

## Muslim Social Workers and Imams' Recommendations in Marital and Child Custody Cases of Persons with Intellectual or Mental Disability

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**Abstract :** Arab society in Israel is undergoing modernization and secularization. However, its approach to disability and mental illness is still dominated by religious and traditional stereotypes, as well as folk remedies and community practices. The present study examines differences in Muslim social workers' and Imams' recommendations in marriage/divorce and child custody cases of persons with intellectual disabilities (ID) or mental illness. The study has two goals: (1) To examine differences in recommendations between Imams and Muslim social workers; (2) To explore variables related to their differential recommendations as observed in their responses to vignettes—a quantitative study using vignettes resembling existing Muslim religious (Sharia) court cases. Muslim social workers (138) and Imams (48) completed a background questionnaire, a religiosity questionnaire, and a questionnaire that included 25 vignettes constructed by the researcher based on court rulings adapted for the study. Muslim social workers tended to consider the religious recommendation when the family of a person with ID or mental illness was portrayed in the vignette as religious. The same applied to Imams, albeit to a greater extent. The findings call for raising awareness among social workers and academics regarding the importance of religion and tradition in formulating professional recommendations.

**Keywords :** child custody, intellectual and developmental disability, marriage/divorce, mental illness, sharia court, social workers

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