

ROLE OF IMĀMS IN COMBATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE CANADIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Muslim women are not more vulnerable to spousal violence. In an anti-Muslim climate, however, the reluctance to talk about this issue fuels questions about the extent of community tolerance. This small-scale study examines the potential role of Canadian Imāms in changing community attitudes on domestic violence by investigating their current level of awareness, perception and approach, along with victims' and perpetrators' reliance on the mosque community. Data was collected from the interviews of eight faith leaders and a survey of 170 Muslim women in Canada. Among key findings: (a) half of the victims seek help from their Imāms, however (b) most Imāms lack training in counseling; (c) Though, most Canadian Imāms maintain that domestic violence is harām and (d) majority of the Muslim men (incl. perpetrators) attend Jumu'ah, (e) one-third perpetrators quote Islām to justify abuse, and (f) khutbah and community workshops on domestic violence remain infrequent. Findings of the study highlight the need for awareness and training workshops for Imāms and faith leaders on spiritually integrated counseling, as well as how to recognize abuse, respond effectively, and when to refer to a specialist or report. It also emphasizes the need for Imāms to use their platforms for clarifying Islām's stance on domestic violence and re-claiming the community narrative.

KEYWORDS: Domestic violence; Muslims; Imām; Justification; Qur'ān

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the Western world, it is only in the recent era that domestic violence has received momentum and recognition as a crime that must be punished, not endured (Baird & Gleeson, 2017). In 1966, New York State passed a law that finally established domestic violence as a valid ground for divorce, if the plaintiff can establish that “sufficient” number of beatings had taken place (Pickford, 2006; Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center, 2017). It presents a sharp contrast with the Islāmic world of the seventh century, where Muhammad ﷺ, the Prophet and the ruler, personally intervened a case of domestic violence when the victim, Habeeba bint Sahl, came to him in the darkness of the night immediately after her husband Thabit bin Qays beat her ﷺ. He called Thabit, told him to separate and divorce her, settled their financial affairs, and let her stay safely with her family rather than returning her to the abuser (Abū Dāwūd, 830-889/2008, Hadīth # 2228; Mālik, 779-795/2014, Hadīth #29.10.31).

Today, the legacy of Islām in calling off the injustices against women is somewhat muffled. It is hardly under the spotlight of the pulpit and more often than not, it is treated as the elephant in the room. The silence is so loud that many non-Muslims as well as Muslims assume by default that wife-beating is permissible in Islām (Baobaid, 2002). Subtle or not, it shows up in the liberal Muslim reformist movements, news involving Muslim female victims of violence, and the everyday Islāmophobic experiences of western Muslims (Fox News, 2008; Project Sakinah, 2020). This kind of stereotyping has become the norm, despite studies specifying time and again that domestic violence is a societal problem – an ugly by-product of systematic patriarchy – not a religious or racial one (Hathout, 2013; Macfarlane, 2012).

In a survey of Canadian Muslim women, around 30% reported spousal violence, a frequency corresponding to the national average (Nowrin, 2021; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2015). Another poll by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) showed that Muslims are as likely to report domestic violence as other religious groups and the general public (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). While Muslim women are not more vulnerable, a former survey showed that community tolerance made it extremely difficult to seek help or ask for divorce (Macfarlane, 2012). Influential cultural narratives based on the community’s assumptions of male dominance and control play a vital role in establishing cultural norms that tolerate domestic violence and even minimize or justify them (Grewal, 2009; Macfarlane, 2012). This is critical, because unlike other faith-groups, the majority of Muslim victims of domestic abuse seek help from their faith leader or community (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). With the progressive history of Islām in fighting the injustices of society and standing by the oppressed, this kind of overlooking is rather surprising and forces the question: why? Is it the lack of awareness of domestic violence or the interpretation of the Qur’ān itself? Is religion being used by abusers to justify their actions? Can Muslim faith-leaders change attitudes surrounding domestic violence in their communities? Can they help victims who confide in them? Do they?

