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## Domestic Violence in Pakistani Homes Islamic Teachings and Societal Interventions

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### Abstract

Domestic violence in Pakistan represents a persistent yet insufficiently addressed human rights crisis, with countless victims—predominantly women—suffering in silence due to social stigma, legal inertia, and cultural normalization. Despite Islam’s unequivocal condemnation of *zulm* (oppression) and its emphasis on justice and human dignity, domestic abuse is often justified or concealed under patriarchal customs and misappropriated religious interpretations. This contradiction between Islamic moral imperatives and societal practice necessitates a critical scholarly inquiry into the ethical, theological, and structural dynamics of domestic violence. This study undertakes a comprehensive postdoctoral-level examination of domestic violence in Pakistani homes, mapping its psychological, legal, and cultural dimensions. It explores how religious rhetoric is selectively employed to preserve male dominance while overlooking the Qur’anic ethics of equity, compassion, and responsibility. The paper exposes the gap between Islam’s normative teachings and the lived experiences of victims, underscoring the need for authentic religious literacy and interpretive renewal. Central to the analysis is the Qur’anic framework of family life built upon mutual respect, emotional support, and *rahmah* (mercy). Drawing from the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the study highlights his exemplary treatment of women and his rejection of coercion and cruelty. These Prophetic values offer a viable ethical model to confront and reform contemporary abusive dynamics. Additionally, the paper critiques current legal frameworks and law enforcement practices that fail to offer timely and effective protection for victims. Educational and spiritual institutions are also examined for their role in shaping societal attitudes and either perpetuating or preventing abuse.

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence, Islamic Ethics, Patriarchy and Misinterpretation, Prophetic Compassion, Legal and Spiritual Reform

### Introduction

Domestic violence in Pakistan remains a pervasive yet often obscured phenomenon that transcends socio-economic boundaries, regional divides, and educational attainment.

Manifesting in various forms—ranging from physical assaults, emotional and psychological coercion, and economic control to the grievously under acknowledged crime of marital rape—it predominantly targets women but increasingly affects children and the elderly. Within the confines of the home, religious authority and cultural customs are frequently manipulated to justify or conceal these abuses, creating an environment where oppression is normalized under the guise of tradition and misconstrued religiosity.

This reality stands in stark contrast to the Islamic conception of marriage as a union grounded in *sakīnah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (mercy), as articulated in Qur’anic and Prophetic teachings.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than fostering dignity and mutual respect, the family space in many Pakistani households has been morally inverted, becoming a site of domination and fear. Such conditions not only betray the ethical essence of Islam but also reflect a broader societal disconnect from foundational values of justice and compassion.

In response to this deeply rooted crisis, this article seeks to bridge the disjuncture between Islamic ethical mandates and their practical realization in contemporary Pakistani society.<sup>2</sup>

It aims to excavate the theological, legal, and social resources within the Islamic tradition that categorically oppose *zulm* (oppression) and advocate for the sanctity of every individual. Through a multidimensional analysis, this study endeavors to illuminate pathways toward a just and violence-free domestic sphere anchored in authentic Islamic principles.

### Islamic Teachings on Domestic Conduct and Violence

Islamic teachings provide a comprehensive ethical framework for family life, rooted in justice (*‘adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and mutual respect.<sup>3</sup>

The foundational texts of Islam—namely the Qur’an and Sunnah—categorically oppose all forms of injustice (*zulm*), including those that may occur within the domestic sphere. Contrary to cultural narratives that often normalize spousal abuse or male authoritarianism, Islamic doctrine calls for emotional harmony, ethical responsibility, and spiritual partnership between spouses.

### The Qur’anic Framework of Family Ethics

The Qur’an articulates the marital bond as a divine sign and a source of inner tranquility:

“And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find tranquility (*sakīnah*) in them, and He placed between you love (*mawadda*) and mercy (*rahmah*)...”<sup>4</sup>

This verse lays the ethical foundation of a marriage defined not by domination or control but by emotional equilibrium and spiritual intimacy. Equally important is the Qur’an’s absolute prohibition of injustice:

“Indeed, Allah does not love the oppressors (*zālimīn*).”<sup>5</sup>

From this standpoint, any form of physical, emotional, or psychological abuse within a household is not only morally reprehensible but also religiously sinful. The Qur'an envisions family life as a sanctuary, not a battleground.

