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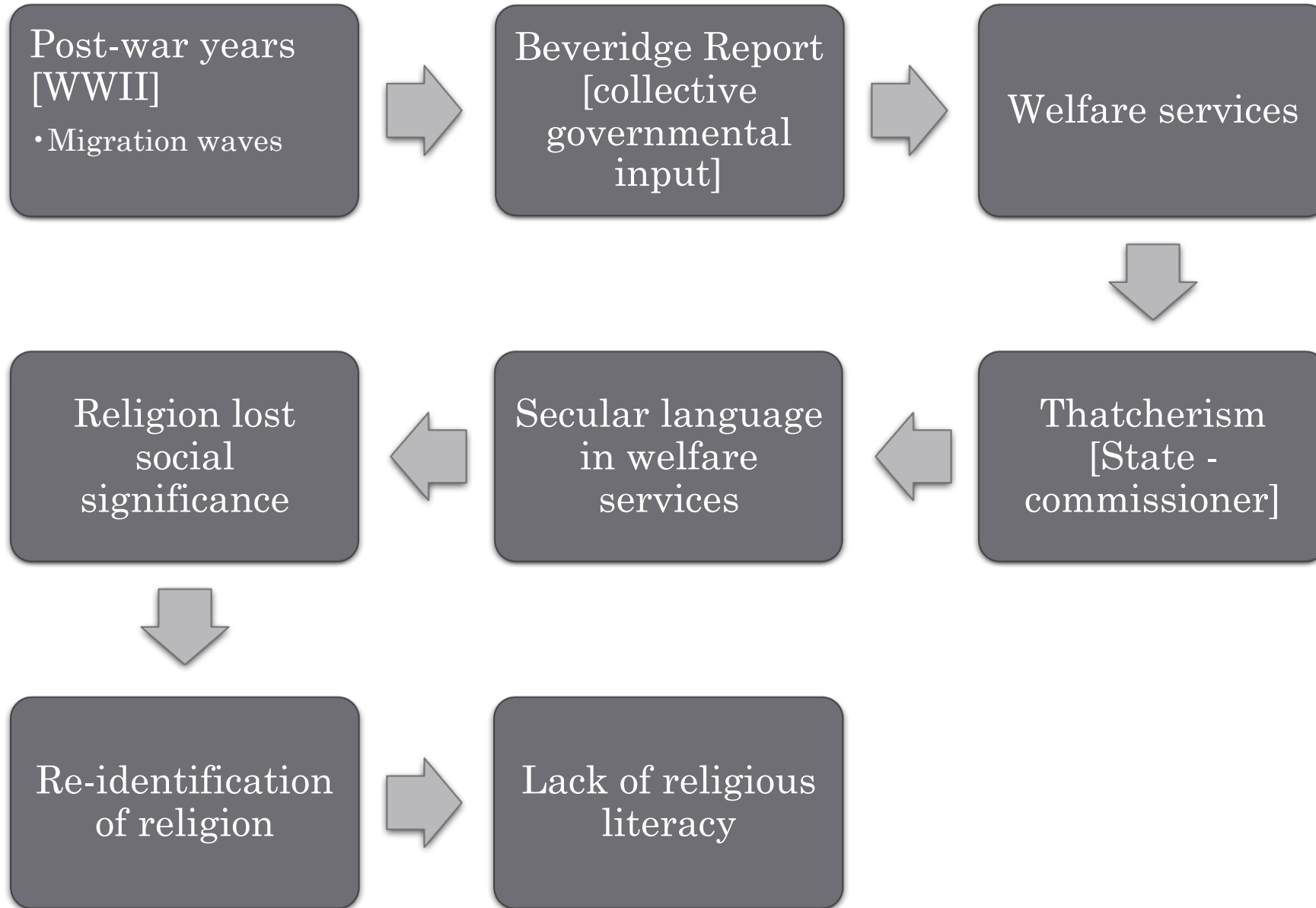
Religion & Belief in Hospice Social Work

