

Integration of Muslim Women in the Canadian Community
A Socio-Anthropological Study on Violence Towards Muslim Women
“Study in London Ontario”

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1-Introduction

In this research I aim to find out the extent to which Canadian Muslim women are subjected to violence. I will do so by examining the sources of this violence, the socio- cultural factors emitted through migrant diverse cultures and through the Quran and the *Sunna* (the sayings and practices of the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) and finally through social upbringing.

I have reviewed previous studies on this issue and through the results of a series of personal interviews, I will attempt to clarify the degrees of violence working from the hypothesis that the violence which Muslim women are subjected to is one of the key factors behind their lack of integration in Canadian society.

The study focuses on the major factors in situations of violence:

- Cultural and social factors, and violence against women.
- The Islamic doctrine and the status of Muslim women.
- Violence and methods of social upbringing.

One factor which I consider fundamental to the violence committed against Muslim women in Canadian society is the degree to which the latter receives and accepts the culture of the other in general and Islamic culture in particular. I have chosen to exclude this however, since the proper examination of such an issue would require a research project of its own.

A- Choice of Sample:

In light of the method of study and its aims, two kinds of samples have been chosen: 1. A sample representative of the general Public which includes a number of Muslim women of various ages who have immigrated to London from different places and at different times. The sample has been chosen randomly and takes into consideration differences in education, age, profession, and economic and social standards. 2. Sample of the Elite: The 'Elite' sample includes a number of leading men and women in the community, individuals who have worked with victims of violence.

B-Research Aims:

The research is designed to identify the positions of individuals in both samples on the phenomenon of violence, its spread against Muslim women and its effect on their alienation from Canadian society. The study will reveal the common factors that describe certain behavioural situations as violent.

I met the interviewees in groups and individually. Some questions were specifically addressed to the elite group; some to the public sample and some were addressed to both groups.

2- Research Theory, Methods and Tools

A-Theory:

- 1- the Action Anthropology theory.
- 2- Structural functionalism theory.

B-Research Methods:

Several research methodologies were used:

- 1-Descriptive Ethnological Method.
- 2-Comparative Method.
- 3-Historical Method.

C-Research Tools:

- 1 Participant Observation.
- 2 The Sample.
- 3 Interviews.

3-Research Concepts:

A-Violence:

The definitions of violence vary, but they all emphasize ideas of extremism, damage, physical strength and psychological and mental conflict between unequal forces.

B- Social Integration:

Societies should produce social behaviour that aims to overcome discrepancy and division towards social solidarity. Societies must adopt a number of regulations to welcome a new member among its ranks and ease the process of acceptance.

C-Status:

A recurrent fact is that every person is expected to behave according to a type of social behaviour that stems from their social status. People gain their status in two ways. 1. At birth without effort on part of the person. And 2. Through the many competitive opportunities achieved through personal effort.

The social status of women is affected greatly by social upbringing and the inherited family values, norms, and traditions.

D-Role:

The concept of role (a combination of behaviours, rights & obligations) is fundamentally linked to the concept of status. Roles are divided into two categories: active, and intrinsic.¹

The continuity and survival of any society depends on the roles of its individuals which are intertwined with the base economic and distributive structure. These individual roles are greatly affected by gender.² The position of women in a group can be defined by what this local position and status ascribes to them of certain behavioural patterns.³

E-Social Upbringing:

The process of social upbringing is highly influential on children because it is fundamentally responsible for character formation. Social upbringing occurs through several mediums, the most important of which is family. **The influence** of the family will be reflected positively or negatively in the character of the children and their behaviour.

F-Development:

When we look at the term "development" in this context we mean the degrees to which something passes to a different stage – from a simple state to a more complex state; an unfolding. This can be allowed to happen provided there are no obstructions or hindrances that prevent this natural "unfolding".

The main obstacle to the development process as I see it, is exploitation in any form and at every level: one society's exploitation of another or one group's exploitation of another inside the same society, or men's exploitation of women. The meaning of exploitation here is when one entity divests another of the latter's characteristic opportunity of developing its contained potential.

G-Cultural and Religious Values:

Every group of people, regardless of its size, owns a set of absolute values which affect and are affected by the behaviour of its members. These values are accompanied by a system of common standards or rules which elucidate the values and work as a motivating force towards a set goal.⁴

¹ Fredrik Barth, "Process and Form in Social Life", Op. Cit., P. 36.

² Janet Zollinger Giele "Women and Future" (Changing sex Roles in Modern America) The Free Press (A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York. Collier Macmillan Publishers London, 1980 PP.2.3.

³ Noha Fahmy, "The National Review of Social Sciences", in the National Center for Social and Criminological research, January, May, September, 1980, P.5.

⁴ Alvin Pertrand, "Introduction in rural sociology" Alvin Pertrand, ed., McGraw Hill book Company, 1985, PP.3:50, P.37.

4. Now that I have explained the main concepts used in the research, I will address the three major points in this study:

A. Cultural and Social Factors and Violence Against Women:

In discussing the image of women in any Islamic society, we must speak of the factors that lie behind a reality *unrelated* to religious heritage. It is really a product of inherited values and ideas. Because the concept of culture is vast, deep and linked to individual mentality, culture is involved in all aspects of life and has a great effect on the formation of the image of women in society.

The social Anthropologist Ahmed Abu Zeid, use the word 'culture' with such wide variation that it encompasses almost all of the achievements of the human brain; everything spoken, done, thought of, or acquired by man, including habits, traditions, behaviour, and societal values.⁵

Violence is not instinctive but socially acquired, and is motivated by a number of objective factors intrinsic in the culture of the society in which the individual lives.

One interviewee stated that: "Muslim societies in particular witness a defect of all kinds: economic, political, cultural, and social, and these make the appearance of violence of every kind inevitable."

