

# **Best Practices working with Arab and Muslim Clients**

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# Brainstorm

What comes to mind when you hear the words

- Arab
- Muslim
- Middle Eastern



# Myth VS Reality

# Where do Muslims in the US come from?

In the United States, Muslims are made up of four groups:

- (1) African American Muslims
- (2) Immigrants Muslims
- (3) American converts to Islam
- (4) Those born to immigrants and American converts

# Where do Arabs in the US come from?

Arabs in the US come from member Nations of the Arab League. (see handout)

# Islamic Perspective on Counseling

Islamic counseling emphasizes spiritual solutions, based on love and fear of Allah (God) and the duty to fulfill our responsibility as the servants of Allah on this earth.

Source: Imam Majid (2005) Islamic Society of North America

# Perception of counseling in Islam

In any form of counseling, or private talks, Allah is present and hears what we are saying

- The private talk in our counseling is to help others to be righteous and to be obedient to Allah
- Any effort that a counselor make in bringing people together is considered a good deed, and Allah will reward for it

Source: Imam Majid (2005) Islamic Society of North America

# The principles of Islamic counseling

- Confidentiality
- Trust and respect
- Recognition of the difference between arbitration and counseling
- The partnership between Imams (religious leaders) and professionals
- The ultimate goal of connecting people with Allah (God) and offering spiritual solutions to them

Source: Imam Majid (2005) Islamic Society of North America

# Areas of intervention

Islamic counseling is offered for:

- Marriage and family issues
- Mental health cases
- Religious guidance

Source: Imam Majid (2005) Islamic Society of North America

# Involving the extended family

The counselor should involve the clients, their parents and their families.

The counselor should tolerate and encourage family involvement.

The counselor should encourage the client's parents and families to be a safety net for them.

Al Krenawi, A., & Graham, J.R. (2000). *Culturally Competent Social Work Practice with Arab Clients in Mental Health Settings*. Health and Social Work, 9-22.

# Acculturation

- Length of time outside country of origin
- Reasons for emigration
- Conditions of emigration
- Level of social and family support
- Degree of religious affiliation

# View of Mental Health

- Negative
- Mistrust
- Keep it short and directive
- Therapist as expert

Al Krenawi, A., & Graham, J.R. (2000). *Culturally Competent Social Work Practice with Arab Clients in Mental Health Settings*. *Health and Social Work*, 9-22.

# Stigma on women

- Decreases marital prospects
- Increases chance of separation and divorce
- Used as leverage to seek second wife

Al Krenawi, A., & Graham, J.R. (2000). *Culturally Competent Social Work Practice with Arab Clients in Mental Health Settings*. *Health and Social Work*, 9-22.

# **Importance of family**

A number of worldviews are critical to Arabs and Muslims. These include the importance of the family and filial piety, respect and honor for parents, and a strong emphasis on duty to the family. An individual's responsibility and duty is to family before the self.

# Family Involvement

- Collectivistic – different definition of family: The community is an extended family and one has responsibilities to it
- Familial duty
- Abandonment

# Religion

- *Illness as divine test of faith: 'Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods, lives and the fruits of your toil, but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere. Who say, when afflicted with calamity: To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return' (Qur'an: 62).*
- **Spirit world:** An understanding of Islamic beliefs and the teachings of Islam is essential to support clients in their religious beliefs, to strengthen their faith, correct their thoughts and beliefs (cognitive re-structuring) and change their behaviors
- **Allah is in charge:** a person's religious belief has a significant bearing on his personality and his viewpoint in life. When a Muslim puts trust in God he minimizes the stress on himself by reducing his responsibility and power to control his failure.

# Culture

- Patriarchal and male dominated: the importance is placed on the role of the male as the head of household while women may work outside the house but only to supplement the family income.
- Opposite gender relationships: sons rarely take part in the daily chores and are valued more than daughters
- Eye contact
- Personal space

# Somatization of Affective Disorders

- Emotions described through physical symptoms
- Fear: my heart fell down
- Depression: I think too much
- Suicide lethality – what to ask

Al Krenawi, A., & Graham, J.R. (2000). *Culturally Competent Social Work Practice with Arab Clients in Mental Health Settings*. *Health and Social Work*, 9-22.

