'My child is a blessing': Exploring the role of religion for Muslim parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

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Abstract

This study explores the role of religion in the experiences of Muslim parents raising children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the United Kingdom. While parental experiences in SEND research have received increasing attention, there continues to be limited focus on the role of religion, both within educational psychology and broader psychological research. A qualitative approach was adopted, using reflexive thematic analysis to analyse semi-structured interviews with eight Muslim parents, including six mothers and two fathers.

The study was grounded in an Islamic ontological and epistemological framework, aligning with a growing tradition of decolonising research by centring non-Western worldviews and reclaiming religious ways of knowing. The findings highlight the central role of a religious lens in shaping how parents perceive their child's SEND, make meaning of their experiences, adopt coping strategies, and engage with community and professional support systems. Drawing on these findings, the study developed a conceptual framework illustrating the link between religious beliefs, practices, and social contexts in shaping parental resilience and religious identity. This framework demonstrates that religion is a primary lens through which lived experience is interpreted. The research highlights the need for educational and psychological practice to engage more meaningfully with religious worldviews when supporting Muslim families, challenging secular assumptions and contributing to culturally and religiously responsive models of SEND support.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Religion for Muslim families

Religious beliefs are integral to family life for Muslims, influencing family dynamics, particularly in parenting practices. Islam provides a guiding framework that shapes identity, values, and everyday interactions (Rothman and Coyle, 2018). Religiosity is seen as a protective factor, reinforcing family bonds and nurturing the resilience needed to navigate external challenges while maintaining family unity (Utting, 2007). The guidance titled 'Every Muslim child matters', highlights that educational and social services must acknowledge Islamic principles to effectively support Muslim families (Coles, 2007). However, religion remains an underexplored aspect of family life within well-being and psychological services, with limited attention to the specific ways it shapes understanding, support and coping. This gap is particularly evident in research involving Muslim families, where religious and spiritual frameworks are often central to meaning making yet remain largely overlooked in mainstream psychological literature (Mahoney, 2010). For Muslim families raising children with special educational needs and disability (SEND), religious beliefs can shape the way they interpret and perceive their child's needs, influencing their understanding of disability and approaches to caregiving (Jegatheesan et al., 2010).

1.2 Caregiving from an Islamic perspective

Caregiving, for many Muslim families, is grounded in Islamic teachings that frame it as a spiritual and religious responsibility. Setyawati et al. (2024) conducted a concept analysis to explore how caregiving is understood within Muslim contexts. They explain that caregiving is linked to the belief which describes humans as caretakers responsible for the wellbeing of themselves and others. Within this framework,

caregiving is often seen as an act of worship. This religious framing is echoed across several studies. Ebrahimi et al. (2017) researched Iranian Muslim families caring for relatives with multiple sclerosis and found that caregivers saw their role as divinely assigned and spiritually meaningful. Nahal et al. (2017) studied Palestinian Muslim mothers of children with spina bifida and showed that caregiving was viewed as a test and a gift from God, approached by the mothers with patience and a hope of being rewarded. Importantly, Setyawati et al. (2024) highlighted that even in the face of hardship, many caregivers continue their roles with determination, often motivated by their belief in being rewarded by God. These studies demonstrate that caregiving in Muslim families is interconnected with faith, shaped and sustained by a religious duty. This is reflected in the Qur'an (4:40), which reminds Muslims that no good deed goes unnoticed:

"Indeed, Allah does not do injustice, [even] as much as an atom's weight… He multiplies [good deeds] and gives from Himself a great reward." (4:40)

1.3 The importance of gaining parental perspectives

The research shows that gaining parental perspectives and experiences is essential for professionals who work with families and children, particularly those with SEND. Parental engagement offers valuable insights into each child's unique strengths, challenges, and needs, making it a key component in developing effective support strategies (SEND Code of Practice, 2015). The importance of involving parents is emphasised in the guidance paper, Every Parent Matters (2007), which highlights the need for developing meaningful collaboration with parents. A systematic review by Musendo et al. (2023), focused specifically on school-aged children with disabilities,

and found that parental involvement in educational interventions led to improved outcomes for children with SEND, as well as for their families, schools, and wider communities. Similarly, Cheng and Lai (2023) conducted a systematic review of families with children who have SEND and identified parental involvement and access to supportive services acted as protective factors that reduced stress and contributed to more effective care. These findings are echoed in the UK-based Lamb Inquiry (2009), which aimed to improve parental confidence in the SEND assessment process and concluded that listening to parents' perspectives results in more effective support.

1.4 Key terms and definitions

The following aims to define important concepts, terms and principles which are used throughout this study. Please note that, should the reader wish to develop a deeper understanding of Islamic concepts; these definitions should be read in conjunction with other sources.

SEND

In the context of this thesis, SEND in children includes long-term physical, cognitive, sensory, or emotional challenges. The interaction with societal and environmental barriers impacts their ability to fully participate in age-appropriate educational, social, and developmental activities (WHO, 2001). This definition aligns with the social model of disability, which shifts the focus from individual deficits to the external barriers that limit inclusion and access to opportunities (Oliver, 1990). In the UK, SEND refers to children with learning difficulties or disabilities that require tailored educational support beyond what is typically provided to their peers (SEND Code of Practice, 2015). These needs can arise from a range of conditions, including physical impairments,

neurodevelopmental differences (e.g., autism, ADHD), and social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs. The SEND framework emphasises equity, ensuring all children receive the resources and accommodations necessary to access education and reach their full potential.

Religion

According to Webster's Dictionary, religion can be understood as a system of beliefs and practices, whether personal or institutional, that centres around devotion to a divine or higher power. It typically involves worship, moral guidance, and a commitment to faith-based observance. Religion as a structured framework that helps individuals make sense of the world, cope with life's challenges, and find meaning and community (Pargament, 1997).

Islam

The word *Islam* means "submission" or "surrender" to God's will. At its core, Islam teaches that true peace, both inward and outward, comes from submitting to Allah, the one true God (Salleh, 2015).

Faith

In the context of religion, faith refers to an individual's personal trust, emotional conviction, and relationship with God. In Islam, faith, referred to as *'Aqidah'*, goes beyond belief. It involves a deep, personal conviction in the oneness of Allah and forms the foundation of a Muslim's worldview. It shapes how Muslims understand life, death, and everything in between (Salleh, 2015). The terms *faith* and *religion* are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. While religion often refers to structured belief

systems and faith to personal conviction, participants in this study expressed their Islamic beliefs as a unified experience, where formal religious teachings and personal trust in Allah were deeply intertwined.

Muslim

A Muslim is someone who willingly submits to the will of Allah, regardless of race, ethnicity, or nationality. Islam is a global religion, practiced by diverse communities across the world. Being Muslim implies living by Islamic teachings (Salleh, 2015).

Allah

Allah is the Arabic word for God. Muslims believe this is the same God worshipped in Judaism and Christianity. In Islam, Allah is described as loving, merciful, and compassionate, but also beyond anything we can fully understand (Salleh, 2015; Merriam-Webster, 2011).

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

Muhammad, peace be upon him (PBUH) is believed to be the final prophet sent by Allah. He lived in 7th-century Arabia, and his life is well documented. He received the Qur'an and served as an example of how to live according to God's guidance. He's not worshipped, but deeply respected as a teacher, leader, and servant of Allah (Salleh, 2015).

Qur'an

The Qur'an is Islam's holy book. The word itself means "recitation," and Muslims believe it to be the exact word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It

has remained unchanged since then and is central to all areas of Muslim life (Salleh, 2015).

Hadith

Hadith refers to the sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These were passed down by his companions, carefully recorded, and verified by religious scholars. Hadith literature is a major source of Islamic teaching alongside the Qur'an (Ilahi et al., 2023).

Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars of Islam form the foundation of Muslim belief and practice. The first pillar, *Shahadah*, is the declaration of faith, affirming that there is no god, but Allah and that Muhammad (PBUH) is His Messenger. The second, *Salah*, involves performing five daily prayers at prescribed times, serving as a consistent reminder of one's connection to God. *Zakah*, the third pillar, requires Muslims to give a portion of their wealth to those in need, reinforcing social justice. The fourth pillar, *Sawm*, refers to fasting during the month of Ramadan, where Muslims abstain from food, drink, and other physical needs during daylight hours as a means of spiritual discipline and empathy. Finally, *Hajj* is the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim is expected to undertake at least once in their lifetime if they are physically and financially able (Hussain, 2024).

1.5 Global and national context

In 2022, the global Muslim population was estimated at approximately 2 billion, making Islam the second largest in the world, and the fastest growing religion, representing about 25% of the global population (Statista, 2022). Most Muslims are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, with large populations in countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and India. Indonesia alone has around 241.5 million Muslims, constituting about 87% of its population (Statista, 2022). According to the 2021 Census for England and Wales, Muslims constitute 6.5% of the population, totalling approximately 3.87 million people. Muslims make up 15% of London's population, an increase from 12.6% in 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Muslims comprise of a variety of communities and contribute significantly to British multiculturalism (Inayat, 2007).

It is essential to acknowledge the diversity within the Muslim community, meaning beliefs and practices can vary significantly. Although Muslim families may share similar cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, their worldviews, ideas, and responses to situations are often diverse (Hasnain et al., 2008). Muslim families are not homogenous in needs, beliefs or circumstances. Variations in cultural heritage and religious practices significantly shape their family dynamics (Lynch & Hanson, 2006). When discussing Muslim families, it's important to avoid overly simplistic representations of their beliefs. Generalisations about Muslim families can lead to stereotyping and misunderstandings (Zaragoza and Bedmar, 2024). Even within shared backgrounds, individual families may hold differing religious perspectives and world views, which highlights the importance of recognising and respecting these differences (Hasnain et al., 2008).

1.6 Cultural competence and the absence of religion

A key element of meaningful engagement within children and family services is cultural competence, which Sue et al. (1982) defined as the development of knowledge, skills, and awareness for working effectively with diverse populations. As the UK has become increasingly ethnically diverse, health and social services are engaging with families whose religious beliefs are central to how they understand and respond to their child's needs. Understanding these beliefs is therefore critical for providing ethical and effective support (Hasnain et al., 2008; Bywaters et al., 2003).

Within educational psychology in the UK, increasing attention has been paid to the need to develop cultural competence, reflecting a growing need for inclusive and equitable practice. The Equality Act (2010) has played a key role by placing a legal duty on services to eliminate discrimination and promote equality, including religious beliefs. In line with this, the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics (2021) highlights the importance of respecting cultural differences and challenging discrimination, as well as practitioners reflecting on their worldview. The BPS Standards for doctoral training (2019) also explicitly states EPs should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different cultural, faith, and ethnic groups. More recently, initiatives like the BPSs 'Becoming a culturally competent practitioner' programme have encouraged psychologists to examine their assumptions and consider cultural contexts as essential components of ethical, person-centred practice (BPS, 2023). However, despite these developments, religion continues to receive comparatively less attention than other aspects of identity such as ethnicity, culture and race. There remains a lack of clear frameworks, resources, and research to support EPs in developing competence in working with religious worldviews.

Consequently, psychology services have overlooked the role of religion as a central component that effects cultural identity. This has left a gap in understanding these families, as religious beliefs guide worldviews, understanding and decision making (Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman, 2010). Plante (2014) emphasised that psychology and related fields often disregard the religious and spiritual dimensions of cultural competence, missing a critical aspect of identify. While improvements have been made in addressing ethnic and cultural diversity, religious beliefs are frequently overlooked. To address this, Plante outlined four steps to improve religious and spiritual competence in professional psychology. First, practitioners must become aware of their own biases and assumptions about religion and spirituality. Second, religion and spirituality should be explicitly considered as part of cultural diversity. Third, psychologists are encouraged to utilise available resources to deepen their understanding of different religious and spiritual traditions. Finally, they should consult with colleagues or religious leaders when appropriate to ensure culturally sensitive and effective practice. These steps highlight the importance of integrating religious and spiritual dimensions into psychological work to better align with families' identities and needs.

1.7 Researcher motivations

This research emerged from both personal experience and my professional development as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. As a British Muslim, I have seen first-hand how important religion can be in shaping families' experiences, particularly in times of challenge. Throughout my training, I became increasingly aware of how little space religion is given within educational psychology conversations, whether in

research, case formulation, or professional guidance. Although frameworks around culture and ethnicity are starting to be recognised, religion often remains an overlooked part of how knowledge formation, identity and resilience are understood. I felt a strong responsibility, both personally and professionally, to centre these experiences and to treat Islamic perspectives as a meaningful, legitimate way of knowing, coping, and making sense of the world. This research is part of my broader commitment to developing more culturally and religiously informed EP practice, where EPs are attempting to meaningfully understand the lived realities of families.

1.8 Aims of the research

While there is a growing body of research that addresses the experiences of Muslims, these studies often oversimplify those experiences by focusing primarily on cultural influences (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Nelson (2009) noted that, '*Although Islam is one of the world's major religions, it has attracted little attention in Western psychology'* (p. 365). Haque et al. (2016) similarly calls for a more in-depth exploration of Islamic perspectives within psychology, urging the integration of Islamic traditions into psychological theory and practice. This study aims to explore how religious beliefs influence Muslim parents' understanding of their children's needs, their coping strategies, and their engagement with religious communities. By investigating the intersection of religion, SEND, and parenting, this research aims to contribute to a more culturally and religiously informed approach for EPs, supporting more responsive and effective engagement with Muslim families.

1.9 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research background, rationale and aims of the research. Chapter 2 sets out the conceptual foundations, exploring Islamic perspectives on disability alongside key psychological frameworks. Chapter 3 presents a scoping review of the literature, mapping key research on Muslim families, SEND, and religious coping, and identifying the gaps this study seeks to address. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach, including the ontological and epistemological paradigms, positionality, the use of semi-structured interviews for data collection, and the use of reflexive thematic analysis for data analysis. Chapter 5 presents the findings and outlines the main themes and sub-themes, and chapter 6 provides a discussion of the findings, implications, as well as presenting a framework as a contribution to the professional field.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Chapter overview

The following chapter aims to explore how disability is understood within Islam and outlines the conceptual foundations for the study. Islamic views are frequently overlooked or misrepresented, sometimes shaped by assumptions rooted in orientalist thinking (Said, 1978) that cast religion, especially Islam, as irrational or incompatible with modern approaches (Ali-Faisal, 2020). This section aims to explore Islamic teachings on disability by turning to the Qur'an and the Hadith.

2.2 Reflections on orientalism

'Orientalism' is a term introduced by Edward Said (1978), which critiqued the historical ways in which the West has perceived and represented the East. This term is used to describe a systematic agenda used by Western societies to construct an image of the 'orient,' which includes regions like the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. This constructed image often portrays these regions as fundamentally distinct and 'other,' reducing them to simplistic and negative stereotypes. Said's analysis of how knowledge and power intersect to create and maintain systems of dominance remains deeply relevant today, particularly in understanding the portrayal of religion in psychological literature. Psychological research often perpetuates these orientalist ideas by presenting Western, secular societies as rational, logical, and intellectual, while portraying Islam as irrational and illogical (Ali-Faisal, 2020).

Despite the growing body of quantitative psychological research on Muslims, the depiction in psychological literature fails to capture the richness of Muslim identities. The research tends to focus on stigmatising beliefs, which reinforce biases that

marginalise alternative perspectives. Al-Alaway (2020) highlights this in the examination of UK mental health practitioners' engagement with Islamic identities and beliefs. The study reveals that these professionals frequently rely on generalised and stereotypical views of Islam, resulting in biased assessments and interventions. Islamic beliefs are often perceived as incompatible with Western ideas of rationality, mirroring Said's concept of orientalism. The findings illustrate how these reductive understandings serve to reinforce power dynamics and sustain Western dominance in modern mental health practice, where Muslims beliefs are framed as obstacles to progress or integration. Younis (2022) examined how the UK mental health system is shaped by histories of orientalism and imperialism. He argued that these legacies have influenced both the development of psychological disciplines and state policies, leading to the marginalisation and securitisation of Muslim mental health within modern day Britain. These historical influences continue to shape modern-day practices, preserving harmful stereotypes. Such biases not only impact healthcare but also reinforce wider societal opinions of Muslims and perpetuate Islamophobia (Ansari, 2002; Busher et al., 2020; Lockley-Scott, 2016). These points highlight the critical foundation for why this study centres Islamic perspectives, decolonial frameworks, and honours the religious worldview of Muslim families.

2.3 Gaps in understanding and emerging solutions

There is a lack of research on disability from Islamic perspectives, which could lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations (Hasnain et al., 2008). This could mean that services may not be able to provide the most effective support. When specifically thinking about SEND, Miles (2002) addressed the need to acknowledge and respect diverse perspectives that may not align with Western professionals' interpretations.

He argued that perspectives are often labelled as outdated, contributing to Western psychologists' tendency to impose their cultural norms and values on others. To move away from these oppressive practices, Saxton, (2017) emphasised that EPs should offer space for the religious perspectives of Muslims to be understood in their unique cultural contexts. This lack of understanding by Western psychologists is further exasperated by the general lack of discussions around the role of religion within psychological practice (Plante, 2014).

There are, however, growing efforts within psychological research to address these biases and incorporate Islamic perspectives in a more culturally sensitive and meaningful way. Haque et al. (2016) shared key advancements in integrating Islamic traditions into contemporary psychological practices. These include the creation of theoretical models rooted in Islamic concepts, such as the understanding of the self, intellect, and spirit, which offer a culturally relevant framework for exploring human behaviour. In addition, researchers and practitioners are developing therapeutic interventions and counselling methods that resonate with Islamic values (Razali et al., 2002; Mir et al., 2019; Qasqas's, 2024). These initiatives mark a positive move towards bridging the divide between Western models and religious perspectives.

2.4 Liberation psychology

As previously mentioned, the historical development of psychology within white, Western contexts has largely ignored global and historical influences, contributing to its contribution to colonialism, oppression, and racism (Fanon, 1967; Okazaki et al., 2007). This issue is particularly relevant for educational psychology, given the field's historical ties to eugenics and the misuse of psychometric testing (Maliphant et al.,

2003). Liberation psychology offers a scaffold for addressing these concerns by centring the experiences of oppressed groups and developing psychological knowledge that reflects their realities (Adams et al., 2015). Drawing on Martín-Baró's (1994) original conceptualisation, Ali-Faisal (2020) advocates for the use of Liberation psychology with Muslim communities. This approach emphasises the need to dismantle dominant narratives and support the construction of positive self-identities among marginalised populations through the amplification of their voices. As Ali-Faisal (2020) stated, '*one of the main tasks of Liberation psychology is to privilege the voices of those marginalised. This means including Muslims in both the production and application of psychological knowledge*' (p.350). In the context of this research, it emphasises the importance of providing Muslim parents with a platform to share their lived experiences and world views.

Liberation psychology in this study is used both as an ethical stance and an interpretive lens. Ethically, it supports the commitment to centre the voices of Muslim parents, whose perspectives have historically been excluded or misrepresented in psychological literature. Theoretically, it offers a framework for understanding how these parents construct meaning and maintain religious worldviews. By grounding this study in the principles of Liberation psychology, the aim is to challenge dominant narratives surrounding Muslim families and contribute to a more inclusive, strength-based understanding of their experiences. This aligns with broader efforts to decolonise psychology and to place the experiences of marginalised communities at the centre of their psychological inquiry (Ali-Faisal, 2020).

2.5 Models of disability

2.5.1 Disability in the Qur'an

Bazna and Hatab (2020) explore how Islam conceptualises disability by returning to the foundational sources of the religion, the Qur'an and Hadith, to move beyond Western definitions of disability. They ground their analysis in the belief that the Qur'an is the unaltered and eternal word of God, and that the Hadith, life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), offer practical examples of how Qur'anic values were lived out, particularly in relation to inclusion and justice. Their reading of the Qur'an suggests that it is the social disadvantage that is the real issue, not the impairment itself. They argue that the Qur'an does not stigmatise physical or cognitive differences; instead, it views them as part of the natural diversity of the creation of God. They state that these conditions are morally neutral, neither a sign of divine punishment nor reward. Islam offers religious accommodations for individuals facing specific challenges, while still encouraging all people to strive spiritually and morally to the best of their capacity. More significantly, Bazna and Hatab (2020) identify that the Qur'an's strongest moral attention is directed not just at those with impairments, but at those whom society disempowers or marginalises because they fail to meet socially created ideals due to poverty, lineage, social status, or perceived lack of ability. It is this socially imposed disadvantage that the Qur'an urges Muslims to address through active advocacy. Their interpretation is informed by a close engagement with Qur'anic verses and the Hadith, as well as the conduct of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions, who interacted with people with disabilities in inclusive and dignified way.

2.5.2 Experiential-contextual framework

The experiential-contextual framework of disability (figure 1) developed by Heer et al. (2012), offers a holistic lens for understanding how families experience and navigate childhood SEND. Designed to explore the experiences of South Asian families in the UK, the framework recognises that the realities of caregiving are shaped by individual and medical factors, as well as by broader social, cultural and religious contexts. It utilises three overlapping models of disability: The medical model, The social model (Oliver 1990), and what the authors term the 'minority experience'. Within this framework, the medical model is understood as a clinical approach to disability that centres diagnosis and biological factors. It assumes that disability is within the person and can be managed through medical intervention. While this model forms the basis of most healthcare systems in the UK, it often fails to account for the wider social and cultural dimensions of disability. The social model (Oliver 1990), by contrast, shifts the focus away from the individual and onto the barriers caused by society, such as inaccessible services or exclusionary practices. Its foundational belief is that disability is not merely about individual impairment but about the failure of society to accommodate difference. The third component, the 'minority experience', introduces a contextual lens. It captures how families from minority ethnic backgrounds interpret and respond to disability based on their own cultural values, religious beliefs, language practices, and community norms. These interpretations may differ significantly from dominant Western narratives.

The minority experience includes the religious perspectives that families may draw upon to make sense of their child with SEND. In the context of Muslim families, Islamic teachings provide an alternative lens. As previously mentioned, Qur'an does not

stigmatise disability; instead, it positions difference as part of God's intentional and diverse creation. The Qur'an emphasises the moral neutrality of impairment and places responsibility on society to uphold justice and remove disadvantage (Bazna and Hatab, 2020). This perspective aligns closely with the social model of disability. Both perspectives reject the notion that the problem lies within the individual and instead highlight the societal injustices that perpetuate disadvantage. Therefore, Islamic teachings reinforce the social model's call for a more inclusive and equitable society. They advocate for a community-centred response that promotes collective accountability.

Figure 1: Experiential-contextual framework (Heer et al., 2012)
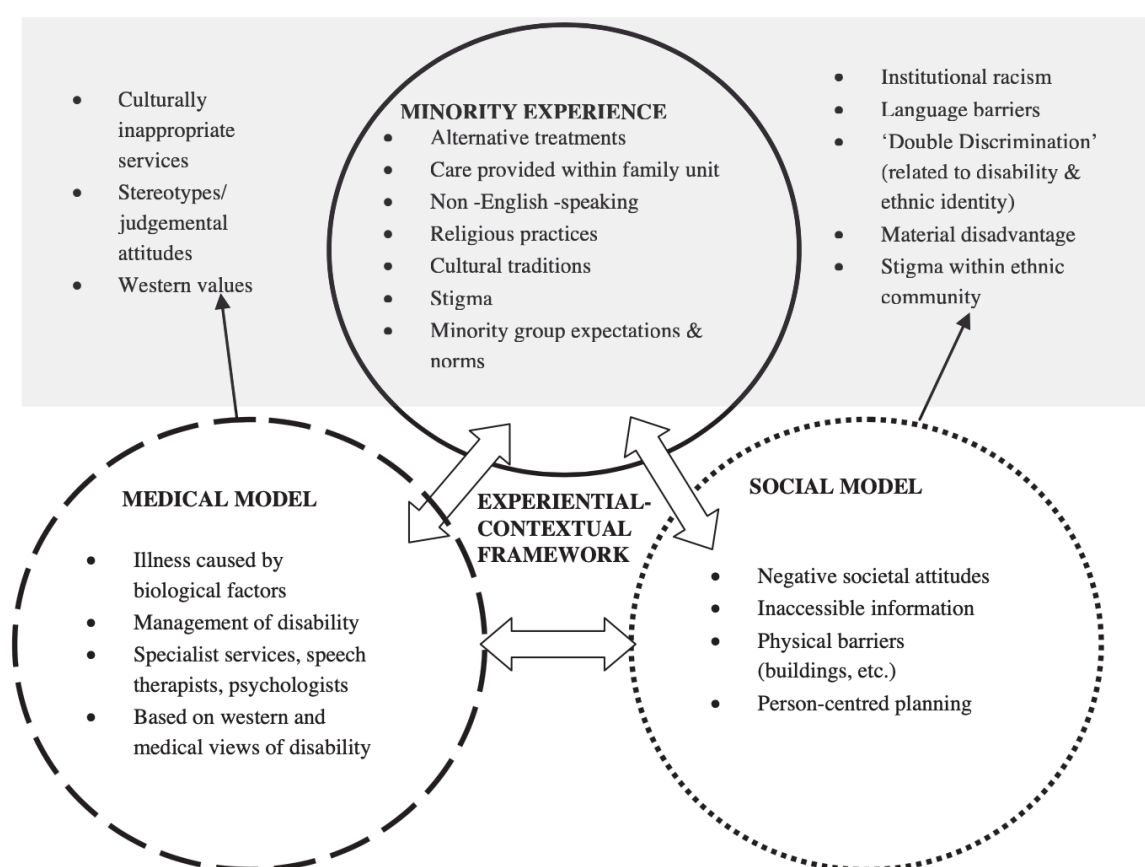
2.6 Contextual and systemic approaches

2.6.1 Ecological model

This shared commitment to inclusion and the removal of barriers, as seen in both the social model and Islamic teachings, can be further expanded upon through the Ecological model. While the social model focuses on societal structures that create or remove barriers, The ecological model takes a broader, systemic approach by examining the interconnected layers of influence on an individual's experience, from family and community to societal systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). With cultural and spiritual considerations, the ecological model provides a broader lens to understand how Islamic beliefs and practices shape the experiences of families navigating disability across these social layers. For Muslim families, this model captures the importance of the family unit and community in providing care and support. The Ecological model also aligns closely with the systemic approach adopted in educational psychology, which considers the child's environment, including home, school, and community, as essential to their development and well-being.

2.6.2 Intersectionality

An Intersectionality lens (Crenshaw, 1991) offers a way of understanding how overlapping identities, such as race, religion, socioeconomic status, and disability, shape lived experiences. These intersections are not experienced separately but are shaped by broader systems such as education, healthcare, and social policy, alongside public attitudes towards both disability and Islam (Shahid, 2023). As Kaplan and Celik (2023) explain, children who belong to minority ethnic groups and have disabilities often face a set of intensified challenges within education systems that may

not be responsive to their linguistic, cultural or religious needs. These challenges are not just about service access but about how identity itself is responded to. An intersectional perspective highlights that disability cannot be viewed as a standalone condition. Instead, it is shaped and often intensified by its connection with other marginalised aspects of identity. These multiple and overlapping inequalities often place added pressure on families, particularly mothers, who are typically the main caregivers (Oyewuwo & Walton, 2023). As Khanlou et al. (2017) note, while caring for a disabled child is demanding for any parent, immigrant and racialised mothers often face additional difficulties relating to language and cultural isolation. In the case of Muslim parents, these layers are intensified by Islamophobic narratives that may shape how their parenting is perceived within professional settings. Taking an intersectional approach is therefore essential to acknowledging that disability should be seen through the lens of multiple, intersecting systems of marginalisation.

2.6.3 Intersectional-ecological model

The Intersectional-ecological model developed by Badran et al. (2023) brings these two models together, by offering a framework for understanding how multiple identity factors intersect across different layers of a person's environment to shape their lived experience. The authors used this model to emphasise how Arabs with disabilities in Israel experience marginalisation at different levels, with disability often shaping experiences more strongly at the individual and family level, and ethnic identity becoming more pronounced at institutional and societal levels.

2.7 Theories of identity and coping

2.7.1 Social identity theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that individuals cultivate a significant aspect of their identity through being part of social groups, and that this group affiliation shapes how they perceive themselves and others. When group membership becomes central to a person's identity, it can significantly influence their behaviours and sense of belonging (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Religious identity represents a powerful form of social identity, as it is often tied to shared morals, values and understanding of the world (Ysseldyk et al., 2010), which creates an important connection with their religious community (Cameron, 2004). Religious beliefs often guide how people interpret life events and find meaning in difficult situations (Park 2007). The marginalisation of Muslim identity in wider society strengthens religious identity, allowing it to act as both a buffer against discrimination, and a source of solidarity within the community (Shah, 2018). From a social identity perspective, this relationship offers not only personal reassurance but also shapes how families understand and respond to their lived experiences. In this study, the theory is used to explore how Muslim parents approach their own and their child's religious identify, as well as locate themselves within the wider religious community and considers how that identity shapes the way they make sense of their child's needs and their parenting role.

2.7.2 Religious coping theory

Pargament's theory of religious coping (1997) sees religion as a way people seek meaning when facing adversity. It highlights that religious coping involves a range of feelings, thoughts and behaviours that help people either hold on to beliefs or develop

new ways of understanding their situation. People may turn to prayer, religious acts or support from their religious community to deal with adversity. This theory distinguishes between helpful forms of religious coping, such as finding comfort, and negative forms, like feeling punished by God or struggling with religious doubt. The theory emphasises that religious coping is shaped by personal context, as well as the nature of the challenges. Bywaters et al. (2003) state that *"Religious or spiritual beliefs may be an important element in the coping mechanism of some families with a disabled child, and therefore, should not be off limits for professionals who may and may not share those beliefs."* (p. 508). This statement calls for religion to be acknowledged as a significant coping mechanism for parents.

2.7.3 Islam as a coping mechanism

Although this perspective offers a lens that describes how religion can be a powerful tool for coping, it mainly reflects Western, Christian assumptions (Khan et al., 2012). Abu-Raiya, Pargament, and Mahoney (2011) applied the theory to examine how Muslims in the America responded to the stress and discrimination they faced after the 9/11 attacks. The study found that many participants increased their engagement in religious practices, such as prayer, fasting, mosque attendance, and reading the Qur'an, as a way of coping. These practices provided comfort, spiritual reassurance, and a sense of stability. El-Khani, Calam, and Maalouf (2023) explored how religious beliefs support displaced families by enhancing emotional stability and promoting adaptive behaviours, particularly through concepts like *Sabr* (patience). Furthermore, Hasan, Mitschke, and Ravi (2018), found that religion significantly aided refugee families by providing psychological grounding and offering a source of hope amongst the uncertainties of resettlement. The findings highlight the significance of religious

coping in managing collective trauma and support the broader claim that coping rooted in religious beliefs can play a vital role in emotional well-being, particularly when communities face marginalisation.

3. SCOPING REVIEW

3.1 Chapter overview

A scoping review was identified as the most appropriate method to map the breadth and depth of existing research in a relatively underexplored area. According to Arksey and O'Malley (2005), scoping reviews are ideal for synthesising diverse evidence, particularly when research spans across disciplines and methodologies. This is supported by Tricco et al. (2016) who claimed that scoping reviews are particularly useful for integrating diverse forms of evidence, as they can offer a comprehensive understanding of emerging fields. This approach is especially suited to the current study, which involves multiple themes such as religion, SEND, culture and parenting. The scoping review will follow the five-stage framework outlined in table 1, introduced by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and later developed by Levac et al. (2010).

Table 1: Overview of the Arksey and O'Malley methodological framework for conducting a scoping study

The five-stages	Steps taken for current review
Stage 1: Identifying the review question	- The review questions, purpose of the research, key search terms and sources of evidence are outlines. - The concepts, target population, and outcomes of interest are considered, to clarify the focus of the scoping review and establish an effective search strategy. - The purpose of the scoping study with the review question are outlined. - A rationale for conducting the scoping review is highlighted to help clarify the purpose.
Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies	- A comprehensive search strategy was employed using electronic databases, reference lists and hand-searching to gather both published and unpublished studies. - To balance breadth and comprehensiveness within the capacity of the researcher (Levac et al., 2010), titles and abstracts of studies that were brought up by the search were read for inclusion and exclusion.
Stage 3: Study Selection	The inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to select the most relevant studies, screening abstracts first and obtaining full articles for further review
Stage 4: Charting the data	Key information was extracted from selected studies, including author details, country, study populations, methodology, focus and key findings, using a data charting table to organise the data.
Stage 5: Collating, summarising, and reporting the Results	An overview of the existing literature was provided in a narrative format, summarising key findings into themes, under 5 review questions.