We cannot separate what is happening in one's homeland from one's new life in Canada. New immigrants arrive here, bringing their memories of violence and sufferings. Iraqi refugees are a tragic and clear example of this.

On being asked about the factors that increase the tendency towards violence, the Mosque sheikh (The religious intellect) answered: "The reasons are many and varied and differ from one place to another and from one family to another. In a country with raging war, children and youth will generally be affected by this violence. In another country, poverty and need will cause violence because of the psychological pressure and nervous crises resulting from the difficulty of bringing food to the table. In contrast, wealth and the search for fame may be a reason for violence in other place.

A highly-educated middle-aged female interviewee states: The culture of Arab societies is a highly patriarchal one that is often supported by a legal code which makes women life-long minors. With men as their guardians, women remain the weaker sex for life.'

The Islamic advocate speaks of violence against women, "One of the examples that come to mind is the violence that may transfer from father to son. When the son marries, he treats his wife in the same way that he has seen his father treat his mother. Another equally scary and painful phenomenon is when the older son incites the same violence on his mother that he has seen his father use. This is a very painful phenomenon that

⁵ Ahmed Abu Zeid, "Hawiyat al-thaqafa al-'rabiyya", al-shirka al-dawlia lil-tiba'a, 6th of October City, P. 14.

needs to be examined, especially given that the violence used within the family has nothing to do with religion. It has been inherited, past down if you will, from their families in their land of origin. Some of them think that this treatment of wives is necessary to enforce Islam within the family. Others think that if they do not adopt this method then the family will never be brought up properly which would mean chaos and negligence. This irreligiousness they have learned from a society and culture which has taught them that woman will never be virtuous unless they are abused.”

If we consider Muslims living in London, Ontario, many fear that they must change some of their original culture. The danger, as one specialist researcher in the field puts it, is greater than in the homeland: “We live here as a minority, and any society generally attempts to preserve the traditions and customs of the group.”

When asked how Muslim families can deal with the structure and culture of a completely new society, the researcher adds: “This makes the family often defensive about their cultural values in this new place. I think this is quite a dangerous situation. We often find that mothers and sons can place more pressure on the daughters of the family than they normally would have in their own homeland, in order to protect their ‘reputation.’ This is an imaginary and unreal fear that sometimes leads to cruel and unnecessary measures. This pushes the girls, especially adolescents, to rebel, who makes parents act more harshly, creating a vicious cycle.”

On the division of roles in the family, the researcher notes: ‘The boy performs the role of the head of the family, and to some degree acts as a moral guardian. He may dismiss the fact that many Muslim boys have girlfriends as he hypocritically forbids his sisters to go out with boys. When you raise boys and girls according to double moral standards, they become unequal, and this leads to increasing girls’ fear. It may tempt boys to use violence in the future, a violence that may have even been sanctioned by the father or the mother.’

Participants from all samples agree, the more advanced a society is, the larger women’s participation in the development process and the stronger her image as an effective participant in development. This can be a starting tool for change towards a culture that is fair to women.

Interviewees stressed that work and social development is an integral aim for their daughters, ‘Responsibilities towards the house and children have to be put into consideration too.’

The Islamic advocate discusses the kinds of violence common in London, Ontario, saying: “Psychological violence is almost as common as physical violence. For example, a woman is from one society and a man is from another. His mother insists that he marry a girl from their original homeland –someone brought up with beliefs similar to his mother’s culture and beliefs. Someone who would also tolerate his behaviour in the same way his mother

tolerated her husbands' behaviour. He complies and the girl travels to Canada and discovers a completely different society from what she has been used to. The man then leaves the girl to fend for herself while he lives his life to the fullest, as they say, and does not approach her physically. This abandonment is a type of psychological violence."

As the imam puts it: "Most Muslims have come from disturbed and unbalanced countries suffering from social, economic, political, cultural and scientific crises. We have a lot of problems and a long journey towards awareness, advice and guidance. We should consider the many intellectuals, thinkers and academics among us and realise that the presence of violence does not mean its inevitability in every household and every family."

Folklore and cultural inheritances, one of the important factors in defining cultural structure, plays a major role in creating prejudice and sexism between men and women. This is the most important and dangerous kinds of violence which Muslim women face.

Popular culture is an influential factor in stereotyping the image of women, and this is reflected in common sayings and proverbs that are even lengthened into myths and tales passed down from one generation to another. As reflected in popular culture, the image of women appears as broken, and reduced in value to the value of the man, and useless without him.

An Arabic idiom is: the shadow of a man is better than the shadow of a wall –even of course, if the man happens to be unsuitable for the woman.

Many women admit that men are indeed decision makers, but acknowledge that smart women can influence a man to convince him that a decision was his from the beginning.

Muslim women today are the most common victims of violence, not only because of their retardation of growth in the education system which prevents professional and administrative promotions, but also because they are viewed by man and some women as "less" than men. A view that women were born for breeding and breast feeling only. It's this kind of view that strips women of the power to do great things.

One of the interviewees, a woman in her twenties, states that if women go out to work, their ability to comprehend, learn, and give inside the house only increases. Work develops sound judgement and the ability to make decisive choices.

Another woman in her forties declares: "The culture of our homeland forbids any role for girls except as wives and home makers. Girls are allowed education and work only to make them more eligible and on the condition that they do not interfere with her primary duties in serving the husband and taking care of the children."

A social specialist working in London told me: 'I gave my girl the freedom to choose where to study and to travel if she wanted to, and rented a flat for

her to stay in. A year later her brother joined her because he had coincidentally chosen the same place. During the first years of study, you should be careful and strict with them, but at university level we become only guides because they have reached a point where then can make their own choices and bear the consequences.'

