A Theoretical Review of the Literature: Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities in the United States

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ABSTRACT: Social workers are often tasked to engage with families where domestic violence is occurring. This challenging task can be exacerbated by factors such as cultural and religious influences. As a means to increase the understanding of these important factors, an extensive literature review of current material on Islam, Muslims and domestic violence was conducted. This literature was divided into several themes to include: Islam and Muslims; Islam, marriage and family; Islam and domestic violence; special circumstances of Muslim victims of domestic violence; why Muslim women stay; the September 11th impact on domestic violence in Muslim families in the US; and services available to these families. Implications include increased knowledge acquisition and cultural awareness as well as a call for more knowledge regarding the relationship between the intersections of factors such as Islam, culture, immigration and socioeconomic status, and the competent assessment of service needs and successful service delivery.

Keywords: Domestic violence; Muslim/Islam; Cultural competence; Intersectionality

1. Introduction

Domestic violence is experienced in all communities and by persons of all religious backgrounds. Yet, this is a problem that many groups may be reluctant to address, especially because it has the potential to cast them into a negative light. This has been especially true of Muslims in the United States, who suffer significant stigmatization and marginalization, especially since the 9/11 attacks. Only within the past decade have Muslims in the US considered domestic violence as a social problem (Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007).

Social workers are often tasked to engage with families where domestic violence is occurring. These situations are challenging enough, but practitioners can be faced with substantial cultural mistrust and the stigmatization related to help-seeking behaviours among Muslim immigrants (Amri & Bemak, 2013). Yet, the complexities of culture and religion must be sufficiently understood in order to effectively assess and intervene in these situations and build trust. The Council on Social Work Education developed nine competencies in its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (2015). Competency 2, Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice, addresses situations like this specifically:

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Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. Social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create privilege and power. (CSWE, 2015, p.7)

Yet, understanding how diversity and difference characterize and shape human experience can be challenging. Even among other helping professionals such as police officers, Ammar, Couture-Carron, Alvi, and Antonio (2013), point out a need to educate about the diversity of the immigrant community and the need to have intervention styles that are "responsive to the complexity of the situation instead of a standard 'culturally appropriate' response." (p. 1465). This takes knowledge and exposure. However, there is a lack of scholarly books addressing Muslims communities' results in insufficient coverage of culturally competent practices related to Muslim communities in curricula (Graham et al., 2010; 2011). So how do we achieve a deeper level of needed cultural competence in order to meaningfully address family and other problems among these growing Muslim populations? As a first step towards remedying this deficit, this paper conducted an extensive literature review on current material on Islam, Muslims and domestic violence, well beyond just the literature related to the field of social work. It is the hope of this study to shed light to what is addressed and what still needs to be addressed related to domestic violence in diverse Muslim populations, which in turn will illuminate more fully the complexities, intersections and unique features involved in working with these communities. Finally, this paper will reemphasize the need for cultural competence and flexibility required in working with this population, especially those that experience domestic abuse. It is the hope of the authors that this paper does *not* further the view of otherness of Muslim cultures, rather it would reflect on both the similarities and the uniqueness of domestic violence for readers to identify and compare with their own faiths and cultures, while understanding the intricacies involved with domestic violence in diverse Muslim communities to help clients better. After all, as Lockhart & Danis (2010) state:

… "one size does not fit all." We cannot expect the same interventions and approaches to be effective with women from different cultural backgrounds. Each domestic violence survivor brings a mix of cultural influences reflecting their own culture of origin… (p. xxv).

2. The Need for a Deeper Understanding

Social identity helps define how we act, behave and also our attitudes and perceptions about our place in the society, what is right and wrong and how we go about our daily lives. Cultural components such as religious beliefs and practices, serve as a major institutional aid in defining one's sense of identity. Social identity in many senses is a fluid entity, constituting multiple selves and realities, with present experiences defining future directions. While social identity is not a static entity, one's subjective identities will have an impact on their objective realities (Coomaraswamy, 2003). Women, in general, learn their sense of identity from their experiences as women growing up (Coomaraswamy, 2003; Alkhateeb, Ellis, & Fortune, 2001). In almost all cultures there are times when, unfortunately, women are expected to believe, practice rituals, and continue customs that demean their value and at times even directly discriminate against, or violate them (Coomaraswamy, 2003).

