Recommendations for a Culturally Sensitive Domestic Violence Treatment Program for Muslim Women in America

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Recommendations for a Culturally Sensitive Domestic Violence Treatment Program for Muslim Women in America

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Abstract
Recommendations for a Culturally Sensitive Domestic Violence Treatment Program for Muslim Women in America

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Cheryl Banachowski-Fuller

Statement of the Problem
Domestic violence is an issue which cuts across social, religious and economic classes as has been presented in literature throughout the last 25 years. However, while there has been research conducted among minority groups within the American society, such as African-American and Hispanic-American, throughout the late 20th Century that includes an understanding of the issue and the specific needs of the individual communities, study within the Muslim community has just begun (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). Examples of community outreach programs include making help available in a native language, advocates working in conjunction with religious and social leaders, billboards and leaflets advertising services and members from within the community who chose to become advocates (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Hampton, LaTaillade, Dacey and Marghi, 2008). These actions, when taken in the larger tapestry of community knowledge and understanding, help bring about the change that is desired. This paper looks at and reviews these advocacy programs to see if they are effective in serving the Muslim American community at large.
Experts in the field of domestic violence have seen evidence of success within the different communities when programs are implemented which serve the needs and the understandings within those communities. The role that advocates play in servicing a community may help or hinder survivors of domestic violence and its importance cannot be over exaggerated. Within a community, people will seek out assistance, support and understanding. If, while doing so, assistance, support and understanding are not offered or have the taint of personal beliefs that differ from the community seeking help, the willingness to seek help in the future becomes limited.

While the understanding within the American culture about Islam and Muslims has increased during the past decade, there remain some difficult and taboo areas and issues to address. As a religion, Islam is portrayed paradoxically as both a peaceful religion and a warring religion (Armstrong, 2000; Ali-Karamali, 2008; Nomani, 2005). Therefore, as an advocate, it is not surprising when there are misunderstandings in terms of addressing these issues.

Cities with a larger Muslim population, such as Chicago, Washington D.C. and Dallas can serve as role-models to other cities in terms of services and opportunities offered. It is a goal that, with better understanding between the criminal justice system and the Muslim communities at large, the fear of reporting domestic violence would be diminished over time. If advocates can work with the religious community, as exemplified in cities with larger Muslim populations, the opportunity to seek assistance and aid will bring about stronger ties between
criminal justice professionals, community and social organizations and the Muslim community.

**Method of Approach**

This paper utilizes secondary data from a variety of sources to gain insight into the issue of domestic violence within the Muslim American community. Analysis of related empirical, theoretical and practical findings serve as a foundation to address programs which best serve the needs of Muslim Americans seeking assistance from the criminal justice system regarding domestic violence issues. Since seeking assistance is not restricted to government entities such as the courts and police but also involves social and community organizations which deal with this issue, the focus on this paper crosses both areas.

Additionally, observations and experiences within the Muslim community, the agencies providing services and government agencies are critically analyzed, providing professional guidelines that respect both the religious traditions and the community’s needs as a whole. Much of this analysis comes from texts, referenced accredited journals and government publications. Conclusions, suggestions and recommendations presented in this paper will be drawn from these sources.

**Results of the Study**

The growth of the Muslim population in the United States brings with it similar rates of domestic violence to those within the general population (Khan,
As such, reaching out to the Muslim community is essential in addressing the needs of the Muslim survivors of domestic violence, just as it is imperative to reach out to any cultural sub-group of our society. This paper provides suggestions and insights towards addressing this issue. However, just as research has continued regarding the African-American experience with domestic violence and towards the Hispanic-American population’s experience, so too must research continue looking at all segments of our society (Hernandez, Almeida and Dolan- Del Vecchio, 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Dabby and Autry, 2005; Hampton, Oliver and Magarian, 2003; Watlington and Murphy, 2006).

There have been strides in recent years to examine the issue of domestic violence from within the Muslim community. Future efforts need to continue and expand with further community involvement. Admitting that domestic violence is a problem within any community can be difficult; however, until a problem is recognized, there is no opportunity for intervention or future remediation. There are shelters and facilities which have been established throughout the country to address domestic violence within the Muslim community. However, there needs to be an enhanced awareness both of these programs within the Muslim community as well as the entire domestic violence advocates community at large. In smaller Muslim populations, the ability to have a “separate” shelter system is not an option. It is in those situations where the advocates can reach out to other advocates thus finding resources, assistance and successes in addressing this problem.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION—DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM: NEED FOR A CULTURALLY SENSITIVE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM FOR MUSLIM AMERICAN WOMEN</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW—DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Increasing numbers of Domestic Violence of Muslim Women Living in America</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Muslim Culture and Gender Roles</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Overview of Ineffective Domestic Violence Programs for Muslim Women Living In America</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Feminist Theory</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Psychological Development Theory</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW—CURRENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN WITH DIVERSE BACKROUNDS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Al-Shifa Clinic and Center</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Hamdard Center</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Apna Ghar</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. DIAS Domestic Abuse Intervention Service</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A CULTURALLY SENSESITIVE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM FOR MUSLIM WOMEN LIVING IN AMERICA</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Empowerment program to work with the survivors</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Educational Programs for Muslim women that addresses the differences between patriarchal family structures—cultural norms</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
--and outright illegal behavior—domestic violence
C. Shelters which provide cultural and religious understanding in working with the Muslim population
D. Providing educational programs which work with the Muslim community in identifying domestic violence as “an issue” within the community

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

REFERENCES
I. INTRODUCTION:

For decades members of society have heard the mantra that domestic violence does not occur in a vacuum, it slices across our society and the global society at large without consideration of race, religion, class, gender or sexual orientation (INCITE! Anthology, 2006; Sokoloff and Pratt, 2006). It is an unfortunate sign of our times that individuals no longer flinch when stories of domestic violence are heard on various media outlets but even more so within our own lives (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2004). Family violence statistics, as reported by the Department of Justice, state “Family violence accounted for 11% of all reported and unreported violence between 1998 and 2002. Of these, roughly 3.5 million violent crimes were committed against family members, 49% were crimes against spouses, 11% were sons or daughters victimized by a parent, and 41% were crimes against other family members.” (Durose, et al., 2005:5).

As the incidences of domestic violence have risen, the United States became more culturally diverse in its population census and more globally affected. Contrary to popular belief, domestic violence is as culturally universal an issue as any other societal problem (Constable, 2007; World Organization Against Torture, 2003; Belhaj, 2007; Al-Jadda, 2004; Cwikel, Lev-Wiesel and Al-Krenawi, 2003). There has been a concerted effort by researchers, criminal justice professionals and advocates to try and address domestic violence within the mainstream society at large; however, it is only within the last ten years that these professionals have focused on addressing the needs of different groups or of
the individual minority communities which make up our society (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). Examples of such needs include: drawing advocates from within the community being represented, providing help in the language of the community, billboards or leaflets advertising services, and finally advocates working in conjunction with religious and social leaders within the community (Trask, 2006; Martinez, 2006; Koyama, 2006; Sahota, 2006; Sokoloff, 2006).

This research specifically focuses on the increasing incidences of domestic violence among Muslim women living in America, and the lack of culturally-specific programs available to this population (Abugideiri and Alkhateeb, 2007; Ahmed, 2008, Apna Ghar). Religion, culture, and family structure of Muslim women must be addressed to better understand why domestic violence is hidden in Muslim families. As a result of this previous limited focus, domestic violence programs for Muslim women living in American are limited to major cities and then only in a very inadequate capacity.

In 2000 a Muslim activist, Sharifa Alkhateeb, did a survey of the Muslim community within the United States “and found that approximately 12% of Muslims live daily with the misery of physical domestic violence. Subsequent surveys by others indicate that if you count all the various forms of violence, the percentage jumps to 47%” (Khan, 2006:80). The difficulty of addressing domestic violence in Muslim communities stems from a variety of issues. One issue centers on the basic cultural understanding of male and female roles in society (Ali-Karamali, 2008; Razack, 2004; Mattson, 2005). Are men and women equal
in a Muslim view? Are men truly allowed to “beat” their wives? Did the Prophet of Islam allow for women’s rights centuries before many countries in the west?