Another woman, a professor specialist in the same field sees that fear for their girls in Canada controls all parents, and the attempt to keep them away from a new society is a precautionary measure to keep them out of harm. She adds, "But I do not see that this fear can be a scapegoat for all violence committed against girls. I don't think anyone accepts violence. The wrongly accused tries to find a justification for the unfairness from a psychological angle, and often realize that their worst enemy is themselves. Many people erase any negative impact of their acceptance of violence."

A woman from the elite sample stressed that, "the participation of Muslim women is evident in Islamic heritage. Effort must be made to spread awareness of women's roles in Islamic culture in order for society to progress towards a new civilisation based on the implementation of the Islamic doctrine within the family."

Managing the house, bringing up children and taking care of the husband are responsibilities that cause women to neglect their interest in cultural life or pursue the level of knowledge that enables them to understand their rights and or violation thereof.

The social specialist reports: "We were given the same chance for education as men in the family, but at the same time we were obliged to take charge of meals and laundry for our brothers. This is our culture. When a boy grows up and gets married, he does not feel that he has to help because he has become used to taking and not giving. No feelings of support or aid have been nourished in him."

In many Islamic communities, including that in London, Ontario, the women's name is not mentioned in speech, in keeping with custom. Women are referred to instead as '*Umm* so and so' (the mother of so and so). In most Islamic countries, the name referred to must be male, by order of birth. If the woman has no sons, the name of the father is used. I have no sons for example, so I am referred to as *Umm Helmi*, (the mother of Helmi), which is my father's name. They do not refer to me as *Umm Shahinda*, which is my eldest daughter's name. In this manner, not only are women stripped of their simplest rights –the right to say their name and take pride in it –but the presence of girls are completely ignored.

Islam itself has treated women with respect, and gave her the right to be called by her own name. As the Prophet Mohamed used to refer to his daughter by her name, saying 'Fatima al-Zahraa.' And when they asked the Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) "who is the wife nearest to your heart?" he said "Asha".

I received many contradictory comments about this issue. Some people thought that 'it is not proper to pronounce a woman's name in front of strangers.' Another found that 'this is done only out of respect for a woman, and not to hide the woman's name. A woman in her 30s stated: "What angers me most is to strip women of their name and entity, for as soon as they become 'mother of someone.' they cease to become the 'someone' or person which they were."

One woman thinks that 'the practice may end with our children, at whom point mentioning the name of the woman may be a normal matter. The younger Islamic figures of today like, Moez Massoud, Mustafa Husni, Ahmed El Shukeiri and even Amr Khaled have no problems using their wives names when broadcasting in Saudi Arabia. I don't think the new generation will be as rigid as the old.'

In discussing the most important cultural aspects which marginalize women and obstruct their integration into society and their development, we must mention one of the most influential factors that affect the awareness of individuals, and that can give an impact on behaviour patterns, values, and habits. I refer here to the media.

Effectively, the image of women as reflected by the media is part of the popular ideology which controls Islamic societies, which in turn stems from official state authority. As William Schram puts it, there is no such thing as one viewpoint for the state and another for the media; there is a single ideology that defines the general path of state and media.⁶

On asking one member of the elite sample, the Islamic advocate, about the role of the media in spreading or eliminating violence, he replied: "This is not the only subject where the media is 'active', and I don't use the word active because it has positive connotations but rather because I blame the media directly in deeply intensifying many issues, among which is family violence. The media adds to the fray and blows out of proportion. Even though the media is a communicator, if it focused on communicating, then the result would have been totally different."

Official state ideology for Islamic countries takes the form of violence against women, and does not admit to their roles in the development, politics or decision making that contributes to the violence. Through its media, it supports and stresses traditional values and relations between men and women in society and family, which, in the end, serves to endlessly rebuild the same power struggle between both. Such ideologies are undoubtedly untrue, and work to fabricate both reality and awareness.

One woman states: "We have become used to seeing certain tasks performed by one gender or another and people accept this because it is what they have become used to. Men are portrayed as performing male-

⁶ Awatif Abd El Rahman, *Surat al-mar'a fi-l i'lam al-'arabi*, 1981, P. 26.

driven roles and appear as mechanics, engineers, drivers, political party member, etc. While women are restricted to nursing, teaching, secretarial & other jobs which have been traditionally been assigned to women."

On the role of the media, the mosque imam declares: "Our religion is full of verses and sayings on how to avoid violating other people's rights or injuring their humanity. Humans are creatures blessed from God, and it is forbidden to insult God's creatures or violate them or harm them in any way "God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion".

A woman in her early thirties remarks: "Women have different responsibilities throughout the day. She is responsible for cleaning the house, preparing food and helping children with their homework. We often hear of how short time is for the amount of things women need to do at home. She is the first person to wake up in the morning and the last to go to bed, and so she finds no time to take on any other responsibility outside the house."

Because each role a woman has carries its own duties and responsibilities which may contradict with the other, women often feel they have no time to multitask. This is one of the most important reasons behind women's lack of success in many fields compared to that of men in the same fields: the lack of time, not incapability.

A specialist who works with abused women states that, "The form of violence which is most spread is family violence. Families come here bearing inherited customs and traditions especially about marriage, as if the whole world revolves around the husband: his wife and children revolve around him, and when he speaks everyone must obey. When coming here, women start to realise their rights and when the tables are turned, the men use abnormal violence. One woman in London, pushed to the extreme, called the police. Despite her reluctance she needed to assert herself, and be allowed out of the house to pursue her own goals. With the intervention of specialists, it worked. She now teaches and this would not have happened had she not turned outside the home for help."

The Islamic advocate states speaking on the violence, "Someone who doesn't know the figures may think that the move to a country with less of such problems may repress the problem in a way that wouldn't happen in the homeland, but in my academic experience, I see that this kind of violence is not limited to a certain class, but it is spread at an incredible rate between non-Muslims and non-Arabs in general to an extent and degree that in several cases the women have to be hospitalised."

