Change From Within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities

Introduction
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A local imam[1] called a Muslim therapist to set up an appointment for a couple experiencing domestic violence. The imam had officiated over their marriage contract several years ago, and had been asked to intervene by the couple now that their problems had led them to an encounter with the legal system. After several incidents in which the wife had been beaten by her husband, she filed a police report and obtained a restraining order against her husband. She asked the imam to facilitate visitations for her husband with the children, and to escort her husband to the home to get his belongings. With three small children and one on the way, managing alone was challenging for the wife. Within a couple of weeks, she gave in to her husbands' requests: she ignored the restraining order and allowed him to come back home.

The imam insisted that the couple follow through on the court-mandated counseling. When the husband resisted, the imam pressured him and set up the first counseling appointment, which the imam himself attended. The imam convinced the husband to commit to counseling and promised to follow up to make sure the husband fulfilled this commitment.

Counseling sessions revealed that the husband believed his wife was less competent and less intelligent than he, giving him the right to "discipline" her in a way that she could "understand." He justified his controlling behavior and his anger towards her for what he perceived as her "disobedience" and "lack of organization." He complained that their house was always messy and his wife was always tired. He was unable to empathize with his wife who worked outside the home the same hours as he did, but then was also expected to come home to assume the responsibilities of three children under the age of five. Although the husband wanted his wife to work outside the home to help with finances, he did not believe he had a role to share in domestic duties.

Sessions with the wife revealed that she had been depressed for months. She stated that she was afraid of her husband and that he was very rough with the children. She, herself, had come from an abusive family in which she had been physically and emotionally abused for many years by relatives. Since she had no family living near her, she relied on her husband's family for emotional support. They encouraged her to be more patient, to forgive her husband for beating her, and to resume "normal" family life for the children's sake. She stated that it was her intention to divorce him when she obtained the restraining order, but was now confused about what was best for her children.

When the husband completed the required number of counseling sessions mandated by the court order, he began couples counseling, but dropped out after a few sessions. The imam attempted to engage him in religious classes and a men's support group to help facilitate change; however the husband was not willing to participate. Having fulfilled the legal requirements, he refused further services and also discouraged his wife from continuing with her therapy. He promised her that their life would be better and insisted they did not need anyone else to help them.

This vignette, based on real events with the details changed to preserve the identity of the individuals, represents some of the pertinent issues faced by Muslims experiencing domestic violence in our communities. Domestic violence is a global phenomenon that threatens many families regardless of gender, age, religion, race, ethnicity, education or class. As one of the many

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[1] *Imam* is an Arabic word which means "leader in a religious context." Although there is no ordained clergy in Islam, the *imam* is a person who is generally assumed to be knowledgeable in religious matters, leads the congregational prayers, and serves as a community leader. In the United States, *imams* often officiate religious marriage ceremonies and divorces, and provide counseling to members of their community.

forms of violence against women, domestic violence is a pattern of behavior between individuals involved in intimate or family relationships in which one person tries to maintain power and control over the other person by using various types of abuse. These forms of abuse include verbal, emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, economic and spiritual abuse. Homes in which abuse is occurring are characterized by the victims living in a climate of fear and humiliation. The traditional definition of domestic violence between two intimate partners is understood more broadly here as "family violence," which can include a range of abuse that occurs within families, such as spousal abuse, in-law abuse, elder abuse, child abuse and incest. Although victims of domestic violence can be either male or female, according to the Family Violence Prevention Fund, the vast majority is female. On both a national and international scale, 1 in 3 women have experienced domestic violence during their lifetime (Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller 1999). A survey of domestic violence from 15 sites in 10 countries, conducted by the World Health Organization and published in 2005, found that 15-71% of women (with most sites falling between 29-62%) had experienced physical violence, sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Garcia-Morena et al. 2005).

It is only in the past 40 to 50 years that domestic violence has become recognized as a serious social problem in the United States (Jasinski 2001). In the past, abuse occurring in families was considered a private matter. There were few, if any, resources to assist victims who were being abused by their partners. Prior to 1970, there was not a single battered women's shelter in the United States (Berry 2000). Currently, according to a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, 85% of domestic violence victims in the United States are known to be women (Rennison 2003), and various surveys indicate that domestic violence against women occurs in 31% of intimate partner relationships (The Commonwealth Fund 1999). According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, approximately half of all female victims report some type of injury, but only about 29% of them actually seek medical assistance (Collins et al. 1999). In families where one parent is abusing another, 50% of their children are also physically abused (Strauss, Gelles and Smith 1990). Although there are few statistics available on the incidence of domestic violence among faith-based groups in the United States, some studies have shown that estimates of couples experiencing domestic violence among Christians and Jews include 46% of Seventh Day Adventists (Drumm et al. 2006) and 19-25% of Jews (Graetz 2004).

