The Role of Muslim American Nonprofits in Combating Domestic Violence in the Community: An Exploratory Overview

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Abstract

Domestic violence, misogyny, and patriarchy have long been a challenge for society. In fact, one of the first realities confronting Prophet Muhammad was the inequity and inequality of women, orphans, and the vulnerable. This resulted in the forbidding of killing female babies and giving women the rights to decide who to marry, request a divorce, and own property – instead of being property – and much more. Many of the Prophet's words and actions (the Hadith and Sunnah) are known to us today because of the memories shared by his wife Aisha. The fact that she became such an important keeper of this tradition and that her memories required no corroborating witness suggest the important role she played in early Islamic society. The Prophet's first supporter and convert was his first wife Khadijah. One of the wealthiest entrepreneurs of her time, she provided the financial independence for the development of the Islamic faith. Both of them play critical roles in Islam's establishment and eventual dissemination. They are beloved by Muslims, but the fact that they are women *and* leaders has not been institutionalized.

Despite these revolutionary reforms, humanity's failure to continue them has led societies, families, and social structures to find ways to control women and further strengthen existing patriarchal societies. One component of this social control is domestic and sexual violence within existing familial structures.

This article seeks to place the efforts of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) to fight domestic violence in the Muslim American community from 1997 through 2005. In addition to examining the society's annual reports

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and *Islamic Horizons* magazine, it draws on the coauthors'[3] embedded experience. It first examines the literature associated with religiosity, Islamic perspectives on domestic violence, Muslim Americans, and Muslim Americans and domestic violence. The article then undertakes a case study of ISNA from 1997 to 2004 and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Muslim American nonprofits, combating domestic violence, DV efforts, ISNA

Literature Review

Religiosity in the United States
Despite declining participation and affiliation driven by modernity, religion has remained an important factor in the United States. Successive studies and contemporary findings suggest a phenomenal degenerative trend in religious affiliations, as well as a growing tendency to identify as "atheist," "agnostic," or "unaffiliated" (Twenge et al., 2016; Thomas, 2019). Instead of self-identifying as belonging to a certain religion, a vast majority of people prefer to establish their identity as being "spiritual" (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2018), a trend more in vogue among millennials and middle-aged cohorts (Percy, 2019). Having said this, religion nevertheless remains an important factor, for the GivingUSA report (2020) indicates that around one-third of all charitable giving goes to religion-related causes. Additionally, these contributions have been growing since 2015 (Giving USA, 2020).

Religiosity's role in the US came to the fore in the mid-1990s as the Clinton administration attempted to restructure the social welfare system. The consequent Welfare Reforms Bill of 1996 provisioned for a Charitable Choice, which made it easier for churches and other religiously oriented service organizations to receive government funds. In a similar pattern, on January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush signed an executive order creating the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to fulfill one of his campaign promises. This was a milestone achievement toward systematizing the above-mentioned notion incubated during the Clinton administration, namely, to shift some social programs from government control to religious organizations (Wuthnow, 2009).

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An Islamic Perspective on Domestic Violence

For Muslims, Islam is God's final message to humanity. It was revealed during the despotic and oppressive social and political reality of seventh-century Arabia, when cruelty, offense, and warmongering were the order of the day. The region's imperial rivalries created instability that, in turn, shaped Arabia's social and political life. As inequality and injustice were everywhere, there was no concept of rights for the weak and downtrodden, orphans and widows, and slaves and servants. Islam brought salvation for these impoverished individuals, established a system of justice and amnesty in that age of darkness, and denounced all oppressive conduct. There is a robust scholarly debate over whether the equality of all human beings, irrespective of race, class, gender, wealth, or worth, is one of the Quran's basic injunctions. Wadud (2016) and Barlas (2016) agree with this statement, whereas Ayesha Hidayatullah (2016) and Kecia Ali (2016) have some doubts about these claims. Hidayatullah and Ali also have some doubts about the ability of scholars to interpret away some key verses and differences in the notion of Quranic equality and modern-day notions. However, these scholars agree that Islam improved the status of women in society, which was a true revolution amid that era's prevailing cultural norms. In the pre-Islamic Arab world women were not treated as human beings, and men who felt disgraced by the birth of a daughter would bury her alive. Within this environment, Islam made society recognize women as human beings and gave them a comprehensive set of rights (Alwani, 2017).

