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## Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures

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### Domestic Violence: Muslim Communities: United States of America

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Domestic violence is a social issue that affects people of all faith groups, ethnicities and races. There are victims from every socioeconomic bracket, educational level and professional background. While there is no single agreed upon definition of domestic violence, particularly in the way it is measured in research studies, a core component is a pattern of behaviors by one person in an intimate relationship designed to coerce or control another person in the relationship. The broadest definitions of domestic violence include spousal abuse, child abuse and sibling abuse. Domestic violence includes verbal, emotional, financial, physical and sexual abuse and can range from threats that cause the victim to live in a state of fear and anxiety, to beatings, rape and even murder.

While great strides have been made in the United States to provide services for victims and treatment for batterers, there are many segments of American society that are underserved, with few benefiting from the existing resources. Muslims are one of these populations. Although Muslims affected by domestic violence have a great deal in common with other Americans in terms of the types of abuses experienced and the types of services that are needed to deal with the abuse, Muslims also have some unique issues and needs related to their religio-cultural background.

The study of domestic violence in Muslim communities in the United States is relatively recent. While the mainstream movement against domestic violence began in the 1960s, documented research related to Muslims began in the 1990s. Among the general population in the United States, approximately 30 percent of women in

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intimate partner relationships are victims of domestic violence (Collins et al. 1999). To date, there is relatively little research about the prevalence of domestic violence among Muslims in the United States, the manifestations of domestic violence in this group, how Muslims in the United States are dealing with domestic violence, and best practices for intervention. Yet in the past 10–15 years, there has been growing attention given to this issue as is evident in both scholarly and community-based literature, as well as in the development of domestic violence services for Muslims (Alkhateeb and Abugideiri 2007).

Recently, Muslim communities across the United States were spurred into action by the case of a Muslim television producer who killed his wife after she sought a divorce following years of documented abuse. The nationally publicized tragedy of Aasiya Hassan forced many Muslim communities to recognize that domestic violence is a real threat to them and to the lives of abuse victims, and that Muslim communities need to become more active in understanding and responding to domestic violence (Abugideiri 2009, Ghayyur 2009, Grewal 2009).

## Demographics

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A recent major study of Muslim Americans describes this population as “youthful, racially diverse, generally well-educated, and financially about as well off as the rest of the US public” (Pew Research Center 2007, 15). Determining the exact number of Muslims in the United States has been problematic, with great variability in survey outcomes, depending on who is conducting the survey, and with no one survey being completely reliable (Leonard 2003). The most commonly cited figures indicate that there are anywhere from 5 to 8 million Muslims in the United States (*World Almanac* 2009; Bagby, Perl and Froehle 2001; Esposito 2010; Smith 1999). The bulk of these Muslims consist of first, second or third generation immigrants (Smith 1999)\*, mostly South Asian Americans and Arab Americans. Among Muslims born in the United States, a large majority are African Americans. This population also includes converts (African American, Caucasian, Latino and Caribbean), who comprise about one-fourth of the United States Muslim population (Bagby, Perl, and Froehle 2001). Significantly, more than three-fourths of Muslims in the United States are American citizens (Pew Research Center 2007). Muslims are therefore an extremely diverse group, representing a wide range of cultures, which are reflected in a variety of attitudes, opinions and behaviors. According to a recent Gallup poll, Muslim Americans are the most racially diverse religious group in the United States (Muslim West Facts Project 2009).

## Cultural and religious identity

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Both religion and culture are very important in the understanding of domestic

violence among Muslims because both of these factors contribute significantly to people's perceptions, interpretations and responses to the phenomenon of domestic violence (Alkhateeb and Abugideiri 2007). It is often hard to separate religion from culture as they inform each other and are deeply intertwined. The diverse cultural backgrounds of Muslims in the United States lead to many variations in the ways Islam is interpreted and sometimes practiced, especially in rituals related to marriage, divorce and the birth of a child. Immigrants from Muslim-majority societies may presume some of their familiar practices are Islamic, when in fact those practices may have predated Islam. Converts to Islam, including whites, blacks and Latinos, are frequently educated by immigrant Muslims about Islamic beliefs and practices, and they may adopt some of the interpretations and practices of Islam that are a result of cultural influences.