3.2 Stage 1: Identifying the review question

3.2.1 Aims and objectives

Baumeister and Leary (1997) outline five key goals that literature reviews may serve, each shaping the structure and purpose of the review. These include theory development, where the aim is to propose a new conceptual framework, theory evaluation, which involves assessing the validity of existing theories, surveying the state of knowledge, which focuses on providing a comprehensive overview of what is currently known about a topic, problem identification, where the review highlights contradictions or unresolved issues in the literature, and lastly, offering a historical account, which traces the development of theory or research over time. This scoping review aligns with the third goal, surveying the state of knowledge, by offering a narrative synthesis of the literature

The aim of a scoping review was to map the existing landscape of research, including non-peer-reviewed papers, rather than to thoroughly assess the quality or effectiveness of individual studies (Mak and Thomas, 2022). A formal critical appraisal of the literature was therefore not conducted. This decision is consistent with the methodological guidance outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), who argue that scoping reviews are designed to provide an overview of the available evidence regardless of study quality, particularly in areas where the literature is limited and emerging. Levac et al. (2010) also note that while critical appraisal can add value in certain contexts, it is not a required component of a scoping methodology, particularly when the objective is to identify key concepts and highlight research gaps. Instead, a reflective commentary was included to critically engage with the literature in a way that aligns with the purpose of the review, offering insight into the focus, methods and

samples used across the chosen literature. The scoping review addresses the central question:

What are the experiences of Muslim parents raising children with special educational needs/disabilities (SEND) in the UK/Ireland and USA?

3.2.2 Population

For this review, the primary focus was the study population; Muslim parents of varying ethnicities, raising children with SEND. This focus was guided by the central aim of understanding their lived experiences and perspectives of parenting within the context of their religion, culture, family and community. The review question focused on research across education and SEND literature and therefore, most papers included do not reference EP work.

3.2.3 Definitions

While the term 'Muslim parents' refers to individuals who identify as following the religion of Islam, initial searches revealed that many studies do not explicitly define their participants as Muslim from the outset or in the title. Instead, they may focus on cultural or ethnic communities, such as Somali, Arab, or South Asian groups, where Islam is a predominant religion. These studies, though framed around culture or ethnicity, provide relevant insights into the experiences of Muslim parents, as religion frequently intersects with culture in shaping parenting practices and responses to SEND. This review will include studies that centre on these cultural or ethnic groups, provided their participants are all Muslim, and their findings align with the research aim of exploring Muslim parental experiences.

3.3 Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies

3.3.1 Search strategy

To capture the breadth of relevant literature, systematic searches were conducted between October 2024 and December 2024, with a final search completed in January 2025 using the EBSCOhost platform. The search targeted databases relevant to psychology and education, including Education Source, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, APA PsycInfo, ERIC, and APA Articles. To ensure the relevance and quality of the included studies, the search criteria incorporated several parameters. Articles were restricted to those written in English to ensure accessibility. Both peer-reviewed journal articles and doctorate theses were included to provide a comprehensive exploration of the topic. The date range for the studies was limited to those published between 2000 and the present, ensuring that the research reflects contemporary experiences and practices from the past 25 years.

3.3.2 Search process

Six separate searches were conducted using carefully selected keywords and the asterisk operator to account for variations in spelling and keyword usage *(e.g., "parent"* to include parents). The full list of search terms is in appendix A. The Boolean operator "AND" was used to combine the six searches, ensuring that the results captured literature relevant to the research question. This process yielded 109 results.

3.3.3 Hand searches

To supplement the database searches and ensure all relevant articles were included, reference harvesting was used from initially identified literature. This process involved reviewing the reference lists of key papers to identify additional studies of relevance.

Google scholar was also utilised to locate additional studies, producing 7 more studies. This resulted in 116 studies screened for relevance to the review question.

3.4 Stage 3: Study selection

3.4.1 Geographical location

This review focuses on the experiences of Muslim parents raising children with SEND in the UK and USA. While the primary interest lies in the UK, incorporating USA studies helps contextualise and expand the findings, offering a broader understanding of Muslim parents experiences in caregiving within a Western context. Both countries have sizable and diverse Muslim populations that share similar experiences as minority communities living in predominantly non-Muslim societies, making research from both contexts relevant and meaningful. The review also includes a study from Ireland due to its proximity to the UK. Given the limited body of literature on Muslim parents' experiences with SEND in the UK, incorporating studies from both regions ensures a more comprehensive and insightful synthesis. The inclusion of USA studies enriches the review by providing insights that may complement UK based findings.

3.4.1 Selection process

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Moher et al., 2009) was used to guide the identification and selection of papers for inclusion (see appendix B). The total number of papers found was 116. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in table 2, 12 papers remained and were included in this review. To support the synthesis of findings, Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis (TA) was used alongside Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) Stage 4 'charting the data'. The charting process allowed key information from each study to be organised, which aligned well with the flexibility of TA. This method provided a structured framework for identifying and reporting themes and patterns across the multiple sources. Key information was extracted from the 12 studies, including author details, country, study populations, methodology, focus and key findings, using a data charting table to organise the data (table 3).

Table 2*: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for scoping review*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Studies including parents or primary caregivers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Studies specifically involving parents or caregivers who are Muslim or implied to be Muslim from their ethnicity. Participant information was screened to confirm their Muslim identity.	Studies that do not focus on parents or caregivers who are Muslim. Papers focusing on South Asian, Arab or immigrant parents without reference to their Muslim identity. Studies including multiple religions without isolating Islam or Muslims specifically. Studies unrelated to SEND (e.g., general parenting or religion topics without a SEND focus). Studies that focus exclusively on physical disabilities or other health-related diagnoses without including broader SEND.
Concept	Research exploring the experiences of Muslim parents, focusing on parenting attitudes and practices, understanding of	Research that does not address religion, Islamic beliefs, or cultural beliefs in relation to parenting. Studies focused solely on clinical, medical, or biological aspects of SEND without

	SEND, coping mechanisms, interaction with educational, healthcare, or social support systems, and community and family networks.	reference to religious contexts. Research that does not involve Islamic beliefs and practices.
Types of Literature	Journal articles (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) and theses.	Masters.
Language	Studies published in English.	Studies published in languages other than English.
Location	Papers focusing on a Western context, specifically the UK and USA.	Studies outside of the USA and UK.

3.5 Stage 4: Charting the data

3.5.1 Sample

The studies included in this review feature a range of Muslim families from various ethnic backgrounds, focusing on their experiences raising children with SEND. Several studies involved Pakistani Muslim families, including those from both first- and second-generation immigrant backgrounds (Bywaters et al., 2003; Akbar, 2019; Habib et al., 2017; Shah, 2010). Somali Muslim families were also a focus, with studies examining the experiences of Somali parents in both the UK and the USA (Selman et al., 2018; Hussein, 2019). Arab-Muslim families were represented by mothers raising children with Autism (Olsen, 2015). Studies involving a mix of South Asian ethnicities within Muslim communities were also included (Jegatheesan et al., 2010), as well as a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds and how they influenced parental experiences with children who have SEND (Bonawitz, 2013; Gilligan, 2013; Fontaine, 2021; Othman et al., 2022).

3.5.2 Methodology of literature

3.5.2.1 Data collection

Most of the studies utilised interviews as the primary method. Several studies used semi-structured interviews, including Bywaters et al. (2003), Bonawitz (2013), Akbar (2019), Habib et al. (2017), Fontaine (2021), and Othman et al. (2022). Additionally, ethnographic studies, such as Jegatheesan et al. (2010), incorporated participant observation alongside interviews, using a longitudinal design. Shah (2010) combined semi-structured interviews and a focus group. Selman et al. (2018) used in-depth interviews as part of a community-based participatory research approach, and Hussein (2019) combined vignettes with interviews. Gilligan (2013) did not clearly specify the data collection method used.

3.5.2.2 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was the most used approach. Bywaters et al. (2003), Habib et al. (2017), Hussein (2019), Fontaine (2021), and Othman et al. (2022) all used TA to analyse data from interviews, with some also including additional methods like observation and vignettes. Selman et al. (2018) used directed TA to interpret the in-depth interviews. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used by Shah (2010), while Olsen (2015) describes using a phenomenological approach. Gilligan (2013) did not specify the data analysis method, leaving it unclear how the data were analysed.

3.5.3 Reflections on the chosen literature

The small sample sizes in many of the studies, particularly as they employ qualitative methods, limit the ability to generalise the findings. For example, phenomenological studies like Olsen (2015) focus on in-depth, individual experiences, which, while

valuable, do not necessarily represent broader trends. There is also a lack of clarity in data collection and analysis methods in some studies like Gilligan (2013). Without a clear description of how data was gathered and analysed, it is difficult to assess the rigour and reliability of the findings. Transparency in methodology is essential for ensuring the validity of the research (Moravcsik, 2020). Finally, while studies like Bywaters et al. (2003), Akbar (2019), Hussein (2019), Bonawitz (2013), and Othman et al. (2022) included fathers, other studies, such as Shah (2010), Gilligan (2013), and Selman et al. (2018), referred to "parents" but only included mothers. This omission of fathers' voices limits the understanding of family dynamics and caregiving in the context of SEND, presenting an incomplete picture of the family experience.

Table 3: Summary of the scoping review literature

Author, year & country	Title	Sample	Methodology	Focus	Main findings
Bywaters et al. (2003) UK	Attitudes towards SEND amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents of disabled children in the UK: Considerations for service providers and the SEND movement	Fifteen Pakistar and five Bangladeshi families with a disabled child	- The evidence reported in the present paper is drawn from interviews conducted as part of an action research project, which was an evaluation of a new advocacy service for Pakistani and Bangladeshi families with a severely disabled child (Fazil et al. 2002). - A series of semi structured interviews were held between 1999 and 2001 for a different project.	The study aimed to use data from an action research project (which was an evaluation of a new advocacy service for Pakistani and Bangladeshi families with a severely disabled child) to examine whether the evidence supports the stereotypical view that Pakistani and Bangladeshi families in the UK with a disabled child do not seek the best care for their children due to religious beliefs.	- Religion played an important role in the lives and understandings of some parents but was only one factor influencing outcomes. - Families often held religious explanations alongside medical ones. Believing a child's life was in God's hands did not prevent them from seeking assistance or providing the best care possible. -

| | | | | | - Thematic content analysis was used. | |

| **Jegatheesan et al. (2010)**

USA | Autism from a religious perspective: A study of parental beliefs in south Asian Muslim immigrant families | Three multilingual immigrant South Asian Muslim families who have children with Autism | The study was a 17-month ethnographic investigation conducted in homes and the community. It used a longitudinal design, combining participant observation with interviews. | The aim of this study was to explore the family within its cultural context, focusing on how parents understand their children's disabilities and how this shapes their childrearing goals and practices. | - The findings showed that families approached raising a child with Autism from a religious perspective.
- Rooted in Islamic teachings, their main objective was to nurture their children in a way that allowed them to participate fully in everyday social, linguistic, and religious activities at home and within their community.
- Parents frequently challenged professional interpretations of Autism, viewing these as obstacles rather than aids to their children's development. |
| **Shah (2010)**

UK | Listening to the experiences of second-generation Pakistani Muslim parents of children with special | Seven second generation Pakistanis Muslims mothers of children who attended | Qualitative study using semi structured interviews | The purpose of this study was to consider the lived experiences of second-generation Pakistani Muslim parents, of | - Mothers shared insights into religious perspectives on SEND.
- Accounts revealed the complexities of family and community dynamics.
- They discussed personal emotions and coping strategies. |

	educational needs: An interpretative analysis	specialist provisions	An additional focus group was also conducted with five of the mothers who were initially interviewed.	children with special educational needs. The study aimed to understand how the mothers made sense of their experiences as parents including the influence of their identity, their understanding of SEND and any arising key messages for professional practice.	- Challenges in interacting with service providers were highlighted, particularly as parents and members of an ethnic minority.
			IPA was used for the analysis		
Bonawitz (2013) UK & USA	My Child Is an Angel from Allah: Perspectives from Muslim Parents of Children with Special Needs in the United Kingdom and the United States	Four Pakistani Muslim parents in England, UK and three Somali Muslim parents in Minnesota, USA.	Qualitative study using an interview protocol.	The study investigated how Muslim parents of children with special needs use their faith and culture to support their	- Findings showed that all seven parents consistently relied on their religion to shape their understanding of the world in various situations. - Two of the seven parents also placed equal importance on another factor, one emphasised culture, while the other highlighted science.

				understanding of raising their child.	
Gilligan (2013) UK	The Challenge of Cultural Explanations and Religious Requirements for Children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions: South Asian Muslim Parents in Bradford, England	Seven mothers and one father who attended the Cygnet program	Collected feedback from 5 parents afterwards (unclear how)	The development in Bradford, England, of specific training materials for parents from Muslim communities of Pakistani origin caring for children with autistic spectrum conditions is outlined, with particular emphasis on challenges arising from non-scientific 'religious' explanations for children's conditions and from parents' feelings of obligation to ensure that	- Feedback from these small purposive samples of Muslim parents of children with Autism spectrum conditions highlighted a need for targeted support. - Parents sought assistance from practitioners, religious leaders, and fellow parents to address challenges. - Challenges included dealing with both religious and non-scientific explanations for their children's behaviour and ensuring their children met religious requirements.

				children meet religious requirements	
Olsen (2015) USA	Raising a Child with Autism: Perspectives from Arab-Muslim Mothers	Eight Arab-Muslim mothers of children with Autism.	- Qualitative study semi-structured open-ended interviews - A phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry	The purpose of the current phenomenological study was to identify and describe themes related to Arab-Muslim mothers' lived experiences of raising a child with Autism with particular emphasis on family, community, and religion and to identify and describe themes related to culturally relevant social behavioural outcomes for their child.	- Religious beliefs shaped parenting, with some viewing their child as a gift or test from Allah and referencing concepts like *Agir* (reward) for their patience. - Mosque attendance was seen as important, but most faced negative reactions to their child's behaviour there. - Participants experienced stigma and social isolation form their communities. - They experienced limited support from the medical community.

Habib et al. (2017) Ireland	Pakistani Muslim mothers' experiences of parenting a child with Autism in Ireland	7 Pakistani mothers who have children with ASD	Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews Analysed via thematic analysis	This study explored the parental experiences of Pakistani Muslim mothers living in Ireland who have a child with Autism	- Positive experiences of mothers were detailed under three sub-themes: - Mothers' positive experiences with schools. - Effective communication with others - The positive impact of parenting a child with ASD. - The challenges faced by mothers included concerns specific to immigrant mothers, such as: - The impact on their role within the family - The effect of their parenting experiences on their lives in the wider community.
Selman et al. (2018) UK	'You are labelled by your children's SEND' - A community-based, participatory study of stigma among Somali parents of children with Autism living in the United Kingdom	Fifteen Somali parents of children with Autism living in the UK.	- Qualitative, in-depth interviews were used - Community-based participatory research approach	The aim was to understand the nature of stigma experienced by Somali parents of children with Autism in the UK, and to consider how they coped with or resisted such stigma	- Nature of stigma: - Parents faced social exclusion and isolation due to the stigma surrounding Autism. - Parents often experienced blame for their children's behaviours, leading to feelings of guilt or distress. - The lack of understanding about Autism and the absence of specific terminology in the

			- Analysed via directed thematic analysis		Somali community contributed to these challenges. - Coping and resistance: - Parents worked to find their own language to describe their child's condition, which helped them cope with societal stigma. - Religious beliefs provided a supportive framework for parents in dealing with the emotional and social challenges they faced. - Parents drew on learning resources and support from peers within their community to navigate the difficulties of raising a child with Autism. - Support from the broader community played a key role in resisting the stigma, providing solidarity and a sense of belonging.
Akbar (2019) UK	Understanding the experiences of minority ethnic heritage parents who have a child with	Ten Muslim, Pakistani participants (seven mothers,	Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews	The study was interested in exploring hidden disabilities in England,	- Hidden disabilities are often harder to comprehend, explain, and seek services for.

	Special Educational Needs and SEND (SEND)	two fathers and one sister)		specifically focusing on how parents of Pakistani Muslim parents understand their child's SEND within the broader context of family and community. It also aimed to examine the facilitators and barriers that impact these parents' partnership with service providers.	- Stigma serves as a significant source of stress, contributing to tension in marital relationships. - Religion plays a protective role in managing challenges associated with hidden disabilities. - Barriers to accessing appropriate services within special education include language difficulties, perceived power imbalances, and mistrust.
Hussein (2019) **UK**	Understanding and awareness of Autism among Somali parents living in the United Kingdom	- Thirty mothers and two fathers. - (16 parents of autistic children and 16 parents o non-autistic children)	Qualitative study using vignettes and interviews	The research aimed to explore Somali parents' knowledge and awareness of Autism, both in parents of autistic and non-autistic children and by assessing their understanding of Autism as well as	- Parents of both autistic (n = 16) and non-autistic (n = 16) children were equally likely to identify vignettes depicting typically developing children. - Parents of autistic children appeared more attuned to recognizing signs of atypical development. - Overall, parents frequently identified and labelled vignettes of autistic children.

			- general awareness of typical and atypical child development.		- However, parents had more difficulty labelling vignettes that described other forms of atypical development, occasionally misidentifying these children as autistic.
Fontaine (2021) USA	An Investigation into the Sense of Community of Muslim-American Parents of Children with Special Needs in a Support Group.	The participants in this study were populated from a support group of Muslim parents of children with special needs. All participants presents were involved in the direct observations of events, however, the offer to interview was only extended to active and older members of the group who were not currently active.	- Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. - Observation of Monthly support group gatherings and planning meetings, large recurring events, and periodic support group outings/social gatherings.	The study explored a support group for Muslim parents of children with special needs, focusing on how the group built and sustained a sense of community as it transitioned from an independently formed support group to becoming part of a mosque's nonprofit infrastructure.	- Religion influenced both the group structure and how group members perceived themselves as parents of children with special needs. - A notable theme emerged regarding the less visible role of fathers within the group.

Othman et al. (2022) USA	Experiences of Muslim Mothers of Children with Disabilities: A Qualitative Study	Eleven Muslim mothers of children with disabilities.	- Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews - The data was thematically analysed.	This study explores the needs and experiences of Muslim mothers of children with disabilities from a multi-dimensional perspective, combining psychological research and cultural analysis to understand how health intersects with culture, religion, and gender.	- The study provided a unique perspective on how gender intersects with culture, religion, and immigrant status for mothers of children with disabilities. - It highlighted the gendered stigma associated with mental illness, the concept of intersectionality, and the physical separation between mothers and their sons with disabilities. - The study emphasised the importance of inclusion and awareness within mosques while navigating gender issues. - Despite the challenges faced by caregivers, their strength was rooted in their religion and hope. - Their strong belief in Islamic values and the Qur'an serves as a source of strength for the community to advocate for accessibility and inclusion. - The leadership of second-generation Muslim religious leaders plays a key role in driving advocacy efforts.

3.5 Stage 5: Reporting the results

This stage of the scoping review provides a narrative overview of the existing literature, summarising key findings to address the central review question: *What are the experiences of Muslim parents raising children with SEND in the UK/Ireland and USA?* The five sub-questions emerged through the engagement with the literature and were shaped by both the initial scoping phase and the thematic patterns identified during data charting:

1. How do religious beliefs shape understandings of SEND?
2. What coping strategies do parents use, and how are they influenced by religious or cultural beliefs?
3. How do communities support and challenge parents?
4. How do cultural norms and religious practices intersect in shaping perspectives of SEND?
5. What are the barriers and facilitators of accessing services?

3.5.1 How do religious beliefs shape understandings of SEND?

3.5.1.2 Meaning making

A significant theme across the literature is how Muslim parents use their religion to make sense of their child's SEND. Meaning making was influenced by Islamic beliefs, as a way to provide parents with a framework to interpret their experiences and challenges and find purpose in their caregiving roles. Bonawitz (2013) found that parents frequently drew on religious beliefs to understand and frame their child's SEND. Religion provided a foundation for meaning making, helping parents navigate personal and societal challenges as well as their own perceptions. Parents often connected their religious beliefs to a broader sense of gratitude and acceptance,

viewing their child's SEND as part of God's divine plan. Similarly, Akbar (2019) highlighted how religious beliefs shaped Pakistani Muslim parents in the UK's perceptions of SEND by reinforcing their sense of gratitude and hope. Many participants expressed a connection to religion through frequent use of Arabic phrases such as '*Alhamdulillah*' (praise be to God), '*Insha'Allah*' (God willing), and '*Masha 'Allah*' (God has willed). These phrases reflected parents' reliance on religion as a source of strength and their ability to find meaning in their experiences, even in difficult moments. By grounding their understanding of SEND in Islamic teachings, parents were able to reframe challenges as part of God's plan. Othman et al. (2022) found that parents viewed caring for a child with special needs as a divine responsibility granted to them by God. Many believed they were chosen by God for their unique ability to provide care, which allowed them to feel special and brought a spiritual purpose to their parenting role. Jegatheesan et al. (2010) found that South Asian Muslim parents saw religious teachings as providing both meaning and practical guidance, which aided them in embracing their parenting responsibilities and advocating for their child.

3.5.1.3 Autism

Several studies specifically focused on Autism, with an aim of shedding light on how religious beliefs influence Muslim parents understanding and interpretation of the condition. Jegatheesan et al. (2010) and Olsen (2015) both emphasised how Muslim parents view their child's Autism as a blessing from Allah. Jegatheesan et al. (2010) found that religion influenced parents' role as protectors, motivating them to ensure their child's safety and teaching siblings to see Autism as part of human diversity. Similarly, Olsen (2015) observed that mothers consistently described their children a

blessing from Allah. The concept of *Agir* (Allah's recognition of good deeds) emerged as a key concept within this study, as mothers viewed their challenges as opportunities to earn good deeds through their patience. Although some mothers expressed concerns about fulfilling certain religious obligations, such as going on the pilgrimage to Mecca, they reframed these struggles as a part of their spiritual growth.

3.5.1.4 A test and a gift

Muslims believe that challenges in life are perceived as both tests and gifts from Allah, serving a purpose to assess a person's character and faith, while offering opportunities for spiritual growth and reward. The Quran states, *"We will surely test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives, and fruits, but give glad tidings to the patient"* (Quran 2:155). For Muslims, this verse highlights that they will face various challenges and enduring them with patience leads to ultimate reward.

Studies by Bonawitz (2013), Akbar (2019) and Fontaine (2021) found that some parents believed that they had been chosen by Allah to raise their children. This perspective allowed the parents to view their child as a blessing and a gift, and their challenges as a spiritual test, which strengthened their religion and guided their parenting. Islam offered not only acceptance but also the promise of spiritual reward, with some viewing their role as a pathway to heaven. Fontaine (2021) also found that some had differing opinions on the role of religion in their community, with some highlighting its importance and others giving it less emphasis. However, they found that despite these mixed responses, religious terms like 'Barakah' (blessing) and *'Rahmah'* (God's mercy) were frequently used by parents to describe their children.

3.5.1.5 Causes of SEND

The literature found that beliefs about the causes of SEND can vary significantly. Hussein (2019) explored the experiences of Somali Muslim parents in the UK, where religious beliefs played a central role in interpreting Autism. Some parents associated Autism with the influence of a jinn, a spiritual entity believed to inhabit the child's body, particularly when unusual behaviours were observed, whilst some rejected this idea. Bywaters et al. (2003) found that whilst some parents attributed the condition to a form of punishment for their past sins, others offered explanations such as maternal illness, early childhood illness, or marriage with extended family members. However, limited access to medical information, often due to language barriers, reinforced reliance on alternative interpretations. Shah (2010) expands on this by demonstrating that many parents rejected the idea of SEND being a punishment. Instead, parents framed their child's SEND as a test from Allah, embracing it as part of Allah's will. For instance, one mother compared raising a child with a SEND to the spiritual journey of completing Hajj.

3.5.2 What coping strategies do parents use, and how are they influenced by religious beliefs?

3.5.2.1 Finding strength, patience and acceptance through religion

Religion was described as a protective factor throughout the literature, where participants described finding strength in religious practices and reframing their experiences positively (Akbar, 2019). Striving to uphold Islamic principles was done by avoiding negative coping mechanisms like despair (Jegatheesan et al. 2010). A consistent theme is the role of religion in helping parents accept their child's diagnosis. Selman et al. (2018) and Hussein's (2019) found that religion was a key

resource for parents coping with accepting their child's Autism. Parents viewed Autism as part of Allah's will, which helped them resist blame and remain hopeful. Many participants expressed the belief that life events are predetermined and beyond human control. Othman et al. (2022) emphasised that religious beliefs were vital for helping mothers rationalise their experiences, particularly in answering questions like 'why,' and for remaining patient and feeling as though they had been chosen for their parenting role. Additionally, for some, engaging in religious practises such as supporting charities for children with SEND allowed them to connect their religious beliefs to meaningful actions.

3.5.2.2 Prayer as a core coping mechanism

Formal prayer in the form of 'Salah' emerged as a core coping mechanism. Shah (2010), Akbar (2019), and Othman et al. (2022) all emphasise the significant role of Salah as a religious practice that supports Muslim parents through their parenting journeys. Shah (2010) highlighted that Salah and the reliance on Allah provided parents with hope. Equally, the study by Akbar (2019) found that parents attributed not only their resilience, but also their child's progress to their religion and the 'power of prayer'. Hussein's (2019) study further reinforced the role of prayer as a significant coping mechanism. However, while prayers and religious guidance such as reading the Quran were commonly used strategies, this study also highlighted the importance of balancing spiritual practices with formal medical advice and healthcare support. Many parents recognised the value of integrating both spiritual and professional approaches to address their children's needs effectively.

3.5.3 How do families and communities support and challenge parents?

3.5.3.1 A sense of belonging through shared experience

The literature highlighted the importance of shared experiences within culturally and religiously similar communities in fostering a sense of belonging for Muslim parents of children with SEND. These connections provided practical guidance and a sense of unity, helping parents reduce feelings of isolation. Selman et al. (2018) emphasised how engaging with other parents of children with Autism from similar religious and cultural backgrounds reduced feelings of exclusion and loneliness. The solidarity and shared understanding within these networks were key to developing a sense of belonging. They reported learning about Autism through discussions with other Somali parents who also had children with Autism. Being able to communicate in their own language and find mutual support created a profound sense of comfort. In addition, Othman et al. (2022) found that participants emphasised the strength they drew from connecting with other Muslim parents who shared similar experiences. The study found that organisations specifically designed to support Muslim families with SEND not only provided them with religiously informed support but further reinforced this sense of belonging.

An example of how community support can function was provided by Fontaine (2021). The study explored the sense of community among Muslim-American parents of children with special needs within a Mosque support group. By working together with families of similar backgrounds, parents gained a sense of empowerment, which allowed them to feel more confident in advocating for their beliefs. Members tried to attend community events both within their religious community and the broader community, with an aim to increase visibility within the mosque to raise awareness. The concept of the 'Ummah,' (global Muslim

community), played a key role in nurturing and promoting community engagement. This sense of unity formed a network that linked members of the community. The religious context provided a powerful basis for the group's work, helping to unite members through shared religious values, which was crucial to the community's support and development efforts.

3.5.3.2 Collective advocacy

Bonawitz (2013) and Selman et al. (2018) and Othman et al. (2022) all stressed the importance of a shared responsibility amongst communities to advocate and share knowledge. There was on emphasis on a responsibility within communities to create inclusive spaces for children with SEND (Bonawitz, 2013). In the study by Selman et al. (2018), one father described how he began to share his newly acquired knowledge with others in his community who were previously misinformed. Through this process, the father not only helped the community member understand Autism but also contributed to normalising the condition within his network, providing evidence on how educating others can create a ripple effect. Some participants noted a sense of hope that the younger generation in the Muslim community had become more knowledgeable and understanding, which would lead to acceptance and inclusivity (Othman et al., 2022).

3.5.3.3 The role of religious leaders

In the study by Bonawitz (2013), some parents expressed frustration with religious leaders for lacking knowledge of SEND and failing to provide both practical and religious guidance. One Somali father critiqued religious leaders for relying solely on religion-based explanations, noting that while they attribute progress to God's will,

they fail to provide practical support. He contrasted this with what he referred to as 'science,' which he viewed as offering more concrete interventions. This tension highlighted a need for collaboration between religious leaders and professionals to support families more effectively. Gilligan (2013) presented an example of how religious leaders could be involved more. The study reviewed the development of specific training materials designed to support parents from Muslim communities in the UK. A key feature of this initiative was the inclusion of religious leaders in the training process. By integrating religious perspectives, the training aimed to address both the practical and spiritual needs of parents. The religious leader's approach, which emphasised answering questions clearly and precisely from a religious rather than a cultural perspective, was particularly valued in helping parents understand Autism within the context of their religion. The study found that religious leaders have the potential to play a vital role in providing culturally and religiously sensitive support. Othman et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of younger imams and religious leaders in fostering greater inclusivity and awareness within the Muslim community. Participants advocated for second-generation imams who could better relate to contemporary issues and effectively educate the community about SEND. These younger leaders were viewed as more understanding and equipped to address the needs of families with children with SEND, reflecting positive progress in building awareness and support within the community.

3.5.3.4 Isolation and pressure to conceal SEND

Bywaters et al. (2003), Shah (2010), Akbar (2019), Selman et al. (2018), and Othman et al. (2022) all found that parents of children with SEND often felt forced to isolate themselves and hide their child's condition due to fear of negative community

reactions. Bywater's et al. (2003), Shah (2010) and Selman et al. (2018) highlighted that parents frequently avoided public outings and withdrew from social situations to prevent judgment and feelings of shame that were intensified by people's comments and attitudes. Shah (2010) and Akbar (2019) emphasise how cultural norms within Pakistani communities contribute significantly to the societal pressure to conceal their children with SEND. Fear of gossip and judgment, rooted in cultural misinformation, often prevented families from openly sharing their child's diagnosis. This stigma was particularly pronounced when it came to sons, as cultural expectations for perfection placed stress on parents.

3.5.3.5 Seeking cures

Shah (2010), Gilligan (2013), and Akbar (2019) all discuss how members of the community often encouraged parents to seek cures for their child's condition, driven by cultural misinformation. This tension was further exacerbated by the absence of open discussions about SEND, leaving some parents feeling unsupported or hesitant to disclose their child's needs (Shah 2010). One mother reported seeking herbal remedies for her son, prompted by members of the community's blaming her for her child's condition, which reflected a cultural belief that SEND might be caused by curses or family wrongdoing (Gilligan, 2013). Community members also advised seeking cures through spiritual interventions, such as visiting a particular mosque or consulting a religious leader. In one case, a father even considered taking his son to Pakistan in hopes of curing the SEND (Akbar, 2019).

3.5.3.6 A need for increased awareness

In the research by Habib et al. (2017) some families were advised against seeking medical diagnoses, under the belief that their child's challenging behaviour was age appropriate. For some cases of Autism, this lack of awareness increased the likelihood of misdiagnosis. A wide range of reactions by family and community members were shared by Arab-Muslim mothers of children with Autism in the research by Olsen (2015). Some mothers received support and understanding, while others encountered indifference or negative responses. Generally, mothers felt that there was little community awareness about Autism, which resulted in a lack of support. Many felt that their child's behaviours were often misunderstood, with the community frequently attributing problem behaviours to poor parenting. Reactions from those with some knowledge of Autism were more positive or neutral, while those without understanding tended to be negative.

Both Hussein (2019) and Selman et al. (2018) conducted research within Somali communities, uncovering challenges faced by parents of children with Autism. Selman et al. (2018) found that parents encountered conflicting messages about Autism, with some people suggesting that their child would grow out of it, while others recognised it as a lifelong condition. Hussein (2019) shared that the absence of a word for Autism in the Somali language led to limited understanding within the community. This was exacerbated by the lack of visible physical signs of the condition, leading to blame being placed on the parents. This confusion, along with the idea within the community that parents might be responsible for their child's condition, led to parents feeling guilt. These varied experiences across all the

literature mentioned demonstrations how community reactions and levels of support are mostly dependent on the level of knowledge and understanding of SEND.

3.5.4 How do cultural norms and religious practices intersect in shaping perspectives of SEND?

3.5.4.1 The role of religion in countering cultural misconceptions

Bonawitz (2013) asked all parents in the study if culture or religion had a stronger influence on their parenting. Parents overwhelmingly viewed religion as a stronger moral and spiritual framework for understanding and addressing their children's needs. This highlighted that religion often outweighed cultural understandings in guiding parenting decisions. Five out of seven parents identified religion as their primary source of guidance, contrasting it with culture, which they saw as more influenced by societal misconceptions. The findings showed that whilst religious teachings frequently emphasise acceptance and care, cultural narratives can perpetuate misconceptions about SEND. Religion often acted as a counterbalance to cultural misinformation, providing parents with principles that opposed stigmatising narratives preserved by cultural norms, such as superstitions. This distinction between religion and culture empowered many parents to reject cultural narratives and focus on their parenting roles through a lens of religious purpose. Some parents acknowledged the importance of balancing religion with other influences, such as science, in their caregiving journey. One father shared that he viewed religion as a source of emotional resilience and acceptance, while scientific knowledge provided practical solutions to address challenges. He expressed that, rather than being in conflict, religion and science worked together to support his ability to care for his child.