# Effective interventions

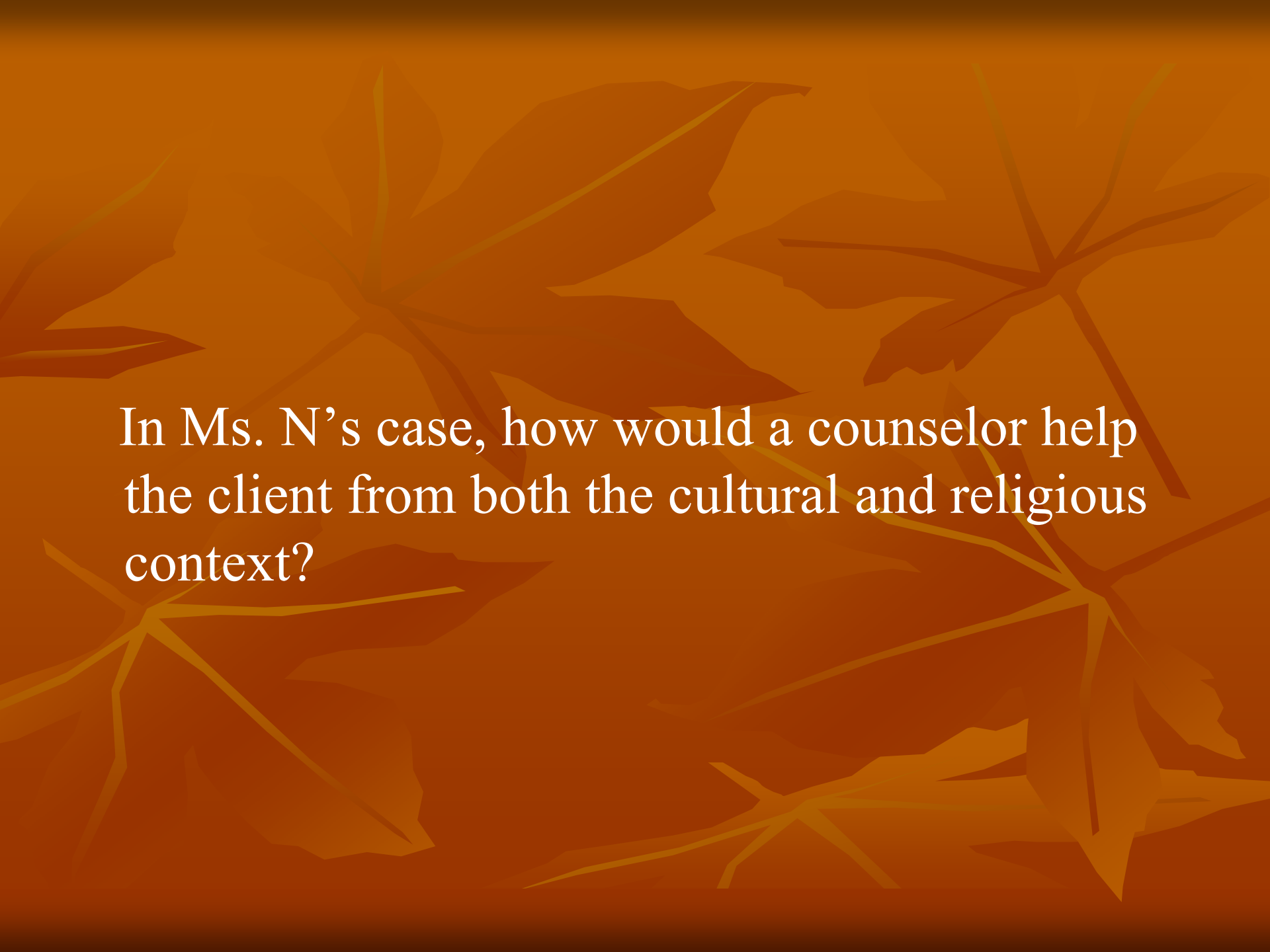
- Respect client's culture and/or religion: Arabs and Muslims who identify strongly with their religious and cultural values need to know that counselors are open and understanding of their perspective and will not try to change it
- cognitive restructuring: Emphasis for the client that Allah can forgive, and that it is important to remember the promise given by Allah to the Prophet: *'If a person has in their heart goodness to the weight of one barley corn, and has said [that] there is no God but Me, he or she shall come out of Hell-fire, '*
- Learn about clients religion and culture: Muslim and Arab clients may see the non-Muslim, or non-Arab counselor as representing the views of a biased society; thus the importance for the counselor be knowledgeable about the religious and cultural practices of Arabs and Muslim clients,
- Be humble: allow the client to educate the counselor regarding his or her culture, religion, values and worldviews, identification, and connection to the larger society

Shifa Podikunju-Hussain, *Working With Muslims: Perspectives and Suggestions for Counseling*

# The case of Mr. A

Mr. A, a fifty-two-year-old Afghan refugee, lost sixty one close relatives including his mother, fiancée, brothers, sisters, uncles, cousins and other members of his family during the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. His father also died when he was five years old. He was referred for Treatment and Rehabilitation because of his chronic and complicated grief reaction, survival guilt depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress symptoms.

In counseling Mr. A was distressed and agitated and cried" throughout the sessions. In addition to his predominant survival guilt, (he was the only survivor of the family) he was carrying the burden of guilt associated with his relationship with God. He believed he would be punished by God for not accepting God's decree and because he was impatient. He was still grieving for the loved ones even though many years have passed.



