

HEALING THE HEALERS

SPECIAL EDITION: COVID-19

A **LIVE** TOWNHALL

The Rise of Intimate Partner and Family Violence:

How can chaplains & faith leaders respond?

EXPERT REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

A PROJECT FROM

ODYSSEYIMPACT!

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Introduction

At Odyssey Impact, we believe in the power of personal story to change perspectives, change attitudes, and even to change the world. As the COVID-19 pandemic intensified in the U.S., Odyssey Impact responded to the needs of faith leaders, spiritual care providers, and faith communities by convening live town halls on requested topics. Experts, leaders, scholars, and on-the-ground providers shared their candid insights and questions arising in this unprecedented time.

Our hope is the following guide will help current Faith Leaders in their work to lead a thriving congregation or community and faculty as they prepare future faith leaders to navigate trauma.

May our networks of care be strengthened, our imaginations expanded, and our hope ignited.



For the creation of this written resource, we are grateful to Hasnaa Mokhtar who is the Special Program Director at Peaceful Families Project and a Ph.D. candidate at Clark University, and our partner on Healing the Healers Series 1: Collective Trauma and Growth. <https://healingthehealers.org/project/>



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Expert Reflection and Discussion Guide

Hasnaa Mokhtar

Our convening of prison chaplains and people of faith who care about issues of incarceration on May 13, 2020 resulted in important conversations between a wide variety of perspectives. Amidst any diverse gathering of correctional chaplains, the enormous differences between contexts is important to recognize; even the role of chaplain is performed in a wide range of ways. Thus, we are especially eager to have the following curated video clips for further engagement.

Video Clip #1: Preaching to break the silence: what does abuse look like?

Video Clip #2: Centering the voices & lived experiences of victims and survivors

Video Clip #3: Intervention at the intersection of privilege and oppression

We invite you to reflect personally, with your staff or colleagues, or in small group discussions among those with whom you provide spiritual care. After viewing each of the following sections, please take time to reflect first on what the speakers share. Then, consider the prompts below for ways you may continue to respond and practice care amid the unfolding and aftermath of pandemic in your midst.



Hasnaa Mokhtar

Hasnaa Mokhtar is the Special Program Director at Peaceful Families Project and a Ph.D. candidate at Clark University. Her research, writings, and activism focus on amplifying the voices of Muslim women and tackling the injustices of gender-based violence. Hasnaa is a storyteller at heart. In 2006, she worked as a journalist in Arab News, and later her articles appeared in Fortune, Yahoo, Bustle, Teen Vogue, and Muslim Girl. You can read her work at www.hasnaamokhtar.com. Previously, she served as the Executive Director of the Center for Nonviolent Solutions in Worcester, MA. Hasnaa is passionate about life, personal growth, spirituality, and everything in between.



The Peaceful Families Project (PFP) is devoted to preventing domestic violence through community education, training, technical assistance, and research, with a particular focus on Muslim families of diverse cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. PFP encourages a holistic approach to addressing domestic violence through collaboration with faith and community leaders, community members, social service professionals, activists, educators, mental health providers, medical professionals, attorneys, and youth leaders. Through education and training, PFP seeks to promote attitudes and beliefs that emphasize justice, freedom from oppression, and family harmony.

Preaching to break the silence: what does abuse look like?

Video Clip #1

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 18:20 - 21:15)

In this clip, Father Charles Dahm notes that many people in abusive relationships do not recognize abuse and will not name the harm as domestic violence. Imam Mohamed Maged responds by emphasizing the role of faith leaders and chaplains in providing guidance from sacred texts about the various types of abuse, and how people can prevent and respond to such abuse.

