

**ISLAMICHERITAGE**  
LEADS THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE UMMAH

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*Editors*

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## *Prakata*

Sejarah warisan Islam telah memberikan impak yang cukup besar kepada perkembangan dunia hari ini. Ia bukan sahaja memberi sumbangan kepada aspek kerohanian malah turut menyumbang kepada aspek ekonomi, politik, pendidikan, sosial, kesenian, kebudayaan, sains dan teknologi. Perkembangan ini memperlihatkan bahawa pentingnya ketamadunan ilmu kepada ketamadunan dunia. Perkara ini selaras dengan tuntutan al-Quran yang menyatakan dengan jelas bahawa Allah SWT memuji sesiapa yang berusaha menuntut ilmu dan juga bertaqwa kepadaNya. Namun sejak akhir-akhir ini, sumbangan hasil pensejarahan Islam sering dipandang sepi oleh generasi muda. Sejarah warisan Islam tidak lagi dijadikan panduan dan iktibar dalam melebarkan ketamadunan ilmu Islam. Mereka lebih tertumpu kepada ketamadunan Barat yang dikatakan ‘kaya’ dengan khazanah ilmu. Sedangkan kemajuan hari ini seharusnya berlandaskan kepada ketamadunan Islam.

Penelitian atau pengkajian mengenai warisan Islam perlu direncanakan sebagai ketamadunan dunia. Idea-idea baru mengenai sejarah warisan Islam perlu diketengahkan, Oleh yang demikian, menerusi *1<sup>st</sup> International Islamic Heritage Conference (IsHeC 2015)* dilihat akan dapat membantu kepada perkembangan produksi seterusnya menjana idea-idea baru khususnya untuk memperkayakan kajian dalam bidang sejarah warisan Islam kepada masyarakat. Dengan penganjuran seminar ini secara tidak langsung membantu untuk menjalinkan hubungan antara para sarjana dalam bidang sejarah warisan Islam. Ini adalah satu cabaran dan membuka peluang baru untuk membina satu perpaduan intelektual merentas sempadan dunia.

Buku ini merupakan kompilasi diskusi ilmu antara para ilmunan yang terlibat secara langsung dalam pembentangan kertas kerja mereka dalam *1<sup>st</sup> International Islamic Heritage Conference (IsHeC 2015)* daripada pelbagai platform ilmu Islam antaranya Kesenian, Ketamadunan, Komunikasi, Pendidikan, Kewangan, Sains dan Teknologi dan lain-lain lagi. Semoga curahan ilmu melalui penulisan ini mampu memberi sumbangan dalam menambah khazanah ilmu Islam kepada masyarakat.

Editor,

*1<sup>st</sup> International Islamic Heritage Conference (IsHeC 2015)*,

Akademi Pengajian Islam Kontemporari,

UiTM Melaka.

## *Kata Aluan Rektor UiTM Melaka*

Dengan Nama Allah Yang Maha Pemurah Lagi Maha Pengasih  
Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh

Segala puji bagi Allah, Tuhan seru sekalian alam, dengan limpah kurniaNya serta keizinanNya, kejayaan penganjuran *1st International Islamic Heritage Conference 2015* yang berlangsung di Hotel Mahkota Melaka pada 11-12 November 2015, telah menghasilkan banyak kertas kerja yang amat bermutu. Justeru, buku ini mengumpulkan puluhan penulisan para ilmuan dan cendekiawan dari dalam dan luar negara untuk bacaan semua.

Pelbagai isu telah dikupas termasuklah perihal seni Islam, budaya, politik, gendar, pendidikan, sejarah, kemasyarakatan, sains dan teknologi, ekonomi, kewangan, falsafah, bahasa dan komunikasi, kedermawanan dan pengurusan. Pembaca juga akan mendapati buku ini memuatkan kajian-kajian yang komited melaksanakan usaha mengintegrasikan antara ilmu duniawi dan ukhrawi. Ini membuktikan kesegaran keilmuan tamadun Islam itu sendiri.

Semoga perkongsian ilmu ini dapat meningkatkan komitmen umat dalam memartabatkan perintah Ilahi dalam kehidupan duniawi sebagai jambatan ukhrawi. Sekaligus ia bakal memberi manfaat pada alam sejagat.

