

Intimate partner violence in Muslim communities in the United States

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INTRODUCTION TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Definition: Intimate Partner Violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual attacks and economic coercion (Hassouneh-Phillip 2009)

- **35.6% of women in the U.S.** will experience a form of IPV in their lifetime
- **Prevalence among Muslims:** A recent study found **31% of American Muslims** reported experiencing abuse within an IPV relationship. Other studies have found prevalence rates between 10% and 53%
- 85% of all IPV is perpetrated against women
- **Consequences of IPV:** low self esteem, shame, helplessness, self-blame, difficulty trusting others, depression, anxiety, PTSD, injury, suicidal ideation, chronic pain, STIs
- 25% of homicides in the U.S. are committed within the family, and 50% of those are perpetrated by husbands against their wives
- 50% of men who abuse their wives also abuse their children
- **The most dangerous time for a woman in an IPV relationship is when she tries to leave**

DOES ISLAM ALLOW INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE?

A CONTROVERSIAL VERSE

Men are in authority over women, because God has preferred some over others and because they spend their wealth. Righteous women are obedient and guard in their husbands' absence what God would have them guard. Concerning those women from whom you fear disobedience/rebellion, admonish them, and/or abandon them in bed, and/or hit them. If they obey you, do not seek a means against them. God is most High, Great (Q 4:34, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

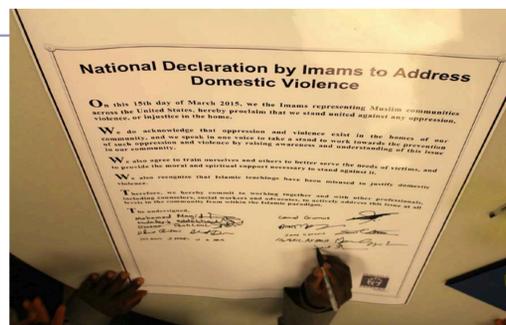
- “The challenge for Muslims is not to read Q 4:34 in a nonviolent way—this can be done easily—but rather to read it nonviolently in the face of an authoritative tradition that only read the verse as sanctioning violence against wives.” - Chaudhry

READING THE QUR’AN AS A WHOLE

- Equality of Genders
- Individual Responsibility
- Against Emotional Abuse and Stalking

THE PROPHET’S EXAMPLE

- The Prophet Muhammad never hit any of his wives, he respected their opinions, and he helped complete household chores.
- In the Hadith (sayings of the prophet), there are examples of the prophet speaking out against men who abused their wives.



3 PERSPECTIVES

Theological Perspective:

- What does Islam teach about marriage, the family, and intimate partner violence?
- Interpretations of Q 4:34 - New interpretations (feminist perspectives)
- How are imams (mosque leaders) responding to domestic violence in their communities?
- Examining the difference between Islamic theory and practice

Psychological Perspective:

- Imams are the most frequent counselors of Muslims, but the majority do not have any formal counseling training.
- Clinicians are trained to help IPV victims, but are not trained on how to help Muslim clients
- **Goals:**
 - Educate non-Muslim clinicians to help them provide culturally and religiously sensitive therapy
 - Encourage a **referral network** between imams and clinicians. Imams can give clinicians credibility to members in the community, and clinicians can teach imams how to respond to instances of IPV.

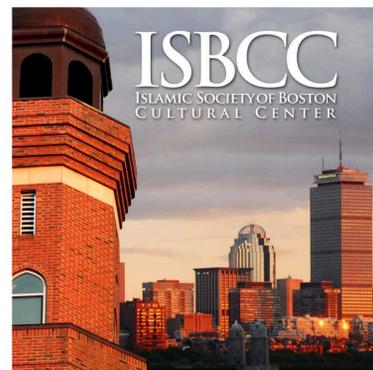
Legal Perspective:

- Fear in the community that the judicial system is anti-Islam. If one community member tries to get legal help and is not successful, the whole community fears accessing services.
- Issues with “Expert Witnesses”
 - Require money, present a distorted view of Islam that helps the perpetrator
 - Judge’s own interpretation of Islamic teaching
- **Immigration issues**
 - Perpetrator does not allow access to travel documents, passport, Victim dependent on spouse for visa

INTERVIEW WITH SALMA ELKADI ABUGIDEIRI, LPC

Interview with Salma Elkadi Abugideiri, LPC of the Peaceful Families Project in Washington, D.C.

- The Peaceful Families Project (PFP) is an organization devoted to ending violence in Muslim families in the U.S. by “facilitating awareness workshops for Muslim leaders and communities, providing cultural sensitivity trainings and technical assistance for professionals, conducting research, and developing resources.”
- “The critical shift occurs when the imams understand the safety issues...no imam intentionally wants to do harm, they just didn’t know they were doing harm. Once the imams understand the psychological damage of IPV, the safety implications, and how harmful it is for children, they are much more open to presenting divorce as an option. Imams are trying to keep families together because they think it is better for the children, but when they understand that is not the case, it changes their whole perspective.”
- “Clinicians need to let go of their stereotypes and be educated.” Uneducated counselors can have an “obsession with the exotic,” focusing on things like a client’s hijab, instead of the fact that she is a victim of abuse. Stereotypes can also lead clinicians to believe that all Muslim women are abused because it is a part of their religion and/or culture, so there is nothing that can be done to solve the problem in therapy. They need to know that Muslims have a resource in their religion.



MUSLIMS IN THE U.S.

- Over 7 million people in U.S. identify as Muslim
 - 23.8% are African-American, 26.2% are Arab-Americans, 24.7% are South Asians
- All Muslims are united by their Islamic faith, but are heterogeneous in terms of cultural and geographic context. This affects their lived experience of Islam.
- **Post-9/11 Islamophobia:** Victims are afraid of confirming prejudices about Islam, advocates need to overcome harmful stereotypes.
- **Media Reporting:** IPV in Muslim marriages is normal and expected, criticism of an entire culture and religion. The same exact IPV in white couples is seen as an anomaly.
- Religion can **mediate negative effects** of IPV (increase mental health) by giving meaning, purpose, and hope.
- Belief systems that blame victims, discourage divorce, and have negative religious coping (blaming God) are associated with higher levels of PTSD.

REFERENCES

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