Yet caught in the Western mode of the thinking, other cultures are oftentimes thought of as oppressive by design. The traditional female identities many cultures still uphold, such as nurturer and caretaker, are given secondary status and equated to reflections of women's submissiveness and/or oppression. Women from other cultures are perceived as victims of their culture, religion and traditions, and abuse is defined as the norm, while Western women are presented with choice and freedoms (Volpp, 2001). The group-based identities of many traditional societies as well as their consequent practices are often considered to be in direct contrast to the Western values of individual rights and self-determination (Coomaraswamy, 2003; Volpp, 2001; Obermeyer, 1995). This binary thinking overlooks many multicultural women's agencies and the will for self-determination. Removing or freeing women from their cultures then becomes the only option of help. Consequently, it unnecessarily poses a dilemma between the universalism of individual-based human rights and cultural relativism (Coomaraswamy, 2003). The argument for many years has been: should the individuals who do not possess the same notion of rights be educated and freed, with the dangers of paternalistic imperialism looming on the background, or at any cost uphold cultural values respecting cultural and group integrity over individual well-being (Obermeyer, 1995)? This type of view also prevents scholars from exploring difficult topics such as domestic violence in a critical manner.

While debates continue, Muslim cultures are often portrayed as being the polar opposite of Western values. This has been especially fueled due to the 9/11 terrorist attack, consequent invasion of Afghanistan, and the emphasizing of Taliban atrocities against Afghan women. This is especially true when it comes to helping victims of domestic violence. For Muslims, like for any other faith population, religious content provides a major source of understanding and context to women experiencing violence. Islam, however, has two identities like any other religion: the ideal theoretical basis and what is real and actually practiced. At times patriarchally-based interpretations of religion serve as moral edits or guides for socialization, more so than what is actually written (Alkhateeb et al., 2001). The unique dilemma related to domestic violence is how to support and identify the personal agency of abused women while balancing what is actually preached by their religion and/or traditions that condone abusive behaviour? How can women be helped in a manner where their view of culture, self-identity and self-determination is respected, and not portray them as a mere victim of their cultures? It is important to understand that

simplistic interpretations of religion deviate from reality (Ammar, 2007). The binary Western arguments often times veil the realities of Muslim women and create additional barriers for helping them overcome abuse:

> "…both these constructs-Western and Muslim-are overly general in that they ignore the diversity that exists within each broadly defined culture from the point of view of both ideology and practice…these dichotomies have a certain appeal because they clearly categorize the world into two sides-black and white-"us" and "them "-and thus, spare us the need to get down to the reality of many shades of gray that are real cultures… (Obermeyer, 1995, p. 370 & 374).

Social work, a field in the lime-light as a helping profession, is clearly not without its own dilemmas of culturally sensitive service delivery. All professions uphold the values, practices and culture they deem right. Thus, professions, including social work, teach its students specialized knowledge that the field deems to be correct and essential. Specialization requires standardization and acceptance to reinforce authority as an expert field. While "resting in the foundation of scared objectivity," the field organizes itself as a qualified member to practice its professional values to its clients and gain acceptance from the general public (Fitzsimmons, 1997, p. 155). However, the dilemma occurs when the profession encounters culturally diverse clients or those who do not accept the values of the profession (Fitzsimmons, 1997). The question is: will the clients receive services that cater to their needs for empowerment as defined by them, or will it be inherently biased to adhere to formally identified standards, and thus, be potentially detrimental in some circumstances? Will services capture the complexities or get caught in binary thinking?