Religious Dying & Secular Social Work Practice in Hospice Care

Outline

- Background
- Methodology
- Findings
- Outcomes
- Q&A

Context – Tracking religion in the public sphere



Methodology & Methods

- Part of a larger project
- Case study
- 7 Hospices in Greater London Area
- 18 qualitative interviews
- Qualitative thematic analysis (Nvivo)



Findings

Perceptions about religion, belief and spirituality

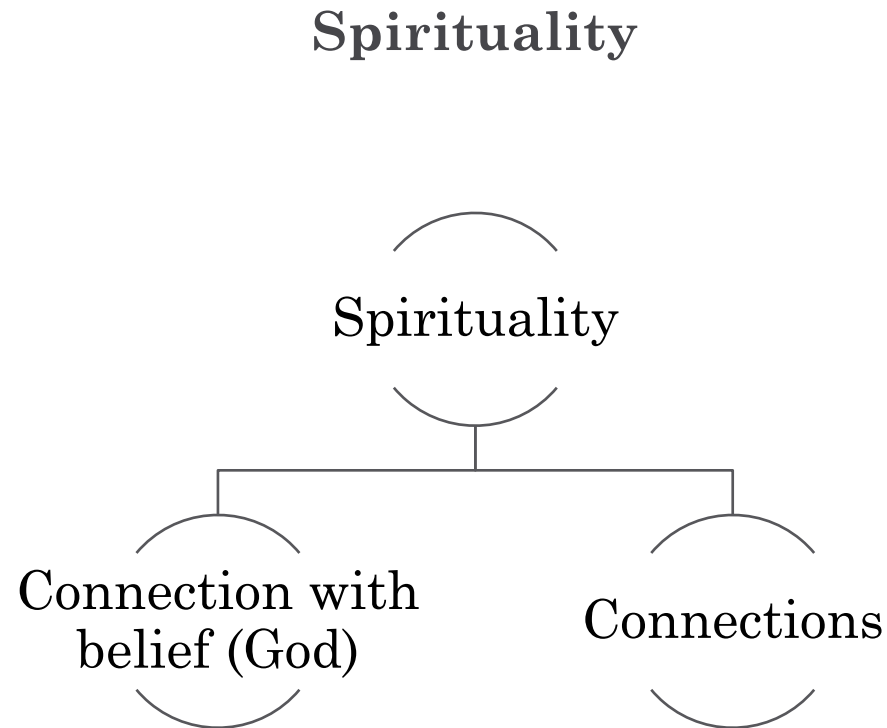
Spirituality > Religion

Belief → source of support

Non-religion → form of spirituality

- I think people in Britain are more spiritual rather than religious
- I think people when they need, when they are in shock, or life is not good, they turn to God, often.
- There are a bunch of atheists, you have got different parts of religion, you have got some really religious elements in our work. Obviously we are very multicultural, so we got really religious elements.
- I think, for me a lot of people that are not religious are still very spiritual. So, I have not - - I am personally not very keen on the term religion, although if you are keen on the term religion and you are - - and your religion is really important, then that is fine.