The Quran forbade the terrible tradition of female infanticide, abolished the custom of considering women the property of men, and refuted the practice that let a deceased man's brother or adult son inherit his wife and take her for himself without her consent (Ali, 2000). The Quran declared that men and women are equal before God, thereby denouncing these established norms and customs. Islam proclaimed that the standard for attaining recognition and distinction in God's eyes is *taqwa* (piety), as opposed to gender, ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic class:

> O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise [each other]). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (49:13)

Additionally, the Quran views men and women as partners of each other. According to 9:71, both sexes are responsible for enjoining what is right and preventing what is sinful. Men have no superior moral authority over women in any manner. In fact, both sexes are equally obliged to maintain each other on the righteous path and deter each other from aberration (Wadud, 1999; Alwani, 2013).

Amid the prevalent culture of bullying women in an unbridled manner, the Quran discouraged the blatant practice of domestic violence through structured edicts designed to resolve marital disputes resulting from a husband's apprehensions about his wife's lustful conduct. Such verses should be applied with a careful interpretation and proper understanding of Islamic jurisprudence. For example, applying 4:34 is strictly confined to a situation in which the wife is assumed to be guilty of *nushūz* (lewd conduct). Secondly, the Quran ordains certain procedures that a husband must comply with if he is confronted with such a situation. First, he must advise her. If that does not work, then he should stop sleeping with her, which is kind of a warning to make her realize the implications of not changing her conduct (Alwani, 2013). Some Muslims argue that husbands have the right to discipline their wives through physical abuse. However, Islam refutes this supposed "right" to the extent of allowing the abused wife to claim recompense under *ta'zīr* (optional physical punishment) (Ibrahim, 2017).

The Contribution of Muslim Americans in the Nonprofit Sector
A Bird's Eye View of the Muslim American Nonprofit Sector
One of the vital signs of connection among Muslims is their empathy toward other Muslims. Contrary to some definitions of philanthropy, which see such an activity as a wholly voluntary act, Muslims consider it a key aspect of their duty toward God and as a right owed to God. Muslims consider donating money to nonprofit institutions as one way of promoting their identity. Following their religious injunctions, which teach and promote a sense of collectivism, Muslims have established religious institutions, mosques, schools, advocacy organizations that argue for civil rights, and relief organizations to donate to their co-religionists living in developing countries.

The Muslim American nonprofit sector is predominantly comprised of small-sized nonprofit organizations (Siddiqui, 2010), perhaps because this country's very diverse Muslim diaspora lacks the integration required to constitute larger nonprofit organizations. As suggested by Khader and Siddiqui (2018), the Muslim Americans' lack of contributions to religious causes is, in contrast to other religious communities, due to their lower numbers and comparative dearth of wealth.

The growth of Muslim nonprofit organizations has been directly proportional to the growing American Muslim population. The community has built approximately 3,000 mosques (Bagby, 2020), and some scholars estimate the number of Islamic schools to be 235 and growing (Khan & Siddiqui, 2017). In 2020 there were 3,020 Muslim nonprofits in the country under the "Islamic" nonprofits NTEE category (X40) registered with the Internal Revenue Service, although this number is likely much higher (www.guidestar.org).

As stated above, IRS data alone does not represent the exact number of Muslim American nonprofits. Although larger Muslim philanthropic nonprofits such as the Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), and Islamic Relief USA are included within these figures, some smaller organizations are either not yet registered or are currently going through the process. Numerous new Muslim nonprofits, apart from mosques and schools, have appeared in recent years. The majority of Muslim nonprofits are small, for the establishment of large ones has not yet occurred (Khan & Siddiqui, 2017).

