

Safeguarding Women in Public: Reconciling Islamic Teachings with the Reality of Harassment

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Abstract

It is but a great obstacle to the women mobility in public spaces when sexual harassment the women constitute is on an increase. This paper highlights this issue that is enforced within the Islamic context so it can be balanced by the concept of women's honor and dignity, even though the truth is women encounter harassment. It brings into review some Quranic verses and Hadiths that recommends the endowment of women with respect and providing them the leeway to move about public unmolested. Finally, this paper explores the rigidity of Islamic Fiqh (laws based on interpretations of divine revelations) and its relevance in domestic violence context. This paper deals with the identification of the current practices among the Islamic societies geared towards protecting women as well as how Islamic principles could be incorporated to create a culture of respect and accountability in public areas. In a broader sense, this research is intended to fill an existing void which exists between the female experience and Islamic teachings, and to come up with practical solutions that can protect and improve the lives of women.

Keywords: Women Protection, Harassment, Islamic Teachings, Public Spaces, Women's Dignity

Introduction

The plight of public violence on women is a social menace that has no regard for the geographical or cultural barriers around the globe. Harassment is a broad term of which verbal harassment, stalking, and physical assault are only some of the many behaviors that can cause severe psychological damage, limitations in the quality of life and increase of women's anxiety and fear about their physical safety. However discouragingly, this problem is in many parts of the world

and the incidence of its occurrence is reported across different societal groups like the urban and the rural. The research work has been confirmed the facts that regardless of the sex and background, the women all over the world encountering the harassment of various kinds (Kashif, 2017). People are violated to their rights of each individual to be secure and free to interact with society when they are harassed and as a consequence, women put themselves in the group of people who are not free, and the ones who feel fear to be in public spaces.

There is a deep-rooted issue of street harassment against women, especially in Muslim authoritative nations where factors such as the surrounding culture and the mindset of the community can aggravate the problem. Although peoples' customs and lifestyles might vary across Muslim communities, research findings reveal that women in these contexts are commonly victims of sexual violence regardless of their social background or status. In many situations, traditional beliefs, patriarchal rules, and stereotyping of the roles for both genders lead to the normalization of the harassment and women' victory silence regarding their true feelings and experiences (UN Women, Asia-Pacific, n.d). Though there have been sincere attempts to tackle the problem with legal reform provisions, advocacy, and community improvement initiatives, the continuance of the harassment situation has illustrated the need for the total understanding solutions as against partial approaches that just address the physical and cultural reasons behind the harassment problem.

Islamic teachings guide us how modesty, social interaction and women's rights in public areas are related, which are important factors for understanding root cause of harassment and subsequently to any solutions of the issue. Muslims believe in the idea of decent and self-respectful behaviour for both men and women, which leads to high status of self-respect and civility in social relations (Kashif, 2017). Wearing headscarf is frequently understood as a symbol

of the rules of modest clothing but it goes beyond that to include religious ethics of behavior, speech and manner. To begin, Islam emphasizes women's rights to education, work, and involvement in community affairs, stressing on their full appreciation and embracement to the society (UN Women, 2021). Through underlining the substantial respect, consent, and accountability, the teachings of Islam give a discipline designed for the establishment of a culture of dignity and safety for all people without regard to gender.

This research encompasses the role of Islamic teachings in preserving women's safety around public spaces and protection against source that restrict free participation in the society. This means the deliberation of how Islam governs violence and harassment with regards to gender in public and other spaces of people's lives today and always. Through examining the Islamic precepts to gender equality, human rights, and social justice as well as the identification of effective strategies and interventions advocating for the safety, dignity and empowerment of women, the research seeks to achieve its objectives. In this research, by employing an interdisciplinary approach that focuses to Islamic jurisprudence, feminist theories, and human rights discourse, the main purpose of the research is to gain clarity about the complexities and the dynamics of gender in Muslim-dominant societies as well as other societies.