Many women I meet through my research, work or activism who have experienced intimate partner or domestic violence, have either denounced their faith or have serious trouble reconciling their spiritual beliefs with the unjust and inhumane treatment they have endured. Unsurprisingly, such women gravitate away from faith leaders and institutions, because more often than not, disciplinary abuse is endorsed, encouraged, and justified via sacred texts, religious directives (e.g. sermons), and study circles. In some cases, the imam, priest, or rabbi is the person committing spiritual abuse. The lines between religion and violence become dangerously blurred. An ex-Muslim advocate for ending violence against women posted a Twitter poll recently asking if the Muslim feminist (A) Lives in contradiction and knows it; Clashes with the truth; or (C) Misunderstands feminism. In her opinion, religion and feminism, one that grants women their rights against violence, cannot coexist. Unfortunately, her views are not uncommon. In contrast, others (feminists included) insist we cannot cede our wisdom traditions to the abuse and corruption of religious institutions. Whatever their perspectives, I have endless compassion for these victims, and I try to offer them nonjudgmental support. Why? Because I was in the same boat not so long ago.

I grew up experiencing domestic abuse, and then married into an abusive relationship at the age of 18. For the longest time, I had a lot of rage inside of me because of what I experienced. However, I had neither the awareness nor the resources to diagnose the symptoms or to seek help. I vividly remember one day, after an abusive episode in which I locked myself on the balcony to cry, that I begged God saying, “If you exist, please help me.” Years later, I discovered that He does exist. The problem is that many of the people supposedly appointed as His spokespeople abuse His words, fail to hold each other accountable, and fail to understand the weight of responsibility they carry to uphold justice and educate people on violence, its signs, and its dangers.

Growing up, my beliefs and value systems were shaped by the knowledge I acquired from religious institutions, educational systems, and familial worldviews. They all shared rigid ideas about gender roles and perpetuated stereotypes about power relations within the family. When abuse or violence occurred, I didn’t recognize it. I didn’t have a name for it. Because I didn’t learn about it. While calls to change the educational systems yielded some progress and positive results, religious institutions lag behind. A few are committed to educating their congregations about the signs of domestic violence, and to holding other faith leaders accountable when they misuse God’s words to legitimize violence. But everyone must be onboard.

Preaching to break the stigma and silence around domestic violence is every faith leader’s responsibility. Educating individuals on what intimate partner violence looks like and why it is a sickness of the heart and soul can save lives. Holding accountable the persons who perpetuate violence, and/or who lead faith communities creates shifts in attitudes and belief systems. I believe that making domestic violence a priority in sermons, discussions, and awareness programs is a communal obligation about which God will question us about when we meet Him one day. Faith and religion can be vital components of change and a healing journey for survivors.

★ Questions for further reflection

- What is the difference between unhealthy, violent, or abusive relationships?
- What are action steps that faith leaders are uniquely positioned to take in working to end intimate partner and domestic violence?
- What are ways, in COVID-19, to educate people on the signs and dangers of domestic violence?

Centering the voices & lived experiences of victims and survivors

Video Clip #2

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 28:20 - 33:22)

In this clip, Rev. Tawana Davis shares that she shows up in her work not only as a pastor and a former chaplain, but as a domestic violence survivor. Dr. Courtney Fisher highlights how leaving an abusive situation, although possible, is dangerous and messy. The need for survivor-led and trauma-informed approaches to domestic violence in faith communities is more crucial than ever in current pandemic conditions.

When I trained in 2014 to serve as a counselor for the sexual assault hotline, our group of trainees met with experts from all walks of life. Lawyers, doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, advocates, caseworkers, and police officers. My most memorable meeting was with a survivor who shared her story of healing, and the reason it took her so long to heal.

“The social worker I talked to asked me, *what happened to you* instead of *what’s wrong with you,*” said the survivor. “It made all the difference. For the first time I felt it was not my fault and there was nothing wrong with me.”

I always tell this story to emphasize three important lessons. First, leaving abusive relationships and healing from domestic violence is a journey and process, although not a quick, easy, or uncomplicated one. There is no blueprint or one-size-fits-all approach. Second, this lifelong healing journey approach allows for the survivor to integrate unique experiences and empathetic interventions to support others. Finally, victim-centered and survivor-led services and interventions are immensely important and urgently needed.