In the aftermath of 9/11, the Muslim nonprofit sector has been subjected to increased scrutiny (Bail, 2015) because the general public and government officials perceive the community's philanthropic organizations with greater skepticism (Thaut, 2009; Khan, 2015; Bloodgood & Tremblay-Boire, 2017; Noor et al., 2021). Three renowned ones were raided and forcefully shut down by various law enforcement agencies in 2001. Five more were raided later on by the newly established homeland security apparatus; there were no subsequent prosecutions (Watanabe, 2004; MacFarquhar, 2006; Watanabe & Esquivel, 2009; Turner, 2009, 2011). Such episodes undoubtedly caused mistrust between the government and Muslim American nonprofits (Caple, 2010-2011). Those Muslims involved in the nonprofit sector are apprehensive that the Patriot Act and similar anti-terrorism laws exist to target them (MacFarquhar, 2006; Watanabe & Esquivel, 2009; Bloodgood & Tremblay-Boire, 2011; Siddiqui, 2013).

This environment of mistrust worsened during Donald Trump's presidency, as Islamophobia was a prominent theme of his election strategy (Lajevardi, 2020) and post-election executive orders. For example, numerous Islamic nonprofits cited Trump's January 2017 signing of an executive order that banned travel from six Muslim-majority countries as an example of his Islamophobic rhetoric. CAIR asked him to abstain from such rhetoric and actions, stating, "Unfortunately, it is President Trump's policies, appointments, and statements that have contributed to the mainstreaming of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric. It is time for him to clearly state that he is the president of all Americans, including American Muslims, and that he rejects Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and all other forms of bigotry" (CAIR, 2017). Muslim-American domestic violence organizations operate within this framework. They have to contend with their internal challenges of fighting against domestic violence while externally defending Muslims from charges of faith-based misogyny. Their work is often under-funded, in an already anemic nonprofit sector, for fear of furthering Islamophobic tropes. Muslim-American organizations that fight domestic violence have to navigate both internal and external legitimacy using very limited resources.

Muslim Americans and Domestic Violence

Domestic violence exists among all cultural and religious groups (Krantz & Garcia Moreno, 2005). In today's world, there is a renewed focus on violence and its various modalities: social, political, structural, interpersonal, and familial. However, some families experience the harshest violence. Surveys reveal that domestic violence occurs every 6 to 20 seconds in the US, UK, and other countries, including Muslim-majority ones (Alwani, 2017). Unfortunately, this is one of the most complex enigmas facing humanity as a whole. According to some estimates, 25% of all homicides in the United States are committed by a family member; 50% of them are husband-wife killings (Cantalano et al,, 2009).

Domestic violence includes many types of abuse: verbal, emotional, sexual, physical, financial, and spiritual. One aspect of Islamophobia is the belief that domestic violence is *more* prevalent in Muslim communities than in others, thereby implying that it is condoned by Islamic texts and/or Muslim social-cultural practices. This view has increased in the post-9/11 world, along with negative stereotypes suggesting that Islam actively promotes domestic violence and the abusive treatment of women. In reality, however, Islam endorses gender equality and denounces all violence against women (Al-Hibri, 2000; Hassan, 1996). Viewed another way, just because a small proportion of followers of a specific religion/faith do something wrong does not mean that the faith tradition condones it. Domestic violence, a form patriarchal violence, is therefore part of a gendered social structure and has little to do with Islam or any other religion.