Islamic Teachings on Public Conduct

The holy Quran verses and Hadiths that are Islamic teachings, provide the persons with what they should follow respectfully, and how the women can present themselves in public. For instance, Quranic verses such as Surah An-Nur (24:30-31) although the modesty is emphasized in clothing and manners for men and women, it calls us to lower gaze and to cover each private part. Similarly, various Hadiths narrated by the Prophet Muhammad highlight the virtues of modesty and decency in social interactions, promoting humility, respect, and dignified conduct towards others

(Sahih Muslim, Book 32, and Hadith 6371). The moral outlines make evident the magnitude of creating conduct of respect for others, composure and civilized behavior in the public arenas where people meet.

Islamic values also focus on the notion of social responsibility and the duty, which underline the obligation to make society safe, clean, and environment where all kind of people can coexist. Quranic injunctions urge believers to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong (Al-Imran 3:104), bring social justice, equity and compassion in community work. Being a Muslim, where hisbah means the essential values such as moral rise and eschewing any form of vice acted as collective responsibility for the Muslims to continue in the ethical values and to secure the welfare of all (Abu Dawood & Sunan Nisa, vol. 1 p. 35). Such a principle is applicable to public spaces, for instance, the one of creating a culture of responsibility, interference, and support that leads people to take actions against undesirable outcomes.

Furthermore, Islamic teachings mainly emphasize the role of men who they should assume respect towards women and eliminate harassment. Quranic verses such as Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59) While emphasizing the need of men to lower the gaze and respect women's modesty in public areas He solicits believers to offer their help by doing self-restraint and expressing their regard about women's autonomy and dignity. Besides that, the Prophet Muhammad's vision provided the guidance towards the good behavior and chivalry, condemning any form of transgression or abuse (Sahih Bukhari, Book 73, Hadith 10). By implementing gender equality as well as dignity and mutual respect principles, Islamic mean of teaching clearly asks men to become active contributors in building societies in which women can not only participate fully, but also can be successful.

In conclusion, the Qur'anic verses, the Hadiths, and the Islamic principles stand for guidance in the complete sense of the thing in this regard which includes women's modesty, conditional advised interaction with men, and women's existence in public spaces. This kind of training enhances the value of cultivating a culture that puts mutual respect and social responsibility first, awards people according to their ethical conduct, has an interventionist spirit, and creates safe environments. Through the implementation of these guidelines, Muslims will be able to tackle problems regarding harassment in public areas and build a world in which people respect each other irrespective of their physical differences or social privileges.

The Reality of Harassment

According to the Islamic teachings, Quranic verses and Hadiths give teachings and observances for modesty, respectfulness and women's presence in public places. For instance, Quranic verses such as Surah An-Nur (24:30-31) highlight modesty as part of dressing and conduct for men and women - "Control your glances, and keep your private parts covered to keep yourself pure." In addition to this, numerous Hadiths were narrated by the Prophet with Muhammad's story of modesty and decency. They showed his humility, affection, and avoidance of any demeaning behaviour towards others (Sahih Muslim, Book 32, Hadith 6371). This becomes even more apparent when we look at the school of thought itself in regard to temperance, consideration and personal honor, which form the principles of decorum in public.

Another dimension of Islam is its insistence on justice and the moral requirement for making society safe and harmonized for all people. Quranic injunctions urge believers to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong (Al-Imran 3:For exemplary leadership, Miller (104), in his article tries to draw the attention of citizens to social welfare responsibilities like fairness, justice, and empathy in the community. The idea of "the hisba that emphasizes the ethical actions of the

people and also prevents vice, has been a sign of the responsibility of the society which is represented by Muslims to conduct ethical actions and protect others in the society since long time ago (Abu Dawood, Book 41, Hadith 4801). This paradigm is interconnected with harassment in public places interactions, and it should be a culture of accountability, intervention, and support where individuals will be interacting through preventing and addressing cases of harassment.

