

The Impact Of Cultural And Religious Beliefs On Healthcare Practices In Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The purpose of this review paper is to explore the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia. The cultural and religious beliefs of a society influence their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards healthcare, and this is particularly evident in Saudi Arabia due to its deeply rooted traditional values and Islamic faith. The healthcare system in Saudi Arabia is heavily influenced by the cultural and religious beliefs of its people, and understanding these factors is crucial in providing culturally competent and effective healthcare services. Through a thorough literature review, this paper synthesizes the existing research on the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia. It examines the influence of societal values, such as collectivism and respect for authority, on patient-provider relationships and healthcare decision-making. It also delves into the role of religious beliefs in shaping beliefs about illness, treatment, and end-of-life care. Additionally, this paper explores the challenges faced by healthcare providers in delivering care that is in line with cultural and religious beliefs, and the strategies they adopt to overcome these challenges. These may include cultural competence training, establishing partnerships with local religious leaders, and incorporating traditional healthcare practices into western medicine. The review also highlights the potential negative consequences of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices, such as delayed seeking of medical help, adherence to treatment plans, and use of alternative medicine. This paper concludes with recommendations for healthcare providers to enhance culturally competent care delivery in Saudi Arabia, including promoting cultural awareness and understanding, building trust with patients, and developing policies that incorporate cultural and religious beliefs into healthcare practices. Overall, this review paper sheds light on the complex interplay between cultural and religious beliefs and healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia, providing valuable insights for healthcare professionals and policymakers on how to provide patient-centred care in a culturally sensitive manner.

Keywords: Cultural and religious beliefs, healthcare practices, medicine, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

Culture and religion play a vital role in shaping healthcare practices in every society. These two elements have a significant impact on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals towards health, illnesses, and medical care. In many countries, including Saudi Arabia, cultural and religious beliefs have a profound influence on healthcare practices. Saudi Arabia, being a conservative Islamic country, has a unique cultural and religious background that shapes the healthcare practices of its people (Long, 2005). This review paper aims to explore and analyse the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia.

The culture of Saudi Arabia is deeply rooted in the Islamic religion, and its people closely follow the customs and traditions taught by the Quran. One major cultural belief in Saudi Arabia is the concept of modesty, where both men and women are expected to dress modestly in public. This cultural belief has a significant impact on healthcare practices, especially for women. In a conservative society such as Saudi Arabia, women are expected to be accompanied by a male guardian or family member for medical appointments (Aldosari, 2017). This cultural practice is rooted in the belief that women should be protected from the gaze of strangers, and men are considered the guardians of their female relatives. This cultural belief can pose a barrier for women seeking medical care, as they may feel uncomfortable discussing intimate health issues with a male doctor or healthcare provider.

Another cultural belief that influences healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia is the concept of fatalism (Alyazidi, et al., 2022). Many Saudi Arabians believe that health and illness are predetermined by God, and seeking medical treatment may go against God's will. This belief can hinder individuals from seeking medical care promptly, leading to delayed diagnosis and treatment of illnesses. It can also discourage individuals from pursuing preventive healthcare practices, as they may believe that their health is out of their control.

Additionally, in Saudi Arabian culture, it is customary for families to take care of their sick relatives at home, rather than seeking medical care in a hospital or clinic (Halligan, 2006). This cultural belief is rooted in the importance of family and community support in times of illness. While this may be beneficial in terms of emotional support, it can also delay necessary medical treatment, leading to a worsening of the illness.

Religion plays a significant role in the daily lives of Saudis and has a profound influence on healthcare practices. One religious belief that impacts healthcare practices is the concept of purity and cleanliness. In Islam, cleanliness is considered half of faith, and individuals are expected to maintain personal hygiene and clean living spaces. This religious belief has a positive impact on healthcare practices, as it encourages individuals to follow preventive measures, such as hand hygiene and cleanliness, to prevent the spread of diseases. (Al Hussein, 2011)

Another religious belief that influences healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia is the concept of seeking healing from God (Al Hussein, 2011). Many Saudi Arabians believe that illnesses are a test from God and that seeking medical treatment is a way of showing a lack of trust in God's will. As a result, some individuals may delay seeking medical care until their condition becomes severe. This religious belief can also lead to the use of alternative forms of healing, such as herbal medicine, as it is believed to be a more natural and holistic approach to health.