Social workers encounter many clients with varying degrees of social identity (Lum, 2004). Yet, the field itself is accused of underemphasizing the need to produce social work curricula that could generate knowledge, skills and the appropriate models of practice with diverse populations. It is argued that more emphasis on standardization is moving the field in a more conservative direction, reflecting primarily mainstream American values (as cited in Lum, 2004). Despite the growing interest in cultural competence and growing literature focusing on culturally diverse practice, there still is an only small representation of "ethnic and cultural content in major practice texts and journals…" (Lum, 2004, p. 19). This is especially true when it comes to Muslim populations. Circumstances of domestic violence, intersecting with culture and religion, further exacerbate this situation. The field itself lacks experts in Muslim culture, even more so when it comes to Muslims and domestic violence. In relation to Muslim populations, contemporary intervention approaches have generally been derived from a Western paradigm and is at times in direct contrast to Islamic values of collectivism and inter-dependence (Khalid, 2007). One immigrant Muslim leader recently captured this dilemma, stating: "One cannot approach Muslim families from a Western or top-down perspective. You will fail to help or, worse, harm families. You have to understand Muslim culture and its diversities" (Texas Muslim Women's Foundation, 2012). The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) delegate assembly to the NASW Code of Ethics approved in 1996 and revised by the 2017 NASW Delegate Assembly, clearly specifies the importance of cultural competence and acceptance of social diversity:

1.05 Cultural Awareness and Social Diversity

(a) Social workers should understand the culture and its function in human behaviour and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures.
(b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups.
(c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, colour, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability.
(d) Social workers who provide electronic social work services should be aware of cultural and socioeconomic differences among clients and how they may use electronic technology. Social workers should assess cultural, environmental, economic, mental or physical ability, linguistic, and other issues that may affect the delivery or use of these services. (NASW Code of Ethics, 2017, pp. 9-10.)

However, caught between the dilemmas of cultural competence, ethical standardization of practice and lacking the expert trainers and the knowledge base needed to provide the required education and training to students, these additions to the code of ethics are essentially rendered meaningless. This review of the literature will only serve as a small step towards bridging these dilemmas.

It is important to note that writing about Islam and domestic violence has the potential of creating the unintended negative consequence of suggesting that there is something inherent within Islam that somehow reinforces or condones the use of violence within intimate relationships. This is not the case and is absolutely not the intent of the authors. In fact, it is important to note that all major religions have been commonly misused to justify abusive and violent behaviour within intimate relationships (Jayasundara, Nedegaard, Flanagan, Phillips & Weeks, 2017).

3. Theoretical Literature Review

Literature related to domestic violence in Muslim communities was used for this review that comes from peer-reviewed articles, published books, technical reports and agency documents, and published excerpts from presentations and training manuals.

Domestic violence is an extremely difficult topic to study in any community, but given the controversies and the hidden nature of the topic and the social isolation Muslim communities face post 9/11, this is a subject that is especially difficult to study in Muslim communities. Adding to this challenge is the relative dearth of reliable studies (Alkhateeb, & Abugideiri, 2007; Ammar, 2007; Kulwicki & Miller, 1999). Islam itself and its variations have generated heated discussions for generations, especially the role of women in Islam. Adding to this debate is the underlying question: does Islam promote wife abuse? The following sections address areas scholars have discussed on these topics, beginning with who are Muslims.

Islam and Muslims. To have a true comprehension of why Muslims victims of domestic violence need to be studied as a special group requiring specific service needs, it is first important to have a working knowledge of Islam and Muslims. At the onset, it is important to note that Islam, like any other religion, has many fractions and diverse interpretations (Alkhateeb, & Abugideiri, 2007). At present, there are more than one billion Muslims living in over 184 countries across the world, speaking multiple dialects (Alkhateeb, & Abugideiri, 2007; Ammar, 2007). Consequently, Muslims or the people who accept Islam as their religion are not one unified or homogeneous community. In fact, Muslims come from multicultural backgrounds with diverse beliefs systems. Scholars have emphasized that Muslim "cultures are not synonymous with Islam itself," in fact the totality and reality of Muslim cultures can only be presented through the "lived cultures" in which Muslims live, and not through "Islamic ideals" (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001, p. 5; 929). An individual's self-identity as a Muslim depends on the person's level of spirituality, the type of Islamic denomination one belongs to, the culture one comes from, and a myriad of other factors (Graham, Bradshaw, & Trew, 2010). Consequently, like any other world religion, it is far from being a singular ideology (Ammar, 2007). In spite of these variations, one unifying factor is the belief in a higher power named Allah, and acceptance of the Prophet Mohammed as the most important prophet (Ammar, 2007). Most scholars agree that the Holy Qur'an is the highest source of reference in Islam, followed by Prophet Mohammed's hadith (sayings and teachings), sunnah (traditions and practices), and shari'a (divine law) (Alwani, 2007; Ammar, 2007). Some scholars have attempted to categorize Muslims in America into differing categories based on their religiosity. These include typologies identified by Nadir and Dziegielewski (2001) that consist of traditional, recommitted, bicultural, acculturated, and assimilated types. Alkhateeb's (2002) classification consists of orthodoxists, inclusionists, reformists and minimalists (as cited in Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007).