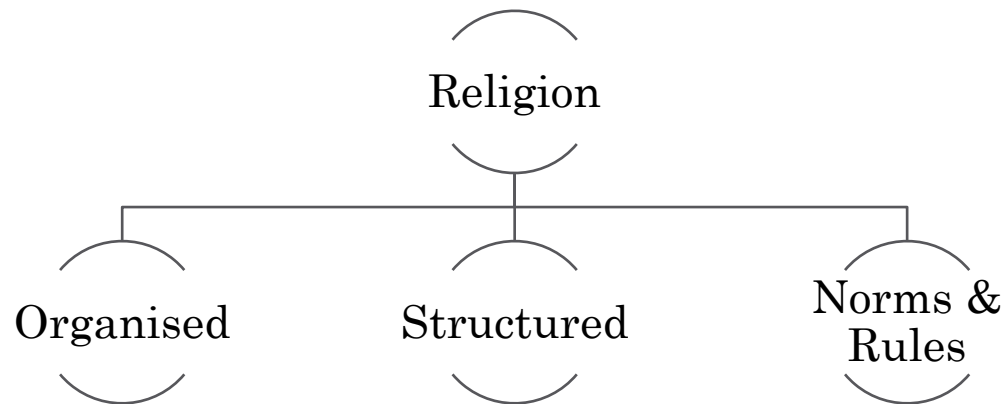
Defining Spirituality



- I think spirituality is just about; it can mean a variety of things, because if you are a religious person, spirituality can mean your connection with your God and your connection with what is going on in your Church and spirituality can mean your -- your feelings about your belief and your connection with it.
- For me, and for perhaps a lot of people, spirituality is about our belief system, and what you believe about the world, and what you believe about the environment, and then -- and what you believe about your connection to other people, and how you chair the world with ... or other animals, it could be anything.

