



The Muslim Seniors Study:

Needs for Healthy Aging in Muslim Communities in Edmonton, Alberta.

Community Report

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A Community-Based Participatory Research Project by:

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Executive Summary

Introduction: There are currently one million Muslims living in Canada with the majority being immigrants with diverse ethnic and linguistic traditions. Although more Canadian Muslims are entering older age, there is still limited research evidence and policy focused on older Muslims' lived experiences and needs in Canada. This Community-Based Participatory Study serves to describe the experiences of Muslim seniors and community stakeholders, with regards to healthy aging and related needs in Edmonton, Alberta. Sixty-four Canadian Muslims from multiple ethno-cultural communities in Edmonton participated in the study. Data collection occurred over a period of one year (2017-2018), using a combination of individual interviews and focus group discussions. A thematic data analysis approach was used to identify final study findings.

Findings: Muslim seniors in this study define healthy aging as being financially independent, staying socially connected, and feeling spiritually fulfilled. Community members highlighted the Islamic obligation to care for seniors in the community, but acknowledged the lack of resources to effectively do so. Muslim seniors without family support or with significant health decline and social isolation experienced high levels of vulnerability. Vulnerable seniors had financial difficulties, limited social support, and restricted access to aging-related support services in their communities. Overall, this study's findings highlights strong community motivation to support healthy aging, combined with significant barriers to community action.

Recommendations: Healthy aging involves creating supportive environments which optimize health and wellbeing of older adults. This study points to the diverse social, economic, emotional, and spiritual needs for healthy aging in Muslim communities. Some of these needs can be met by seniors and their families, however many of the identified needs demand the collaborative efforts of Muslim communities, mainstream senior-serving organizations, and policymakers. Priority recommendations include: creating supportive living options and seniors programming that meet the needs of Muslim seniors, raising awareness and increasing accessibility within Muslim communities to provide services for seniors, and fostering conversations about healthy aging within Muslim communities in Edmonton.

Background

Latest estimates of Muslim populations across Canada were at 3.2% in 2011 which equals approximately one million individuals (Statistics Canada, 2013). The majority of Canadian Muslims are first-generation immigrants to Canada and are visible minorities. While the overall Muslim population is relatively young, the experiences and needs of Muslims as they grow older is increasingly becoming a concern within Muslim communities. In Edmonton, a little over 45,000 individuals identify as Muslim, with the majority reporting South Asian and Arab ethnicity (Statistics Canada, 2013). Of the Muslims in Edmonton in 2011, a little under 2000 individuals were 45 years of age or older (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Religious and cultural practices of Muslims differ based on level of assimilation into Western culture, country of origin, and personal religiosity. For practicing Muslims, spirituality and religion takes a central role in their daily lives and can include praying five times a day, dietary restrictions, fasting the holy month of Ramadan, and using Quranic verses and teachings for physical healing and spiritual guidance (Ahmad & Khan, 2016). Respect for elders is highly valued in Muslim communities, where families are often expected to ensure elders are treated kindly in older age and are revered for the wisdom they bring to younger generations (Ajrouch & Fakhoury, 2013). Additionally, Muslim communities place a high value on filial piety which translates into expectations for care of aging family members; this expectation can put a burden on families and result in inadequate development of formal support structures for aging Muslims (Ahmad & Khan, 2015; Senzai & Bazian, 2013). In the context of receiving health and social services, studies on Muslim populations identify the need for gender-sensitive care, understanding Muslim dietary restrictions, respecting the centrality of prayer and fasting, and accommodating rituals around birth, death, and illness (Ahmad & Khan, 2015; Ajrouch & Fakhoury, 2013).

Muslims seniors share many of the experiences of other minorities and immigrants in Canada. For immigrant minorities, these experiences differ depending on whether migration occurs early or late in life, and on the socio-economic capital of immigrants and their communities. Security, enhanced independence, and availability of social and health services in Canada contribute to the well-being of older immigrants (Koehn, Neysmith, Kobayashi, &

Khamisa, 2013). Lack of employment opportunities, deskilling, and discrimination experienced by immigrants with significant language and integration barriers result in health stressors (Koehn, Neysmith, Kobayashi, & Khamisa, 2013). Migrating after retirement can also create stressors that negatively impact health, where older immigrants depend on family for economic security and experience dependency, social isolation, and loss of autonomy (Wu & Penning, 2015). Moreover, an over-reliance on family members for support creates significant strains when families lack the necessary financial and social resources to support aging family members (Neufeld, Harrison, Stewart, Hughes, & Spitzer, 2012).

