Intimate partner violence in Muslim communities in the United States

Author: Amilia James
Intimate Partner Violence in Muslim Communities in the United States

Amilia James

INTRODUCTION TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Definition: Intimate Partner Violence is a pattern of abusive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual attacks and economic coercion (Hassoun-Phillip, 2009).

Prevalence among Muslims: A recent study found 31% of American Muslims reported experiencing abuse within an IPV relationship. Other studies have found prevalence rates between 10% and 53%.

Consequences of IPV: low self-esteem, shame, helplessness, self-blame, difficulty trusting others, depression, anxiety, PTSD, injury, suicidal ideation, chronic pain, STIs.

Prevalence among Muslims: 35.6% of women in the U.S. reported experiencing abuse within an IPV relationship.

Does Islam Allow Intimate Partner Violence?

A CONTROVERSIAL VERSE

Men are in authority over women, because God has preferred some over others and because they spend their wealth. Righteous women are obedient and guard in their husbands' absence what God would have them guard. Concerning those women from whom you fear disobedience/rebellion, admonish them, and/or abandon them in bed, and/or hit them. If they obey you, do not seek a means against them. God is most High, Great (Q 4:34, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

“Sometime the challenge for Muslims is not to read Q 4:34 in a nonviolent way–this can be done easily- but rather to read it nonviolently in the face of an authoritative tradition that only read the verse as sanctioning violence against women.” - Chaudhry

Theological Perspective:

- What does Islam teach about marriage, the family, and intimate partner violence?
- Interpreting Q 4:34 - New interpretations (feminist perspectives)
- How are imams (mosque leaders) responding to domestic violence in their communities?
- Examining the difference between Islamic theory and practice

Psychological Perspective:

- Imams are the most frequent counselors of Muslims, but the majority do not have any formal counseling training.
- Clinicians are trained to help IPV victims, but are not trained on how to help Muslim clients
- Goals:
  - Educate non-Muslim clinicians to help them provide culturally and religiously sensitive therapy
  - Encourage a referral network between imams and clinicians. Imams can give clinicians credibility to members in the community, and clinicians can teach imams how to respond to instances of IPV.

Legal Perspective:

- Fear in the community that the judicial system is anti-Islam. If one community member tries to get legal help and is not successful, the whole community fears accessing services.
- Issues with “Expert Witnesses”
  - Requirement money, present a distorted view of Islam that helps the perpetrator
  - Judge’s own interpretation of Islamic teaching
- Immigration Issues
  - Perpetrator does not allow access to travel documents, passport, Victim dependent on spouse for visa


Interview with Salma Elkadi Abugideiri, LPC of the Peaceful Families Project in Washington, D.C.

Interview with Salma Elkadi Abugideiri, LPC of the Peaceful Families Project in Washington, D.C.

- The Peaceful Families Project (PFP) is an organization devoted to ending violence in Muslim families in the U.S. by facilitating awareness workshops for imams and communities, providing cultural sensitivity trainings and technical assistance for professionals, conducting research, and developing resources.
- The critical shift occurs when the imams understand the psychological damage of IPV, the safety implications, and how harmful it is for children, they are much more open to presenting divorce as an option. Imams are trying to keep families together because they think it is better for the children, but when they understand that is not the case, it changes their whole perspective.
- Clinicians need to let go of their stereotypes and be educated. Uneducated counselors can have an “obsession with the exotic,” focusing on things like a client’s hijab, instead of the fact that she is a victim of abuse. Stereotypes can also lead clinicians to believe that all Muslim women are abused because it is a part of their religion and/or culture, so there is nothing that can be done to solve the problem in therapy. They need to know that Muslims have a resource in their religion.

REFERENCES

Alwani & Abugideiri, U.S. Department of State,
Amilia James, A&S Class of 2016

http://www.posterpresentations.com