This small-scale study seeks to find these answers through a survey of congregants and interviews of faith-leaders in the Canadian Muslim community. It analyzes the experiences of female congregants with their Imāms, their common approaches to conflict resolution, and collects the perspectives of Imāms on domestic violence from various Canadian communities. Due to the nature of the subject, the definition of domestic violence or spousal violence in this paper is limited to ‘physical assault¹ against women in a marital relationship’ unless specified otherwise. In the

¹ Such as throwing things, pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, kicking, hitting, biting, beating or choking. (Statistics Canada, 2014)

following sections, the paper further elaborates on this topic with the current state of awareness and activism in the review of literature, followed by research methodology and results of the current study, and concludes with some practical steps Imāms can take to combat domestic violence in their communities.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Muslims in the Western world face a double bind as a minority population. They are painfully aware of being an avid interest of the media and feel that discussing internal controversial issues may result in a frenzy of anti-Muslim sentiments and stereotyping (Alkhateeb & Abugideri, 2007; Cross, 2013). To an extent, even the term ‘domestic violence’ and its association with the Western feminist movement presents as an obstacle in the community, where its values are often considered ‘Western’ and not compatible with Islām (Alkhateeb & Abugideri, 2007). Moreover, there are far too many victims who do not disclose abuse for the fear of being reported to the police or child services, tarnishing of the family name, protecting family cohesion, shame, and fear of being judged or treated unfairly among other reasons (Sawrikar, 2019; Sinha, 2013). All these contribute to a silence that presents a false narrative of Islām and curtails the severity of domestic violence in the community. However, things are starting to change.

The Muslim communities of the West are in the early phases of acknowledging domestic violence as a public concern (Alkhateeb & Abugideri, 2007). In 2019, the Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI), in collaboration with multiple religious, social and legal organizations including the Canadian Council of Imāms (CCI), organized a one-day conference to provide a learning opportunity for Imāms and Chaplains to better understand the realities of domestic violence in the Canadian Muslim community (CCI, 2019). Up until now, conversations surrounding domestic violence in the Muslim community usually spiked post-events that involved Muslim perpetrators or victims of domestic violence and honor killings. Consistently, the verdict has been a defensive approach to explain why domestic violence is un-Islāmic, rather than acknowledging and battling the problem existent within the community (Musaji, 2009).

A prime example is the notorious case of the Shafia honor killings in 2011, following which two-dozen Canadian Imāms, backed up by 60 Canadian Muslim groups, banded together and gave Friday sermons clarifying Islām’s stance against honor killings and violence against women (CBC News, 2011; Palmer, 2011). The Islāmic Supreme Council of Canada (ISCC) issued a fatwa that unequivocally declared honour killings, domestic violence, misogyny, spousal abuse, child abuse in all forms as forbidden in Islām. In the fatwa, ISCC also said that the correct translation of the controversial verse 4:34 which recommends the procedure for a married woman who approaches adultery is ‘first, educate her; second, take separate beds; and third, *cite her to authority*’ if the former effort at reconciliation fails (ISCC, 2012). The fatwa was signed by 34 North American Imāms and clerics, majority of them Canadians.

In recent years, more and more individuals and organizations are working together to fight the taboo. Though most of these efforts are started by women, the Muslims for White Ribbon campaign is a brave and timely grassroots initiative by men that has been collaborating with mosques, women’s organizations and institutions across Canada to organize awareness events, give Friday *khutbahs* and encourage participants and congregants to sign a pledge to ‘never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls.’ (Iqra.ca, 2013). Another dynamic organization, Peaceful Families Project (PFP), has been working for the last two decades facilitating awareness workshops for Muslim faith-leaders and communities, offering cultural sensitivity trainings, and developing resources for domestic violence prevention in America (PFP, 2020).

Project Sakinah, established in 2009 in response to a very public and brutal case of spousal violence in the American Muslim community, is involved in a similar fashion (Project Sakinah, 2020). In 2015, NISA Homes established transitional homes especially for Muslim women and children in Canada and has since sheltered over 600 women and children. They have also been collaborating with mosques and Islāmic organizations to run domestic violence awareness events (NISA Homes, 2020). All these little efforts have compounded into a generation who are speaking out and not condoning the injustice of domestic violence prevalent in their communities. And yet, while working on this project, we saw a certain reluctance in the community to attend events and workshops that even talk about ‘abuse’, a phenomenon often experienced by advocates of domestic violence in the Muslim community (Youssef, 2020). We have made a good start, but a lot remains to be done.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was performed using cross-sectional data from a structured online survey of Canadian Muslim women issued through various social media platforms, mosques and women centers across Canada, and interviews of Canadian Imāms and faith-leaders across different communities. The research methodology is discussed in the following:

3.1 Survey Methodology

The survey methodology of the study has been elaborated in detail in part I of this research series (Nowrin, 2021). The structured online survey was participated by a representative sample of 170 ever-married Muslim women in Canada between September 11, 2018 and May 30, 2019. Data was collected pertaining to participants’ demographics, incidence of abuse, spouses’ religiosity, frequency of mosque attendance, association with various risk-factors, perception of abuse, justification of abuse using religion, as well as victims’ experiences with local faith leaders. In particular, the female respondents were asked whether they sought the counsel of an Imām or faith leader regarding issues of marital conflict, and their subsequent response. They were also asked if their local Imām ever gave a *khutbah*/lecture on the rights of wives and/or discouraged domestic abuse.