A second issue concerns the increasing misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Islam within the American society. Are all Muslims terrorists? Do women veil because they are forced to or is it a religious choice that they make? Are all Muslim women truly downtrodden and mistreated? Each of these questions creates additional questions which need to be answered, however, a basic understanding of these questions will assist those who are in positions to help Muslim survivors of domestic violence begin the process towards both strengthening and healing the family.

These two issues may also lend insight into why victims of domestic violence choose to remain in the shadows (Ali-Karamali, 2008; Nomani, 2005; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). A quote that many young Muslims hear is: “Marriage is ½ of faith and the rest is fear Allah”. When this is directed at young Muslims, it means that once married, half of their religious obligations have been fulfilled (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). Unfortunately, this doctrine puts Muslim domestic abuse survivors in a moral dilemma regarding culture, ignorance of faith, loyalty and safety. As such, it becomes increasingly hard for a Muslim survivor to leave an abusive situation.

There has been very little focus on the Muslim community at large in reference to domestic violence; therefore, it is impossible to know if the rate of abuse within this community is rising due to the actual population increasing, if
abuse is just being reported more or if there is a combination of both of these factors (MacFaroquar, 2008). *The New York Times* reports that the ability of Muslim victims of domestic violence to seek help is stymied not only by the limited number of shelters throughout the country but also because the advocates who are providing the services do not, in many cases, have an understanding of the faith, culture or practices of the people seeking assistance (MacFaroquar, 2008). As has been demonstrated in research done on specific communities, such as within the African-American or Hispanic-American communities, the ability to access help is often limited to what the communities themselves are willing to admit to and accept help from the service providers (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Bograd, 2005; Dasgupta, 2005; Abraham, 2005; Hampton, Carrillo and Kim, 2005; Smith, 2005).

Religion, culture and family structure must be explored before addressing the concerns regarding the incidences of domestic violence among Muslim women living in America, along with the availability of domestic violence programs. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to address the issue of domestic violence among Muslim women living in America, and how religion and culture, especially the patriarchal family structure, plays a large part in the incidences of domestic violence. Muslim culture in America a generalization for what is in fact a very diverse group. The Muslim culture can be Arab, Indo/Pakistani, Malaysian, or European. This research also addresses the lack of effective domestic violence programs available for this culturally sensitive group of women. The goal of this research is to offer recommendations for an
exemplary domestic violence program for Muslim women living in America that is both culturally sensitive and consistent with Muslim values.

This paper is intended to serve the Muslim community as well as those victim advocates who will come into contact with Muslims. It is intended to serve as a means for the advocates to better understand where the Muslim survivors of domestic violence are situated. Hopefully, it will also be a door which has been opened to this shameful secret within the Muslim community, thus allowing for necessary services to reach those within it. Survivors of domestic violence should not feel that they have to choose between their faith and the help they want and need.
II. Literature Review—Domestic Violence in the Muslim Community

This section is divided into three parts. The first section provides a brief history of the rise of the Muslim population within the United States and discusses the problem of domestic violence within the Muslim Ummah (Community). The second section reviews Muslim religious cultures and gender roles. This section is meant to give non-Muslim providers of domestic violence resources a limited basis of understanding when a Muslim survivor is seeking assistance from their shelter. The final section reviews current shelters and discusses various system constraints that limit the ability to best serve a Muslim survivor of domestic violence.

A. Population Increase of Muslims in the Untied States and An Increasing Rate of Domestic Violence within the Muslim Community

A simple definition of someone as a Muslim or a follower of Islam is “someone who has submitted to God” (Denny, 1987:7). Muslims believe that “Islam is a complete way of life embracing beliefs and devotional practices within a larger context of regulated social relations, economic responsibilities and privileges, political ideals and community loyalties” (Denny, 1987: 6). Muslims therefore view Islam as “a ‘complete way of life’ in which no distinction is made between the religious and secular” (Denny, 1987:7).

In Islamic Values in the United States: A Comparative Study, Yvonne Haddad and Adair Lummis give the following summation of the history of immigration of Muslims to the United States. “There have been three waves of Muslim immigration. The first occurred in 1875 with migrant laborers,
uneducated and unskilled workers willing to work hard…Many stayed, but those who went home encouraged others to come to America…The second wave in the 1930’s was stopped by World War II….The third wave of immigrants from the 1950’s and 1960’s tended to be well educated and from influential families, often trying to escape political oppression or to obtain higher education” (Haddad and Lummis, 1987: 13-14).

In 2007, the Pew Research Center released its report “Muslim Americans Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream” stating that “Muslims constitute a growing and increasingly important segment of the American society” (Pew, 2007: Forward). Islam, as a religion, has increased within the population of the United States during the last quarter century with both immigrant Muslims and native-born Muslims (Pew, 2007). Muslims believe that everyone is born a Muslim, however not everyone is exposed to the religion, therefore, whenever a “non”-Muslim chooses to become Muslim they are not converting, they are reverting back to their original religion (Ali-Karamali, 1999; Anway, 1995).

While as a population the number of Muslims is rising, the population is not a large enough segment of society for independent reporting of domestic violence rates, such as has occurred in the Hispanic-American and African-American populations. The larger segments of “minorities” in the United States have programmatically focused on incidences of reporting and interventions to reduce the occurrences of abuse (Sokoloff and Pratt, 2006; Color of Violence ~
As a result of the September 11th 2001 attacks, there have been a number of consequences for the international Muslim community. One such consequence has been an increased interest in better understanding the lives of Muslims around the world but more importantly, an increased understanding of Muslim culture within the United States. Therefore, domestic violence within the Muslim community in America has gained limited notice in recent years because it has been reported in the media. In 2003, Newsweek reported a story explaining how “Muslim-American women are quietly coping with the tragic side effect of the (9/11) attacks—a surge in domestic violence” (Childress, 2003). In 2005, a counselor working primarily with Muslim and Middle Eastern families in the Washington, D. C. metro area, published an article discussing the issue of domestic violence within the Muslim community (Abugideiri, 2005). One Muslim—focused website places the number of domestic violence cases as high as 10 percent, but goes on to express that there are no solid numbers to estimate the problem because it is not considered to be enough of an issue where there needs to be independent research (Abugieiri, 2005; Kirtz, 2008). It is difficult to pinpoint if the rise in abuse within the Muslim community in the United States is due to the rise in population; the results of pressures from the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001; a willingness of the community to reach out for help into the society at large; or all of the above.
One difficulty in accurately determining the incidence of domestic violence is that there are sub-groups of women within the broad descriptor of “Muslim American”. As the Pew report showed, this title includes women who are native-born Americans and/or women who were born abroad and then traveled to the United States for any number of reasons such as educational opportunity, political/religious asylum, or family unity (Pew, 2007). A Muslim-American is someone who feels that being both Muslim and American plays a role in defining who they are. They can be women who were born in Muslim countries or those who chose the faith later in life after following another path; they can be women who were raised in other cultures and traditions or women who were born and raised in the “West” and therefore have a “westernized” attitude and outlook of the world (Anway, 1995; Pew 2007).

B. Muslim Culture and Gender Roles

As stated above, Muslims are raised to believe that marriage is an important part of both the religion as well as the cultural life. Men are told to get married to protect them from behavior which would lead them commit “zina” or illicit sexual relationships (Nomani, 2003 and Nomani, 2005). Just as Muslim men are told of the importance of marriage so too are Muslim women; they hear repeatedly, “Marriage is half of your faith” (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). There is a belief that marrying and having a family are the most important things that a Muslim can do. Muslim women who come to the faith from another tradition are also exposed to this idea that marriage is important. In many cases, as soon as the
reversion to Islam occurs, the marriage proposals from within the community follow (Hassounah-Phillips, 2001; Anway, 1995).