Overall, Muslim seniors have many strengths but are also exposed to a range of challenges as they grow older. A better understanding of the needs of Muslims growing old in Canada is a necessary initial step towards ensuring positive aging experiences. This report provides a description of the aging experiences of Muslims in Edmonton, Alberta and highlights recommendations for supporting healthy aging in this population.

Study Design

A Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach was used for this study. A Community-Based Participatory Research approach engages the community in all stages of the research process. Muslim communities in Edmonton have identified healthy aging and the needs of Muslim seniors as an emerging and critical priority area. A Community Research Advisory Committee was formed to include stakeholders and seniors from different Muslim community/religious organizations. This advisory committee met monthly, over the span of one year. Furthermore, this committee identified relevant stakeholders, supported recruitment of seniors, and participated in data analysis and the final drafting of the community report.

This research study was designed to address an identified knowledge gap, by answering the following question: **“What are the experiences of healthy aging and related needs of Muslim seniors living in Edmonton, Alberta?”** Individual one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with seniors and stakeholders were used to gather research data. This study focused specifically on seniors who identified as Muslims, were 55 years of age or older and also living

in Edmonton, Alberta. Stakeholders of this study were individuals who actively supported and engaged with seniors in Muslim communities.

All interviews and group discussions were completed by Dr. Jordana Salma. Interviews and group discussions lasted 1-2 hours on average and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative thematic analysis of the data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013) was undertaken, in order to identify common patterns and themes about Muslim seniors' experiences of aging in Edmonton. Any collected data shared with the Community Advisory Committee or disseminated in this report were masked from identifying information, in order to ensure and maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants. This study was approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB application # Pro00076588, approved 11/2/2017).

Study Findings

Who participated in this study?

In total, 64 Muslim seniors and stakeholders participated in this study. Seven focus groups and 8 individual interviews with seniors were held in the community. Sixteen stakeholder interviews were completed with community leaders and senior-service providers who had experience working with Muslim communities (Five of whom also identified as being seniors). The majority of seniors and stakeholders were immigrants to Canada. A small number of seniors and stakeholders were refugees or Canadian born. Predominant regions of origin for immigrants were the Middle East/North Africa, South Asia, and East Africa. More than half of the participants in this study were women. The Muslim seniors ranged in age from 55 to 85 years of age, with varying levels of English-language fluency, income and education.

Perspectives of Muslim seniors: A definition of healthy aging

Healthy aging for Muslim seniors means being: (a) independent, (b) socially connected, and (c) spiritually fulfilled. Independence was defined as being financially self-sufficient and not reliant on one's children. Muslim seniors want to pay their bills, purchase healthy food and medication, and engage in social and recreation activities. Additionally, independence meant being mobile, where Muslim seniors are able to engage in daily activities, participate in the

community, and access needed social and health resources. Being able to converse in English, having a support system, and having access to transportation were identified by Muslim seniors as being essential for independence.

“...the first thing that comes to my mind when I hear healthy aging, is connectedness with the community, within a support system, logistics, if there’s good public transportation, or maybe a system of volunteers to take seniors, or somewhere to gather, that’s what I mean by logistics. Financial support is very important To me personally, healthy aging would mean that I’m not isolated. I am able to have a social life, meet people, contribute, do the things that I’m passionate about...”
(Participant 11)

Financial independence, especially, was a source of pride and losing this was detrimental to seniors’ sense of wellbeing.