3.2 Interview Methodology

During the course of the study, more than fifteen Imāms of various Islāmic centers and mosques across Canada were contacted with a request to interview. Between October 2018 and June 2019, eight faith leaders in Ontario and one in Alberta were interviewed either in-person (4), over phone (2) or through email (2). Two of the six Imāms interviewed served as professional family counsellors in their respective mosques, and one of the eight interviewees was female. Table 1 lists the roles of the interviewees and the communities in which they served. For standardization purposes, each interviewee was asked the same questions pertaining to the frequency of domestic violence complaints, type of support sought by the victims, and their approach to resolving conflicts that involve domestic violence. They were asked whether they raised domestic violence awareness in their community through *khutbah*, lectures and/or counselling. Finally, they were asked about the perspective of Islām on domestic violence and the correct interpretation of the Qur’ānic verse 4:34.

3.3 Ethical Consideration

The survey and interview procedures were approved by the University’s ethics committee. All participants were fully informed about the aims of the research before participation. All the data collected from the survey were anonymous, confidential, and voluntary. Although verbal consent

was sought for using interviewees' names and opinions, according to the mandate of IOU ethics committee, identities of all the participants are kept anonymous.

3.4 Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic content analysis, through which common themes, patterns and opinions were identified, and were overlapped with the findings of the survey. Spearman's correlation and bi-variate logistic regression were used to identify correlations between study variables and are mentioned where relevant. This report presents the main themes that emerged from the study.

Table 1: Interview Participants' Roles and Communities of Service

Interviewee	Role in the community	Community
A	Imam + spiritually integrated counsellor	Brantford, ON
B	Imam + family counsellor	Scarborough, ON
C	Imam	East York, ON
D	Imam	Scarborough, ON
E	Imam	Red Deer, AB
F	Imam	Scarborough, ON
G	Khateeb (gives sermons)	East York, ON
H	Alimah (female Islamic scholar)	East York, ON

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1 The Necessity for Spiritually Integrated Family Counselling

Victims Seek Imām's Counsel

One-fourth of the survey participants said that they sought an Imām's counsel for marital conflicts, two-third of them victims of domestic violence. Consistent with a poll by ISPU that found similar statistics, half of the domestic violence victims in this study said that they approached their local Imāms for resolving their marital disputes (Figure 1) (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). However, according to the Imāms, they seldom disclosed physical abuse. One Imām said that 10% of all his clients reported domestic abuse (men and women). Others said that they received between one to four cases a year – more women came to them than men. One Imām said that the frequency had decreased severely over the decade, and he attributed it to raising awareness within the community and family integration into the Canadian community. This discrepancy was explained by one Imām, who also served as a spiritually integrated counsellor in a mosque in Ontario. He said that victims of spousal violence tend to hide physical abuse for the fear of being reported to the police or child services, social stigma, defamation of the husband in the community, shame etc. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, most Canadian women didn't report physical abuse to the police because they considered it a personal matter and/or they did not want anyone to find out (Sinha, 2013). He said that the reports Imāms get is far under-reported than the prevalence of spousal abuse in the Muslim community – victims may open up to counsellors or services but they tend not to open up to their Imāms.

This issue is far more complex than appears on the surface. One of the reasons why a domestic violence victim may choose to go to her religious leader rather than police is because she wants to solve matters behind closed doors. However, if the Imām is required to report cases of domestic violence, this may create a dilemma within the victim that prevents her from even seeking community support. This may also create an ethical dilemma for the Imāms who while nurturing a goal of uniting families may find themselves in muddy waters, often weighing between victim safety, legal responsibility, family integrity, and trust.

