

Dr Jussra Schröer started her presentation by giving a definition of spiritual care, or “Seelsorge”, according to the Qur’an and orienting spiritual care in the context of Islamic theology as well as offer a legal context in Germany in which practitioners of Islamic spiritual care act. Within the Islamic theology the practice of offering seelsorge should not be limited to imams only but by all Muslims and the religion or background of the receiver is not of importance. Through the offering seelsorge one can better accept people and help ones family, neighbours, and friends better cope with their lives. Through these meetings people can become aware of one another and experience the mercy of God. This mercy is especially important in relation to the Qur’an which emphasises the importance of God’s mercy, which humans can rely on, but in return also mercy towards God and among all humans against one another. This translates into a tradition of caring for others in Islam despite seelsorge not being explicitly described as terminology in the Qur’an.

Dr Schröer highlighted the duality of working alongside Christian chaplains. While the Christian co-workers were reported as being an important point of contact for the Muslim spiritual carers it is important to ask whether it is possible for to apply the Christian method and model of spiritual care to Islamic spiritual care. The differences between the role of imams and priests were given as examples. Furthermore, the universality of offering seelsorge within the Islamic faith has led to spiritual care traditionally having been carried out by family, friends or the local Muslim community. Which poses its own challenges in the form of lack of professionalization. Muslims seelsorge in Germany requires sound knowledge of Islam, basic medical knowledge, basic therapeutic knowledge, but a on a personal level social and communicative competence. By enabling this Muslim seelsorge can be more integrated in the clinical process but also support the professional work and co-operate with communication and consultations of Muslim patients. Professionalization of the volunteers could also help improve their work environment, many reporting that they struggled to not bring their work experiences with them home.

Islamic spiritual care is currently facing a number of great challenges in Germany. The Muslim community in Germany is a very heterogeneous group which derives from different branches of Islam but is also characterised by ethnic and linguistic pluralism as well as membership to different Muslim organisations. This poses a challenge when trying to standardise Islamic spiritual care. A further political challenge is can be derived from the German constitutions which does not attribute a privileged status to any religious groups, including Muslims. While religious congregations and groups are allowed to offer institutional spiritual care within the military, hospitals, and prisons this is mainly provided on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, there is no common co-ordinator responsible for all Islamic institutional spiritual care or seelsorge in Germany, instead there are a number of different actors.

In conclusion Dr Schröer established that Islamic spiritual care in institutions is an under researched area with limited data in the area available. Islamic spiritual care must establish its own way in Germany and set new priorities to be able to address challenges regarding the diversity of Muslims which are sure to appear in the coming years.