Pihak UiTM Melaka merakamkan setinggi-tinggi tahniah dan ucapan terima kasih atas segala sokongan dalam bentuk material, tenaga dan sebagainya dalam merialisasikan seminar ini. Buat semua penaja yang telah memberikan sumbangan kepada wacana ini, sekalung penghargaan diucapkan. Semoga seminar dwi tahunan ini akan terus diperkasakan demi mengangkat martabat umat melalui kecemerlangan tamadun Islam yang diakui telah terbukti diseluruh jagat.

Sekian, terima kasih. Wassalam

**PROF. MADYA DR MOHD ADNAN BIN HASHIM**

Rektor ,  
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## A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON WIFE ABUSE IN MUSLIM FAMILIES: WHY WOMEN ENDURE?

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### ABSTRACT

Malaysia is an Islamic country with more than half of its population embracing the religion of Islam. In relation to this, the requirement of understanding the Islamic approach on various aspects of its people lives is pivotal. This includes the teachings on the structure of the Muslim family. According to the Islamic view, marriage entails certain obligations, rights and duties between a husband and wife. These foundations have been laid for the couples to achieve a happy marriage as well as to enjoy a stable married life equally. Previous studies have shown that the prevalence of domestic violence in Muslim societies is comparable to that of Western countries where the research data in Egypt, Palestine and Tunisia shows that the occurrence of domestic violence is 1 in 3 women. Domestic violence can be seen as *nusyuz* or a careless attitude towards responsibilities between husband and wife, without any unlawful reasons which are solemnized by the *Sharia* Law. Islam prohibits the husband to use any form of violence against the wife when disagreements arise. This paper attempts to elaborate the impact of wife abuse and also identify the barriers that make the women unable to disclose the violence; from their perspectives as a Muslim. The study employs qualitative interviews with 25 women who identified themselves as victims and survivors of domestic violence. The findings indicate that the women perceived of wife abuse as strengthening their faith in destiny, however their understanding on Islamic concepts about being 'a good wife' is in vital need of rectification.

**Keywords:** Wife abuse, domestic violence, family violence, abusive relationship, domestic abuse

### PREAMBLE

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The objective of this paper is to discuss about the occurrence of domestic violence among Muslim families in Malaysia. The discussion includes the stand of Islam in relation to the issue, its prevalence, the spiritual impact on the women victims as well as the barrier of disclosing such violence in their relationships. The research data was gathered through in-depth interviews with Muslim women who identified themselves as victims and survivors of domestic violence. After series of interviews, thematic analysis was performed for the emergent of themes via NVivo software. The study found that women decided not to leave the relationships because they want to become a good wife, they afraid of being *nusyuz* and they believe it as their destiny. In due course, these women submitted themselves deeply to Allah S.W.T through the prayers and *doa* as another options to rest their case.

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## ISLAM AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### Rights and Position of Muslim Women

The study of women in Islam has demonstrated the complexity of the women's role within this religion. The Noble *Qur'an*, the holy book of Islam, indicates that both men and women are equal, and this has been emphasized in respect to their duties, rights, virtues and merits. They are also promised the same reward for good conduct and the same punishment for evil conduct:

"Whoever commits a sin is requited for just that, and whoever works righteousness - male or female - while believing, these will enter Paradise wherein they receive provisions without any limits." (*Qur'an* 40:40)

The notion of equality in the Muslim woman's life is well preserved by *Sharia* law. This concept provides the women with equitable rights in terms of marriage, divorce and the inheritance of property. Even though in a Muslim society the man has full responsibility for the maintenance of his family, the women on the other hand may also contribute anything that she earns if she wishes. Muslim women have equal rights in terms of strengthening the home and supporting the family well-being. In fact, they both shared duties in a marriage. As the *Qur'an* says:

"And among His signs is this: That He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest, peace of mind in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are signs for people who reflect." (*Qur'an* 30:21).

"...Your wives are your garments, and you are their garments." (*Qur'an* 2: 187)

"And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them." (*Qur'an* 2:228).

