



Domestic Abuse

A guide for Muslim communities



Contents

Contents	page 2
Author's note	page 3
Preface	page 4-6
Introduction	page 7
What is domestic abuse?	page 7
Key facts about domestic abuse	page 8
Cost of domestic abuse	page 9
Domestic abuse in the Muslim Community	page 9
Types of domestic abuse	page 10-11
Why do some men abuse their wives?	page 12
Why don't people seek help?	page 13
The Communities Role	page 14
Women and men - different but equal	page 15
What you can do to prevent domestic abuse	page 16-17
Concluding thoughts	page 18
Useful resources	page 18
Where to go for advice and support	page 19

Author's note

The 'Domestic Abuse - A Guide for Muslim Communities' deals with domestic abuse in the Muslim community. It is aimed at helping the Muslim community to understand, raise awareness and respond appropriately to domestic abuse.

This guide has been produced not because Muslim women are more likely to be subjected to violence than non-Muslim women, but because the way it impacts on them can be different.

It has been put together by health promotion experts and Islamic scholars, who have stayed within the spirit of Islam, while ensuring the advice and suggestions are scientific and culturally sensitive.

I am extremely grateful to all those who participated in the development of this guide - the individual imams, Leeds Makkah Masjid, members of the public, the staff at NHS Leeds, Leeds City Council Domestic Violence Team, the White Ribbon Campaign and Asian Radio Fever whose contributions have been invaluable.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Salma Elkadi Abugideiri and Maha B. Alkhateeb from the Peaceful Families Project for sharing their resources which are available through their website www.peacefulfamilies.org

For further advice and information on the guide, please contact:

Bushara Bostan - Health Improvement Specialist
Diversity Inclusion & Vulnerable Groups Team
Tel: 0113 84 35049
Email: bushara.bostan@nhsleeds.nhs.uk

Preface

Domestic abuse and violence occurs against women in all societies regardless of culture, ethnicity, religious background and socio-economic status. This guide has not been produced because Muslim women are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than women belonging to other communities. Instead, the aim of the guide is to remind Muslims of the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) so that such un-Islamic practices do not take place in Muslim households.

In his 38 years of married life, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) never abused any of his wives and was extremely gentle and compassionate with his family. In fact, one of the companions is reported to have said: *"I have never seen anyone more kind to his family than Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him)."* [Muslim].

Women as well as men can be victims of domestic abuse which manifests in various forms, most commonly as physical violence, but also as emotional abuse and financial control. Abusers excuse their violent actions towards their victims as a consequence of frustrations resulting from financial difficulties, problems with the children, family members or colleagues, cultural pressures, or an inferiority complex and they let out their frustration by abusing their spouses. In order to justify their actions, they sometimes, distort the meaning of a particular passage of the Glorious Qur'an and take it out of context.

In fact, instead of condoning domestic abuse, Islam is a way of life that brings peace and harmony through submission to Allah (swt). It offers an entirely different picture of how husband and

wife relations should be conducted. Allah Almighty says in the Glorious Qur'an that when men retain their wives in marriage it should not be to take advantage of them rather kindness and affection should be the mark of their relationship: *"Retain them in kindness or release them in kindness. But do not retain them to their hurt so that you transgress (the limits). If anyone does that he wrongs his own soul. Do not take God's instructions as a jest."* [Qur'an 2:231].

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has equated perfect belief with good treatment to one's wife and has also declared it as one of his practices. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has said: *"The most perfect believer is one who is the best in courtesy and amiable manners, and the best among you people is one who is most kind and courteous to his wives"* [Tirmidhi].

Domestic abuse or violence not only brings the whole institution of marriage into disrepute but it can also lead to young Muslim women leaving Islam altogether because they perceive that the Muslim community has failed to live up to the Islamic promise of protection, peace and kindness.


Domestic violence must therefore be dealt with in an appropriate way in order to educate, provide assistance and prevent future occurrences in those who suffer.