3.5.4.1 Distinguishing cultural norms and religion teachings

Shah (2010) highlights how religion and culture are often intertwined, making it difficult to distinguish between the two in some contexts. Parents in the study identified themselves and their families as Muslim but acknowledged that practices among Muslims can vary significantly. Some parents noted that comments from other Muslims did not necessarily reflect Islamic teachings, suggesting that cultural practices or opinions were sometimes misrepresented as religious perspectives. Others described a fine line between religion and cultural practice, emphasising how the two are often conflated. These findings demonstrate the complexities in separating cultural norms from religious beliefs, highlighting the need for greater awareness and understanding of this distinction, particularly when supporting Muslim families.

3.5.5 What are the barriers and facilitators of accessing services?

3.5.5.1 Systemic barriers to support

Shah (2010), Akbar (2019), and Bywaters et al. (2003) all emphasised the role of language barriers in hindering effective support. These barriers often left parents feeling excluded, misunderstood, and unable to fully participate in processes and decisions regarding their children's care. Across these studies, a lack of clear communication and unreliable interpretation services created systemic challenges that limited the effectiveness of support services. As well as language difficulties, stereotypes, and the absence of culturally sensitive services were also stated as barriers. Service providers often failed to consider or integrate participants' religious and cultural contexts into the support they provided, further limiting the effectiveness

of these services and contributing to feelings of exclusion among families (Shah 2010). Even when parents had a foundational understanding of English, the use of technical vocabulary in meetings hindered parental involvement, making it difficult for parents to fully understand and make informed decisions. Some parents also lacked knowledge of statutory processes, such as the legal obligations associated with EHCPs, leaving them feeling excluded and uninformed. A few parents, particularly those speaking Urdu and Punjabi, were not involved in the SEND process at all, with a few unaware that their children even had an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), (Akbar, 2019).

3.5.5.2 Importance of religiously sensitive support

The literature emphasised the need for healthcare professionals to develop a deeper understanding of where SEND and religion intersect. Participants expressed that this knowledge is essential for providing appropriate support and resources (Othman et al., 2022). Gilligan (2013) provides an example of the positive impact of religiously sensitive support for Muslim parents of children with Autism. In Bradford, England, specific training materials were developed for Muslim parents of south Asian origin. Feedback from these parents highlighted the value of receiving support from practitioners, religious leaders, and other parents to navigate issues such as the need to meet religious requirements. The program created a safe and supportive environment where parents could explore these issues with empathetic practitioners and other Muslim parents facing similar experiences. Parents also valued opportunities to engage with religious leaders and teachings, to dismiss unhelpful beliefs and prejudices within their communities. The integration of these sessions

into the Cygnet program enhanced its cultural and religious relevance, demonstrating the benefits of tailoring support to the religious and cultural needs of families.

3.6 Conclusion

The review aimed to answer the central question: What are the experiences of Muslim parents raising children with SEND in the UK/Ireland and USA? To provide a comprehensive understanding, the review also addressed five sub-questions, focusing on coping strategies, religious interpretations of SEND, family and community support, the intersection of cultural and religious practices, and barriers and facilitators in accessing services.

When considering the sub-question, 'How do religious beliefs shape understandings of SEND?' The literature has highlighted that religious beliefs play a vital role in how Muslim parents perceive and understand a child's SEND. Many parents use their religion to understand their child's SEND, viewing it as part of God's plan rather than a hardship. This perspective helped promote acceptance and a sense of purpose in their parenting role. The literature shows that religious beliefs are crucial in shaping how Muslim parents approach SEND.

In response to the sub-question, 'What coping strategies do parents use, and how are they influenced by religious beliefs?' The literature consistently presents religion as a protective factor through prayer and other forms of worship, helping parents find strength and patience.

In response to the sub-question, 'How do families and communities support and challenge parents?' the literature shows that Muslim families find support through shared experiences within culturally and religiously similar communities, which helps provide emotional and religious guidance. However, challenges arise from social stigma, cultural pressure to conceal SEND, and misinformation. While communities offer important support, greater education and collaboration between religious and professional networks are needed to better assist Muslim parents navigating SEND.

To answer the question, 'How do cultural norms and religious practices intersect in shaping perspectives of SEND?' the literature indicates that while cultural norms often contribute to misconceptions and stigma surrounding SEND, religious teachings typically offer a more helpful framework for parents. For many, religion is seen as a stronger influence than culture. The literature highlighted that the close relationship between cultural and religious practices can sometimes blur the lines, making it challenging to separate cultural norms from religious teachings.

Lastly, to consider the sub-question, 'What are the barriers and facilitators of accessing services?' the literature highlights several barriers, including language difficulties, stereotypes, and a lack of culturally and religiously sensitive services, which often left parents feeling excluded and uninformed. Inadequate communication and a lack of understanding of statutory processes further impacted access. Alternatively, religiously sensitive support was identified as a key facilitator, with support tailored to cultural and religious needs helping families navigate challenges more effectively and engage with services in a meaningful way.

3.8 Rationale for current research

While many existing studies touch on the role of religion when researching the experiences of Muslim parents, they typically explore it as part of a broader cultural framework. However, research by Bonawitz (2013) suggests that Muslim parents often view religion as a more significant influence than culture when it comes to parenting, particularly in the context of children with SEND. The literature provides evidence that Islamic beliefs are central to the worldview of Muslim parents and shape many aspects of their lives, including their understanding of parenting and SEND. These beliefs provide a basis for how parents approach caregiving, cope with challenges, and make decisions related to their children's SEND needs.

This study aimed to highlight the role of religion, and to understand how it influences parental perceptions of SEND, coping strategies, caregiving decisions and community interactions. By focusing specifically on religion, this research sought to fill a gap in the literature and contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of religion in shaping parental experiences in the context of SEND.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Chapter overview

The following section provides a detailed account of the research purpose, aims, and questions, alongside a rationale for adopting a qualitative research design. It also explores positionality, ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives, discussing how these factors influenced the research process. The section further delves into my use of reflexivity, detailing my strategies for managing potential biases and ensuring self-awareness throughout the study. Additionally, the methodology chapter addresses key components of the research process, including participant recruitment, data collection methods and analysis, and the strategies used to maintain quality and ethical rigor in the research.

4.2 Research Positioning

4.2.1 Axiology and identity

Axiology is concerned with the values that shape how the research is done and how personal values influence the process (Thompson, 2010). Savin-Baden & Major (2013) suggest three ways I, as the researcher, can think about my position. First, I would need to identify my own position and how it influenced the research. This includes my personal motivations and the epistemological and ontological views I hold. Second, it's important to consider the relationship between myself as the researcher and the participants. Thirdly, it's about recognising that my values and position will have an impact on the

whole research process. As a second-generation Muslim, my religion has always guided me, both in life and now in educational psychology. I am therefore deeply committed to the Islamic values of social justice, fairness, and inclusivity, which shape the way I approached the research.

4.2.2 Reflexivity statement

There is an increasing amount of research conducted about Muslims, often by non-religious researchers, which raises important questions about ethics and positionality (Ryan et al., 2011). Kapinga et al. (2022) question whether researchers who do not share the religious or cultural worldview of the Muslim participants they are interviewing can fully understand or do justice to their lived experiences, especially when religion is central to their worldview. They highlight that this debate is not just methodological, but ethical, and has particular significance in research on communities that are frequently politicised and stereotyped. The fact that I share the same religion as the participants is a key reflexive point in this research, given that this study is focused on religion and its role in shaping understanding and experiences. The insider versus outsider debate has been a long-standing debate in qualitative research (Holmes, 2020). An insider perspective brings doubts about whether an outsider can truly understand the experiences of those within a particular culture. On the other side, an outsider perspective raises concerns about how well an insider researcher can detach from their worldview and avoid bias (Kusow, 2003). I may be considered an insider, and with that comes both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include having an existing understanding of religious perspectives and being able to ask more meaningful questions and potentially having a better chance of participants giving honest responses because of the shared cultural and religious background (Sanghera & Bjokert, 2008).

However, I am aware that this familiarity does not automatically lead to openness, as participants may have still chosen to withhold information, rely on assumed shared understanding, or feel uncomfortable sharing sensitive experiences. Therefore, it's important to consider the challenges of being an insider researcher, such as the risk of bias and the difficulty of staying completely objective (Holmes, 2020), and the potential impact on power dynamics and trust (Raheim et al., 2016). While these are important aspects for me to consider, I believe that my identity does not fit neatly into the insider or outsider box. Instead, I find myself in 'the space between', navigating multiple identities (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). To navigate this space, I chose reflective thematic analysis (RTA) for data analysis. This approach encourages continuous self-reflection and openness throughout the research process and views subjectivity as a tool for analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

In terms of strategies to mitigate limitations, I engaged in continuous reflexivity through journaling and discussions with my research supervisor, who is not Muslim, allowing me to critically evaluate how my cultural background and faith influenced the interpretation of data. Having a non-Muslim supervisor provided a valuable external perspective. Their critical viewpoint challenged assumptions and interpretations, prompting deeper reflection on the study's findings and offered a balance between insider and outsider perspectives. They were able to ask questions or raise concerns that someone with an insider perspective might overlook. By recognising my position in the research process, I strived to uphold the integrity of the research while remaining attuned to the evolving nature of both my own perspectives and that of the participants.

4.2.3 Positionality

In this section I aim to establish my positionality, emphasising how my values informed the research process. As a Muslim and a trainee educational psychologist, I adopted a critical realist stance, which acknowledges both the objective reality of phenomena, such as God and SEND, and the socially constructed nature of knowledge about them. However, I felt that critical realism alone was insufficient for capturing the religious and spiritual dimensions central to the Muslim participants' experiences. My discomfort closely resonated with Sheikh's (2022) reflections, who similarly questioned the appropriateness of research methods when exploring the experiences of British Muslims health experiences. Researchers have argued that studying British Muslims outside of an Islamic ontological framework risks epistemic erasure (Sheikh, 2023; Azram, 2011; Elmessiri, 2013; Grosfoguel, 2013; Malik, 2019). My decision to centre an Islamic paradigm was therefore both methodological and political. It challenged the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems in psychology and education, which have historically marginalised and problematised religious worldviews (Sheikh, 2023). Therefore, I extended the lens by incorporating an Islamic ontological and epistemological perspective. This approach ensured that participants' religious experiences were recognised and centred within the research paradigm (Stonebanks, 2008).

4.2.4 Ontology

Ontology concerns the nature of reality and whether it exists independently of human perception or is shaped entirely by human experiences and social constructs (Braun and Clarke, 2022). For this study, I chose a critical realist ontological stance. Critical realism declares that reality consists of both observable and unobservable features (Stutchbury, 2022). It holds the belief that a phenomenon exists independently of human perception, but our understanding of it is shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. It rejects

the positivist view that reality can be fully captured through observation alone and the relativist view that reality is entirely constructed by social experiences (Al-Saadi, 2014).

As a Muslim researcher, I hold the belief that religion, God and SEND exist as real phenomena with objective and socially constructed dimensions. From in Islamic perspective, religious principles, such as divine teachings, have been revealed and exist independently from individual interpretation (Azram, 2011). SEND involves real, measurable differences in children's cognitive, emotional, or physical functioning. These differences exist independently of social perceptions. However, I also recognise that the manifestation of religious beliefs (how religion is lived and interpreted) is shaped by social and cultural contexts. I acknowledge that the topic of this study has connections to ongoing philosophical discussions about the existence of God or a higher power. While exploring the metaphysical nature of religious truths is beyond the scope of this study, it is essential to recognise that, for religious individuals, God and religion are real, objective aspects of their lived reality (Sheikh, 2023).

4.2.5 Epistemology

Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge and how we come to understand reality. It explores questions such as: how do we acquire knowledge? What counts as valid knowledge? What is the relationship between the researcher and what is being studied? (Braun and Clarke, 2022). For this study, I adopt a critical realist epistemological stance, which holds that knowledge about real phenomena such as God, religion, and SEND is constructed and shaped through social, cultural, and religious experiences. From this perspective, knowledge is not neutral but is influenced by context and interpretation (Bhaskar, 2011; Stutchbury, 2022). This epistemological

position allowed me to explore how parents constructed knowledge about their child's SEND through religious frameworks, while recognising that this knowledge was shaped by cultural influences. For instance, one Muslim parent may have interpreted their child's SEND as a test from God, while another may have viewed it as a blessing and a source of spiritual reward. These differing interpretations illustrated how parents' understandings of SEND and religious teachings were socially and contextually influenced.

4.2.6 Working within and beyond critical realism

Critical realism offered a feasible basis for addressing the ontology and epistemology of this research. It allowed me to maintain a belief in the existence of religious realities, while also acknowledging that our understanding of these realities is influenced by social and cultural factors. Throughout the research design process, I engaged in ongoing reflection, moving between different paradigms in search of an approach that resonated with both my Islamic worldview and the expectations of mainstream educational psychology. Among the paradigms available, critical realism provided the most logical fit, as it enabled me to explore religious interpretations without reducing them to rigid objectivism or minimising them as socially constructed. However, the discomfort I felt in adapting western, secular paradigms to fit religious perspectives led me to question the limits of existing approaches and turn towards decolonial alternatives, an exploration that is detailed in the following paragraphs.

4.2.7 Decolonising methodologies and the case for an Islamic paradigm

4.2.7.1 Who's knowledge counts?

The impact of colonialism on knowledge systems has enforced Eurocentric epistemologies, disregarding alternative ways of knowing, including those rooted in Islam (Sheikh, 2013, Grosfoguel, 2013; Malik, 2019). Grosfoguel (2013) critically examined the racialised origins of knowledge production in humanities and social sciences. He argues that the dominant theories taught in Western universities are overwhelmingly based on the ideas of white men from Italy, France, England, Germany, and the USA. He questions how these men came to have such epistemic authority, to the level that their knowledge is treated as universally applicable, while knowledge from the rest of the world is excluded or devalued, describing this as epistemic inferiority. He highlights that this dominance reflects not only geopolitics, but a maintenance of racialised and sexist hierarchy of knowledge, in which the viewpoints of white Western men are positioned as superior. For this superiority to be upheld, the knowledge produced by people in the Global South, Indigenous communities, and women, has therefore been systematically and intentionally reduced. This establishes a form of epistemic racism and sexism that continues to shape the foundations of knowledge production (Grosfoguel, 2013; Medina, 2013).

4.2.7.2 Epistemicide

Grosfoguel (2013) describes this erasure of knowledge, known as 'Epistemicide', through examples such as the destruction of Islamic scholarship during the conquest of Al-Andalus. Malik (2019) reports that the mass burning of libraries during this period was a deliberate act of intellectual violence and erasure, targeting Islamic and Jewish knowledge systems. These attacks took place alongside genocidal violence, forming the early foundations of intellectual colonisation that aimed to minimise and diminish alternative epistemologies and declare the dominance of European worldviews.

Shaikh (2023) extends this analysis, highlighting how Epistemicide has contributed to the loss of Islamic intellectual heritage and left generations of British Muslims disconnected from their historical knowledge systems. Shaikh (2023) states that '*This Epistemicide has also been an attack on the psychology of Muslims. This is why it is crucial to frame a study with Muslims being mindful of Islamic ontology and epistemology as part of the process of giving power back, restoration and healing'* (pg. 115).

Berenstain et al. (2022) argue that colonial systems of knowledge are not accidentally exclusionary, they are deliberately designed to silence non-Western, spiritual, and embodied ways of knowing, resulting in epistemic oppression. Shaikh (2023) states that when research methodologies fail to engage meaningfully with religious and non-Western ways of knowing, they preserve epistemic oppression. This marginalisation is directly relevant to the current research topic on Muslim parents raising children with SEND, as mainstream psychological and educational models often overlook how religious beliefs shape parental experiences. By acknowledging an Islamic ontological and epistemological framework, this study opposes the Eurocentric framing of knowledge and instead centres the lived realities of Muslim parents, aligning with broader decolonial efforts to reclaim non-Western knowledge systems (Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008).

4.2.8 An Islamic paradigm

4.2.8.1 Islamic ontology and epistemology

I aim to introduce an Islamic ontology and epistemology as the foundational framework for this research based on the work by Shaikh (2023) and Azram (2011). Both ontology

and epistemology are critical because they shape how researchers approach knowledge production and interpretation (Al-Saadi, 2014). Shaikh's (2023) Islamic ontology framework emphasises the importance of decolonising knowledge production by centring Islamic ways of knowing. As previously mentioned, I initially found it difficult to identify an ontology and epistemology that aligned with both my own perspective and the lived experiences of the participants. The Western psychological paradigms that dominate educational psychology research failed to capture the spiritual, moral, and communal dimensions that shape how Muslim parents understand their children's needs. Islamic ontology and epistemology therefore provided an empowering alternative, aligning with both mine and participants' religious values, ethics, and ways of understanding the world.

4.2.8.2 How knowledge is acquired and understood from an Islamic perspective

Azram (2011) shares an epistemology from an Islamic perspective, sharing that knowledge is understood as a sacred goal, guided by the belief that all knowledge ultimately comes from Allah. According to this view, there are two forms of knowledge in Islamic epistemology:

1. **Revealed knowledge:** The is two types of revealed knowledge, 'Instinctive' knowledge, which is the natural, pure sense we are born with, like a 'gut feeling'. This is described as a universal, innate awareness of God. The second form is described as 'revelation', which is knowledge given through divine revelation. This is considered as coming directly from Allah and preserved in the Qur'an and Hadith (the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH). Revealed knowledge also includes fikr (reflection), which encourages contemplation of Allah's signs to gain wisdom, and dhikr (remembrance), which

is the act of praising Allah through spiritual devotion. Together, these concepts guide believers to seek knowledge and live ethically, as taught in the Qur'an.

2. **Derived knowledge:** This is the knowledge humans acquire through study, experience, deep thinking and research, using faculties given by Allah. In Islam, scientific inquiry and rational thought are considered acts of worship, deepening the understanding of Allah's creation and supporting spiritual growth.

Nasution et al. (2023) explain that in Islamic epistemology, God is the ultimate source of all knowledge and truth, but humans are still central in how that knowledge is derived and applied. They outline five main sources: the Qur'an, the Hadith, the five senses, the intellect and the heart, showing that Islamic knowledge brings together reasoning and spiritual awareness. Building on this, Azram (2011) highlights that unlike secular views, Islamic epistemology sees all knowledge, whether revealed or gained through experience, as being connected to divine guidance. Knowledge isn't just about collecting information or advancing technology; it should deepen awareness of God, support moral development, and ultimately lead to the service of others.

4.2.8.3 Applying an Islamic ontology

To apply an Islamic ontological worldview in practice, I drew on Shaikh's (2023) Islamic ontological paradigm created for Muslim research in psychology and related disciplines (see appendix C for full model). This model provided a spiritually rooted framework that guided how I approached the research. Table 4 below outlines how each principle from the 11-point model was applied during the research process.

Table 4: Applying Shaikh's (2023) Islamic ontological paradigm:

11 points to consider	How it was applied
God-consciousness	I approached the research as a form of worship and responsibility, making *dua* at key stages and reminding myself that I was accountable to Allah for how I shared participants' stories and represented Islam.
Intention	I approached the research with sincere intention to serve the Muslim community and produce knowledge that honours Islamic values and challenges marginalising narratives.
Excellence	I committed to excellence by being methodologically rigorous, reflective, and aiming to analyse and present participants' voices with care and depth.
Prophetic leadership qualities	I kept the Prophetic qualities in mind throughout the research, specifically compassion, justice, and sincerity. They helped guide how I treated participants, how I handled their stories, and how I responded when things felt difficult or uncertain.
Justice and balance	This shaped how I approached reflexivity. I often paused to check whether I was remaining balanced, both in how I represented participants and in how I balanced academic demands with my religious values.
Honouring the Qur'an	I engaged with literature that engaged with how disability is understood in the Qur'an. This helped me keep the study rooted in Islamic knowledge and supported my aim to reflect the way participants made meaning through their Islam.
Connecting to revealed and instinctive knowledge	I utilised on my instinctive knowledge (my inner sense of what felt ethical and true), when making decisions and interpreting data and deciding what to centre. Alongside this, I stayed connected to the Qur'an and Islamic teachings, using reflection and dua to guide how I made sense of participants' words.
Remembrance and reflection	Throughout the research, I kept a reflexive journal to help me process my thoughts and decisions. Reflection was both academic and spiritual. I made space for the remembrance of God, especially when I felt overwhelmed or uncertain.
Honouring Muslim voices and knowledge	I centred Muslim ways of knowing throughout the research. I aligned the research with Liberation psychology, which calls for centring the voices and knowledge systems of marginalised groups, rather than forcing them to fit dominant frameworks.
Awareness of sociopolitical factors	I stayed mindful of how wider issues like Islamophobia and colonial legacies shape the lives of Muslim families. These factors were part of how I framed the literature and made sense of the data, especially when looking at barriers in education and services.
Islamically compatible methods	I chose RTA as it flexibility allowed me to work in a way that felt religiously aligned. The interviews were designed to be participant-led and sensitive to the religious context, so

> families could share their experiences in a way that felt respected.

4.2.8.4 Relational ontology and the Ummah

Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) effectively demonstrate that research becomes more ethical and meaningful when it reflects the worldview of the people it is about. Their framework, based on an indigenous ontology, highlights that knowledge is not just individual, it is relational, shaped through connections with the indigenous land and community. This idea, known as 'relational ontology', (Thayer-Bacon, 2003), describes knowledge as something formed through collective experiences and social relationships. Their model, framed through 'ways of knowing, being, and doing', challenges dominant Western methodologies that often misrepresent Indigenous perspectives. This has directly influenced my decision to root my own study, which explores the experiences of Muslim parents raising children with SEND, in an Islamic ontology and epistemology. Shaikh, (2023) highlights that the concept of relational ontology also strongly resonates with the Islamic concept of *'Ummah',* the global Muslim community, which is built on shared on interdependence. In this study, an Islamic paradigm allows Muslim parents' religious beliefs and relational ways of knowing to be meaningfully acknowledged.

4.3 The research design

4.3.1 Design

The study adopted a qualitative exploratory design to gain an in-depth understanding of how religion influences the lives of Muslim parents raising children with SEND. This approach, in line with liberation psychology, embraced the diversity of voices and

experiences within the Muslim community, helping to enrich our understanding of their perspectives (Ali-Faisal, 2020).

4.3.2 Rationale

While there has been growing attention to cultural competence in educational psychology, religion has often been overlooked. Plante (2014) argues that ignoring religion in psychological practice can be unethical and may even lead to malpractice because it risks overlooking a core part of identity. For many, including Muslim families, religion greatly shapes their world view. Despite the significant role religion plays, it remains largely absent from most psychological frameworks. Miles (1995) emphasises the need to respect cultural perspectives that may not align with Western psychological norms, warning that non-Western views are often dismissed as outdated or even harmful. To address this issue, Saxton (2017) argues that EPs must create space for understanding religious perspectives in their unique cultural contexts. The ethical guidelines from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and the British Psychological Society (BPS) also emphasise the importance of incorporating diversity, including religious beliefs, into professional practice of EPs (BPS, 2022; HCPC, 2023b).

4.3.3 Research purpose

The primary aim of this study was to explore the role of religion in the lives of Muslim parents raising children with SEND. This research focused on three areas: meaning making, coping and community. This research aimed to investigate how Islamic beliefs shape parental understanding, support resilience, and influence community dynamics.

4.3.4 Research questions (RQ)

1. How does religion influence the way Muslim parents perceive and understand the experiences and needs of their children with SEND?

2. In what way does religion function as a source of support and resilience for Muslim parents raising children with SEND?

3. In what ways do religious communities provide both support and challenges?

4.4 Research process

4.4.1 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was granted by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust in April 2024. When revisions were made to the recruitment strategy, ethical approval was resubmitted and regranted. The study followed the guidelines outlined in the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2021) and the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021), ensuring that the rights and dignity of all participants were upheld throughout the research process. Please see Appendix D for ethical approval letter.

4.4.2 Reflexive thematic analysis

RTA is a qualitative method used to analyse and report patterns and themes within a dataset. This method is especially useful for exploring the meanings behind participants' experiences. Braun and Clarke (2022) explain that there are three types of thematic analysis; coding reliability TA, codebook approaches to TA, and reflexive thematic analysis. Coding reliability uses inter-rater reliability to ensure consistency among multiple coders, aiming for objective interpretations of the data. Codebook TA is a hybrid approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods (Braun and Clarke, 2022). RTA, from Braun and Clarke (2022), is the method I have chosen for this research. It is

an interpretive, qualitative, 6 phase approach, that allows a researcher to identify and analyse themes while acknowledging their own subjectivity and reflexivity (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Braun and Clarke (2022) outline core assumptions of RTA, the first being that *'researcher subjectivity is the primary tool for reflexive TA, as knowledge generation is inherently subjective and situated'* (p.8). Rather than viewing subjectivity as a bias to be eliminated, RTA regards it as a *resource* for analysis (Gough & Madill, 2012). In this research exploring the role of religion, where I, as the researcher, share the same religion as the participants, subjectivity provides valuable insight. RTA sees my perspective as an integral part of the analysis process. Another core assumption is that reflexivity is essential for ensuring analytical rigour. This goes by the principle that themes are not passively discovered within the data but are actively constructed through my interpretive engagement with the dataset. Therefore, I aimed to deeply consider how my positionality, values, and beliefs, including shared religious backgrounds with participants, informed my interpretations and shaped the analytical process. I reflect critically on my position throughout the research process, ensuring that my personal experiences and assumptions are considered and incorporated into the analysis. RTA is not about gaining objectivity; instead, it values subjectivity as a strength that adds depth and insight into the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

4.4.2.1 The suitability of RTA

RTA was chosen for this study because it offers the flexibility needed to work within an Islamic ontological and epistemological framework (Shaikh 2023). As Braun and Clarke (2022) explain, RTA can be adapted to different theoretical positions, which makes it

suitable for research that challenges dominant approaches to knowledge. Shaikh (2023) faced similar challenges in finding a research method that aligned with an Islamic and decolonial worldview. After exploring several options, Sheikh also chose RTA as it allowed her to stay true to an Islamic paradigm, even when no explicitly Islamic method was available. Sheikh (2023) was able to adapt RTA by bringing in Islamic concepts such as deep reflection, which allowed her to move beyond rational analysis and include the role of the heart and spirituality in making sense of the data. This approach showed that RTA can be a powerful tool when layered with religious values, offering space for reflexivity and religious insight.

4.4.2.2 Reflexivity in RTA

Reflexivity is defined as '*a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes'* (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022, p. 242). Braun and Clarke (2022) state that reflexivity is key to producing high-quality analysis. Reflexivity in research serves various purposes, guiding researchers in understanding how their positionality shapes their work. Some approaches aim to neutralise subjectivity, such as bracketing, where researchers attempt to set aside personal biases (Neubauer et al., 2019). However, this approach has been criticised for being unrealistic and reinforcing power imbalances (Holmes, 2020). The main purpose of reflexivity has been to acknowledge subjectivity by making the researcher's influence explicit (Russell & Kelly, 2002), though this alone offers limited insight. A deeper approach is explaining subjectivity, where researchers analyse how their positionality shapes interpretations, enhancing transparency and research quality (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Malterud, 2001). For this study, the purpose of reflexivity is to

capitalise on subjectivity, by embracing my perspective as a resource for richer, co-constructed insights (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

RTA is a flexible and creative process that allowed me to adapt my approach as I developed and refined themes from the data, facilitating a deeper understanding of the findings. Braun and Clarke (2022) state that personal reflexivity involves the researcher considering their positionality and reflecting on where they occupy positions of social privilege and where they experience social marginality. I used Olmos-Vega et al. (2022)'s framework on types of reflexivity to ensure the practise of reflexivity was comprehensive. Table 5 defines the types of reflexivity and how they were utilised.

Table 5: Types of reflexivity taken from Olmos-Vega et al. (2022)

Type of reflexivity	Definition	Question	Reflection
Personal reflexivity	Focuses on how the researcher's unique perspectives, biases, and life experiences influence the research process.	How are our unique perspectives influencing the research?	As a second-generation Welsh Yemeni Muslim woman, my cultural and religious identity inevitably shapes how I perceive the experiences of Muslim families with SEND. Being mindful of my perspectives and biases ensures that I approach the data with more awareness and transparency.
Interpersonal reflexivity	Examines the power dynamics between the researcher and participants, considering how these relationships affect the research process and data.	What relationships exist and how are they influencing the research and the people involved? What power dynamics are at play?	As a trainee EP without personal experience as a parent of a child with SEND, I may hold an inherent power imbalance with participants. This influences how I build rapport, the trust established during interviews, and how participants share their experiences. It's important to reflect on this dynamic throughout the study.
Contextual reflexivity	Involves the researcher reflecting on the social, cultural, and environmental contexts that shape the research and participants' experiences.	How are aspects of context influencing the research and people involved?	The broader socio-cultural context, including issues of Islamophobia, societal attitudes towards SEND, and the cultural expectations placed on Muslim parents, significantly impacts the lived experiences of the participants. I must be attuned to how these contextual factors shape both their experiences and my understanding of them.

Methodological reflexivity	Involves reflecting on the methodological decisions made throughout the research process and their potential implications.	How are we making methodological decisions and what are their implications?	The decision to use RTA acknowledges my subjectivity in the research process. As a researcher, it is crucial to reflect on how my decisions in coding, theme development, and analysis may affect the final interpretation of the data and the findings, especially within a religious context.

4.4.2.3 Comparison with IPA

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was initially considered for this research due to its focus on exploring individual lived experiences and personal meaning-making (Smith et al., 1999). However, I ultimately chose RTA, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022), because it better aligns with the research aims and positionality. IPA is highly idiographic, meaning it focuses deeply on individual experiences and aims to preserve participants' unique meanings (Eatough & Smith, 2017). This can be a limitation when my aim is to explore broader patterns across participants, such as shared themes about how religion shapes the experience of raising a child with SEND. RTA, by contrast, is designed to identify shared patterns of meaning across a dataset, which is often more aligned with research seeking collective insights rather than individual narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Unlike IPA, which requires bracketing of a researcher's experiences to prioritise participants' sense-making, RTA explicitly embraces the researcher's active role and shared positionality in the analytical process, making it more suitable for a study where I share a religion with the participants, which is a key lived experience relevant to the research. RTA also allows for a broader exploration of shared themes and patterns across participants, rather than focusing solely on individual, idiographic experiences, as IPA does. This is particularly important for this research, which seeks to understand

how religious frameworks shape knowledge of SEND across multiple participants, while still valuing individual differences.

4.4.3 Recruitment strategy

The initial recruitment strategy involved asking Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPS) in boroughs with high Muslim populations, to recruit participants through the local authority Educational Psychology Service (see appendix E for example email sent to PEPs). After receiving ethical approval, the PEPs were to send emails to Educational Psychologists within their services, who would then circulate the information sheet (appendix F) and consent form (appendix G) to the eligible families. However, the initial strategy proved to be ineffective due to the multiple layers of communication involved, making it difficult to directly reach eligible parents. The extended chain of communication led to delays and limited the reach of the recruitment efforts. As a result, I decided to revise the strategy.

A resubmission of the ethics application was required to reflect the new recruitment strategy in response to the challenges encountered. The recruitment strategy was adjusted to focus on direct engagement with Muslim communities, which was given ethical approval (see appendix H for ethical approval email and a reflexive diary extract during this process). I reached out to people with a large reach in the Muslim communities in England and Wales, seeking their assistance in distributing the recruitment poster (appendix I). They played a vital role in sharing the recruitment poster with potential participants through large community group chats. Additionally, the snowball sampling technique was employed, with community members helping to identify individuals who met the inclusion criteria and encouraging them to share the

recruitment poster with others who may also be interested. By engaging directly with the Muslim community, I was able to avoid the challenges of local authority communication and successfully reach potential participants. This approach was much more effective and enabled the study to meet its recruitment goals. Table 6 highlights the inclusion criteria, as well as the rationale.

Table 6: Participant inclusion criteria and rationale

Inclusion criteria	Rationale
Parent or carer must self-identify as a practising Muslim in the UK, from any ethnic background.	Ensures that participants have a Muslim background to explore how their religion influences their understanding of their child's SEND experiences, whilst capturing diverse perspectives from varying ethnicities and cultures.
Child must have special educational needs or a disability (SEND), not just a physical disability.	Ensures that the focus is on children who have broader SEND, including learning, communication, and other needs, beyond just physical disabilities.
The child must have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or an IDP (Individual Development Plan) if in Wales.	EHCP indicates the parents have worked with an EP, making it in line with the researcher's discipline. An IDP was added after noticing interest from parents in Wales and acknowledging the different process.
Child should be school-aged and attending an educational setting.	Ensures parents are currently engaging in the schooling process, increasing its relevance to the discipline of educational psychology.
Parent must be proficient in the English language to ensure effective communication during interviews.	Ensures that the participant can engage in meaningful dialogue during the interview process, avoiding language barriers that may hinder data collection.