On the integration of Muslim women inside Canadian society in London, the Imam says: "Many Muslim women are in universities and in the workplace. Many have degrees and high academic profiles. This does not mean, that we are a community, with no problems. Violence may cause

some families to isolate themselves and hide away, but these cases are few and rare. In my view, many of the cases of lack of integration don't emerge from violence but have emerged from the popular stereotypes of Islam, and Muslim men and women- especially after, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Taliban. What the media have made of these, which has popularised the broken image Muslim women of the twenty first century and in the Islamic world from East to West."

The Islamic advocate professed that violence against Muslim women is one of the reasons behind their lack of integration but it is not the only one: "There are many reasons that obstruct the effective integration of Muslim women in the bigger social unit in London, such as language and shyness ('feminine' shyness that emanates from the culture of the homeland). Moreover, many of these women have learned from their mothers that institutions, conferences and forums are men's, not women's domain. Women are also prevented from participating in social development. Also, the new reality created for Muslim's after September 11 has created an atmosphere of fear of participating in Canadian society, lest their integration be viewed in a negative way. These are some of the things that should be dealt with if we want Muslim women to integrate in Canadian society."

Women should not stand helpless, but should create emancipation movements and attempt to change society's view of Muslim women. The movement should include goals which seek to achieve equality between the sexes in different aspects of life and assurance of fair treatment.

It should be clear that women do not naturally shy away from work and social participation but there are obstructions in the shape of customs, traditions and social organisations that stand in the way of women's progress. Many Muslim women have overcome these obstacles and have succeeded in all areas of life.

b- Islamic Teachings and the Status of Women in Islam:

International institutions have become aware over the past decades of the dangers of gender violence that causes or may cause physical, sexual or psychological violence to women But Quran texts have shown and clarified the status of decent morals and behaviour through treatment for about fifteen centuries. One of the examples of decent morals in Islam is the prohibition of violence against women.

Historically men shone as heroes either in the field of battle and self-sacrifice or on the call to worship but, women did the same.

Large numbers of women were called to Islam, explained its ideas, spread its culture and taught the tenants of the new creed and its laws. Others studied it deeply and started Islamic schools to narrate the teachings of the Prophet, and were later quoted as authorised narrative sources.

The gap between theory and application in all fields makes us realize what most noble minds have conjured of progressive values of freedom of all kinds; all are just theory but lack the practical application. The same applies to Islam, which embodies great ideological theories, but the problem lies with the practice of its followers.

The first thing done in Islam, to emphasise the dignity of women was to show the evil of men's hatred for daughters and happiness at having been given sons. The Quran says:

"When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people, because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain it on (sufferance and) contempt, or bury it in the dust? Ah! what an evil (choice) they decide on!"⁷

"When news is brought to one of them of (the birth of) what he sets up as a likeness to (God) Most Gracious, his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief!"⁸

"Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin."⁹

"When the female (infant), buried alive, is questioned/ For what crime she was killed".¹⁰

"Lost are those who slay their children, from folly, without knowledge, and forbid food which God hath provided for them, inventing (lies) against God. They have indeed gone astray and heeded no guidance".¹¹

"O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife [Hawwa (Eve)], and from them both He created many men and women".¹²

As a legislative system, Islam visualised the correct treatment of male and female children, considering them both equal, and equally a gift from God. As the Quran says: "To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates what He wills (and plans). He bestows (children) male or female according to His Will (and Plan)/ Or He bestows both males and females, and He leaves barren whom He will: for He is full of Knowledge and Power".¹³

In the Dark Ages, the time when a newborn girl was buried alive in a coffin, one of the aims of Islam was to eliminate the negative view of the birth of a baby girl, and condition Muslims according to new principles. Islam

⁷ Surat al- Nahl, 59-59.

⁸ Surat al-Zakhruf, 17.

⁹ Surat al-Isra', 31.

¹⁰ Surat al-Takwir, 8-9.

¹¹ Surat al-An'am, 140.

¹² Surat al-Nisa', 1.

¹³ Surat al-Shura, 49-50.

emerged as a correction of the oppressive circumstances in which women lived, and secured their positions in society as counterparts of men. The sexes were given equal rights to a secure and dignified life as desired by God for all his human creations.

Quran stories also feature women who have left a far greater legacy than many sons. At the forefront is Mariam Bint Umran, whom God chose and blessed over all the women of the two world.

The imam commented on this by saying: "We believe sincerely of what came in God's book, that God swore by the figs and olives that He created human beings (male and female) in the best form, that is, in the best shape and countenance and at the highest nobility of spirit. We must believe God, as He says: 'we have honoured the sons of Adam' (al-nisa, 70). The word "honoured" here refers to the ability to amass knowledge and to use speech. It also refers to being touched by the spirit of God."

Islam treated both sexes equally, and made a point of forbidding the transgression of this balance by making it one of the biggest sins that go against the favouring He has bestowed on human beings.

Other texts stress this equality. The Lord says:

O mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single Person, created, of like nature, His mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women;- Fear God, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (That bore you): for God ever watches over you.¹⁴

And whoever does righteous good deeds, male or female, and is a true believer in the Oneness of Allah (Muslim), such will enter Paradise and not the least injustice, even to the size of a *Naqira* (speck on the back of a date-stone), will be done to them.¹⁵

"They are *Libas* [i.e. body cover, or screen, or *Sakan*, (i.e. you enjoy the pleasure of living with her - as in Verse 7:189) *Tafsir At-Tabari*], for you and you are the same for them."¹⁶

The meaning and significance of all these verses are clear in the equality they accord men and women. It can easily be discerned that there are physiological differences that were not considered a basis for difference by Islam. What is clear from the verses is the presence of an equal complementary status between the sexes, such as in the last quoted verse.