Islam, marriage and family. Islam, like most religions, provides a moral basis for all aspects of life, including marriage and family life (Alwani & Abugideiri, 2003). The Qur'an is the highest reference of authority on family matters (including on domestic violence). But, hadits, and fatwas (Islamic rulings) are also used for family matters (Ammar, 2007). Family is seen as the base unit of society, not the individual. Marriage between man and woman is considered one of God's main commandments. It is a "special treaty" with "spiritual value" (Umma.ws, 2011, p. 1). It is considered to provide the basis for human relations and for procreation (Alwani & Abugideiri, 2003). Therefore, children are viewed as Allah/God's blessing and healthy relations between parents and children are advocated for (Umma.ws, 2011, p 1). Scholars argue a "qur'anic marriage involves intimacy, support and equality" as sura Al-Baqarah (chapter 2), verse 187 considers spouses: "they are your garments, you are their garments" (Ammar, 2007, p. 521). From the religious perspective when a man and a woman enter marriage, they enter into a "*solemn covenant"* with God to follow the religious path fulfilling the obligations of marriage by following the Qur'an as well as the sayings and traditions of the prophet Mohammad (Alwani & Abugideiri, 2003, p. 39). For the protection of both partners, it is required that several conditions be met; each individual has to be mature enough to consent for marriage, each party enters marriage voluntarily (religiously this is a condition expected even in arranged marriages, where parents arrange the marriage for the children. However, culturally, this is overlooked at times, that

marriage should be a public matter with a minimum of two witnesses. The terms of the dowry, a gift from the groom to the bride, (while in many south Asian cultures the dowry is given to the groom by the bride's family, in Muslim cultures, the dowry is a gift to the bride) should be specified at time of the marriage contract (Alwani & Abugideiri, 2003). In fact, in Islam, a dowry is prohibited, but a Mahr is compulsory. A Mahr is a required payment of money or goods that is paid to the bride by the groom at the time of *marriage*. As mentioned earlier, variations exist related to interpretations, culture, and level of religiosity.

In decision-making regarding family matters, partners are advised to consult each other and come to mutually agreed-upon decisions. Islam promotes a divided but equal division of labor between genders, especially within the family (Alwani, 2007; Alwani & Abugideiri, 2003; Fortune, Abugideiri, & Dratch, 2010). Therefore, men are seen as primary financial providers, while the women's role is primarily that of nurturers and caregiver (Abugideiri, 2007; Alwani, 2007; Alwani & Abugideiri, 2003). This does not mean that women are excluded from working outside or pursuing education (Faizi, 2001). Abugideiri (2007) argued that traditional domestic roles can be viewed as women being freed from financial burdens in some countries. Thus, readers are cautioned not to make quick judgments that a woman who comes for services and does not know about her husband's financial matters is not inevitably experiencing financial abuse.

The majority of Muslim cultures promote extended family structures, where several generations of families live together in the same household. In extended families, matters of decision-making take place within the extended family (Alwani & Abugideiri, 2003). However, this is a practice that goes beyond Islamic tradition alone, as in many cultures. For example, in south Asia, community orientation of the family allows for extended family living arrangements and communal decision-making.