Within the Muslim community there is some debate as to what a woman’s role is both within the society as a whole as well as within the family—is it the man (husband) who is the “head of the household” or is it the woman (wife), or is it some combination of the two? One Islamic scholar refers to this idea as “Woman is not just biology” (Wadud, 1999: 64). “Because woman’s primary distinction is on the basis of her child-bearing ability, it is seen as her primary function. The use of ‘primary’ has had negative connotations in that it has been held to imply that women can only be mothers” {emphases added} (Wadud, 1999: 64). Dr. Wadud identifies the very controversy some women within the Muslim community feel, that women only have the singular role to be a mother.

Therefore, a woman can be told, by her family, by her religion and by her community that she is only “good enough” if she is a mother. In order for a woman to become a mother in the Muslim community she must first become a wife. If a woman is raised with the belief that the husband is the head of the household and that her responsibilities are tied to her husband and her family’s happiness and well-being, there is some evidence that the woman will allow herself to subjugate her own personality, needs and wants to that of the family as a whole (Hassounah-Phillips, 2001).
Within the Qur’an there is a verse which states:

“(Husbands) are the protectors
And maintainers of their (wives)
Because Allah has given
The one more (strength)
Than the other, and because
They support them
From their means
Therefore, the righteous women
Are devoutly obedient, and guard
In (the husband’s) absence
What Allah would have them guard.
As to those women
On whose part ye fear
Disloyalty and ill-conduct,
Admonish them, (first)
(Next), refuse to share their beds,
(And last) beat them (lightly) (Surah 4: Ayat 34–{Ali, 1998:195 Translation}).

According to Dr. Amina Wadud and the Islamic scholar she quotes—Aziza al-Hibri, “it cannot be overlooked that ‘Many men interpret the above passage as an unconditional indication of the preference of men over women’.

They {Muslim men} assert that ‘men were created by God superior to women’ (in strength and reason). However, this interpretation… is (i) unwarranted and (ii) inconstant with other Islamic teachings…the interpretation is unwarranted because there is no reference in the passage to male physical or intellectual superiority” (Wadud, 1999: 71). Many Muslim men also may view the translation of “Husbands are the protectors and maintainers of their wives” to equate elevation over women as opposed to the more open interpretation of providers for those who are biologically different from one another (Badawi, 1997).

As is seen from the end of the above verse, there is “permission” for men to “beat them lightly” (Ali, 1998: 195; Hekmat, 1997). This becomes very
difficult for a woman—be it a born Muslim or a Muslim revert—to defend against and creates with a sense of cognitive dissonance. In cases where the husband legitimizes abuse through religion, the wife may end up feeling even more isolated and unwilling to seek out assistance from within the community. In the cases of women who revert to Islam and rely on their husbands as a major source of support and information on the religion, this subsequent hijacking of their religion by their husbands can be an issue even more so than for Muslims who were born into the faith (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Hekmat, 1997).

There are varying “scholarly” opinions on the role of corporal punishment within the confines of a marriage. In his book, Women and the Koran, Anwar Hekmat argues that many scholars will say that spousal abuse is wrong, but will then offer the husband a pretext (1997). He states that “wife beating is not an exceptional case, but rather it is common practice among the poor classes in Muslim communities. Although some may say that the beating and scourging of wives is limited to ‘the rougher strata of society,’ unfortunately, many Muslim societies, especially those in Asia and Africa, are poor. Therefore, ‘the rough strata’ comprises the whole, or at least the majority, of the people” (Hekmat, 1997: 218). Yet other scholars such as John Esposito and Natana DeLong-Bas in their book, Women in Muslim Family Law state “Perhaps in recognition of the reality of domestic violence, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco and Syria specifically grant the wife the right to petition for divorce if her husband physically harms her” (Esposito and DeLong-Bas, 2001:103).
Consequently, individuals providing domestic violence survivors assistance must be knowledgeable about those scholars who do not provide or accept justifications and exceptions to abuse. For many individuals, this is not something that is within their cultural understanding of Islam in the United States. As a country, the United States may have as our basic understanding of the religion its most extreme and in many cases—its most violent parts, based on terrorist actions and various negatively focused news reports. As with any sacred dogma, religious scholars can provide contradictory interpretations of holy texts.

The Qur’an is a sacred text. As such it, unlike the Bible, has not been changed, edited or revised over time with different versions (Armstrong, 2000). As two Middle Eastern scholars said in their book Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak: “The Koran has been called untranslatable, and a good deal of controversy still exists among scholars about which of many English translations is the best attempt to reproduce the spirit as well as the letter of this remarkable document. The order in which the surahs were revealed is also the subject of dispute” (Ferne and Bezirgan, 1997:7). One reads the Qur’an in Arabic, but may and can learn the religion by any number of means: the internet, conversations with other Muslims, books, videos and conferences to name a few. For those who are not native speakers to Arabic, this can prove both a challenge as well as a stumbling block.

In many cases, the understanding of the religion comes from a variety of sources, both religious and cultural. One may rely or follow specific fatwa’s—or
religious opinions (Armstrong, 2000). Fatwa’s may be issued by a well known source (example include the any number of the fatwa’s issued by the Al-Azhar University in Cairo) or from someone who claims to have the authority to issue one (an example would be any of the various on-line fatwa providers). One may rely on outside research of the religion via texts or the internet. In many cases, one may also rely on the culture to educate themselves by talking with other people in the mosque or Islamic Centers.

Up until recently, domestic violence was not something that was discussed in mosques and Islamic Centers. As one researcher put it, “Women who experience violence in their lives are encouraged to be patient and to give in. No clear stand is taken against the man who is violent. Violence in marriage is generally condemned but when it does happen, the religious community gives no clear consequences for the violent behavior. Furthermore, the religious community condemns any woman who seeks legal protection from an abusive spouse. Rather, her actions are considered disloyal to the husband and the family. In addition, the Islamic Centers themselves fail to impart any information on domestic violence protection and prevention programs available within the community.” (Ayyub, 2000: 242).

However, this began to change in 2006 when an Imam used his Friday khutba (sermon) to not only admit that domestic violence exists within the Muslim American community, but that it is tacitly condoned within the community and in many cases that the wife is condemned (Khan, 2006). Imam
Khan publically stated that domestic violence is religiously wrong (Khan, 2006). Khans’ khutba, however, was the exception to many of the Friday khutba to take such an open and public stance against domestic violence. It is because of this, that being able to turn to the community may not be an option. In many cases, the assistance offered is limited or even non-existent (Kulwicki and Miller, 1999:6; Ahmed, 2008; Anjum and Anjum, 2008). Muslim survivors of domestic violence are compelled to utilize non-religious resources to provide aid and assistance when abuse occurs. The problem arises in inadequate understanding of the needs of a Muslim woman, such as dietary needs, cleanliness, or segregation.

C. Overview of Ineffective Domestic Violence Programs for Muslim Women Living in America

Muslim survivors of domestic violence may first turn within the community, speaking to other women they know, speaking to their local imam, or even in some cases looking for resources to provide assistance (Ahmed, 2008; Anjum and Anjum, 2008; Khan 2006; Nomani, 2005). However, in instances where they are unable to speak with others, either due to the fact that the support network does not exist or they personally are just not able to turn to the community, they may seek assistance from outside resources. Currently, shelters are set up on a need basis and will accept women and their children assuming that the shelter has the available resources such as room, beds, and food.

According to one study, shelters are based on “patriarchal terrorism…” where the violence is male initiated, escalating, and represents a man’s attempt to dominate and control his partner. In this model, violence: is purposeful and
meant to intimidate and control the female partner” (Carney and Buttell, 2006:572). It is accepted that abuse by its very nature is a means to dominate and control one partner. Shelters in the United States are not abundant enough where they are able to take in any and all domestic violence survivors who may need their services (Senate Judiciary Committee July 31, 1990). It is understandable then when even the shelter system has been designed in a way that is limited to provide help; it would reinforce the Muslim domestic violence survivor’s view of the ability for assistance and help.