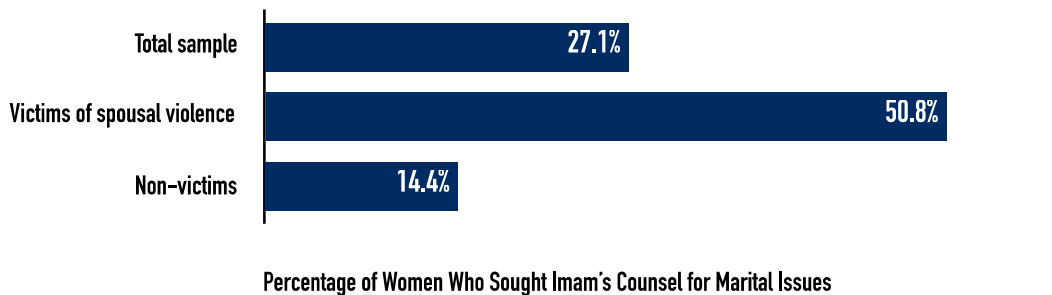


Figure 1: Dependency on Imām’s Counsel for Resolving Marital Conflict

Spousal Abuse is Widespread

In the study, 32% women reported physical abuse and 57% reported other forms of abuse including emotional (49%), verbal (39%), financial (24%), spiritual (13%), and sexual (13%) abuse (Nowrin, 2021). Both Imāms who served as professional family counsellors in their respective communities agreed that psychological abuse is far more prevalent in the Muslim community, however, most don’t realize what they are suffering is abuse. One of them pointed out that emotional, verbal, and physical abuse are inseparable, in fact according to our survey, physical abuse almost always accompanied other forms of abuse (in at least 96% of the cases) (Nowrin, 2021). In his community, gang violence among teens is a big problem and these problems compound at home – ‘chatting, pornography, low income, mental illness, culture gap, gang violence – there is just too much anger in the house’. He suggested that not only is it necessary to build awareness on recognizing abuse, but a holistic approach is required to challenge the family violence prevalent within the community.

Victims Seek Guidance and Intervention

According to the interviewed Imāms, the three main kinds of support that the victims of spousal violence seek are intervention, religious guidance, and divorce. The victims often ask about Islām’s view on domestic violence and spiritual guidance for navigating through the trials. Some request to talk to their spouses and/or their families in an effort to reconciliation, while others seek information for contacting professional support, and many come at the end of their journey and want to proceed with the religious divorce.

Imām’s Approach Varies Depending on Expertise

Majority of the interviewees said that they approached conflicts case by case, however, it was observed that their approach varied tremendously depending on their training. According to both participating groups, the general approach of the faith leaders was counselling both parties in an effort to reconciliation in the light of Qur’ān and Sunnah unless the problem was too complicated or one of the parties was not co-operating at all. However, 20% congregants felt that the Imām did not listen to her or dismissed her.

Both the survey participants' and interviewees' responses on common advice given in these situations resonated with each other. Figure 2 represents the survey data. According to the survey, the most frequent advice given by the Imāms was to observe patience in the face of this hardship (32%). This was acknowledged by several interviewees who said that if the victims asked for religious guidance, they advised them to be patient and gave guidance regarding how to cope emotionally. This advice was most commonly accompanied with an offering to talk to their spouses in an effort to reconciliation (29%). Those Imāms who had training in counselling tended to guide the families to additional community and government resources such as an anger management course that is recognized by the court and inform the authorities if need be. 16% of the respondents said that they were advised to seek help from social support or mental health professional and 8% were re-directed to seek legal help. Some of the respondents said that the Imām offered a balanced advice to both of the spouses, provided marital counselling, advised open communication, and gave spiritual advice. Only two of the respondents said that the Imām advised divorce in her situation. It is noteworthy that the only an *Ālimah* (female Islāmic scholar without training in counselling) interviewed in this study said that since she only gets to hear from one party and can't see the whole picture, all she can do is advise to be patient and tell them to think about the children. As discussed above, Imāms with training and experience in counselling were observed to be more apt at offering wholesome guidance and support to the victims, whereas those without much awareness of domestic violence tended to underestimate the severity and passively discouraged escaping violence by coining the virtue of patience.