In Islam, men are permitted (not required) to marry up to 4 women under special conditions. If a man takes more than one wife, he must be able to provide sufficiently for each one. The Quran further states: "Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire" (4:129) commanding Muslim men to be fair to everyone. However, scholars point out that this decree was issued a very long time ago, at a time when there was no limit on the number of wives a man could have and was designed to limit the maximum number of women a man could have as wives. This was especially important during times of war to ensure care for widowed and orphaned women/girls (Abdullah, 2007; Umma.ws, 2011). Some scholars argue that polygamy frees the women from excessive children bearing, promotes sharing of household responsibilities, and provides the opportunity to work outside and go to school (Abdullah, 2007). As polygamy is banned in the US, men who take more than one wife can only marry them according to Islamic law and not legally (Alwani & Abugideiri, 2003). Once again, it is important to identify that variations exist depending on interpretations and level of religiosity.

Islam and Domestic Violence. Several studies have attempted to explain and delineate different perspectives and explain misconceptions about the Islamic standpoints on domestic violence (Abdel Meguid, 2006; Abu-Dawud, 1999; Alkhateeb, 1999; Ammar, 2000a, 2000b, 2007; Haggar, 2004). These studies have exclusively looked at male abuse against their female partners, primarily that of wife abuse. Many scholars have analyzed passages from the Qur'an as well as the sayings by and reports of the Prophet Mohammad (hadiths) to illustrate Islam as a religion that

promotes peaceful families (Alkhateeb, 1999). Yet, other studies have pointed out that some interpretations/misinterpretations of Islam undermine women's wellbeing (Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007; Ammar, 2000a, 2000b, 2007).

The biggest controversy the literature has addressed is around verse 34 of the chapter (sura) 4, of the Qur'an (Alkhateeb, 1999; Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007; Alwani, 2007; Ammar, 2000a, 2000b, 2007; Haggar, 2004; Silvers, 2006). This verse has been identified as the primary verse that discusses the principals of male guardianship (qiwama) over women and female obedience (ta'a). It also contains the most commonly cited option for males to physically discipline their disobedient wives. The standard English translation of the verse reads, " …as for those (women) from whom you fear disobedience (nushuz), admonish, then send them to beds apart and beat them..." (as cited in Ammar, 2007, p 518). Many progressive scholars have attempted to provide alternative interpretations of this verse, including that, "hit" is not a correct interpretation or translation of the word 'idribhunna' in the verse (Alkhateeb, 1999; Ammar, 2007; Faizi, 2001; Silver, 2006). Ammar (2007) posits that this verse has been interpreted according to four different classifications: (a) wife-beating is admissible if the wife disobeys the husband; (b) wife-beating is admissible but only with consideration of her safety; (c) that wife-beating is generally unacceptable unless in exceptional circumstances; (d) that the verse is misinterpreted and does not refer to hitting at all (Ammar, 2007). Alkhateeb & Abugideiri (2007) posits that 1400 years ago when this verse was revealed it was progressive movement for women's rights as it was an era where women were habitually beaten by their husbands. This verse put a limit on wife-beating at that time but now must be revisited:

> In instances of marital discord, verse 4.34 required men to refrain from habitually
> beating their wives, and to instead engage in a multi-step process of
> communication, which included strategies of conflict resolution and mediation with
> authority figures. Today, however, outdated interpretations of the verse, some
> from over 1000 years ago, fail to honor Islam's egalitarian spirit towards women
> (Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007, p. 18).

Yet some other scholars direct readers to other verses and hadiths that explicitly promote treating women with respect and kindness and disapproval of ill-treatment of wives, for example, Quranic verses; 2:229-237; 4:19; 4:25; 30:21; 9: 71 (Alkhateeb, 1999; Ammar, 2007), and prophet's sayings such as "the strong man is not the one who can use the force of physical strength, but the one who controls his anger" (Alkhateeb, 1999 p. 54). Additionally, scholars have also pointed to the life of Prophet Mohammad, who never hit a woman or a child as an example of his disapproval of spousal abuse (Alkhateeb, 1999).

