

## From “Why Me” to “Try Me”: A Muslim Mother Reflects on Her Journey of Raising a Child with Additional Needs

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## From “Why Me” to “Try Me”: A Muslim Mother Reflects on Her Journey of Raising a Child with Additional Needs

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The story “My Daughter—My Inspiration,” published in this issue of *Al-Raida*, was written by Madiha Sajid, a Pakistani mother of a child with a physical impairment. Madiha participated in a participatory action research project that brought together six Pakistani families with disabled children to explore their support needs in the context of the United Kingdom (Kramer-Roy, 2012). During the study, the individual families initially explored their experiences of welcoming their children into the family. After that, three action research groups were formed for the fathers, mothers, and non-disabled siblings of the families, respectively, each of which chose a shared issue to explore through creative activities (Kramer-Roy, 2015) and action research cycles (Kemmis et al., 2004).

The mothers found the initial meetings very helpful. During these meeting, they used drawings to represent their relationship with their disabled child and to share stories with each other, which allowed them to discover common themes. For example, they all recognized that in their families and communities, they had initially been met with very negative perceptions about disability, including the view that their child’s condition was God’s punishment for the parents’ sins. While this made their initial years of parenting particularly challenging, they also all spoke of how their love for their child caused them to question these perceptions, and to deepen their faith and sense of identity as Muslim mothers through their prayers. Each in their own way, they spoke of how they gradually realized that their child was not a punishment, but rather a blessing from God.

Based on this positive experience of mutual understanding and support, the mothers’ “action” within the research cycles focused on trying to set up a local group to continue this conversation with other mothers in their communities. This involved designing leaflets and visiting local community centers, shops, and special education schools to display the leaflets and to speak

to other mothers. In their evaluation of the project, the participating mothers spoke of how empowering it had been to take the initiative to reach out to other mothers and to speak to community members about the need to increase support for families with disabled children. This illustrates the emancipatory nature and intent of participatory action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Madiha's story is a moving and powerful account of transformation and resilience. She describes her journey from the moment her daughter Sophia was born, through the valleys and mountaintops of fulfilling Sophia's needs. All this, while negotiating and managing the expectations of family, community members, and society. Read and be inspired!

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