This devastating social crisis affects men, women and children across the UK and hinders their physical, social and psychological functioning. Domestic abuse can only be properly dealt with if members of the family as well as the whole community realise the grave effects of domestic abuse on the whole family as well as on the community.

Mosques can also play a key role in promoting Islamic family values amongst the Muslim community. Young men and

women should be educated about their respective rights and responsibilities in marriage so that it is instilled in them that tension at home or at work must not result in domestic abuse and violence. Married spouses' aim should be to develop a healthy, violence-free family life.

Finally, a person who resorts to domestic abuse must also realise that he is not only destroying his family life but is also going against the teachings of Islam. He should, on the one hand, try to acquire important life skills, such as anger management, communication skills, stress management, decision making and problem solving skills, that can help to prevent domestic violence; and on the other hand, he must aim to strengthen his relationship with His Lord so that he finds inner peace and harmony.



Qari Muhammad Asim
Leeds Makkah Masjid

Domestic Abuse

Introduction

Thousands of women around the world are victims of abuse every year by their husbands and other family members, usually in-laws. Domestic abuse and violence occurs against women in all societies. However, Muslim women's experiences of domestic abuse are greatly influenced by cultural dynamics and pressures, which impact on the way they disclose and seek help.

It is hoped that Muslim advocates and communities can use this resource to understand the issue of domestic abuse and provide appropriate support to individuals and families affected by domestic abuse.

Although the focus of this guide is on the needs of Muslim women as victims, we need to be mindful that Muslim men can also be victims of abuse inflicted on them by their wives and or her extended family. These men, (in particular those who are here as spouses or dependants from abroad) are victims of both physical and emotional abuse and require the same level of support as women. Much of the information in this guide may also be applicable to men who are victims of abuse.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse (also referred to as domestic violence) is any form of physical, non-physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse that takes place within the context of a close relationship. This relationship will usually be between partners or ex-partners (usually in the home) but it can also occur in extended family situations where abuse may be from other family members.

Some common abusive acts include:

- Physical assaults i.e. hitting, punching, slapping, kicking
- Calling your partner names
- Not allowing them to see friends or relatives
- Refusing to interpret properly
- Blaming them for your own behaviour

Key facts about domestic abuse

- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience at least one incident of domestic abuse in their lifetime. Women are more likely to experience multiple repeat incidents and fear as a result of this pattern
- In Europe, domestic abuse is the major cause of ill health for women aged between 16-44, more common than cancer or traffic accidents (New Internationalist Journal, 2004)
- In the UK at least 2 women are killed each week by a current or former partner (Ending violence against women and girls strategy, 2010)
- The Police in the UK receive one call from the public every minute for assistance for domestic violence
- In an average year 1 in 10 women are known to have experienced violence from a partner or ex-partner. In Leeds this equates to over 35,000 women (HALT, 2011)
- Although men are also victims of abuse, the vast majority of victims are women
- Domestic abuse has direct health consequences including higher rates of mental illness in women, contributing to depression, anxiety, stress, self-harm and suicide

- For children the emotional effects of witnessing domestic violence are very similar to the psychological trauma associated with being a victim of child abuse
- Domestic abuse affects all communities including the Muslim community. However, evidence suggests that many women from ethnic minority backgrounds tolerate regular abuse because of cultural attitudes which can make seeking help more difficult i.e. bringing shame upon the family

Cost of domestic abuse

The cost of domestic abuse is enormous. Around 3% of the NHS budget is estimated to be spent on treating the physical injuries associated with this. The Home Office estimates that the cost of violence against women and girls to society is around £36.7 billion (Department of Health Action Plan, 2010). However, the true cost is likely to be much higher, given the under-reporting of violence.

In Leeds alone, the annual social and economic cost of domestic violence is 'estimated at over £320 million. This is equivalent to £447.53 per head.' (Leeds DV Strategy 2008-11).

*Please note that the above information is general data on domestic abuse and not specific to the Muslim community.