Furthermore, Islamic belief places much importance on how men see women as another race which has right to their own life as well as their right to live a better life without being harassed. Quranic verses such as Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59) The commanding verse 30 emphasizing the point lower down eyes of men wherever and wherever they find any woman as to keep their guard on their modesty. The occasion is there for men to show off their forbearance and women can together maintain their dignity and decency in public life. Furthermore, the ideology of the Prophet Muhammad upholds values of compassion, gallantry, and respect towards women whilst completely restraining any forms of mistreatment or abuse of women (Sahih Bukhari, Book 73, Hadith 10). Through principles propounding equality of genders but with respect and honor for women, Islam directs men to be part of activities creating safe and inclusive communities where gender inclusions are observed.

Verses of Quran, Hadiths and Islamic laws provide an exhaustive framework for attending to modesty, internal respectfulness and propriety in public spaces by women. The training centers around the life principles which promote a climate of shared respect, societal conscience, equality between sexes, and the concept of doing the right thing by calling cease to a crime and creating safe zones especially for the vulnerable groups. By implementing these principles, Muslims can

resolve harassment in the public spaces and the societies will be more inclusive ones where the rights and dignity of everyone are preserved for the protection of the public space.

Reconciling Principles with Reality

The harassment of the public space is, in part, due to a complex interplay of social, cultural and psychological factors that emerge in its essence and continuity. Social-tendencies (role standards, power relations, and presumptions) formed by grouping impact the personality of different individuals and their perception of the public sphere (Kearl, 2018). In a cultural context that worships male leadership, oppresses women and finds excuses for violence against females, such a setting normalises the behavior of abusers of women (UN Women, Asia-Pacific, n.d.). Furthermore, psychological factors such as the gender of individuals, their attitudes, degree of belief and perception that bring about the perception and response of the individuals becomes deterministic in how they react to the harassment (Buchanan et al., 2017). Such as perpetrators may make their behavior right by blaming the women however wrong they are or believing the women are responsible for promiscuous responsible. Therefore, the public spaces should not be solely designated for a few, but they should be equal, respecting and multi-functional spaces for all.

Categorically, sexually harassment of women has an important role in their wellbeing, freedom of movement, and participation in the society. Maltreatment not only does physical and emotional harm to the victim which includes long-term impacts on the life of the victim (By Fisher et al., 2018). The women who are victims of this kind of harassment often claim that they feel vulnerable, afraid, and powerless; this can affect not only their self-esteem but also their mental health in general as reported by Fisher et al., (2018). Also harassment limits women ability of getting education employment and other social activities whereby women are confined to home

while men are advancing their lives (UN Women, 2020). There could exist a situation where women would rather diminish their safety out of fear of assault by following behaviors of not going to certain places and times of the day that will eventually deny them their autonomy to join the public. The perilous impacts of this violence sustain the saga of gender bloated inequalities and thereby challenge attempts to gain gender equality and empower women as well. Comprehensive statistics and research shed light on the prevalence and different forms of harassment that women encounter in public spaces, showing the importance of the effective interventions and the solutions. The data from different countries remains uniform beyond the measure of harassment.

In fact, worrying figures about this issue are reported across varied context and settings (Stop Street Harassment, n.d.). It is seen in surveys that women of different ages, lifestyles, and social status are always in danger of harassment, whereas the younger generation and oppressed people are more prone to mistake (Stop Street Harassment, n.d.). Besides, the type of harassment delivers in different styles including verbal, unwanted physical contact, stalking, and sexual assault. This shows that the problem at hand is multi-faceted (Kearl, 2018). Eventually, research numbers will give a more holistic picture of the harassment space, annoying and writing an instructional message, and help government agencies to see problem areas, guide advocacy teams and encourage collective action.