A Brief Assessment of Domestic Violence in Muslim-Mainstream Countries

That said, the existence of domestic violence in Muslim-majority countries cannot be denied. Certain countries can have culturally peculiar manifestations of domestic violence (Ammar, 2006; Haj-Yahia, 1998). For example, domestic violence within the Middle East's cultural context is largely perceived to be a personal or family issue, as opposed to a serious public health threat or a politico-legal issue (Kulwicki & Miller, 1999). A study of 121 Afghan men and women revealed that 30% felt progressively disturbed about family violence (Abirafeh, 2007). Another survey of 2,677 Bangladeshi women aged between 13 and 40 showed that 75.6% of them had experienced violence at the hands of their husbands (Silverman et al., 2007). Vizcarra et al. (2004) interviewed 631 Egyptian women, 22% of whom had experienced violence by an intimate partner. Furthermore, Jahanfar and Malekzadegan (2007) found that 60.6% of the 1,800 pregnant Iranian women they interviewed had been subjected to various kinds of domestic violence, including sexual (23.5%), physical (14.6%), and psychological (60.5%).

Similarly, a survey of 1,324 pregnant Pakistani women conducted by Karmaliani et al. (2008) revealed that 51% of them had experienced physical,

sexual, or verbal abuse in the six months before and/or during their pregnancies. Another study by Usta et al. (2007) of 1,418 women in Lebanon who visited primary healthcare centers found that 35% of them had experienced domestic violence, including physical violence (66%) and verbal abuse (88%). In addition, through interviews with individuals living in refugee camps in Palestine, Khawaja et al. (2008) discovered that the majority of married men (60.1%) and women (61.8%) believe that wife-beating is justifiable under most circumstances. These same trends were revealed by Ahmed's (2007) survey of 146 Sudanese women at an outpatient clinic, 45.8% of whom were victims of domestic violence. Another study of 506 Turkish women at a healthcare facility found that 58% of them faced domestic violence (largely physical and psychological) recurrently and continuously (Alper et al., 2005). All these statistics from different Muslim-majority countries pose a serious threat to the contention that Islam recognizes and protects women's rights.

Summary Observations About Domestic Violence in the Muslim American Community
Sociodemographic assessments reveal that the occurrence of domestic violence among US Muslims ranges from 10% (Alkhateeb, 1999) to nearly 30%, of which 14% of women reported experiencing physical abuse in their current marriage and 17.5% in a previous marriage (Ghayyur, 2009). These figures are synchronous with those among the overall US population (NCADV, n.d.). According to a study by Killawi (2011), 12-18% reported experiencing physical abuse and 30-40% experienced emotional abuse. The Peaceful Families Project (2011) surveyed 801 Muslim American women and found that 31% had experienced abuse by an intimate partner and 53% had experienced some form of domestic violence during their lifetime.

In regard to the Muslim American community's acceptance of domestic violence, Kulwicki and Miller (1999) conducted a study of 202 Arab American homes comprising 162 women and 40 men (98% of whom were Muslim). The respondents endorsed a man's right to slap his wife if, according to them, the following conditions were met: 33% of men and 34% of women found it justified if she insulted him when they were at home alone, 43% of men and 17% of women deemed it appropriate if she disrespected him in public, and 59% of both women and men would endorse it if she hit him first during an argument (Kulwicki & Miller, 1999). Another study conducted by Alkhateeb (2009), one that used quantitative and qualitative interviews of executive directors of nine domestic violence organizations serving significant numbers of Muslim women, found that of the 1,962 Muslim women served annually, the average age was 32 and 85% of them were immigrants. These women had experienced several forms of domestic violence, including physical abuse (74%), sexual abuse (30%),

financial abuse (65%), emotional blackmailing or verbal abuse (82%), and spiritual abuse (49%) (Alkhateeb, 2009).

Crimes against women receive little attention, for the media seldom reports such incidents due to the Muslim American population's diverse composition and the majority of them being immigrants. Other factors, such as sociocultural norms (e.g., legal and religious practices), impede the probing and reporting of such crimes. Arab immigrants bring with them such cultural norms as not speaking out about abusive incidents that have occurred within their family. Such an introverted approach is a major obstruction for victims who decide to seek help, a cultural norm that also hinders law enforcement agencies and health professionals seeking to combat this health threat within this specific community (Abdullah, 2007).

