

The Female Scholars Network

**Addressing Spiritual Abuse in
Our Community:
*A Community Call In and
Leadership Directives***

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Introduction

All praise is due to Allah, the Just, the all-Hearing, the Ever-Watchful, and peace and blessings be upon our beloved Messenger Muhammad ﷺ and his blessed family and companions.

The following is a paper formally written by the Female Scholars Network, a group of over 100 female Islamic scholars, teachers, and daa'iyyas across Canada, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, Malaysia and elsewhere around the world.

We condemn the ongoing issue of abuse within religious spaces, which has permeated all communities for far too long. We also stand firmly in support of victims of all forms of abuse in their quest for justice and truth, and in awe of their strength and courage as they go through the painful journey of healing and recovery.

As Muslims, we aspire to be grounded in a foundation of taqwa, knowing that Allah will hold us all to account for how we choose to behave in the face of this evil. We are also grounded in a foundation of justice against *dhulm* (oppression)^{1 2}; which includes holding one another to account. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ reminded us that **“A believer is the mirror of his brother. When he sees a fault in it, he should correct it.”**³

Most importantly, we are grounded in the knowledge that we must take account of ourselves before we are collectively held accountable on the Day of Judgement, and that those of us in positions of leadership will be questioned about our leadership.⁴

While abuse is a universal human problem not specific to any race, religion, or culture, as Muslims we have a religious obligation to look within our ummah and to “command the good and forbid evil.”⁵ As a Muslim community, it is our sacred duty

¹ {Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.} (Qur'an 16:90)

² {O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives...} (Qur'an 4:135)

³ Abu Hurayra said, "A believer is the mirror of his brother. When he sees a fault in it, he should correct it." [\[Al-Adab Al-Mufrad\]](#)

⁴ Abdullah ibn Umar reported: The Messenger of Allah, ﷺ, said, "Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock." [\(Bukhari and Muslim\)](#)

⁵ Quran 9:112

to protect the vulnerable, offer support to the victims, and ensure that they receive care, compassion, and justice. The Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَلْيُغَيِّرْهُ بِيَدِهِ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِلِسَانِهِ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِقَلْبِهِ وَذَلِكَ أَضْعَفُ الْإِيمَانِ

"Whoever among you sees an injustice, let him change it with his hand; if he is unable to do so, then with his tongue; if he is unable to do so, then with his heart; and that is the weakest level of faith" [Sahih Muslim].

The principles and objectives of Islamic law (*maqasid ash-shari'ah*) guide us to speak out against harm and to prevent it where possible:

- Maxim: *La darara wa la diraar* (No harm should be inflicted nor reciprocated).⁶
- Maxim: *Dar' al mafasid muqaddam 'ala jalb al masalih* (Prevention of harm is given precedence over pursuing benefit).⁷

Additionally, we wish to remind the community that addressing spiritual abuse is not a "women's issue" or a way to attack men; rather, victims of abuse include boys and men, and perpetrators include women. In this matter, as in all matters, we remember Allah's words: **{The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong...}** (Qur'an 9:71)

We must thus stand with those who have been wronged, provide them with a safe space for healing, and work together to prevent further harm. Our obligation goes beyond speaking out against abuse; we must provide resources and support to help navigate a path to healing, and work to prevent future abuse at a grassroots level.

It is in this spirit that we write this paper.

⁶ "*La darar wa la dirar*" is an Islamic legal maxim that means "no harm shall be inflicted nor reciprocated". The maxim is based on a hadith, and is close to the principle of "non-maleficence" in secular bioethics. Islam directs people to not be harmful or maleficent to others, and if one is harmed, Islam advises not to reciprocate harm. The term "darar" is a legal term that means harm, prejudice, or cruelty. For example, in marriage, darar may be grounds for divorce.

⁷ *Dar' al-mafasid muqaddam 'ala jalb al-masalih* is an Islamic maxim that means "Prevention of harm is given precedence over pursuing benefit." Under this maxim, warding off of evils is given preference. This maxim can be used to help resolve disputes in cases where there is a lack of direct evidence, but the risk of grave harm is present.

What Is Spiritual Abuse?