The Lord says: "O mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single Person."¹⁷ Equality in humanity entails equality in all rights related to the trait of being human: the taboos of blood, honour, money and dignity- the dignity accorded by Islam and declared by the

¹⁴ Suort al-nisa', 1.

¹⁵ Suort al Nisa ,124.

¹⁶ Surat al-paqarraah ,187.

¹⁷ Suart al-Nisa', 1.

Prophet to be for all people. As the Quran says: "We have honoured the sons [children; my addition] of Adam."¹⁸ Men and women are both the children of Adam.

There is a verse in the Quran that describes men as the guardians of women in the sense that they provide financial, moral and emotional support. Some use this verse against Islam and point out that it degrades the status of women. I interpret this as, some men, not all of them, are guardians of some women. At the same time, some women could be the guardians of men if they provide the same kind of support.

This makes sense because as some men have positive traits, others have negative ones, and the positive traits some women have, others lack. Privilege cannot be intrinsic to human nature, otherwise any liar or pervert male is intrinsically better than the Virgin Mary, of whom the text describes as having been chosen and purified above all the women of the two worlds. Or any male would be better, by nature, than Musa's mother, and the Pharaoh's wife who were mentioned in the Quran.

"As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): For God is Most High, Great (above you all)."¹⁹

The Imam adds: 'The permissibility of beating here has been refuted by *hadiths*, such as that which prohibits the beating of the daughters of God, and that which states that the Prophet never hit a woman. Even if permitted, beating is not encouraged, otherwise the Prophet would have beat his wives in allegiance to God's will. The alternative to beating is divorce, and that is also permissible in Islam.

In case the husband's morals are in question, then wives should ask for a dissolution of the marriage directly from the legal system. Prior to the arrival of Islam, around 1400 years ago Women lived, oppressed, in a patriarchal world, where they were treated as possessions to be sold and bought and inherited. Such oppression as well as wars stripped women of their dignity, making them subject to verbal and physical abuse. With the advent of Islam, women were elevated in status. The obedient were encouraged to take care of their women kinsfolk through *hadiths* or words of Mohammed such as the best of you is he who is good/generous to his kinsfolk, and I am no different', and 'who has three daughter or three sisters or two daughter or two sisters, and treated them well as God would desire, then Heaven is their reward'. Mothers were recommended for special treatment. All these points enhanced the protection of women and the appreciation of the roles they play in society. At the time it was very common to beat wives. Islam used the gradual elimination tactic to do away

¹⁸ Surat al-Isra', 70.

¹⁹ Surat al-Nisa, 34

with this practice as well. Since the practice was so common, the law had to be less radical to ensure a gradual wearing away effect.

Islam has honoured women by forbidding the beating of wives, giving women the right to take their complaints to a higher authority such as guardians or the law.

“ And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with *At-Taiyibat* (lawful good things), and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preference”.²⁰

The Lord says: “And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect”.²¹

Younis, the blessings of God be upon him, reports that the Prophet said ‘He who leaves to go to one of the markets of the city and buys something for his children has bought alms for them until he gives it to them. He should start with the females before the males, for he who has made a female happy is like the person who has wept in awe of God, and he who has wept in awe of God has saved his body from Fire.’

One woman working in the field of women’s rights of the Elite sample tells me: “There was once a religious group directed by a woman of high knowledge and social standing in the Muslim community. Today, and many years after the group has stopped, many women complain to me that the woman ruined their lives, for she would insistently encourage them to stay at home, spreading the idea among them that they should go out of the house only once or twice a week to attend the religious meeting and then return home to cook and clean. Even going to take English language classes was *haraam*, sinful. The implementation of misunderstood religious teachings is one of the strongest kinds of violence on Muslim women in London, Ontario and in the world today.”

The Islamic advocate says, “It upsets me when customs mix with religious teachings. This phenomenon does not just appear in the veiling of little girls but in many methods of worship and treatment. A fact we cannot ignore is that Islam spread outside the region of Saudi Arab in 100 years and spread through all of Africa, reaching the tips of Asia and Europe. This quick surge led to the dismissal of what is absolutely religious and mixing the remainder with inherited customs. The sudden arrival of Islam led to the passing down of traditions from one generation to another as if they were Islamic teachings, while in fact they were inherent traditions in the culture before the advent of Islam. The result was that a large number of traditions

²⁰ Suart al-israa, 70.

²¹ Suart al-Rum, 21.

were passed down and little religious teachings. Over time, habits became fossilized and religious teachings became the silt on top. Generally, priority went to customs and traditions.

As a concluding remark to this segment, I would like to present you with the anecdote of the Prophet and his wife Umm Salama. In the 6th year of Hijrah ('migration'; also the basis of the Islamic calendar), the Prophet attempted to perform the Umrah (the minor pilgrimage, as opposed to the major 'Hajj' pilgrimage). The rival tribe Quraish learned of these plans and decided to impede the Muslims in their endeavors. When the Muslims threatened to declare war on Quraish, they feared the worst and agreed on an armistice with the Muslims, consisting of specific terms and conditions to ban the Umrah that year. The Muslims were outraged, yet the Prophet agreed to these terms as instructed by God. The Prophet then ordered the Muslims to slaughter an animal in sacrifice and shave their heads, symbolizing the completion of Umrah. The Muslims hesitated, unsure of the orders given to them. Umm Salama suggested that her husband himself offers a sacrifice and shave his head as an example to his people. Upon seeing this, the Muslims immediately repeated his exact actions. This example portrays the status of women in politics and Islamic procedures, as the Prophet himself took the advice of his wife.

c- Violence and Social Upbringing:

Social upbringing is one of the most influential processes on children. Social conditioning is one of the ways in which children acquire customs, traditions, general trends and values. Social upbringing is carried out through several means, the most important of which is family. Its role in guiding children is evident in the methods used to raise them - whether balanced or unbalanced- and which reflect in the children's characters and positive/negative behaviour.