Islamic views of divorce are another important aspect of the topic at hand. It is commonly accepted that Islam disapproves of divorce (Faizi, 2001). A most cited prophet's statement to this end is, "Allah did not make anything lawful more abominable to him than divorce" from Abu Dawud, 1999 (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001, p. 422). Additionally, the literature suggests that many women and men believe divorce can only be sought by men. However, many progressive interpreters have once again disputed this belief, stating women do have the right to seek a divorce (Khula) (Alwani, 2007; Alwani & Abugieiri, 2003; Alkateeb, 1999). Alwani & Abugieiri

(2003) acknowledge that there are different schools of thought on divorce and that Imams may be more conservative on the matter than others; however, they posit that a wife can initiate divorce. But if the wife initiates divorce without the presence of cruelty and ill-treatment, she may lose her right to her gifts and dowry. Nevertheless, if a wife who is experiencing abuse initiates a divorce, she has the option of initiating the divorce without penalty. However, it is advised that assistance be sought prior to initiating the divorce;

> " 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… but if they disagree (and must part), God will provide
> abundance for all from his All-reaching bounty: For God is He, that cares for and is
> wise" (4:128, 130).

Special Circumstances of Muslim Victims of Domestic Violence. Scholars have argued that patriarchal interpretations have left men overdue power and left women without knowing their Islamic rights as Muslim women (Alkhateeb, 1999; Faizi, 2001). The literature points out that patriarchal explanations of the Qur'an, especially sura 4:34 by individuals, communities and by shari'a laws adopted by individual and countries have led to many complications for Muslim women facing domestic violence (Alkhateeb, 1999; Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007; Alwani, 2007; Ammar, 2000a, 2000b, 2007; Faizi, 2001; Haggar, 2004; Silvers, 2006). On the one hand, some Muslim men have used this verse as a license to abuse their wives. On the other hand, some women themselves view male abuse against their wives as a male entitlement (Faizi, 2001; Hajjar, 2004; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). In most dictatorial families, a husband can lead the family to believe that whatever he wants and desires is whatever God wants (Alkhateeb, 1999; Faizi, 2001). Thus, an abusive husband may use Islam as a tool to abuse and control his wife. For example, a husband can use religion to get what he wants: threaten divorce, twist Islamic readings to question a wife's worth, tell her she will go to hell if she does not obey him, use religion to restrict her freedom of movement, threaten to tell family and the community that she does not fulfill her duties as a wife (Faizi, 2001).

Several studies have also shown that many men and women believe it is the woman's fault for getting beaten, including victims themselves (Alkhateeb, 1999; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). The fear of divorce and the belief that women do not have the right to seek divorce means that many women will not consider divorcing their abusive partners unless their situation is a matter of life and death (Faizi, 2001; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). As divorce, in general, is not accepted, members of many Muslim communities view divorced women as "broken glass," that which is once broken cannot be glued back as a whole (Cohen & Savaya, 1997, p. 236). Many Muslim women's self-identity is tied to wifehood and motherhood and are brought up to believe that their family needs come first before their individual wellbeing. A woman is first a mother, secondly a wife and then a self (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). Additionally, in many cultures, women are expected to uphold the family honor and reputation (Abirafeh, 2006; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001).

Complicating cultural beliefs further is the fact that some Muslim women living in the US come from countries that have laws that are enforced in a manner that undermines women rights or even directly accept beatings of wives. For example, a recent bill that passed in Afghanistan

authorizes Shi'ite men to withhold money and food from wives who refuse to give them sex, to give limited inheritance and take custody rights away from women who seek divorce and to deny women freedom of movement without permission from their families (Baker, 2010).

While these dynamics complicate women caught in domestic violence in Muslim communities, some scholars argue that the majority of dynamics are not unique to Muslim communities (Hajjar, 2004). In fact, they argue that in many respects, domestic violence circumstances are similar to other spiritual communities across the border (Lockhart & Danis, 2010). Additionally, while Islam and Muslim cultures create unique circumstances for women in general, domestic violence situations also vary from one woman to the other. What is important is that individual rationalizations based on spiritual or religious belief systems pose unique impediments or opportunities that must be considered when assisting victims of domestic violence (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003).