### The Prophetic Example (Sunnah)

The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ further reinforces these principles. His own conduct within the household epitomized gentleness, patience, and emotional intelligence. He famously declared:

“The best among you is he who is best to his wife, and I am the best among you to my wives.”<sup>6</sup>

There is no record of the Prophet ﷺ ever striking his wives or children, even in moments of tension. His lived example categorically refutes any attempt to justify violence as a form of discipline or authority. In doing so, the Prophetic model offers not only a theological mandate but a moral compass for Muslim families.

### Misinterpretations of Islamic Texts

One of the most misinterpreted and controversial verses concerning gender relations is:

“...As to those women on whose part you fear disobedience (*nushūz*), advise them, abandon them in bed, and (as a last resort) strike them [lightly]...”<sup>7</sup>

This verse has historically been weaponized to legitimize male dominance and even physical abuse. However, contemporary Islamic scholarship—including voices like Muhammad Asad, Fazlur Rahman, Amina Wadud, and Javed Ahmad Ghamidi—emphasize a contextual and ethical interpretation. Key insights include:

1. The verse prescribes a staged, reconciliatory process—not punitive violence.
2. The term "strike" (*darb*) is interpreted symbolically by some as withdrawal or distancing, not physical harm.
3. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself never enacted this verse literally, nor encouraged others to do so.
4. Any interpretation that contradicts Qur'anic values of *rahmah*, *‘adl*, and human dignity is theologically and morally untenable.

### Domestic Violence in Pakistan: Scope and Forms

Domestic violence in Pakistan is not confined to isolated incidents or specific demographics; rather, it is a systemic issue deeply entrenched in cultural, legal, and religious misappropriations.<sup>8</sup>

Despite increased awareness in recent years, domestic abuse remains grossly underreported due to stigma, institutional apathy, and societal normalization. A clear understanding of its prevalence, multifaceted forms, and root causes is essential for formulating effective interventions.

## Prevalence

Empirical evidence underscores the alarming scope of domestic violence in Pakistan.<sup>9</sup>

According to national and international surveys conducted by UN Women, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), and various government agencies, over **30% of married women** have experienced physical, emotional, or psychological abuse from their spouses. These figures are likely conservative due to underreporting, particularly in rural areas where social structures discourage disclosure. While urban-rural variations exist in visibility and response, the pattern of domestic abuse cuts across class, ethnicity, and educational status, reflecting a nationwide crisis.

## Forms of Abuse

Domestic violence manifests in multiple, often overlapping, forms that extend beyond physical harm:

1. **Physical Abuse:** Beating, slapping, kicking, choking, and other forms of bodily harm.
2. **Emotional and Verbal Abuse:** Persistent humiliation, threats, intimidation, manipulation, and enforced isolation from family or social circles.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** Marital rape, coercive intercourse, and other violations of bodily autonomy, often dismissed or unacknowledged under marital norms.
4. **Financial Abuse:** Restricting access to money, sabotaging employment opportunities, or denying basic necessities as a form of control.
5. **Technological Abuse:** Digital surveillance, online harassment, non-consensual sharing of personal data, and manipulation through social media.

These categories demonstrate that domestic violence is not merely a physical threat but a complex violation of autonomy, dignity, and personal agency.