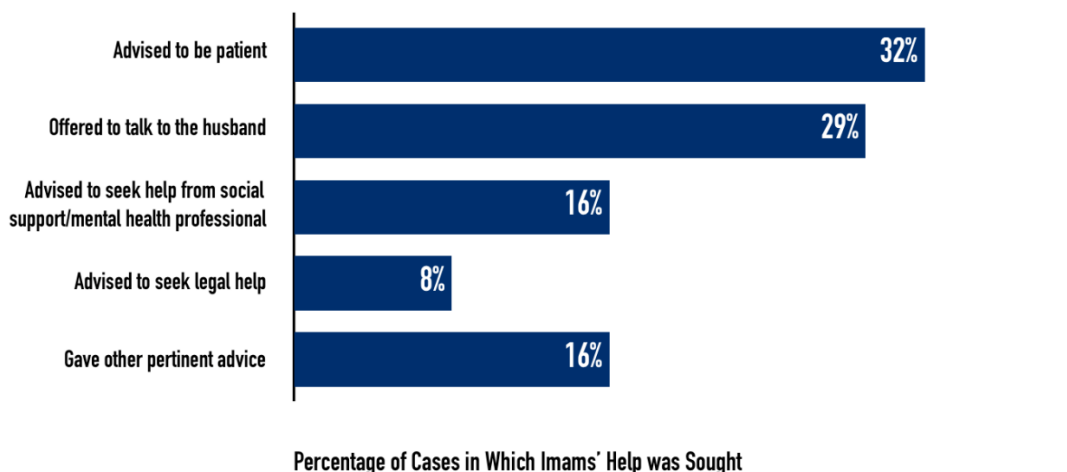


Figure 2: Common Responses of Canadian Imāms While Addressing Marital Issues (According to the Survey of Female Congregants)

A home where domestic violence takes place is a dangerous place for everyone in the family. The Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee recorded 410 domestic homicides in twelve years, majority of them involving intimate partners with a past history of violence (Hayes, 2018). Though victims tend not to reveal abuse, the findings indicate that of all those who approached Imāms for marital counsel, two in three women experienced physical abuse (Figure 3). While this statistic is alarming, it also means that unlike other groups, the Muslim community has an exceptional opportunity to identify and help closeted victims of domestic violence. If the Imām is aware of the probability of his clients being a domestic violence victim, he might be more willing to assess the severity of the situation and help redirect the victim to appropriate specialists or services without her having to confide in him at all.

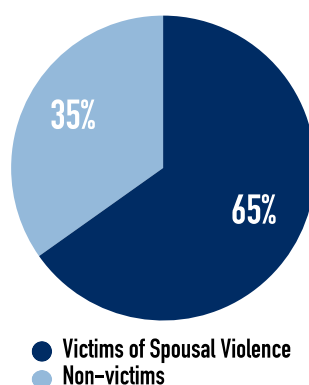


Figure 3: Two-third of Those Who Sought Imām’s Counsel for Marital Issues Were Victims of Spousal Violence

Children Suffer from Inaction

Unfortunately, as of now, most Imāms lack the proper training for counselling and as the study suggests, are generally unaware of the prevalence of domestic violence in their communities. As a result, many end up passively discouraging victims from escaping violence through emphasizing the virtue of patience and the sheltering of children. However, data from the study corroborates with multitudes of studies that have shown that children who grow up in homes where domestic violence takes place are more likely to have mental health issues, psychiatric disorders, aggression, anger problems, poor academic performances, addiction, and most importantly, grow up to be an abuser or victim themselves (Martin, Moracco, Garro, Tsui, Kupper, Chase, & Campbell, 2002; Nowrin, 2021; see Figure 4). While Imāms share a goal of uniting families by predominantly focusing on reconciliation, the over sanctification of marital bond and family life without due consideration to the harmful effects of domestic violence may influence victims to remain in dangerous relationships (Ellison & Anderson, 2001). Findings of the study emphasize the need for large-scale awareness workshops and training programs for the Imāms, a step which might be pivotal in changing attitudes and conversations surrounding domestic violence in the Muslim community.

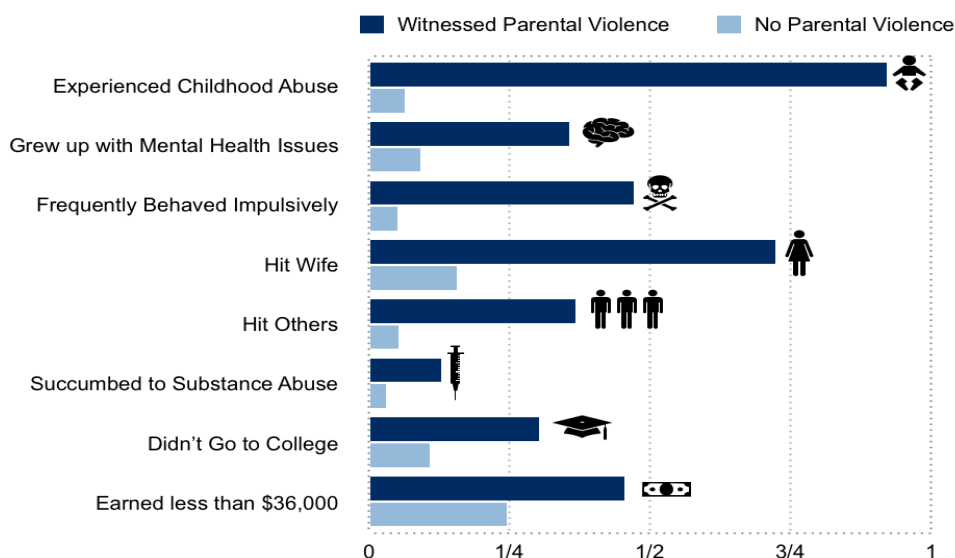


Figure 4: Negative Impact of Parent-to-parent Violence on Children’s Emotional, Cognitive, Behavioral and Social Well-being (Nowrin, 2021)