Another study carried out by Abugideiri (2007) with 190 Muslims seeking mental health counseling in northern Virginia revealed that 41% experienced domestic violence in the form of physical (50%), sexual (14%), and verbal or psychological abuse (60%); 3% of respondents reported having a relative who had been killed. Of the respondents, 16% were children, 12% were adult males, and 71% were adult females.

To cater to the needs of abused women effectively, both secular advocates and faith leaders need to be aware of best practices for offering assistance. In certain situations, secular advocates might feel helpless when an abused woman refuses to speak out to protect her family's honor and safeguard her religious beliefs, even though doing so limits her chances for any recompense and might also perpetuate her victimization. Faith leaders may also have their own prejudices about women's "appropriate" roles and of their seeking assistance from secular resources, such as the criminal justice system. If secular and religious organizations understand their limitations and biases and seek knowledge to redress them, it will help them serve abused women more effectively (Hamid, 2015). Muslim victims of domestic violence may be aided in accessing services such as English language/literacy classes, legal consultation or advocacy, support groups, social services/public support, funding for a job training program, counseling for herself and her traumatized children, and access to transportation and/or driving lessons (Hamid, 2015).

The Role of Mosques and Imams

Another important Muslim American philanthropical institution is the mosque. These houses of worship contribute by preaching the teachings of Islam, offering community-building services, and appealing for contributions to help the needy. Chronicle records maintain that mosques existed in America as early as 1925. Barely 2% of them were founded before 1950 (Khan & Siddiqui, 2017). The US Mosque Survey, conducted in 2020, found there are presently 2,769 mosques, an

increase of 31% from 2010. This increase is the result of the growing Muslim population due to both immigration and the birth rate (Bagby, 2021).

An investigative study of 22 mosques in New York revealed that 96% of their participants recognized imams as counselors and that 74% had sought their counsel around safety issues (Abu-Ras et al., 2007). As abused immigrant women chiefly depend on their faith communities for support, they are prone to experience more victimization when confronted with a lack of support, denial, or silence from their clergy and congregations.

Both domestic violence survivors and advocates share that in most cases their religious and community leaders fail to acknowledge the presence of domestic violence (Johnson, 2015). Not only do imams need to acknowledge that violence occurs, but they also must challenge themselves to see if their cultural beliefs have influenced their perception of married women's rights to reflect those of the women to whom they preach. Not all imams have sufficient information or a clear understanding of the different forms of violence (e.g., emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual) or the signs of domestic violence, as well as how to differentiate between intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and couple's situational conflicts (Johnson 2005). Some of them may simply see domestic abuse as an aspect of day-to-day disputes among couples and thus neither acknowledge it outright nor support the women. Therefore, they need to be vociferous about the Sharia's standpoint that domestic violence is an injustice (Alkhateeb, 2007; Choi et al., 2016).

Domestic violence advocates, usually women, who selflessly serve their communities and are misperceived as breaking up families, generally encounter a considerable amount of skepticism (Choi et al., 2016; Alkhateeb, 2007). Survivors of domestic violence will be empowered if imams support their views and speak out against domestic violence in sermons. Such actions will also unify their advocates and lend credence to their efforts. There is a strong possibility that Muslims who oppose the promotion of "feminist" or "pro-Western" mindsets in their community's imams will try to block such efforts by citing references to American society becoming more individualistic, the breakup of the family system, and the impact of the rising divorce rate on children due to women's liberation or feminist philosophy. However, such statements have been shown to promote domestic violence on the one hand and, on the other, to represent an outright denial of Islam's real spirit, which teaches peace, harmony, and congruence in society at large and in marital relationships in particular (Hamid, 2015).

There have been attempts to engage this important constituency. For example, ISNA has both conducted and included training sessions for imams about domestic violence prevention in their national and regional conferences.

The Peaceful Families Project has conducted trainings and promoted appropriate sermons as well.