The shelter environment is also meant to be temporary in nature. However, a problem arises when a survivor of domestic violence uses the facility, gets the help that they need and then attempts to remove themselves from the shelter and re-start their lives back at home again. One simple example of this is in the issue of protective order modification. When a survivor of domestic violence is staying at a shelter, one means that the shelter uses to try and assist is that of protective or restraining orders. However, when survivors begin to feel “safe” enough, often times they will ask the court to modify or change the restraining order to allow more access or easier access between the parties. Survivors who are able to use the shelter system to provide the necessary space, find a financial hardship when they attempt to return home again and their spouse is living elsewhere (Lyon, 2005). Two additional areas of concern can be family transportation and child care issues, be it the costs of these things or the ability of one parent to rely on the other parent to take care of these matters.
For Muslim women particularly, there can be the added burden of addressing their religious requirements (prayer five times a day, no pork or pork by product in their lives, seclusion from the opposite sex at a certain age) within the shelter system. Muslims do need to pray five times a day, as it is one of their pillars of faith (Armstrong, 2000; Sultan, 2004). When they pray, they require a “clean space” where no one has walked with shoes having dirt from the outside. Many Muslims use special prayer rugs which are solely used during prayer time, and then removed until the next prayer. Given the extremes that force women out of their home, few personal items such as prayer rugs are salvaged while exiting.

Dietary traditions can present an additional challenge especially as it relates to pork. Ideally, Muslim women need to prepare their food in a place that has never been exposed to pork. This becomes difficult in a shelter setting where the food is sometimes donated and there maybe a variety of people who are using the facilities. Even if a Muslim brings in their own food, they will still face the problem of food preparation by using pans, utensils, silverware and dishes that may have come into contact with pork items (Uddin, 1994).

Finally, there is the issue of segregation of sexes. In many cases, once children have reached the age of puberty they are segregated in Muslim cultures. In cases where divorce happens, male children are supposed to remain with their mother until the age of seven. If the child is a girl, she is to remain with the mother until puberty which has been set at age nine, at which time they then are supposed to go to the father’s family to be raised (Esposito and DeLong-Bas,
2001). While this maybe what these scholars have written, in terms of actual practice within the community, there is some negotiation between the parents and the judge who views the case (Nomani, 2005; Ali-Karamali, 2008). Within most Muslim communities, even within the United States, the boys are sent with their fathers and the daughters with their mothers in major holiday settings such as Eid parties (Nomani, 2005). In shelters, where children are usually with a parent, there is no gender separation. In the immediate context of a Muslim family this would not be an issue, however, in cases where there are multiple families present—Muslim and non-Muslim, this would present a certain amount of theological discord based on cultural practices as well as Qur’an readings.
III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION OF FEMINISM AND PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT THEORIES TO MUSLIM AMERICAN SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

There are many reasons why domestic violence occurs in homes across the United States. This paper focuses on the application of two theoretical models to address the ability of programs to assist Muslim survivors of domestic violence. The purpose of looking at feminist theory and psychosocial development theory is in providing services, education regarding prevention, and recovery once the abuse has occurred. Many Muslim scholars argue that Prophet Mohammed was among the first feminists. As such, the application of feminist theory to domestic violence among Muslim women is consistent with Muslim theology (Armstrong, 2000; Esposito and DeLong-Bas, 2001; Khan, 2006; Nomani, 2005; Wadud, 1999). The Prophet outlawed the killing of newborn girls by burying them alive in the desert with Qur’an Surah 16: 58 (Ali, 1998). The practice called female infanticide was common in pre-Islamic Arabia, as female children were considered to bring shame and expense to a family.

In terms of the psychosocial development theory, Erik Erickson presented different developmental tasks that an individual masters throughout their lifetime (Funder, 2004). Because most domestic violence occurs in circular patterns in life, developmental theory can be of assistance to both domestic violence survivors as well as providers of assistance and care in understanding the pattern which leads to abuse as well as the necessary steps to break the circle (Ney, 1992; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). Understanding that someone who witnesses abuse
is more likely to either be an abuser or be abused reinforces the need to look at those who have been exposed to this violence and find ways to overcome it.

A. Feminist Theory

One concept of feminist theory addresses gender roles and how women may be impacted. In dealing with the social order, a feminist theorist would argue that enforcing or reinforcing the patriarchy of a society disconnects and eliminates women entirely from the society at large. Patriarchy as defined in the Web- ster’s Dictionary is: “A social system in which the chief authority is the father or eldest male member of the family or clan; A community characterized by this system” (1989:736). Patriarchy means an established chain of command or a hierarchy within a society. Karmen asserts, “For centuries, legal traditions granted the man, as head of the household whose home was his castle, the right to discipline his wife and children as he saw fit, since they were regarded as his property or chattel” (2004:229). Karmen maintains that there were three major periods in history where the rights and by extension the treatment of women became an issue in the United States. The first era was in the 1600s when “Puritans in Plymouth Colony and Massachusetts Bay Colony passed the first laws anywhere in the world forbidding verbal or physical abuse between family members” (Karman, 2004: 230). The second in the late 1800s where “reformers {who} argued in favor of the principle that the government had a responsibility to enforce morality as codified in laws…Societies for the prevention of cruelty to children were set up across the country” (Karman, 2004: 230-231). The final wave was in the early 1970s and focused on “victim-support activities” and the
“widespread acceptance of victim-blaming arguments that portrayed beaten wives in an unsympathetic light” (Karman, 2004: 231).

By contrast to the societies of the Western world, the Prophet of Islam brought about many changes for women within Islamic society in the 600s. According to the Qur’an, the practices of the Prophet (called Sunnah) and the reports of his words by the first followers of Islam, (called Hadith or Ahadith) demonstrate that the Prophet valued women both as members of the religious community and as members of the society at large (Ali-Karamali, 2008; Wadud, 1999). However, this practice has been minimized by the cultures who adopted Islam in the years since his enlightened attitude regarding gender roles was proclaimed. It also can be argued that his enlightened attitude is no longer the practice, but is the exception leaving one scholar to wonder if there has been a reaction against the “West” that has also reinforced the patriarchal roles as a reaction against women’s rights (Mernissi, 1987 and Mernissi, 1991).

There is some debate within the Feminist Muslim community as to the extent which the Prophet was providing women equal rights and access both within their community as well as within their religion. According to some, achieving women’s rights was a gradual process while others reason that the process towards equal rights was in place at the time of the Prophet’s death, as it was part of Sunnah, and, as such, it should remain part of the religious practice to this day (Ali-Karamali, 2008; Mernissi, 1987; Nomani, 2005: Wadud, 1999). Ultimately, it becomes an issue of religious understanding vs. cultural
understanding in addressing this issue, both with in the Muslim community as well as outside of it.

One must then add the discussion of how to address the issue of domestic violence within the Muslim societies both within and outside of America. In many cases, feminist theoretical ideas have been successfully argued against by calling them “Western” ideas and behaviors. This doctrine is supported by fundamentalists and mainstream Muslim society as well (Mernissi, 1987). One approach that may initiate a better path towards understanding is creating dialogue inclusive of women’s roles and rights in a Muslim society; knowledge of which many Muslim women themselves maybe unaware.

Feminist theory, since the 1970s, has further developed the idea of “Battered Women Syndrome”. Battered women syndrome suggests that a woman who is abused within the home becomes so broken down by the abuse that they no longer possess an inner core of strength on which to draw. This prevents women from stopping the abuse, thus the cycle repeats itself in a vicious circle until either the abuser or abused ends it either through death or leaving the violent environment (Wallace, 2005; Karmen, 2004). For Muslim women living in America who may already be isolated by their misunderstood religion and their culture the steps to recover from “Battered Women Syndrome” may be even steeper.
B. Psychosocial Development Theory

Erik Erickson’s theory is based on the eight stages of man’s (or woman’s) development over a lifetime. Unlike some of the theorists of his era, Erickson did not believe that people stop developing once they reach puberty. However, the basis of human development within those early years will influence individual development throughout the rest of one’s life. Erickson’s theory believes that individuals needed to master certain tasks at mirrors points in their development. If they were unable to do so, his theory suggests that individuals would face certain challenges later in life, especially with relationships, trust, empathy and autonomy.