The American Muslim community is in the early phases of considering domestic violence to be a matter of public concern. The first documented study of the incidence of domestic violence among Muslims, conducted in 1993, reported that 10% of American Muslims experienced physical abuse in their homes (S. Alkhateeb 1999). However, many Muslim advocates estimate that the figure would be much higher if the study had also measured emotional and verbal abuse. The Muslim community as a whole is slowly coming to realize that it is affected by domestic violence as much as the greater mainstream population. As this awareness and recognition is growing, Muslim communities are struggling to understand the phenomenon of domestic violence, to develop appropriate resources within the community to deal effectively with individuals and families impacted by domestic violence, and to identify strategies to prevent further violence in the family. Individual Muslim advocates may espouse different aspects of specific theories on domestic violence. To date, rather than seeking to create a unified theory, Muslim advocates have focused on raising awareness regarding the prevalence of domestic violence among Muslims, and providing education on Islam's stand against the issue of family violence.

With so few resources available on domestic violence in Muslim families, we hope that this timely edited volume will help to shed light on the issues of domestic violence in Muslim families, and to clarify Islam's position against abuse. This book brings together a range of approaches which advocate against domestic violence in Muslim families and communities, and shares the perspectives

of survivors, advocates and activists, as well as sociological, clinical, theological, and legal perspectives. We anticipate that this book will help dispel stereotypes about Islam and Muslims' so-called acceptance of family violence, and will help Muslim and non-Muslim advocates and service providers gain insight into the factors associated with domestic violence in Muslim families, so that they can better assist Muslims.

Within the context of Islam, the Qur'an[2] and the *Sunnah*[3] provide a model of healthy family systems with clear teachings about justice, gender equity, mutual respect in marital relations, complementary gender roles, and family units that are grounded in love, compassion, and mercy (Alwani and Abugideiri 2003). Islamic teachings, supported by various examples in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, clearly promote just and harmonious relations between family members, and violations are considered a serious breech of morality. People who commit such violations of teachings are viewed as lacking a proper understanding of Islam, and lacking in their faith. Due to different interpretations of Islamic teachings within varying historical and cultural contexts, some cultural practices in Muslim societies promote the uninhibited superiority of men, which is often shown to be a contributing factor to violence against women. Interventions related to the prevention of domestic violence in Muslim communities center on educating Muslims about the teachings of Islam that prohibit any form of violence in the family.

Until now, discussing domestic violence has been taboo in many Muslim families and communities (Alkhateeb, Ellis, and Fortune 2003). Even the term "domestic violence" has sometimes been an obstacle in moving the conversation forward, because it is perceived by some as a "Western" term that is not relevant or applicable to Muslims. Many Muslims associate the term with the "Western" feminist movement, and believe it to have values that are incompatible with Islam. Furthermore, the term "domestic violence" may also be unfamiliar because it has not traditionally been used in Islamic literature. However, both the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* address the concepts of domestic violence and family abuse within the broad contexts of oppression, harsh treatment, and injustice, and clearly prohibit all behaviors that fall under any of the categories of abuse. We hope that this book will serve to bridge communication gaps that may exist within our faith community to facilitate the necessary conversations that must occur in order for Muslims to uphold their values of equitable and peaceful relationships within the family and society.

While conversations about physical and verbal abuse are slowly occurring, conversations about sexual abuse are more difficult. For example, most Muslims consider the concept of "marital rape" as a contradiction in terms. Historically and legally, in much of the world, the word "rape" has only been used to refer to forced sexual acts by someone other than a spouse. In the Qur'an, an Islamically grounded marriage is a relationship based on mutual love and compassion (Qur'an 30:21), in which spouses are described as "garments" for one another (Qur'an 2:187). In such an egalitarian relationship, husbands and wives adapt to each other's needs, and are encouraged to sometimes put their spouses' needs before their own. Thus, ideally in an Islamic marriage, husbands and wives desiring intimacy show foresight and consideration towards each other, and are understanding if one spouse is not in the mood. Similarly, out of love for each other, spouses may sometimes choose intimacy even if they are not in the mood. In a healthy Islamic marriage, a balance should be achieved that acknowledges and satisfies the personalities and needs of both

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[2] The Qur'an is the holy book of Muslims, who accept it as the divine word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad through Angel Gabriel. The revelation was in Arabic, so translations of the Qur'an are considered to be interpretations of the divine word.