4.2 The Power of Khutbah

The Imām's platform is well-acknowledged in many Muslim as well as secular countries as an effective medium for promoting public agendas (Basu, 2016; Dhaka Tribune, 2019). Recent studies have shown that congregants felt deeply affected by the *Jumu'ah khutbah* (Underabi, 2018). According to a survey of Muslims by the Environics Institute (2016), 48% Canadian Muslims (including male and female) attended the mosque at least once a week. In this survey, 90% men attended the *Jumu'ah* prayers – including 95% of those who perpetrated domestic violence, one-third of whom quoted Islām to justify their abuse. This confirms the tremendous outreach potential of the *Jumu'ah khutbah* and the utmost need for utilizing it for education, awareness and community development purposes. In the following, findings related to the extent to which this platform is being utilized for creating domestic violence awareness is discussed.

Mixed Opinions on the Importance of Giving Khutbah on Domestic Violence

When asked if they gave *khutbahs* (Friday sermons) or lectures on domestic violence, half of the interviewed faith leaders said that they did not think it was important because they believed domestic violence was not a severe problem in the Muslim community. In the survey, 29% of the female congregants said that their local Imām never talked about this issue (note, 43.5% women responded 'don't know' which is expected since attending *Jumu'ah* is not common among women, see Figure 5). However, the data suggests that many Canadian Imāms are involved in raising awareness, some having given *khutbah* a few times while others doing it frequently on all available platforms. Some Imāms said that they were part of the nation-wide Muslims for White Ribbon Campaign in which Imāms across Canada give a *Jumu'ah khutbah* on ending violence against women during the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women in Canada (Iqra.ca, 2013).

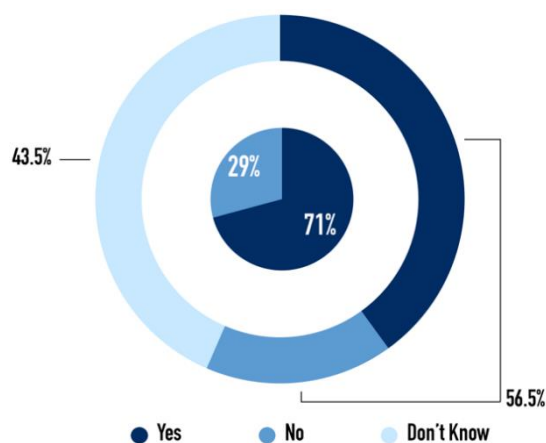


Figure 5: Has Your Local Imām Ever Given a Khutbah/Lecture on the Rights of Wives and/or Discouraged Domestic Abuse?

Perspectives on Domestic Violence and Islām

The faith-leaders were asked about the Islāmic perspective on domestic violence and the verse 4:34 in the Qur'ān which has been used by many to justify it. Their responses were similar and are summarized in Figure 6. Predominantly, the interviewees said that any kind of violence is forbidden in Islām, and violence against wife is detestable and disliked. They also highlighted that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ must be taken as an example, and he never laid a finger on his wives

and constantly preached to end domestic violence against women. As for verse 4:34, the interviewees interpreted it in two different ways. One group explained that it is a reconciliatory process that involves three steps – first, counsel, second, separate marital bed, and if both fail, third, discipline without causing pain – up to *tapping* with nothing larger than a *miswak* stick to show frustration – is allowed but not recommended. It should be noted that they believed this kind of *tapping* cannot be considered physical abuse. The other group explained it in terms of *Maqāsid Ash-Shari’ah* – Objectives of the Islāmic Law. They said that the purpose of these verses is to restore marital harmony and end domestic violence, not to promote it. It gives a three-step process that aims at managing the situation at the verge of anger. Quoting Imām Yusuf Badat (2018) who gave his opinion on a public platform,

The Arabic word ‘*darb*’ has many meanings. Refer to Arabic linguistic manuals and *fiqh* terminology. It can certainly mean ‘beat’ but here the verse, in today’s context, the more appropriate translation would be ‘take measures of discipline and reconciliation’. The purpose of the verse is to give advice to the couple to improve the marital situation and eliminate problems. Beating or domestic violence will not solve the problems rather intensify them, due to physical hurt, police charges, court cases, restraining orders, separation, jail time, children and extended family being stressed etc. (...) Disciplinary measures to solve marriage problems in today’s time and age would entail family therapy, counselling, pre- and post-nuptial agreements, anger management therapy, problem solving workshops etc.