The proper understanding among men in regard to responsibilities as leaders (caliphs) in a family unit is crucial. Although they are considered as a head of the family as well as the 'breadwinner', the role of women is not to be neglected. In return, Muslim women are expected to obey their husband in his role as the head of the family. This is the meaning of obedience in the context of marriage in Islam. As the *Qur'an* states:

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in absence what Allah would have them guard." (*Qur'an* 4:34)

In line with the above statement, Islam also has attached a very high status to Muslim women. This can be seen in their important role as a wife and a mother. A few sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) are also cited about the honour of being a mother:

"Your heaven lies under the feet of your mother." (Ahmad, Nasai)

"Verily, God forbade for you, rudeness to mothers." (Muslim)

"Do not leave your mother unless she gives permission or death takes her, because that is the greatest (deed) for your rewards." (Al-Kabir)

A man asked the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to whom he should show kindness and he replied: "Your mother". He asked who comes next and he replied,



“Your mother”. He asked who comes next and he replied, “Your mother”. He asked who comes next and he replied, “Your father, then your relatives in order of relationship.” (Tarmizi, Abu Da’ud)

Therefore, it can be concluded that Muslim women are granted privileges over men in certain aspects, for instance in relation to their religious duties and financial liabilities. Further, significantly the women enjoy higher recognition in the sight of the Islamic religion by virtue of being a mother. Although men are given the role as ‘the protectors and maintainers of women’ in verse (4:34), this circumstance does not indicate in any sense that women are inferior to men. In many instances, the verses of the *Qur’an* emphasize the element of equality between men and women incorporating a wide range of various aspects of life. Though, it is believed that there is a strong necessity for Muslim women to be well informed in regard to their rights and obligations according to the *Sharia* because the demands as well as the challenges of modern day living has increasingly put pressure on Muslim women worldwide.

### Concepts Pertaining to Wife Abuse

In respect to marital violence *per se*, Islam prohibits the husband to use any form of violence against the wife when disagreements arise. There are three stages to be followed in order when the arguments worsen. For whatever reason, wife abuse is not allowed although the *Qur’an* acknowledges the light battering of a wife for the purpose of disciplining. The husband must avoid severe and harsh punishment in his treatment of his wife. The *Qur’an* states about such circumstances:

“.....As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance).” (*Qur’an* 4:34)

The verse stated above does not portray that Islam belittles women. Even though the light beating of the wife is permissible in Islam, if the husband may refrain from it that would be a much better option. The striking in particular served as the last resort and also as a curative measure. The husband, in any situation, may not beat his wife in wild or savage manner. In fact, he must avoid attacking her in the face at all times. Only a ‘*siwak*’ (a tiny stick that is used for cleaning teeth) can be used for the hitting with the condition that no damage is done to the wife’s body and no mark is left on her. Thus, the description mentioned in the *Qur’an* in relation to beating the wives is obvious. It is believed that the husband’s ignorance of the basic teachings of Islam may best explain the circumstances of marital violence as well as other related factors such as economic issues, external love affairs and substance abuse problems.

When reflecting on the wife abuse situation, typically none of the conditions stated earlier are met. Therefore, the beatings perpetrated by the husband in these circumstances are not considered as permissible in accordance to the *Sharia*. The word ‘beat’ in the verse (4:43) does not convey the meaning of batter or abuse. In short, the Islamic religion does not condone any forms of violence against women. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also forbade wife beating,

“Give her (your wife) food when you take food, clothe when you clothe yourself, do not revile her face, and do not beat her.” (Sunan Abu-Dawud, Book 11, Marriage (Kitab Al-Nikah), Number 2139)

In particular cases like domestic violence, the laws of Islam provide the woman her right to seek an end to a marriage if the husband has ill-treated his wife. Initially, the reconciliation procedure may be introduced with the couple in order to attempt to save the marriage. Conversely, if the relationship is no longer reconcilable, the wife may proceed with the process of divorce. Allah says in the Holy *Qur'an* Chapter 4, Surah Nissa verses 128 and 129:

"If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves; and such settlement is best; even though men's souls are swayed by greed. But if you do good and practice self-restraint Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do."

"You are never able to be fair and just as between women even if it is your ardent desire: but turn not away (from a woman) altogether so as to leave her (as it were) hanging (in the air). If you come to a friendly understanding and practice self-restraint Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful."