When I look back at my younger self, trapped in an abusive relationship, I see hopelessness and helplessness. I never would have imagined myself being at this point of my life, reconnecting with my inner self, rediscovering my invisible wounds, and working through my trauma. I learned to accept healing as part of my ongoing work to serve. It is never a destination. My experiences allow me to extend compassion (not pity), empathy (not sympathy), and to hold an unconditionally safe space to support others. But the more I do the work of healing and serving, the more I realize how important it is to listen to survivors, to prioritize their needs, and to center their experiences.

The movement to raise awareness about intimate partner and domestic violence is led by many well-intentioned and sincere individuals, groups, and organizations. Yet too often, survivors' voices and trauma-informed approaches to domestic violence advocacy tend to get sidelined. The need for a survivor-led intervention and prevention model is important because it attends to one's autonomy, dignity, and self-determination. It prioritizes one's safety, wellbeing, and needs. It requires taking the specific experience of each survivor as a starting point, recognizing how each experience is shaped by multiple factors and identities, and focusing on how to restore power to survivors. It also necessitates that decision-making within organizations and movements is informed by these unique experiences. In developing programs and ways to support survivors, faith leaders and religious institutions ought to integrate the perspectives of survivors and the expertise of advocates and organizations.

★ Questions for further reflection

- What new perspective or information did you gain for what process of healing from trauma and abuse feels and looks like?
- What is a victim-centered and survivor-led model to services and intervention, and why is it important?
- What action steps could your faith community implement to center the voices and experiences of survivors in the work you do?

Intervention at the intersection of privilege and oppression

Video Clip #3

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 53:57 - 57:39)

In this clip, Rev. Tawana Davis highlights the role faith leaders can play in building strong relations with marginalized and impoverished communities that lack access to many resources sometimes deemed as luxuries. Father Charles Dahm notes connections between prevention work and reaching young people. Understanding the intersection of oppressive systems that exacerbate domestic violence is critically important for dismantling it.

Though many of us are fed-up with lockdown or quarantine regulations due to COVID-19, for some, staying at home means intensified abuse. For others there is no home in which to seek refuge. I work remotely via accessible internet, but I know that for many people, the internet is an unaffordable luxury. To get consultation from medical professionals, I simply log in a portal online and contact my physician, there are those with no health care or medical insurance. As I navigate the world with a visible hijab that marks my Muslim identity, I remain light-skinned and have different experiences of the world than Black Muslims. These factors are crucial to consider as we seek to prevent intimate partner and domestic violence.

We cannot understand and address interpersonal, visible, and direct forms of violence without addressing structural, invisible, and indirect forms of violence. “Personal violence is built into the system” argued the founder of peace and conflict studies, Johan Galtung. When abuse occurs in the home, it is not solely the result of one person’s actions. Ongoing sexism and structural oppression of women and minorities are also factors. When Muslims choose not to disclose abuse, or refuse to seek professional help to escape violence, their decisions are impacted by fear of Islamophobia, racism, and stereotyping. When blacks are perpetually killed due to state violence, it is the result of historically ingrained and systematic anti-Black racism.

All oppression is interconnected. Power and control do not exist without privilege and oppression. Accordingly, for us to do the work of combating intimate partner and domestic violence, we must attend to the intersecting systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism, ageism (to name a few!) that exist across many institutions such as the legal system, education, policies, and the media. These inform interpersonal actions and behaviors, and become internalized beliefs and value systems. Black scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the theory of Intersectionality to feminist theory explaining that, “Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem there, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.”

To change the violent conditions at home, we need to change the violent conditions that lead to domestic violence such as privilege, patriarchy, and anti-immigration hate speech and attitudes. This work requires us to be aware of our own privileges and other people’s oppressions. Blind spots, unconscious biases, and privileged assumptions we make about others create situations ripe for re-victimization and re-traumatization of survivors.

★ Questions for further reflection

- What are your own identities, privileges, and positions of power in relations to the people and cases of domestic violence you are addressing?
- How do your identities, privileges, and positions of power impact your work?
- How might the Oppression and Privilege Self-Assessment Tool or the Privilege Walk exercise be helpful in your work?