4.4.3.1 Sample size

Following Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidance, this study aimed to recruit a small to moderate number of participants. Braun and Clarke (2022) state that while an initial sample size should be estimated, it may need to be adjusted during data collection,

depending on the richness and complexity of the data. I set out to recruit 6-8 participants, considering the sample sizes of similar studies, such as Akbar (2019) with 10 participants and Bonawitz (2013) with 7 parents. I continued recruiting until the data was sufficiently rich to address the research questions, and the data had reached theoretical saturation with no new themes emerging, ultimately resulting in a final sample size of 8 participants. During the recruitment stage, only one father participated. To recruit additional fathers, I decided to offer the existing participants (mothers) the opportunity to invite their husbands to participate in the study. This resulted in the addition of one other father. The study included 8 Muslim parents of children with SEND including 6 mothers and 2 fathers. Participants came from a range of ethnic backgrounds, including Indian (n=3), Pakistani (n=2), Bangladeshi (n=2), and Middle Eastern (n=1). The children's diagnosed needs varied and included autism, autism with ADHD, Down syndrome, learning disabilities, and a rare neurological condition. The children ranged in age from 3 to 13 years, reflecting a broad spectrum of developmental stages and needs.

4.4.4 Data collection

Participants contacted me by email, after which I confirmed whether they met the inclusion criteria (see appendix J for an example). Once confirmed, participants were sent the consent form and information sheet. Data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews. The interviews lasted between 60 to 100 minutes and were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Online interviews were chosen to accommodate parents across the UK and to allow them the flexibility to participate from their own space, considering their caregiving responsibilities (Janghorban et al., 2014). Online interviews were found to allow participants feel more open and able to build rapport

more easily (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). Participants were asked for consent to record the interview through the consent form, and before beginning the recording, I confirmed that participants were still comfortable with being recorded. Two mothers turned their camera's off during the video recording because one wore the face veil and the other did not want to be on camera. Microsoft Teams automatically transcribed the interviews. Afterward, I reviewed the video recordings to ensure the transcription was accurate, making note of any non-verbal actions or expressions observed. Due to the topic discussed, the participants frequently used common Arabic phrased that are used by Muslims, so I made sure to capture this in the transcription as the transcription tool on Microsoft teams could not pick these phrases up. Any identifying information, such as names or local authorities, was anonymised to maintain confidentiality. Interviews were conducted in quiet environments to minimise distractions.

4.4.4.1 Interview schedule

The semi-structured interview schedule was developed based on the research aims, allowing me to focus on key topics and areas of interest (appendix K). I introduced myself, explained the study's purpose, and clarified that there were areas of interest, but the interview was flexible, giving the participants the freedom to lead the conversation. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and ethical approval, were also discussed before the interview began. During the second interview, it became evident that parents were focusing more on their child's development rather than sharing their own experiences as parents. I realised that parents had a lot of contexts to offer about their child, so, after discussing this with my research supervisor, a modification was made to the interview schedule. The first 10/15 minutes were designated for parents to provide context about their child's SEND and background,

while the remaining time was focused on their parental experiences. This adjustment ensured that important context was shared without taking up too much time. Open-ended questions were used to encourage detailed responses, and sub-questions were included as prompts to help participants elaborate further. Prompts were used throughout the interview to encourage elaboration, particularly when participants struggled to express themselves or when a question was not fully understood. Additionally, extra questions were introduced as needed, depending on the flow of the conversation, to further engage the participants. The questions were intentionally non-leading, allowing participants to guide the conversation and express their experiences freely, without being steered in a particular direction. Once I had felt that most of the key areas had been addressed, the interview was concluded. Please see appendix L for reflexive diary extracts after interviews.

4.4.4.2 Pilot interview

A pilot interview was conducted with a mother who met the inclusion criteria, a Muslim mother of a 10 year-old child with SEND. Pilot interviews are essential for assessing the appropriateness of the interview schedule, especially for inexperienced researchers (Majid et al., 2017). This step helps identify any flaws, weaknesses, or limitations within the interview structure that may need revision (Malmqvist et al., 2019). My research supervisor provided feedback on the original interview schedule. One key piece of feedback was the importance of avoiding leading questions and assumptions about religion's role in the phrasing of the questions. This was a helpful addition, as it gave me the opportunity to notice something that had been overlooked, offering an 'outside' perspective that was valuable for refining the interview process. The pilot interview also revealed that some questions were quite complex and difficult to understand. For

example, the question "How do you interpret your child's condition in the context of your religious beliefs?" was too wordy and complex. This was revised to: "Can you describe how, if at all, your religious beliefs influence your understanding of your child's SEND?" to make it clearer and more accessible. Additionally, the pilot highlighted that a question on the original interview schedule, "Are there any specific religious texts or teachings that you find relevant to your child's experiences and needs?" might put undue pressure on parents, making them feel as though they were being tested. As a result, this question was revised into a sub question and would only be asked if the parents began talking about religious texts or teachings during the interview.

4.4.5 Data analysis

I will aim to provide a detailed account of my engagement at each phase of RTA, highlighting key elements of the analytical journey. For each phase, I will outline the specific objective to clarify its purpose within the broader analysis. I will reflect on my initial experiences, including any challenges or insights encountered. The approach adopted at each phase will be articulated to show the rationale behind coding and theme development decisions. Finally, I will describe the detailed processes undertaken, including coding steps, theme generation, and refinements, to demonstrate how themes were created and evolved throughout the analysis. This structured and transparent approach will ensure that the analysis is both robust and reflexive.

4.4.5.1 Familiarisation with the data

- During the familiarisation phase, the interviews were re-watched with video recordings rather than simply listening to them to ensure that both verbal and non-verbal communications, such as gestures, facial expressions, and body

language, were captured and accurately interpreted. This approach enriched the understanding of the data beyond the written transcript. After verifying the accuracy of the transcriptions, the transcripts were read three times to develop a deep knowledge of the dataset. Throughout this process, the researcher actively and critically engaged with the content, combining notetaking with more focused reflections at the end of the data review.

- Based on Braun and Clarke's (2022), I asked myself key questions to explore the meaning behind the participants' narratives: How are the participants making sense of their experiences? Why might they interpret their experiences in a particular way rather than another? In what different ways do they understand the topic? How common is the depiction presented in their account? How would I feel if placed in the same situation, and how does that compare to the participants' feelings? What assumptions underpin their descriptions of the world, and what kind of reality is revealed through their account? This reflective inquiry was crucial in identifying emerging patterns of meaning, setting a foundation for the subsequent phases of the analysis.

4.4.5.2 Coding

- The coding process focused on systematically analysing and interpreting the data using the software Nvivo to develop a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This phase involved engaging with the data at a more detailed level by creating and refining codes that captured both the explicit and implicit meanings of the participants' responses. I used a primarily inductive approach, which meant that the analysis was driven by the data itself,

rather than being guided by pre-existing theories or hypotheses (deductive). This allowed patterns and themes to be formulated organically, helping to build a more authentic understanding of the participants' perspectives. I conducted coding on each interview twice, ensuring that the entire dataset was thoroughly examined. I continuously referred to the research questions, coding any data that was considered even slightly relevant to addressing them.

- In this phase, I began with semantic coding, which focused on the explicit or surface meanings of the data. This approach allowed me to capture what was directly stated in the interviews. Over time, however, I expanded the coding process to include latent coding, which involved identifying deeper, underlying meanings within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Throughout the process, I also referred to a reflexive journal, and reflexivity guideline (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022), which provided additional insight such as reflecting on interpersonal reflexivity and how my questioning may have impacted what the participants chose to share. This phase produced a list of initial codes. Please see appendix M for a list of initial codes from Nvivo and an example of coded transcript.

- To support the early stages of data familiarisation and initial pattern recognition, I generated a word cloud using NVivo to visualise the most frequently used words across the dataset (see figure 3 for word cloud). The purpose was not to guide coding decisions, but to gain a visual snapshot of which terms featured most prominently in participants' narratives. This process offered a reflective and creative prompt, allowing me to consider what language stood out and why (Gascoine et al., 2024). Unsurprisingly, yet significantly, *Allah* emerged as the most common word across interviews, highlighting the centrality of God-consciousness (Shaikh, 2023). The word cloud supported my deeper

engagement with the data by drawing attention to repeated concepts that shaped the eventual development of themes.

Figure 2: A word cloud of the most frequently used words used in the coding process created through Nvivo.

4.4.5.3 Generating initial themes

In Phase 3, I began grouping codes and identifying patterns to generate initial themes. The aim of this phase was to move beyond individual codes and develop broader themes that captured meaningful patterns in the data. This phase required on going refinement and critical thinking. Following the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2022), I approached this phase by considering the following:

- The three research questions were used as a guiding framework to group codes. The codes were grouped using Microsoft word initially (appendix N) to create cluster codes. They were grouped under each research question to ensure the dataset was focused. The clusters were then reviewed and labelled with emerging theme names under each research question (appendix O).

- Initial themes were developed to tell a specific story aligned with the research questions, rather than attempting to capture everything in the dataset. Initially, there was a sense of pressure to include every detail, as it felt important not to lose any valuable information. However, reflecting on this consideration, the focus shifted to identifying key patterns that contributed meaningfully to the overall narrative, rather than attempting to represent every aspect of the data.

- Using the initial themes, the codes were then clustered on Nvivo (appendix P), to combine the dataset and ensure the themes captured perspectives across multiple participants. The dataset was reviewed, and initial themes were expanded that were capturing one participant's perspective. This was initially difficult as there were important perspectives worth capturing that didn't span multiple voices, however merging these views with similar codes allowed for these to still be captured within a larger theme or subtheme. Please see appendix Q for a full list of combined codes to create initial themes under each research question.

- Themes and subthemes were treated as provisional, with the understanding that they would evolve as more insight was gained into the data. At times, it was tempting to become attached to certain themes that initially seemed promising, such as an initial theme of 'coping', however upon reflection and review of the dataset attached to the codes that made up this initial theme, this was split into

more specific ways of coping, such as acts of worship and the way hardship is viewed. Efforts were made to avoid this attachment to remain fully immersed in the process. This mindset allowed for the refinement, merging, or even discarding of themes where necessary, ensuring that the analysis stayed grounded in the data.

4.4.5.4 Developing and reviewing themes

- The purpose of Phase 4 was to refine the themes identified in Phase 3, ensuring they were rich, meaningful, and closely aligned with the research questions. Digital sticky notes using the software Miro were utilised to form thematic maps. This visual method allowed for flexibility and creativity in the analysis process. The metaphor of a dandelion seed head provided a helpful way to visualise how different codes could connect to a central idea, enabling the development of coherent initial themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

- This phase focused on ensuring themes represented patterns of shared meaning across the dataset, rather than being simple topic summaries (Braun and Clarke, 2022). I worked to create an initial thematic map that captured the complexity and depth of the analysis using the research questions as a framework (appendix R).

- This phase presented challenges, as many initial themes required reworking to ensure they were clear and meaningful. The themes were originally developed under each of the three research questions, which helped to keep the analysis focused and grounded in the aims of the study. However, as the analysis progressed, I reflected on how certain themes naturally spanned multiple research questions.

- This led to a process of merging and collapsing themes across questions to better reflect the interconnectedness of participants' experiences. Revisiting the data and refining the themes allowed for a more cohesive and holistic narrative, while still maintaining a strong connection to the core research questions. I attempted to collapse and integrate candidate themes. To achieve this, I revisited the initial themes by reviewing coded data and the entire dataset, checking whether each theme formed clear and distinct patterns.

- Themes were examined to ensure they revolved around a central organising concept (Braun and Clarke, 2022). I also assessed whether the themes had enough meaningful data in the form of quotes to support them and whether they contributed to addressing the research question. This process required moving back and forth between the data and themes and adjusting as needed.

- During this phase, several refinements were made to improve clarity and coherence. Unnecessary themes/sub themes were removed, and similar themes were combined to ensure relevance. I also checked every quote under each theme to ensure there were no repetitions, as some quotes had multiple codes and therefore were under multiple themes. At this point, a decision was made about where these quotes fit best. Please see appendix S for early forms of the thematic map.

4.4.5.5 Refining, defining and naming themes

- This phase centred on finalising the themes by refining, naming, and defining them in a way that effectively conveyed their meaning. I reflected on Braun and Clarke's (2022) observation that researchers often mistake topic summaries for themes. To avoid this, careful attention was given to ensuring that the themes

represented meaningful patterns of shared meaning rather than simple summaries of topics discussed during the interviews. I reviewed the boundaries and essence of each theme, ensuring they were closely aligned with the data and addressed the research question. This involved asking key questions, such as what the central organising concept of each theme was, what its boundaries included or excluded, what made it unique, and how it contributed to the overall analysis. Writing concise definitions (appendix T) for each theme proved particularly useful in testing their clarity and depth, while revisiting transcripts and recordings ensured that nothing significant was missed. These definitions were reviewed and edited to accurately capture the data that represented each theme.

- Naming the themes required a balance between creativity and clarity. I aimed to ensure that theme names captured the reader's attention while accurately reflecting the analytical depth of the themes. Overly simplistic names were avoided to prevent misinterpretation as topic summaries. In one case, a direct quote from the data was used as it effectively captured the essence of the theme. Reviewing definitions further clarified my understanding of each theme and their contributions to the analysis. By the end of this phase, the finalised themes and subthemes were formalised, and a thematic map was created (Figure 3).

4.4.5.6 The write-up

The final stage of RTA focused on presenting a coherent and engaging account of the data while addressing the research questions. This phase required me to guide readers through the findings and analysis in a meaningful and accessible way. Quotes were included alongside the analysis to complement the commentary, highlight key arguments, and reflect the diversity of participants' responses. Multiple participants were included to reflect the way themes and subthemes spanned across

interviews. In line with RTA principles, the findings moved beyond surface-level descriptions by offering interpretations of the data. Please see appendix U for a reflexive diary extract from the data analysis process.

4.6 Research quality

4.6.1 Commitment to quality

To ensure the research was conducted rigorously, I was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2020) 20 evaluation questions, which outline best practices for Thematic Analysis. These questions helped ensure that the chosen methods were well-justified, and that the analysis was thorough and reflective of the data. Additionally, Yardley's (2000) qualitative research principles were applied to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. These principles provided a framework for maintaining high-quality qualitative research by emphasising sensitivity to the research process and ensuring findings were meaningful and well-supported.

4.6.2 Transparency and coherence

Throughout Phases 4 and 5 of the analysis, I engaged in discussions with a colleague and the research supervisor to deepen the interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). These discussions were not aimed at establishing consensus but rather at critically reflecting on analytical decisions and ensuring that themes and codes remained strongly connected to the data.

4.6.3 Social responsibility

As a trainee educational psychologist, I occupied a position of knowledge, which may have led participants to seek advice or guidance during interviews. Given the nature of

the study, it was important to maintain clear boundaries and make it clear to participants that the purpose of the interview was not to offer advice, ensuring that the interviews remained focused on participants' lived experiences.

4.6.4 Impact

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the religious perspectives of Muslim parents raising children with SEND. While the study does not seek to generalise findings to a wider population, it highlights important personal accounts that have been largely underexplored in existing literature. The findings have practical implications for EPs and other professionals.

4.6.5 ICT resources

To ensure efficient data collection and analysis, Microsoft Teams transcription and video recording were used for recording and transcribing interviews. Once recorded, the interviews were securely stored on a password-protected laptop, accessible only to me. The transcriptions were manually reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy. For data analysis, NVivo was utilised to facilitate the organisation, coding, and thematic exploration of the interview transcripts. This software enabled a structured approach to identifying patterns and themes within the data.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

4.7.1 Informed Consent

Participants were provided with detailed information about their participation in the research, both in written form through an information sheet and verbally, prior to the

interviews. This document clearly outlined the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, potential risks and benefits, the right to withdraw, and how their data would be managed and stored. Given the possibly sensitive topics of religion, disability, and parenting, it was essential to ensure participants were fully informed about the research focus. Participants were also provided with my professional email for any questions or concerns. Consent was obtained from each participant, confirming their understanding and agreement to the terms outlined in the information document.

4.7.1 Right to withdraw

Participants were clearly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage, including after the interview. A specific timeframe for data withdrawal was provided to ensure participants felt in control of their contributions.

4.7.3 Potential benefits to participants

Participants may have benefited from the opportunity to speak with a Muslim practitioner who shares an understanding of the role of religion in their lives and the cultural factors that shape their experiences. Engaging in discussions with someone who acknowledges the significance of religious beliefs and practices may have provided a sense of validation and comfort. This combination of shared religious understanding and professional knowledge may have created a space where participants felt heard and respected, allowing them to reflect on their experiences in a meaningful way. Although the study was not intended to provide support, the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings in an accepting and informed environment may have offered a form of reassurance and personal reflection.

4.7.4 Confidentiality

All interview transcripts were anonymised to ensure that participants could not be identified. The importance of confidentiality was reiterated both verbally and in written communication throughout the research process.

4.7.5 Data protection

Data collection, storage, and retention followed the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Participants were fully informed about why personal data was being collected, how it would be used, data-sharing practices, and retention procedures. The recording of the interviews and transcripts were stored in a password protected laptop, in a protected file that only I had access to.

4.7.6 Debrief

After the interviews, participants were offered an opportunity to debrief and were reminded of the right to withdraw and were given an opportunity to answer any questions. All interviews ended with the opportunity for participants to ask any clarifying questions, and to discuss their thoughts following the interview. This was done once the recording ended.

4.7.7 Reflexivity and researcher's positionality

I carefully considered my positionality thought out the research process. Acknowledging potential power dynamics and biases resulting from a shared religious background with participants. This commitment to authenticity and reflexivity was maintained throughout the data collection and analysis processes, supported by RTA.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Chapter overview

The following chapter presents the research findings, beginning with a thematic map that illustrates the key themes and sub-themes identified (figure 3). Throughout the analysis, the research questions were continuously revisited to ensure they were addressed within the themes. Each theme and sub-theme are then explored in depth, using extracts from the data to illustrate themes. To enhance clarity and conciseness, ellipses (...) have been used to indicate omitted portions of text, ensuring that the extracts remain focused while preserving the integrity of participants' voices. In line with the principles of Liberation Psychology (Martín-Baró, 1994) and as emphasised by Ali-Faisal (2020), these extracts have been included to privilege the voices of Muslim parents and centre their lived experiences.

Figure 3: Thematic map

Thematic map illustrating the final themes and subthemes
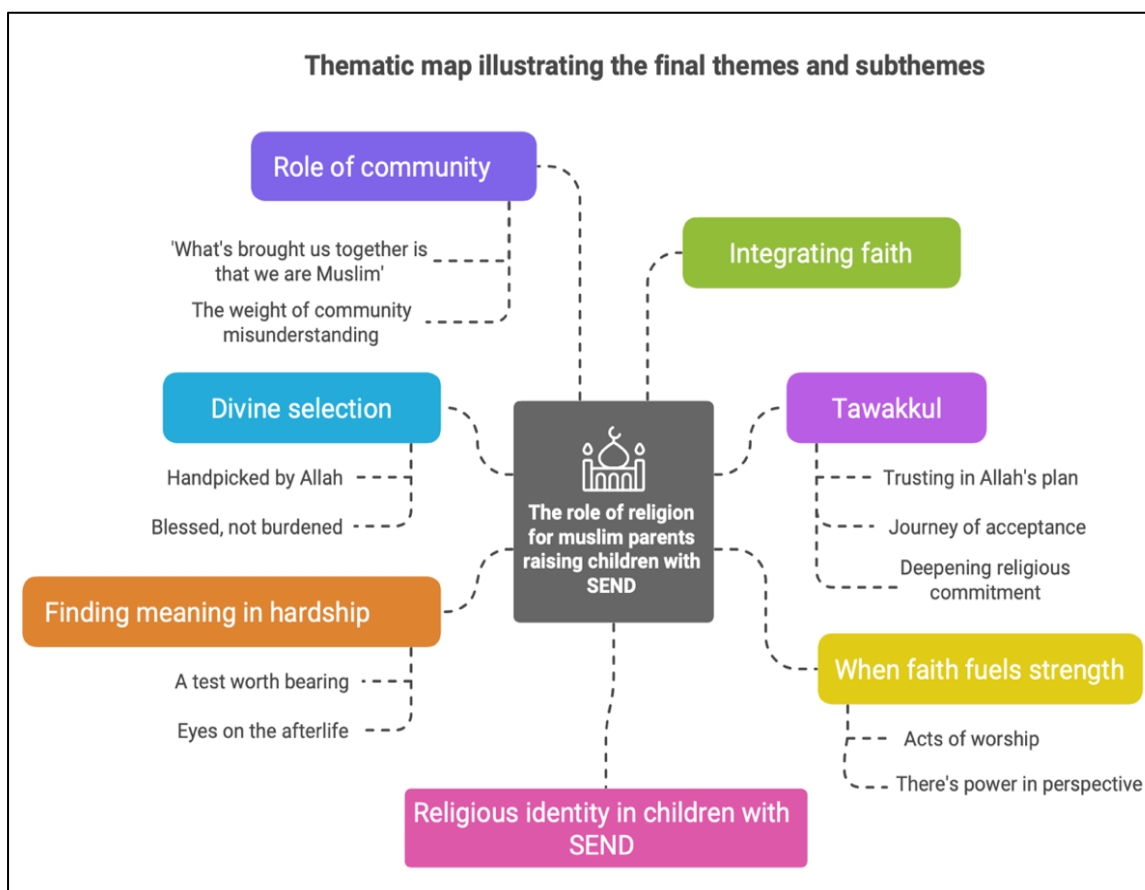
5.2 Theme 1: Divine selection

The theme of 'Divine selection' reflects the belief that both parents and their child have been intentionally chosen and blessed by Allah for a higher purpose. The first sub-theme, 'Handpicked by Allah', highlights how parents find comfort in the Islamic teaching from the Quran that Allah will not burden a soul beyond their capacity, allowing them to view their experiences as a sign that Allah has specifically chosen them for this role due to their internal strength. The second sub-theme, 'Blessed, not burdened', builds on this idea, with parents believing they have been selected for this role as a blessing. Their child is seen as a source of joy, spiritual growth, and even protection from worldly harm.

5.2.1 Handpicked by Allah

The parents believed that Allah is all-knowing, and the parents and children are chosen and blessed by Allah for a divine purpose. They view the journey as not one of misfortune, but of divine purpose. The teaching in Islam that Allah will not give a person more than they can handle and that they were chosen for this role because Allah knew they could handle it was referenced multiple times. This sentiment among parents is displayed in the quotes below:

"Well, I just keep praying because of the belief that He (Allah) will not give you what you're not capable of handling" (Participant 1)

"I've understood that Allah doesn't put us through anything that we can't handle." (Participant 7)

"God only gives you how much you can bear. So, so when I couldn't do something or when I felt overwhelmed, I would think, Is it really a bad thing? Is it that I can't cope, or is it just difficult now?" (Participant 4)

"So, Allah chose me to be his mum because, because Allah knows that I can provide and look after him. And Allah has given me that task because He's perfected (Child's name) to be a part of our family. Alhamdulillah, he's, our blessing. That's the way I see it and I always have seen it." (Participant 6)

One mother shared how her perception of disability shifted from pity to admiration because of this belief:

"If I see a parent with a disabled child, I, I used to think it must be so hard for them. Now I think, 'Wow, this must be a strong woman. Allah wouldn't have given her this child if she wasn't internally strong or on a journey to being closer to Allah."

(Participant 5)

This belief also helped them push back against cultural explanations of disability that suggested supernatural causes, such as black magic or *Ruqyah* (this is the practise of invoking or removing spiritual beings such as Jinn. Some cultures believe disability or mental health difficulties to be associated with Jinn possession). One mother reflected on how her faith shielded her from these perspectives:

"Even in Islam, I think a lot of the times people, maybe it was just me, but people will turn to things and say like, 'Have you thought about Ruqyah? Have you thought about black magic?' And without my faith… I think what my faith gave me was, God only gives you how much you can bear." (Participant 4)

Instead of seeing themselves as struggling under the weight of responsibility, they embraced their roles as caretakers of a child specially chosen for them by Allah and viewed their roles as advocates. This sense of spiritual responsibility was expressed in the quotes below through parents' identifying themselves as advocates, not just in a practical sense, but as a divinely appointed role rooted in their faith: *"I've realised I'm his voice. I have to advocate for him"* (participant 1)

"And I feel like I'm his advocate. I have to be his voice and his advocate until he can be himself. And I wanted to be that positive energy around him". (participant 6)

One mother emphasised how her child with down syndrome is an intentional and perfect act of divine creation. She rejects the idea of it being a 'defect' and instead embraces the child as Allah's deliberate and beautiful design: *"Him having that extra chromosome, it's not a defect, it's just the way Allah created him."* (Participant 6).

This belief does more than provide comfort, it actively shapes how parents understand with their child and the world around them, by seeing their child's existence as intentional.

5.2.2 Blessed, not burdened

Many parents expressed their belief that their child is a blessing. They see their child as a gift from Allah. Parents interpret their child's SEND as a blessing in different ways, shaped by faith, family influence, and the unique joy their child brings to their family. One parent emphasises how faith within the family reinforces this belief, showing that perspectives on blessings are often strengthened through shared religious beliefs: *"My wife has a very strong belief that he's a blessing, actually…I kind of believe that, yes. I think it's a blessing for sure."* (Participant 8)

Others focus on the immeasurable joy their child brings, recognising that their presence adds value to the family beyond their condition: *"She has a very exuberant personality. She's very much larger than life. And has added a lot to the family. So, we definitely see her as a blessing irrespective of her illness."* (Participant 2)

For many, this belief stems from the idea that anything that brings a person closer to Allah is a blessing, and these children hold a unique spiritual status and can be a source of goodness for their community as shared in the quotes below:

"He has given me this child for a reason, and we have looked at him as a blessing because anything that gets you closer to Allah, that is a blessing from Him."
(Participant 1).

"I have a feeling he will be a really big blessing for the community." (Participant 5)

This suggests that, rather than viewing their child's condition as something to be fixed or viewed as unfortunate, parents embrace it as an opportunity for spiritual growth, increased faith, and a means to bring goodness to the wider community. For others, the gratitude of simply being given a child, especially after struggling with infertility, deepens their perception of their child as a gift from Allah:

"I just never fell pregnant. So, when I felt pregnant with him, I accepted the gift from God for me. It's a gift for God, Subhan Allah. And then I said, you know. But I am, you know like - We say it in Arabic 'Astuda3tuha 3an Allah' - 'I give it back to Allah to protect the gift' and then when I found that it was a boy, I was very excited and ecstatic. I was, I was just over the moon. And I promised that because Allah, you know, gave this gift to me after 13 years. I was like, you know what? No, nothing is going to come between this child and me." (Participant 3)

This belief is intertwined with a sense of responsibility and appreciation, as many parents acknowledge how difficult it is for others to conceive. One mother reflected:

"I had a bit of anxiety around my pregnancy, but my child was loved. As soon as I saw the blue line, so there was no like, you know, I think as a Muslim mother, I've always had it in my head that my child is a blessing. I have friends and family who have struggled to get pregnant. So, for me, whatever Allah blesses you with, you say Alhamdulillah." (Participant 6)

Another mother acknowledged that having children is not guaranteed, making the experience more precious: *"I know personally, people in situations who can't have children, you know, and it's never taken for granted what we have been given. So yeah, I think we just want the best. We want the best, whatever the best is.''* (Participant 4)

Several parents believe that their child's disability protects them from worldly corruption and harm, offering them a kind of spiritual safeguard. Some interpret their child's innocence as a sign of Allah's mercy and wisdom, believing they will be protected from the struggles that other children face. One parent shared how a conversation with a friend changed her perspective:

"She said, 'God sent prophets in the world to cleanse the world as and when it started becoming quite bad. The way the world has become now, it's so horrible that God is sending children like these to cleanse the world, cleanse the families.' So, when I look

around and I see all that's going on, it's like you want to keep your child protected and

safe and in the right direction." (Participant 1)

This belief strengthens the idea that children with SEND have a higher spiritual status, as they are seen as unaffected by worldly distractions. These parents echoed this view:

"If I didn't believe that, you know, I was being tested. There's a bigger picture, and my boy is a blessing from God. My husband and I always say, is it really a punishment, or is it a blessing that he doesn't understand some things, that he'll never be caught up in some things?" (Participant 4)

"Every single day, I'm like, Alhamdulillah. Thank you, God, for my child. I never wished that he was a neurotypical child." (Participant 3)

5.3 Theme 2: Tawakkul

The theme of *Tawakkul* (reliance on Allah) highlights how parents of children with SEND develop trust in Allah's plan for their life, finding strength and comfort in the belief that their journey is guided by Allah's wisdom. In Islam, *Tawakkul* means placing complete trust and reliance in Allah, through the recognition that ultimate control rests with Allah and that He is capable of anything. It is not passive submission but an active form of faith that provides trust, especially during uncertainty. Within this theme, this trust unfolds through three key process displayed as sub-themes. The trust in Allah's divine plan allows parents to surrender control, believing that every challenge has a purpose.

The journey taken to accept a child's SEND reflects how parents navigate the grief of the child they thought they would have, before reaching to a feeling of peace and seeing their child's SEND as part of Allah's plan. Finally, these parents' religious commitment deepens as they lean into trusting Allah's plan. Through this process, Tawakkul becomes a way of life, by shaping how parents accept and grow from their experiences.

5.3.1 Trusting Allah's divine plan

A key part of Tawakkul is trusting in Allah's divine plan, which is the conviction that Allah's wisdom and abilities exceed human limitations. For many parents, their faith in Allah gives them hope where others might feel helpless. They believe that Allah alone has the power to change circumstances, and everything is ultimately in Allah's hands. For these parents, trusting in Allah also means letting go of the need to control every outcome. Instead of fixating on their own desires, they surrender to the belief that Allah knows what is best, even when things do not go as planned or hoped.

There is reference to the belief that everything in life is already written and decided by Allah, a concept rooted in the Islamic idea of *Qadr* (divine destiny). This belief helped parents see that everything in their journey was meant specifically for them. For many, this idea was not about passivity or giving up hope, but rather, it provided a deep sense of comfort. One mother reflected on how this belief influenced her decision to not pursue prenatal screenings, saying: *"What's meant to be for you, it's written for you. Whatever happens is the will of Allah. So, I didn't do any of the screenings or anything." (Participant 6).*

Another mother echoed this idea when discussing her son's diagnosis: *"Whatever genetics he has, whatever genotype, whatever he has, neurodivergent or neurotypical,*

the diagnosis doesn't matter. What happens will still be in Allah's hands. We don't have any control, even if we might have a diagnosis." (Participant 5).

One mother shared using the Quran to frame her child's condition as intentional, and uses this belief to remind other Muslim mothers that Allah makes no mistakes:

"There's two verses in the Quran that I share with other moms that I meet who have Down syndrome, is that Allah perfected us in the wombs and so for me it was that Allah perfected him with that extra chromosome, so him having that extra chromosome is not a defect or anything. It's not an error or anything, it's a perfect creation that He has blessed me with." (Participant 6)

One mother simply put it: *"One thing I've relied on is my instinct and the faith in Allah because that's ultimate, right? You have to have this complete faith in Allah that he'll take care of it, and then you go like, OK, it's gonna be OK."* (Participant 1).

These reflections show how Tawakkul isn't just a personal feeling; it becomes a spiritual framework for navigating life and decision-making. Believing in what is written and decided by Allah allows parents to reframe the feeling of not having complete control not as a crisis, but as a reminder to return to trusting and surrendering to Allah's plan. Therefore, rather than feeling powerless, they find strength in relying on Allah.

Parents also see Allah's control over everything as a source of humility, recognising that any success or strength they have has been granted by Allah:

"I shouldn't be full of myself. 'Cause this is not me. This is Allah's blessing on us. This is Allah telling me, 'Yes, OK, your prayers are heard. So I'm going to give that to you'.

And wallahi, no matter what I tell people, don't think that it's my doing. No, I don't, I don't take any credit for it." (Participant 3)

"I think I wouldn't have got through any of them. At the time, I'm like, 'please, please, please.' And I look back and I'm like…Allahu Akbar because Allah got me through it." (Participant 4)

"Whatever Allah's given me; I'm going to take it. Then I'm gonna take care because Allah has, you know, people may say I have done well, I've done this and that. No, none of it is me, this is Allah, because Allah has made me like this. He puts these things in my mind." (Participant 7)

Similarly, another father reflects on how, despite his initial disappointment when his child didn't get into their preferred school, he later realised that Allah's decision led to a better outcome: *"Allah decided that this is the school he's going to go to. And he is thriving, Alhamdulillah. So sometimes it's best to leave the plans to Allah and not be focused on exactly what you want."* (Participant 8).