[3] The *Sunnah* is the example of Prophet Muhammad's life as narrated in the *Hadith*, which are collections of his sayings and a documentation of his habits. The *Sunnah* provides many details for implementing Qur'anic teachings in daily life.

spouses, and takes potential external stressors into account. Verbal, emotional, physical, and spiritual manipulation is un-Islamic, and at no time is the use of any type of force acceptable by any party. If a spouse insists on practicing sexual relations in a way that lies outside the Islamic dictates of "mercy" and "compassion," then that person has *violated* divine orders and is subject to punishment in a court of law in this life, and is also deemed to be held accountable in the hereafter.

In many Muslim communities, responses to addressing domestic violence include denial that it actually occurs in Muslim homes and an unwillingness to "air dirty laundry" in an international climate that already stereotypes and discriminates against Muslims. In deciding to publish this book, we had to consider several factors. We are aware that Muslims face a double bind; as a minority community, Muslims are conscious of their image both inside and outside of their communities. We are aware that Muslims are very cognizant of how they are portrayed in the media, and some may hesitate to address internal social problems for fear of adding fuel to the proverbial fire (Nimer 2002). On the other hand, we also want to highlight the fact that Muslim advocates recognize that non-Muslim service providers are keenly aware of the prevalence of domestic violence in Muslim families since Muslims receive services from mainstream organizations and shelters due to the lack of sufficient social services in Muslim communities. If we, as members of Muslim families and communities, want to help ourselves, we must address the issue of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a reality in every society of every faith, culture, and race. We hope that this book will help the many Muslim families and communities who are currently unaware of this reality to face the issue of abuse. We look forward to Muslim and non-Muslim advocates and communities using the stories and learning tools offered in this book to further understand the issue of domestic violence in Muslim communities, and to provide appropriate resources and support to individuals and families affected by domestic violence. Indeed, the Qur'an instructs Muslims to, "…*stand up firmly for justice as witnesses to God, even if it is against yourselves, or your parents, or your relatives …*," and to, "…*fight[4] in the cause of God and for those who, being weak, are ill-treated and oppressed…*," and that if one individual wrongs another, all Muslims must, "…*fight against the one that oppresses another until the person complies with the command of God*" (Qur'an 4:135, 4:75, and 49:9).

The Qur'an covers the topic of family relations (which includes marriage, divorce, and parenting) in greater detail than any other issue that it addresses, emphasizing the importance of proper behavior and interaction among family members as a key aspect of practicing Islam. The Qur'anic emphasis on families and the laws that govern healthy relationships provide the mandate for Muslim families and communities to establish peaceful families. While most of the Qur'anic verses addressing family matters and family laws are very clear, there are some verses that have been interpreted in multiple ways.

One verse in particular, Qur'anic verse 4:34, has been the subject of much controversy and is often misused by abusers to justify physical abuse against their wives. There is an urgent need for Muslim jurists and scholars to revisit and provide a contemporary interpretation of this verse. In line with Islam's emphasis on women's rights, verse 4:34 was progressive when it was revealed over 1400 years ago. In pre-Islamic Arabia, particularly in Mecca, violence against women was socially acceptable and common, so the revelation of verse 4:34 served to check that violence. The verse encouraged conflict resolution via communication rather than through violence, a novel idea for

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[4] Fighting here includes a broad range of meanings that can be used to affect change. This range can include "fighting" with words, with the pen, through protests, through modeling and in extreme cases, through battle. Thus, educational workshops can be one way to "fight in the cause of God" if the goal is to promote the understanding and implementation of God's teachings as laid out in the Qur'an. Similarly, "fighting" an abuser can include holding him/her accountable, pressing charges, or obtaining a restraining order.

most men at that time. In instances of marital discord, verse 4:34 required men to refrain from habitually beating their wives, and to instead engage in a multi-step process of communication, which included strategies of conflict resolution and mediation with authority figures. Today however, outdated interpretations of the verse, some from over 1000 years ago, fail to honor Islam's egalitarian spirit towards women. The Prophet Muhammad expressed abhorrence towards the practice of violence against women, and his attitude against mistreating one's spouse is heavily supported by the Qur'anic paradigm which promotes peaceful family relations. Yet, since Prophet Muhammad's death, much of the scholarly interpretations of this verse have allowed for wife-beating under specified circumstances, and with certain restrictions. However, to interpret verse 4:34 as allowing for any type of abuse rejects the full Qur'anic picture, as well as the living example provided through the behavior of Prophet Muhammad. It is time for Muslim scholars to revive the spirit of *ijtihad*[5] (which was encouraged by Prophet Muhammad himself) in order to develop more clear interpretations of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, so that abusive individuals cannot justify domestic violence. Muslim attorneys and jurists also need to create viable models for balancing Islamic and U.S. laws, particularly with regard to marriage and divorce.[6]

Role of Religion & Culture

The beliefs and practices of Muslims encompass diverse cultural and religious perspectives, even within the same racial and ethnic groups. In addition, education and socioeconomic status, among other factors, also create diversity among Muslims. There are approximately 1.3 billion Muslims in the world, which comprise about a fifth of the global population. Contrary to popular belief, Arabs comprise a minority of the world Muslim population (only 20%). There are 56 countries in which Muslims are the majority; the largest populations of Muslims are in Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India There are also significant Muslim minority populations located in numerous countries, such as India, China, Central Asia, Russia, Europe and America (Esposito 2002). About 85% of the Muslims in the world are Sunni, and 15% are Shi'a (Esposito 2002). Even within both sects, adherents represent a rainbow of theological and social viewpoints, from the far right to the far left.