The dissolution of marriage or divorce is the final termination of a marital union between men and women. In Islamic law, divorce is referred to as *talaq*. Although Islam promises women protection from a husband's propensity to violence for example, the reality in some Muslim women's lives is different. Nevertheless, no one has to remain in those abusive conditions. Thus, divorce is permitted. As Muslim women cannot verbally divorce their husband (unlike the men), they are granted the right to terminate their relationships through the divorce process in the court.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES

Domestic violence is a global issue that affects the lives of millions of women worldwide. The problem cuts across cultural and religious barriers and can impact people of all ages, genders, ethnicities, education levels as well as socio-economic groups. The prevalence of domestic violence in Muslim societies is comparable to that of Western countries. In the Sivas Province of Turkey, for example, the study found that 52 per cent of 583 women were exposed to at least one type of violence. In terms of type of violence, more than half of the participants reported being verbally abused by their partners (Kocacik & Dogan, 2006). Similarly with Khosravizadegan, Azizi, Khosravizadegan & Morvaridi (2008) research, the prevalence of violence in a sample of 100 female adults showed that the majority of the respondents experienced symptoms of physical, behavioural, social and psychological abuse. This cross sectional study also described the resistance of abused women in Iran to disclosing their violence incidents to others, due to matters including shame and embarrassment as well as a lack of knowledge about getting appropriate assistance from service providers.

Soltanifar, Behnam & Moghadam Hoseini (2008) found the highest rate of any form of violence against pregnant women in Iran was sexual abuse. This quantitative study used the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) version to determine the frequency and intensity of intimate partner violence in their sample. There was also a significant correlation between the occurrence of violence and low birth weight (infant) recorded for mothers with domestic abuse experiences. Prior to the above mentioned study, the same instrument was used by Albrithen (2006) to investigate the association between alcoholism and domestic violence in Saudi society. Apart from the Conflict Tactics Scale, the author also employed the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) to determine its relationship. The results showed that a higher level of aggression was evident in husbands with an alcohol problem and several types of abuse were reported to be involved during the violent incidents. It was found that domestic violence among women in Saudi communities was mostly perpetrated by male partners rather than other family members.

In 2013, the role of religion on domestic violence was identified by Hayati, Eriksson, Hakimi, Hogberg and Emmelin. In their study, spiritual framing as well as positive diversion of the self were among coping strategies indicated by women in Indonesia. The results of the study showed that the Javanese women's coping dynamics were multifaceted, in which they struggled against the violence in a spiritual way. The in-depth interviews in rural Purworejo District also found that most women preferred to keep silent about the violence and decided to stay in the relationships because of the difficulty in mobilizing internal and external support to end the abuse. In a similar respect, Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) suggests that women's faith has occasionally been manipulated by the abusers as a result of the silence. The purpose of manipulation is to maintain power and control over the wives. Thus, eventually these women will gradually lack self-confidence and would rather undertake a spiritual form of coping mechanism to deal with the abuse. The same author found that the results of the examination of American Muslim women's experiences can be divided into four stages, namely "reaching the point of saturation", "initiating the divorce process", "facing family and/or community disapproval" and "reclaiming the self" (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001).

In Arab countries such as Egypt, Palestine and Tunisia, the data shows that the occurrence of domestic violence is 1 in 3 women. This problem is largely considered as a private matter and 'punishment' for 'misbehaviour' on the part of the wife. Despite the increasing frequency and its damaging impacts, this social issue is not a matter of major concern (Douki, Nacef, Belhadj, Bouasker & Ghachem, 2003). This is because abusers attempt to justify their actions through the verses from *Qur'an* regarding permission to engage in wife beating. In the Arabs societies, concealing the offences will preserve the honour of the husband as well as for the rest of the family. Actually, this misleading concept was a result of influence on cultural norms and perceptions. In general, these related literatures showed a significant link between women battering with spiritual coping strategies, a high prevalence of violence as well as undisclosed abuse among victims of domestic violence in Muslim societies.

From the Malaysian context, based on the statistics in the year of 2013 sourced from the Royal Malaysia Police and Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development showed that cases of domestic violence are rising every year, as the number increased to 30 per cent higher in 10 years' time (2555 cases recorded in 2003 and 3673 cases in 2013). In terms of service delivery, the provision of Islamic Family Law offers protection to women under section 127 and 128. The sections' details are as follows:

- Ill-treatment of a wife - "Any person who ill-treats his wife or cheats his wife of her property commits an offence and shall be punished with a fine not exceeding one thousand ringgit or with imprisonment not exceeding six months or both." (Section 127)
- Failure to give proper justice to a wife - "Any person who fails to give proper justice to his wife according to *Hukum Sharak* commits an offence and shall be punished with a fine not exceeding one thousand ringgit or with imprisonment not exceeding six months or both." (Section 128)