Spiritual abuse refers to the misuse of religious knowledge, authority, or position to control, manipulate, or harm individuals or groups.⁸ It involves exploiting religious influence to dominate others, often leading to emotional, psychological, physical, financial, or even sexual harm.⁹ Such abuse undermines the victim's autonomy, manipulates their faith, and maintains control, either using religious beliefs or by simply exploiting the power dynamics within the relationship. Whether through emotional, financial, physical, or sexual exploitation, this form of abuse operates by eroding trust, distorting religious teachings, and isolating the victim from sources of support. Whilst we are aware that the term 'spiritual abuse' may be used with different intended meanings, the definition above is widely accepted by professionals in the field and will be our intended meaning when using the term henceforth.

Spiritual abuse not only harms the well-being of individuals but can also severely impact a person's relationship with Allah, their faith, and their future.¹⁰ The most significant and distinct harm created by spiritual abuse is that the perpetrator explicitly or implicitly places themselves in the position of Allah ﷻ, or as an intermediary to Him within the life of another person, thereby distorting the victim's relationship with their faith altogether. Therefore, the heinousness of this crime cannot be overstated.

The consequences of spiritual abuse in our families, our communities, and our societies at large are simply too grave to ignore.¹¹ Spiritual abuse is not a matter of one-off scandals we hear about within the larger Muslim community, but a chronic, festering disease that harms everyone. Criminal actions such as grooming, sexual assault of women, and child sexual abuse must be investigated to identify factors that enable the abuse, with an eye toward building strategies for prevention.

⁸ [Defining Spiritual Abuse, and Why We Use The Term](#)

⁹ [Processing Spiritual Abuse In Islam: A Comprehensive Guide For Individuals, Communities, And Organizations](#)

¹⁰ [Insights into the Psychological Sequelae of Spiritual Abuse, Dr Rania Awad and Dr Tabish Riaz](#)

¹¹ [The Challenges of Leaving Spiritually Abusive Groups](#)

The Fallibility of Scholars

The most important principle of our deen is that of tawheed. One of the main objectives of Islam was to eradicate intermediaries between people and God. The Makkans had several idols as intermediaries, while the Christians, through the practice of confession, turned to their priests and popes as intermediaries between them and God. They also held the belief that some figures were infallible. Islam eradicated this ideology of intermediaries to allow each individual to have a personal and individual relationship with Allah, with no need for any priest or idol to pray on their behalf.

Scholars and righteous people are an integral part of our deen; many assist people on their journey to Allah, offering crucial insight and naseeha (advice). Respect for our scholars, righteous people, and elders is a part of our tradition, and having access to scholars to assist a person on their journey to Allah is a great blessing. This respect, however, is not without its limits, and there should be absolutely no adherence to the words of a scholar where he or she contradicts the guidelines given by Allah and His Messenger ﷺ.

There have been many cases of spiritual abuse in the Muslim community involving those in clerical positions. Keeping in mind that we do not believe in the infallibility of scholars, we must emphasize that no scholar or pious person should be held equal to Allah. No scholar has special access to worshiping Allah in a way that other believers are excluded from, nor should they be positioning themselves in this manner.

Individuals who position themselves in this manner must be identified and held to account, whether by legal authorities and/or by the community (when applicable). Where individuals hold positions of responsibility towards communities and individuals, such vigilance becomes even more critical. Communities should ensure that there is no glorification of teachers as though they are sinless or somehow above reproach, as this paves the way for predatory people to gain an easy following. Time and time again, we have seen Muslims in positions of power completely destroy the lives of those they were meant to protect.¹²

¹²[Blurred Lines: Women, “Celebrity” Shaykhs, and Spiritual Abuse](#)

Who Are the Abusers?

Anyone can exploit a situation where they hold some power over another person. Abuse is not limited to a particular gender, age group, profession or level of knowledge. It is often a combination of personal and contextual circumstances that allow for abuse to occur in the first place and then continue unabated.

Abuse more likely occurs if the context facilitates opportunities for abuse. This usually means that the abuser has easy access to vulnerable individuals, that there are few accountability structures in place, and that the abuser's harmful actions are overlooked by others. Abusers may also instill fear in the victim or manipulate them into thinking that the abuse is normal and that they should not speak out or that they have no avenue to seek help.