In the United States there are approximately 6 – 7 million Muslims with a wide range of backgrounds (Bagby, Perl and Froehle 2001). Among these Muslims in the U.S., one study has suggested a typology that categorizes Muslims into traditional (strongly practicing), bicultural (moderately practicing), acculturated (marginally practicing), assimilated (non-practicing), and recommitted (strongly practicing) (Nadir & Dziegielewski 2001). Another study described four categories of religiosity to include Orthodoxists (literal interpretation of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*), Inclusionists (a selectively modernist interpretation of the Qur'an using the *Sunnah* as a complement), Reformists (a modernist interpretation of the Qur'an using primarily the essence of the *Sunnah*), and Minimalists (belief in the essence of the Qur'an without engaging in ritual practices, and rejecting virtually all the *Sunnah* as outdated) (M. Alkhateeb 2002).

Due to the challenges of sampling religious minorities in a secular country, available studies on American Muslims have mostly examined individuals attending mosques in some capacity throughout the year. One study found that the largest groups of Muslims who regularly attend mosques in North America are of South Asian, indigenous African-American, and Arab

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[5] *Ijtihad* is a process under Islamic law in which independent judgment, based on the accepted legal schools of thought, is applied to a particular legal or theological question.

[6] A movement has begun by scholars in the U.S. to develop a jurisprudence for Muslim minorities, "which takes into account the relationship between the religious ruling and the conditions of the community and the location where it exists." (Al-Alwani 2003, 3).

backgrounds, respectively; and 16% are converts to Islam (Bagby, Perl and Froehle 2001). Muslim converts in the United States are predominantly comprised of indigenous Americans,[7] Caribbean-Americans, and more recently, Latin-Americans (Bagby, Perl and Froehle 2001). As a religious minority, there are unique aspects of each element of the American Muslim tapestry, but there are also some common threads that link us together. For example, many indigenous Muslims, depending upon the community they surround themselves with after adopting Islam, have integrated various facets of immigrant culture into their understanding of Islam. For Black indigenous Americans, the concept of converts who ascribe religious authority to immigrant Muslims has been referred to as "authentication" (Jackson 2005). Furthermore, more recent generations of indigenous and immigrant Muslims, have begun to forge an "American Islam," one that is becoming more bereft of cultural norms and traditions that may contradict Islamic teachings. "American Islam" emphasizes aspects of American culture that parallel Islamic ways of life.

Like other faith communities, cultural and religious interpretation shape Muslims' understanding of, and responses to, domestic violence (Abugideiri 2005b). Cultural perceptions of gender roles, pride, equality, and the structure of power can significantly impact approaches to interpersonal relations and the definition of abuse. In the Black indigenous Muslim community, for example, some of the significant factors that contribute to these perceptions include the history of slavery and contemporary societal racism, both of which have shaped the way men and women view themselves and each other, as well as the perception of how power is distributed and maintained. Many Black indigenous Muslim men experience feelings of powerlessness that date back to slavery and have been maintained by many historical, social and economic factors. Such factors contribute to the need for control among abusers if they feel challenged by females in the household who may have more education or better jobs. In the event of family violence, while many Black indigenous Muslim victims may be very knowledgeable about potential resources, they may be reluctant to utilize services for fear of furthering negative stereotypes and images among their immigrant Muslim counterparts, as well as the general American public. Furthermore, some Black indigenous Muslims may have lost their original support systems upon becoming Muslim, and feel that they have no family to turn to if they choose to leave an abusive relationship.[8]

In the case of immigrant Muslims, the cultural background from a Muslim individual's country of origin may continue to play a significant role in how abuse is defined and interpreted. On a related note, though no culture should be viewed as monolithic on any issue, there are some commonalities that are specific to immigrant victims of domestic violence. For instance, domestic violence victims from immigrant backgrounds may lack the extended family and social support networks they had to leave behind in their countries of origin. Furthermore, immigrant populations may live in households that include in-laws and other relatives, which, in an abusive family, can expose victims to multiple abusers. The spouses of immigrant victims of abuse may also control them by withholding their passports and other important documents, may threaten to falsely report them to authorities and have them deported, and may also threaten to kidnap their children and take them overseas. Additionally, immigrant victims may be reluctant to report abuse to legal authorities for fear that their abuser may be deported. Immigrant victims face an added reluctance to leave their abusive spouse due to the stigmatization of divorce in many communities, including the shame that

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[7] The term "indigenous Americans," or "indigenous Muslims," is utilized among many American Muslims to refer to African American and Caucasian Muslims.

