

Therapy with Victims of Domestic Violence in Saudi Arabia

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Women & Violence Worldwide

- Violence against women surpasses class, cultural, geographic, ethnic, national and religious divisions.
- A UN report released in 2006 following a study conducted in at least 71 countries concluded that violence against women is “severe and pervasive” worldwide with one in three women subjected to intimate partner abuse during her lifetime.

Saudi women as Disadvantaged Group

- Certain groups of women are more vulnerable to violence due to their disadvantaged conditions in society (refugees, minorities, women in detention, women in conditions of conflict, women with disabilities, elderly women, illiterate women, etc.)
- Saudi women may be looked at a particularly disadvantaged group given its secondary status in society

Domestic Violence: A Public Issue

- Issue of violence against women has entered public discourse given the work of some activists and the media.
- Saudi women are reporting violence in spite of their sense of stigma and shame, their fear of self disclosure, betrayal of family, declaration of weakness of faith, feelings of guilt and the belief that they may deserve it.

Women Status in Saudi society

- Saudi society has a mixed set of beliefs that combines traditional laws and Islamic laws.
- Saudi women are at a disadvantage in practically every institution in society (civil and criminal justice system, the economy, education, healthcare, and the media).
- This can be both a cause and a consequence of violence against them.
- Expressions, values and rules are invoked to justify violence against women as a normal feature of life.

Slow Progress in Women's Rights

- Gender discrimination is built into Saudi Arabia's governmental and social structures and is integral in religious practices.
- According to Human Rights Watch (2008) Saudi women's access to employment opportunities is limited and they do not enjoy the full benefits of legal adulthood (Perpetual Minors)

Male Guardianship

- Male guardianship over adult women contributes to risk for family violence.
- It also makes it difficult for them to seek protection from violence or redress mechanisms.
- Dismantling the system of legal guardianship is critical to give women access to needed services.

The Face of Domestic Violence

- In 2004, the issue of domestic violence was made international and brought into public consciousness by Rania Al Baz, a famous Saudi TV anchor.
- Horrific images of injuries sustained from beating by her husband shocked the global community and ignited debate in Saudi Arabia.
- The first research study on domestic violence in Saudi Arabia was completed the same year uncovering a culture of abused women, 90% of whom had their own mothers similarly abused.

Domestic Violence UnIslamic

- There are still some Islamic scholars who sanction occasions where women beating is appropriate (Qur'an An-Nisa 34).
- However, Verse 34 of An-Nisa is one of the most important verses that regulates husband and wife relationship in Islam, but the phrasing in Arabic is open to several interpretations.
- Islamic law is often manipulated by batterers who use its perceived authority to control women in their lives.

Clinical Work with Victims of Domestic Violence

- Women's low social and economic status can be both a cause and a consequence of violence against them.
- Saudi women often concede public rights and space in return for private security and dignity over the life span.
- Two women will be presented to portray the unique challenges they face and consequent decisions they made in their personal lives.

Conclusion

- Educating women about the concept of free will, although highly valued in Islam, does not translate necessarily into exercising options available to them.
- Taboos held by society at large regarding disobedience of their male guardians and misinterpretation of Qur'an verses present serious obstacles to effective clinical intervention.

Religion as an Antidote to Violence

- Invoking Qur'an verses in support of women's right to dignity and happiness such as “Believers, men and women, are protecting friends, one of another, they enjoin good and forbid evil. Pray, pay Zakat, and obey Allah” (9:71)
- and the Prophets Hadith “Treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partner and committed helpers” serves as an effective antidote to cultural and traditional practices that condone violence.