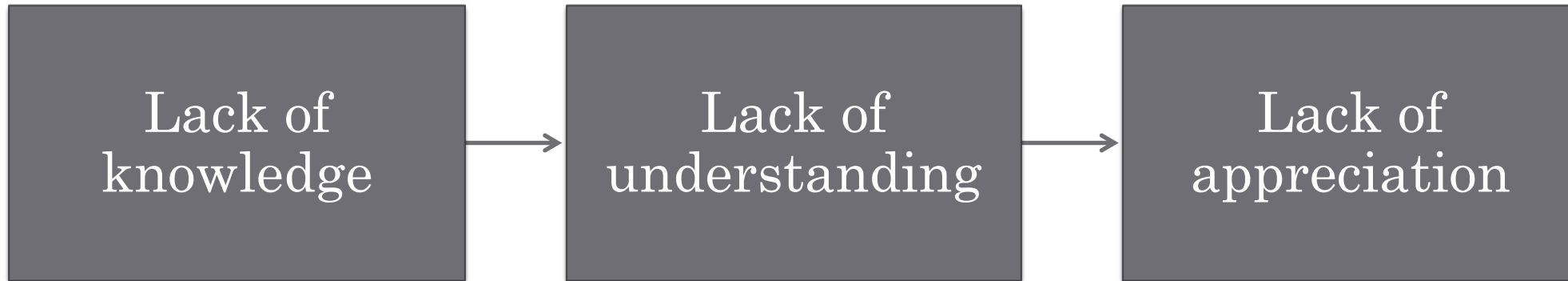
Defining Religion

Religion



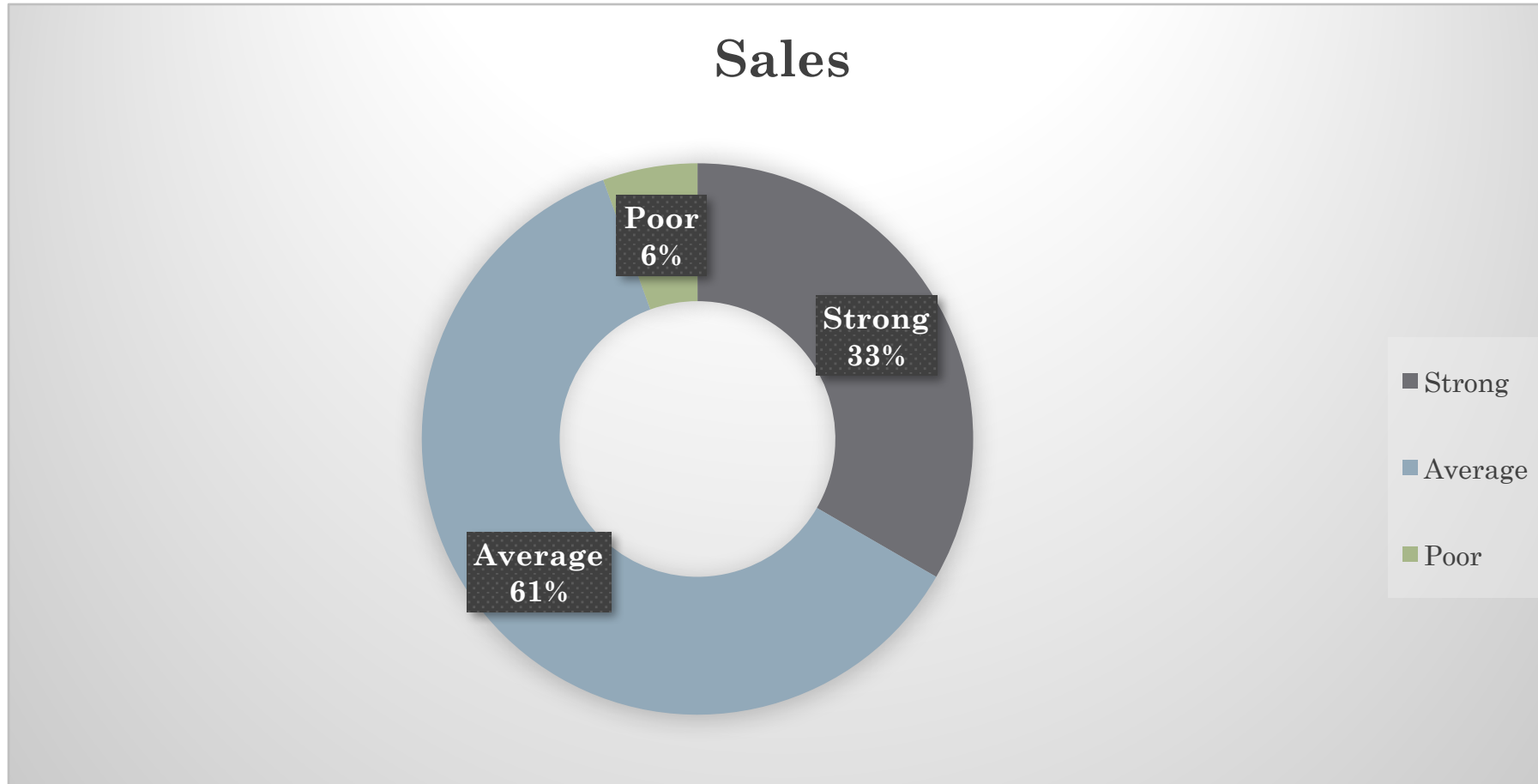
- it is organized by people of ... to worship in the way that they want - - if they want. But it is structured and organized. I think sometimes it is just an organized way of people [] recognizing their beliefs and worshiping their God, and [] - - and belonging to a group, which is also very comforting.
- People belonging into a group, so it is - - a lot of groups that like to worship together, in their way. I mean, if I am talking about religion generally, I think it is all these organizations that are around, and organization might sound a bit commercial, but I am not using that word - - several organizations that have developed over the millennia to enable people to worship their God, but also to perhaps collect money.

'Comfortable to engage'



- **So I feel quite comfortable, because I know that I do not know quite a lot of stuff, so you know what I mean, and I am quite willing for people to tell me.**
- **I am very comfortable to talk about it. Whoever it is, I can direct them to the right person and I am fine with it.**
- **Yes, I mean, people find awkward moments sometimes to bring it up. Like, when you are talking about announcing to their families something.**

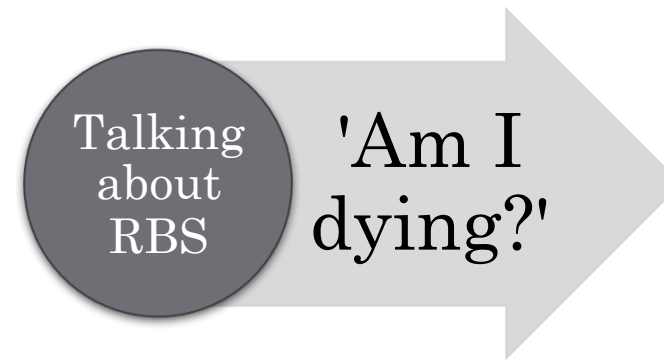
Self-rating of knowledge & understanding of RBS



Culture of Avoidance

Why choose not to talk about religion and belief?