## Contributing Factors

The persistence of domestic violence in Pakistan can be attributed to a confluence of cultural, religious, and institutional factors:

### **Patriarchal Norms Misattributed to Islam:**

Deep-rooted gender hierarchies are often justified using distorted religious rhetoric, reinforcing male dominance and female submissiveness.<sup>10</sup>

### **Lack of Religious Literacy:**

Inadequate understanding of Islamic ethics, especially regarding family conduct, enables the misuse of religious texts to rationalize abuse.<sup>11</sup>

### **Judicial and Police Inefficiency:**

Procedural delays, insensitive law enforcement personnel, and a lack of gender-sensitized judicial frameworks hinder timely justice for survivors.<sup>12</sup>

**Economic Dependency:**

Financial reliance on male guardians forces many women to endure abusive relationships out of necessity rather than choice.<sup>13</sup>

**Social Stigma and Honor Culture:**

Victims often face ostracization, victim-blaming, or threats to family honor, which silences their voices and discourages legal recourse.<sup>14</sup>

**Inadequate Legal Protections:**

Existing laws vary in their scope and enforcement, and many regions lack effective implementation mechanisms, leaving victims vulnerable.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding these factors is vital to developing a nuanced and effective framework for reform, grounded in both Islamic ethics and human rights.

**Islamic Ethical Response to Domestic Violence**

Islamic ethics offer a profound moral framework for the sanctity of family life, emphasizing dignity, justice, compassion, and accountability.<sup>16</sup>

Far from condoning coercion or violence, the Qur'an and Sunnah establish clear moral imperatives that regard the home as a site of emotional security (*sakīnah*) and mutual care. Domestic violence, therefore, is not merely a social ill but a grave ethical and spiritual violation that undermines the core values of Islamic teachings.

**Human Dignity (*Karamah*)**

The Qur'an asserts the inherent dignity of every human being, regardless of gender or social status:

“We have certainly honored the children of Adam...”<sup>17</sup>

This divine affirmation of *karamah* (honor) establishes that any act—physical, verbal, or psychological—that demeans, degrades, or dehumanizes another person is fundamentally un-Islamic. Within the family unit, this principle demands that each member, especially those in vulnerable positions such as women, children, or the elderly, be treated with respect and care. Abuse violates the very essence of this Qur'anic value.

**Justice (‘*Adl*) and Balance (*Mīzān*)**

Justice is a central ethical command in the Qur'an and must be upheld in all human relations, especially within the home:

“Indeed, Allah commands justice (‘*adl*), excellence (*iḥsān*), and giving to relatives...”<sup>18</sup>  
Marriage, as described in the Qur'an, is not a structure of male dominance but a partnership of mutual dependence and equity:

“They are your garments, and you are their garments...”<sup>19</sup>

This metaphor encapsulates the ideals of protection, intimacy, and equality. Any abuse of authority—whether economic, emotional, or religious—represents a distortion of the balance (*mīzān*) that Islam commands in interpersonal relationships. Tyranny within the household undermines not only justice but the divine order.

### **Trust (*Amānah*) and Accountability (*Mas’ūliyyah*)**

Marriage in Islam is a sacred *amānah* (trust), not merely a contract. The responsibilities entrusted to spouses are grounded in ethical stewardship and moral vigilance.<sup>20</sup>

Violence within the home constitutes a betrayal of this trust and violates the divine accountability assigned to marital roles.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized this moral discipline:

“The strong man is not one who overpowers others in wrestling, but the one who controls himself in anger.”<sup>21</sup>

This hadith underscores that moral strength lies not in dominance or aggression, but in emotional regulation and self-restraint. The ethical imperative here is clear: inflicting harm is not an expression of strength but a manifestation of spiritual failure.

By centering *karamah*, *‘adl*, and *amānah*, Islamic ethics offer not only a condemnation of domestic violence but a spiritually grounded alternative rooted in dignity, justice, and mutual accountability. These principles must be revived in contemporary discourse to counteract cultural distortions and realign Muslim households with prophetic values.