Religion is reported to be important to between 72 and 80 percent of Muslims in the United States, with 47 percent identifying themselves first as Muslim, second as American (Pew Research Center 2007, Muslim West Facts Project 2009). In comparison, 65–82 percent of Americans in general report religion to be important in their lives (Newport 2009; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2009). For this reason, it is critical to understand the religious impact on the occurrence of domestic violence, as well as the ways in which religion can be used as a deterrent and preventive resource.

As far as religious affiliation is concerned, about half of the Muslims in the United States are Sunni, 22 percent report no particular affiliation, and 16 percent are Shi'i. While 50 percent of Muslims believe the Qur'ān is to be read literally, 60 percent believe that there is more than one way to interpret Islamic teachings. Almost 70 percent of Muslims believe that Islam treats men and women equally, while 23 percent believe Islam treats men better than women (Pew Research Center 2007).

Muslims in the United States cover the entire continuum of religiosity, from extremely conservative to extremely liberal. Some Muslims are more secular than others. Nadir and Dziegielewski have suggested a typology that categorizes Muslims according to degree of practice, while Alkhateeb has suggested a matrix that categorizes Muslims according to the degree of literalism by which they interpret the Qur'ān (Alkhateeb and Abugideiri 2007).

## Prevalence

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It is difficult to ascertain the prevalence of domestic violence among Muslims for many reasons. Research specifically considering Muslim Americans and domestic violence is emerging, although it is more common to find studies focusing on particular ethnic groups that tend to be heavily Muslim, such as South Asian or Arab American, without always providing a breakdown of how many participants were

Muslim. Readers should note that while the majority of Arabs in the Arab world are Muslim, the 2002 Zogby International Survey found the majority of Arab Americans to be Christian (Arab American Institute n.d.). However, research studies mentioned in this article have focused on communities in the United States, such as Dearborn, Michigan, that have large numbers of immigrant Arab Muslims. Studies of South Asian Americans and Arab Americans have focused more on the ethnicity and cultural factors than the religious identity of the target population. While this research certainly has helped tremendously in beginning to understand some of the cultural variables that affect domestic violence, it has not focused on the importance that religious identity has for many Muslim Americans. Those studies that have focused on issues that may be specific to Muslim Americans have emphasized the significance and impact of their understanding of religious teachings and practices within their cultural contexts (Abugideiri 2007).

The first documented survey of domestic violence among Muslim Americans was conducted by Sharifa Alkhateeb in 1993 (1999), looking at a range of abuse from hitting to incest. In this study, 10 percent of respondents reported experiencing some type of abuse, not including verbal or emotional abuse. In a 2009 survey of 241 Muslims, approximately one third of respondents reported feeling afraid of a current or previous spouse. In terms of physical abuse, 14 percent reported experiencing abuse in a current marriage, and almost 18 percent had experienced it in a prior marriage. In addition, 4.3 percent of the women reported miscarriages due to abuse (Ghayyur 2009). In a study of 190 Muslims (mostly Arab and South Asian) who had sought counseling mainly for family and relationship problems or for depression, 50 percent of the clients had experienced physical abuse; 63 percent had experienced emotional abuse; and 14 percent had experienced sexual abuse. Three percent of these clients reported the death of a family member due to domestic violence (Abugideiri 2007). Among Americans in general, one in four women (or 25 percent) report experiencing abuse by an intimate partner (Family Violence Prevention Fund n.d.), and more than half of women accessing mental health services have experienced either current or past abuse by an intimate partner (Warshaw and Barnes 2003).

## Contributing factors

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Although there is no single cause for domestic violence, and no single theory that explains it, it generally occurs as a result of inequality and the desire on the part of the abuser for power and control. There are cultures in which oppression of women is more tolerated than others, with highly patriarchal cultures more susceptible to the abuse of women. In addition to the systemic risk factors, research on Muslim Americans seems to suggest the possibility of certain risk factors that may also contribute to domestic violence.