5.3.2 The journey to acceptance

While Tawakkul is central to many parents' perspectives, this acceptance and surrender is not always immediate. For most, it is a gradual process that involves initial resistance. Parents describe moving through different phase such as denial and frustration, and ultimately, an acceptance, as they come to terms with their child's SEND. One mother captures this process, emphasising that acceptance unfolds in stages:

"I call it my different phases. So first it was understanding what was happening with her, then it was accepting what was happening with her. Now I'm going through a

phase where I'm navigating life with her and for her. I went through a phase of accepting that this is what we're going to live with because I did fight a lot with myself. And it was a bit of a spiritual journey for me as well." (Participant 7)

A few parents described how the process of acceptance was a long one. When considering developing Tawakkul, while this may provide comfort, it does not erase the human experiences of loss, grief and disappointment. Instead, this belief plays a role in gradually helping parents come to terms with their new reality. The following quotes provide a candid portrayal of the struggle between developing Tawakkul, the journey of acceptance, and other human emotions. The admission of disappointment and questioning Allah's plan shows that this belief is not always immediate:

"It took time. I mean, it's not something that you're given the news and then the thought pops into your head and you're OK with it. It takes a very long time to come to terms with it." (Participant 2)

"We didn't immediately relate to that like, 'Oh yeah, that's Allah's plan, right?' Yeah. I mean, I was disappointed as well, and I would say, 'Why has Allah done this to us? Why couldn't we be a normal family?' That was my immediate reaction, as most normal people would have. But gradually, as you, you start accepting. I think it's good to just look at the positives from your situation rather than keep thinking about it and keep worrying and just be unhappy." (Participant 8)

"I've gone through the whole process of emotions about him being different, and I'm really happy now. We are very happy in terms of our relationship and everything in life in general. Yes, it is not easy, and it can be extremely challenging and emotional as well." (Participant 3)

In the following quote, the mother describes a moment of emotional exhaustion. The image of sitting alone on a prayer mat, crying in the night, captures the isolation and helplessness that can come with being a parent. Then the mother gets a simple moment of relief the next day. This reflects the essence of Tawakkul, believing that even in the hardest times, comfort through faith can come in the smallest, yet most meaningful, ways:

"I think the faith gets me through. Right at the beginning of my journey, I didn't think I could do it. And, and I think looking back and thinking, I thought I couldn't get through it then. And I did. You know, I'm sitting on my prayer mat and everybody's asleep, and I'm crying and I'm thinking, who is even listening to me? And then my son wakes up in a good mood the next day. And I'm like, oh, wow." (Participant 4)

Another mother shows that faith moves beyond just coping, it becomes a lens through which parents understand their child's existence. Acceptance is no longer just about making peace with hardship but recognising a greater purpose and the child's inherent value in the world. These reflections give examples of how having Tawakkul is not about passivity, but about trusting Allah while finding meaning in Allah's plan:

"I think Islam has helped me to come to terms with whatever it is. It is meant to be like this. Allah chose it this way, and there must be a hikmah behind this, for my growth and his growth. And he can still be beneficial to the community, even in the way Allah made him." (Participant 5)

In this context, *hikmah*, refers to divine wisdom and the idea that Allah, in His infinite knowledge, has chosen this path for both the parent and child for a meaningful reason. Even if the purpose is not immediately clear, parents trust that there is a greater good behind their experience. While the journey to acceptance was often difficult, religion plays a significant role in helping parents make peace with their circumstances. One mother describes how her fear about her child's future gradually transformed into trust in Allah:

"What will happen to him if I go? I was so fearful. I used to pray to Allah, 'Allah, I have to just be here for him.' And then there came a moment where I realised, I have to have complete faith in Allah. If He has chosen this for him, He will ensure he's taken care of." (Participant 1)

For some parents, the struggle toward acceptance was made harder by cultural beliefs, particularly the stigma surrounding disability. In these cases, faith served as a counterbalance to societal expectations:

"A lot of it is culture and not Islam. There was a big denial from both of us in the beginning that, you know, all children are different. It was my first. I think, you know, there was a lot of denial there that I didn't really think there was anything wrong until the regression started." (Participant 4)

Another parent reflects on how this journey toward acceptance broadened their perspective, making them more open to diversity and difference: *"You just become more accepting of diversity. You know, Allah has made you in diverse races, colours, and*

things mentioned in the Quran. But from there is a learning, you see that now more." (Participant 5).

5.3.2 Deepening religious commitment

For many parents, developing *Tawakkul,* and going through the emotional journey of acceptance are not just ways to cope, they fundamentally reshaped their faith. As they learned to let go of control, place their trust in Allah, and accept their child's SEND, many found themselves becoming more committed to their religion. Over time, this spiritual transformation led them closer to Allah. Some parents expressed how their children became catalysts for their religious growth, acting as reminders of faith in their daily lives:

"Definitely, 100% this journey has brought me closer to my religion...She's seen me pray so she prompts me. She's a gift from Allah for me. She reminds me to pray. She gets excited and says can I pray today? (Participant 7)

"I tell my husband he was sent to put us on the right track. I have turned to Allah more after him, after my son. I do believe that my children are the greatest motivator. I mean, if I'm not doing it, how can I pass it on? Right?" (Participant 1)

"My reliance on Allah has grown, I think. And not only, I mean, I used to be into reading Quran or Salah or going into Taraweeh prayers and other things, but that emotional maturity and development and reliance on Allah wasn't coming until this hardship came in a way. So, you can see he's definitely a blessing in my life."

(Participant 5)

The following quote is from a father highlighting how faith became more than a set of practices, it shaped how he viewed life itself. The shift from material aspirations to spiritual priorities demonstrates how *Tawakkul* encourages Muslims to trust in Allah's plan rather than just focusing on worldly achievements. The child's diagnosis, while initially challenging, ultimately became the reason he reassessed his values and placed greater emphasis on religion:

"We were practising beforehand as soon as we got married, but this has probably made us a bit more better practising Muslims today than we were maybe 10 years ago…Our thoughts and aspirations at that time may not have all necessarily been guided by the religion, irrespective of us praying. But now I would say, obviously, we still have aspirations and dreams that are material, but we are most definitely more spiritual… So, that's how I would say we became better Muslims or had more focus on the religion." (Participant 2)

For others, faith deepened in moments of desperation. This mother openly acknowledges the human tendency to turn to Allah in moments of hopelessness, particularly through *Tahajjud* (voluntary night prayer), while also recognising the inconsistency of this reliance during happier times:

"And it's like, I'm not saying I'm a horrible Muslim. But, you know, when, when I really want something and I stand in Tahajjud, I think, Allah's giving us the opportunity. We don't have to do Tahajjud every night. But look, we're so selfish that when we are at breaking point, we're up here in the middle of the night, and Allah is listening. And it's got me through so many things, so many, so many things." (Participant 4)

Here, the mother reveals how driven by a crisis religious practise can sometimes be when people feel powerless. In the context of raising a child with SEND, parents often experience moments of overwhelming uncertainty, prompting them to seek Allah. The mother emphasises how frequently this reliance on Allah has provided comfort and strength. However, the mother also offers critique on her own pattern of seeking Allah only in times of hardship, calling it *"selfish"*. This suggests a level of self-awareness and spiritual growth, as she reflects on coming to the realisation that faith and seeking Allah should not only be reactive, but consistent.

5.4 Theme 3: When faith fuels strength

The next theme explores how parents draw on their religious beliefs and practices to help them navigate the challenges of raising a child with SEND. Faith is not just a source of comfort but an active mechanism that drives their resilience. The two sub-themes, 'Acts of worship' and There's power in perspective', illustrate the ways in which parents use faith as both a coping mechanism and a way to reframe their struggles through religious teachings and stories.

5.4.1 Acts of worship

Acts of worship, whether through dua (supplication by talking directly to God), *Salah* (form prayer)*,* or *umrah and hajj* (Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca), become essential tools for offering strength. Through actively practising their religion, parents find strength in difficult moments. When faced with overwhelming moments, whether due to their child's distress, their own exhaustion, or the unpredictability of SEND, many parents turn to religious acts of worship for emotional relief.

One mother describes how dua became a source of emotional release and strength during particularly difficult times. Rather than asking for the situation to change, this mother prays for inner strength, patience, and resilience. Her faith allowed her to frame her struggles as opportunities for personal growth: *"I used to break down, lots of tears, being very sad and upset. But I remember with all that just saying, 'Please God, just give me the strength to better myself, have more patience and work on him.'"* (Participant 3).

Religious routines, particularly *Salah* offer parents a structure and stability during the unpredictability of life. The structured nature of *Salah* provides moments of stillness and reflection. One mother describes how committing to *Salah* creates a better sense of emotional balance. Here, *Salah* is more than an Islamic obligation, it becomes a stabilising force in her life, making daily life feel more manageable, whilst a father describes how *Salah* is not just a routine but a means of seeking clarity and guidance:

"I don't know how to do this, or this is not working, and then coming down, going to pray and then asking Allah for guidance. I need Allah's hands in this." (Participant 3)

"You understand that you will have a better day if you have your routine of, you know, praying all your Salah's and doing your extra things." (Participant 2)

For some parents, religious pilgrimages like *Umrah* or *Hajj* become defining moments that change their perspective on hardship. These moments provide clarity and a renewed sense of purpose, reinforcing their belief that Allah's wisdom extends beyond

what is obvious or visible. One mother described how being reminded to make dua for herself during *Umrah* helped her realise the benefit of praying for her own well-being, not just for her children:

"I used to beat myself up a lot… But this Umrah made a huge difference to me…I met a really lovely sister, and she said, 'You're constantly making dua for your children. But have you ever made dua for yourself?' And when I was in Umrah, I thought, 'Oh my gosh, Allah, just give me the strength.' Because I know when I'm a mess, those days are more difficult for my kids. And, and I know people say it constantly. 'Look after yourself'…. But what does that look like? But I made a dua to help me through the anxiety and I've seen Allah has already granted me that because since I got back like I said, first time in eight years, I went out a couple of weeks ago with some friends for dinner." (Participant 4)

Similarly, another mother describes how *Umrah* helped her let go of expectations and surrender to Allah's timeline. The parent reinforces the idea that faith does not remove struggles but provides the patience to cope with them:

"I've been to Umrah…I said,' Insha'Allah, one day she would go around the Kaaba by herself'. And then I thought, it doesn't have to be now. It could be 30 years from now. But Allah is going to make it happen." (Participant 7)

While many parents turn to dua to ask Allah to change their circumstances, over time, it becomes a means of submitting to Allah. This shift from control to trust is a key part of how worship helps parents cope and allows them to develop Tawakkul. One father

reflects on this transformation, moving from asking Allah for specific outcomes to fully trusting His decisions. This represents the purest form of Tawakkul, where dua moves beyond just expectation and into complete submission to Allah's plan:

"Maybe I'm asking for something that Allah doesn't want me to have. When I pray, I don't ask for things to be done a certain way… What I pray to Him is like, 'Do what's best for him, whatever You decide is best for him." (Participant 8)

One mother uses a Prophetic saying to reframe her struggles as opportunities for something greater. The mother moves from seeing her child's condition as a limitation to viewing it as a pathway to spiritual growth and an opportunity to gain Allah's approval:

"There is one dua which made me really connect with Allah… Um Salama's dua: 'Allah, give me better than what I have lost.' That's beautiful. What if I've lost not being able to raise my child without this diagnosis? Allah can give me something better. And what could be better than Allah's pleasure?" (Participant 5)

5.4.2 There's power in perspective

For many parents raising a child with SEND, strength is not just about endurance, it is about perspective. Religion offers them a way to reframe challenges, shifting their focus from what is lacking to the blessings they have. Rather than seeing their struggles as unique or isolating, they draw strength from the concept of gratitude, religious narratives, and the understanding that caregiving, like all aspects of life, comes with challenges.

One of the most profound ways parents shift their perspective is by focusing on being grateful. Instead of longing for what others have, they find reassurance in the Islamic teaching of looking to those who are struggling more, to encourage humility and contentment. These parents reflect on how gratitude is not always automatic; it is a mindset that requires conscious effort. By internalising this perspective from the *Hadith* about looking at those who have less, parents find resilience in knowing that even amidst difficulty, there is still much to be thankful for:

"You know that Hadith when someone says you should always look at those who have it worse than you? People like to look up to those who have more and say, 'Oh my gosh, I want what they have.' But why aren't we looking at the people who are having a harder time than us?" (Participant 4)

"You can see that you say, 'Oh Alhamdulillah, we're not in that situation.' So you get a source of strength from that as well. As Muslims, you're told to be grateful because there are always people worse off. That was something that we had to drum into our heads over time." (Participant 2)

This mother reflects on how the ongoing displacement and humanitarian crisis in Palestine serves as a reminder of the universal strength and hope that Islam provides:

"But obviously with everything going on in Palestine, I always think how I'm looking at these horrible images, and it could really and truly be anyone. War could break out anywhere. And the faith that they have, you know, is constantly reminding me."

(Participant 4)

Parents shared the realisation that challenges are an inevitable part of life. Islam helps them understand that everyone faces struggles, just in different forms. One mother reflected on how every stage of life comes with its own challenges, not just raising a child with SEND:

"Yes, it's challenging, but what in life is not challenging? I mean, when I see neurodiverse kids, or even neurotypical kids who have other problems…a child breaking the house because they want their way, or a child who is 13 or 14 and not praying. I feel sad for them. Look at the challenge that they have." (Participant 3)

By acknowledging that no parent has a struggle-free experience, parents reframe their situation not as a burden, but as just another inevitable challenge in life. Similarly, a father emphasised that nobody is given a perfect life:

"Allah gives you certain things but also takes away certain things. Nobody is born with 100% of their full potential. Every person has some limitations, some behavioural issues, or something they are not good at, but some elements that they are very good at. So, if you come from this perspective and say like, OK, what is it that I have that is different from others and what is it that I don't have that others have? Now what you see is majority of the people will have certain types of skills, but there are few special people who will have very different set of skills than you. But that doesn't make them ill. It makes them different." (Participant 8)

This perspective challenges societal ideas of normality, allowing parents to accept their child's condition without seeing it as a loss. Instead, they focus on their child's unique strengths, reinforcing the belief that every individual is intentionally created with a purpose.

Parents found strength and resilience in the struggles faced by the prophets and historical Islamic figures. These stories served as reminders that hardship has always been a part of life. One mother described how learning about the struggles of the prophets and women in Islam helped her reframe her own experiences. In the quote, the mother is reflecting on the story of Hajar as she performs a part of Umrah, walking between the mountains Safa and Marwa. According to Islamic teachings, a Prophet had to leave his wife and their infant son, in the barren desert of Mecca at Allah's command. As the baby cried from thirst, the mother ran desperately between the mountains of Safa and Marwa searching for water. Her firm trust in Allah was rewarded when Allah sent Angel Gabriel, who caused the Zamzam well to spring, resulting in their survival. Today, Muslims credit her struggle by performing the walk between the two mountains during Hajj and Umrah as a way of honouring her strength and trust in Allah. This reflection on this story reshaped this mother's perspective, helping her find strength and meaning in her own challenges:

"It's not just my faith in God. It's my faith in the stories from back in the day…the Prophets, the strong women in Islam. They didn't have a child with autism, but they went through far worse than I did. These things constantly remind me that I can handle this…When I was in Umrah and I'm doing the Safa and Marwa and I'm thinking, 'Oh my gosh, like as a mom, this is my test. But what about her test? … You've got A/C

and the flooring is marble. And you're walking between Safa & Marwah… And I find

myself reading the story of Safa and Marwa, thinking, 'Oh my God, we're never

actually going to get how she felt.' Because yeah, we're walking barefoot and stuff like

that…but can you imagine her running back and forth with her child? And we're

worried about how cold we're going to get?' Like, it's so silly. Life is so surreal, but to

think about humans going through these things." (Participant 4)

Beyond specific religious stories, parents also actively seek religious knowledge and guidance to help them through difficult times. They listen to lectures and attend Islamic classes and find comfort in connecting with their religion. These mothers describe how listening to Islamic talks and lectures gave them reassurance, and how religious learning kept them grounded and connected to their faith:

"I listen to a lot of talks by certain sheikhs. And then there comes this moment where

you have to, have to have complete faith in Allah. If He has chosen this for him, He will

ensure he's taken care of." (Participant 1)

"I don't call myself a student of knowledge or anything, but I have an attachment to

Islamic classes. I like learning…even if it's just a line, even if it's a short word about

Islam that connects me to my Rab, my Lord." (Participant 5)

5.5 Theme 4: Finding meaning in hardship

This theme explores how, rather than seeing hardship as suffering without a purpose, Muslim parents view it as a test from Allah that strengthens their connection to Him. Their struggles are not endured in vain but are opportunities for spiritual elevation and

a path toward *Jannah* (paradise). The two sub-themes; 'Test worth bearing' and 'Eyes on the afterlife' demonstrate how religion helps parents assign meaning to their challenges, both in this life and in preparation for the next. Parents view their hardships as divinely ordained tests, believing that patience will lead to spiritual reward. Parents find peace in the belief that their child is guaranteed *Jannah*, and that their own struggles are a means to earn Allah's happiness and eternal reward.

5.5.1 A test worth bearing

For many Muslim parents, raising a child with SEND is seen as a test that holds purpose and the promise of spiritual reward. Within this perspective, challenges are not just obstacles to endure, but intentional trials from Allah that ultimately serve to strengthen our faith. Parents find comfort in the belief that their sacrifices will never go unnoticed by Allah, strengthening their sense of purpose and perseverance in parenting. These parents reflect on how this perspective helps them cope with uncertainty. For some parents, the idea of hardship as a test also means shifting their mindset from seeing difficulty as a punishment to recognising its hidden blessings:

"I think when those tough times come around, for me, it was just like, oh, Allah is testing me. I have to be strong. I have to have patience. And my reward is with Allah. No matter what happens, it is the will of Allah. We plan, we have these thoughts and ideas, but at the end of the day, it is all Allah. Whatever happens, whether that's good or bad, I accept it as a Muslim, and it is for the betterment of me, whether I know it now or not." (Participant 6)

"It isn't a test for the child, it's for me. My understanding from the deen (religion) is that it's not the disabled person being tested, it's the people around them who are being tested." (Participant 7)

"If I didn't believe that I was being tested, that there's a bigger picture, then I wouldn't see my boy as a blessing from God". (Participant 4)

"I think he was just a mini test for me. Now reflecting back, maybe it's good that I experienced that hurt. Maybe, probably, I made dua for him, and this was the answer to my dua." (Participant 5)

Another belief that helps parents cope with the weight of parenting a child with SEND is the conviction that no act of sacrifice goes unnoticed by Allah. By mentioning Allah's names, *Rahman* (The most merciful) and *Rahim* (The most compassionate), this mother draws on the belief of Allah's infinite kindness, trusting that He acknowledges their efforts and will reward them accordingly. This mindset allows the mother to view her exhaustion as having a sense of purpose:

"The difficulties I have in the nights, when I wake up with her… I have to turn her in the night because she doesn't turn. I don't get much sleep, and I'm thinking, 'Allah is going to reward me for this.' He's not going to, to say this has gone unwasted because Allah is Rahman and Rahim. This is what helps me cope now. This is, it's what keeps me going… She's a gift from Allah. And all this time that I'm spending looking after her, Allah will reward me for it… Allah doesn't benefit, but we do. He will reward us for it."

(Participant 7)

5.5.2 Eyes on the afterlife

For many parents, their ultimate motivation and source of comfort comes from the belief and longing for *Jannah* (paradise), both for themselves and their child. In Islamic teachings, individuals who are unable to fully comprehend religious obligations are not held accountable for them, and many parents take solace in the belief that their child is guaranteed a place in *Jannah*. This perspective allows them to reframe their struggles, seeing them not as burdens but as a means of acquiring their own place in the *Jannah*. Rather than dwelling on what their child may not achieve in this world, these parents shift their focus to the afterlife, where they believe eternal reward awaits. Many parents view their child's SEND as a unique path to *Jannah*, both for the child and for themselves:

"Allah knows best, but you know, I tell this to my daughter, that he is, he is your path to Jannah. Treat him well...He's what we call a 'Janati boy,' right? He's pure." (Participant 1)

"So, for me, it was like Allah has blessed me with a child of Jannah and he's my means of attaining Jannah." (Participant 6)

This belief reinforces that acts of patience and service towards a child with SEND are not just necessary responsibilities, but sacred opportunities to gain paradise.

One of the mothers also went onto describe how her belief in Jannah helped her detach from material concerns, allowing her to focus on the bigger spiritual picture:

"I've reached that Zen level. You have to focus on the purpose…You are at peace because you're not focusing on this world and what's happening in this world. What am I going to achieve? Where do I go? How many cars, how many clothes. You focus on why we are here and the afterlife. Then everything just loses its significance."

(Participant 1)

One mother shared a deeply emotional moment from her *Umrah* (Islamic pilgrimage) journey. In this moment, the mother is overwhelmed by the contrast between her expectations of how Umrah should feel and the reality of her child not fully comprehending it. However, her faith helps her reframe:

"My husband again is so good at reminding me that these children are a blessing from Allah…For example, when I went to Umrah, and I was on the plane and all these gorgeous, tiny little children in their…their clothing. And my son was there. And we can't travel without his iPad. And he's in his DKNY jumper… And I'm in floods and floods of tears, and my husband's looking at me asking; 'Why are you crying? We're going to Umrah?' I was like, I know, but my son will never get it. You know. May Allah accept our Umrah. We've done this amazing thing. But he's never going to understand where he's been, or you know exactly what we're doing. But like the opportunity to just come here. I never thought I'd be able to take my son on a plane all the way to Mecca to do this unbelievable thing, this surreal, unbelievable situation that we're in and I'm there and I'm crying and I'm crying and I'm there and I'm looking at all these, these beautiful families and children, thinking, you know, he's never going get it." (Participant 4)

"…And my husband says to me… these are children of God. You're worried he's never going to get it here in the Dunya. But he's got his place. He's going to be in Jannah. He's going to be there and he's going to say, 'Where's Mum?' Remember everything you put up with and every time you tried." (Participant 4)

Whilst grieving what her child may not experience in this life, she is reminded that he is guaranteed a place in *Jannah*. The phrase *"he's going to say, 'Where's Mum?'"* emphasises the belief that every sacrifice and hardship endured for the sake of motherhood will lead to reward in the afterlife.

Some parents emphasised that earning a place in *Jannah* exceeds any worldly goals or successes. This mother rejects the idea that neurotypicality is the ultimate standard of success, instead focusing on whether a child's life pleases Allah. The idea that *Jannah* is the true goal helps her let go of comparisons and societal pressures, shifting her focus to spiritual fulfilment instead:

"Those people who don't have ASD, is their life happy? Is that how we should describe that they are successful in Allah's eyes? It matters if my child goes to Jannah or not. It doesn't matter what condition he has. If he was blind, if he has a hearing problem, or if he has autism, non-autism, is he pleasing Allah? So, his condition isn't going to define him. My goal for him is to go to Jannah and get Allah's pleasure. So why should I worry? So that helps me to keep me on track sometimes. 'Cause, yes, I feel sad. Many things are just so challenging about him, and I feel like I wish, you know, he's different, or he didn't have that. But I think that's any mother. A non-autistic mother, they won't

want many traits in their children either. So, these thoughts kind of calm me down."

(Participant 5)

5.6 Theme 5: The role of the community

For Muslim parents raising a child with SEND, the religious community can be a source of strength but also can be experienced as unsupportive or challenging. While religious support networks offer comfort and solidarity, misunderstanding and stigma within the family and wider community can lead to isolation and frustration. The first sub-theme, 'What's brought us together is that we are Muslim', highlights the power of faith focused support. The second sub-theme, 'The weight of community misunderstanding', captures the challenges of the lack of knowledge and misinformation within some families and communities. Some parents experience judgment, misplaced pity, or cultural beliefs that frame SEND as something to be hidden or cured. These sub-themes highlight the varied role of community in shaping parental experiences. While support rooted in religion provides a powerful source of strength, a lack of understanding within the wider Muslim community can add unnecessary burdens.

5.6.1 'What's brought us together is that we are Muslim'

For many parents raising a child with SEND, family and religious communities become essential pillars of support. While the journey can feel isolating, connecting with others who share similar experiences helps parents find comfort. Whether through text messaging groups, structured support circles, or simple reminders from fellow Muslims, these networks play a critical role in helping parents navigate the emotional and practical challenges of caring for a child with SEND.

In Islam, sisterhood is not just about family ties, it is about the spiritual connection that binds Muslim women together. It's common for Muslims to call each other 'brother' and 'sister', a reflection of the deep sense of unity, brotherhood and sisterhood within what Muslims call the '*Ummah*' (the global community of Muslims). This sisterhood is especially powerful for mothers raising children with SEND, as they draw strength from each other through shared experiences:

"People are sending reminders in group chats that are not specifically for me, but then I can relate. And I think, it's not just me, you know, and it's just reminding me that it's not all sadness. No, it's not all difficulty. And we are all here for each other…I know I can turn to a group chat and ask something to 30 sisters. I don't actually know them, but what's brought us together is that we are Muslim. We have the same faith, and we believe that these children, our babies, they are special. They're only given to us for a short period of time." (Participant 4)

The experiences reflected in the quote above highlights how sisterhood in Islam provides a support system that transcends personal relationships. Even in virtual spaces, where women may not personally know one another, their shared faith unites them, creating a safe and uplifting space where they can seek guidance and support. Similarly, one mother reflected on how sharing her own journey helped other mothers reframe their experiences positively:

"Me sharing my stories and encouraging others… I remember one day I was in Halaqa, and one mother was worried about her child. And I said, 'Remember, Allah

loves your child more than you do.' And that came from my own learning, so you know, in a way, you can see that my son is a blessing to the community. And I think he will do a lot for Islam as well Insha'Allah." (Participant 5)

The mother from the quote above had previously mentioned that, even before her child was born, she had been making dua that he would be a blessing to the Muslim community. When he was later diagnosed with SEND, she initially wondered whether this dua would be answered in the way she had envisioned. However, over time, she came to realise that her prayer was being fulfilled not in the way she had expected, but in a way that carried even deeper meaning. In the quote, she highlights that her child is still a blessing to the community, not only through his own presence but through the way being it has shaped her ability to support and offer support for other Muslim mothers facing similar challenges.

One mother spoke extensively about the lack of structured support for Muslim families of children with SEND. She initially struggled to find spaces that catered to both her child's needs and her faith:

"I think as well another thing that I, kind of, throughout my journey within the last three years, I felt that there wasn't much support groups out there for Muslim mums. So, in terms of, even within a masjid. There were a few masjids where they had stay and play sessions, I went to general children centre stay and plays and I went to a few masjids where they had stay and plays. But I didn't find anything that really catered for children that have additional needs. So that was something that I kind of have been looking at. But Alhamdulillah, I think within the last year or so, I I feel there's a lot more

now coming out slowly but surely. But within my locality, I didn't really find anything."

(Participant 6)

Recognising this gap, she set up her own local support group with the mosque, offering a space where Muslim mothers could come together, share experiences, and receive both practical and religious support. The significance of sharing religious beliefs meant that the mothers could hold space for each other in a unique and meaningful way, which couldn't be created by other support groups that didn't have the foundational Islamic element:

"But then we had one new mom who I hadn't met before and she came to the group and she it was like, you know, she's been holding everything in for so long and being so strong. And then when she came to this group, she just let everything out. And she just, the whole time we were there, she was just offloading and talking and all her concerns where she was just letting it all out. And even though within my first session it was only that one new mum who attended, I felt like that that mattered still. I felt like that mum needed this space to come because at home, when you're caring for a child, especially like her, her child has autism. I feel, you have a lot more, your circumstances at home and just generally I feel is a lot more of a struggle if you don't have the correct support. So, I think when she came to this group, the way I saw it was that she, at home, she's managing everything, she's getting on with her day-to-day. Being a mom and being a carer and making sure her child's OK and dealing with what she has to. But then when she came to this group, she just had to let it all out."

(Participant 6)

Beyond emotional relief, these spaces also serve as reminders of Islamic teachings on patience and reward. The same mother explained why she chose to hold her group meetings in the mosque:

"I think the reason why I wanted this space is just to give these Muslim mums a chance to, just bring them back to why they were put in this situation and just remind them about what Islam says about it and that's why I hold it in the Masjid. My local masjid have been brilliant to give me this space free of charge and, you know, use the space to hold these meetings. I think that's the reason why I held it in the Masjid as well. Just to remind them that, Yes, it's tough. It's hard to be a mom who's caring for your child, but Allah chose us for this, and this is our test. And just to remind them that, the struggle is there, but inshallah the reward will be greater". (Participant 6)

This highlights the importance of religiously tailored support spaces. While support may exist, they do not always accommodate the unique religious and spiritual needs of Muslim families.

5.6.2 The weight of community misunderstanding

One of the challenges Muslim parents of children with SEND face is the lack of understanding within their families and communities. Many parents express frustration at the way people around them sometimes fail to grasp the nature of their child's condition, often leading to misconceptions and judgment. This leads parents to feel frustrated with the misunderstanding and assumptions made, as well as the pity directed at them by some:

"Lack of education, lack of knowledge. Not knowing what it is about and appreciating that look, it's a condition and this is what I say. It's not a disease…this is not a mental illness" (Participant 8)

"They think that an autistic child is nonverbal, with lots of behavioural issues and lots of, like let's say, hand flapping, lots of different sorts of like coping or stems or ticks and things like this. My child is not always showing these signs…It's a lack of understanding because they don't understand that it's a spectrum. That your child may appear very, very normal or neurotypical." (Participant 3)

This mother went onto share the struggle with convincing the wider family that the child was different, with some family members assuming it's due to poor parenting. *"Until recently, my own twin sister did not and still doesn't fully believe me. She honestly says, no, just poor parenting…he's spoiled"* (Participant 3).

Many parents learnt to set boundaries to protect themselves and their child from unsupportive or dismissive attitudes, whilst some parents actively try to educate their families and communities, they recognise that more needs to be done:

"You need to go back and educate yourselves first and break down that information for their understanding and educate your children." (Participant 7)

"There are a few who just don't get it, so I don't bother with them. I have learned now…you have to build this barrier." (Participant 1)

"This is the fundamental thing that the society, especially our people, the Muslim community, needs to understand…An individual that is unique, that is different to the crowd." (Participant 8)

One of the key frustrations one mother shared is how religious language is sometimes used to frame SEND as something unfortunate that should be prayed away or fixed:

"It's a lot of the times, unfortunately, it's 'Ohh Insha'Allah he will be better soon. Oh, may Allah make him better for you'. You know, like the words. It's like, when you wish someone well because they have an illness." (Participant 3).