It must be noted that the study sampled a small group of Muslim faith leaders. Though these may be the majority opinion, it cannot be concluded that these are the only interpretations existent in the community. Other studies in the Canadian Muslim community had shown a diverse array of beliefs on this issue among the Muslim men (Ammar, 2007; Baobaid, 2002). While the examples of the Qur’ān and Sunnah are used by the majority to promote ending violence against women, the same verses have been used (or abused) by many to justify their abusive inclinations.

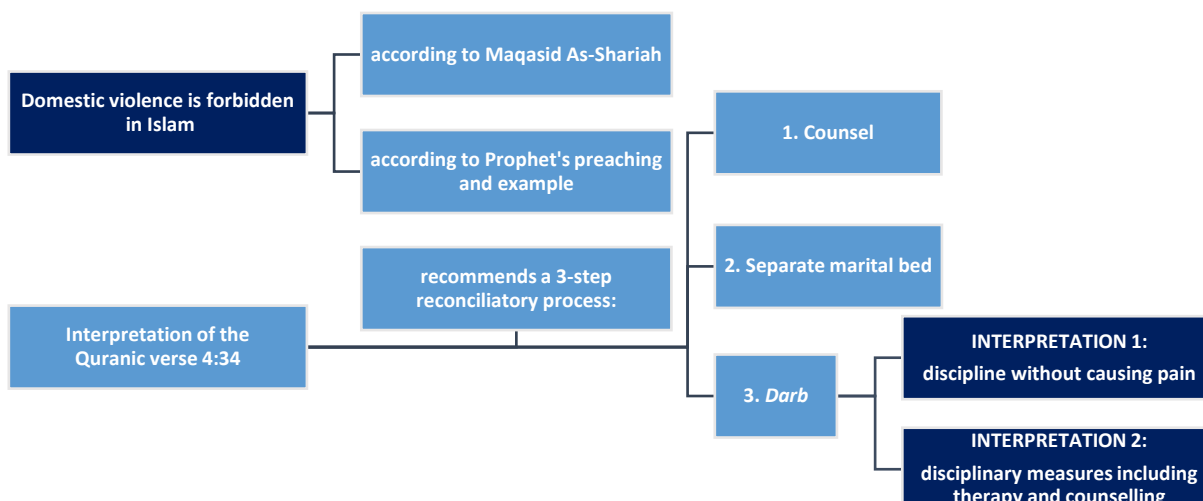


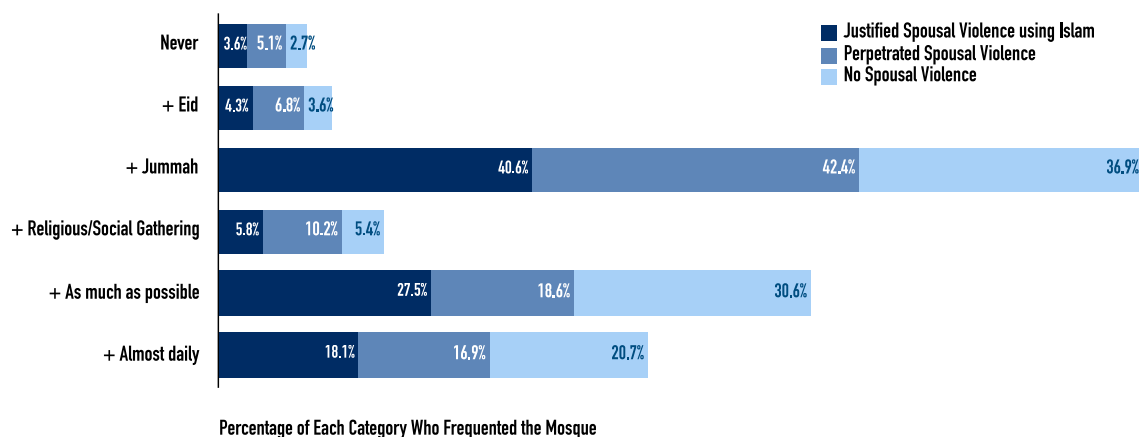
Figure 6: Perspectives of Interviewed Imāms on Domestic Violence and Islām