And here is the problem for most Muslim families living in Canadian society. The parents' attempts at instilling discipline in their children's characters and forming them into capable social figures. Qualities like responsibility, leadership and self-dependence are encouraged in male children, while they are not in female children.

One woman speaks: "The higher the family's social class, the less the difference in raising girls and boys."

Whatever the reasons ascribed for it however, there appears to be difference in the upbringing of boys and girls. One woman declares, "Whatever we say and however many degrees women get, girls upbringing prepares them for future as a mother or wife. Interests and skills associated with the female world in which the girl is expected to live later on always arise [in girls' upbringing] such as cooking and husbandry, in addition to the

official education they receive at schools and universities. Educating girls is by no means forbidden, but the value of marriage must be instilled in them."

Another interviewee adds that, since outdoor tasks, such as mowing the lawn or shovelling snow are viewed as 'masculine' they are not taught to women.

One of the women from the Elite sample who has experience working in family services speaks of the difficulty in balancing Islamic and Canadian cultures when raising children: "My opinion is an outcome of my values and traditions as an Arab, and my experiences after living in Canada. Unfortunately, deep down inside we perceive a difference between the upbringing of boys and girls. We fear more for girls, someone may hurt them or harass them. However the fact is that today the danger girls face is the same that boys do. I worry about girls to the same extent that I worry about boys. The danger of sexual harassment for example is the same for both. However, I feel that girls can show more wisdom in judgement than boys."

One social specialist, also a member of the elite sample, holds that there are many variables to discuss when it comes to boy's upbringing. "If we go back to the social upbringing we perceived as a model from our parents, we find that it is very different from that which we practice with our children. A fixed factor is the way which the model or lead figure solves or faces problems, which affects children and can condition them to regard using any kind of violence, verbal or physical, as the only way to solve problems. The idea becomes part of the baggage inherited from parents. The second factor is the way society deals with problems, tension and stresses. The third factor to be taken into consideration is the treatment of boys and girls by teachers or between themselves in schools. This also goes back to the model available at home. Conduct in school is a reaction to what happens at home, whether we solve problems by beating, abuse or by a more civilised method."

Parents have the duty to implement a plan for the social upbringing of their children, making them skills that enable them to integrate in society, participate in various activities, recognize and carry out their responsibilities as well as the ways to coordinate between these responsibilities and personal conduct in diverse situations. In short, raise them to become useful members of society.

The social specialist notes: "Upbringing children is a delicate matter. Fathers who beat their sons are following in their own fathers' footsteps. While girls are treated more harshly, freedom is granted to boys unconditionally and without any kind of follow-up which in turn leads to the problem of addiction. We should always impart to our children a sense of trust, a confidence that we are here to protect them and not to stand against them even if they make mistakes."

As the Islamic advocate says: "The idea of women's superiority has made women focus on their own success, abandoning the house and childcare. The

spring of gentle motherhood has begun to run dry. Children now grow up contrary to their God-given nature and do not mind resorting to violence if the opportunity presents itself. Add to this, the electronic games played by children. Society now teaches children these kinds of morals, propagating them through the media, which has led to the spread of violence amongst males and females. We hear of some women as well who resort to violence that even leads to murder. But violence is spread at a greater rate among men in general."

One member of the elite sample comments: "I am blessed with an understanding husband who agrees with me that upbringing should be the same for boys and girls. It doesn't make sense to say, because you are a girl, don't do this and don't do that, and because you're a boy, you can do what you want. I see this going on a lot here. This unfair discrimination exhausts daughters further when they become wives and mothers. If you use sound upbringing principles, boys and girls grow up taking sound decisions. Because I have worked, I've seen that women who raise their children according to solid, balanced, and rational principles and build bridges of discussion and understanding."

In a discussion with several Muslim women, it was agreed that we must end the double standard. We must also work to eliminate the ignorance about and the misconceptions about women's status in Islam.

The social specialist tells me that "one of the differences we face [from other parents] when raising our children is the different cultures and civilisations [we bear]. We need to combine both cultures: everything that is good in Islamic culture and everything that is good in Canadian culture. We must not create a wall between us but pick and choose what is suitable and beneficial. For example, I took care that my children mix with the Muslim community as well as have Canadian friends, and I got to know the families my children mixed with. Then we would settle on the kind of relation we form with each family. I always followed up on my daughter's friends and observed the conduct of my son's friends inside the house, even sometimes going out with them. There can be follow-up at any age even if it happens from afar, and the point is not to prevent them from making friends and isolating them from society. My girls are not veiled but they know that to be veiled is part of Islam. I don't make them wear the veil. They may make the choice to wear it in the future. That was my parents' attitude with me."

The socialist specialist added: "One of the mistakes parents make with sons is to be harsh with them so as to make them into 'strong men.'" For example, one boy who had many siblings came to me complaining that his father has tried to make him 'manly' since he was young. He's in tenth grade and can't perform at school because all the stress he has to bear. He is unable to make friends and avoids mates because he considers himself an older adult who does not waste time mingling with people. This is because he was raised in an environment, although underlined with good intentions

of making him a strong independent man, was undermined with lack of love and tenderness and too many orders.”

When discussing negative social upbringing, we must see how they are related intrinsically to women’s education and upbringing. I have found in the wealth of literature on the topic that upbringing methods spread among Muslim families is to use oppressive tactics, inconstancy and over-protection. All these methods increase passivity and lack of decision-making abilities and thought processes for what it habituates the child of repressing questions, inquiry, initiative and discovery.