The mother highlights how well-intentioned but misguided expressions of pity often impact the way people speak about SEND. By positioning SEND as something temporary that needs healing, these comments fail to acknowledge neurodiversity as a valid, natural state of being chosen by Allah. This mother goes onto describe feeling responsible for managing the emotions of others who react with sadness or shock upon learning about their child's diagnosis:

"I try most of the times to reassure them about our situation as much as I don't want to feel their sadness, so I try to provide reassurance to them that we are really OK and then remind them that Allah's with us all the time and we have been blessed and Alhamdulillah we are really well." (Participant 3)

The mother then shared an instance where a community member reacted so strongly to the child's diagnosis that they shed tears:

"I have seen people shed tears over his diagnosis. You know, like, honestly, I'm not kidding… We went to (Origin country)…And I will not forget that Lady. She came to

our house, and she wanted to meet me, and then… she was so upset that she got herself into tears that we are calling him autistic." (Participant 3)

One mother made an active effort to reject pity and instead frame her child's condition as a source of joy and blessing. The parents took control of the narrative surrounding their child's diagnosis, ensuring that the people around them focused on the positives rather than offering pity or feeling sadness:

"We didn't want anybody to feel pity or feel or bring any negativity around us, so we had kind of drafted a message, for what we wanted around us and what we saw in our child...Our child is our blessing, and Allah chose us to bless us to be his parents and we wanted to celebrate his arrival and not be shown any pity or to be told. Oh, we're sorry to hear he has this, because him having Down syndrome isn't something to be sorry about." (Participant 6)

Some parents describe a shift in their mindset. They come to accept that others may never fully understand their child's experiences and, rather than feeling frustrated, they choose to let go of external expectations and focus on their child's well-being. A key aspect of this acceptance is recognising that many people simply do not have the lived experience to truly understand SEND. Some parents no longer take offense at people's lack of knowledge because they realise that unless someone is personally affected by SEND, they are unlikely to understand:

"In terms of like relationship as well. Thing is, I'm quite a private person. And I'm very much about, we'll just crack on. You know what I mean?" (Participant 2)

"I have my Allah. He's enough for me. I don't need them to do this...I feel like sometimes I need to share, but then I'm thinking, hey, you don't need their help, you need Allah's help (Participant 5)

"Now I Just smile, because they're on their own journey isn't it. Because I used to get offended, it used to really frustrate me, but now I just smile. It's because the understanding is, it's just not there, and you know they can't be actively looking into this because they're not affected by it daily. No, I don't. I don't expect them to know it, to be honest." (Participant 7)

5.7 Theme 6: Religious identity in children with SEND

For Muslim parents raising children with SEND, religious identity remains a fundamental part of their child's upbringing, even when they believe their child may not be held accountable in the same way as others. Many parents emphasise that being Muslim is a core part of who their child is, regardless of their condition. They do not view religion as something that should be set aside due to SEND, instead, they see it as a fundamental aspect of their child's identity that should be nurtured. These parents demonstrate a deep commitment to ensuring that their children engage with Islamic practices and beliefs in ways that suit their abilities:

"And it's no different when you have a SEND child. He's still our baby, and faith is going to be a part of him. And our beliefs are going to be a part of him." (Participant 4)

"He knows we are Muslim, he knows Mama can't be seen in public without the hijab…

he knows we are Muslim, and we have halal, and we have haram." (Participant 3)

Parents recognise that traditional methods of teaching Islamic practices may not always work for their child. Instead, they find creative and inclusive ways to introduce religious concepts, ensuring that faith remains accessible rather than overwhelming. This mother offers an example of this: *"So, she said 'I want my own Quran' so I'm thinking, so I can get some the pages of the Quran and have them blown up to a bigger size, have them laminated, make like a folder"* (Participant 7).

Another mother adapts the natural tendencies of her child to reinforce Islamic learning. Instead of seeing Echolalia as a barrier, they use it as a tool to introduce religious phrases and dua: *"I've come a long way like he has Echolalia, so he'll repeat what we repeat. So, you know, he'll say his night-time dua with me. Things I never thought he'd do"* (Participant 4).

Another mother describes how her child's curious nature and interest in languages led to a deeper engagement with Arabic and Islamic teachings: *"He was very interested in languages. So that's how he got into Arabic… He was interested in knowing life and what happens after…So it got easier, and he used to ask such questions"* (Participant 1).

One mother describes that even if the child is not fully participating in prayer, they are still involved in a way that considers their abilities: *"We are still working on it. But he*

*knows Mama's praying and he will say, you know, he will be quiet and sometimes he
will come and be in a sitting position rather than standing next to me"* (Participant 3).

Some parents acknowledge that their child may not be held accountable for practicing
in the same way as others, yet they still feel a responsibility to introduce Islamic
teachings:

*"I wanted to change that misconception that because (child) has complex medical
conditions, she can't still follow the deen…Allah is merciful and kind. He's not going to
punish her for not praying because that's between her and her Lord. But it doesn't
mean that I can't equip her with the understanding of it."* (Participant 7)

5.8 Theme 7: Integrating faith

These theme highlights that religious practises and seeking support are not seen as
opposing forces, but as interconnected elements of healing. Parents view both as tools
provided by Allah, with religion being an emotional anchor that guides them through the
uncertainties of their child's condition. One father shared that he rejects the idea that
they must choose between religion and science. Instead, he emphasises that both can
work together harmoniously:

*"We can do both. We can do both. It doesn't have to be a rejection of one over the
other. It can. It can be both, and whichever one works, works. And it could be that they
both work together."* (Participant 2)

He goes onto give examples of how Islamic healing can be integrated into medical treatment. Rather than rejecting medical intervention, this father enhances it through religious practices, ensuring that religion remains an active part of their child's well-being. One of the ways he does this is by using *Zamzam* water, a water in Islam that is believed to hold spiritual and physical healing properties, whilst reading extracts from the Quran about healing:

"Because she can't take a capsule, so we dissolve it…Ever since she was prescribed it, the water, we mix it with Zamzam always. So, I'm always buying the five litre bottles to mix her medicine with the Zamzam. And now with the Zamzam, I'll try to then recite the Ayah's of Shafa over that water as well." (Participant 2)

Similarly, he shared that once he checked with the doctor, he incorporated *Sidar* honey and black seed oil, other forms of Islamic healing remedies, into his child's care:

"Again, we're Muslims, what do we do? We get the Sidar honey. So that's how I would say, like, I blend it with her. So, she has a normal medicine, and I'll mix those things because I have probably more belief in the Zamzam and the black seed than I do in the other thing." (Participant 2)

One mother describes how, in moments of uncertainty, she turns to spiritual practices rooted in Islamic tradition, such as *Ruqyah*. While in some Muslim cultures, *Ruqyah* is associated with the removal of jinn possession as mentioned above, in this context, the mother refers to it as the Islamically acceptable practice of reciting Quranic verses and supplications to seek protection*:*

"This is not working and then…going to pray and then asking Allah for guidance. And,

and then lots of Ruqyah as well. Lots of Zamzam, lots of Ruqyah." (Participant 3)

One mother reflected on the balance between relying on Allah and seeking support:

"And I just realised that I just need to run to Allah. I didn't realise this at that time. I just

thought like I have to go to all of these people. Yes. As a Muslim, we have to. We can't

just leave it on Allah completely. We have to tie the camel and then leave the rest. But

I couldn't balance it that time." (Participant 5)

In Islam, 'tie your camel and then put your trust in Allah' comes from a Hadith where the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught that *Tawakkul* does not mean passivity. Muslim's must still take action, while trusting Allah for the outcome. Muslim parents believe must trust in Allah's plan while also actively seeking the best possible care and support for their child. The parents highlighted that religion is not a separate aspect of life but deeply intertwined with how they understand and process their child's needs:

"It's really important for professionals to have some respect of their Muslim

background, the faith, to understand that some of the things we are not going to be

flexible on if we are practising Muslims." (Participant 3)

Another mother describes how this lack of sensitivity is particularly evident at the point of diagnosis, where medical professionals often approach SEND as a purely clinical issue, without considering its emotional and spiritual impact: *"The hardest part was I*

think the diagnosis, and I think there should be more sensitivity around people's faith in it rather than it just being a medical thing." (Participant 4).

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Chapter overview

The chapter draws together the key findings of the study and situates them within the wider academic and professional context. The purpose of the chapter is to interpret the findings in relation to the existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and the study's original research questions. It begins with a detailed commentary on the findings and explores how Muslim parents draw on their religion to understand their child's SEND, how religion serves as a source of resilience and support, and the role that family and community play in shaping parental experiences. The chapter then outlines the study's contribution to the field of Educational Psychology, supported by an introduction of a conceptual framework developed through this research. Implications are then considered at multiple levels. The chapter also presents a dissemination strategy for sharing findings with both professional and community audiences, followed by a reflexive account of the role of religion for me as the researcher throughout the research process. A critical appraisal of the study's strengths and limitations is provided, leading to suggestions for future research.

6.2 Commentary on the findings

6.2.1 How does religion influence the way Muslim parents perceive and understand the experiences and needs of their children with SEND?

6.2.1.1 Divinely selected and perfectly created

A central theme that emerged from this study was the belief that both the parent and child were selected for a greater spiritual purpose and that their child was intentionally created and bestowed on them by Allah. This belief offered parents a powerful lens for understanding their child's SEND as part of Allah's intentional and perfect design. This is consistent with Othman et al. (2022), who found that many parents perceived the care of a child with SEND as a God given duty. The belief that they were chosen resulted in seeing the parental role as honourable. These findings align closely with Bazna and Hatab's (2020) interpretation of disability in the Qur'an, which emphasises that all human differences, including physical and cognitive variation, are part of Allah's perfect creations. In this view, disability is not a mistake or punishment but a feature of human diversity. By internalising this Qur'anic view, parents saw their children as spiritually significant, and themselves as entrusted with a duty. This belief in divine selection also translated into action: parents often described themselves as advocates, recognising that their position required them to take up their caregiving role well. This reflects a key principle of the *Social Model of Disability* (Oliver, 1990), which holds that the problem is not located within the child, but within the barriers that society places around them. Parents in this study positioned themselves as active agents in dismantling those barriers, whether through seeking inclusive spaces, educating others, or speaking on behalf of their child. Their belief that Allah had entrusted them with this role strengthened their motivation to strive for excellence within their caregiving roles.

6.2.1.2 Trust and reliance in Allah

Tawakkul, or trust and reliance in Allah, guided how Muslim parents understood and brought meaning to life and hardship. Although not explicitly named by the participants, the concept of Tawakkul runs deeply through the findings. Parents acknowledged their child's needs and recognised the challenges it presented, yet they also maintained a firm belief that outcomes ultimately rest with Allah. These finding challenged simplistic binaries often found in the literature and professional practice, such as religious versus medical, or acceptance versus denial. Tawakkul emerged as a concept that supports responsible action without over-relying on personal control. Parents do not reject professional input or refuse to engage with medical advice, they interpreted those services through a spiritual lens that acknowledge both effort and Allah's input. This way of thinking reflects the two key forms of knowledge outlined in Islamic epistemology: revealed knowledge and derived knowledge. As described by Azram (2011), this recognises both sources as valid and interconnected. Parents' trust in Allah was shaped by revealed knowledge, while their use of services, integration of faith within healthcare, and understanding of their child's condition drew on derived knowledge. Rather than seeing religious beliefs as separate, these parents integrated them into their everyday life. Their approach offers a clear example of how Islamic ways of knowing are lived out in real decisions, and how both types of knowledge are used side by side in everyday caregiving for Muslim parents. When writing in the context of Hawaiian epistemologies, Berenstain et al. (2022) described the act of preserving Indigenous knowledge systems as a form of resistance, stating that *'knowledge reclamation is resistance work'* (p. 289). In viewing the world through this lens, parents play out a form of epistemic resistance (Medina, 2013, Berenstain et al., 2022), emphasising religious knowledge over Western psychological interpretations when those narratives feel

misaligned. These findings reinforce the study's broader epistemological position, that for Muslims, Islam offers a valid way of knowing.

6.2.1.3 Strengthening religious identify

A key insight from this study was the deepening of religious identity among Muslim parents, which unfolded alongside their caregiving journey. As parents faced demands of raising a child with SEND, many described how their trust and reliance in Allah grew stronger, prompting a more committed and intentional relationship with their faith. Some reflected that prior to their child's diagnosis, religious practices may have been routine, but through the trials of parenting, religion became internalised as a guiding influence. This spiritual transformation often emerged in moments of crisis, and through daily acts of reflection. Parents found that as their reliance on Allah deepened, as did their religious practices. This growing desire to strengthen their faith was not limited to the parent's own identify, it was actively extended to their children. Despite recognising that their child may not be held religiously accountable in the same way as others, parents were deeply invested in nurturing their child's Islamic identity. They did not see faith as conditional on understanding or performance but as a core part of who their child is. Religious identify was taught through daily routines, spiritual language, and adapted religious practices. This perspective reflects Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which asserts that belonging to a group provides individuals with a stable sense of self. For these parents, ensuring that their children felt part of the *Ummah* (the global Muslim community) was an essential part of ensuring inclusion. Ysseldyk et al. (2010) suggest that religious identity functions as a distinct form of social identity, offering individuals a sense of belonging, emotional grounding, and a framework for coping with life's challenges. In this way, religious identity

became both a stabilising force for parents and a tool for inclusion and empowerment for their children.

6.2.1.4 Experiential-contextual framework

The experiential-contextual framework (Heer et al., 2012) is particularly useful for understanding how Muslim parents in this study gave meaning to their child's SEND. Rather than interpreting disability solely through a medical or social lens, parents drew on religious concepts such to frame their experiences. Their understanding of disability was in the belief that their child's condition was intentional. This allowed parents to see themselves not as spiritually entrusted caregivers whose role had value in both this life and the hereafter. The strength of the experiential-contextual model lies in its recognition that meaning is constructed within layered cultural, religious, linguistic, and systemic contexts. The 'minority experience' component of the model reflects the ways in which Muslim families drew on Islamic teachings to resist negative views of SEND imposed by others.

6.2.2 In what way does religion function as a source of support and resilience for Muslim parents raising children with SEND?

6.2.2.1 A pathway to spiritual reward

A recurring theme across the findings was that many Muslim parents understood the hardship associated with raising a child with SEND as a test from Allah. They believed that this test carries deep spiritual meaning and long-term purpose, meaning it is also a blessing. They did not view these tests as a punishment, but instead, saw their challenges as intentional trials from Allah, designed to encourage patience and draw them closer to Allah. This belief helped them reframe emotional and physical exhaustion as spiritually meaningful, with the conviction that no sacrifice goes unnoticed. This finding echoes studies by Bonawitz (2013), Akbar (2019), and Fontaine (2021), which highlight how Muslim parents understood

their caregiving journey as a spiritual test given to them by Allah. In their accounts, the challenges associated with raising a child with SEND was framed as a religiously significant trial through which reward could be earned. Within this belief, a key insight is how parents framed their experiences in relation to the afterlife. The belief that children with SEND are guaranteed entry into *Jannah* (paradise), and that parents are spiritually rewarded for caring for a vulnerable child, provided a powerful long-term source of motivation. These frame parenting as more than a duty; it becomes an opportunity for reward and holds a spiritual purpose. This belief shifts focus away from worldly success goals and redefines caring for a child with SEND through the religious lens. This lens is one where success is measured by developing trust in Allah and patience so that one may receive the reward in the next life.

6.2.2.2 Religious Coping

Within psychology, religion is often treated as a secondary, private, and personal factor rather than something that significantly shapes well-being (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). The concept of *Tawakkul* not only supported parents with meaning making but provided them with ongoing trust in Allah that helped them cope. Although existing literature has touched on religion as a coping mechanism, the findings add depth by showing why religion is such a powerful resource, as it provides a deeper explanation for the purpose of hardship, making caregiving spiritually meaningful. Trusting that their child's SEND and life path were part of Allah's divine plan reduced feelings of worry and helplessness. This perspective helped parents develop resilience during uncertainty and gave them the emotional strength to continue caregiving even during overwhelming moments. For many, trusting in Allah allowed them to release the pressure of trying to control outcomes and instead focus on doing their best while relying on Allah's wisdom and timing. This trust was not limited to moments of crisis but was described as a steady, long-term mindset that carried parents through the daily demands of caregiving.

Parents in this study described religious practices as a key part of how they supported themselves emotionally and navigated daily life. Acts of worship such as prayer, reciting Qur'an, remembrance of Allah, and dua were used as obligatory practises of faith and as practical tools to maintain routine and provide stress regulation. For many, these practices provided a predictable routine within an otherwise unpredictable caregiving environment. Prayer created space to reflect and offered spiritual connection, especially when parents felt isolated during moments of hardship. This reflects and extends previous work by Shah (2010), Akbar (2019), and Othman et al. (2022), who identified prayer as a meaningful religious routine that enabled parents to draw strength from their religion.

These findings can be situated within Pargament's (1997) Theory of religious coping, which frames religion as a keyway people make sense of adversity. However, as noted in the introduction, this theory has been largely shaped by Western and Christian perspectives (Khan et al., 2012) and does not fully capture the theological depth or communal dimensions of Islamic coping. By exploring how Muslim parents engage in acts of worship, rely on the concept of divine tests, and use Qur'anic narratives to frame their experiences, this study extends religious coping theory in ways that centre Islamic understandings of patience and divine trust. It demonstrates how coping is not just emotional regulation, but a spiritual worldview that actively shapes meaning-making and day-to-day resilience.

6.2.3 In what ways do religious communities provide both support and challenges?

6.2.3.1 Misunderstanding and stigma

While religious communities offered support and strength to many parents, family and community members were sometimes a source of tension. These reactions were often rooted in limited understanding, or culturally rooted ideas about child development and disability. Despite this, most parents clearly differentiated between these explanations and Islamic teachings. These interactions reflect the microsystem level of the Ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), where immediate relationships with family play a direct role in shaping parental wellbeing. In addition to denial or misunderstanding, many participants described a subtler but equally harmful challenge, which was the use of religious language that was lined with pity. People would make comments with good intention, about the child being cured. Although they knew this was meant with no harm, the idea that their child needed fixing sat uncomfortably with the parents who had been on a long journey of acceptance. Parents described responding to this by setting boundaries with relatives or wider community members who were unsupportive. These decisions were often protective rather than confrontational or negative, with the focus that their trust in Allah was the priority. These findings echo research by Shah (2010) and Akbar (2019), who noted that culturally rooted beliefs and stigma often shaped community responses to SEND, particularly within Pakistani families. Similarly, Selman et al. (2018) found that Somali parents encountered a mix of support and misunderstanding within their communities.

6.2.3.2 Sources of strength through shared religious values

For many parents in this study, religious communities offered a powerful source of emotional support rooted in shared religious values. Parents described feeling uplifted and strengthened when surrounded by others who shared their belief that their child's condition

was part of Allah's divine will. Whether through group chats, *halaqas* (religious study circles), or support groups in mosques, mothers found strength in sisterhood. These spaces became a sanctuary where they did not have to explain their beliefs, and a place where sentiments like being chosen by Allah and seeing their child as a blessing revealed shared understandings rather than pity or judgment. In these moments, religion functioned not only as a personal resource, but as a collective scaffold that reinforced belonging and purpose. This sense of shared religious identity aligns with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which highlights the psychological significance of group membership and belonging. Being part of a religious 'ingroup' provided emotional support and reduced feelings of isolation, especially when some participants felt misunderstood by extended family. While previous studies such as Akbar (2019), Fontaine (2021), Gilligan (2013) and Olsen (2015) have acknowledged the benefit of religiously informed community support, this study adds new depth by bringing light to the spiritual specificity of that support. It was not just the presence of other parents of children with SEND that was meaningful, but the shared Islamic interpretation of SEND and hardship that made these relationships so powerful.

What these findings contribute is a more balanced depiction than much of the existing literature. While previous studies have identified stigma within Muslim communities, and others have highlighted the value of religious support, this study highlights the existence of both realities whilst acknowledging how religious beliefs mediate these experiences. It shows how support often depends on how well community members integrate religion with disability awareness. One area that did not feature in this study, but was highlighted in the existing literature, is the role of religious leaders in supporting families of children with SEND. Previous studies found mixed experiences. Bonawitz (2013) reported parental frustration at leaders offering only religious explanations without practical support, while Gilligan (2013) and Othman et al. (2022) highlighted the potential of training younger imams to raise

awareness and offer culturally and religiously sensitive guidance. Although this did not emerge in the current findings, it may represent an area for future research and a possible route for improving community awareness and support.

6.2.2.3 The wider picture

This study draws on the Intersectional-ecological model developed by Badran et al. (2023), which builds on the Ecological system's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and Crenshaw's (1989) theory of Intersectionality. It recognises that experiences of marginalisation are not the result of a single identity, but the interaction of multiple across several social positions. For Muslim parents raising children with SEND in the UK, this model provides a valuable lens for understanding how challenges arise not only at the individual or institutional level, but also within family and community spaces. The model allows us to see how families are positioned within systems of power and exclusion across the microsystem (home, mosque, school), exosystem (healthcare and education services), and macrosystem (national policy, Islamophobia, and ableism). These overlapping identity positions can create the concept of 'double jeopardy' (Blanchett et al., 2009), where families experience exclusion not only due to their minoritised religious and ethnic background, but also due to the additional barriers linked to disability. This means that Muslim families are not only navigating under-resourced systems but are also subject to their religious, ethnic and cultural identities being misunderstood (Khedr, 2006). In this study, Intersectionality is used not only to understand how systems of marginalisation intersect, but also how multiple identity positions, such as religion, ethnicity, gender, and disability, shape distinct ways of coping and meaning making. The findings do not focus solely on barriers, they illuminate how Muslim parents draw on overlapping aspects of their identity, such as religious beliefs, mothering roles and community ties, to construct strength and purpose in the face of adversity.

6.3 Returning to an Islamic worldview

I will now aim to bring this discussion full circle by grounding the findings back within the Islamic ontological framework that shaped this research from the outset. As outlined in the methodology chapter, I drew on Shaikh's (2023) model as a methodological guide for myself, and as a spiritual and ethical commitment to reflect the lived realities of Muslim families. What has become increasingly clear through the findings is that the parents in this study were themselves living and parenting through a distinctly Islamic ontological worldview, one that mirrors many of the same values and principles that shaped my own approach as a researcher. I will now be using Shaikh's (2023) Islamic ontological model once again to interpret the worldview of the parents in this study.

Their *God-consciousness* was evident in how they interpreted their child's condition through the lens of divine wisdom, intentional testing, and spiritual reward. Parents consistently described their child's SEND as part of Allah's intentional and perfect creation, which shaped their parenting role with meaning and religious grounding. Many expressed a clear *intention*, seeing their role not merely as caregivers but as spiritual advocates entrusted with a divine responsibility. Their pursuit of *excellence* came through in the ways they advocated for their children, resisted marginalisation, and remained deeply committed to their role despite the emotional and physical demands. Parents drew strength from *Prophetic leadership qualities,* frequently referencing stories of prophets to make sense of their own hardship. These were not distant historical accounts, but active tools of resilience that shaped their outlook. A sense of *justice and balance* was clear in how parents navigated stigma, protecting their children while also upholding harmony and unity within their families and communities. They also *honoured the Qur'an,* not just through belief, but by applying its teachings to make meaning of disability and reward in day-to-day life. These teachings actively shaped how they interpreted their child's identity and responded to misconceptions

around them. Parents further demonstrated *connection to revealed and instinctive knowledge,* by relying on prayer, inner conviction in their faith, and religious insight when making decisions. In times of uncertainty, many described how inner spiritual intuition and moments of clarity through prayer helped guide their actions and ease anxiety. There was a consistent theme of *remembrance and reflection*, seen in how parents described prayer, pilgrimage, and religious routines as emotional support. These religious practices were not passive but became deeply embodied actions that anchored them throughout their parenting journey. Parents also *honoured Muslim voices and knowledge* by rejecting negative interpretations of SEND and turning instead to religious-centred meanings. Lastly, Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) described 'relational ontology' as the concept that knowledge is not just constructed individually but through collective experiences. For the parents in this study, Islam was a relational framework grounded in their connection to Allah, to prophetic stories, to the Qur'an, and to each other as members of the *Ummah*. These findings affirm that Muslim parents raising children with SEND are not simply using religion as a coping mechanism; they are living through a rich Islamic worldview.

6.4 Contribution to the professional field

In drawing the findings together, a conceptual framework was developed to capture the interaction between religious beliefs, religious practices, and social contexts in shaping Muslim parents' understanding and navigation of SEND. This framework is grounded in a critical realist ontology, which holds that realities such as God, divine purpose, and SEND exist independently of human perception, but are interpreted through social, cultural, and religious experiences. It also draws on Islamic ontology and epistemology, recognising Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings as legitimate sources of knowledge, alongside experiential and reflective knowledge gained through lived realities. By centring an Islamic paradigm,

this framework challenges secular models of disability and meaning making, offering a decolonial and religious lens through which Muslim parental experiences can be understood (Sheikh, 2023). The framework is also informed by principles of Liberation Psychology (Martín-Baró, 1994), which calls for centring the knowledge systems and experiences of marginalised communities in psychological research and practice. By centring an Islamic worldview as an accepted epistemology, this study resists the secular, Eurocentric framings that dominate Educational Psychology and SEND research.

The framework also reflects the interconnectedness of religious beliefs, practices, and social contexts, illustrating how these elements do not operate in isolation but continuously shape and reinforce one another. Religious beliefs influence coping strategies, resilience, and meaning making, while practices such as *Salah* and *dua* deepen these beliefs and offer tangible tools for coping. At the same time, social contexts, such as communal support, stigma, or shared religious values, influence how beliefs are enacted and how coping is sustained. These processes are deeply interwoven, changes in one domain (e.g., strengthened faith through hardship) ripple across others (e.g., increased religious practice or reframing of stigma). The framework also highlights a bidirectional relationship between religion and SEND, whereby religious perspectives shape parents' interpretations of their child's needs, and experiences of raising a child with SEND can deepen, challenge, or refine religious understandings. Rather than a linear process, this model captures a dynamic, ongoing dialogue between religious identity and the lived realities of parenting a child with SEND. Please see appendix V for an initial sketching of conceptual framework.

Figure 4: The religious lens framework for understanding Muslim parenting and SEND
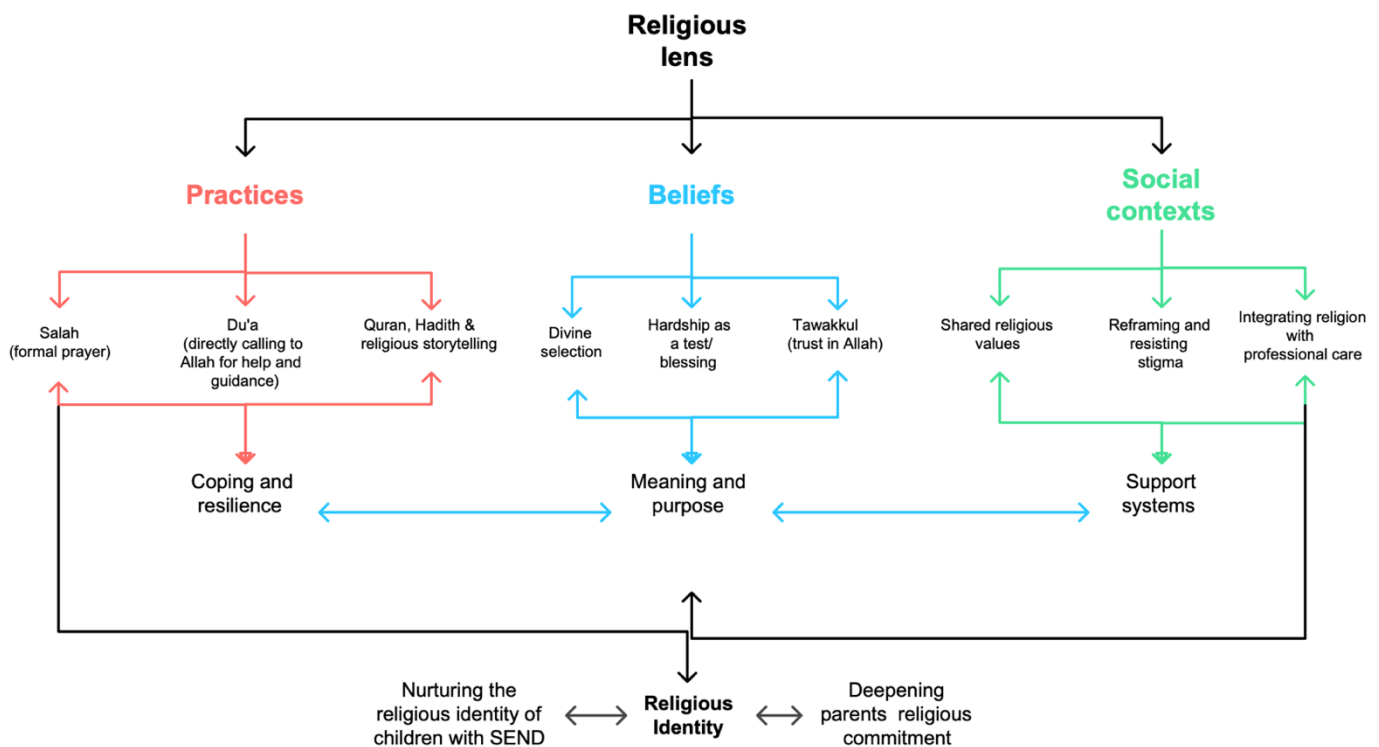
This conceptual framework illustrates how Muslim parents of children with SEND use a religious lens to bring meaning and navigate their parenting experiences. The religious lens functions much like a pair of glasses, shaping how parents interpret and act within their religious world view.

From this lens emerge these interconnected domains:

- **Beliefs:** How experiences are interpreted and the religious beliefs that underpin this.

- **Practices:** How religious actions provide coping and emotional regulation.

- **Social contexts:** How beliefs and practices are supported, challenged, or negotiated.

- **Religious identity**: running across all three domains is the central thread of religious identity, influencing, and being influenced by, the journey of raising a child with SEND.

6.4.1 Belief

At the heart of parents' meaning making are the Islamic beliefs that reframe their child's needs as a divinely intentional and purposeful plan. Several key beliefs emerge:

- **Divine selection:** Parents view their caregiving responsibility as spiritually meaningful acts of devotion and view themselves as advocates. Parents recognise their role as the parent of a child with SEND as a form of divine selection, believing they have been specially chosen by Allah for a unique and spiritually significant responsibility. Parents interpret their caregiving as an act of devotion and worship, seeing their efforts, struggles, and advocacy for their child as spiritually rewarded actions. This belief gives profound meaning to their experiences, transforming feelings of burden into feelings of purpose and closeness to Allah. It also strengthens their sense of agency and moral responsibility, motivating them to advocate for their child's needs within family, education, and social settings.

- **Hardship as a test/blessing:** Challenges are seen as opportunities for spiritual growth, *ajr* (reward), and entry into *Jannah* (paradise). Anything that brings Muslims closer to Allah is understood as a blessing. Muslim Parents often view children as a precious gift, and believe children with SEND possess a spiritual purity, protected from worldly corruption. These children are also seen as a source of goodness and mercy for their families and communities.

- **Tawakkul (trust in Allah):** Parents develop *Tawakkul* by placing their trust in Allah's wisdom, capabilities, timing, and plan. This reliance helps ease anxiety, offering emotional stability amid the uncertainties of raising a child with SEND. *Tawakkul* is not passive acceptance; rather, it encourages parents to actively seek support and pursue interventions while remaining grounded in the religious belief that Allah has full control. This sense of trust provides a deep source of hope and relief, allowing parents to find comfort and meaning even when challenges feel overwhelming, or outcomes are unclear.

6.4.2 Practice

Religion is not only a belief system but a set of embodied practices that Muslim parents actively draw upon to cope with the challenges of raising a child with SEND. The three central practices identified are *Salah*, *dua*, and engagement with Qur'an, Hadith, and religious storytelling. These are supplemented by acts of pilgrimage, remembrance of Allah and religious stories, and seeking religious knowledge, which together create a dynamic spiritual foundation for coping through religious practice.

- **Salah (prayer):** The structure of the five daily prayers provides emotional grounding and spiritual stability. In the face of exhaustion and unpredictability, *Salah* becomes more than a religious obligation, it offers a stabilising routine. This form of prayer is often described as creating a sense of clarity and offering moments of surrender to Allah's will.

- **Dua:** Dua is a form of prayer where Muslims directly call to Allah for help and guidance. The practise of talking directly to Allah acts as a personal and flexible way for Muslims to express their fears, hopes, and frustrations directly to Allah. Parents utilise *dua* to seek specific outcomes for their child, as well as seeking inner strength, patience and acceptance. The approach to *dua* reflects a deepening of *Tawakkul*, where parents call to Allah for guidance, whilst surrendering outcomes to Him.

- **Engagement with Qur'an, Hadith, and religious storytelling:** Religious texts and stories serve as critical scaffolds for reframing hardship and finding meaning. Parents draw strength from the struggles of the Prophets and historical figures, seeing their own challenges as part of a continuous tradition of practising and strengthening faith through adversity. Engagement with these stories provides moral guidance and nurtures patience. Alongside engagement with religious texts, many parents also actively seek religious knowledge through Islamic classes, finding reassurance and connection through ongoing religious education.

6.4.3 Social contexts

Religious beliefs mediate how parents interact with their social environments, including family relationships, community engagement, and professional systems. These social contexts shape both sources of support and areas of challenge. The key aspects include:

- **Shared religious values and religiously rooted support:** Families and communities that affirm Islamic teachings, such as divine wisdom, patience leading to reward, and trust in Allah, provide crucial emotional and spiritual support. Support spaces that are rooted in Islamic beliefs create a sense of belonging where shared belief strengthens resilience.

- **Reframing and resisting stigma**: While some parents find solidarity within the Muslim community, others encounter misunderstanding, stigma, and misplaced pity. Cultural beliefs sometimes frame SEND as an illness to be 'healed' or hidden, adding to emotional burdens. In response, many parents' religious perspectives help deepen their reliance on Allah and shift their focus from seeking human validation to prioritising Allah's approval, by using religion to emotionally shield themselves from negative community reactions.

- **Integrating religion with professional care:** Parents blend secular medical interventions with Islamic practices. They integrate both worlds rather than seeing them as opposed. Parents emphasise the need for professionals to respect their religious identity, acknowledging that faith is central to parenting.