While the research is still quite limited, some of the risk factors that seem to be associated with Muslim Americans' experience of domestic violence include a family history of abuse, as well as poverty, isolation, and tenuous legal status (Abdallah 2007; Kulwicki and Miller 1999; Maker, Shah and Agha 2005). Other factors that need to be researched and that may exacerbate the potential for or existence of domestic violence are related to the historical and geopolitical contexts of many Muslim American sub-groups. Muslims who have come to the United States to escape war, political persecution, torture in refugee camps, or other types of violence may be suffering from traumatic disorders that could lead to emotional instability, making them either more likely to tolerate abuse or more likely to be abusive. In this author's clinical experience working with refugees, women who had experienced torture or witnessed extreme forms of violence due to war dismissed the beatings or threats they sustained from their husbands as minor irritants compared to what they had already endured. In terms of their perceptions of and responses to abuse, African American Muslims may be affected by their history of slavery and oppression, as well as contemporary societal racism they have experienced in the United States (Alkhateeb and Abugideiri 2007). These are just a few examples that highlight aspects of the Muslim American experience that need further study in order to determine scientifically the contribution these factors make to the occurrence of domestic violence. Researchers also emphasize the importance of considering the impact of the intersections of race, class and gender, which also influence the ways people perceive and respond to domestic violence (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005).

## Cultural and religious attitudes and beliefs

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Cultural belief systems typically include contradictory values that can be either supportive of abusive practices or liberating from abusive practices (Ammar 2000; Kasturirangan, Krishnan and Riger 2004). For example, many majority-Muslim societies place a high value on the integrity of the family unit and the role of women in maintaining the well-being of the family. The honor of the family is tied to women's reputations, and men are generally tasked with controlling women's behavior as a way to protect their reputations by limiting their access to anything that might mar their reputations. Shame is often used as a regulating factor in South Asian and Arab cultures to maintain behaviors within acceptable social norms.

At the same time, these societies also subscribe to religious beliefs of individual accountability and the fact that God hates injustice and oppression and sides with the oppressed. The health and well-being of children are highly valued. In addition, Islam sets conditions for marriage that are preventive of abuse, such as terms that can be set in the marriage contract guaranteeing a woman's right to education, a certain standard of living, and so on. Islam highlights the accountability of each human being directly to God, as well as the importance of critical thinking and freedom of choice.

These are examples of beliefs that can be used to empower women and create systemic change (Alkhateeb and Abugideiri 2007; Faith Trust Institute 2007).

Immigrants bring their cultural legacies with them when they come to the United States, and although the process of acculturation certainly can dilute cultural norms, beliefs and attitudes over time, the deeply engrained values related to shame and honor in Arab and South Asian cultures can be seen even in second and third generation Muslim Americans. Women coming from highly patriarchal cultures where they have limited rights may not even recognize behaviors that constitute abuse simply because they may be prevalent or condoned in their native culture (Ahmad et al. 2004). To further complicate matters, some Muslims confuse their cultural norms with Islamic teachings, misusing certain Islamic teachings to enable and maintain abusive relationships.

For example, the high value placed on marriage from both a cultural and Islamic perspective can lead many parents to focus on encouraging their daughters to be patient and endure an unhappy marriage, even if the marriage is abusive. These parents rely on Islamic teachings that value marriage and women's patience in order to avoid the shame of a failed marriage, to the exclusion of Islamic values of mutual satisfaction in marriage, justice, and accountability. Parents may not realize that their pressure, in and of itself, is a form of abuse of their daughters who are also experiencing abuse from their husbands (Ayyub 2000).

Among Muslims in the United States, there is a wide range of interpretation of Islamic teachings. Certain Ḥadīth and Qur'ānic verses have sometimes been used to justify wife-beating, the submission of women to their husbands in general, and the husband's right and responsibility to discipline his wife. These teachings are sometimes used out of context; at other times, the problem arises from translations of Qur'ānic text that are informed by the translator's geocultural and historical context. The most frequently misused and misunderstood Qur'ānic verse in this case is 4:34. Problematic issues can be seen in the commonly used translation of 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī (1989), which ostensibly instructs men to "spank" their wives if they are disobedient to them:

Husbands are the protectors and maintainers of their wives because Allah has given the one more strength than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in the husband's absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them first, next refuse to share their beds, and last spank them lightly. But if they return to obedience, seek not against them means of annoyance, for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all) (Alī 1989, 195)

An alternative translation, which reflects greater internal consistency with the rest of the Qur'ān, as well as greater congruence with the model of the Prophet Muḥammad's life, is written by Laleh Bakhtiar:

Men are supporters of wives because God has given some of them an advantage over others and because they spend of their wealth. So the ones (f) who are in accord with morality *are* the ones (f) who are morally obligated, the ones (f) who guard the unseen of what God has kept safe. But those (f) whose resistance you fear, then admonish them (f) and abandon them (f) in their sleeping place then go away from them (f); and if they (f) obey you, surely look not for any way against them (f); truly God is Lofty, Great (Bakhtiar 2007, 94; f denotes feminine gender pronoun).