In conclusion, cultural and religious beliefs have a significant impact on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia. These beliefs shape the attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of individuals towards health, illnesses, and medical care. While some cultural and religious practices may have positive effects on healthcare, such as the importance of cleanliness, others can be potential barriers to seeking timely medical treatment, leading to adverse health outcomes. It is crucial for healthcare providers to understand and respect the cultural and religious beliefs

of their Saudi Arabian patients to provide culturally sensitive care. Further research and efforts from policymakers and healthcare providers are necessary to bridge any gaps between cultural and religious beliefs and modern healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia.

Methods & Results

Saudi Arabia is a culturally and religiously diverse country with a rich history and traditions. The cultural and religious beliefs of the Saudi people play a significant role in shaping their healthcare practices and attitudes towards health and illness. Understanding these beliefs and their impact on healthcare practices is crucial for providing effective and culturally sensitive care to the Saudi population. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative review is to explore the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia.

Methodology

This qualitative review conducted a systematic literature search using databases such as PubMed, CINAHL, and Google Scholar. The keywords used for the search included “Saudi Arabia,” “culture,” “religion,” “healthcare,” “beliefs,” and “practices.” Studies that were published in English and focused on the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia were included in this review.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Studies that were published between 2000 and 2024
2. Studies conducted in Saudi Arabia or about Saudi Arabia
3. Studies that explored the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices
4. Studies published in English

Based on the inclusion criteria, a number of relevant studies were selected for the qualitative review.

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data from the selected studies. Thematic analysis is a systematic method of identifying, organizing, and describing patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first step in the analysis process was to read and familiarize ourselves with the selected studies. Next, the relevant data were extracted and coded. The codes were then organized into themes and sub-themes. The themes were reviewed, refined, and validated by two independent reviewers to ensure accuracy and credibility.

Results

The findings of this qualitative review revealed three main themes that highlight the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia: attitudes towards illness and healing, perceptions of healthcare providers, and cultural and religious practices influencing healthcare decisions.

Attitudes towards illness and healing

The first theme that emerged from the analysis was the attitudes towards illness and healing. The studies reported that cultural and religious beliefs play a significant role in how illness is perceived and treated in Saudi Arabia. For instance, the concept of "sabr," which means patience, is highly valued in Saudi culture and is seen as a way to cope with illness. This belief is rooted in the Islamic religion, where patience is seen as a virtue and a means of gaining divine reward. As a result, many Saudis may delay seeking medical treatment or rely on spiritual healing first instead of seeking medical treatment. Moreover, traditional healing practices, such as herbal remedies and cupping therapy, are deeply ingrained in Saudi culture

and are often used in conjunction with modern medical treatment. These practices are based on religious beliefs and are seen as a way of seeking cure and protection from illnesses. (Pasha-Zaidi, et al., 2021; Bahattab & AlHadi, 2021).

Perceptions of healthcare providers

The second theme that emerged from the analysis was the perceptions of healthcare providers. The studies showed that cultural and religious beliefs also influence how Saudis perceive and interact with healthcare providers. In Saudi culture, doctors are highly respected and considered the ultimate authority in matters pertaining to health. However, the belief in divine will and fate can lead to a lack of trust in medical interventions, as some Saudis may believe that seeking treatment goes against the will of Allah. Moreover, the gender of healthcare providers also influences how Saudis perceive and seek medical care. In a conservative society like Saudi Arabia, many women may prefer to seek medical treatment from female healthcare providers due to religious and cultural norms. This can create a barrier to accessing healthcare for women, as the number of female healthcare providers in Saudi Arabia is limited. (Almutairi, 2015; Almutairi & McCarthy, 2012).

