



WISE Muslim Women's Shura Council

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A VIOLATION OF ISLAM

2-Page Digest

The Shura Council is a global and inclusive council of Muslim women scholars, activists, and specialists. The Council endeavors to connect Islamic principles to society's most pressing issues and develop holistic strategies for creating positive social change.¹ In the following statement, **the Shura Council condemns domestic violence as an absolute violation of the teachings of Islam.**

Introduction

Domestic violence, also known as "intimate partner violence," is a form of violent or oppressive domination over a family member or partner. Domestic violence results from a diverse set of factors, and occurs in families and relationships around the world and across culture, religion, race, and geography. However, it is particularly important for Muslims to reclaim the discourses of non-violence and peace from within the Islamic traditions, as some Muslims try to excuse domestic violence on the basis of religion.

Domestic Violence Contradicts The Holy Qur'an

Some Muslims excuse domestic violence on the basis of Surah 4, verse 34 of the Qur'an. Likewise, some non-Muslims point to 4:34 to condemn Islam as sexist and violent towards women. Both of these groups assume that this verse specifically gives husbands the right to beat, or at least physically chastise, their wives. In most English translations, the second half of this verse is translated as follows: "*As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty [nushuz], first admonish them, then abandon their sleeping places, then beat them [lightly] [udribuhuna].*" However, linguistic analyses of the words "daraba" and "nushuz," a consideration of the general message of the Qur'an, the prophet's example, and the historical context of the revelation forecloses such an understanding.

Linguistic Analyses of the words *Daraba* and *Nushuz*

In classical Arabic, the word *daraba* has 25 different meanings. "Beat" or "chastise" are two of them, but another is "go away from." Therefore, the verse could be rendered: "*As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty, first admonish them, then abandon their sleeping places, then go away from them.*" In fact, in her *The Sublime Quran*, Laleh Bakhtiar translates 4:34 in a similar manner: "*But those whose resistance you fear, then admonish and abandon them in their sleeping place, then go away from them.*"

However *daraba* is defined, the Qur'an clearly makes its application conditional upon the fear of *nushuz*. *Nushuz* is often translated as "disobedience," "disharmony," or even "disloyalty"; however, linguistically, the word means "to stand up," as from a seated or sleeping position with the intent to leave that specific location. This is how it is consistently used in other parts of the Qur'an (e.g. 58:11 and 2:259). In the context of 4:34, therefore, *nushuz* must mean to get up and leave the marriage. Therefore, the understanding of *nushuz* as "disobedience" seems to reflect gender roles within the medieval mindset more than the actual semantic range of the word.

General Message of The Qur'an

The broader message of the Qur'an is the promotion of harmony and affection between husband and wife. Marriage is depicted as a sacred bond of love and mercy. Surah 30, verse 21 says: "*And among His Signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may live in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily there are Signs in that for those who reflect.*" Interpreting *daraba* in 4:34 to mean "to beat" would seem to contradict with this message of tranquility, love, and mercy in the home.

Significantly, while no other passages support the "beating" interpretation of 4:34, there are other passages that support the "distancing" or "going away from" meaning (e.g. 2:226-227). Translating *daraba* as "beat" also produces a contradiction between Qur'anic verses, if 4:34 is compared to those verses on divorce, which offer a picture of non-coercion in marriage,

¹ For more information about the Shura Council, please visit <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/about/shuracouncil/>.

even in ending it. For example, Surah 2, verse 231 says: “When you divorce wives and they are about to reach their term, then hold them back honourably or set them free honorably; but do not hold them back by injuring them so that you commit aggression.”

Domestic Violence Contradicts the Prophet’s Example

The Sunnah, which is taken as a reflection of how the Prophet understood the Qur’an, contradicts an interpretation of *daraba* as “beat.” We do not have a single report of the Prophet striking his wives. Instead, we read from Anas ibn Malik, a Companion of the Prophet: “I have never seen anyone more kind to one’s family than (the Prophet Muhammad)” (Sahih Muslim).

The Prophet ordered, “Never beat God’s handmaidens” (Sunan Abu Dawud), and he commended those who treated their wives with kindness: “The most perfect of the believers in faith are the best of them in moral excellence, and the best of you are the kindest to their wives” (Sunan Tirmidhi).

When the Prophet experienced conflict with his wives (especially during the strained period when they requested a higher living standard, which he could not afford), he simply left his marital home and stayed away from them. If he had understood 4:34 to demand physical discipline, he would have done so. Instead, based on his actions, the Prophet interpreted 4:34 to mean “go away from,” not “beat.”

Domestic Violence Contradicts Islamic Law

According to scholarly consensus, the six “principle objectives” of Islamic Law (*maqasid al-Shari’ah*) demand the protection and promotion of religion (*din*), life (*nafs*), mind (*‘aql*), family (*nasl*), dignity (*‘ird*), and wealth (*mal*) in society. Inflicting injury on one’s spouse is a violation of at least four of these fundamental principles:

The Protection of Life: Domestic violence endangers lives of countless women every day.

The Protection of Mind: Domestic violence harms the minds of all parties in the household, including the partner who is subjected to violence, the partner who commits the aggression, and the witnessing children.

The Protection of Dignity: All forms of domestic violence breach this important principle.

The Protection of Family: Domestic violence violates the objective of Family, which makes the family a safe refuge for all of its members. Domestic violence may lead to divorce.

Historical Context: The Qur’anic Approach of Gradual Elimination

In the 7th century, men did not need permission to abuse their wives. Therefore, the Qur’an was not giving permission for abuse in verse 4:34; rather, it was restricting it. Even the early jurists, who generally understood *daraba* to mean beat, restricted the application of the verse. Ibn Rushd, for example, insisted that even a man who caught his wife in bed with another man could either forgive or divorce her, but nothing beyond that.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Holy Qur’an clearly advocates against domestic violence, promoting harmony and affection between husband and wife. Similarly, the Prophet’s life, a model of excellence, dignity, and justice, never included violent behavior towards members of his household. Domestic violence is also inexcusable when one considers the objectives and principles of Islamic Jurisprudence and the historical contexts in which specific verses were revealed.

Campaigns and Activism

As a part of its ongoing *Jihad Against Violence* campaign, Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) is collaborating with Bedari, a Pakistani NGO, on an Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence in District Jhelum. WISE and Bedari are working to eradicate domestic violence in the district by providing religious and legal education against the practice, alongside community-based activities.

For more information about current campaigns, to connect with organizations and activists working to eradicate domestic violence, and to find tools for activism, please visit <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/currentissues/domesticviolence/>.