Predators often engage in commonly identified grooming tactics with both adult and child victims such as giving gifts, the over-praising of physical attributes, claiming God will be pleased with them if they unreservedly listen to the person being abusive, and rewarding the victim for their compliance. These behaviors are red flags that parents and leaders need to be vigilant about. Abusers may also make direct threats to victims' *dunya* and *akhira*, such as telling victims that God will be displeased with them if they refuse to comply or if they tell anyone, or that the abuser will tell people things that would make the victim feel ashamed if others were to know.

Major red flags also include encouraging the victim to keep secrets and not tell anyone else what is happening, communicating with the victim in private in person or online or both, and hiding their actions from the general public. Very often victims are made to feel like they are making a mutual decision and complying with the abusers requests of their own volition. However, the reality is often more complex as they may not realize they have been groomed. They may have been led to believe that they have a 'special relationship' with the abuser.

Some signs of abuse can be very clear. These include cases where a perpetrator asks someone to carry out haram actions, sometimes justifying them within a religious context, or when they demand total obedience, promising that it will bring the victim closer to Allah, or when they control many of the victims' everyday religious

and personal decisions. Abuse itself is often hidden, which means that we should look out for misconduct and signs of abuse and use these to question behaviours.¹³

Vulnerable Targets for Grooming and Exploitation:

While anyone can be a target for grooming and exploitation, particular individuals are recognised as vulnerable groups at greater risk for abuse. These include:

- Children and young adults
- Single mothers with weak or non-existent support networks
- Convert mothers, convert women in general, and new male converts
- Muslim women who are starting their journey to their deen
- Divorcees
- Women struggling to find a spouse
- Individuals who have been abused in the past
- Muslims who grew up without an understanding of religion and are reconnecting with Islam
- Those struggling with mental health challenges (diagnosed or otherwise)
- Those who are disabled and may be without strong support or protections

Children in particular are more susceptible to believing what adults tell them, especially if the adult holds a trustworthy position or is introduced to them by other trusted adults. Some may not be sure about what types of conduct are acceptable when coming from an adult, while others may not know how to seek help when an adult's conduct toward them is obviously inappropriate. Even with guidance from parents or other adults about personal boundaries and having models of healthy relationships around them, children are especially vulnerable to being told that there are "exceptions."

Once a person is trapped in an abusive situation, it becomes very difficult for them to find a way out. Abuse often begins as harmless affection, which may escalate very slowly and incrementally. This process is called grooming and causes the victim to let their guard down, while being manipulated to not realize that they are in fact victims.

¹³Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 has a list of behaviours considered suspicious: [Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship](#)

People rely on the help and support of religious leaders, and they should be able to do so safely without the risk or fear of any exploitation. Mosques and Islamic organisations must be cognizant of the vulnerability of the above-mentioned groups and provide them with referrals to appropriate local support where necessary (such as Muhsen in the US and Solace in the UK). Even when such organizations do not exist specifically to address abuse, the built-in support systems that they do provide function as a protective measure.

A Call To Action:

We call on imams, community leaders, teachers, and Islamic institutes to:

- 1. Implement safeguarding measures to protect all staff, students, and community members**
- 2. Hold predators publicly accountable through legal means and internal policies**
- 3. Prioritise discussions around spiritual abuse**
- 4. Establish structures that support victims and survivors**
- 5. Provide education on building God-centered healthy family dynamics**

1. We call on imams, community leaders, teachers and Islamic institutes to actively safeguard staff, students, and the wider community.

We must take precautionary measures to prevent abuse and to set up a culture of safe leadership. There should be safeguarding training¹⁴ for all staff and a strong safeguarding policy should be enforced with consequences for misconduct. Institutions should appoint a designated safeguarding lead to whom any unsafe behaviours and potential issues can be reported.

All safeguarding policies should include Islamic guidelines on *khalwah*, interactions with minors, private communications, and a blanket prohibition on communication outside of official platforms.

¹⁴ Such trainings are available through existing organizations, such as the [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(UK\)](#), although there exists a need for further trainings to be developed in the context of religious leadership

Those in positions of leadership, whether as religious figures or masjid/institution board members, must demand that any organizations that they work for or with have safeguarding policies developed and enforced.¹⁵

In order to prevent offenders from moving from community to community wreaking havoc, *masajid*, institutions, and organisations, which all have a clear obligation to protect others from harm, must institute policies of refusing to hire anyone who has been involved in *any* form of abuse, anywhere, let alone those convicted of such offences.