Although the provisions are meant to safeguard women as well as acknowledge women's position in a marriage, many Malaysian women to date are still unaware of the existence of such provisions thus leaving them vulnerable to the husband's abusive behaviour. Endut (2000) in a study concludes that many women fear the consequences of reporting their husband's violence, hence choosing a reconciliation process as an alternative to resolve the situation. It was found that the prosecution of a person in the *Sharia* Court is not a straight forward process. The exercise of Act 303 under section 127 and 128 for women experiencing domestic violence was entirely appropriate but the possible outcomes of these two sections should have been clearly explained to women. On many occasions, the husbands who were prosecuted under the section 127 (ill-treatment of wife) and 128 (failure to give proper justice

to wife) contested the petition to divorce by using section 129 (*nusyuz*) in which they allege disobedience of their wife to counter the prosecution *Nusyuz* in section 129 refers to:

“Any woman who wilfully disobeys any order lawfully given by her husband according to *Hukum Sharak* commits an offence and shall be punished with a fine not exceeding one hundred ringgit or, in the case of a second or subsequent offence, with a fine not exceeding five hundred ringgit.”

The definitions of ‘disobedient’ include leaving the house without the husband’s permission however in most cases of domestic violence the wife has no other option but to leave the house without the husband’s knowledge. The *nusyuz* petition, however, can be appropriately countered and contested for the case of spousal abuse with supporting documents as evidence of violence which would include the police report, written records of medical examinations and the filing of a complaint regarding a marriage dispute to the Islamic Religious Affairs Department. Nonetheless, the stakes are high for a woman who loses the *nusyuz* case as she may lose the custody of her children, she will not be eligible for any forms of alimonies from the husband and she may be refused the receiving of portions of her matrimonial properties in that present marriage. Therefore, women are advised to understand the rules, regulations as well as related procedures concerning *nusyuz* divorce and to gather all the evidence needed in the case of domestic violence.

## EMERGENCE OF THE THEMES

### The Impact of Wife Abuse: Strengthening the Women’s Self-faith

Based on information provided by the participants during the interviews, subthemes of the spiritual impact of domestic violence on abused women are categorized as the ‘desire to be closer to Allah S.W.T’ and also ‘accepting the *qadr*’.

#### 1) Subtheme - Desire to be closer to Allah S.W.T

A few participants revealed that they searched for meaning of the problem through their religious beliefs. It was found that the women grew in faith as they responded to the violence experiences. Many of them engaged in spiritual practices to channel their suffering and seeking Allah’s help. Yan and Siti expressed their feelings about searching emotional comfort and inner strength:

*“It’s hard for others to see me like this but can’t compare to what I actually had gone through. All I could do is to turn to Allah Almighty and seek Allah’s help. If I tell to people, they will only spread the story to others. But if I tell to Allah no one will know. Allah will surely help me”.* (Yan)

*“Whenever I perform ‘Solat’, I will ask from Allah and sometimes do Zikr, “Oh! Allah Almighty, help me to remain in composure and let no worries come to me. My children are all that I care most. Give me the strength to get through it all. Oh! Allah”.* That is all that I wish for at the end of each prayer”. (Siti)

Domestic violence also impacted the women’s lives in terms of the way they perceived personal experiences of violence and benefited from religious faith. Overall, the women thought that these depressing experiences somehow had a positive side to them.

*“Ustaz advised me to go back to the teachings of Islam. All this while I was far deviated and this maybe the consequence. I willingly accept my fate that we will end up in divorce. That would be best for me and my children. Allah will help us through*

*if Allah is willing. I felt so much composure when I perform Solah and read the Quran". (Junaidah)*

*"At first I thought this world had been unfair to me. I have a husband who is a wife-beater and a drunkard. As days goes by, I've learned to accept my fate and face the fact. Allah had bestowed long lasting strength upon me. I do a lot of prayers". (Baizura)*

*"Alhamdulillah, there is a reason why all these had happened to me. It made me drew closer to Allah. Now, I would never neglect to perform my prayers five times a day. I also perform 'Solat Hajat' to seek Allah's guidance and pray for the safety of my children". (Ikin)*