Domestic abuse in the Muslim community

Many Muslims are uncomfortable with open discussions about domestic abuse. Some of their reservations are that: It gives Islam a bad name, it is a very rare phenomenon. The true level of domestic violence among Muslim communities is not really known, but there is no doubt that it does happen.

Islam does not condone domestic abuse or violence against women or anyone else. In fact abusive individuals are completely disregarding the Islamic teachings of kindness, mercy, gentleness, and forgiveness. The Quran and hadith make clear reference to the treatment of wives: *“And among His signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and he has put love and mercy between your hearts.”* (Qu’ran 30:21).

During 38 years of married life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), we do not find even a single incidence of abuse or mistreatments. The Glorious Quran states that our example is the Prophet (peace be upon him) and we cannot accept any behaviour which is inconsistent with his way of life.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: *“I recommend that you treat women with goodness. The best of you are those who treat their wives the best.”* (Tirmidhi).

Types of domestic abuse

In order to understand the different types of abuse this section highlights the various types of abuse, their manifestations and effects on women (and men).

The most common form of abuse is **emotional** and **mental abuse**. This includes verbal threats to divorce the wife, to remarry, or to take the children away if she does not do exactly as she is told; intimidation and threats of harm; degradation, humiliation, insults, ridicule, name-calling, and criticism; false accusations and blaming her for everything; ignoring, dismissing, or ridiculing her needs; neglect and the silent treatment; spying on her; restricting her access to

transportation, health care, food, clothing, money, friends, or social services; physical and social isolation; extreme jealousy and possessiveness; lying, breaking promises, destroying trust; etc. In Muslim homes this can be made worse by twisting Islamic teachings to make her feel worthless because she is a woman and telling her she is a failure and will go to hell. Emotional abuse can take place in public or at home.

Although it is completely contrary to the example of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Muslim community nonetheless tends to dismiss the seriousness of mental abuse, rationalising it as a petty argument between husband and wife, and saying It is not serious unless he hits her. In reality, mental abuse does severe psychological harm to many Muslim women. It destroys their self-esteem and makes them question their self-worth; sometimes leading to mental breakdowns.

Furthermore, psychological abuse can lead to physical abuse.

Physical abuse includes pushing, shoving, choking, slapping, punching, kicking, and beating; assault with a weapon; tying up; refusing to help her when she is sick or injured; physically throwing her out of the house etc. Physical abuse escalates in frequency and severity.

The third form of abuse is **sexual abuse**, involving forced or violent sex. For example, a wife may not want to have sex for health reasons, but the husband may force her anyway.

These three forms of abuse are usually related and may occur for a long period of time. Muslim men, just like non-Muslims, often start with mental abuse and work their way up.

Why do some men abuse their wives?

There is no single reason why some men are abusive. There are a number of factors that influence the behaviour and choices (whether conscious or unconscious) of all men regardless of social class, religion, culture or ethnic background.

Some abusers have witnessed abuse themselves. They are often part of a cycle, picking up the habit after watching their own fathers abuse their mothers. And their own children learn this abusive behaviour and abuse their wives. Children need to see positive examples of how to relate to and treat women, without using violence or abuse. This is because choosing not to use violence after witnessing violence against a mother or female carer becomes difficult for some men, especially if they have grown up with it. This is an important point because the longer the Muslim community tolerates abuse, the longer it will be passed on from generation to generation.

For cultural reasons, some Muslim men accept the idea that it is normal for a man to hit his wife and that she is no more than a piece of his property.

Some husbands excuse their violent actions to their wives as a result of frustration resulting from economic hardship, political oppression, problems with the children, or an inferiority complex.

Some Muslim men actually use Islam to “justify” their abusive behaviour, they wrongly use the Qu’ranic verse that says men are the protectors and maintainers of women to go on power trips, demand total obedience, and order their wives around. They disregard the Islamic requirement for the head of the household to treat all the family with kindness and affection and consult them when making decisions.