Implications of impending death



- I suppose the only - - to be honest the only thing that might hold me back at times, is that - - is that sometimes some people, if you bring up the issue of religion or spirituality, they immediately will think that you are ... because they are going to die.
- Often times people think that you are asking that because they think you are going to die.
- When, in some context, if you sort of just saying [] - - you know, literally it could be something - - [] you know, you are - - if you go to Church, if you, you know if you - - if someone on the ward really might benefit from seeing somebody, and you sort of ask about religion or [] do they - - would they like to see somebody - - would they - - while they were here [to see somebody]. It is just - - yes, a few times some people said, 'oh! Why are you asking that?' You know - - and I think there was one person that actually said to me 'well you think I am going to die?' or something like that.

How to ask questions?



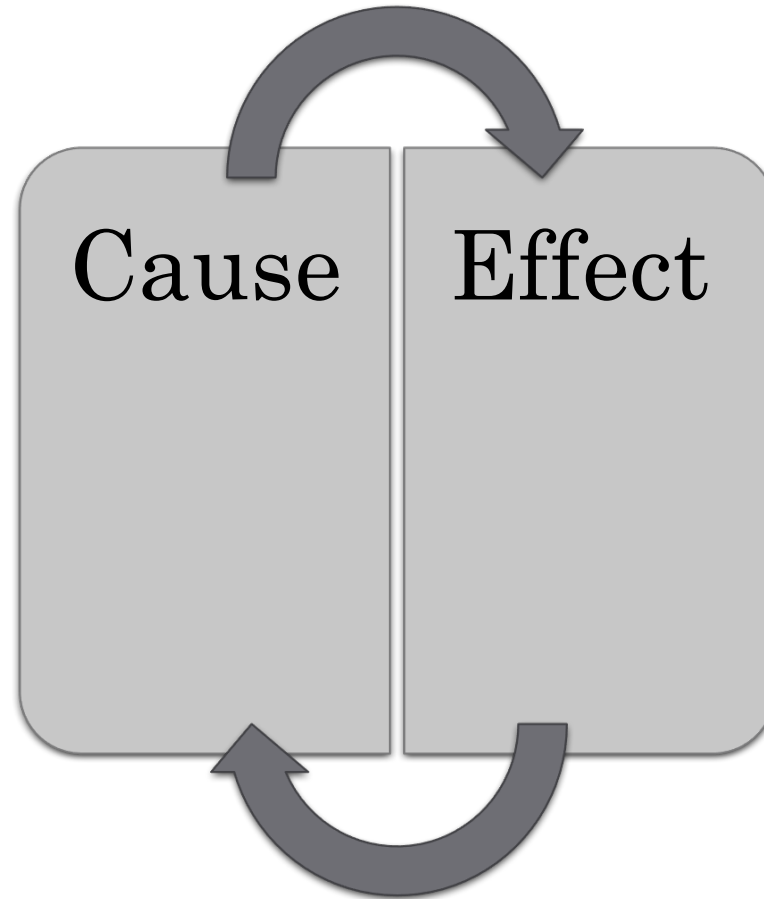
- I am comfortable knowing that I do not know a lot. But I am not - - the only thing is how to ask questions sometime
- I think sometimes - - no - - actually [] they feel uncomfortable. I do not know. Been asked that question, you do not know what - - you know, what their history is, whether they feel guilt, or - -. Yes, you can see their face changes a bit, so I think - - you know, why are you asking that for? And it is about finding the way to say it, you know, so it is naturally brought than - - you know.

Initial assessment

- I think when you are doing an assessment, and you have got a list of things, because that is one of the things that is in the list for people to get asked when they come in here. So, I think when people do the initial assessment and they go down the list, they talk about the point of religion and spirituality, and then that is fine, because it is part of the assessment process.
- Others ask when the patient first comes in, so it is not our job to do that really. But of course, if it is necessary I will ask, it is just that the patient has already been asked and it is in their initial assessment if I need to have access to it.