In addition, Patimah asserted that prayer helped her to be stronger, more devoted and continue steadfastly in spite of difficulties in her marital life. A similar account was narrated by Rizzi who is *mualaf*, a new Muslim convert, (Buddhist by birth). As explained by them:

*"I do a lot of prayers and those are the reasons behind the strength that I have now. If not because of it I would have mentally gone out of my mind. Let Allah know it all because only Allah can help us. Alhamdulillah, I am stronger now". (Patimah)*

*"Our daily lives should be guided by the rules according to Islam. We have to fully observe it. Although I am a new Islam converter but I learned how to perform prayers read the Quran and recite 'doa'. I have learned more about Islam". (Rizzi)*

## 2) *Subtheme - Accepting the Qadr*

By the same token, spirituality and religious beliefs had given these women a sense of accepting their fate in life. Accepting *qadr*, an Islamic term meaning one should accept Allah's decree with an open heart, and being patient regarding such tests. Being *Muslimah*, participants in the study demonstrated how they accepted destiny and believed in the provisions of Allah S.W.T.

*"No one would want to have problems like this, but it is our destiny. The 'qada' and 'qadr' had been determined. I submit myself to Allah. Let Allah do all the punishment that he deserved. If it is not in this world, let it be in the world after". (Nuri)*

*"We cannot regret to what had happened to us. Those are Allah's 'qada' and 'qadr'. I submit myself entirely to Allah. I accept all the tests given by Allah to me". (Nor)*

*"I had neither put the blame on my children nor my grandchildren. Nor had I put the blame on anyone else. This is Allah's 'qada' and 'qadr'. I tried to accept it all although it's bitter. There is always a blessing in disguise". (Zawiyah)*

From the perspective of battered Muslim women, living in an abusive relationship has made them search deeper into their inner-self, their beliefs and their faith. The research findings showed that many of these abused women participants had subjected themselves to religious observance in order to ease stress as well as to find inner peace. This brought back the motivation to continue with their daily lives through a spiritual connection with Allah S.W.T.

### **Barrier to Disclosing Violence: Misconception about the Idea of 'A Good Wife'**

The thematic findings in this study indicated that women's accounts pertinent to barriers of disclosing domestic violence incidents involve misunderstanding of religious tenets. In the

interviews with the participants, it was clear that women were inhibited in disclosing their violence experiences out of the ignorant reasons.

### **1) Subtheme - Being an obedient and faithful wife**

According to Islam, there is a significant principal that associates the husband and wife relationship. For the Muslims, it is thought that 'a woman's heaven is beneath her husband's feet' in which this belief in fact has made disclosing partner violence even more complicated among Muslim women. Many interviewees in this study concurred that they have to be patient while enduring the partner's abusive behaviours. It was because of their goal to be a good and obedient wife towards the husband. The examples herewith of the excerpts from the women interviewed:

*"I do not have the strength to fight him. If I do that, he is going to say that I am an un-loyal wife. I can never get the taste of paradise. He reminds me quite often that a wife's paradise depends on the husband's blessing... I became weak. He knows how to play around with words".* (Rosy)

*"I kept my patience throughout the time I was abused. It was patience...and more patience. I had to bear with my husband's attitude for many years. I am unable to fight him back. I had to follow his ways. Sometimes I nag at him. If I fight him back, I will have to endure his beating".* (Aton)

*"I want to be a good wife... loyal to my husband. I sincerely want to be a good wife to him and a good mother to my children. However, it didn't turn out to be as such. I tried to be patience hoping that someday he will change and be a better person. That is why I have hold on to this marriage relationship for so long".* (Izhan)

Wan and Patimah added:

*"Each time I was beaten, it hurts so much. He went out of his mind when he was angry. I told my children to stay inside the room. I am used to his behaviour now, that I take no notice of him. My mother advised me not to go against my husband if I want to be in paradise. That is the only reason that made me stay on with him for many years".* (Wan)

*"If I object him, he would say that I have been rebellious towards him. When I kept quiet, he would say that I am like a log. It made me confused. As women, our paradise lies with our husbands. The thought of making a police report when he abused me had often occurred in my mind. But it is so difficult for me to talk about things like that".* (Patimah)

### **2) Subtheme - Fear of being nusyuz**

Besides trying to be obedient wives to their husbands, these women also imagined the problems they may create if they choose to report the incidents to the authorities (i.e. Islamic Religious Affairs Department). This refers to *nusyuz* allegation. The term *nusyuz* means the inability to obey the wishes or commands of the husband and that includes when she leaves home without the husband's permission. Therefore, with many occasions of domestic violence cases in *Sharia* court, the husband in fact files a petition of *nusyuz* against the wife.

