Communication and health in a multi-ethnic society

Untapped Potential: Cultural Sensitivity-Islamic Persuasive Communication in Health Promotion Programs[1]

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Abstract

The development of the health communication field has been paralleled with the appreciation of the importance of the social and cultural context in understanding health, health behaviour and health communication. This argues both for a shift in methods and a shift in the theoretical and philosophical approaches underpinning these methods. A lack of understanding of Muslims and their cultural and religious tradition contributes to potential conflicts in health promotion. Thus, this paper suggests the use of Islamic values and elements in developing a communication strategy for promoting health behavioural change. This paper has three objectives: (1) to briefly review the research on cultural sensitivity factors with specific focus on religious factors in health communication; (2) to identify the most promising explanatory mechanism for faith-based (Islamic) communication persuasion in health promotion, with particular attention to the relationship between religious factors and health behaviour; and (3) to critique previous work on Islamic communication and health, pointing out potential and promising new research directions in health promotion. These insights may contribute to further development of health promotion strategies for Muslims in Islamic nations as well as Muslim communities in non-Islamic nations through the inter-culturalisation process.

1. Introduction

As globalisation seems to have eliminated geographical nation state boundaries, it has also led people to be more literate in so many aspects across culture and values. Although scenarios in global health are witnessing benefits from new medicines and technologies, nonetheless there are unprecedented reversals. Chronic diseases, consisting of cardiovascular and metabolic disease, cancers, injuries, and neurological and psychological disorders, are major burdens affecting poor and rich countries alike. In addition, health crises of epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, SARS and Avian Influenza are invariably recurring (WHO, 2006). As a result, the World Health Organisation has encouraged more innovative approaches in promoting health risk reduction and the reconsideration of risky lifestyle behaviour.

Within the global society context, the current health communication paradigm which is based on a Western perspective provides more opportunity for healthy growth in terms of both theoretical perspectives and research methodology. The invariably recurring state of diseases and epidemics, in developed as well as developing countries, indicates that

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