6.4.4 Religious identity

Woven throughout all three domains is the evolving religious identity of both parents and children. Religious identity is not static; it is lived, negotiated, and reshaped through the ongoing realities of raising a child with SEND.

- **Parents' religious identity**: For many parents, the experience of raising a child with SEND deepens their religious engagement. Hardship encourages relying on Allah, emotional growth, and a reassessment of life priorities, leading to more spiritually focused and resilient values. Parents describe a shift from viewing religion as a set of practices to experiencing it as a vital emotional anchor.

- **Children's religious identity:** Parents intentionally nurture their children's religious identity, ensuring that Islamic teachings, practices, and belonging are accessible and meaningful, even though they will not be held religiously accountable. Religious education is adapted creatively and flexibly to meet each child's needs, rejecting the belief that SEND excludes a child from full participation in religious life. Through these efforts, parents affirm that religious identity is an inherent part of their child's being.

6.4.5 Links within the conceptual framework

- The religious lens forms the foundation of the framework, shaping how Muslim parents interpret, cope with, and navigate SEND. It structures meaning-making, daily practices, and resilience-building.

- Within practices, beliefs, and social contexts, internal arrows show how elements work together. Acts of worship nurture resilience, religious beliefs frame hardship, and social experiences shape available support, illustrating that no single belief or practice operates in isolation.

- The horizontal arrows reflect the mutual influence between all domains. Beliefs shape religious practices, which in turn affect social engagement, while social experiences feed back into religious understanding.

- Arrows at the base show how the domains meet to nurture children's religious identity and deepen parents' commitment to their faith. Caregiving becomes a site of long-term religious identity work for both parent and children.

▪ Religion initially frames and influences experience of raising a child with SEND, but lived caregiving also reshapes religious understanding. Faith moves from beliefs to lived realities, with religion and life experience continuously influencing and deepening one another over time.

6.5 Implication of findings

6.5.1 Implication for research area

The study offers an original conceptual framework for understanding Muslim parental experiences of raising children with SEND. The framework is grounded in participants' lived realities and highlights the interconnected roles of religious beliefs, religious practices, and social contexts in shaping coping and meaning making.

6.5.2 Implication for educational psychology

This research highlights several key implications for educational psychology practice. First, it highlights the importance of recognising religion as central to how families understand SEND. EPs could engage with religion as part of a family's worldview if appropriate. Religious belief should be treated as part of the child and family's identity, not as a barrier to engagement. This requires a practice shift toward curiosity rather than assumption. It may not be helpful to assume that Muslim families view their child's SEND exclusively through the lens of religion, but it should be acknowledged as a factor in their understanding and decision making. There is a pressing need to move beyond just cultural competence, toward religious literacy (Plante, 2014). EPs can play a vital role in supporting family and community relationships. While some families withdrew from community due to misunderstanding, others found resilience through religious sisterhood and communal spaces. EPs are well-positioned to help families reconnect with empowering networks. This includes signposting

to inclusive support groups in mosques or working in partnership with imams and Muslim community leaders where appropriate.

6.5.3 Implication for Muslim families and community leaders

For Muslim families, the findings affirm their meaning-making and religious parenting within SEND contexts. Parents feel more empowered to embrace their role through an Islamic lens, recognising their child's needs as part of a divine plan and their caregiving as a religiously significant responsibility. For community leaders and mosques, the research highlights that religious spaces often serve as powerful places of emotional and spiritual support, but only when they are inclusive and informed about SEND. While many families in this study found comfort and solidarity in their religious networks, others felt excluded due to a lack of awareness.

6.6 Dissemination strategy

6.6.1 Muslim Parents and the Muslim community

- Parent workshops will be delivered either in-person or online through schools, mosques and community centres, particularly in boroughs with large Muslim populations.

- Fndings will be shared with mosque leaders and imams in the form of short, accessible summaries. Bespoke CPD sessions will also be offered to imams and mosque volunteers, focusing on SEND awareness and how Islamic teachings can support inclusion and compassion toward families of children with SEND.

- Collaborative partnerships will be developed with inclusive mosques and Muslim charities that are already supporting SEND families. These partnerships may include

co-hosted events, discussion circles, or the integration of SEND awareness into existing community initiatives.

6.6.2 EPs and other professionals

- CPD training will be developed and delivered for EPs, focusing on the role of Islamic beliefs in meaning-making around SEND. The training will aim to enhance religious literacy and provide practical strategies for more faith-sensitive consultation, assessment and support.

- A teaching will be recorded for the Year 1 doctorate in educational psychology philosophy of Research module, sharing insights from the study on Islamic ontology and decolonial approaches to research.

- The findings will be presented through the Trainee Educational Psychologists' Initiative for Cultural Change (TEPICC), a national TEP-led platform I am a member of. This space will be used to share insights on religion and inclusive practice with a wide audience of trainees and early career EPs.

- Insights from the research will be integrated into my current and future EPS roles. This includes applying findings in casework, consultation, and service-wide discussions, with an emphasis on inclusive practice that upholds families' religious identities.

- I will aim to submit to the professional publications such as *Educational & Child Psychology*, ensuring that the findings reach a wide audience of practising EPs and relevant professionals. Conference presentations will also be proposed for events such as the DECP Annual Conference.

- CPD opportunities will also be developed for other professionals working with Muslim families, including SENCos, teachers, and social workers. These sessions will focus

on the importance of recognising and integrating religious beliefs into understanding SEND, fostering a more collaborative and religiously responsive approach to supporting these families.

6.7 Critique of the study

6.7.1 Strengths of the study

One of the strengths of this research is its multi-ethnicity sample. While many previous studies have focused on single ethnic groups (e.g., Pakistani, Somali, or Arab families), this study draws on the voices of Muslim parents from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity enabled the identification of patterns in how religion shaped parents' experiences and understandings of SEND across multiple ethnicities. Unlike many existing studies that conflate Islamic practice with cultural traditions, this research purposefully disentangles religion from culture. It centres the religious beliefs that parents themselves used to make sense of their child's needs. This emphasis on religion marks a significant shift in how Muslim parental experiences are often represented. The study moves beyond culture and provides a deep exploration of how Islamic concepts were actively drawn upon by parents to cope and construct meaning. The study consciously adopts a strengths-based perspective, challenging negative views that often pathologies Islamic perspectives or frame religious communities as inherently hard to reach. Rather than viewing Islam or Muslim identity as barriers, the study highlights how faith acted as a source of resilience and positive reframing. By clearly distinguishing between Islam and the broader social dynamics of Muslim communities. Participants were recruited from across England and Wales, offering a diverse set of perspectives across the UK. As a result, the findings are more representative of Muslim parental experiences across different UK contexts, rather than being limited to one borough, city or region. Lastly, the study included parents of children with a variety of

SEND, rather than focusing solely on one diagnostic category (e.g., Autism). This allowed for a broader examination of how Islamic frameworks were used to make sense of a variation of needs, developmental, cognitive, emotional, and communicative, thereby enhancing the relevance of the findings to EPs working with a wide range of SEND profiles.

6.7.2 Limitations of the study

Despite aiming to include a balanced representation of parental voices, only two fathers participated in the study. The remaining participants were mothers. As a result, the findings primarily reflect maternal perspectives, and the voices of Muslim fathers, who may conceptualise and experience both religion and parenting differently, are underrepresented. Future research would benefit from actively recruiting more fathers. All interviews were conducted in English, and no interpreters were used. While this ensured language consistency, it inadvertently excluded non-English-speaking parents from the study. This may have resulted in the underrepresentation of more recent migrants or those less confident in English, whose perspectives may differ significantly in terms of access to services, experiences of marginalisation, or religious expression. Including translated interviews in future research would help capture a wider spectrum of Muslim parental voices. Although this research prioritised participants' lived experiences and religious meaning-making, it did not fully explore the Intersectionality of parental identities due to time and scope constraints. The study primarily focused on religion as a lens, and while issues of culture, class, ethnicity, age, and ability were mentioned, they were not explored in detail. Drawing on John Burnham's (2013) *Social GRACES* framework could enable a more multidimensional understanding of how various aspects of identity interact with religion, caregiving, and SEND experiences. Although all participants had accessed an EP service as part of the EHCP or IDP process, only one parent explicitly reflected on their experience

of working with an EP. As such, this study provides minimal insight into how Muslim parents perceive EPs or what they value (or find challenging) in their approach. Given the study's relevance to EP practice, a deeper investigation into these views would have been beneficial.

6.8 Reflections on the role of religion for the researcher whilst completing the project

Throughout the process of this doctoral research, my religion played a central and active role, not only shaping how I positioned myself as a researcher but also providing spiritual and emotional support during challenging moments. This reflection, drawn from my ongoing reflexive diary, explores how religion influenced my thinking, learning and reflexivity across different stages of the research journey.

At the onset of the project, I experienced a strong sense of Amanah, the feeling that this work was a trust from Allah. I believed that I had been put in this position as a researcher and given certain skills, experiences, and access to opportunities to benefit the Muslim community, which left me feeling as though I was carrying a responsibility not just to my academic field, but to the wider Muslim community. This belief gave me motivation and meaning, particularly in moments when the work felt challenging.

In the middle of this project, I performed Umrah, a pilgrimage in Mecca that came at a time of high academic pressure. I approached that pilgrimage with prayers and duas for clarity, strength, and purpose. This act of worship became a grounding moment, and an opportunity to reset the intention for the research that had been rooted in sincerity and a

sense of service. The role of dua and prayer remained consistent throughout the thesis process, especially during emotionally and academically demanding periods. Whether before data collection, writing or while managing the wider demands of training, turning to Allah became a regular source of clarity and direction.

The principle of Tawakkul was something I returned to repeatedly. There were many points during this project when I doubted my abilities or questioned whether I could do justice to the voices of the parents, especially during data analysis where the pressure to analyse the data to the best of my abilities felt very high. Reminding myself that success ultimately comes from Allah allowed me to push through uncertainty. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by pressure, I reframed the journey as one that required trust, doing my best while recognising that outcomes are ultimately not in my hands alone.

My religious community and social networks also played a motivational role. Words of encouragement from fellow Muslims who saw value in the topic reminded me why this work mattered. As a TEP from a minoritised background within the profession, I often felt that I was holding space for stories that had not previously been heard. This sense of collective responsibility fuelled my commitment to the project and reminded me that my work was part of something larger than myself.

Importantly, this research also allowed me to deepen my own religious learning. Engaging with participants' narratives around religion, SEND, and parenting invited me to reflect on my own understanding of Islamic teachings I hadn't revisited in a while. In doing so, I was not only analysing their perspectives but actively strengthening my own understanding. I found myself reflecting on stories of prophets and believers who demonstrated resilience.

This reflexivity gave me a richer framework for understanding the parents' experiences and strengthened my ability to interpret data.

My values, particularly around justice, equity, and the centring of marginalised voices, were present throughout the research. I intentionally sought to forefront interpretations that privileged the voices of parents who are often overlooked in educational and psychological discussions. As someone who is both part of the Muslim community and a minoritised figure within Educational Psychology, I brought with me lived experience that shaped how I listened, what I noticed, and how I made sense of participants' words. Rather than attempting to bracket out my identity, I allowed it to be part of the interpretive process, which meant RTA felt both appropriate and empowering for my role as the researcher.

For me, religion was not just a subject of this research, it was interwoven through every stage of it. My faith helped me interpret the findings, connect with participants, stay grounded in purpose, and persevere through personal and academic challenges. Religion served as both a lens and a protective factor, enriching my understanding of the topic, helping me navigate my own self-doubt, and giving me the spiritual and emotional resources to carry this research through to completion.

6.9 Suggestions for future research

This study highlights several areas that could be explored further in future research. One key gap is the limited inclusion of Muslim fathers. Future studies could focus on how fathers understand and engage with their child's SEND through an Islamic lens, and how this may differ from maternal perspectives. Another important direction would be to explore EPs

knowledge and use of religion in their practice, looking at how they understand the role of faith in families' lives and whether they feel equipped to work in faith-sensitive ways. Similarly, further research could examine how schools respond to or engage with the religious beliefs of Muslim families, particularly in the context of SEND support. Another under-researched area is the role of religious leaders, such as imams, and their level of understanding around SEND from an Islamic perspective. Exploring how mosques can become more inclusive and supportive spaces for families would be valuable. Beyond Islam, future research could also consider how parents from other religious backgrounds, such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, or Sikhism, make sense of SEND. Finally, future studies should aim to include non-English-speaking Muslim parents, whose perspectives are often overlooked. Using interpreters or culturally matched researchers could help ensure that these voices are better represented.

6.10 Conclusion

This study set out to explore how Muslim parents understand and experience raising a child with SEND, with a particular focus on the role religion. What became clear throughout the research is that for many families, Islam is not just something they turn to in difficult times, it's the foundation through which they make sense of their child's needs, their parenting role, and the world around them. From the onset, I was committed to grounding this work within an Islamic paradigm as an ethical, moral and religious stance, but also as an act of resistance. I wanted to ensure that the research did not contribute to the long-standing and often unspoken practice of forcing Western frameworks onto families whose realities are shaped by a different set of values. Too often, Muslim voices are filtered through secular or culturalist lenses that fail to fully acknowledge the depth and legitimacy of their religious worldviews. The findings highlight the need to move beyond seeing Islam as having only

cultural influence. The core take-away from this study is that religious beliefs can be a valid and powerful way of knowing. For EPs and other professionals, this means being open to different worldviews, listening carefully, and recognising that religion can be central to how some parents navigate life with their child.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Scoping review search terms

Search mapping terms	Field	Key word search terms
1. **Parent*** AND	**Abstract**	OR Parenting OR mum* OR dad* OR caregiver* OR mother* OR father* OR carer* OR guardian*
2. **Special educational need*** AND	**Abstract**	OR SEN OR SEND OR Special needs OR special educational needs disabilit* OR disab* OR neurodiver* OR additional needs
3. **Cultur*** AND	**Abstract**	OR Ethnic minor* OR Religi* OR Racial*
4. **Muslim** AND	**Full text**	OR Muslims OR Islam
Child	**Full text**	OR children OR young person
Experience*	**Full text**	View* OR Percept* OR Lived Experience* OR thought* OR belief OR attitude* OR Perspective* OR Feeling*

Appendix B: PRISMA

```
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Records identified      │        │ Additional records      │
│ through database        │        │ identified through      │
│ screening (n=109)       │        │ other sources (n= 7)    │
│ (duplicates were removed)│       │                         │
└─────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────┘
```

Records screened
by title and abstract
(n= 116)

Records excluded based
on inclusion and exclusion
criteria (n= 85)

Full text articles
assessed for
eligibility (n= 31)

Articles excluded,
based
on further criteria
(n= 19)

Studies included in
scoping review
(n=12)

Appendix C: Islamic ontological paradigm (Sheikh, 2023)

ISLAMIC ONTOLOGICAL PARADIGM FOR RESEARCH IN PSYCHOLOGY & RELATED FIELDS: A MUSLIM RESEARCHER'S PROCESS-BASED PERSPECTIVE, 11-PONT MODEL. — Dr Aaliyah Shaikh

Reference/Source: Shaikh, A (2023). British Muslims' experiences of pregnancy and birth. (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, City, University of London) https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/29686/
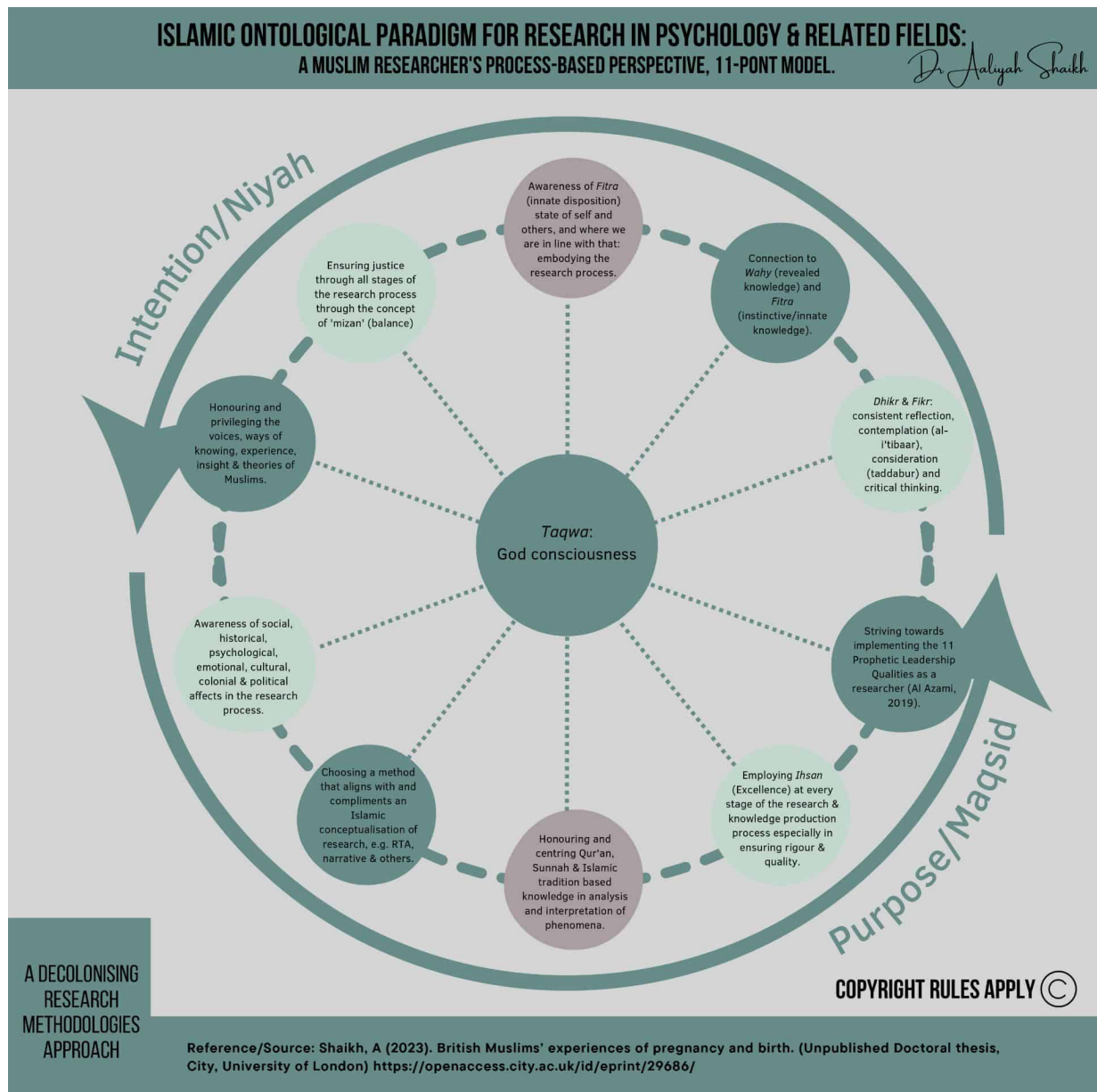
Appendix D: Ethical approval letter

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Zahwa Mahyoub

By Email

09 April 2024

Dear Zahwa,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: *'Exploring the Role of Religion in Muslim Parents' Experiences of Raising Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)'*

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.
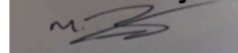
If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Franklyn

Academic Governance and Quality Officer
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc.   Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix E: Recruitment email sent to PEPs
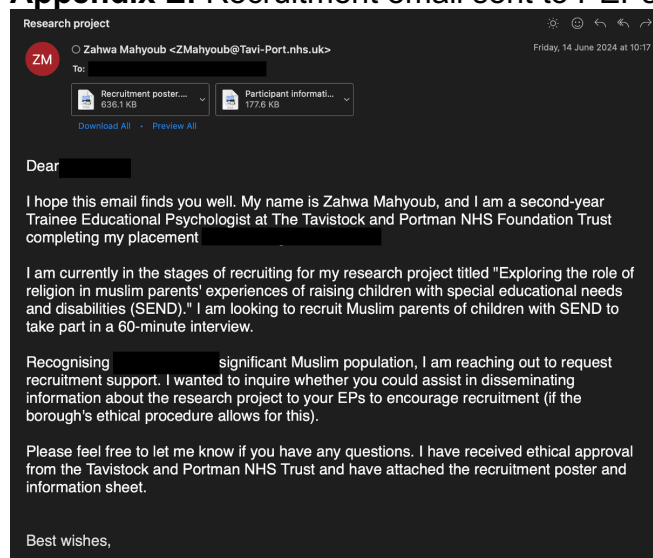
Appendix F: Information sheet

1. PROPOSED PARTICIPANT INFROMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take the time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who is conducting the research?

Zahwa Mahyoub - a second year Trainee Child, Community and Educational Psychologist at The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust.

Can I take part in the study?

To take part in the research, you must be a practising Muslim parent of a child with special educational needs and disability (SEND), currently attending an education setting, with an education, health, and care plan (EHCP).

Why is it being conducted?

To gather your views, as Muslim parents with children with SEND, so that the researcher can explore the intersection between religion and disability-related factors so that a range of professionals will have greater insight in how to support diverse populations.

Why have you been asked to take part?

Your participation in this research is sought because your experiences as a Muslim parent offers insights into the role of religion when parenting a child with SEND. Your perspective can contribute to the exploration of how religious beliefs shape perceptions and influence decision-making regarding a child's education and well-being. Through your input, the research will aim to contribute to the understanding of the diverse experiences of families in similar situations.

What is required of you?

To attend one online meeting through Microsoft teams on a laptop with the researcher, which could last approximately 60 minutes. The researcher will record the discussion using the microsoft audio recording tool. It is expected that you remain in a confidential space throughout the meeting.

What will happen to the data you provide?

The data gathered during the interview will be transcribed and stored on an encrypted data stick. Only the researcher has access to the data stick. Your views will be used to generate possible themes using a Reflexive Thematic Analysis research method. The themes, along with some of your quotations will be used to write a final thesis as part of a Doctorate in Educational, Community and Child Psychology.

How your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained?

All personal information which can identify you, your child, your family, will be anonymised. The researcher is bound by guidelines from The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) 'Guidance on Conduct and Ethics', and 'Code of Ethics and Conduct' by the British Psychological Society to maintain your confidentiality and only use the information for the purpose for which it was given. However, if any confidential information raises concerns about the safety or wellbeing of someone, then the researcher would be bound by the HCPC guidelines to discuss this promptly with their university supervisor or practice placement provider. During the write-up of the research, you will be referred to by a pseudonym (fake name).

Who has reviewed the research project?

The project has received ethical approval from _____

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

You are under no obligation to participate in the research, and it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Please note that because the data will be anonymised, it may not be possible for all data to be retrieved and discarded after data analysis has commenced. You will be able to withdraw your contribution up to 1 month after your interview.

Contact for further information.

If you have any queries about the study, please contact the researcher:

Zahwa Mahyoub

Email: ZMahyoub@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

If something goes wrong, such as internet connections preventing you from joining the interview, of if the connection is lost during the interview, please contact:

The researcher in the first instance. Please see details above. Or the researcher's University Supervisor:

Dr Nikki Collingwood

Email: ncollingwood@tavi-port.nhs.uk

You are under no obligation to participate in the research, and it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Please note that because the data will be anonymised, it may not be possible to track your answers back to you.

What do I do now?

If you are interested in taking part then please return the consent form to the Zahwa Mahyoub, the research, (details above).

Many thanks,

Zahwa Mahyoub

Appendix G: Consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research title: Exploring the Role of Religion in Muslim
Parents' Experiences of Raising Children with Special
Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

This Project Has Been Approved by _____

*This study is part of the researcher's completion of the
Doctorate in Educational, Community and Child Psychology
at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust.*

If you consent to participate, please complete and sign the
consent form below:

**Please initial box if you agree I agree to take part in the
above research.**

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above research and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.	
2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason and without detriment, prior to the commencement of data analysis (within 1 month of my interview).	
3. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.	
4. I understand that the participant sample is small, which may have implications for anonymity, although measures will be taken to ensure anonymity I.e. the researcher will endeavour to remove or alter details that would identify the participant).	
5. I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed following transcription. *To note: If you do not want your interview recorded you can still take part in the study.*	
6. I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	

7. I understand that because the data will be anonymised, it will not be possible for all data to be retrieved and discarded after data analysis has commenced.	

Name		Telephone number	
Date		Signature	
Email			

Appendix H: Ethical approval after resubmission and reflexive diary extract

Reflection on recruitment

I decided to change the recruitment strategy to recruit directly from the community. I had initially gone with recruiting through peps and EPs but now I'm realising how difficult this may become, due to PEPs not responding. I have so many links w/ the muslim community so this strategy makes a lot more sense. My connections mean I can recruit throughout England and wales and targed families directly. This aligns better with my values to, as I am using the community to help w/ recruitment rather than going through services,

Appendix I: Recruitment poster

RESEARCH SEEKING MUSLIM PARENTS

Of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Who am I?

I am a trainee child and educational psychologist completing a doctorate at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust

Are you eligible?

- Muslim parent
- With a child with special educational needs and disability (SEND)
- Attending an education setting
- With an education, health, and care plan (EHCP)

About the research

The research aims to explore your experiences as a Muslim parent raising a child with SEND.

It aims to gain a better understanding of how your Muslim identity and religious beliefs impact your views and decisions about your child's education and well-being.

Your participation

One online meeting with me, Lasting about 60 minutes

If interested, please Contact:
Zahwa Mahyoub
Zmahyoub@tavi-port.nhs.uk

The project has received ethical approval from The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust ethics commitee

Appendix J: Email sent to participants to ensure they met the inclusion criteria

Re: Research

⊗ Zahwa Mahyoub <ZMahyoub@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk>   Thursday, 4 July 2024 at 17:25

To: ▮▮▮▮▮

▮▮▮▮▮ · could I request you confirm that you meet the following criteria;

- Muslim parent of a child with special educational needs/ disability
- The child must attend an education setting.
- The child has an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Please let me know if you're unsure of any of these points. Thank you for your time.

Zahwa Mahyoub
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix K: Semi-structured interview schedule

Theme	Questions
Introductions	Provide a brief overview of the study's objectives and the interview process. ***Process*** - *Recorded – Only I have access to the recordings. They will be deleted once transcribed.* - *Confidentiality*

	- *Withdrawal – you can withdraw at anypoint, and upto a month after your interview.* - *Answer whatever you're comfortable with* *This research aims to explore the experiences of Muslim parents raising children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It aims to increase our understanding on how religious beliefs influence parenting practices, perceptions, and interactions with support systems.* *The research aims to provide insights into how faith inform the way parents interpret and manage the unique challenges associated with raising a child with SEND.* Confirm participant understanding and obtain verbal consent. Ask the participant to provide any relevant contextual details about their child's specific needs and challenges.
Religious interpretations and perceptions of disability	1. Can you describe your religious beliefs? 2. How/ if at all - does your religious teaching or principles affect your views on your child's needs? 3. Can you describe how your religious beliefs

	influence your understanding of your child's SEND? *SUB Q: Are there any specific religious teachings that you find relevant to your understanding of disability/ experiences of parenting a child with SEND*
Coping	4. What role do you think religion has in supporting your child? *SUB Q: Can you share any specific religious practices that you find particularly helpful in managing your child's needs?* 5. What support does your religious community offer, if any? 6. Family background and SEN/ Culture - could I ask about family background as an influence on parenting.
Community	7. What support does your religious community offer, if any? 8. Family background and SEN/ Culture - could I ask about family background as an influence on parenting.

Cultural and religious sensitivity	9. How do you feel your religious identity has influenced the support you receive from services? *SUB Q: Are there any conflicts between your religious beliefs and the recommendations provided by professionals? If so, how do you navigate them?* *SUB Q: Can you share any positive or negative experiences related to the cultural and religious sensitivity of service providers?*
Help-seeking behaviours	10. When you need support for your child, what types of help do you seek out first? 11. What has been your experience of EP support? 12. What are your experiences when seeking help child from educational or healthcare services? 13. What could services do differently/ better?
Closing	14. Is there anything else you want to share re. this topic?

Appendix L: Reflexive diary extracts after interviews

I thought about the idea of being religiously muslim and culturally British. He spoke a lot about his identity had a British muslim. - How Britishness blends w/ Islam and how he feels the go hand in hand. I reflected on my own Britishness and how I always wanted to be accepted but would also reject that part of my identity bc I worried about ever being accepted.

He spoke about science + islam & how he mixes them so seemlessly. zam zam + medicine honey + black zeed oil. The synergy is caused by having a good / (foundational at least) understanding of both.

I felt quite overwhelmed w/ the amount of background information there was - I noticed a feeling of wanting to have as much as possible by the parent and I wondered if she also felt overwhelmed w/ the amount she had been keeping in.

"Being muslim, you will understand this" when talking about the power / role of prayer.

A lot of focus on the child and I wanted to hear more from her perspective and how she feels.

"So that's been the journey so far

Appendix M: List of initial codes from Nvivo and an example of coded transcript

Name	Files	References
A blessing to the community	1	4
A gift from Allah	4	6
A muslim that does their Fardth	1	2
a purpose in hardship	5	18
A spiritual or religious journey	1	3
acceptance that some people dont have the knowledge	3	6
Accepting that Allah made it like this	2	2
Accessible ways of learning faith	3	9
Actively practicing religion	2	3
Acts of worship	4	5
Prayer - Salah	7	16
Advocacy	3	4
Allah and faith giving you hope	6	17
Allah choosing the child	3	3
Allah created my child this way	1	2
Allah is capable of anything	2	3
Allah is enough	1	1
Allah is kind	2	2
Allah knows whats best for you	2	5
Allah loves them	1	2
Allah makes me calm	2	2
Allah makes no mistakes	2	4
Allah will not give you more than you can handle	4	4
Allah will reward hardship	4	6
Allah's ability too change our circumstances	5	6
Allah's blessing	7	13
My child is a blessing	7	15
Allah's mercy	1	4
Allahs creation	1	2
Allahs creation is perfect	1	4

Name	Files	References
And I just realised that I just need to run to Allah. I didn't realise this at that time. I just thought like I have to to all of these people. Yes. As a Muslim, we have to. We can't just leave it on Allah completely. We have to tie the camel and then leav	1	1
Arabic phrases	6	11
Alhamdulillah	6	7
Masha'Allah	1	1
Asking Allah for guidance	1	1
Asking Allah for strength	4	8
Athaan being calming	1	2
Aunty Zahwa	1	1
Autism & cultral differences in parenting	1	1
Bad experiencies with professionals	2	2
Balancing not sharing too much and seeking support	3	6
Balancing religion with profession help	1	1
Balancing SEND and practising the religion	4	16
Being more lenient about religious obligations	2	3
No accountability	3	4
Pure	1	1
benefiting the community	1	1
Bigger reason for it	1	1
bilingual	1	1
black seed oil	1	1
Bringing you closer to God	6	21
Britishness	1	2
Building a positive relationship	1	2
Change in how we are in the community	2	2
Changing perspective of disability	1	2
Children belong to Allah	3	5
Children of Jannah	4	7
Comparison to others hardship	2	5
Connection to the Quran	1	1
Cultural differences	2	2
culture vs religion	1	1

Name	Files	References
Cures	5	11
death	2	2
Deen and dunya	2	2
Denial	2	2
Difficult times	2	4
Discovering something through Allah	1	1
Dont want to take it for granted	1	1
Dua	8	26
Educating adults on SEND	1	1
Education the child on difficult topics	1	2
everyone has challenges	3	10
everyone has their own challenges	1	1
Everything is in Allahs Hands	2	3
Evil eye	1	2
Examples of others finding strength in faith	1	3
Faith helping coping	5	19
family not agreeing with how you parent	1	3
Fear of parent dying and leaving the child behind	1	1
Feeling more equipped	1	1
First son	1	1
Focusing on the childs needs not the outside world	1	1
Free from the temptations of this world	1	1
grateful for the SEND	4	4
Growth and development as a purpose	3	7
hadith	1	1
Having a bigger purpose	5	9
Having a british identity and culture	1	4
Health needs come first and then education second	1	2
Hiding	1	3
Hopelessness	2	2
How a SEND child changes you	1	1
If its meant for you, Allah will make it happen	1	1
Immigrant status adding to complexity	2	3
Increasing strength	5	7

Name	Files	References
InshAllah	1	1
Interaction with the wider community	1	4
Intersectionality	1	1
Islamic stories	1	3
It takes time	2	2
Its not me its Allah	3	3
Jannah has the goal	2	2
Jannahh as thr ultimate goal	2	2
Jinn	1	1
Lack of understaning and knowledge in the community	5	18
Learning Arabic	2	2
Leave it to Allah	1	1
Leave t	1	1
Leaving it to Allah	1	1
Looking back	1	2
Misconception of hardhship being a punishment	2	3
Misconception of SEND	1	1
Misunderstanding of family	3	5
Mothers managing the whole family	1	1
Mum support groups	3	9
Mums looking after their wellbeing	2	3
Need reminding	1	7
No name for Autism	1	1
Not caring about the wider community or public	1	1
Not fitting in the system	1	1
Not losing hope	3	12
Not talking about SEND in the family	1	1
Others sadness	1	1
Palestine	2	2
Parent is chosen by Allah	2	4
Parents still want to and have to each them the religion	1	1
Path to Jannah	3	3
Patience in parenting	1	1

Name	Files	References
People feeling pity	2	5
People have it worse	2	4
Phases of acceptance	7	15
Positivity	1	1
Practising faith causing feelings of beloning	1	1
Praising God	1	1
Praying for something to change	5	7
Privacy	1	3
Professional help	1	2
Professionals working with muslims	3	4
protecting the child from judgement	1	3
Racism	1	1
refinding prupose	1	1
Reliance on Faith and God has got me through	6	11
Religion and science mixing	1	6
Religion as the top priority	1	1
Religion in britain	1	4
Religion instead of professional support	1	1
religious identity	4	24
Learning to read the Quran	3	4
Respect for parents	1	1
Rigidity and autism	1	1
sacrificing for the comfort of the child	2	3
Sad by other peoples reactions	1	1
Schools not meeting religious obligations	1	1
Seeking a connection to Allah	1	3
Seeking islamic knowledge	1	1
Seeking knowledge from Sheikhs	2	2
Send changing perspectives on how we practise religion	1	1
SEND children as a way to cleanse the world	1	1
Services trying to underdtand muslims	1	1
Sharing knnowledge with others	2	4
Sharing with others	3	6

Name	Files	References
Shifting perspectives	1	1
Sidar honey	1	1
Sisterhood in islam	1	2
strength in Motherhood	1	4
Strong enough for this challenge	1	1
Subhan'Allah	1	1
Support from family	1	1
Support from Muslim parents of SEND	3	11
Support in the masjid	1	4
Support network	3	5
Taking blame	1	1
Tawakul	7	13
Allah's protection	4	7
Reliance on God	7	13
Reliance on God easing worries	7	12
Teaching children how to pray	1	1
Tensions in marriage	1	1
Test from God	4	9
The child being born after infertility	3	3
The child is protected from this dunya	2	3
The importance of faith in the childrens lives	1	3
The researcher being muslim	5	8
The way islam views children	1	2
The will of Allah	3	7
Theres nothing, theyre just different	1	1
Theyre still able to follow the deen	3	12
Things happening because of Allah	2	4
trust	1	1
Trust in Allah	4	12
Trying your best	1	1
Ummah	2	3
Ummrah	2	8
Ups and downs	0	0
Using religion to understand SEND and illness	1	1

Name	Files	References
Using the wording disability	2	2
Vulnerable	1	1
Whats meant for you is already written for you	1	1
Wider community	3	7
Wider family not believing its SEND	1	2
Women in Islam	1	3
Working on bettering the self religously	2	7
Working with EPs	1	1
working with professionals of different faith and culture	2	2
Zamzam water	2	2

Example of codes transcript

Participant 6   36:59

I think as well another thing that I, kind of, throughout my journey within the last three years, I felt that there wasn't much support groups out there for Muslim mums. So in terms of, even within a masjid. There were a few masjids where they had stay and play sessions, I went to general children centre stay and plays and I went to a few masjids where they had stay and plays. But I didn't find anything that really catered for children that have additional needs. So that was something that I kind of have been looking at. But Alhamdulillah, I think within the last year or so, I I feel there's a lot more now coming out slowly but surely. But within my locality, I didn't really find anything.

