Mental Health Needs of Muslim Adolescents in NSW

Executive Summary

Background
There are more than 600,000 Muslims living in Australia. Muslim adolescents may be more likely to be exposed to school psychological stressors, which can have an effect on both physical and mental health. Given the relative lack of research on this topic, mental health status of Muslim adolescents living in Australia remains not well known.

Aim
The purpose of this study is to explore the psychological distress and mental health needs of Muslim adolescents living in Australia compared to the general Australian adolescent population.

Method
A cross-sectional study, carried out in 2018, included 11-17 year-old students across three Muslim schools in New South Wales (NSW), representative of 100% of the Muslims in the three schools in Sydney. During the screening stage, six hundred and thirty-two students (response rate of 48% with 261 males, 371 females) completed the Strengths and Difficulties paper-based Questionnaire (SDQ) in the classroom given that written consent from parents were received. Recruitment was conducted via collaboration with several Muslim schools in Sydney, NSW.

Results
Muslim adolescents reported higher psychological distress levels (i.e. 38%) when compared to Australian adolescents. Specifically, Muslim adolescents reported higher emotional symptoms (47%), conduct problems (33%), hyperactivity (31%) and peer problems (49%). There was no difference in psychological distress between males and females. In addition, Australian Muslim adolescents reported higher clinical levels of psychological distress (12%) than Australian adolescents (10%). Finally, Muslim adolescents reported lower levels of psychological distress (i.e. 37%) when compared to adolescents in routine clinical care.

Conclusion
The research findings presents higher psychological distress levels for Australian Muslim adolescents in comparison to the national SDQ baseline. Therefore, providing culturally and religiously congruent mental health resources and appropriate outreach services are critical in addressing the mental health needs of Muslim adolescents in Australia. Additionally, there is a large need for future research to evaluate the efficacy, acceptability and suitability of these new services and resources.