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Factors influencing the sexual and reproductive health of Muslim women: systematic review

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Background

- In Islamic societies sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues are rarely discussed
- As a result, poor SRH knowledge and practices
- Many young Muslims engaging in extra/pre-marital sexual relations
- Single women do not need to be knowledgeable about their own SRH

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Aim: To explore the barriers and facilitators to sexual and reproductive wellbeing among Muslim women.

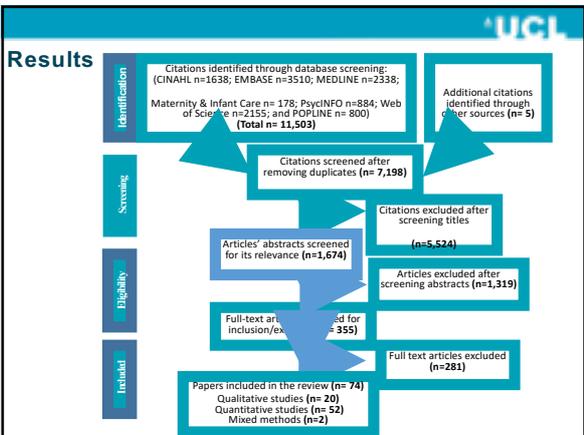
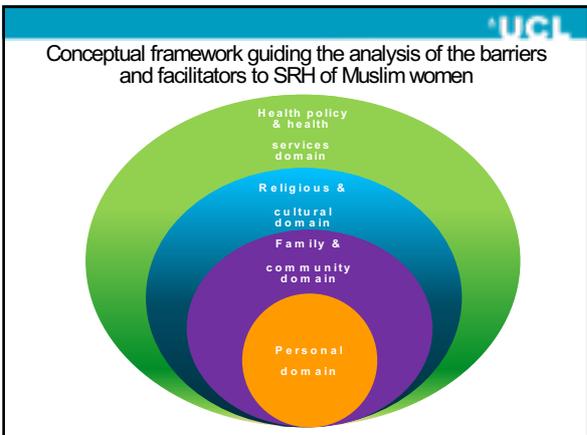
Objectives:

- Explore factors affecting SRH among Muslim women
- Explore barriers and facilitators to contraception
- Explore barriers and facilitators to seeking SRH services and education

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Methods

A systematic review was conducted on seven electronic databases. Studies were included if focusing on SRH of Muslim women worldwide in two main areas: contraception and access SRH services and education. Narrative synthesis using thematic analysis was applied in this review.



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Findings

Contraception

A. Personal domain

- Insufficient knowledge about contraception
- Fear of side effects and misconceptions

"We believe that after the first child its preferable... not to have contraception method because we think [...] some women have been sterile after they used contraception" (Jordan)

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Contraception

B. Family and community domain

- Husbands control over fertility choices
- Family interference, particularly the mother-in-law

"I have no say in the matter of how many children we have. It's my husband who decides" (Palestine)

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Contraception

C. Cultural and religious domain

- Islam encourages high fertility
- Using contraception is a sin
- Unmarried women face greater difficulties accessing contraception
- Cultural desirability for sons

"As an Arab woman, I have the idea that I need a son to feel 'complete'" (Palestine)

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Contraception

D. Health policy and health services domain

- Gender of healthcare providers
- Communication issues

"She said I am going to call the [male] doctor to put the coil in for you, and I said to them, no way am I going to have a [male] doctor. I'll have 10 kids, but I will never have that from the doctor." (United Kingdom)

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Access to SRH services and education

A. Personal domain

- Unawareness of available services
- SRH education is not needed as religious practices provide protection against STIs
- Unmarried women feared of losing their virginity during medical examinations

"We don't go through the process of multiple partners. That is a religious distinction [...] It keeps us safe from many sicknesses. [...] At least we have kept ourselves safe from sexually transmitted disease." (Canada)

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Access to SRH services and education

B. Family and community domain

- Unmarried women face opposition when attempting to seek answers on certain SRH matters
- Unmarried women believed to not require SRH services

"I get annoyed by my delayed periods. My family tells me that, as I am not yet married, I don't need to worry or take any measures." (Iran)

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Access to SRH services and education

C. Cultural and religious domain

- Some women thought SRH education is forbidden in Islam
- Religious leaders encourage SRH education

"People who think that sex education isn't permitted in religion are completely wrong, but such knowledge should be taught in a way that informs adolescents about sexuality in a modest and moral manner." (Iran)

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Access to SRH services and education

D. Health policy and health services domain

- Lack of privacy and confidentiality
- Healthcare providers felt that it was not a part of their professional duties to help unmarried women

"It has been established in our country that infections and gynaecological problems occur after marriage. That is, an unmarried woman cannot have such issues." (Iran)

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Conclusion

- There are multiple levels of factors that influence women's SRH.
- All women have the right to be taught about SRH irrespective of their sexual activity or religious beliefs.
- Increasing awareness would empower women to take charge of their own reproductive health choices.
- Focusing on the views of people from a specific culture or religion can falsely create the presence of 'issues' for this particular group when often there are similar issues for people from different cultures and religions.

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Thank you
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