional education, and institutional policy. In particular, the study seeks to contribute to the development of culturally sensitive ethical guidelines, supervision frameworks, and training modules for therapists working in Arab and Islamic contexts. More broadly, the research aims to assist psychologists in navigating the complex intersection of spirituality, professional ethics, and evidence-based practice, while critically examining both the practical and conceptual implications of integrating spirituality into contemporary mental health care.



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Dr Faten Skafi is an Educational Psychologist, Licensed Practitioner, and Assistant Professor of Psychology at Beirut Arab University, and also teaches at the Lebanese University. She has over 24 years of experience in academic teaching, clinical practice, and research. Her work focuses on psychological assessment, clinical and cognitive evaluation, and psychoanalytic approaches within culturally informed and ethically grounded frameworks.

She holds a PhD in Religious–Social Psychology from the Lebanese University, where her research examined the role of religiosity in shaping mental health, family relationships, and social tolerance in Arab and multicultural contexts. Her broader research interests include educational and family psychology, early childhood development, gender studies, and mental health.

Dr Skafi previously served as a Research Associate at the Arab Network for Early Childhood (ANECD), coordinating multi-country research initiatives on early childhood and mental health in crisis contexts. Alongside her academic work, she remains active in clinical practice and mental health supervision.