Why Muslim Women Stay. The extent to which Islam factors into the decision of a Muslim woman to stay in a violent relationship differs from one woman to the next (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). Many have cited misinterpretations of the Qur'an (Alkhateeb, 1999; Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007). These misinterpretations have been cited to have many significant repercussions to include trapping women in violent relationships, not identifying domestic violence as abuse, viewing wife abuse as a Western concept, that only bad Muslims gets beaten, and that violence is a man's right, God's test of faith or God's will (Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007; Abu-Ras, 2007; Abirafeh, 2006). Ammar (2007) states that "these mixed messages and complexities of the situation of the status of women including wife-beating in Islam are perplexing to many who work with victims" (p. 524).

Many immigrant and refugee Muslim families also enter America to flee oppressive governmental structures of their countries. These tyrannical forces extend their power through the ill-use of Islam. The families themselves and especially the women may not be aware that their own abuse is "a microcosm of the tyranny and despotism they so actively oppose, and mistakenly think a tyrannical family structure is an Islamic one" (Alkhateeb, 1999, p 51).

"The Muslim sense of community and family provides women with a sense of identity, connection, and order. Therefore, in cases of abuse, family and community disapproval are also strong disincentives to leaving" (Faizi, 2001, p. 216, 217). As previously mentioned, many of the cultures Muslims come from women are still viewed in traditional roles, where women are seen primarily as a wife, mother, and daughter, sister and then as self (Haj-Yahia, 1998; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). Leaving an abusive husband is therefore seen as breaking the family, tarnishing family honor, and disrespecting religion and community values.

Additionally, "authoritarian family structures predispose many Muslims in America to be abused in some way." Consequently, while most of the mechanisms of abuse utilized are the same, high levels of abuse in the community make many families believe that violence is part of family life but is not a threat to the family (Alkhateeb, 1999, p 51).

September 11th impact on domestic violence in Muslim families in the US. Many in both the Muslim and the mainstream communities are reluctant to discuss the impact of 9/11 on Muslim families. Additionally, due to 9/11, Muslim scholars also take caution in discussing domestic violence in their communities, as they fear further increasing negative stereotypes about their communities (Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007). Very few academic studies have looked at the

impact of 9/11 in general on Muslims families (Barkdull et al., 2009; Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, 2010; Abu-Ras & Abu Bader, 2008; Childress, 2003). These studies show that Muslims faced great fear, stigma and sometimes direct discrimination by non-Muslims (Bardull et al., 2009). It is clear that Xenophobia and racism are still rampant against people of Muslim dissent post-9/11. Ammar (2007) reiterates this negative impact on families. Often Muslims are portrayed on TV as terrorists and consistent discrimination, and stereotyping can be found in the mainstream media. This includes the view that Muslim men are abusers and Muslim women as passive agents with no will or agency. Hijab (using a scarf to cover the face) is often portrayed as an indication of their backward thinking along with other intolerance of Muslim religious practices. There are a generalized fear and suspicion of Muslims that can lead to the belief that Muslims deserve to be punished. There appears to be more fear and caution that can lead to distrust of formal authorities, more isolation and separation of Muslim communities from mainstream society, with more pressure for positive image building and pressure for the Muslim community to not bring any additional negative attention (Texas Muslim Women's Foundation, 2011). Consequently, post 9/11 there appears to be an increase in instances of domestic violence in Muslim communities in the US, yet, especially in Arab communities in the US there appears to be a decrease in service utilization, especially from the police (Abu-Ras, 2007; Abu-Ras & Abu-Bader, 2008; Childress, 2003). Abu-Ras (2007) states that few Arabic families that contacted mental health services for domestic violence post 9/11 showed no interest in contacting the police due to fear of stigma and harassment by the police.