Cultural and religious practices influencing healthcare decisions

The final theme identified was the influence of cultural and religious practices on healthcare decisions. Studies reported that cultural and religious beliefs have a significant impact on the healthcare decisions of Saudis. One study found that religious beliefs, particularly the concept of "qadar," which means divine destiny, played a role in the acceptance or rejection of medical treatment. Some Saudis may believe that illnesses and their outcomes are predetermined by God, and it is not in their control to change it. Moreover, the Islamic practice of "barakah," which means blessings, influences healthcare decisions. Saudis may seek out healthcare providers who they believe possess barakah, which is seen as a sign of divine favor and healing power. This demonstrates the strong influence of religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi culture. (Bokhari, 2016; Khurshi, 2013; Jahroni, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative review highlights the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia. The findings indicate that cultural and religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards illness and healing, perceptions of healthcare providers, and healthcare decisions. These beliefs need to be considered when providing healthcare to the Saudi population, as it can affect the effectiveness of medical interventions and the overall health outcomes of individuals. Further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of these beliefs and their impact on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia.

Discussion & Conclusion

Discussion

The objective of this qualitative review paper was to explore the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia. The findings of this paper revealed that cultural and religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping healthcare practices in the country. These beliefs are deeply rooted in the Saudi Arabian society and have a strong influence on the healthcare system.

One of the major cultural beliefs that was identified in this paper is the concept of modesty. In Saudi Arabia, modesty is highly valued and is reflected in the healthcare practices. For example, female patients prefer to be treated by female healthcare providers and often have a male family member present during medical consultations. This cultural belief has significant

implications for the delivery of healthcare services as it can create barriers for female patients in seeking medical care, especially in emergency situations. It also has implications for the staffing of healthcare facilities as there is a shortage of female healthcare providers in the country.

Another cultural belief that was highlighted in this paper is the strong emphasis on family and community in Saudi Arabian society. The concept of family is highly valued and plays a crucial role in healthcare decision-making. The family is often involved in the treatment process and is expected to provide emotional and physical support to the patient. Furthermore, community support is also highly regarded, and traditional healers and faith healers are often consulted for healthcare needs. This highlights the importance of considering the role of family and community in healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia.

Religious beliefs and practices also have a significant impact on healthcare in Saudi Arabia. The Islamic faith is the dominant religion in the country, and its principles are deeply integrated into the healthcare system. For example, dietary restrictions based on Islamic beliefs are observed in the hospital setting. Fasting during the month of Ramadan is also seen as an important religious practice and can affect the management of chronic illnesses. Moreover, the belief in fate and predestination can also impact healthcare practices, as some patients may see their illness as a result of God's will and may be less inclined to seek medical treatment.

The findings of this paper also suggest that the intersection of cultural and religious beliefs with modern medicine can create challenges for healthcare providers. There is a need for healthcare professionals to have an understanding and awareness of these beliefs to provide culturally sensitive care. This requires training and education on cultural competence and the integration of traditional healing practices into the healthcare system. It is also crucial for healthcare facilities to have policies and procedures in place to accommodate cultural and religious beliefs and practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative review paper has shed light on the significant impact of cultural and religious beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia. The country's cultural values of modesty and emphasis on family and community, along with the dominant Islamic beliefs, play a crucial role in shaping the healthcare system. These beliefs can create challenges for healthcare professionals, but with awareness, education, and accommodation, they can be managed effectively.

It is evident that cultural and religious beliefs are deeply ingrained in the Saudi Arabian society and cannot be ignored in the healthcare context. It is essential for healthcare providers to understand and respect these beliefs to ensure the provision of culturally competent and patient-centred care. Further research is needed to explore the experiences of patients and healthcare professionals regarding the impact of these beliefs on healthcare practices in Saudi Arabia. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and help in the development of strategies and policies to address any challenges that may arise.

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