This translation in no way suggests any kind of violence; rather it suggests constructive steps for dealing with the serious disruption in marriages that can occur when one partner (in this verse, it is the wife) violates the moral obligations outlined by God.

This verse has been interpreted in at least four ways, ranging from permitting wife-beating under certain conditions and with certain restrictions to having nothing to do with beating at all (Ammar 2007). The degree to which Muslims' interpretations of Islamic teachings are influenced by patriarchal values is an important factor in the degree to which domestic violence will be tolerated in any given family or community.

In one sample of a group of Arab Americans, 98 percent of which was Muslim, with limited education and lower socioeconomic status, more than half of the respondents approved of a man slapping his wife if she hit him first during an argument. More women than men believed that a man should slap his wife if she had been unfaithful. In the case of a wife's affair, 20 percent of the women believed a man could kill her (Kulwicki and Miller 1999). Another study of a similar population (85 percent Muslim) found that 25 percent of women believed husbands were justified in beating their wives in the case of infidelity, disobedience, or insulting the husband (Abu Ras 2007). While this research is helpful in beginning to develop a picture of attitudes regarding domestic violence among American Muslims, it should be noted that the samples in these two studies are not reflective of the broader American Muslim population in terms of education and socioeconomic status, nor are they reflective of the general Arab American population.

Mental health counselors who served Arab American women (a majority of whom were Muslim) reported that abused women cited religious beliefs to support the values of placing the needs of the family above their own, maintaining an intact family for the sake of the children, and men's right to discipline their wives. At the same time, women who condemned domestic violence used religious beliefs to

support their position (Halabu 2006).

African American Muslims and converts to Islam may be influenced by all the values mentioned here if they are framed as Islamic and if their primary source of learning about Islam is from those immigrant Muslims who espouse attitudes and values that can lead to the oppression of women in the home. On the other hand, African American Muslims are a distinctive group and have their own heritage, cultural values and beliefs that shape their perceptions and attitudes toward violence. Their experiences with racism have contributed to sometimes antagonistic or ambivalent attitudes toward immigrant Muslims and other groups. African American Muslims are a diverse group in terms of their journey to Islam. While approximately 10–15 percent of the Africans brought as slaves to the United States were Muslim, they were unable to retain Islam more than a few generations. The history of African Americans as Muslims has had multiple influences, including the Ahmadiyya movement and the Nation of Islam. Currently, the majority African Americans are Sunni (Leonard 2003; Turner 2004).

Despite the existence of misogynist attitudes and practices in the Muslim world, nearly 70 percent of Muslims interpret Islam to be egalitarian in its treatment of men and women (Pew Research Center 2007). Muslim survivors, advocates, community leaders and imams who are working to end domestic violence rely heavily on Islamic teachings to change cultural attitudes or religious interpretations that foster abuse (Alkhateeb and Abugideiri 2007; Faith Trust Institute 2007).

It is important to recognize that there are significant differences in the ways subgroups of the ethnicities mentioned vary in their interpretation and practice of Islam. There are also significant generational differences between immigrants and their children, who may adopt some, all or none of their parents' values and beliefs.

### Culture-specific manifestations of abuse

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Domestic violence can be manifested in many different ways. The key factor in determining whether behavior falls under the category of domestic violence is that the behavior is designed to control or wield power over another person in the family, and generally contributes to a climate of fear or intimidation. Abusers can accomplish this goal in many ways, including physical, sexual, psychological, financial and verbal abuse. While these categories of abuse exist in every culture, the meaning that is ascribed to particular behaviors is dependent on the cultural context in which it occurs (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). There are some behaviors and practices that occur in Arab and South Asian cultures that may appear abusive to Westerners but may not be abusive at all. For example, while some Saudi women may long for the opportunity to drive, others may be grateful to have chauffeurs and feel no need whatsoever to drive themselves.

