

Recording...



Dr. Siti, Lecturer at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ISLAM

AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The status of women in Islam is a pertinent issue in modern times due to the growing recognition of the nexus between religion and human rights. It is widely acknowledged that Islam raises the status of women and safeguards their human rights.

[“Engaging Muslim faith actors in the issues of violence against women and girls is crucial because faith actors play an important role in shaping the norms and practices in our communities.”](#) These were the words of Dr. Siti, lecturer at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, as she moderated a webinar held last month to examine the Islamic Perspectives on Preventing Violence Against Women (VAW).

Dr. Siti acknowledged that there is a rise in the number of victims and survivors of violence against women and girls in the Muslim world. She called upon the faith actors to explore the disconnect between Islamic teachings and practices, identify if there is something wrong with our understanding of Quranic verses, and, find which of the verses have been misinterpreted to encourage Violence Against Women.

During the webinar, the speakers looked critically at sexual and gender-based violence and their understandings of Islamic teachings on violence against women and they also shared experiences on how Muslim faith actors can prevent SGBV through faith-based action and re-interpretation of religious texts and teachings.

Below is a summary of discussions by the four panelists:

Panellist 1: Dr. Tuti Alawiyah, Deputy Director, Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Jakarta.



The root causes of VAW include cultural causes such as patriarchal ideologies that place women in subordinate positions. They also use verses such as Quran 4.34 and 33 that have been used to justify violence against women and girls.

Dr. Tuti mentioned that the word 'Dharaba', often translated as wife-beating has been used to justify VAW and intimate partner violence but can be interpreted differently. When discussing and interpreting the Quran, it is important to review the basis of the verse, the context, and the culture at the time. Therefore it should be interpreted using the universal message of the Quran.

'Out of the 49 times the word 'Dharaba' is mentioned in the Quran, the meaning of beating is mentioned only once. We can use other meanings of 'Dharaba' such as Livedom in Ayah 34. Settlement of issues with the issue through advise, separate from their bed or send them away.'

Currently, Dr. Tuti works with theologians and religious leaders to interpret and explain the understanding of the 'Dharaba' to their communities. The Muslim leaders acknowledge that the misinterpretation of the 'Dharaba' has been used to justify domestic and intimate partner violence. Aisiyah and Muhammadiyah have developed a 'Sakina family guide book' for its Muslim members that contain family principles and values. It also directs users to different Quranic verses that can be used to resolve conflicts in the family setting.

Panellist 2: Prof. Dr. Ahmed Ragab, Professor of reproductive health at the International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research, Al-Azhar University, Egypt.



"In Islam, there are no rights but there are duties. Duties of someone of tends to be rights of another." Prof Dr. Ahmed Abulmekt, ex-chairman of human rights in Egypt, as quoted by Prof. Ragab.

Prof. Ragab mentioned that women are respected in Islam. He emphasized that violence against women has nothing to do with Islam. It is a manmade concept that has nothing to do with Islam; he termed it as a misunderstanding of religious teachings. In many societies, women's rights are not considered and Muslims are practicing their own culture, practices, and traditions. This has resulted in women being subjected to patriarchal and traditional practices and political oppression that harm women.

Prof. Ragab further expounded on the role of husband and wife and noted that matters such as Polygamy was not invented by Islam. It is a practice that started before Islam

The role of the man and woman in the household has also been used to justify VAW. Polygamy did not come with Islam. It was already there when Islam came. Furthermore, FGM/female cutting does not appear anywhere in the Qu'ran. There is no single evidence in the Quran that encourages Female Genital Mutilation. The Rulers opinion is Sharia. If the ruler prohibits FGM, this becomes Sharia'

Prof Ragab said that International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research has resources on the eradication of Violence against Women. They have prepared training manuals, training workshops, caravans, and training Al-Azhar students using the manuals.

Prof. Ragab provided two recommendations on how we can strengthen the understanding of theologians and take into consideration of women's experiences to repair the harm that has been done to women. First, theologians need to understand the anatomy of women and men and this will enlighten them on FGM. By understanding the anatomy of a woman, they will know that female cutting is removing an important and useful part of a woman's body. Second, Theologians need to understand the harm of early child marriage such as Fistula; If they understand this they will not support child marriage.

Panellist 3: Sheikh Saliou Mbacke, President, Cadre des Religieux pour la Santé et le Développement (CRSD)

"Islam gives an important position to women. Both men and women are equal in Islam and equal in duties but with different responsibilities" In his presentation, Sheikh Mbacke said that theology is a human construct and can be manipulated by humans to suit human interests at different times. He added that the mistreatment of women is not based on Islamic text but is based on patriarchal interpretations of the text. Islam mentions that men have to have mercy and treat women with compassion considering the responsibilities of taking care of the home and children.

"As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct (nushuz), admonish them, refuse to share their beds, and beat them" 34th Qur'anic verse (Ayah) of the Al Nisa (Women) chapter (Surah).