[8] The overview of the Black indigenous Muslim experience is based upon email communication with Aneesah Nadir, President of the Islamic Social Services Association, and Bonita McGee, Board Member of the Islamic Social Services Association, on March 26, 2007.

may be directed towards them and their families, and the rejection they may fear from their communities. These common experiences of abuse faced by immigrant women have been well documented by organizations such as Legal Momentum, the Family Violence Prevention Fund's Battered Immigrant Women Program, and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild.

Looking at the wider system, the intersection of culture and religion, socioeconomic status, political history, and a history of patriarchal oppression related to cultural practices of family violence in particular, needs further study by Muslims. Notably, many indigenous and immigrant Muslim families in the United States have a history that includes slavery, living under conditions of war, living in refugee camps where they experienced torture, escaping oppressive government regimes, and experiencing oppression under colonization for several generations (Abugideiri 2005a). This history also includes present-day un-Islamic practices of violence against women, such as honor killings, female genital mutilation, dowry-related deaths, acid burning, forced prostitution, trafficking, exploitation of labor within the home, female foeticide, sexual harassment, rape, and forced marriage, in addition to socially accepted practices of wife-beating. Muslim women, like other women, experience such types of abuse in the United States, as well as abroad. This culture of oppression impacts how individuals perceive abuse, how they define it, how they problem-solve and communicate, and how they relate to each other. Keeping these contexts in mind adds complexity to understanding the phenomenon of domestic violence among many Muslim families.

Another layer of complexity is added when the misuse of religious texts is added to cultural norms that may encourage or facilitate abuse. According to FaithTrust Institute, some abusive Christians and Jews misuse the Bible, Torah, and other religious texts to support their abuse. Similarly, some abusive individuals who identify themselves as Muslim misuse the Qur'an to justify their misbehavior (S. Alkhateeb 2002). In such situations, abusive individuals use their false understanding of the Qur'an and traditions of Prophet Muhammad as a weapon against their victims. They quote Qur'anic verses out of context, reference unsubstantiated traditions of Prophet Muhammad, and sometimes even confuse cultural practices with Islam, since, in some families, religion has been steeped in cultural tradition and the boundaries between culture and religion have been blurred. In such practices of "spiritual abuse" across faith traditions, religious verses have been manipulated to benefit those in power (Fortune 1991). Spiritual abuse is not always limited to the confines of the home; abusive behavior can even exist between fellow community members. This method of abusing power may also be practiced by some Muslim clergy and lay leaders. In particular, the form of spiritual abuse that we are referring to here is mostly gender based, as it emphasizes women's submission to men, and twists Islamic teachings to enforce male power and superiority over women. When the Qur'an was revealed, Islam secured significant rights for women, including the freedom of religion, the equality of men and women before God, legal and financial rights, the right to own property, the right to work, the right to divorce, and the right to sexual satisfaction. However, among some Muslims, these Islamic rights are not recognized in many individual, family, and societal practices. Muslim women who internalize spiritual abuse struggle with the feeling that they will be wronging God if they challenge the violence, and that they will be condemned by their community leaders and the larger community if they leave their abusive situation.

A lack of understanding by mainstream service providers of the unique cultural and religious issues relevant to Muslims may lead to services that are not culturally sensitive or appropriate. Similarly, a lack of understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence sometimes leads Muslim leaders, community members, and extended family members to discourage victims from seeking appropriate intervention and support. There are also differing opinions within Muslim leadership as to whether Muslims should utilize resources in mainstream society or rely solely on Muslim-based

services, to insure that interventions are not in conflict with religious values and beliefs. Increased stereotyping and discrimination of Muslims post-9/11 has also created a more pressing need for advocates and service providers to develop widely-available counseling and domestic violence interventions that are culturally appropriate for Muslim families experiencing abuse.