Then, if their wives dare to speak up or question their orders, these men misinterpret a Qur’anic verse that talks about how to treat a rebellious wife and use it as a license for abuse.

Why don’t people seek help?

One issue is that many Muslims (men and women) don’t want to get involved in the ‘private’ family affairs of other Muslims. Rather than trying to stop abuse in a friend’s or neighbour’s family by offering to mediate between the husband and wife or by encouraging them to speak to Muslim counsellors, many Muslims close their eyes and pretend they don’t know there’s a problem (this also happens in non-Muslim families). So the abuse goes on.

Another reason why abuse isn’t stopped is that many abused Muslim women simply don’t seek out help. They’re afraid that if their situation becomes public they will lose their privacy, and they fear the abusers will become more hostile when the negative publicity gets back to them. Furthermore, many abused Muslim women remain silent because they lack confidence in themselves and believe that they somehow deserve the abuse. Abused Muslim women also keep quiet out of a feeling of hopelessness and a belief that no one will help them, out of financial dependence on their husbands, out of a desire to keep homes together for the children’s sake, or out of love for the abusive husbands. Other Muslim women accept the abuse as a fact of life and learn to live with it.

Of those women who reach a breaking point and seek help, many Muslim women turn to imams of mosques. Unfortunately due to lack of training in the area of domestic abuse most community leaders including imams are ill-equipped to deal with such situations. For instance, it is dangerous to offer mediation in cases of abuse, the abuser and the abused should always be supported

separately. Imams may inadvertently make situations worse by offering to see couples together or putting the importance of family privacy above any harm that might come to the individual woman. If this happens once, then other abused women will not turn to their imams for help.

Abused Muslim women will also turn to relatives for help, only to be told to accept the abuse because making a big deal out of it could hurt the relatives' family honour (izzat) and reputation.

Since the Muslim community often leaves them to suffer, many abused Muslim women turn to shelters or refuges run by non-Muslims for help. Seeing abused Muslim women at shelters and refuges leaves non-Muslim social workers with a negative picture of Islam as being unjust because the Muslim community tolerates wife abuse.

Many women who experience abuse go even further, leaving Islam altogether because the Muslim community fails to live up to the Islamic promise of protection, brotherhood, and sisterhood.

The communities role

The Muslim community is failing in its obligations to protect many Muslim women and to bring abusive individuals to justice. The community needs to accept the fact that domestic abuse is a problem and that it needs to deal with it much more effectively in order to stop the immediate suffering of people in abusive situations and to help build healthy Muslim families.

Community education is essential to help achieve this. Starting today, community leaders and other concerned Muslims need to educate people about the problem and about efforts to help victims and prevent future abuse - through Friday khutbahs

(sermons), educational seminars, and workshops. These educational programmes can themselves reduce abuse simply by sending a message that the Muslim community will not tolerate abuse of women anymore.

Furthermore, the community needs to establish classes to teach Muslim men, young and old, how to be good husbands and fathers and to teach Muslim women, young and old, that good wives and mothers do not need to remain silent about abuse. Both Muslim men and women need to know their rights and their obligations in these important roles.

Women and men - different but equal

Men and women are created differently, physically we are different. We need to learn to appreciate and respect our male or female counterparts. The answer is not for men and women to try to be alike. Men and women must realise their respective 'equal roles' and strive to complement each other. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated: "*Women are the twin halves of men.*" (Abu Dawud).

In order to correct the abuse of male dominance, men must concentrate on using their dominant qualities for the good. They must use their strength to protect and preserve the feminine character, helping women realise their true potential. Islam encourages women to be educated, work, own property and engage in business. It has elevated the value and worth of a woman to an unprecedented status in society.

A role model to Muslim women is Sayyidah Khadija, the wife of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who successfully fulfilled the roles of a business woman, a wife and a mother.