In general, harassment in the public sectors is a matter of multiple interactions of social, cultural, and mental factor that has consequences of it has been prevalent and impacting. Identifying the root causes that contribute to harassment, as well as the lasting effects and impact on those affected, is a crucial step in forming powerful strategies to stop this widespread abuse. Social justice efforts to this end may mean targeting the underlying factors for

harassment and also providing appropriate support to the victims, which, in the long run, will provide safer and more welcoming community for all, where every person is able to feel respected and safe, as well to go freely without constraints.

Discussion

The integration of Islamic teachings with modern attempts to emancipate women and guarantee their well-being in the public areas of the society can have really vital implications for the promotion of equality between the genders and justice to the society. Justice, equality and the intrinsic value of all individuals are the primary principles that motivate the teachings of Islamic belief system (Al-Azmeh, 2003). While employing these approaches, the Islamic principle can introduce a new trend of uprooting patriarchal order by demolishing gender-based violence and discrimination (Khan, 2019). For example, Islamic dictates of modesty and integrity in public communication can be utilized to specifically develop interventions and programs aimed at providing public spaces with respect (Haque, 2020). Nevertheless, such concern of women's rights to education and work as well as participation in public life as has been highlighted in Islamic preaching, can go a long way in creating a habitat where women feel empowered to demand accountability for their safety (UN Women, 2023).

While implementing solutions drawing from Islamic paradigm which are aimed to minimize gender-based violence may be found to be challenging in diverse social contexts. The religious traditions and also customary practices in which colonialists used to interpret the Islamic teachings, they might be reinforcing the gender norms that are restrictive and they might suppress efforts aimed at advancing women's rights, as (Khan, 2019 put it). Moreover, the resistance from Muslim conservative religious authorities or other social actors who interpret the Islamic teachings in a way that reduce opportunities and challenge women's empowerment

efforts and efforts to combat gender-based violence may become a hindrance to any initiative targeted at women and violence based on gender (Haque 2020). Also, it involves an extensive approach that deals with the structural aspects of the issue like inadequate legal remedies, police bias, and socioeconomic problems through transcending religious frameworks (UN Women, Asia-Pacific, n.d.). And accordingly, the applying of Islamic principles may bring to light the issues related to safety of women and provide them with moral foundations however, the process of overcoming the challenges underlined by diverse social contexts and deep-rooted power imbalances will remain a difficult issue. While the ideals of Islam have much to offer to the quest of empowering women and ensuring their safety in the public space, this article is not without shortcomings that should be carefully examined.

For instance, the tendency for a particular school of thought to be followed and emphasized may overlook the multiplicity of views in Islamic scholarship and the dynamical nature of the discussions within the framework of the religious discourse (2003). Besides, regional differences on the social norms, cultural performances, and the legislative systems may distort the content and the performance of the solutions that emerge in line with Islamic principles. (UN Women, Asia-Pacific Region, n.d.). Henceforth, future research must develop multilayered perspectives that consider interpretations of Islam that are multiple and also explore how other characteristics like socioeconomic status and culture might play a role in determining the lives of women in various societies. Also, accommodate the grassroots organisations, community leaders and the policymakers by collaboration to create solutions based on this principles which are relevant, inclusive and sustainable in these efforts.

Conclusion

Thus, such research reveals that the principles of Islam may find a way through offering the means of protection for the women in the public spaces as well contributing to the achievement of social order and equality. In Islam, there are values of justice and fairness that help in the fight against patriarchal structures and gender-based violence. For the Muslim woman, Islam thus provides the platform to express herself, to challenge traditional roles and to do so in a just and balanced society (Khan, 2019). The main findings emphasized the need for further dialogue and mutual actions between religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society organizations as they collectively come up with and implement approaches that are in line with Islam and that put high value on women's safety and well-being in the public (UN Women Headquarters, n.d.). Understanding this the need to solution may be emerged from the comprehensive culture of respect in public spaces based on Islamic values requires the addressing of systemic problems and engaging all diverse participants (Haque, 2020). Therefore, advanced studies need to address the designs of innovative interventions, durability of network, and empowering the interests of women in order to contribute to the development of secure, functional and inclusive society.

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