According to Erickson, “Mothers, I think, create a sense of trust in their children by that kind of administration which in its quality combines sensitive care of the baby’s individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness within a trusted framework of their culture’s life style” (Funder and Ozer, 2004: 264). Mothers, however, must be able to provide this care and if they are unable to the child develops a sense of mistrust both of its parents as well as the world at large. A mother who is being abused may not be able to provide this sense of security to their child, regardless of their efforts to do so. As Wallace states in his text: “Power/Powerlessness: …When a mother needlessly disciplines her child, she maybe reacting to the fact that her spouse and others are controlling her. By disciplining the child, she can exert power over another person” (Wallace, 2005:20).
Erickson’s second developmental stage, “Autonomy vs. Shame, and Doubt” he discusses the idea of holding back vs. releasing and the cause and effect in such actions. Erickson also expresses that there is no inherent cultural significance to this action, only the importance which a specific culture places on the actions (Funder and Ozer, 2004). Should a child witness violence within the home, a child has a choice, either to internalize it as “normal” behavior or to “express” it by telling others. The parents’ attitudes dictate what this child does within the behavior pattern. If a child internalizes violence as “normal” behavior then as an adult, one might anticipate violent behavior. Researcher Ney has found in various studies that there is a correlation between how children are treated and how they, as adults, treat their children, especially in mothers (Ney, 1992).

Erickson’s third developmental stage is that of initiative vs. guilt and something Erickson calls “…mutual regulation’. Where the child, now so ready to over-manipulate himself (herself), can gradually develop a sense of paternal responsibility, where he (she) can gain some insight into the institutions, functions, and roles which will permit his (her) responsible participation, he (she) will find pleasurable accomplishment in wielding tools and weapons, in manipulating meaningful toys—and caring for younger children” (Funder and Ozer, 2004: 266). In simpler terms, the child learns to distinguish between striking out on his or her own or going too far, and causing guilt to result from this action.
The fourth developmental stage is “Industry vs. Inferiority” which Erickson compares to a child realizing his or her skills yet comparing them to another and finding they are lacking. According to Erickson, the child can either be prepared or not prepared for this stage by their parents and their schooling. If a parent prepares a child adequately for this stage, the feelings of inferiority will be lessened, because the child will have been shown “meaningful roles within society” from the parents. (Funder and Ozer, 2004: 266).

The fifth developmental stage is “Identity vs. Role-Diffusion”. In this stage the child’s or adolescent’s focus becomes more external. It’s about “appearances” and relationships that are cultivated both within and outside the home. Discussions regarding individuality and independence become paramount. Ultimately, it is expected that the individual becomes more concerned with their standing in society as a whole (Funder and Ozer, 2004).

The sixth stage is “Intimacy vs. Isolation”. Does the now adult choose to have a life partner or live alone? Is the person able to deal with the relationship requirements necessary to establish intimacy or is this person better served by living alone (Funder and Ozer, 2004)? In the case where Muslims are told that marriage is half their religion, the expectation is that they will have a relationship with someone. However, depending on their past experiences, Erickson would probably question if Muslims are emotionally prepared for intimacy.

The seventh stage of Erickson’s developmental tasks is “Generativity vs. Stagnation”. Generativity was a word of Erickson’s creation where his focus was
on the person’s choosing to become a parent, “establishing and guiding the next generation or whatever in a given kind of responsibility” (Funder and Ozer, 2004: 268). According to Erickson, either we choose to reproduce and thus “pass on” our experiences/knowledge or we chose to stagnate and ultimately die off without providing for the future. However, to reproduce can be described both in the literal “reproduce” with a progeny or reproduce by having a purpose and meaning in our lives.

The eighth and final stage for Erickson is “Integrity vs. Despair”. Accordingly, Erickson suggests that without properly going through all the prior stages of life, one cannot fully reap the rewards of a life fully lived. As a part of the final stage, one reviews their life, balancing integrity with despair. There is question presented to this individual: did they fulfill their life’s potential (Funder and Ozer, 2004)?

Given that domestic violence can be considered cyclical in many regards, the ability to fully mature through all of Erickson’s stages of development could potentially be impacted. A parent cannot prepare their children for the future when they themselves are attempting to only take care of the immediate here and now of any given situation. However, if domestic violence support personnel can provide survivors of domestic violence with the opportunity to advance through these stages of Erickson’s development, then maybe changing the patterns of abuse will follow.
Islam’s philosophy is compatible to Erickson’s Psychosocial Development Theory when one looks at the Prophet’s Sunnah. He consistently preached that “paradise was at the feet of your mother” (Ali-Karamali, 2008; Nomani, 2005). If paradise is truly at the feet of your mother, then witnessing your mother being abused would cause you to remain within the earlier stages of Erickson’s Psychosocial Development theory. By providing a home which is true to Islam’s teaching of “Peace” and mercy, it enables a child to complete Erickson’s stages in an easier manner. Islam teaches that the community is important, but ultimately, each individual is responsible for the choices, decisions and life that they have lived (Ali-Karamali, 2008; Armstrong, 2000; Mernissi, 1987; Nomani, 2005; Wadud, 1999). This remains true to Erickson’s Psychosocial Development Theory as well, that the individual is ultimately responsible for the progression of their development.
IV. LITERATURE REVIEW—CURRENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN WITH DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

As a problem, domestic violence does not have a prescriptive type of solution. Solutions can be and are found within a variety of means. One example is to identify successful culturally sensitive programs and examine their solutions to address domestic violence. Extrapolating these successes to other areas of the country would be the second step. This section of the paper reviews three “Muslim” specific organizations, one local domestic violence program in Madison, Wisconsin and one organization which focuses on state-wide programs and initiatives within Wisconsin.

A. Al-Shifa Clinic and Center, Dallas, Texas

The Al-Shifa Clinic in Dallas, Texas was originally created in 1995. Its goal was to serve everyone within the Dallas/Fort Worth area as the number of Muslim residents in the area increased due in part to a rising refugee community (Ahmed, 2008). Clinic staff developed Al-Shifa independent from any specific mosque or Islamic Center, thus preventing the politics of that institution from influencing and impacting the work that they could do. It is because Al-Shifa serves anyone within the community, Muslim and non-Muslim, they are able to seek funding from numerous sorts of resources including grants from the Susan G. Komen Foundation to the United States Department of Justice to the Foundation for Community Empowerment of Dallas (Ahmed, 2008).
Al-Shifa is both a health clinic as well as a center which provides social service assistance as needed. The health clinic opened in October 1998 and deals primarily with “diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, minor infection and other general medical problems” (Ahmed, 2008: 27). The patients receive free medication and consultation with doctors who have donated their services. The clinic also recently opened a service for women and children once a month. The clinic also provides health information to area clinics, hospitals and hospices on how to address the “religious and cultural sensitivities of Muslim patients” (Ahmed, 2008: 27).

The family services section of Al-Shifa works on a variety of issues. One area is pre-marriage and post-marriage counseling, handling various family issues which arise along with divorce, assistance and counseling if the situation arises. Counselors attempt to work with the parents of children to help resolve major issues before those family disruptions negatively impact the relationship between the parents and children. Clinic staff will also arrange Islamic arbitration to work through the many issues that arise in the end of a relationship (Ahmed, 2008).

In cases where there are significant family problems, Al-Shifa are contacted to assist with finding foster families to deal with children who are abused in order to keep children with “Muslim” families (Ahmed, 2008). This is done so that the child who is removed will still have the familiarity of their religion within their lives. Al-Shifa has also created a program which addresses “Domestic Violence: An Islamic Perspective” where counselors work with
survivors of domestic violence and provide clients with counseling, assessment and assistance to local shelters (Ahmed, 2008).