ISNA's Efforts to Combat Domestic Violence 1997-2005
ISNA, formally founded in 1980, traces its roots to the Muslim Student Association of the US and Canada (MSA), established in 1963. A national umbrella organization that hosts an annual convention and regional conferences, ISNA publishes *Islamic Horizons* magazine, organizes youth programs, and has had interfaith relations with the US federal government since 2005. Its board is largely elected by individual members. Over time, ISNA has managed to achieve cognitive legitimacy (Siddiqui, 2014), a status that has allowed it to oppose domestic violence publicly through its programs.

     For the purpose of this paper, we adopt Suchman's (1995) definition: "Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within certain socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions." ISNA's legitimacy does not depend on specific events alone; rather, its long-term legitimacy depends on a collection of events or history. Nevertheless, we will see that its legitimacy was, at times, influenced by singular events. Legitimacy, which does not always reflect reality, is actually the perception of the organization or its reputation. In other words, it is "possessed objectively, yet created subjectively" (Suchman 1995), a social construct that can vary based on the audience. Any nonprofit organization, including ISNA, can be both legitimate and illegitimate, depending on the person or group making the judgment.

     There are three broad types of legitimacy: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive. Pragmatic legitimacy is based on the self-interest of the organization's stakeholders. Support for ISNA depends on what value the constituents expect to receive, such as a direct personal benefit, his/her belief that ISNA furthers his/her overall beliefs, and that the organization cares about him/her. Under this frame, Muslim-American domestic violence activists would likely be willing to support ISNA if they felt ISNA would support their cause.

     Moral legitimacy depends on whether ISNA's actions are justified, rather than whether they merely benefit the audience. It achieved moral legitimacy by operating in socially acceptable ways and due to the influence of its structure and organizational leaders' charisma. Nonprofit organizations' claims to resources are based on demonstrating their moral commitments (Ostrander & Schervish, 1990). In this framework, Muslim-American anti-domestic violence activists and others would support ISNA, if they perceived that its stands on this and related issues were morally correct.

ISNA attained cognitive legitimacy, the most powerful form of legitimacy, when people or institutions began believing that it was necessary or inevitable based on a taken-for-granted cultural framework.

Until 1991 (Gulf War I), ISNA largely benefitted from pragmatic legitimacy. At a time when Muslim American organizations were less developed institutionally at the national level, it provided representation, opportunities to network and connect, needed programs for community development, a way for the diaspora community to donate to causes back home, and tax exemption for local nonprofit organizations through its group tax exemption. ISNA's revenues depended on program activities, diaspora giving, and donations from the Persian Gulf and the US.

Between Gulf War I and 9/11, ISNA achieved moral legitimacy. Prior to that war and due to the funding it was receiving from the Middle East, ISNA was seen as dependent on international donations. Its opposition to US involvement in the war was regarded as breaking with Middle Eastern leaders and aligning itself with Muslim American public opinion, a move that resulted in deeper domestic financial support. The period of 1993-2005 was a time of deep programmatic engagement and institutional stability, for this domestic funding enabled ISNA to achieve cognitive legitimacy before 9/11.

Although managed by a professional staff and led by an executive director, the organization has been unable to transition away from its founders at the board level. In 2018, the membership elected Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed, who was president of the Council of Presidents (est. 1980), as its president. He had already served as its chief executive officer (1993-2005) and is a first-generation Muslim American immigrant. In fact, during the 2018 election no second-generation Muslim American won a seat on ISNA's board.

In 2019, ISNA hired Tayyab Yunus, a second-generation Muslim American to serve as its executive director. However, he left less than six months later after failing to help ISNA become more responsive to a more diverse audience of Muslim Americans. ISNA's cognitive legitimacy is best illustrated by its 2019 Annual Convention. Despite being very small compared to past ones and even with other Muslim American organizations' national conventions, it was the only Muslim American national convention to host Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Julian Castro and comedian Trevor Noah. ISNA has been able to maintain its national standing due to its cognitive legitimacy and a core set of donors who continue to ensure its financial stability despite scant social returns in recent years. This level of legitimacy has allowed ISNA to reassert itself into the national Muslim American framework during the Covid-19 pandemic under the leadership of Basharat Saleem, its new executive director. Saleem has served in various ISNA roles for over 19 years and has played a national role in a membership association of American journalists.