Sheikh Mbacke stated that this verse has been used as a justification for violence against women and in most socio-legal discussions. He called upon faith leaders to interpret texts by focusing on the spirit of the Quran and Allah. He further expressed that advocacy and sensitization of religious leaders on religious texts are important to equip them with the correct knowledge to play their role in sensitizing communities in society.

Sheikh Mbacke added that Muslim family Law comes from male-dominated interpretations of religious texts. Whilst laws can be put in place to proscribe violence, this is not enough to prevent violence against women. Therefore, it is important for women to be aware of their rights in Islam and to gain knowledge and education so that they can defend themselves.

Panellist 4: Mohammed Bun Bida, Programme Manager, Muslim Family Counselling Services (MFCS)



Mohammed mentioned that there is a clear distinction between normative teachings and Islamic teachings. Bearing in mind cultural beliefs and religious beliefs in the communities that we serve, at MFCS, they use an interfaith approach when working with religious leaders, that is, using scriptural texts for Muslim and Christian communities.

They have worked to improve the attitudes of both traditional and faith leaders in responding to SGBV. They are working to respond to SGBV with men and women to improve the community safety nets.

"We are empowering women and men to fight this by increasing knowledge and teachings in correct religious texts". Mohammed noted.

Mohammed specified that different cultural beliefs and religious beliefs determine how faith leaders can prevent SGBV. He suggested that faith leaders can respond to calls on ending SGBV in the community by re-interpreting religious texts.

"Faith leaders are usually the first point of response for SGBV survivors in the community. But if faith leaders do not know how to respond to these cases, in some cases, they send them back home."

In conclusion it was submitted by the facilitator that Faith to Action Network recognizes that there are barriers that have contributed to the discrimination against women. One of the barriers is the misinterpretation of scripture; religious scriptures have been misused to justify discrimination, inequality, and violation of women's rights. The other barrier to women enjoying rights is the mixing of culture and religious practices. In most communities, the boundaries between culture and religious practices are fluid and what is cultural is wrongly viewed as religious.

To help provide clarity on the theological grounding and the practice of women's rights in Islam, Faith to Action Network in collaboration with its founding members Al-Azhar University, Muhammadiyah, and Muslim organizations has organized a series of six consultative dialogues that aim to create a safe space for Muslim faith actors to share perspectives and insights on Women's Rights in Islam. This webinar was the 1st one in a series of 6. The next one will be in July.

The webinar was held in collaboration with Muslim Family Counselling Services (MFCS) and Cadre des Religieux pour la Santé et le Développement (Religious Leaders Framework for Health and Development, Senegal) and attracted 53 participants comprising leading Islamic scholars, local Muslim scholars in Africa and Indonesia, faith leaders, civil society organizations and Muslim women's rights networks. The webinar video is available [here](#).

Additionally, the dialogues will contribute to our advocacy efforts we are implementing through 2 projects named YW4A- Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability (YW4A) and Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA). These two projects seek to raise awareness on young women's human rights, with a focus on young women's leadership, participation and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and strengthen and use the agency of religious actors in furthering freedom of religion or belief by challenging harmful norms and practices in relation to gender equality that limit the rights of women, respectively.

Special Gratitude to our partners



YW4A - Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability (YW4A), aims to strengthen the leadership and advocacy capacities of young women and women's rights organisations (WROs) in Egypt, Palestine, South-Sudan and Kenya. World YWCA is working in collaboration with YWCA Kenya, YWCA South Sudan, YWCA Egypt, YWCA Palestine, Equality Now, Faith to Action Network, KIT Royal Tropical Institute and Ibrahimia Media Center.

Together with progressive faith allies, policy and legal experts in the African and Middle East and North African (MENA) regions, these young women and WROs raise awareness, advocate and hold governments to account on young women's human rights, with a focus on young women's leadership, participation and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)



Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA) is an interfaith consortium – including Catholic, Islamic, Protestant, interreligious and secular organisations – which will promote Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda. We will partner with religious actors as agents of change within the broader civic space.

While acknowledging religion and religious actors' important role in promoting FoRB, the consortium also understands that the freedom of religion of one person can also result in the limitation of the rights of others. Across the countries in which we work, harmful norms and practices in relation to gender equality, youth participation and sexual orientation persist. Often these norms have a basis in religious doctrines and understanding. This includes practices such as forced marriages, sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) including female genital mutilation (FGM), limited access to resources, and exclusion from decision-making processes within the household, community and (in)formal religious institutions. Patriarchal tendencies and doctrines within religious communities hamper the attainment and fulfilment of women's rights. JISRA will strengthen and use the (potential) agency of religious actors in furthering freedom of religion or belief. Our approach to religious engagement recognises that religious actors, both leaders and lay people including women and youth, can be positive voices for peace within their communities.

Special Gratitude to our members