Al-Shifa believes that women must be empowered “to confront and overcome the cycle of domestic violence and exploitation” and, as such, works to actively promote its “Roshni” service, whose goal is to create “healthy and harmonious family relationships” (Ahmed, 2008: 27; MCC-Muslim Community Center for Human Services). By actively going into the community, creating awareness and programs addressing this issue and providing culturally-sensitive counseling assistance, Al-Shifa has been able to address domestic violence in the Dallas/Fort Worth area (Ahmed, 2008; MCC-Muslim Community Center for Human Services). Because Al-Shifa is not affiliated with one mosque or Islamic Center, their assistance is not hindered by politics which can occur within a religious community. “Women are encouraged to share their problems and seek help and organize small women-only sessions at different locations” which address the problem in a more “Islamic-friendly” manner (Ahmed, 2008:27).

B. Hamdard Center, Woodale, IL

The Hamdard Center is located in the greater Chicago area. The Center focuses its services with the South Asian and Middle Eastern communities. While the Hamdard Center has many similarities to the Al-Shifa Clinic and Center in Dallas, it does not provide the health services that Al-Shifa does. Hamdard Center focuses on mental health issues, behavioral issues, family crisis issues and aims to be a one-stop point of reference for those in the community who need
their services (Hamdard Center, 2001). Hamdard Center does assist women, children and elderly people who are being abused by providing a shelter, a 24-hour crisis line, multilingual assistance, and striving to meet other needs as they arise.

The Hamdard Center is based on the Duluth Domestic Violence Intervention Project Model and was the first of its kind in this country to focus on Middle Eastern, South Asian and Bosnian refugees (Hamdard Center, 2001). The Duluth Model believes the following in terms of addressing and treating domestic violence: “Interventions must account for the economic, cultural, and personal histories of the individuals who become abuse cases in the system. Both victims and offenders are members of the community; while they must each act to change the conditions of their lives, the community must treat both with respect and dignity recognizing the social causes of their personal circumstances.” (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, 2008). In order to achieve these and other goals, the Duluth Model looks at four interconnected objectives in having various agencies work together.

The Duluth Model found that the various agencies working with people suffering because of domestic violence needed to have a complete restructuring of their services to better serve those seeking assistance. This included understanding what the different agencies and departments did in situations involving domestic violence; information sharing between the different agencies and departments, having accountability between departments; and having a set
view of policies and procedures for directing those seeking assistance (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, 2008). The next step focused on safety. Is the survivor safe in their environment or in the environment which the service is providing? The third step examined ways to work with the various groups and agencies involved in the process, understanding that sending someone to “Agency X” would, in fact, provide them with the services they were seeking. The final step addressed accountability. This was for the abusers as well as the agencies and service providers who work with survivors of domestic violence. Abusers must be held accountable for the abuse they perpetrated and provider’s service must continue to be able to successfully serve those in their community who need their assistance (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, 2008).

By using these directives, the Hamdard Center, has been able to construct a system that provides services and assistance to individuals throughout the Chicago area. Hamdard Center is also able to work with the various agencies that address issues of domestic life, including counselors, the Department of Children and Family Services, the court system, and the community at large. Hamdard works in providing community outreach and training and will go into the religious communities, as well, to provide assistance and help to survivors of domestic violence (Hamdard Center, 2001).

C. Apna Ghar, Chicago, IL

Apna Ghar was created by a small group of South-Asian women who saw a need within their own community to address issues related to domestic violence
and wanted to do something to fix it. As a result, Apna Ghar has served over
5,400 domestic violence clients since its creation in 1989 (Apna Ghar, nd). Apna
Ghar—literally, “Our Home” provides a 24-hour crisis-line, assistance in a
language that the caller can understand—Hindi or Urdu are two examples, a
shelter and housing assistance, employment training and assistance to survivors of
domestic violence (Apna Ghar, nd). Apna Ghar has also begun a resale store that
provides women and children both cultural and Western clothing options. Staff
members are also creating a training program entitled SEW (Sewing Empowers
Women) for women who, prior to coming for services have very little
professional experience (Apna Ghar, nd).

Apna Ghar was the first shelter of its kind in the Mid-West when it was
created. It also provides counseling, legal advocacy and housing assistance for
survivors once participants are able to leave the shelter (Apna Ghar, nd). Apna
Ghar will allow for supervised visitation schedules and assist families who need
help in obtaining this service, which allows both parents to maintain contact with
the children, but also allows for a safe transition between the parents, who may
not be able to come into contact with each other (Apna Ghar, nd).

Apna Ghar also provides community outreach programs including
working with community leaders to address issues of poverty, racism, cultural
isolation, and domestic violence. Apna Ghar believes that the best ways to
change a situation are to work within the community to bring about change one
person at a time. Staff members are active in working within the community to
address issues of domestic violence as well as helping survivors learn to feel empowered by learning skills of self-care and self-reliance, participate in educational or employment opportunities as well as understanding that domestic violence is a situation that can be changed.

**D. DAIS-Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, Madison, WI**

DAIS or the Domestic Abuse Intervention Services in Madison, Wisconsin provides many of the same programs which Al-Shifa, Hamdard Center, and Apna Ghar provide, however because Dane County, which DAIS primarily serves—is predominantly Caucasian (81%) its focus is therefore based on this community (Gleason, 2006).

DAIS provides a 24 hour-crisis line, many support groups, and advocacy assistance in finding and obtaining the correct social services as the situation warrants it. DAIS also provides an “emergency safe house” which allows survivors of domestic violence shelter, food and clothing for 30 days while they attempt to address their situation (DAIS, 2008). DAIS has trained staff that help survivors receive medical, legal and social service support. DAIS will also work with survivors to help with employment or job training programs which enable survivors to continue being successful once they are able to leave the emergency shelter. One additional service that is different from the other programs mentioned is assistance in finding shelter for the family animal/pet. While most shelters are unable to provide care for the family pet, this assistance can make the transition for the children, who already have to experience the loss of their home.
and familiar surroundings, a bit easier. It also removes the “fear” of what happens to the pet, because the family is aware of where it is (DAIS, 2008).

**E. Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Madison, WI**

As a statewide organization, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence aims to provide programs and outreach to the many communities which reside within its borders. The Coalition does well in addressing the issue of domestic violence and attempting to serve the varying populations including the Hmong, African-American and Hispanic-American communities. However, in terms of “newer” communities, there is still a need for resources, information and assistance to be provided.

As a resource, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence does attempt to direct persons seeking assistance to the appropriate places within their county. If you live in a more populated county, such as Dane (seat of the state government) or Milwaukee (county with the largest population) a significant number of resources are available. However, if you live in one of the more sparsely populated counties in the western or northern part of the state, the ability to find geographically convenient resources becomes more difficult.

Ultimately, this becomes an issue within the society at large. When one looks to countries which have a history of immigrant populations, one finds that the number of resources offered in a variety of languages are an example of expansion into different communities. Domestic violence is a problem that does
not recognize boarders, cultures or continents. In countries as vast as Australia or as small as Denmark there are brochures published in multiple languages to meet the needs of the countries’ multicultural population (NSW Department of Community Affairs; Minister for Social Affairs and Gender Equality). One wonders why the United States cannot be a leader in this area as well.

Each of these service providers has something unique to provide to the society at large. Understanding and creating a program which use these ideas or philosophies of the various facilities will make assistance for domestic violence survivors more compatible within the communities it needs to serve.
V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A CULTURALLY SENSITIVE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM FOR MUSLIM WOMEN LIVING IN AMERICA

In February 2009, a news story was published that unfortunately showed the need for the Muslim community to come to terms with the issue of domestic violence. In Buffalo, New York a prominent businessman was arrested for the murder of his wife, after she had filed for divorce and for a protective restraining order (P.R.O.). Included in her request for this P.R.O. was information about a marriage that for years was marked by controlling and violent behavior (Tan, Warner and Williams, 2009). While her murder was particularly gruesome, one of the reasons this story made the national news was because this couple had created a television station that was aimed at addressing the issue of the Muslim Community within America in this post 9/11 world in a positive light. On the outside, this was an ideal “Muslim” marriage. In private, based on news accounts since this murder, it was a nightmare for Aasiya Hassan (Tan, Warner and Williams, 2009).