*"Another reason why we hesitate to come forward and ask for help is because we are afraid that our husbands would declare us as disobedient wife. Leaving our home without permission would lead to being disobedient. In a court of law, if a woman has been proven to be disobedient, she has to return and obey her husband. Our problems will not get solved".* (Ikin)

*“Like what I’ve said before, the officers at the Religious Department more often side with men. There was an ustazah at the Religious Department who told me about the issue of ‘nusyuz’ (disobedient wife). She said that if we do not obey our husband we will be in the category of ‘nusyuz’ “. (Zara)*

A story from an interviewee named Ain:

*“There are many issues that are brought up when we get into a fight. He said that I was a slut who works in night clubs and things like that. At that time I was not married. I cease to work there anymore after I got married. He threatened me by saying that I was a bad woman and that no one will ever believe me. He said that I was ‘nusyuz’. When I asked Puan Tina (a social worker at the shelter home) she said that ‘nusyuz’ is applicable on matters that are against the teaching of Islam. It doesn’t cover all matters. I am confused about it because I do not have a strong religious understanding”. (Ain)*

The question remains: to what extent will the husband’s abusive behaviour be safely hidden by the view of domestic violence as a marital affair? Furthermore, Islamic teaching does not condone any form of violence against women. Misapprehension regarding concepts where women have to be obedient to their husbands is clearly visible in the context of this study. Thus, external factors such as the intervention by professionals may play a major part in encouraging abused women to overcome the issue of unreported cases of domestic violence in Malaysia.

During the interviews, the women expressed their frustration regarding negative stereotypes together with social stigma that was attached to abusive relationships disclosure. Due to the influence of cultural perceptions in the societal context, women generally do not dare to speak against domestic violence. They feared that others would not believe their stories, discredit them as being a “disobedient wife”, labelled by others as “nusyuz”, not to mention that the women certainly would be very worried if the others blamed them for causing their husband’s violence. It was found that the women’s sense of confidence was undermined, as the stigma around revealing the abuse will result on the focus of her disclosure rather than their partner’s violence behaviour.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### The Spiritual Impact of Wife Abuse

The findings of this study indicate that participants perceived the situation of domestic violence as strengthening their self-faith. *Desire to be closer to Allah S.W.T* emerged as an important element in the way these women believed their faith was growing. The participants utilised religious practices such as prayers, *dhikr* (chanting the greatness of Allah), perform ‘*solat*’ and reciting the *Qur’an* to establish connections with Allah. At a personal level, women highlighted the significance of seeking spiritual resources for emotional comfort and inner self-resilience subsequent to accepting their *qadr*.

In the context of abusive relationships, Muslim women should attempt to change their current situation by getting help from others. Although it seems that they may accept their *qadr* of marrying an abusive husband, they should also move their lives towards better conditions. Besides resolving the problem through prayers and *solat*, efforts should be made in order to create an ‘abuse-free home’ for instance by disclosing the violence for further assistance. Equally, Allah also prohibits humans from so-called ‘not doing anything’ towards the matter that can harm (*mudharat*) them in one way or another. This prohibition is most

appropriate under domestic violence circumstances where reluctance in disclosing the abuse may cause great danger, for example in suicide or thoughts of suicide cases.

Somehow, it is interesting to note that many of women participants in this study had reflected these depressing experiences in a positive manner. For some, they perceived that such tests have brought back their motivation to surrender to Allah's providence. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that for a few abused women interviewed, it was a long process until they finally accepted their unfortunate fate within their marriage. Another important finding was that some of the participants reported consulting with experts for religious advice (with or without disclosing the abuse) whilst some women learned the Islamic teachings on their own through books and so forth. This finding of the current study is consistent with those of McIntosh, Silver and Wortman (1993) as well as Drescher (2013), who suggested the utilization of spirituality for improving individual health and psychological well-being.