What you can do to prevent domestic abuse:

Muslims (men and women) are obliged to speak out against injustice and to fight against all forms of abuse. It is the Islamic duty of everyone who knows of abuse taking place to prevent it if they are able to do so. Therefore, family relatives, friends and the community as a whole must take this responsibility very seriously.

This section sets out some key actions that individuals and communities can do to end domestic abuse against women and men.

MUSLIM MEN can show their support for an end to abuse in all its forms in our communities by:

- Talking about violence against women (mothers, daughters and sisters) and acknowledging that it does happen
- Being clear that it is shameful for a man to resort to violence against a woman
- Refusing to accept justification of violent or abusive acts (for example she was nagging me, I just lost it)
- Being clear that it is the abuser who damages family honour (izzat) and should feel shame not the innocent victim
- Instilling in the mind of young children and adults that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) never hit any of his wives
- Men can lead by example publicly too by the way in which they address and respect their wives in public, as it is not just a private matter
- Men can also sign up to the online White Ribbon Campaign¹ (www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk) and make a personal pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about men's violence against women in all its forms.

If all men start by taking one action, that will make a huge difference to ending violence against women.

MUSLIM WOMEN can help other women in these same ways. They can also:

- Visit women experiencing violence so they are not alone
- Help with the children if she is injured or tired after an assault
- Take her to the doctor for medical help
- Listen and believe what she says
- Let her make her own decisions about staying or leaving. She is an adult who can make choices
- Let them know about services and support available

IMAMS - in addition to the above, imams can show their support for an end to abuse in all its forms in our communities by:

- Having regular sermons (khutbas) in the community to talk about such issues
- Inviting expert organisations (such as the White Ribbon Campaign) to deliver training/workshops in the mosques
- Taking up domestic abuse training so they are better able to understand, support, advise and refer women to appropriate services

¹ The White Ribbon Campaign (WRC) is the UK branch of the global campaign to ensure men take more responsibility for reducing the level of violence against women.

Concluding thoughts:

Islam is a religion grounded in justice and mercy; and it is a religion that values and promotes healthy individuals and peaceful families. Islam encourages us to be proactive members of society and to use any and all appropriate tools to end oppression. Muslim communities who insist on denying the existence of this social problem are enabling the spread of oppression and the destruction of their communities through the destruction of the family. It is time for Muslims to collaborate with other Muslims, and non-Muslims, to establish healthy and vibrant communities that can only exist through the protection and promotion of healthy and peaceful families.

The noble 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 in the cause of God and for those who, being weak are ill-treated and oppressed.'* So, if one individual wrongs another, or if one of the parties acts wrongfully towards the other *'then we 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).

Useful resources:

Helping victims of domestic abuse - a guide for imams and community leaders. Available through www.issausa.org

What Islam says about Domestic Violence - A guide for helping Muslim families. Available through www.peacefulfamilies.org

Islam and Domestic Violence - A Commentary.
Available through www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk

Where to go for advice and support:

There are many agencies available to give advice and practical help to both men and women. The names of some of these agencies are listed below:

The National Domestic Violence Helpline (women)
0808 2000 247

The Men's Advice Line
0808 8010 327

West Yorkshire Police Non-Emergency (ask for a domestic violence coordinator)
0845 6060 606

Leeds Women's Aid
0113 246 0401

Sahara
0113 230 5087

Help Advice and the Law Team (HALT)
0113 243 2632

Behind Closed Doors
0800 328 2430

RESPECT Phoneline
0845 122 8609

Leeds City Council Domestic Violence Team - can offer domestic violence training and support. For information please call the office on
0113 395 2140

The White Ribbon Campaign - You can volunteer your time or just sign the online pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. For further information please contact the office on **01422 886545** or visit the website www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk

“And among His signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and he has put love and mercy between your (hearts).”

(Qu’ran 30:21)

“O ye who believe stand up firmly for justice, as witness to Allah even if against yourselves or your parents or your kin and whether it be against rich or poor; for Allah can best protect both...”

And if ye distort justice or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.”

(Qur’an 4:135)