Interpreter: *“You know, you cannot buy your grandson or granddaughter a birthday card or give them a little present or give them a little treat because you can barely meet your own needs.”*

Participant 1: *“It feels like begging, it is your pride.”*

Participant 5: *“It hurts your pride to ask your children for funds all the time, it hurts your ego.”* (Focus Group 7)

Muslim seniors in this study wish to remain socially connected to family, peers, and the wider community. These Muslim seniors also emphasized the importance of connecting with peers from the same age group for wellbeing.

“I think just being with a son and the daughter-in-law is not enough. She doesn’t have any family here. No one knows her. See, she becomes a non-entity in a way. She’s recognized as L.’s daughter-in-law, or Z.’s mother. She doesn’t have any identity of her own....we were able to arrange a ride for her... So she started going twice a week (to seniors’ social group) and that really made a difference. Over there she made friends and they would be waiting for her.” (Participant 12)

“I have an 84-year-old lady. Amazing! She does her five prayers a day, moves around quite well, lives with her son and her daughter-in-law... the family feels like

beyond us she needs to have another individual to help her along the way and make sure she's safe. So her day starts off at 2:30 after the afternoon Namaz (prayer). She has seven different families within a ten-block radius, so she gets up, gets ready, and then with a caregiver she goes house to house having coffee. Three hours later she makes her way back. You should see this lady. She is amazing.” (Participant 14)

Muslim seniors value spirituality and religiosity as a central aspect of healthy aging. These seniors view older age as a time to reconnect spiritually and prepare oneself for the journey towards and into the afterlife. Older age can mean less worldly responsibilities and more free time to focus on spiritual wellbeing. Religious activities include completing daily prayers and reciting the Quran. Many Muslim seniors also are known to visit Mecca and perform the Muslim pilgrimage to Hajj and Umrah.

“In regards to spirituality, it's very common that you will see a senior want to visit Mecca, if they haven't already done so. So they are kind of all starving for that spirituality at an older age too, so they feel that that is an obligation. They want to make up time fast for what they missed in their youthful years...they are closer to meeting God, so they want to be prepared and you see them trying to make it to Mecca.” (Participant 1)

Perspectives of Muslim seniors: Needs for healthy aging

Muslim seniors in this study were either long-term immigrants who had been in Canada for decades, or recent immigrants who had come for family-reunification at an older age. Across these two identifiable groups, there were a small percentage of highly vulnerable Muslim seniors who experienced multiple unmet social and health needs. Below, we discuss the overall needs for healthy aging addressed by research participants.

Family

Of greatest concern and impact on quality of life for newly arrived Muslim immigrant seniors to Canada, is the quality of family relationships. Newly arrived seniors depend on their families, most often their children, for financial and emotional support.

“Our whole culture, you know, it is somehow around the family and that is a very big support system. Your children, mostly it is your kids really not your brothers, sisters, mother, that is the strongest support system. Most of them (seniors) rely on family for everything.” (Participant 4, Focus Group 5)

Community members emphasized the Islamic obligation to treat seniors with respect and to care for seniors in the community. Children were expected to play a central role in caring for aging parents.

“So as long as I have a parent live with me, Islam tells me clearly that I have to take care of them. And I have to do all of my best to provide them with a better life, with the life that they deserve... Which means that if every child takes care of their parents, then we’re not leaving too much to the community to take care of those adults...However, in some cases, some people don’t follow. So now if the elder is left without support from their children, then the responsibility will be for sure on the Muslim community.” (Participant 6)

Family members, however, could not always meet the needs of Muslim seniors, either due to lack of awareness about their needs, neglect, abuse, or competing life stressors that limited the support provided to seniors.

“I went to the mosque and I was talking to all these women who came for Friday prayers...and they told me how their daughters-in-laws treated them and their sons even. Some of them are very nice, but a lot of them: ‘Don’t come up from the basement until we are gone. Don’t mess the kitchen up,’ and they would always leave young children with them and go.” (Participant 13)

Income

Muslim seniors can experience financial difficulties in older age, due largely to decreased income post-retirement. Muslim seniors with low incomes struggle to find appropriate housing, to eat healthy food, to pay for medication, and to participate in social and recreation activities. Family-sponsored seniors who migrate to Canada later in life are reliant on their children for financial support for up to the first 20 years in Canada as mandated by Canadian immigration

policies. Seniors frequently discussed their struggles with depending on family for financial support and the resulting limited access to publically-funded services in older age.