I asked one of the women from the Elite sample how she deals with questions from her children. She replied: “This is a very important point. How we close off our children’s minds and lock up the doors to knowledge, especially sexual knowledge.” In Arab culture, there is a taboo against discussing sex with children, but she adds: “We must talk to our children about sex. Sexual education in the family is necessary. For example, I always tell my ten year old son, when you want to talk about sex, come to me or your father, because your friends just don’t have the right information like adults, or ask the teacher.”

The social specialist says that when it came to discussing sex with her daughter, she realised her daughter knew everything because the teacher had explained it all to them. She said, “So I took her aside and talked some more. There must be open conversation on things. Our children are luckier than we are; there must be understanding between us.”

And while there were many differences in the way girls are brought up in the motherland and here in Canada, the primary role for girls was still taking care of the home. One of them states: “The required role for women is that of homemaker. She is not required to succeed in any other field.” It is as if social upbringing aims to marginalise women and specify gender-specific roles for them.

A professor from the Elite sample notes: “The beginning of violence against women starts from the discrimination between her and his sons while raising them. For me, I don’t hold such things as ‘women’s work’ and ‘men’s work’. The housework is divided and outside work is divided, whatever the gender.” She cites Wagdi Ghoneim’s lectures who stated that the Prophet helped around the house. The professor went on to say: “I agreed with my husband in the beginning that anything outside the house was his responsibility, and anything inside the house was mine. After a year at home, I realised that this doesn’t work along with women’s work and the effort to succeed. The balance is hard. All kinds of work must be shared. Hence, team work began. We work together outside the house and we work together inside the house, and the same with my son and daughter. This in itself creates a sound environment for social upbringing based on sharing not discrimination.”

She holds that the most extreme kind of violence is discrimination in treatment, speech, and freedoms as well as the image women have of themselves which can even make them violent towards as other women.

The social specialist says: 'I have three girls and a boy, and all are equal. Discrimination creates violence. I make no difference between them in going out, in the same way as my mother and siblings treated me.'

The Prophet says: 'Order your children to pray at seven years old,' and if he wanted, he could have said veil your daughters at seven years of age, as well. We Muslims who believe in the truth of the Prophecy spoken by our Prophet, and realise his magnanimity, honesty, love for children and childhood cannot believe that veiling seven year olds is correct. How can people allow themselves to blaspheme so?

One of the ladies of the Elite sample says: "I enrolled my girl in an Islamic school, and when she turned seven, she was required to get veiled, without discussion. Unfortunately, I fell into that mistake. Later, I made her take off the veil. Now I leave her to choose her own way."

Another woman notes: "One of the conditions for following religious mandate is to have passed puberty. We are ordered by the Prophet to get our children used to praying and fasting at an early age, but he didn't order us to condition girls to the veil."

A woman adds, from the Elite sample: "Islam doesn't just order us to encourage children to pray, fast and wear the veil, but also to avoid verbal abuse, malicious reporting and gossip both before and after puberty. God and the Prophet have forbidden it."

A thirty year old woman muses that she often sees very young girls wearing the veil. "The other day I saw a girl less than two and half years old wearing the veil. She must see that everyone else is not wearing one, which can have psychological ramifications. But if she is obliged to wear it at a later age, she may see many girls wearing it, which may be easier to bear. They say 'but this way she'll get used to wearing it at a young age'- yes, but her mother obviously will be veiled anyway, so the sight won't exactly be unusual for her. In fact, she might volunteer to do so herself when she comes of age."

Yet another woman disagrees with veiling pre-adolescent girls: "Little girls want to play and run and jump about and put bows in their hair. If they have no idea why they are asked to or forced to wear the veil they may even come to resent it."

The Islamic advocate quotes the Prophet (peace be upon him), saying: "If people knew and learned this saying, they would never place a veil on the head of their girls if they have not reached the age of puberty. The story goes that the prophet tells Asma: When a woman reaches the age of her first menstruation, she should not show her body to the public except these two areas, and he pointed at the hands and face. The meaning of the word

'when' is very clear. This means that before that age, the girls are still young, and we don't hinder their freedom with such clothing. In this way we can also put the child in the position of having to answer questions from her schoolmates, such as what are wearing, and do you go to sleep wearing this as well? What are they supposed to do then? This kind of situation only makes them rebel against customs and traditions, and makes them take off the veil and go the opposite direction entirely. Some societies force the veil on little girls, but these are social customs and not Islam. We should place Islam before customs and traditions, and realise that it came with a practical side as well as a theoretical one, and we should take care to follow the former. We don't gain more reward if we force such dress on our young daughters. One narrative of the Prophet tells of the time he heard of the meeting between three people where one man said "I fast all year round", the second said "I never approach women", and the third said "I pray all night long". The Prophet was very angry, and called them and informed them: "I swear I am the most pious of you, and fear God the most, but I fast and stop, pray and sleep, and marry women. Who digresses from my teachings does not follow them." Accordingly, we should tell such people that what they're doing neither deepens piety nor educates sons and daughters; it is in fact stupidity manifest. And I say it as it is because such acts only lead to the children's future repulsion from the clothing and a reverse reaction. If we cause a reverse reaction than the one intended, then we have gone against the teachings of God and His Prophet."

5- Conclusions

All of those I interviewed agree that violence committed against women can cause severe psychological harm. As such, it becomes hard for Muslim women to mix with and face a society that finds itself in a dilemma of how to deal with these individuals. The women can only isolate themselves and withdraw from society.

I hope to discuss this issue in further detail in another study.

A woman from the public sample assures me that before her separation from her husband, she lived in complete isolation from society because of the psychological violence practised against her by her husband from the beginning to the end of her marriage. Undoubtedly, being mistreated by parents or partner attacks a person's self-esteem and confidence, and feeds their sense of blame.