While this singular incident reinforces the needs of all survivors of domestic violence, it also awakened the Muslim community in a shocking and horrific way, thus creating or forcing a learning opportunity from this incident. Suddenly people were organizing groups on the internet to both honor Aasiya Hassan as well as to motivate the Muslim community to address this issue in their Friday Khutbas. As was frequently reported after her death, Aasiya Hassan’s life was about acting as a “bridge” between the Muslim community and the non-Muslim community to promote understanding between one another. The irony in
her atrocious death is that she has become the inadvertent heroine against
domestic violence in the Muslim community. Muslim communities are now
actively attempting to prevent a reoccurrence of this incident. Communities are
asking that Imams address the concerns of the women who come to them and seek
help. Communities are advertising resources that, prior to this incident, were
difficult to find. Ultimately, Muslim communities are admitting privately that
domestic violence is an issue within their community just as it is in every other
community in the world.

Muslims living within the United States face the same issues that all
Americans face. When addressing the issue of domestic violence and its
survivors, there are no simple solutions to this complex issue. A few simple words
will not resolve the problem nor will it disappear if communities believe this
problem no longer exists. In the case of Muslim women who are dealing with the
issue themselves, prior to this very public murder, finding the resources that fit
their needs and their understandings were extremely limited. Unless one lives in a
largely populated area, the services available are difficult to access and are
directed at serving a cross-section of the community. Considering that Muslims
reside geographically everywhere in this country, there is a very strong possibility
that most shelters will come in contact with a Muslim survivor of domestic abuse
at some time during their operations.

Therefore, the important needs of the community include the
understanding of the issue from the perspective of the Muslim survivor. The
Muslim survivor must be able to understand that their religion does not condone
violence in the most intimate and important relationship which exists. The Muslim community must be willing to come to terms with the issue of domestic violence within their community, address the issue and resolve to eliminate domestic violence from within.

A. Empowerment Programs to Work with Survivors of Domestic Violence

The Al-Shifa Clinic and Hamdard Center demonstrate that programs directed specifically at working with Muslim women that offer survivors of domestic violence an understanding on how gaining empowerment will work towards preventing these survivors from reentering these situations. Empowerment programs have been shown to work across communities and cultures because, while the programs entitle the survivor to know their rights, these programs also preserve the understanding within the culture and/or the community from which the survivor is coming (Hampton, LaTaillade, Dacey, Marghi, 2008; Grossman and Lundy, 2007; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005).

In the case of Muslim survivors of domestic violence, once women can be shown that their faith does not condone violence within the intimate relationship of marriage survivors can realize that staying in a violent situation is not the religious requirement. While the importance and strength of the community come from the establishment of marital relationships, Islam does not force married partners to stay in abusive situations for religious reasons.

There is an abundance of literature that supports a woman’s right to self-protection within Islam. Infanticide was outlawed in Islam. Women are allowed
to participate in the decision making process involving who they marry. Both parties have the right to determine what they want in their marriage contract. Each spouse can have the divorce right if it is reflected in their contract. It becomes the responsibility of each and every Muslim to understand their religion, and to determine what is “religious” and what is “cultural”.

The message offered in empowerment programs can be as simple as individuals understanding that each partner has rights within a relationship. Empowerment programs can be designed for survivors of domestic violence as a means of gaining confidence within themselves. Programs can simply present an English class for non-native English speakers or be trying to help the survivor find outside employment and income to avoid dependence on their abusive spouse for monetary support.

With empowerment comes strength, and with that strength comes the ability to break the continuing cycle of violence within an abusive home. Research demonstrates that those who witness abuse in their homes as children are far more susceptible to become abusers themselves or to be abused in the future (Postmus and Severson 2005). If an incident happens once and the survivor of domestic abuse is able to prevent its reoccurrence, based on their ability to reach out for help and obtain services which fit their needs, the repetitiveness of the domestic abuse cycle is discontinued in that home. It is an unfortunate process which makes these steps to eradicating domestic violence from our communities seemingly so slow and individualized. However, it is also absolutely necessary to continue to make these individual steps.
B. Educational Programs for Muslim women that addresses the differences between patriarchal family structures—cultural norms—and outright illegal behavior—domestic abuse

Religious institutions are thought to be responsible for religious education. However, individuals learn about other religions through friends, family, co-workers and acquaintances whose faith is different than their own. Many religious organizations also fund religious education throughout the world, examples include churches who send missionaries abroad to bring medical attention, education and the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people (Armstrong, 1993).

Islam is no different. The Saudi Arabian government is the “protector” of the two holiest sites in Islam, Mecca and Medina. As such the Saudi government has used great wealth from the exportation of petroleum to share their view of Islam, called Wahhabism (Armstrong, 2000). Examples of this include their willingness to fund and build many of the mosques around the world. Karen Armstrong in her book Islam describes the views of Wahhabism, which was founded by Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab: “…a fundamentalist return to the Qur’an and sunnah and by a militant rejection of all later accretions…which most Muslims now regarded as normative…to create an enclave of pure faith, based on his view of the first Ummah of the seventh century” (Armstrong, 2000:135).

A concern arises when one looks at the scope of Islam, just in terms of its global growth. Since the 7th Century, Islam has expanded from the Atlantic coast of Africa to Indonesia. It is a religion which is growing even within the Untied States of America, according to the recent American Religious Identification
Survey (Grossman, 2009). Therefore, Islam is going to encompass many different cultures and their corresponding traditions. According to some religious scholars, of different cultures are permitted if they do not contradict the Qur’an (Cornell, 1999). A difficulty arises, however when ones religion and culture are so interwoven, that to determine if the tradition is religious or cultural or both can require a believer to review their fundamental understandings of themselves. This is not an easy or simple process. Finally, in addition to the religious versus cultural conflicts, issues of domestic violence complicate the lives of Muslim survivors.

It is not the intent of this paper to suggest that all advocates working with a Muslim survivor of domestic violence posses a religious scholars understanding of the issues that challenge a Muslim survivor. However, any advocates must be aware of Muslim cultures and beliefs to best serve the Muslim survivor. In cases such as Hamdard Center and Al-Shifa Clinic advocates already have a basic understanding of the religion because the centers were organized by Muslims. In remote areas, such as Southwestern Wisconsin, the Muslim population is not as great, an advocate may not be aware of Muslim beliefs or the survivor’s religious foundations. Therefore, it is imperative to share the knowledge of the existence of organizations, such as Hamdard Center or Al-Shafia, within the Muslim Ummah, and to provide the knowledge of available resources to all domestic violence shelters throughout the United States.

One of the most important things that came from the recent death of Aasiya Hassan was the very public and strong reaction to her death. This came
not only from ordinary Muslims who joined memorial pages created for her on the internet, but from within the national organizations that address Muslim issues within the United States i.e. American Society for Muslim Advancement, Muslims for Progressive Values, The Faith Trust Institute and The Islamic Society of North America. Imams (religious leaders) were being asked, by local communities and these national organizations, to have a public and open discussion on the issue of domestic violence from within the Muslim community. Imams were given guidance from organizations established to deal with domestic violence issues, from other imams within the communities and from social agencies. Prior to Hassans’ death, social service agencies wanted to reach into the community to offer assistance but never had a way to contact. While it is unfortunate that it took Aasiya Hassan’s death to create this dialogue, if Muslim survivors of domestic violence benefit then Aasiya Hassan did not die in vain.

C. Shelters which provide cultural and religious understanding in working with the Muslim population

In many places throughout the country there are shelters designed for various sociological and culturally identified groups. What usually prompts this occurrence is an acknowledged need for the community to have some type of religious representation within the shelter system. This can be as basic as advocates who “look” the same as the victims, speak their language or understand their cultural values (Richardson, 2006; Dasgupta, 2000; Hernandez, Almeida and Dolan-Del Vecchio, 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). Not every shelter within the United States provides a Spanish speaker or has an African-American working
within it, because that is not always possible. However, when seeking to hire advocates, certain characteristics are sought. Are these positions always filled with appropriate individuals, no; but these characteristics provide a description of what is an “ideal” candidate is to fill a position.