ISNA's Efforts Against Domestic Violence

In 1997, ISNA's secretary general established a social services department in response to the grassroots community leaders and social services activists' suggestion that Muslim Americans were dealing with widespread issues, among them bullying, mental health, domestic and family violence, and substance abuse. As most Islamic centers considered these issues taboo, no widespread effort was undertaken to legitimize these activists' work. A safe space in which important religious frameworks could be established for these conversations was also needed. Although this department lasted less than two years, it did accomplish some important work in terms of organizing two annual conferences, bringing scholars and practitioners together, and providing important material for *Islamic Horizons* and programs for ISNA's annual and regional conferences. When this department was closed due to a lack of funding and disagreements between the director and secretary general, its efforts continued as part of a new association, the Islamic Social Services Association, for those who had been involved in these efforts.

However, due to the department's initial efforts (and success), ISNA continued to receive requests for help from families, Islamic center leaders, imams, and practitioners. The secretary general therefore tasked the newly formed community development department to organize appropriate activities. ISNA also took the controversial step of deciding not to collaborate with other national organizations to establish joint national anti-domestic violence efforts. There were likely a few reasons for this decision. First, ISNA was in a rebuilding mode and thus a scarcity mindset was at the center of most of its decisions and work. As Siddiqui (2014) suggests, the secretary general believed that the organization's past collaborations had birthed new organizations that had removed valuable resources, a development that eventually resulted in financial issues during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Second, as domestic violence is a delicate issue within the Muslim community, he was worried that a broad coalition may eventually be a hindrance due to the consistent need for consensus.

Consensus development, while great for community-building, can dilute the work against domestic violence. In fact, ISNA was already facing opposition from some of its board members who believed that such violence was limited and no more than a legal tool used by women in family law disputes! As the staff did not feel equipped to face internal challenges (which were professionally dangerous) while also dealing with external efforts to dilute their fight against it, going it alone seemed like the easiest path to take. Finally, ISNA lacked the administrative and financial resources needed for a true collaboration.

ISNA immediately sought activists in the community who would help its efforts. Fortunately, it was introduced to Bonita McGee, who had been involved in such efforts both within and outside the Muslim community. A young African

American Muslim leader, she was the ideal person to understand the limited but important role an organization like ISNA could play. She recommended that ISNA confine its efforts to 1) legitimize the work against domestic violence within the Muslim community; 2) be unequivocal concerning Islam's opposition to this practice; 3) convene meetings of imams, practitioners, and scholars to oppose it; 4) establish a bridge between work being done in the Muslim community and national-level efforts to reduce silos being developed; and 5) be a resource for non-Muslims to tackle domestic violence within the Muslim community. ISNA's secretary general appointed her ISNA National Chair for Muslims against Domestic Violence, and in that capacity she worked with the community development department to organize such efforts as convening conferences, placing articles in *Islamic Horizons*, and developing a website.

Between 1999 and 2003, the department hosted a series of small annual conferences on such topics as Muslims against Domestic Violence, Islamic Perspectives on Counseling, Dispute Resolution Training, and Imam Training on Domestic Violence. Because ISNA's board refused to authorize the necessary funding, the staff organized them at the ISNA headquarters in Plainfield, IN. The disagreements over these activities ran so deep that ISNA's accounting staff refused to release payments to vendors, thereby delaying planning activities. But despite these internal challenges, ISNA staff and volunteers managed to host and livestream (a new concept at that time) these events that brought together between 50 and 100 imams, community leaders, practitioners, and scholars and enabled others to join the conversation virtually.