At the same time, some abusive practices may have more impact on Muslim American women than other American women. For example, accusing a woman of having a boyfriend in a culture that normalizes boyfriend/girlfriend relationships will not feel as threatening as it will to a Muslim woman whose reputation will be ruined if such an accusation is made about her. In order to capitalize on the significance that reputation holds in many Muslim communities, abusers may threaten to tell others that she is guilty of immoral or loose behavior, or threaten to broadcast secrets he has learned about her family, as a way to control her behavior. Despite the fact that Islam allows divorce, many Muslims from immigrant cultures feel a great deal of shame about divorce. Muslim men who are abusive might utilize the threat of divorce, or actual repeated divorces, to manipulate their wives into doing what they want.

Furthermore, the structure and hierarchy in many immigrant families sometimes leads to abuse by family members other than the husband (Dasgupta 2000; Halabu 2006). This abuse can come from the victim's family (brother, father, uncle) who may believe that she should be obedient to her husband and remain in the family at any cost. In addition to pressuring her, family members may actually physically abuse her. In other cases, the abuse may come from the husband's family members, either to reinforce his position or as unrelated abuse because of her lower status in the family.

On the other hand, family members can often be extremely supportive of the victim and may intervene, provide refuge, or even confront the abuser or help the wife end the marriage when they learn of the abuse. In some cases, the husband's family may be the wife's strongest allies. Extended families can be the source of multiple types of support, and can be a great resource for many women who might otherwise feel isolated and forced to remain with the abuser for financial and other reasons.

## Religious abuse

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Religious or spiritual abuse occurs in all faith groups and refers to the use of religious values or teachings in a manner that is manipulative and controlling. Although in some ways this type of abuse overlaps with the culture-specific manifestations of abuse, and technically falls under the category of psychological abuse, it warrants attention and understanding because advocates and professionals from secular backgrounds may not easily understand the significance and the impact this type of abuse has on women of faith. In fact, because of the relative unfamiliarity of mainstream service providers with Islamic teachings, it is not uncommon for these providers to believe batterers who claim a religious right to abuse their wives. This can lead to biased treatment, collusion with the abuser, and re-victimization of the abused woman if she and/or her religious beliefs are blamed for the abuse.

Religious abuse includes a wide range of behaviors that include taking Ḥadīth or Qur'ān out of context to manipulate the wife or to give authority to the husband,

calling the wife a bad Muslim, and telling the wife she will go to hell if she does not obey her husband in all matters. It also includes preventing her from practicing her religion or forcing her to practice in ways that are not comfortable to her. For example, in considering the issue of *ḥijab*, it becomes abusive if the husband either forces his wife to wear it when she does not want to, or prevents her from wearing it if she chooses to.

Muslim women themselves may not be knowledgeable about their religious teachings and may believe that their husbands have the right to beat them. Many Muslim women do not know they have the right to initiate a divorce (*khul'*), or that domestic violence is grounds for *ṭalāq* (divorce initiated by the husband or ordered by a judge in which the wife retains financial rights). They may also not be aware of the ways Islamic values can be used as resources. For example, while patience (*ṣabr*) has typically been used to encourage women to endure a bad marriage somewhat passively, the Qur'ān uses it in association with action. With this understanding, Muslim women can utilize the same value of *ṣabr* to motivate them to seek help and explore their options.

Regarding the actual marriage process, there are some Muslim Americans who prefer to have only an Islamic marriage contract, or *nikāḥ*, without registering the marriage in court. This preference may exist for many reasons, but one of these is related to polygyny. In the United States, the practice of polygyny creates a potential area for abuse because of its prohibition under US law. While some women, and particularly African American women, may view polygyny as a solution to the shortage of eligible or compatible men that is experienced by Muslim American sub-cultures, the fact that the marriage is illegal in the United States automatically creates a system with built-in abuses. The second wife cannot have any marital rights enforced in court, including the provision of *mahr* (gift given by the groom to the bride), and she must often keep her marriage a secret, which in and of itself violates the conditions of an Islamic marriage. Abusive men may use the threat to take a second wife as an effective control tactic for those women who do not want to practice polygyny.

### Culturally appropriate services

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Some of the first organizations to provide culturally sensitive services to Muslim Americans were established in the late 1980s and were primarily ethnic-specific, serving South Asian Americans or Arab Americans, for example. In the 1990s, Muslim-focused organizations that incorporate the Islamic paradigm were also gradually being established around the country (Alkhateeb and Abugideiri 2007; Dasgupta 2000). Because of the limited number of these organizations, and their often limited resources, many Muslim American survivors of abuse continue to need to rely on mainstream American services.