Muslims Taking a Stand Against Domestic Violence

As we have worked with Muslim communities and domestic violence advocates across the country, we have become aware of a global surge in activism against domestic violence by Muslims in recent years, primarily by women. Many grassroots organizations have sprung up in Muslim-majority countries and in countries with significant populations of Muslims. Their goals have included providing direct services to victims of domestic violence, raising awareness levels, disseminating educational resources, conducting research, documenting cases, and advocating for social, legal, and political reforms. In the United States, as Muslim leaders are becoming more aware of the prevalence and impact of domestic violence, several Muslim communities have taken an active role in addressing the issue of domestic violence. In the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, for instance, several mosques have posted a declaration signed by various local imams proclaiming their stand against any form of abuse. At least one mosque we know of has placed educational brochures about domestic violence, as well as resources for victims, in the women's bathroom, so that women can access the information privately without fear of retaliation from the abuser or community members. In addition, several local imams have established collaborative relationships with judges in family courts, with mental health professionals, and with agencies that serve victims of domestic violence. Throughout the U.S., many Muslim leaders are also serving on local domestic violence task forces, participating in interfaith activities to prevent domestic violence, and organizing workshops for their communities to teach families about peaceful relationships. Also, in weekly sermons, imams are addressing topics of domestic violence, gender issues, and the problem of taking verses out of context. Such efforts are important steps in reducing domestic violence in Muslim communities.

Gradually, as Muslim communities and organizations across the country face the realities of domestic violence, they are beginning to establish a variety of services, such as shelters and culturally appropriate alternatives to mainstream social services (Faizi 2001). For Muslims advocates, the development of culturally appropriate services for Muslims experiencing abuse has been eased by the existence of ethnic-based domestic violence organizations. In response to the lack of culturally appropriate services for ethnic minorities, various ethnic-based organizations, focusing on African, Arab, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino and Native American communities have been established during the last couple of decades, predominantly in major urban areas in the United States (VAWnet 2007). Ethnic-based domestic violence organizations have significantly contributed to services for abused minorities, particularly women, and in many ways, have helped to pave the way for the establishment of Muslim domestic violence organizations and services. Ethnic-based domestic violence programs and shelters serve significant numbers of Muslims. Though domestic violence services may be ethnically or religiously categorized, the types of abuse experienced, and the services and advocacy required by Muslim individuals and families, may cut across ethnic and religious categories. In the last ten to fifteen years, dozens of Muslim domestic violence organizations based in the United States have been established. Muslim organizations advocating against domestic violence in Muslim communities include Al Baitu Nisa in Gaithersburg, Maryland; Baitul Hemayah in Newark, New Jersey; Baitul Salaam Network in Atlanta, Georgia; Central Texas Muslimaat in Austin, Texas; the Committee on Domestic Harmony in Long Island, New York; the Foundation for Appropriate and Immediate Temporary Help and their program Muslim Men Against Domestic

Violence in Herndon, Virginia; the Islamic Social Services Association, a national organization based in Tempe, Arizona; Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, a national organization based in Washington, D.C.; NISWA in Lomita, California; and Turning Point in Flushing, New York. *(See the Resources section at the end of this book).*

Many of these Muslim domestic violence programs provide interpretation, legal advice or referrals to legal resources, crisis intervention, financial assistance, individual and family counseling, premarital counseling, imam counseling, support groups, and job placement. A few programs, such as Baitul Salaam and NISWA, have shelters. Many provide advocacy programs in which Muslim community members and leaders can raise their awareness regarding domestic violence, and can educate themselves on their Islamic and legal rights. Muslim domestic violence and social service advocates also provide expertise and trainings for governmental and mainstream organizations to sensitize them towards the needs of Muslims, as well as provide comprehensive assistance to families affected by domestic violence. In some of these organizations, there is an informal system of cross-referral between local imams, Muslim therapists, and other service providers. Although far from being able to meet all of the needs of the Muslim families impacted by domestic violence, cross-referral and collaboration provide a preliminary working model on which to build broader services. We believe that significant factors in the success of this cross-referral system are: the respect that each advocate has for the other's role; the recognition that domestic violence is a serious social and moral issue among Muslims; and the willingness to address the issue from both a spiritual and social perspective.

Our organization, the Peaceful Families Project, was founded in 2000 by Sharifa Alkhateeb (1946-2004), a tireless advocate for individuals affected by domestic violence who spent 40 years advocating for the civil, human, and women's rights of Muslims. Known for her zest for life and proactive change, she brought together Muslim leaders, community members and social service providers in numerous cities across the United States from 2000-2004 by conducting workshops to raise awareness on domestic violence. As one of the pioneers for domestic violence advocacy in Muslim communities, Mrs. Alkhateeb's domestic violence workshops inspired future advocates, jump-started vocal anti-violence community activism, and motivated communities to create their own domestic violence programs. Upon inheriting her significant and wide-impacting project, our goal has been to honor her legacy and to continue to effect change. In the last two years, we have conducted multiple workshops in Muslim communities throughout the United States. We also have facilitated and presented sessions on domestic violence at national Muslim conferences and conventions with the goal of reaching the broadest audience possible. To date, our work has included convening a gathering of Washington, D.C. area imams to sign a mutual declaration against domestic violence; conducting a pilot survey on domestic violence at the Islamic Society of North America's 2006 annual convention; and assisting FaithTrust Institute in the development of the first documentary film on domestic violence in American Muslim communities.