In terms of having the Muslim community represented within the shelter system of the United States, one can look towards a basic understanding of what the religion requires. One example of this would be in terms of dietary needs. By religious law, Muslims are not allowed to have contact with any pork or pork by-product. This would include not only food, but cooking utensils, pots and pans, plates and silverware. In a shelter system that has a limited budget, finding the resources to keep two sets of utensils in the facility is impractical and, in some cases, impossible. By acknowledging this basic need, many shelters might be able to establish a relationship with Muslim survivors. Being understanding and sympathetic towards the survivors dietary needs the advocate is knowledgeable and acting in a non-judgmental manner. In locations where there are larger Muslim populations, it maybe possible to create a shelter that would provide Muslim—focused assistance. In smaller communities, such as rural Southwestern Wisconsin, an advocate can contact another program that has successfully dealt with dietary issues to learn how it was resolved. This may be all that is needed for the survivor. Having suggestions for where this person can seek more religious sheltering also shows that there is an understanding of the survivors’ basic needs to heal physically, emotionally and spiritually.
A second area advocates could enhance is understanding religious customs related to prayer. Muslims are required to pray towards Mecca five times a day. Most Muslims have the resources to understand which direction Mecca is as well as the times at which they need to pray. In cases where they don’t know, use of the internet is an excellent resource. Access to prayer rugs, however, creates a challenge.

Prayer rugs are placed between the Muslim and the floor, which may be dirty. In many cases, the act of leaving ones home is not only a stressful situation but one which occurs quickly. Remembering that one should take a prayer rug is not always the most important concern. However, any rug, without any human or animal design, can work as a prayer rug if need be. A simple solution for shelters may be to have extra “throw” rugs available. Another solution may be involving advocates working with the local Muslim community, requesting that prayer rugs be donated. Obtaining prayer rugs, as well as acknowledging a Muslims diet, can demonstrate caring and a non-judgmental attitude towards survivors, and the fact they are seeking help. Simple acts create comfort by reaching out in this most uncomfortable situation.

It may not be possible for all Muslims to have access to “Muslim” domestic violence shelters. Shelters, can strive to provide advocates who have even a minimum amount of knowledge regarding the Muslim religion and demonstrate acceptance of the customs to provide the needed services towards the Muslim community. Advocates have been trained to help. These are survivors who need assistance but have a fear of reaching out because of the potential for
encountering judgmental advocates. These simple acts that demonstrate a basic understanding of Islam are profound and reveal sensitivity to the survivors needs.

D. Providing educational programs which work with the Muslim Ummah in identifying domestic violence as “an issue” within the community.

The death of Aasiya Hassan created a teachable moment within both the Muslim Ummah as well as the domestic violence community at large to work collaboratively in addressing this issue. No longer is denial an acceptable method of addressing domestic violence within the Muslim community. While there have been attempts at addressing issues of domestic violence, discussions have been limited in nature or focused only on one or two communities at a time (Anjum and Anjum, 2008; Khan, 2006).

There is only one recognized national organization which addresses the issue of domestic violence within Muslim homes; the Peaceful Family Project (www.peacefulfamilies.org). Their focus is to work with the Muslim Ummah as well as advocates, counselors and researchers. Peaceful Family Project also provides a “cultural-sensitivity” program to advocates who serve Muslim populations because programs such as this are extremely limited, a serious deficit exists within the advocate community as well as within the Muslim community. As was seen with Ms. Hassans’ death, this deficit can be costly.

Having advocates who come from within a community has been an effective means of addressing the lack of Muslim specific domestic violence programs. When someone seeking shelter encounters a culturally compatible advocate the nature of the survivor—advocate relationship becomes more positive
and equitable. While there are Muslims who have advocated for an end of violence within the home, the number tends to be limited within the community. However, the number of Muslim families willing to address the issues of domestic violence needs to increase and addressed within the community. With the isolation the Muslim community feels members of this community are never going to fully trust that by going outside of their community, they will receive the services they need without reinforcing current stereotypes (Constable, 2007; MacFarquhar, 2008; Childress, 2003).

Having advocates who can work with local imams can also be of assistance and is one way to bridge the cultural gap until more “native” advocates are willing to present themselves. This requires openness between the advocates and the Muslim community. Advocates must be able to suspend their own possible prejudices about Islam to demonstrate their ability to work with the community. Advocates must be willing to learn about the cultural and religious aspects of Islam and Muslims. Imams must be willing to be open to non-Muslims providing assistance but who pass no judgments on the imam’s religion or beliefs. This means that the imams must be willing to do the same towards the advocates. Both sides must be willing to actively work with each other in presenting a united front against the scourge of domestic violence. Imams can be a resource when a Muslim survivor reaches out to the advocates, both in terms of finding shelter, and intervening in the best interests of the survivor, their family and the community at large.
When situations occur, such as the death of Ms. Hassan, the advocate and the imam can work together to present programs on why domestic violence is unacceptable in Islam and why survivors should seek shelter. In time, parties touched by domestic violence hope that situations similar to Ms. Hassan would be able to be eliminated before ending in death.

Acceptance of an issue does not create a blemish on the Muslim community. Denial, however, does. If even one survivor of domestic violence feels that they must choose between their religion and their lives, as one researcher found, then everyone is at fault within the community (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). This goes against the very nature of Islam which is supposed to bring peace in the lives of its followers. It also goes against the very example of the Prophet Mohammed, whom followers are supposed to emulate, which was to never hit a woman or a slave (Ali-Karamali, 2008; Nomani, 2005; Badawai, 1997).
IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Domestic violence is not an issue that will vanish without acknowledging that it exists within any community. While there maybe shame and discomfort in admission, it is necessary as domestic violence thrives in both denial and silence. Survivors of this crime need to be reminded that abuse is a crime and as such needs to be reported and within the criminal justice system. Domestic violence offenders need to be able to receive the assistance to prevent this from occurring in the future. Finally, Muslim communities need to affirm that domestic violence will no longer be tolerated within it. In addition, public discussion regarding domestic violence within the Muslim community must be encouraged.

Within the entire Muslim Ummah, there must be accountability as well. For too long, abusers have been protected the communities silence and the communities’ unwillingness to publically address the issue of domestic violence for fear of bringing about “shame” to the Ummah. It is more shameful to the Ummah of Islam to not acknowledge domestic violence while the community at large is fully aware, and still take no action to protect the survivors and their families, as is the example of Aasiya Hassan. The death of Aasiya Hassan is a teachable moment to everyone, but especially within the Muslim community. There is an obligation to implement changes that will save lives of survivors experiencing domestic violence.

Change is never easy nor is it ever simple. True change must come from within the communities that are impacted. Islam, by its very definition is
supposed to provide and bring peace to its followers. Domestic violence is just that, violence within the most intimate relationship any person may have. The result of this creates a spiritual dissonance and may cause a person to either lose their faith or lose their internal spirit at the minimum, and may lead to death. Domestic violence should be unacceptable to anyone and everyone in a community. Within the tradition of Islam, the Prophet Mohammed never hit a woman, and his life is the greatest example to Muslims.

Within the Muslim Ummah at large and the Muslim community within the United States, efforts must continue to eliminate the scourge of domestic violence from inside it. There must be a willingness to admit that domestic violence is a problem and a public denunciation of it. Domestic violence advocates must diligently work with the Muslim community leaders to address the issue, without judging the faith. Religious leaders and scholars need to question why in a faith which at its roots was so fundamentally “pro”-woman, has seen that attitude fall by the wayside. Is it because of a limited focus on women’s roles within the society, is it because over time, Islamic teaching has adapted in a way to allow only those who say what “culturally” is liked remains? Lastly, within the criminal justice community continued efforts are needed to identify successful programs as well as impediments to survivors within the Muslim community.
REFERENCES


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54


MCC-Muslim Community Center (Al-Shifa Clinic) http://www.mcc-hs.org/