> Support from Muslim parents of SEND   Mum support groups

Researcher   37:25

And from what you could see, what was the general Muslim community understanding of additional needs or disability?

Participant 6   37:35

I think sometimes more like sometimes with some of the things that people would just, you get the few people who genuinely understand, and they come up and they shower my son with love, and they say 'oh mashAllah mashAllah'. But then you also get the ones that are, I think it's sometimes it's just the body language as well with some people like they they they're showing that they understand but then it's more out of pity than love.

> People feeling pity pity   Support networks   Lack of understanding and knowledge in the community

Researcher   37:35

Hmm.

Participant 6   38:01

And I think that it's not on that person. I think it's them not knowing and understanding. And I think a few people, when once I've spoken to them and, you know, talked to them, they kind of, oh, OK, like they understand and then they kind of correct the mannerism. So like I've within my Muslim local community I have created a support group for mums

that have children with addition needs in September. And I've had two sessions actually now my, To be honest with my last one was yesterday.

| Support networks | Mum support groups |

Researcher   38:45

Amazing, how have they been going?

Participant 6   38:46

Alhamdullilah. My first one that I had, so I had two mums that I already knew whose children have down syndrome and they came to show support. But then we had one new mom who I hadn't met before and she came to the group and she it was like, you know, she's been holding everything in for so long and being so strong. And then when she came to this group, she just let everything out. And she just, the whole time we were there, she was just offloading and talking and all her concerns where she was just letting it all out. And even though within my first session it was only that one new mum who attended, I felt like that that mattered still. I felt like that mum needed this space to come because at home, when you're caring for a child, especially like her, her child has autism. I feel, you have a lot more, your circumstances at home and just generally I feel is a lot more of a struggle if you don't have the correct support. So, I think when she came to this group, the way I saw it was that she, at home, she's managing everything she's getting on with her day-to-day. Being a mom and being a carer and making sure her child's OK and dealing with what she has to. But then when she came to this group, she just had to let it all out.

So that was the first session and then yesterday, Alhamdulillah, we had like 5 mums who came. And again, it was the same thing. I felt like these mums, they and even the feedback that I got as well, they, they felt that they could come and just offload and vent because no one else would understand what you're going through and they're in the same situation as you. Unless you have a child, who has additional needs or is has a similar need to your child, they're not going to understand what your day-to-day struggle is or what you're dealing with. Whether that's school, whether that's at home. So I think that's what they found beneficial. And I think that's what my aim of this group was as well. To give Mum's that space. And Alhamdulillah's you know it, the feedback I've got has been really good.

| Support networks | Mum support groups |

Researcher: 41:10

It sounds amazing.

Participant 6   41:12

Thank you. It has been lovely.

Researcher   41:15

My Allah reward you for the space that you're providing for these parents, and it must also, it' not just for them. It sounds like it's for you too and it and they're probably learning so much from you, but you're probably taking so much from them also. Which, mash'Allah is so beneficial.

Participant 6   41:34

Yeah, I think from I think the reason why I wanted this space is just to give these Muslim mums a chance to, just bring them back to why they were put in this situation and just remind them about what Islam says about it and that's why I hold it in the Masjid. My local masjid have been brilliant to give me this space free of charge and, you know, use the space to hold these meetings. I think that's the reason why I held it in the Masjid as well. Just to remind them that, Yes, it's tough. It's hard to be a mom who's caring for your child, but Allah chose us for this, and this is our test. And just to remind them that, the struggle is there, but inshallah the reward will be greater.

| Divine selection | Sisterhood in Islam | Mum support groups |

| Parent is chosen by Allah |

Appendix N: Grouped codes in Microsoft word under each research question

How does religion influence the way Muslim parents perceive and understand the experiences of parenting a child with SEND?				
Cluster	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5
A gift from Allah	Phases of acceptance	Deen and Dunya	Advocacy	Changing perspective of disability
Allah choosing the child	Shifting perspectives	Jinn	Building a positive relationship with your child	
The will of Allah	Taking blame	black seed oil	Patience in parenting	Using religion to understand SEND and illness
Allah created my child this way	Send changing perspectives on how we practise religion	Evil eye	Trying your best	Using the wording disability
Allah's blessing		Cures	Positivity	Theres nothing wrong, theyre just different
My child is a blessing	A spiritual or religious journey	Sidar honey	Health needs come first and then education second	Denial
		Zamzam water		

Allahs creation				How a SEND child changes you
Allahs creation is perfect	Bringing you closer to God		Respect for parents	
				Intersectionality
Children belong to Allah	Working on bettering the self religously		Trust	
				Mothers managing the whole family
Children of Jannah	Need reminding			
				Women in Islam
Parent is chosen by Allah	Its not me its Allah			
				Sisterhood in islam
The way islam views children	Jannah as the goal			
				strength in Motherhood
	Path to Jannah			
				Mums looking after their wellbeing
	Jannah as the ultimate goal			

				Ummah
	A Muslim that does their Fardth			
	Actively practicing religion			
	culture vs religion			
	death			

In what way does religion function as a source of support and resilience for Muslim parents raising children with SEND?				
Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5
Accepting that Allah made it like this	Seeking a connection to Allah	Allah and faith giving you hope	Allah is capable of anything	Faith helping coping
Allah knows what's best for you	Acts of worship	Reliance on Faith and God has got me through	Things happening because of Allah	Allah will not give you more than you can handle

Prayer – Salah	Tawakul	If its meant for you, Allah will make it happen	Strong enough for this challenge
Ummrah	Reliance on God	Whats meant for you is already written for you	Allah will reward hardship
Praying for something to change	Reliance on God easing worries		
Arabic phrases		Everything is in Allahs Hands	Test from God
Alhamdulillah	Allah's protection		The child being born after infertility
InshAllah	Not losing hope	Trust in Allah	
Masha'Allah	Hopelessness	Allah's ability too change our circumstances	Dont want to take it for granted
Subhan'Allah	Asking Allah for strength	Allah is enough	Misconception of hardhship being a punishment
Dua	It takes time	Allah is kind	

	Praising God	Looking back	Allah loves them	Bigger reason for it
	Athaan being calming	Asking Allah for guidance	Allah makes no mistakes	Having a bigger purpose
	Connection to the Quran	Leave it to Allah	Allah makes me calm	Growth and development as a purpose
	Seeking islamic knowledge	Leaving it to Allah	Allah's mercy	Ups and downs
	Seeking knowledge from Sheikhs		Discovering something through Allah	refinding purpose
	Hadith			a purpose in hardship
	Religion and science mixing			Comparison to others hardship

	Religion as the top priority			People have it worse
				Difficult times
				everyone has challenges
				everyone has their own challenges
				Examples of others finding strength in faith
				Palestine
				Islamic stories
				Increasing strength

How does religion identity influence the sense of belonging and community for Muslim parents raising children with SEND, and in what ways do communities provide both support and challenges?				
Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5
A blessing to the community	acceptance that some people dont have the knowledge	religious identity	Autism & cultral differences in parenting	family not agreeing with how you parent
benefiting the community		Learning to read the Quran	No name for Autism	Balancing not sharing too much and seeking support
SEND children as a way to cleanse the world	Focusing on the childs needs not the outside world	The importance of faith in the children's lives	Not fitting in the system	
	Not caring about the wider community or public	Accessible ways of learning faith	Bad experiences with professionals	Hiding
Free from the temptations of this world				Lack of understanding and knowledge in the community
grateful for the SEND	Interaction with the wider community	Teaching children how to pray	Balancing religion with profession help	Misconception of SEND
The child is protected		Balancing SEND and		

from this dunya	Sharing with others	practicing the religion	Services trying to understand muslims	Educating adults on SEND
Sharing knowledge with others	Support from family	Parents still want to and have to teach them the religion	Religion instead of professional support	Misunderstanding of family
	Support from Muslim parents of SEND			Wider family not believing its SEND
		Practising faith causing feelings of belonging	Britishness	
	Support in the masjid		Professional help	Not talking about SEND in the family
		Being more lenient about religious obligations	Racism	
	Support network			Others sadness
			Schools not meeting religious obligations	
	Privacy	Theyre still able to follow the deen		People feeling pity
	protecting the child from judgement		Professionals working with muslims	Sad by other peoples reactions
		No accountability		

	sacrificing for the comfort of the child	Rigidity and autism	Working with EPs	
	Change in how we are in the community	Pure	Cultural differences	
		Learning Arabic	Having a british identity and culture	
	Mum support groups			
		Education the child on difficult topics	working with professionals of different faith and culture	
	Wider community	Bilingual		
		Fear of parent dying and leaving the child behind	Immigrant status adding to complexity	
		Feeling more equipped	Religion in britain	

Appendix O: Emerging themes formed from cluster codes

How does religion influence the way Muslim parents perceive and understand the experiences of parenting a child with SEND?				
Divine selection and Allah's will	**The Journey of acceptance**	**How SEND deepens religious commitment**	**Patience and advocacy**	**Blessings and a sacred status**
Allah choosing the child	Phases of acceptance	A spiritual or religious journey	Advocacy	Allah's blessing
Parent is chosen by Allah	It takes time	How a SEND child changes you	Building a positive relationship with your child	A gift from Allah ??
The will of Allah	Looking back	A Muslim that does their Fardth	Patience in parenting	My child is a blessing
	Taking blame	SEND changing perspectives on	Trying your best	The child being born after infertility
	Using religion to			

Allahs creation	understand SEND and illness	how we practise religion	Positivity	The way Islam views children
Allahs creation is perfect	Shifting perspectives	Bringing you closer to God	Health needs come first and then education second	Children belong to Allah
Allah makes no mistakes	Changing perspective of disability	Working on bettering the self religiously	Trust	Children of Jannah
Allah created my child this way	Theres nothing wrong, they're just different	Actively practicing religion		
	Need reminding			

In what way do their religious identity function as a source of support and resilience for Muslim parents raising children with SEND?

Strength through Faith	Coping with faith	Tawakul (reliance)	The importance of religious identity in children	A purpose in enduring hardship
			religious identity	
SUB: Holding onto hope	SUB: Acts of worship as a coping mechanism	SUB: Divine capabilities	Pure	SUB: The promise of reward for hardship
Hopelessness			No accountability	a purpose in hardship
	Faith helping to cope	Allah is capable of anything		Test from God
Allah and faith giving you hope	Acts of worship	Allah's protection		
		Its not me its Allah	Balancing SEND and practicing the religion	Allah will reward hardship
Not losing hope	Prayer – Salah	Things happening because of Allah		Misconception of Hardship being a punishment
	Arabic phrases:			
Allah will not give you more than you can handle	Alhamdulillah InshAllah	Praying for something to change	The importance of faith in the children's lives	Don't want to take it for granted
Strong enough for this challenge	Masha'Allah Subhan'Allah	Allah's ability too change our circumstances	Accessible ways of learning faith	SUB: Eyes on the afterlife
	Praising God		Teaching children how to pray	
SUB: Drawing strength from	Dua	Discovering something through Allah		Deen over Dunya

religious teachings		Allah's Mercy		Jannah as the goal
Examples of others finding strength in faith	Athaan being calming	Allah is enough Allah is kind	Parents still want to and have to teach them the religion	Path to Jannah
Palestine	Allah makes me calm	**SUB: Surrendering to Allah**	Practising faith causing feelings of belonging	Jannah as the ultimate goal
Islamic stories				
Increasing strength	Ummrah	Tawakul	Being more lenient about religious obligations	**SUB: Hardship is a human experience**
	SUB: Seeking knowledge and guidance	Reliance on Faith and God has got me through	Theyre still able to follow the deen	Difficult times
				Ups and downs
	Connection to the Quran	Reliance on God	Learning to read the Quran	Comparison to others hardship
	Hadith	Reliance on God easing worries	Rigidity and autism	People have it worse
	Seeking Islamic knowledge	reward it to Allah		everyone has challenges
	Seeking knowledge from Sheikhs		Learning Arabic	everyone has their own challenges
		Accepting that Allah made it like this		Women in Islam
	Asking Allah for guidance		Education the child on difficult topics	Sisterhood in Islam

		Allah knows what's best for you	Bilingual	strength in Motherhood
	Asking Allah for strength	Trust in Allah	Ummah	
	Seeking a connection to Allah	If its meant for you, Allah will make it happen	culture vs religion	
		Whats meant for you is already written for you		
		Everything is in Allahs Hands	Feeling more equipped	
		Allah loves them	Fear of parent dying and leaving the child behind	

How do Muslim parents of children with SEND engage with community networks and formal service providers, and what supports and challenges do these interactions present?				
Children as agents of hope	**Support through community**	**Challenges**	**Religion and Britishness**	**Working with professionals**

		SUB: Lack of understanding	Healing through faith and medicine	
A blessing to the community	Sisterhood in Islam			
benefiting the community	Support network	family not agreeing with how you parent		Bad experiences with professionals
SEND children as a way to cleanse the world	Sharing with others	Hiding	Cures	
	Support from family	Lack of understanding and knowledge in the community	black seed oil	Schools not meeting religious obligations
	Support from Muslim parents of SEND		Sidar honey	
Free from the temptations of this world		Misconception of SEND	Zamzam water	Professionals working with muslims
	Support in the masjid			Services trying to understand Muslims
grateful for the SEND		Educating adults on SEND	Religion instead of professional support	
	Mum support groups			working with professionals of different faith and culture
The child is protected from this dunya		Misunderstanding of family		
	Sharing knowledge with others		Balancing religion with profession help	
		family not believing its SEND		
	Balancing not sharing too much and			Professional help

	seeking support	Not talking about SEND in the family	Religion and science mixing	Religion in Britain
		Others sadness	Religion as the top priority	Immigrant status adding to complexity
		People feeling pity		
		Sad by other peoples reactions	**SUB: Religious and cultural identity**	Racism
			Cultural differences	
		SUB: It is what it is - community edition	Having a British identity and culture	
		acceptance that some people dont have the knowledge	Britishness	
			Autism & cultural differences in parenting	
		Change in how we are in the community	No name for Autism	
		Focusing on the childs needs not the outside world		

		Not caring about the wider community or public	Intersectionality	
		SUB: Interaction w community		
		Privacy		
		Interaction with the wider community		
		protecting the child from judgement		
		sacrificing for the comfort of the child		
		Wider community		

Appendix P: Codes combined in Nvivo to create emerging theme

Appendix Q: A list of combined codes to create initial themes under each research question

Name	Files	References
RQ1.1 Divine selection and Allah's will	0	0
Allah choosing the child	3	3
Allah created my child this way	1	2
Allah makes no mistakes	2	4
Allahs creation	1	2
Allahs creation is perfect	1	4
Parent is chosen by Allah	2	4
The will of Allah	3	7
RQ1.2 The Journey of acceptance	0	0
Changing perspective of disability	1	2
It takes time	2	2
Looking back	1	2
Need reminding	1	7
Phases of acceptance	7	15
Shifting perspectives	1	1
Taking blame	1	1

Name	Files	References
Theres nothing, theyre just different	1	1
Using religion to understand SEND and illness	1	1
RQ1.3 How SEND deepens religious commitment	0	0
A muslim that does their Fardth	1	2
A spiritual or religious journey	1	3
Actively practicing religion	2	3
Bringing you closer to God	6	21
How a SEND child changes you	1	1
Send changing perspectives on how we practise religion	1	1
Working on bettering the self religously	2	7
RQ1.4 Patience and advocacy	0	0
Advocacy	3	4
Building a positive relationship	1	2
Health needs come first and then education second	1	2
Patience in parenting	1	1
Positivity	1	1
trust	1	1
Trying your best	1	1
RQ1.5 Blessings and a sacred status	0	0
Allah's blessing	7	13
Children belong to Allah	3	5
Children of Jannah	4	7
My child is a blessing	7	15
The child being born after infertility	3	3
The way islam views children	1	2
RQ2.1 Strength through Faith	0	0
SUB Drawing strength from religious teachings	0	0
Examples of others finding strength in faith	1	3
Increasing strength	5	7
Islamic stories	1	3
Palestine	2	2
Sisterhood in islam	1	2
strength in Motherhood	1	4
Women in Islam	1	3

| Name	Files	References
SUB Holding onto hope	0	0
Allah and faith giving you hope	6	17
Allah will not give you more than you can handle	4	4
Hopelessness	2	2
Not losing hope	3	12
Strong enough for this challenge	1	1
RQ2.2 Coping with faith	0	0
SUB acts of worship as a coping mechanism	0	0
Acts of worship	4	5
Alhamdulillah	6	7
Alhamdulillah (2)	6	7
Allah makes me calm	2	2
Arabic phrases	6	11
Athaan being calming	1	2
Dua	8	26
Faith helping coping	5	19
Masha'Allah	1	1
Masha'Allah (2)	1	1
Praising God	1	1
Prayer - Salah (2)	7	16
Ummrah	2	8
SUB Seeking knowledge and guidance	0	0
Asking Allah for guidance	1	1
Asking Allah for strength	4	8
Connection to the Quran	1	1
hadith	1	1
Seeking a connection to Allah	1	3
Seeking knowledge from Sheikhs	2	2
Seeking knowledge from Sheikhs (2)	2	2
RQ2.3 Tawakul	0	0
SUB Divine capabilities	0	0
Allah is capable of anything	2	3
Allah is enough	1	1
Allah is kind	2	2

Name	Files	References
Allah's ability too change our circumstances	5	6
Allah's mercy	1	4
Allah's protection	4	7
Discovering something through Allah	1	1
Its not me its Allah	3	3
Praying for something to change	5	7
Things happening because of Allah	2	4
SUB Surrendering to Allah	0	0
Accepting that Allah made it like this	2	2
Allah knows whats best for you	2	5
Allah loves them	1	2
Allah's protection	4	7
Everything is in Allahs Hands	2	3
If its meant for you, Allah will make it happen	1	1
Leave it to Allah	1	2
Leave it to Allah (2)	1	2
Reliance on God	7	13
Reliance on God easing worries	7	12
Tawakul	7	13
Trust in Allah	4	12
Whats meant for you is already written for you	1	1
RQ2.4 Importance of religious identity	0	0
Accessible ways of learning faith	3	9
Balancing SEND and practising the religion	4	16
Being more lenient about religious obligations	2	3
Being more lenient about religious obligations (2)	2	3
bilingual	1	1
Education the child on difficult topics	1	2
Learning to read the Quran	3	4
Learning to read the Quran (2)	3	4
No accountability	3	4
No accountability (2)	3	4
Parents still want to and have to each them the religion	1	1
Practising faith causing feelings of beloning	1	1

| Name	Files	References
Pure	1	1
Pure (2)	1	1
religious identity	4	24
Rigidity and autism	1	1
Teaching children how to pray	1	1
The importance of faith in the childrens lives	1	3
Theyre still able to follow the deen	3	12
Ummah	2	3
RQ2.5 Purpose in hardship	0	0
SUB A promise of reward for hardship	0	0
a purpose in hardship	5	18
Allah will reward hardship	4	6
Dont want to take it for granted	1	1
Misconception of hardhship being a punishment	2	3
Test from God	4	9
SUB Eyes on the afterlife	0	0
Deen and dunya	2	2
Jannah has the goal	2	2
Jannahh as thr ultimate goal	2	2
Path to Jannah	3	3
SUB Hardship in human experience	0	0
Comparison to others hardship	2	5
Difficult times	2	4
everyone has challenges	3	10
everyone has their own challenges	1	1
People have it worse	2	4
Ups and downs	0	0
RQ3.1 Children as agents of hope	0	0
A blessing to the community	1	4
benefiting the community	1	1
Free from the temptations of this world	1	1
grateful for the SEND	4	4
SEND children as a way to cleanse the world	1	1
The child is protected from this dunya	2	3

Name	Files	References
RQ3.2 Support through community	0	0
Balancing not sharing too much and seeking support	3	6
Mum support groups	3	9
Sharing knowledge with others	2	4
Sharing with others	3	6
Sisterhood in islam	1	2
Support from family	1	1
Support from Muslim parents of SEND	3	11
Support in the masjid	1	4
Support network	3	5
RQ3.3 Community challenges	0	0
SUB interaction with communitty	0	0
Interaction with the wider community	1	4
Privacy	1	3
protecting the child from judgement	1	3
sacrificing for the comfort of the child	2	3
Wider community	3	7
SUB It is what it is - community edition	0	0
Not caring about the wider community or public	1	1
SUB lack of understanding	0	0
Educating adults on SEND	1	1
family not agreeing with how you parent	1	3
Hiding	1	3
Lack of understanding and knowledge in the community	5	18
Misconception of SEND	1	1
Misunderstanding of family	3	5
Not talking about SEND in the family	1	1
Others sadness	1	1
People feeling pity	2	5
Sad by other peoples reactions	1	1
RQ3.4 Religion and Britishness	0	0
SUB healing	0	0
Balancing religion with profession help	1	1
black seed oil	1	1

Name	Files	References
Cures	5	11
Religion and science mixing	1	6
Religion as the top priority	1	1
Religion instead of professional support	1	1
Sidar honey	1	1
Zamzam water	2	2
SUB religious and cultural identity	0	0
Autism & cultral differences in parenting	1	1
Britishness	1	2
Cultural differences	2	2
Having a british identity and culture	1	4
No name for Autism	1	1
RQ3.5 Working with professionals	0	0
Bad experiencies with professionals	2	2
Immigrant status adding to complexity	2	3
Professional help	1	2
Professionals working with muslims	3	4
Religion in Britain	1	4
Schools not meeting religious obligations	1	1
Services trying to understand Muslims	1	1
working with professionals of different faith and culture	2	2

Appendix R: Initial thematic map under each research question
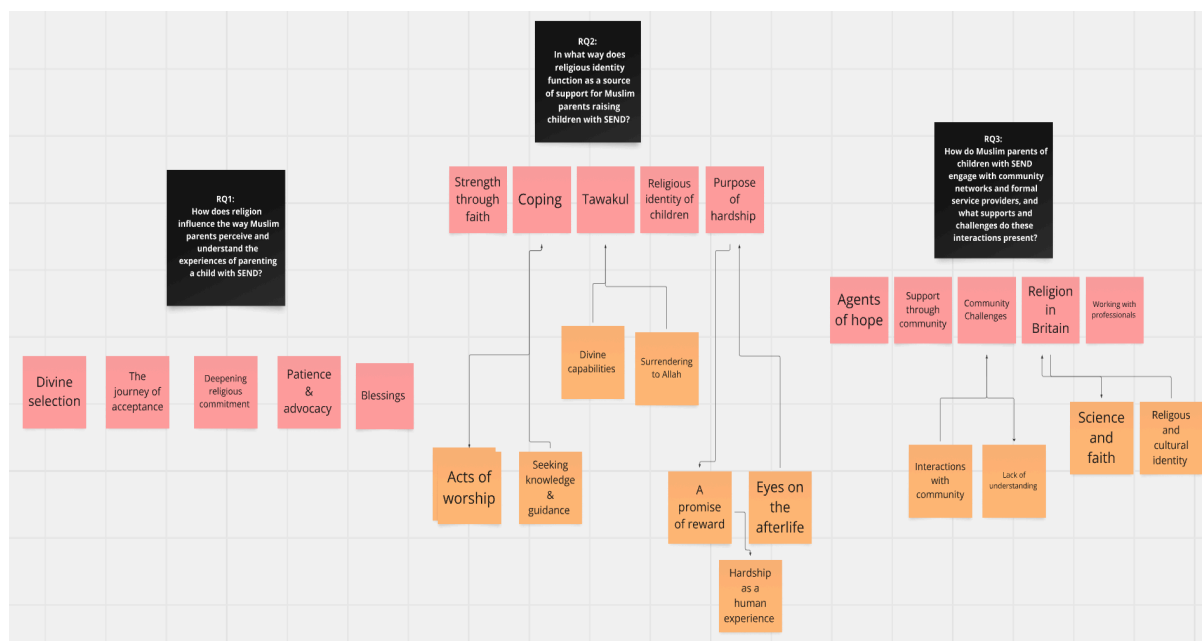
Appendix S: Early forms of the thematic map
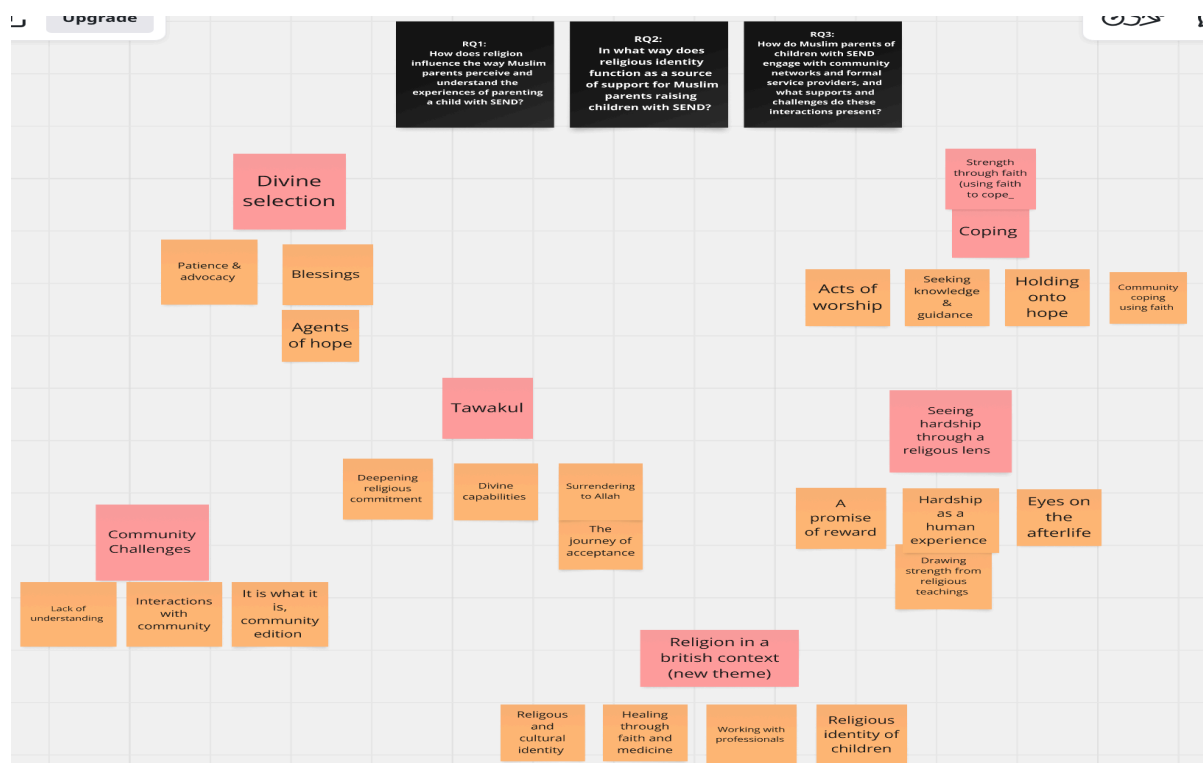
Appendix T: Definitions for each theme and sub-theme

Definitions of themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Definition
Divine selection	Handpicked by Allah	Parents believe they and their children are intentionally given to them by Allah and that they have been chosen by Allah to care for them.
	Blessed, not burdened	Children with SEND are seen as spiritual blessings and gifts from Allah.
Tawakkul (Reliance on Allah)	Trusting Allah's divine capabilities	Parents place complete trust in Allah's control and wisdom, finding peace and hope despite uncertainty.
	The journey to acceptance	Acceptance of their child's SEND is a gradual spiritual journey, often involving grief before reaching trust and surrender to Allah's plan.
	Deepening religious commitment	These experiences deepen parents' religious practises, making their connection to Allah stronger and more consistent.
When faith fuels strength	Acts of worship	Religious practices like prayer, dua, and attending Mecca for pilgrimage offer emotional relief and stability.
	There's power in perspective	Islamic teachings help parents reframe hardship, focus on gratitude, and draw strength from religious stories and perspectives.
Finding meaning in hardship	A test worth bearing	Struggles are interpreted as meainful tests from Allah that build faith and carry spiritual meaning and reward.
	Eyes on the afterlife	Parents find comfort in the belief that their children are destined for paradise, and their caregiving earns them reward in the afterlife.
The role of the community	'What's brought us together is that we are Muslim'	Faith centered support networks, especially among Muslim women, create solidarity and emotional upliftment.
	The weight of community misunderstanding	Some parents face judgement, lack of understanding, and pity within their families and communities, requiring emotional boundaries and reframing.

Religious identity in children with SEND		Parents adapt religious teaching to their child's abilities, maintaining religion as a central part of their child's identity.
Integrating faith		Faith is integrated with medical care; parents reject the idea that religious and clinical approaches are incompatible.

Appendix U: A reflexive diary extract from the data analysis process

Data analysis week
Reflection.

I started coding today. I had previously gone through the transcripts so I was familiar w/ the data but improved my say on how much more codes I was able to pull out. from an element I noticed one extract could have multiple codes. I Initially found it hard to name my codes bc I wanted them to capture what I was saying w/out just being a sentence - I wanted it to be clear + catchy - not too long + not too short but I just thought about the purpose of the code + how the label /wording wasn't necessarily important it was more what it represented. I also noticed my key grouping more easily.

Latent coding has been easier bc I know what religious concept they're pulling from when they take a certain perspective - I also understand how much background context I need to give to a reader who isn't muslim

Appendix V: Initial sketching of conceptual framework