Prescriptive practice

- I do not really go in there with an instant way to ask, so what I normally do not quite find out, I do not normally - - you know what I mean, so I will try and get them by the person anyway.
- That is the last thing about our jobs as social workers here; we have not gotten - - you know, obviously you have got to protect people and things like that, but you have not have to be going in there prescriptively or to find out today necessarily.



Service-centred vs. person-centred practice

- The organizing, it was not person centred, you know, it was service centred. It was services that nuns wanted to provide and obviously I think that is wrong as well, because we have to be person centred.
- We need to be more person-centred and respond to what people need. There is a lot of other concerns within the organisation, like money and stuff, but our practice should remain person-centred.



Controversial
practice?

Comfort level

- **They are not too much confident to be honest. They will just reach for the phone. Get someone to come. I do not think they are that confident really.**
- **I think they would literary say, religion, well call the appropriate person. I think that is probably what it would mean.**
- **No, I think they are not. There is still so much work to be done around it, and people may say they are great with it, but not really. Or at least we do not see it happening.**

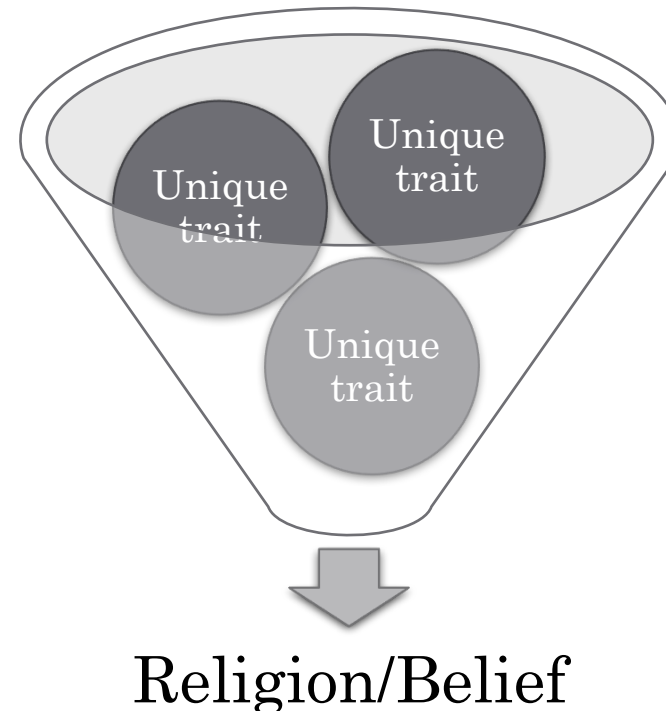
Working in partnership with other professionals

- I am not really an MDT person, you know. I might go to a meeting once a quarter but that is it really. If someone needs spiritual care we can notify the chaplain without discussing it between us.
- I mean, we do talk to each other and all, and we meet sometimes, but if we do meet then it is because there is some medical or clinical issue to attend to. We would not meet for spiritual needs.



Generalisability

- **Talking about Islam is that there are wide variations in Islam as perhaps any religion I have ever seen. But, there are so many similarities, almost the same, no matter if they are here or another country.**
- **I think all Muslim people tend to mix with themselves. They have so many things in common. Once you know what one needs, you can assume what others may need too. So, other people might not mix so much. Non believers for example.**
- **If someone says they are Christian for example, we will invite the chaplain to come and talk to them.**



RBS in Hospice Care – Social Work perspective

- Call in the chaplain
- Initial assessment
- Itemised form
- Unifying knowledge

Outcomes

- Religion = structured framework vs. spirituality = individualised connections
- Culture of avoidance
- Tendency to treat religious groups in a homogenous way
- Working in partnership with other professionals is not prioritised
- Comfort level for engagement is low

Lack of religious literacy?

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Thank you – Q&A

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