Overview of Chapters

We hope that this book, our first attempt in bringing together a variety of perspectives, will help to address the significant literature gap regarding the Muslim experience of domestic violence. We solicited authors throughout North America and also internationally in the hopes of bringing diverse voices to the table under the common umbrella of working to end domestic violence. Like other advocates addressing domestic violence in Muslim communities, their interpretations of Islam regarding family structure and gender roles may differ, as well as their approaches towards advocacy work. Yet, they are united in their belief that all Muslim families should be free from abuse. This book has been divided into four sections: **The Islamic Paradigm**, **The Reality of Domestic**

Violence, **Survivor Stories**, and **Strategies and Solutions**.

The Islamic Paradigm lays the foundation for establishing and maintaining peaceful families with Zainab Alwani's thorough explication of Qur'anic rulings, prophetic traditions, and jurisprudence that relate to the concept, structure, and relationships of families in Islam. Alwani's *The Qur'anic Model for Harmony in Family Relations* highlights the Islamic sources of knowledge and its paradigm for family relations. Alwani also analyzes the Islamic concepts and guidelines for consultation, authority, parenting, and prevention of abuse.

Section Two, **The Reality of Domestic Violence**, highlights some of the experiences and issues faced by Muslims experiencing domestic violence. Keilani Abdullah's chapter *A Peaceful Ideal, Violent Realities: A Study on Muslim Female Domestic Violence Survivors* offers a look at the Islamic concept of marriage and divorce, and shares the results of her study focusing on the role that marital status (including common law marriages), race, and socioeconomics played, and the types of abuse the women experienced. In *Domestic Violence Among Muslims Seeking Mental Health Counseling*, the results of Salma Elkadi Abugideiri's study emphasize the effects that domestic violence has on each family member, and the correlation between experiencing abuse and developing mental health problems. Abugideiri stresses the need for imams and other Muslim leaders to play a prominent role in ending domestic violence.

The following two chapters are selections from experiences of Muslims outside the United States and feature studies of Afghan and Sudanese women. In *Freedom is Only Won from the Inside: Domestic Violence in Post-Conflict Afghanistan,* Lina Abirafeh examines the political situation contributing to family violence in Afghanistan, the current experiences of Afghan women, and the types of abuse they are encountering. Abirafeh's study encompasses Afghan women and men and their perspectives on gender-focused interventions, and finds that interventions focusing solely on women's needs rather than both genders can have negative repercussions when men feel left out of the picture. Awad Ahmed's *Domestic Violence in the Sudan: Opening Pandora's Box* researches the domestic violence experiences of Sudanese women, including the circumstances in which abuse was likely to occur, the types of abuse women were subjected to, and the exacerbating factors of culture, poverty, low education, unemployment, and substance abuse.

The third section of this book, **Survivor Stories**, includes the stories of four Muslim women which offer direct insight into the lives of Muslim domestic violence victims, and sheds light on their ability to empower themselves and transform their circumstances.[9] Siraha Kalam's *My Story* describes her challenging childhood, the abuse she endured at the hands of her husband, and the resolution she has achieved. In *Toasted Cheese Sandwiches* Suzan Williams traces her turbulent and abusive childhood, her sudden decision to permanently end the years of abuse inflicted by her husband, and her path towards self-sufficiency. Merjanne Hope's *Broken Wings No More* confirms the importance of inner peace, spirituality, and a direct relationship with God. Despite experiencing emotional and spiritual abuse by her husband, she kept her faith and inner connection to God throughout her ordeal. In the last chapter of this section, Jennifer Mohamed's *A Survivor Story* shares her painful ordeal with incest as a child, the long-term effects of which have lasted until today. Each of these four stories are a source of awareness for those unfamiliar with Muslim experiences of domestic violence, and are a source of inspiration not only to women currently encountering abuse, but also to advocates, family members, and friends who are determined to provide help and support .