Due to these volunteers' heightened involvement, these events were held at no additional cost to ISNA. As they were held on weekends, staff donated their time. Fortunately, these smaller conferences resulted in some real anti-domestic violence champions, such as Imam Mohamad Magid of Virginia, who gradually became an important figure within ISNA. In addition to serving on its executive council and board, as well as its vice president and president, he also provided political cover for staff and these activities internally. In 2009, in response to Aasiya Zubair's murder, Imam Magid issued a statement calling for a change in Muslims' attitudes about domestic violence and a robust plan of action to fight against this scourge (Hammer, 2019). These conferences, although small, featured important speakers and topics that became part of ISNA's annual conference and regional conferences.

These efforts resulted in articles appearing in *Islamic Horizons*, which amplified the cause. They also appeared on ISNA's new internet weekly news show that was broadcast through the organization's website.

ISNA developed a Muslims against Domestic Violence website that included a toolkit and materials, developed by scholars and practitioners. These materials were presented at its annual conference; McGee was its architect. ISNA

started receiving copyright permission requests from mainstream national organizations against domestic violence to reproduce them in their own publications. The website also enabled ISNA to state unequivocally that Islam forbids all forms of domestic violence and reiterate its position on gender equality. As important as these events were, they were short-lived because of the departure of key staff, including Sayyid Syeed and one of the coauthors of this article.

As Hammer (2019) notes, Muslim religious leaders developed a normative Islamic marriage model that proposed three important points: domestic violence exists within the Muslim community, a position that ISNA's leaders were not willing to openly embrace between 1997 and 2005; it should not exist; and that it is un-Islamic because it negates the Quranic requirement of a "tranquil marriage model" (Hammer, 2019).

Conclusion

This article seeks to illustrate the engagement of a national organization in the efforts to combat domestic violence. While much of the literature related to Muslim efforts in this regard highlight the work of activists, this article sheds light on the work of a Muslim organization that was not part of that network. A number of important national, regional, and local organizations now exist to combat it.

ISNA's efforts differed in several ways. First, its efforts were not initiated by activists. Although Syeed and Siddiqui personally disagreed with domestic violence, prior to engaging in this work they would not have been considered activists. Part of their broad mandate to help community challenges was to find ways to solve problems at the grassroots level. Thus, they had to turn to an activist and leader like McGee who could better guide this work. Second, the widespread Muslim activities against domestic violence were being done by "non-establishment figures," for the community leaders fighting it were also fighting the national, regional, and local community-elected leaders. As ISNA was largely considered "part of the establishment," its efforts to uplift and amplify these activists were unique at that time.

In addition, ISNA also faced internal and external challenges in the form of vocal board members who opposed the community development department's work, although the board had established it. Its programs, therefore, received little or no additional funding. ISNA's inability to educate and take its board on this journey ensured that these efforts would be short-lived. Finally, ISNA refused to collaborate with other "establishment" Muslim American organizations and chose to work with activists. A great deal of the research on Muslim efforts to combat domestic violence has been confined to the work of activists. ISNA's efforts enable researchers to examine how Muslim American non-activists sought to deal with this specific challenge.

This article is an important contribution to the literature on the work of non-domestic violence activists within the Muslim community. However, new avenues of research also need to be pursued. First, researchers should examine how this tension between the fear of Islamophobia while confronting issues of domestic violence has impacted fundraising. Was this work funded through external grants or Muslim American donors? What were these donors' motivations, challenges, and belief systems? Second, what kind of backlash or challenges did non-domestic violence activists face within the local, regional, or national contexts? Third, how important was the investment of federal, state, local, and foundation grants in furthering this campaign? Fourth, what challenges did these activists face while pursuing federal, state, local, and foundation grants? Finally, as documented above, ISNA's efforts were dependent upon a few internal and an external champion. This raises the question of what efforts must organizations like ISNA undertake to institutionalize such work? This is an important question, one that can help broaden organizational efforts to oppose domestic violence in the Muslim-American community.

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