Domestic violence advocates have found that Muslim Americans are more likely to trust and utilize the services of individual advocates and domestic violence organizations that are aware of their religious and cultural values. Some strategies that have been effective in serving Muslim victims of domestic violence include working in a non-judgmental fashion, recognizing that culture and religion contain many positive values that can be enlisted to empower women and to lend credibility to the services being provided, and building collaborative relationships with Muslim communities, to increase trust and opportunities for education and effective intervention.

## Responses to domestic violence

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Muslim Americans' responses to domestic violence are quite varied. At the individual level, most women who are abused remain in the relationship (M. Alkhateeb 2009; Halabu 2006). They cope by avoiding dealing with the problem, relying on their faith or distracting themselves by focusing on children or work. Despite the fact that many women believe that the most effective response to domestic violence is to have the husband arrested, few women choose this option, especially after the attacks of 11 September 2001 (Abu Ras 2007). Muslim women may not reach out for help for many reasons, some of which include valuing the family's privacy, perceiving the services to be culturally insensitive, fearing that their immigration status will be compromised or that they will be reported if they are undocumented, or that the children will be removed from the home. Other obstacles include racism, language barriers, lack of familiarity with available services, and perceptions that Americans are hostile to Muslims (Abu Ras 2007; Grewal 2009; Halabu 2006).

Those women who do take some action involve others, seek professional services, or try to change their own behavior in the hopes that the violence will be reduced (Halabu 2006). African American Muslims tend to use more counseling services than immigrant Muslims, and because they are more familiar with American culture, may have more resources than their immigrant counterparts that will allow them to be more independent. At the same time, because many are converts, they may be alienated from non-Muslim family members and feel more isolated than their immigrant counterparts (Abdallah 2007).

In a recent survey of Muslim Americans, most respondents reported that mosques are not doing enough to address the issue of domestic violence (Ghayyur 2009). Responses from community and family members range from getting absolutely no support, to getting the support they needed at some point during the abusive relationship or upon leaving (M. Alkhateeb 2009; Halabu 2006). Unhelpful responses from religious leaders include an insistence that women remain in abusive relationships, discouragement from seeking counseling, blaming the victim for the abuse, and

conducting assessments or counseling with the abuser present. Because there is no unified policy for imams regarding how to deal with domestic violence, and no oversight body to regulate how imams and community leaders respond to cases of abuse, responses are varied and inconsistent, often leading to frustration on the part of victims and their advocates (Abdallah 2007; Abugideiri 2007).

At the same time, Muslim women have reported to this author that their imams played critical roles in their ability to leave an abusive relationship, in making them feel supported and validated even when family members have not been supportive, and in pressuring the abusive husband to seek treatment. As imams and community leaders are being confronted with the reality of domestic violence in their communities, they are responding by learning more appropriate methods of intervening and are beginning to collaborate with others who have more expertise in the matter (Faith Trust Institute 2007). Following the murder of Aasiya Hassan in February 2009, many Muslim organizations responded immediately by sending out press statements denouncing the murder and the preceding abuse, while organizations such as the Muslim Alliance of North America have developed healthy marriage initiatives to prevent domestic violence (Grewal 2009), which are being practiced by a growing number of mosques around the country. National organizations such as the Peaceful Families Project and the Islamic Social Services Association have developed resources and training workshops to address the needs of Muslim American communities regarding domestic violence.

The Muslim American community, though widely diverse, is becoming more aware of the phenomenon of domestic violence and its impact. With this growing awareness and understanding has come a response that is beginning to address the needs of those affected by domestic violence. Continuing research must be conducted to determine accurate prevalence rates, to further identify and mitigate risk factors, and to develop best practices for prevention and effective intervention.

\* The Pew Research Center's study (2007) reported there are 2.35 million Muslims in the United States, a figure standing in stark contrast to the more commonly cited figures of 5–8 million (World Almanac 2009; Bagby, Perl, and Froehle 2001; Smith 1999). The discrepancy may be a result of any number of problems, including defining who is counted as Muslim (Smith 1999), lack of scientific surveys (Pew Research Center 2007), and differences in sampling procedures.

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