Translator: *“But you would like to have dignity by having a little bit of your own money instead of being totally dependent, like a small amount, like up to \$300 a month and not have to wait for 10 years. I think 5 years is better than 10 years, 10 years is just far too long, people could die.”*

P2: *“We will not survive.... Sixty years of age plus, they should start giving a little pocket money, 3 to 400 dollars a month.”* (Focus group 7)

For seniors who had lived in Canada most of their lives, financial challenges post-retirement still existed due to reliance on public pensions which were not seen as sufficient in the absence of supplemental pensions. Many of these seniors had immigrated to Canada in their working years to be employed in jobs that did not provide supplemental pensions, while other seniors were self-employed through out their lives or were women who did not participate in the workforce.

“You see the government provides 17,000 dollars a year, the government raises the tax and then they never put it down. The people get really upset from the food store, all the stuff comes from California... how am I supposed to get money to buy.” (Participant 3, Focus Group 2)

Most Muslim seniors, even when in dire need, do not wish to burden their families and might avoid directly asking for financial support. Seniors felt that their children did not always ask about their needs or support their wishes for increased independence.

“We never do the needs assessment of those seniors, when they come from their home, within the home. So a son would not sit with his father, and say so what can that need be, and how can we empower them, and what would that empowerment look like, right? So when they come, they are powerless. Absolutely powerless. Back home, they had all the power. But they are powerless. So the question is, the challenge is, how can you empower them as a son, as a daughter, as a grandchild...” (Participant 4)

Social and recreation opportunities

Muslim seniors can experience difficulties accessing mainstream social and recreation opportunities. Primarily, these difficulties are described by seniors as related to “not belonging”, “feeling different”, and “not feeling comfortable”.

Participant 3: *“I would say when you go to other centers (a) you do not know them, (b) you are very apprehensive at that age about meeting them and (c) you feel kind of alienated, like you do not belong to the group. I can move everywhere but I can see why people do not move.”*

Participant 2: *“Not too comfortable, it's not.”*

Participant 1: *“Like here we feel at home among your own culture, religion.”*

Participant3: *“Here you feel part of the group whereas there you don't feel part of group.”*

Interviewer: *“That's an important point for us to think about.”*

Participant 3: *“Yes, very important.”*

Participant 5: *“Maybe our age is the same, our culture is the same.”*

Participant 1: *“Our problems are the same.”* (Focus Group 5)

Underlying these descriptions are participants' experiences and perceptions of not having their cultural and religious preferences met and not feeling welcomed in mainstream senior-serving agencies and in local community/recreational centers.

“She said elder people, they need a facility, somewhere to exercise, to swim, culturally appropriate that they can use, like swimming pools, exercise spaces that are only for women. So, as you see, all these women are wearing hijabs, they don't want men to see their bodies, exposed, so they really want the government to look at that, like the provincial or the City of Edmonton, to think about or to create, implement a place, that is culturally appropriate for seniors, all women.”

(Interpreter, Focus Group 4)

Racism and Islamophobia

There remains a lack of discussion about the ways in which everyday racism and Islamophobia impact the lives of Muslim seniors. The presence of everyday racism and

Islamophobia and incidents of religiously-motivated violence increases the apprehension Muslim seniors feel when engaging in public spaces and also exacerbates their worry about the safety of their family and community.

“Do you know, for example, what happened in Quebec, the shooting in the Mosque, it actually shook the whole country and some seniors got killed over there so this is a concern and it's not just for seniors but it's for everybody.... because when our daughters go out with hijab (Islamic head covering), they are not safe...to say we are not impacted would be actually living a dream. Maybe you don't have a daughter, I have, and they wear hijab. I am worried when they are out in the mall...” (Participant 2, Focus Group 6)

Most notable in this study is the minimal use of mainstream senior-serving organizations by Muslim seniors, which if utilized more often can potentially provide much needed services and supports to enhance healthy aging in Muslim communities. The need for more inclusion and intentional bridge-building of mainstream senior-serving organizations with Muslim communities was identified as essential by all stakeholders in this study.