Justification of Spousal Violence Using Islām

Among the perpetrators of spousal violence in the study, one-third quoted the Qur’ān and Sunnah to justify their abuse (34.5%), and two-third asserted that men were dominant to women according to Islām (63.4%). As expected, justification of male dominance using religion was moderately associated with the justification of domestic violence ($r_s (155) = 0.460, p < .001$). Former studies had also shown that Muslim male abusers were likely to manipulate religious beliefs to justify their violence and to maintain power and control in the family (Macey, 1999). While the study found no correlation between justification of wife beating using Islām and abuser’s Muslim religiosity, significant associations were found between justification of wife abuse using religion and upbringing in a home where gender inequality and domestic violence took place (Nowrin, 2019).

Trend of Mosque Attendance

Similarly, no correlation was found between mosque attendance and domestic violence ($r_s (170) = -0.126, p > .05$) or abuse of Qur’ānic verses ($r_s (161) = 0.055, p > .05$). Figure 7 compares the trends of mosque attendance among the perpetrators of spousal violence, those who used Islām to justify abuse, and others. This chart may be useful to realize the actual reach of the mosques and sermons. It is important to note that according to the Environics Institute (2016), 22% Canadian Muslims look up to their local mosques and 10% look up to their local Imāms for religious guidance.



Note. No association was found between mosque attendance and the perpetration of domestic violence or its justification using Islām. The study assumed that those who attended *Jumu'ah* prayers also attended *Eid* prayers, those who attended religious gatherings also attended *Jummah*, and so on.

Figure 7: Trend of Mosque Attendance Among Those Who Perpetrated Spousal Violence, Justified It Using Islām, and Those who Did not Perpetrate Violence.

The findings suggest that while majority of the Muslim faith leaders in Canada maintain that domestic violence is forbidden in Islām, this sentiment is not well-communicated to the congregants. Part of this gap may be attributed to the lack of awareness on the prevalence and impact of domestic violence among the faith leaders and the resulting low vigour in building awareness within their communities.

5. CONCLUSION

The Canadian Muslim community has the advantage of being a close-knit multi-cultural community with weekly congregation and faith-based programs where majority of the congregants look up to their faith leaders for spiritual as well as familial guidance and counsel (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). In fact, almost half of all the domestic violence victims seek the counsel of their local Imāms and two in three women who come with marital issues are likely to be victims, although physical

abuse is hardly disclosed. This makes faith leaders among the first professionals, and sometimes the only ones, who come into contact with closeted victims of spousal violence.

When equipped with the proper skills, especially in risk-assessment and recognition of abuse, Imāms may have a unique opportunity to intervene early, respond effectively and/or redirect towards appropriate counselling and therapeutic services that intercept physical abuse or its subsequent recurrence. However, these skills and level of awareness are not yet mainstream. The study draws the attention of the Canadian Council of Imāms (CCI), Islāmic organizations as well as interested government organizations to seriously consider initiating and subsidizing the training of faith-based leaders on domestic violence awareness and counselling on a large-scale. Currently, the Peaceful Families Project provides a great model for this kind of venture (PFP, 2020). In addition, if every community invests to make spiritually integrated counselling accessible and affordable within its niche, together this might be a huge leap forward for the greater community.

Finally, while many Canadian Imāms use their platforms to change attitudes about domestic violence, this topic is not discussed as much or by as many. The study confirms the tremendous outreach potential of the *Jumu'ah khutbah* for education, awareness and community development purposes, and more importantly, the utmost need for utilizing it effectively. It was shown that gender discrimination and perception of male superiority were not only partly responsible for domestic violence, but also the norm in many families and must be fiercely addressed (Nowrin, 2021). While Imāms may have little influence in permanently changing violent attitudes, they can conclusively silence those who use Islām to justify their bias and violence. Moreover, in order to address the key risk factors of domestic violence, workshops on family nurturing, mental health, and anger management at the mosques were suggested, a venture in which Imāms' role is unprecedented (Nowrin, 2021).

From raising awareness through their pulpits, proficiently serving as a first responder, to facilitating programming in their mosques, supporting social media campaigns that influence cultural and behavioral change, and helping create culturally-sensitive prevention programs, faith leaders have an enormous potential and responsibility to fight domestic violence in their communities, for 'the *Imām* is a guardian and he is responsible (for his subjects)' (Al-Bukhāri, trans. 1997, Hadīth # 5188). When mosques openly condemn domestic violence and educate community members of its impact on the next generation of Muslims, it may not only dismantle the fears that prevent victims from seeking help, but the Muslim community may also address this issue better than any others.

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