From a traditional social viewpoint which takes into consideration the following: A patriarchal society in which men are given such wide room for freedom and decision-making that they can subject women to violence in the name of protection and guardianship; the stereotypical view of the traditional role of Muslim women; and finally, women's social upbringing which calls for deference and negativity, violent behaviour towards women is dismissed as normal daily practice, whether physical or psychological,

however much it entails obligation, deprivation of freedom and decision-making power.

The rate of violence is higher in unemployed women or women who live in modest environments than those living in medium income or higher environments. Women's liberation, before everything, is her liberation on the economic level. This is a freedom that should also be guaranteed by laws and legislations.

Women themselves can be one of the main factors behind some violence by accepting it-through forgiveness, submission or silence, which makes the other party go further and become bolder in using it.

Islamic laws that defend the rights of women should be implemented so women can feel safe and secure. Spreading social awareness is important. Women need to be made aware of their rights, how to defend them and learn ways to communicate their grievances to the specialized institutions. Women must learn not to stay silent on the violation of their rights

The Islamic advocate commends the work of Dr Mohamed Beibeid who championed the idea of dealing with family violence. "An institution was formed within the mosque before it was transferred to Family Services, Thames Valley. Forums and meetings were held but they weren't quite sufficient, until government grants helped to develop it into the Muslim Family Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration." He also pointed out the benefits of the work of a Muslim social specialist saying: "The presence of Muslim women social specialists is so important because not only are they culturally diverse, but they understand both the nature of women and the Islamic heritage and Muslim community."

The Islamic advocate has reservations about the role played by mosques and religious institutions. He says: "Religious discourse still deals with generalities, leaving topics strictly treated by the Quran and Sunna, so we find ourselves repeating the same general discourse that talks of praying and abolitions and things we learned in primary school. Now in this country we face challenges that emerge not only because of our presence here, but because the age in which we live has brought up certain challenges. How can we talk of the way to pray if violence prevents people from concentrating."

Violence against women then is not caused by one societal factor alone as much as it is related to a network of interrelated social, economic, cultural, political, religious and ethnic factors. As such, a number of approaches should be used to examine this phenomenon such as women's studies, criminology, development studies, human rights studies, general health, sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, theology, as well as law and judicial studies. It becomes clear that values, traditions and social organisation –rather than religion –are some of the reasons that prevent women from participation and integration in society.

6-Recommendations:

1. Set up specialised developmental programs on a national level to follow up on the integration of immigrant women in general and Muslim women in particular. Research studies will support those programs with the aim of supporting immigrant Canadian women's participation in society. Modernising procedures that aim to encourage all immigrants to learn English is crucial. Those developmental programs together with the acquisition of the English language, can increase the rate of women's participation in the workplace and hence their integration in society.

2. Violence against women is not a passing occurrence that can be simplified or dismissed. Violence against women is violence against society. Eliminating violence or lessening it as much as possible is a legal problem with many angles. It requires serious effort to solve the problem, we need more effective? judicial and administrative procedures to prevent violence before it happens. We also need to intensify legislative, educative and general awareness programmes to correct religiosity for individuals and societies, as well as defining protectorate rights and the legal ways to acquire them. All of this stands beyond being influenced by customs and traditions contrary to law, or by slogans or legal norms that have passed down from the dark ages.

The Islamic advocate advises on the importance of establishing the following programs:

- I. Inequality usually starts in the family, when power relations between man and woman are imbalanced. Every young man and woman who want to marry should attend a training course that takes place every four months in Islamic centres that aims to train the future spouses on the roles of husbands and wives. They must know what Islam says on the matter
- II. Courses should be made available to teach proper parenting to fathers and mothers. Our attitude to such matters is lacking. Many leave their children to be raised by the media and the society in which they live. If parenting courses exist, they will undoubtedly have positive effects: courses for parents on the one hand and ones for children on the other.
- III. We must reach out to social institutions like Women's Community House and Children's Aid Society violence to work with them and instruct them on the way Islam approaches such matters.

The media plays a strong role in changing stereotypes. It can work to improve the image of Muslim women in society and help to eliminate discriminatory ideas. This will not only have a positive effect on Muslim women and encourage them to integrate into Canadian society but it will also have a positive effect on society itself.

The most important challenges which threaten the protection of women from violence is the difference between speech and action. Much is spoken

about violence toward women, but the actions made are often lacking or insufficient.

Although I am not a religious scholar, I trust that our great Islamic religion does not forbid women from being social leaders, decision-makers and agents of change. Muslim women have strong potential and talent that should be used for the development and improvement of society.

Thus, supporting Muslim women and working to build the foundation for their growth and development is an important first step. A feminist institution working to educate, enrich the culture of, and rehabilitate Muslim women in Canadian society; one which helps explain and simplify issues whether of upbringing, health, society and religion to guarantee the women's quick progress. This institution must be built on team work, scientific research and field study. It should seek to authorise a constructive policy towards women, to eliminate the culture of violence against women, and to support the role of Muslim women in the social upbringing process within the family unit, which will reflect on the general development of society.

In conclusion, we have a lot of work to do if we want to create a non-violent culture. The result however, will be worth it. We must create a healthy environment for women and children. We cannot go on pretending that the violence does not exist. Every victimized woman and child will potentially grow to be perpetrators of violence. Technological advancements are gradually eroding all barriers, all divisions. Problems in one area of the world reflect on the whole.

That is why this report has stressed the necessity of relating violence against women to the violation of human rights. If societies accepted women as vital and active role-players within it, and if women were treated as human beings on a par with men and male sons, then the issue of violence committed against women would be less of a 'sympathetic attitude adopted towards the female gender' and more of a social issue challenged on an international level.