### **Legal and Policy Interventions in Pakistan**

Several provinces (Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab, Islamabad) have enacted laws against domestic violence, yet **implementation remains weak** due to:

1. Lack of police training
2. Absence of shelter homes
3. Weak forensic and psychological support
4. Religious opposition from some factions

#### **Gaps in the Legal System**

1. Difficulty proving abuse
2. Lack of female legal representation
3. Delayed justice
4. Reconciliation pressure over justice

## Integrating Shari‘ah-Compliant Protective Frameworks

Islamic jurisprudence permits **judicial separation, khul‘**, and **legal penalties for physical harm** (based on Qisas and Diyat laws). These can be **revived and decontextualized** to support victims within a religiously acceptable legal model.<sup>22</sup>

## Societal Interventions: Toward a Moral Revival

Religious leaders (‘ulamā, khatībīn) must:

1. Reinterpret contested verses responsibly
2. Preach family ethics, mercy, and justice
3. Denounce abuse from Friday pulpits

## Curriculum Reform

Incorporate **Islamic ethics of marriage, anger control, gender justice**, and rights of women in **madaris, universities, and schools**.

## Mosque-Based Counseling Models

Inspired by Qur’an 4:35, establish **community arbitration councils** offering premarital counseling, crisis intervention, and legal advice—all in light of Shari‘ah.

## Digital and Media Advocacy

1. Campaigns led by religious scholars, women activists, and counselors
2. Address religious misconceptions
3. Normalize male vulnerability, emotional responsibility, and non-violence

## Recommendations and Way Forward

Addressing domestic violence in Pakistan requires a coordinated, multidimensional strategy that aligns legal, educational, spiritual, and community-based interventions with the ethical teachings of Islam. The following recommendations present actionable reforms grounded in Islamic principles and responsive to the socio-cultural landscape of Pakistan:

- **Issuance of National Fatwas Against Domestic Abuse**

Recognized religious authorities (e.g., Council of Islamic Ideology, Wifaq al-Madaris) must issue unequivocal fatwas declaring domestic violence—physical, emotional, sexual, or financial—as *ḥarām* (prohibited), clarifying that it constitutes *zulm* in both Shari‘ah and moral terms.

- **Madrasah Curriculum Reform**

Traditional Islamic seminaries should incorporate contemporary modules on marital ethics, gender justice, anger management, and Qur’anic family values. This would



produce future religious leaders equipped to challenge domestic abuse through informed scholarship.

- **Imam-Led Premarital Education Programs**

Mosques should institutionalize premarital counseling led by trained imams and counselors. These programs can instill Islamic values of mutual respect, emotional regulation, and marital rights and duties before conflict arises.

- **Development of Survivor Support Infrastructure**

Establish community-based networks providing shelter, trauma-informed therapy, legal aid, and vocational training for survivors. These services should be Shari‘ah-compliant and culturally sensitive to build trust and efficacy.

- **Integration of Religious Counselors in Family Courts**

Family courts can benefit from including trained religious counselors who provide ethical guidance consistent with Islamic teachings, ensuring that religious values are used to protect—not pressure—victims.

- **Active Male Participation in Anti-Violence Advocacy**

Engage male scholars, community leaders, and youth in campaigns that redefine strength through the prophetic model—where dignity, self-control, and compassion are central. Emphasizing Islamic masculinity rooted in *rahmah* and *hilm* (forbearance) can help counter toxic patriarchal norms.

## Conclusion

Domestic violence in Pakistani society is not a mere family dispute—it is a public ethical breakdown and a spiritual deviation from the principles of Islam. While the Qur’an and Sunnah offer a profoundly dignifying vision of family life based on *sakīnah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*, this vision has been obscured by cultural patriarchies, legal inertia, and theological misreadings.

To combat this endemic issue, a return to the Prophetic model is essential—where moral strength lies in gentleness, where justice protects the vulnerable, and where trust (*amānah*) is never violated through harm. This revival must occur hand in hand with institutional reform: laws must be enforced, educational content reimaged, mosques activated as centers of guidance, and media used to disseminate ethical literacy.

Only through this integrated reform—rooted in Islamic values yet responsive to contemporary realities—can the home be restored to its intended status: not a site of fear, but a sanctuary of peace. It is through such holistic, principled, and collective action that Pakistani society can begin to heal from the spiritual and social wounds of domestic violence.



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