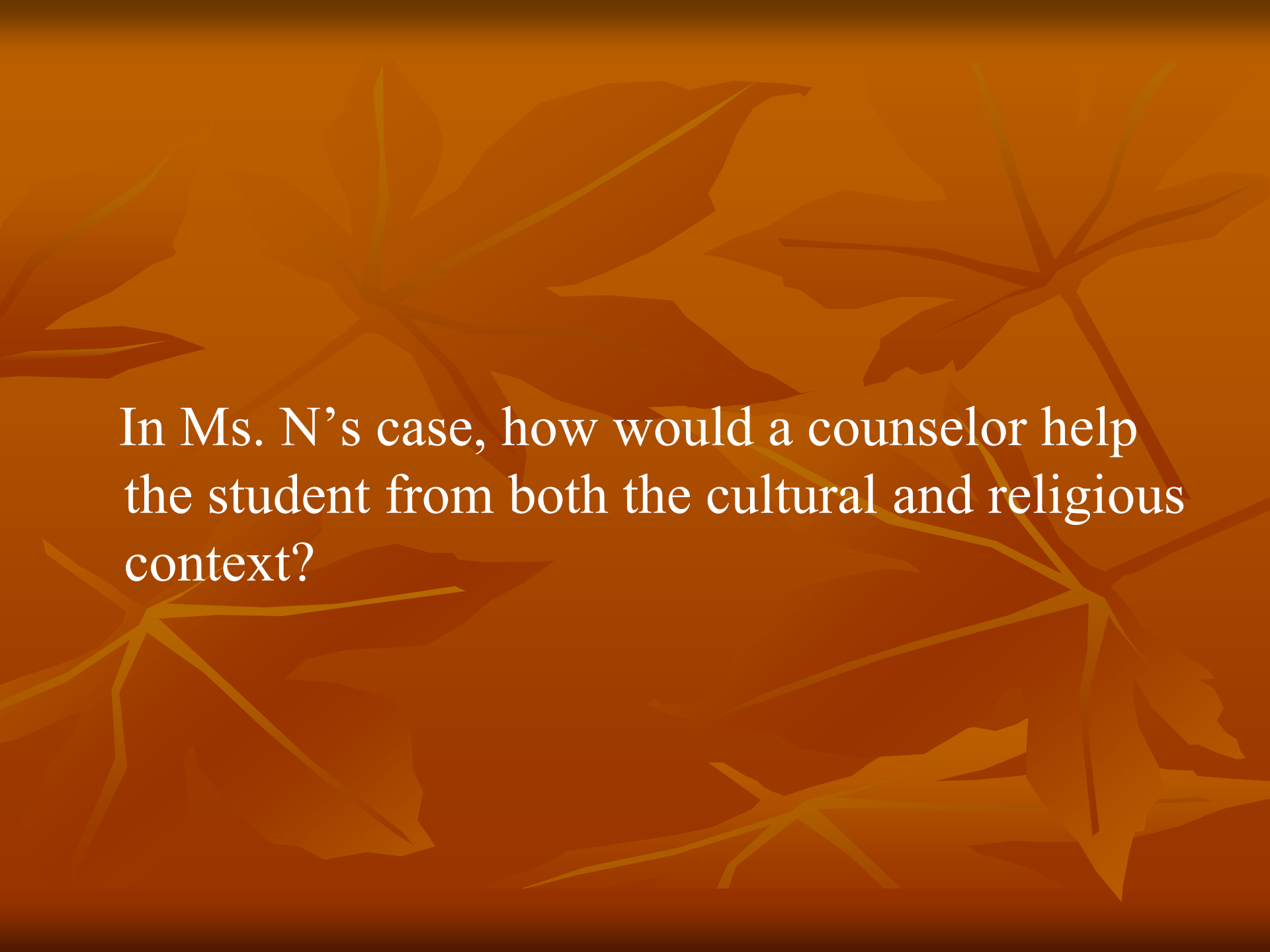
In Ms. N's case, how would a counselor help the client from both the cultural and religious context?

# The case of Ms. N

*A 16-year-old Muslim girl of South Asian descent reports to the school counselor's office with fears of being pregnant. She became sexually active in the past month and did not use any contraception or protection. Her fears are compounded by the possibility that her parents will find out and will be upset beyond forgiveness.*

*The notion of dating and premarital sex is condemned by not only her cultural values but also her religious beliefs. The student's guilt and shame are so overwhelming that her academic performance is deteriorating. The student is afraid that her actions have tainted her soul, and she will be punished for her sins by never finding success and happiness in this life and in the next.*

Shifa Podikunju-Hussain, *Working With Muslims: Perspectives and Suggestions for Counseling.*



In Ms. N's case, how would a counselor help the student from both the cultural and religious context?

## A drink of water...

*“If I am walking all day and I come to you, I need a drink of water, you give me a drink of water, not ask me about the problem. They ask me to talk about the problem, talking, talking, talking about the problem. Always asking me about the problem.*

*Just give me a drink of water.”*

*Rahma (Somali refugee), discussing the problems with MH and Social Work service providers.*

# For more information

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