“So creating a space that is more inclusive, anti-oppressive, welcoming to all cultures in existing systems, in existing agencies, seems harder, seems like a longer road, seems more painful, because we might try something and experience racism or discrimination. However, I think it's more sustainable for generations to come. Because we're creating different norms, and we're establishing something that others can then come in and follow.” (Participant 6)

Age-friendly Muslim spaces

Muslim seniors report experiences of loneliness and social isolation. These experiences relate to a lack of senior-focused programming and senior accessible spaces in ethno-cultural community organizations and religious spaces, such as mosques. For new immigrants, it is known that having support from peers who share the same language is essential for integration into Canada. Peers also allow seniors to reminisce, share worries and build confidence in solving their problems. Socialization with peers was the strongest indicator of wellbeing reported by seniors in this study. Muslim seniors need mosques to accommodate their unique needs, such as:

accessible walkways, appropriate seating, and support for caregivers who come with their dependents. In Edmonton, many seniors would like to attend their local mosques but are unable to do so.

Interviewer: *“How about going to the mosque for like lessons or prayers or things?”*

Participant 7: *“I would like to but again, with my bad knees, you know, it’s hard to climb stairs.... I believe the mosque has got a lift, but I don’t go, because again, ladies have to go in a separate section, men have to go in a separate section. If he (spouse with dementia) walks out, what will I do? So I make sure I send him with guys. [Laughs] And even the guys, I’ve told them, I said, ‘He has a habit of walking away, so please keep an eye on him.’ He keeps asking me, ‘Why don’t you come?’ And I said, ‘No, I don’t want to climb steps.’ By the way, have you been to (Mosque name)? How is that elevator or the new entrance working?”*

Stakeholders identified two major barriers to addressing social isolation of Muslim seniors: (a) a lack of awareness within Muslim communities about the needs of seniors and (b) Muslim organizations’ competing priorities coupled with limited funding to create senior-focused programming.

“You see, we have programs for all age groups. We have for the kids, for the younger ones. We have the youth, boys and girls. Then you have for the adults. And normally in many Masjids (mosques) I hardly have seen – including my Masjid as well – that when we say adults, we expect adults of all ages, even seniors. We say, ‘Okay, this is a program.’ But there has come a time where we need to focus more on seniors as well, have a senior-only program...So we need to create a little more than just having an adult program in the Masjid, creating something specific for the seniors.” (Participant 8)

Volunteerism and workforce participation

Seniors need more opportunities to volunteer in their communities, especially when they lack English language fluency skills or are recent immigrants to Canada. These Muslim seniors wish to engage in their communities and would like to have their wisdom and skills utilized to benefit others.

“There are seniors who are in a good health, and they want to give back. They want to contribute. They could do a lot of things. We don’t have anything for them, to utilize them in an effective way. And this is, again, a frustration for them. I had a senior who was 90 years old with – very fragile, but – and with no eyesight, but he wanted me to find volunteer work for him...And he always asked me that, ‘Can you find something for me? I want to volunteer. I want to volunteer.’”

(Participant 4)

However, opportunities for social engagement and volunteerism were not readily available to seniors in their ethno-cultural and religious communities or within the wider Canadian context community due to a combination of ageism, sexism, and racism.

“... especially the younger generation, if I want to say, ‘Oh, I want to volunteer for this,’ and they say, ‘Oh, auntie, what do you want to do?’ I say, ‘Oh, well, whatever I can do.’ ‘Okay, we’ll contact you.’ And then they never get back to me....But they don’t see me as a valuable participant ... So I felt like I was not being welcome sometimes, because of my age.... The younger generation is coming forward and taking the responsibility, but slowly the older generation is being pushed out...”

(Participant 3)

The opportunity to participate in the workforce was also identified in this study as a need, in order to help combat social isolation and reduce financial stressors.

“She said that we need programs, we need job opportunities, we need business opportunities, we need to do our own things, we don’t have to be dependent on government help. We don’t know the language very well but there are so many things that we can do and we are not very old yet and when we go and look for a job they consider us old people and if we are 50 or 55 nobody is hiring us...”