The chapters in the last section of this book, **Strategies and Solutions**, are written from the perspectives of an imam, an attorney, a journalist and researcher, and a community activist. Each perspective offers approaches from their respective fields towards addressing and preventing

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[9] All the survivors in this section have chosen to use pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

domestic violence. In an interview with Imam Mohamed Magid in *Affecting Change as an Imam*, he discusses his role in the Muslim community as an advocate working against domestic violence, shares the methods he employs to combat abuse (including the usage of Islamic teachings as a prevention tool), and imparts his suggestions for other community leaders and members seeking to address abuse. In *A Legal Guide to Marriage and Divorce for the American Muslim Woman*, Marwa Zeini outlines the commonalities and distinctions between Islamic and American law regarding marriage, divorce, financial support, and child custody. She stresses the need to have improved education for Muslim women regarding their Islamic and legal rights, for Muslim community and religious leaders so they can better assist women, and for the American judiciary through diversity training to create greater awareness of Muslim sensibilities. Sarah Kamal's *Development Communications Strategies and Domestic Violence in Afghanistan* covers the social repercussions of twenty years of conflict affecting Afghan women, and the communications tactics used by the United Nations Development Fund for Women to advocate change through media campaigns. The UNDF strategy involved the creation of a multilingual toolkit for journalists that indirectly addressed domestic violence by emphasizing gender-neutral methods of empowerment, such as through education and employment, and the ways in which all family members and society would benefit. We conclude our book with Maryam Funches' *A Preliminary Model for Providing a Domestic Violence Program in the Muslim Community*, a framework that Muslim communities will find useful as they develop strategies for addressing domestic violence. The model includes community and client services, community education, sample workshops, crisis management techniques, recommended counseling and advocacy approaches, developing a volunteer program, and encouraging the involvement of community leaders and members.

Looking Ahead

We look forward to this edited volume generating considerable interest and discussion, and also anticipate Muslim communities following the lead of the pioneering organizations we have described above. We also look forward to seeing more Muslim leadership gain a deeper awareness of domestic violence and the ways in which families are impacted daily by this phenomenon. It is only when the silence is broken and we are able to talk about this social illness without fear that we will be able to achieve the goal of eradicating violence from our lives. Once we are able to discuss domestic violence openly and gain more insight into how it impacts Muslim communities at the individual, family, and societal levels, we can identify effective interventions. By the same token, we can identify programs and mechanisms that are geared towards the prevention of domestic violence.

An important part of achieving these goals depends on Muslim communities, along with their leadership, implementing the Qur'anic injunction of taking a united "stand for justice"[10] against all forms of family violence. This stand will first require Muslims to recognize the importance of implementing Islamic teachings as a whole when applying them to daily life, rather than taking segmented parts of teachings that may have negative ramifications when implemented out of context from the complete Islamic social paradigm. Achieving these goals will also require community members, leaders, and advocates to develop a plan for a coordinated response in which they work together effectively. In the vignette at the beginning of this introduction, the example of the imam's involved and coordinated response to domestic violence is currently not the norm in most Muslim communities, though such efforts are starting to become a trend. The example of the imam illustrates the type of coordination and collaboration which leads to interventions that offer

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[10] Qur'anic Verse 4:135: "*O you who believe! Stand up firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah (God), even as against yourselves, or our parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor. For Allah (God) can best protect both…*"

the possibility of change, as well as the encouragement of accountability for abusive individuals.

We hope that every Muslim individual will take it upon him or herself to become educated about the issues of domestic violence and begin discussing it openly. We look forward to every Muslim family and community challenging all forms of degradation of women in their private and public lives. We urge more Muslim men to become vocal advocates against domestic violence, as abuse happens to men too; and their mothers, sisters, and daughters could become victims. Muslim communities and Islamic centers can invite domestic violence speakers to raise awareness, educate community members about the issues, and promote advocacy. Muslims can help by volunteering their time at social service agencies and organizations helping victims of domestic violence, at domestic violence advocacy organizations, and at abused women's shelters. Those who do not have the time to volunteer can help such organizations by donating monthly, as an annual portion of their *zakat*,[11] or by providing supplies, food, clothing, printing services, property, or other forms of in-kind donations.

We hope that advocates and service providers of all faiths and ethnicities will use this volume as an opportunity to bridge the communication gap that has kept us working separately for far too long. Domestic violence is a family and community problem, not just an individual problem. We are all doing similar work and supporting populations who face similar issues. It is time to pool our knowledge and resources in order to develop effective strategies, working models, theories and interventions that will be part of our mission of "fighting oppression" in our homes and our communities.

We anticipate that the publication of this book will generate mixed responses. However, it is our sincere hope that this volume will assist in triggering the willingness of Muslim families and communities to honestly address the proverbial elephant known as domestic violence, which has the potential to destroy families and generations of communities. With great optimism, we look forward to sharing the insights provided in these ground-breaking chapters, which will be of interest and use not only to Muslim communities, but to secular advocates and advocates from other faith and ethnic communities. Only by working together will we be able to combine our resources and knowledge in an effort to develop effective interventions and preventive strategies to live a violence-free existence.

Assalamu Alaikum (may peace be upon you).

Great Falls, Virginia   **Salma Elkadi Abugideiri**
April 2007   **Maha B. Alkhateeb**

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[11] *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam, and requires Muslims to give a portion of their wealth to the needy.

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