



Rhode Island Council for Muslim Advancement (RICMA)

Domestic Violence does *not* discriminate against Muslims

The beheading of Aasiya Hassan in New York back in February 2009, by her husband and founder of Bridges TV, Muzzamil Hassan, continues to ripple through the Muslim community in North America as a wake-up call crying out: "Domestic Violence does not discriminate against race, gender, nor religious background". Unfortunately, it has taken this high profile murder case, to once again lift the veil of ignorance and denial to show that Muslim communities are not immune to the dangers of domestic violence, even as the tenants of Islam strongly condemn it.

Significant strides have been made, and continue to be made, to raise awareness on domestic violence in Muslim communities across the US. Last month in Hartford, CT, during the 34th Annual Convention of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) and Muslim American Society (MAS), an entire workshop was dedicated to domestic violence. Led by Muslim Irish American, Malika Rushdan from ICNA Relief, a diverse room full of Muslim men and women was introduced to the basics of domestic violence and the dangers of ignoring its alarming presence, destructive cycles, and seeming absence from our communities.

Recognizing that some Muslim community leaders, also known as Imams, might not be trained to deal with domestic violence has been a milestone in itself, as more cases are sadly seen in our communities. Educational materials and guidelines for Imams on how to deal with, and respond to, domestic violence cases in their communities continue to emerge, including a "customized" Muslim Power and Control Wheel, developed by the late Sharifa Alkhateeb, founder and pioneer of the Peaceful Families Project. Recently, an entire issue of one of the leading Islamic magazines in North America, The Message International, was dedicated to the topic, acknowledging our religious teachings do not support and indeed condemn domestic violence.

In actuality, Islamic teachings even provide clear guidance on how to deal with domestic violence. As one of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad states: "Help your brother (sister) whether he is an oppressor or he is oppressed". The Prophet was asked: "It is right to help him who is oppressed, but how should we help him if he is an oppressor?" He replied: "By preventing him from oppressing others."

Muslim strides against domestic violence are not limited to educating the Muslim leaders and community at large on the topic. Muslim shelters, hotlines, counseling services, support groups, and even pre-marital classes are on the rise, especially in California, New York, and New Jersey; where the Muslim population is estimated to reach well over 2 million.

In Rhode Island, efforts are currently being made under the auspices of the non-profit organization Rhode Island Council for Muslim Advancement (RICMA) to create a Domestic Violence task force. A group of Muslim men and women, under the leadership of a female domestic violence survivor, gathered last Saturday in the facilities of the Islamic School of Rhode Island, in West Warwick. These men and women met to discuss the formation and mission of the task force. Through brainstorming, examination of statistics and resources available through the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV), and evaluation of existing materials addressing domestic violence from an Islamic perspective, goals were set to provide education and support to the Muslim community. The group hopes to reach out to the RI community for dialogue, guidance, and support on this important mission.

For more information, please contact Kathleen Taylor at contact@ricma.org or visit <http://www.ricma.org/SW-home>

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