(Interpreter, Focus Group 4)

Religiously and culturally-sensitive continuing care

All seniors in this study stated that they valued personal independence and wished to age in place, at home, for as long as possible. Participants recognized that not all families are able to care for the seniors in their lives despite the religious obligation to do so. All participants equally

acknowledged the need for religiously and culturally-sensitive continuing care for when they are no longer able to live on their own.

“The subject is very sensitive because it has two sides. The side is, Islamically, the kids must look after their parents, till the last day, they should never let them go. Only, we are talking about people who do not have anybody, kids. The Muslim community is looking into finding a way to do this themselves. They need a different environment, different food, different practices, prayer area for themselves...” (Participant 1, Focus Group 2)

Many seniors in this study elaborated further, by sharing their thoughts on creative living options that would support aging in place, be culturally and religiously appropriate, and maximize seniors’ independence. Islamically-oriented models of continuing care living spaces would incorporate and provide the following religion-specific supports: dietary restrictions, prayer spaces, and gender-segregated accommodations. Seniors’ needs, however, go beyond the physicality of food and space. Muslim seniors want the centrality of family, spirituality, and community in their lives to be recognized and embraced within alternative living options.

“I would like for two or three seniors to be living together in a home where there are no stairs and somebody to look after them, paid by the government, like a nurse or a caretaker. To see that the food is being made, you have your dignity and your independence as much as you can and the kids are around, they pop in, they come, they see you, but living in a senior home is like an institution. I would not like to go and live in an institution, it is like a jail camp, it is like a prison.”
(Participant 3, Focus Group 5)

Recommendations

Collectively, healthy aging for Canadian Muslim seniors means feeling valued, respected, having financial independence, being socially connected, and practicing personal faith. The strength, resourcefulness, and optimism of seniors in this study were evident, even in Muslim Seniors who were in the most difficult of personal circumstances. The Muslim seniors from this study demonstrated the support they provide to peers within their communities through

companionship and sharing of personal resources. Muslim seniors are known to be actively engaged in Muslim and mainstream communities as volunteers, community leaders, and activists. Muslim seniors are sources of wisdom and vital connectors to our history, our culture, and our linguistic traditions. The following recommendations focus on the major challenges and needs identified by seniors and stakeholders. We emphasize that any recommendations in this report needs to be addressed and implemented with seniors as equal partners (e.g. equal partners in community action and programming). Muslim seniors know what they need, what will work in their communities, and can identify the best approaches to addressing these recommendations.

Recommendations for Muslim seniors and families

- Muslim seniors want to avoid burdening their children and their communities even when their essential needs are not met. Seniors will often avoid asking their children for support or seeking formal mainstream services. Directly asking Muslim seniors about their needs and problem-solving with them on ways to meet those needs is crucial. Aspects of daily life that Muslim seniors are likely to need support in, include the following: getting to places they need (or want) to go, eating healthy food, having opportunities to socialize with peers, and carrying out activities of daily living (housework, cooking, self-care).
- Financial, emotional, and physical abuse can and does occur towards Muslim seniors. Abuse can occur when seniors co-reside with their children and are dependent on their children. Dependency can occur when seniors do not speak English, are new to Canada, have multiple health challenges, and are financially reliant on others. When families have limited support and are experiencing multiple life stressors, the risk for abuse increases. Families are encouraged to seek out formal support programs and services to help alleviate some of these stressors, especially when they are primary caregivers for the seniors in their lives.

Recommendations for Muslim community centers and mosques

- Islamic teachings emphasize treating elders with respect and dignity. In practice, however, minimal services, activities, and programs within Muslim centers and mosques cater to the specific needs of seniors. Also, there is a lack of accessible spaces for seniors in these organizations. Muslim seniors wish to access mosques and Muslim community

centers because they are culturally, religiously, and linguistically appropriate. Creating social spaces for seniors and finding ways to address transportation barriers that limit access to these spaces were identified by participants in this study as major priorities.