In a study by McIntosh *et al.* (1993), the authors found that religious participation was significantly related to perceived social support of parents who had lost a child. More to the point, it was demonstrated that religious participation has also been associated with finding the meaning of the child's death among the respondents. There were 124 parents who had lost a child due to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome included as a sample within the study. Taken as a whole, the research concluded that religious participation together with religious importance felt by the participants was in some way related to an individual's well-being, where these parent's distress levels showed a gradual reduction over a period of time following the bereavement. Similarly, Watlington and Murphy (2006) found that there was a significant correlation between religious involvement, religious coping as well as spiritual experiences with symptoms of depression and posttraumatic stress among battered African American women in the US. It was reported that high spirituality was associated with less depression in battered women. The study also concludes that the black church in general has played an important role in the lives of African American women.

A direct comparison between the findings obtained in other cultures such as the African American community and this particular study in Malaysia showed that abused Muslim women in the study search for the meaning of such 'tests' to build their self-confidence in relation to Allah's power. One unanticipated finding was that many participants in the study considered the abusive relationship as one of *qadr* which is destined to cause their journey back to Allah. Participants also believed that there are always blessings in disguise for what has happened in their lives. As with the African American community, the women turn to spirituality in their search for finding strength to cope with the situation, as well as healing, and taking an exit from abusive relationships. In other words, the African American survivors seek the religion and the church for strength, solace, support and assistance (Gillum, 2009). In a qualitative study by Potter (2007) it was found that spiritual practices among 40 African American domestic violence survivors was utilized in their efforts to cope with and/or getting out of violent relationships, whereas Gillum's study in 2008 showed spirituality as a healing process utilised in order to overcome and cope with the abuse experience.

### **The Reason Why Women Choose to Stay in Abusive Relationships**

Describing from the context of Malaysia, the Malay ethnic in particular views their cultural perspective in association with Islamic religion (Che Soh, 2010). Marriage is seen as a sacred covenant with certain obligations to fulfil between husband and wife so as to achieve balance and harmony within the family. Nonetheless, the misuse of the revelation from some verses in the Holy *Qur'an* had justified irresponsible Muslim men to cause violence to their wives. As for the women, they sometimes were manipulated and believed that the disclosure of private marital matters is inappropriate as well as a sign of disobedience towards the husband. The



example of related verses stated in the *Qur'an* and *hadith* that are usually misinterpreted by people;

- The husband has absolute rights over the wife:  
 “Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth...” (Qur'an 4:34)
- The wife must obey and being respectful to the husband:  
 “If I were to command a single person to bow in prostration to another person, I could have commanded a woman to bow down (in obedience and respect, not in worship) to her husband.” (Abu Daawood)
- The husband's honour should be preserved at all time:  
 “The best woman is the one who when you look at her, you are pleased; when you order her, she obeys; if you are absent from her, she guards herself and your property.” (At-Tabarani)

Although some South Asian studies had mentioned perceptions of being a ‘good’ wife (Jayasuriya, Wijewardena & Axemo, 2011; Zakar, Zakar & Kraemer, 2013), refusing to disclose abuse because of *nusyuz* allegations has not previously been described. The reason for this is not clear but it may have something to do with Islamic family laws enforced in the country. Within this legal provision, a husband may file a *nusyuz* petition over the wife's divorce's application. It is a common circumstance for the defendant (the husband) to counter-petition the plaintiff's (the wife's) application when a domestic violence case is initiated. If the domestic violence case has been proven, the wife may then be granted with the divorce by the *Sharia* court. Otherwise, a *nusyuz* petition may overrule the divorce petition and the court may ask the women to obey the husband's command (called ‘*perintah kembali taat*’). As a result, many women are reluctant to be involved in such stressful and tedious proceedings.

## Conclusion

The results of this study indicate the importance of education on violence against women at the societal level. Due to their ignorance, many of these abused women seem to be trapped in violence relationships and feel unable to escape. Therefore, it is vital to educate adult women in general about the seriousness of this crime through various means. Society as a whole also needs to be aware of how unacceptable domestic violence is and adopt a zero tolerance policy toward this matter.

Further, knowledge education about women's rights, gender equality, religious concepts pertinent to violence behaviour, male-female role attitudes as well as the availability and access to domestic violence service provisions would be beneficial to all women. The evidence obtained here also highlights the value of research that provides an opportunity for abused women to express their feelings as well as sharing their stories with the purpose of making other people better understand their violence experiences. It is clear from this research that the context of religious beliefs among Muslim society plays an important role in determining how these abused women perceived their experiences of violence in a relationship.

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