Services available to Muslims. Like with any other religious community, two types of formal support services are available to Muslims in the US (Faizi, 2001) in addition to informal support from extended families, friends and the community. These formal supports include such mainstream domestic violence services including case management, counselling, legal advocacy, housing, childcare, transportation, financial assistance, and shelter services (Texas Muslim Women's services, 2011) and religious support services (Faizi, 2011) such as seeking guidance through Mosques and Imams. Religion and spirituality play a major role in many Muslim communities and impact how they cope and view domestic violence. Therefore, many victims tend to seek help from relatives and religious leaders rather than from mainstream domestic violence services (Abu-Ras, 2007). Especially since Islam is considered by many who practice it as a way of life, using spiritual counselling and Islamic teachings are preferred by many victims, including those who are non-practicing. As they turn to Islam as a way of understanding the abuse they undergo, educating victims of their Islamic rights is recommended (Abu-Raz, 2007). However, it is important that Imams, other authority figures, and the community are aware of the dynamics of domestic violence to provide proper assistance (Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007). Additionally, it is equally important that mainstream workers know about the special circumstances of Muslim victims to include the intersections of domestic violence with religion and other factors (Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007; Faizi, 2001; Texas Muslim Women's Foundation, 2011). More recently, Muslim grassroots agencies have begun to provide localized and specialized services that both follow mainstream models of domestic violence and include spirituality as an important aspect of a woman's recovery process, catering to their individual needs (Texas Muslim Women's Foundation, 2011).

Oyewuwo-Gassikia (2016), recently reviewed the literature and identified eight facilitators and barriers to domestic violence service seeking of Muslim women in the US: cultural perceptions of abuse; religious perceptions of abuse; children, feelings of embarrassment, fear, and shame; immigration status and language barriers; education level; knowledge and perception of services; and informal supports and support systems.

4.   Implications and Conclusions

Knowledge acquisition and cultural awareness are key prerequisites to cultural competence (Lockhart & Danis, 2010). As a means to this end, this study reviewed the current literature on Muslims and domestic violence. The current discourse provided an initial overview of complexities and special circumstances of Muslim women who suffer domestic violence. This study highlights the third wave feminists' emphasis on the importance of intersectionality for culturally competent service delivery (Alkhateeb, 1999; Alkhateeb & Abugideiri, 2007; Collins, 1998; Danis, and Lockhart, 2010; Fortune, Abugideiri, & Dratch, 2010). Such an intersectionality perspective goes beyond the view that all victims are the same and promotes multilayer variations between and within-group differences. A major axiom of this perspective is that what we think impacts what we do and how we do it (Lockhart & Danis, 2010). Religion and cultures, as discussed above, can play a major role in how one views the world and obtains meaning and purpose of life (Frakle, 1946). Consequently, the lived experiences of victims can only be understood in light of their important intersections (Lockhart & Danis, 2010), such as religious affiliation. As the above review indicated, this is especially true with Muslim populations. Continuous enhancement and practice of cultural competence is an ethical obligation of the social work field (Lockhart & Danis, 2010). Social workers who work in the domestic violence field that is invested in working with one of the most vulnerable populations also have a special obligation to culturally competent services delivery especially when one considers how leaving abuse is difficult in any circumstance without added layers of complexity and barriers.

Effective cultural competence is not quickly attained. As with all skills and abilities, this takes time and effort to study this group and increase one's understanding. That also calls for additional studies in this area, especially on intersections of Islam, culture, immigration status, socioeconomic status, political history, and the history of patriarchal oppression related to cultural practices of families (e.g., Jayasundara, Nedegaard, Sharma & Flanagan, 2014). Additionally, more knowledge is needed regarding the relationship between these factors and the competent assessment of service needs, barriers to receiving services and successful service delivery. As the literature review highlighted, the past studies on domestic violence and Muslim communities have not examined the special service needs, and barriers from the perspective of victims and service providers, nor have studies considered how social work education prepares students to work with Muslim victims of domestic violence. Finally, it is imperative that both researchers and practitioners who address Muslim culture and discuss delicate topics such as domestic violence should maintain awareness of the current sentiment in the US about Muslims and be demonstrate appropriate sensitivity by not further negative stereotyping.

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