- Muslim women who are seniors continue to experience social isolation and loneliness. Some avenues to increasing social participation of older women may include increasing Muslim women's representation on boards and committees, creating welcoming spaces for social and religious activities, and hosting open discussions of issues of concern to older women. While some Muslim organizations have taken strong steps to create accessible and appropriate spaces for older women, others are lagging behind. Initiatives that specifically engage Muslim senior women in their communities are needed.
- There is an emerging need for Islamically-sensitive continuing care: Home care, Designated Supportive Living, and Long-Term Care. Not all Muslim seniors have families that can or are willing to care for them when physical and/or cognitive decline occurs. The lack of attention within mainstream continuing care to the cultural and religious practices of Muslims is a source of stress and fear for Muslim seniors. This often results in Muslim seniors not accessing support when they need it most and contributes to the stigma Muslim families feel when accessing support for their loved ones. It is imperative that future Islamically-sensitive continuing care initiatives avoid the "one size fits all" approach, especially given that Muslims vary in their religious and cultural practices and, hence, require flexible services that can be further tailored to specific individual and cultural preferences.

Recommendations for mainstream organizations

- Muslim seniors and their families lack awareness of available resources in Edmonton that support healthy aging. Knowledge gaps exist for Muslim seniors regarding opportunities they may have access to (in Edmonton), such as discounted or subsidized social and recreation services, homecare services, caregiving supports, and financial and housing resources. Lack of access to information can be due to language barriers and/or being unfamiliar with the Canadian social and health service systems. There is a need to adapt knowledge resources for diverse ethnic and linguistic communities. These knowledge resources also need to be disseminated within local Muslim and ethno-cultural community organizations to increase access to information.

- Intentional bridge-building with Muslim communities to link mainstream senior-serving organizations with local ethno-cultural community organizations and mosques will have the double benefit of informing mainstream services on ways to be culturally-sensitive and also informing community centers on ways to be more age-friendly. A successful strategy in Muslim communities is the use of community-outreach workers to connect local community and religious organizations to mainstream resources. A second successful strategy is having representation of Muslims and Muslim seniors on committees and boards in mainstream senior-serving agencies.

Recommendations for policy makers

- Policy makers need to listen to the concerns of Muslim seniors and support culturally and religiously appropriate programs and activities. Faith-based community organizations continue to struggle to justify and receive government funding for older adult programming. These organizations cater to the needs of vulnerable and socially isolated Muslim seniors as more cohorts of immigrants enter older age and, thus, will require financial support and resources to manage this emerging role.
- Many seniors in this study were sponsored by their children to come to Canada. Canadian immigration policies mandate that family-sponsored seniors be financially supported by their children for up to 20 years in Canada. This policy can be detrimental to the wellbeing of seniors who are then unable to access government services and supports for healthy aging. Further attention to this policy in the context of healthy aging is needed to address the resulting inequities experienced by immigrant seniors.

Recommendations for researchers

- Long-term care and designated supportive living settings in Edmonton continue to lack culturally and linguistically appropriate spaces for Muslim seniors. This report focused on community-dwelling seniors and did not include residents in supportive living or long-term care facilities. Muslim seniors and their families in the community do report distress and fear of using these facilities. This negative perception can lead to caregiver stress and decreased quality of life for seniors whose needs cannot be met at home. Further research on the experiences of Muslim caregivers and Muslim residents of continuing care facilities is needed.

- Canada has growing populations of ethnically and religiously diverse seniors. Further research is needed to understand the ways these diverse groups define and experience healthy aging. Of critical importance is understanding the ways seniors exercise agency within their communities and the ways service providers can maximize this agency to promote independence and wellbeing in older age.

Conclusion

Muslim seniors in Edmonton are resourceful, motivated, and engaged in their communities. Many Muslim seniors and stakeholders who participated in this study are working to address the challenges identified in this report. This report is a first step towards working collaboratively across Muslim and non-Muslim communities to maximize opportunities for healthy aging. If you are interested in further information on this study or wish to collaborate on initiatives for healthy aging in Muslim communities, please contact Dr. Jordana Salma, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta: email: sjordana@ualberta.ca; Tel: (780) 492-7555.

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