There must be clear recruitment processes for larger institutions with the relevant safeguarding background checks.¹⁶ Laws exist to prevent the employment of individuals with certain types of convictions on their records (e.g. child sexual abuse) if such employment puts them in a position to be working with vulnerable demographics. Religious organizations must consider themselves akin to social services organizations and comply with these laws, given that *masajid* and other religious spaces often serve as socio-spiritual resources.

¹⁵ [Ensuring The Safety Of Our Communities: A Call For Immediate Corrective Action From American Muslim Organizations](#)

¹⁶ In the UK, a DBS check could flag up such convictions, although this obviously does not account for potential perpetrators. In countries like Canada, a Criminal Record Check will flag prior convictions as well.

2. We call on imams, community leaders, teachers and Islamic institutes to hold predators publicly accountable through legal means.

Community leaders must get professional training from accredited sources so that they can learn about mandatory reporting, signs of child abuse, and how to support victims. In turn, this knowledge should be shared with the public so that the entire community receives consistent messaging about how to deal with these matters in an Islamically ethical and appropriate manner.

There must be due processes within institutions to receive and thoroughly investigate complaints and to hold predators accountable. Institutions must ensure that these processes for reporting and investigation are made well-known. To avoid corrupt or perfunctory investigations, these complaints should ideally be dealt with by a designated external body. We thus call upon community leaders to establish such a regulating body.

This work has already begun at some *masajid* and Islamic organizations; existing structures of accountability can be further researched and serve as sources of inspiration for building effective systems for use in the Muslim community.

In addition to internal processes, institutions should not hesitate to contact relevant authorities such as the police when the law has potentially been broken and individuals have been harmed.

In order to recognize abuse and implement these policies, community leaders must get professional training from accredited sources so that they can learn about mandatory reporting, signs of child abuse, and how to support victims. In turn, this knowledge should be shared with the public so that the entire community receives consistent messaging about how to deal with these matters in an Islamically ethical and appropriate manner.

3. We call on imams, community leaders, teachers and Islamic institutes to prioritise discussions around spiritual abuse.

An educated community is a safer community. Discussions about healthy dynamics and signs of abuse need to happen often—and long before a crisis strikes. We need to build a culture of safety by discussing abuse in our communities and how to ensure it is prevented. Leaders need to run regular programs about spiritual abuse and talk about it in *khutbahs* and *halaqas*.

Furthermore, when instances of abuse occur, these must be acknowledged and addressed publicly. Silence not only protects the abuser, but also fails to offer justice and support to the victim. We will be accountable if we are silent. Discussions should take place within institutions between all the concerned parties and must directly address the *dhulm* (oppression) and sinfulness of the crime.

In addition to internal discussions, written communication to the community affected, together with communal addresses, needs to take place. The focus must remain on the incident, in order to create awareness and protect victims and potential victims, rather than shifting blame with distracting discussions on gender wars and feminism.

Additionally, leaders should not ignore behaviors that do not fall under criminality, but are Islamically unlawful. These often involve exploitation of a position of power, such as secret marriages,¹⁷ pressuring minors into marriage (in countries or states where there are no laws against minors marrying), taking advantage of convert women by not safeguarding their Islamic rights, and exploiting one's position as spiritual leader/counselor to gain personal access to vulnerable women.

4. We call on imams, community leaders, teachers, and Islamic institutes to establish structures that support victims and survivors.

Too many survivors of abuse are ashamed to seek help because of the pervasive culture of victim-blaming. This must change. Community leaders must model trust in and compassion for victims of abuse. In discussions of sexual abuse (especially child sexual abuse), suggestions of segregation or hijab as the solution to abuse must not be the sole focus.¹⁸ Instead, institutions must uphold the sunnah of holding perpetrators accountable.

Victim blaming in this and other ways can give rise to microaggressions and painful ostracisms at community gatherings, such as community members distancing themselves from victims of abuse or spreading gossip about them. The fault *always* lies with the perpetrators and never with the victim.

Demonstrating compassion for survivors includes constantly fighting against the culture of stigma and shame that surrounds abuse. Institutions should make explicitly clear that they prioritize safeguarding the community, and should ensure

¹⁷ [On Secret Marriages | Dr Shaykh Mohammad Akram Nadwi](#)

¹⁸ Hijab and segregation have a place in larger discussions of societal well-being and protective measures, but can never be seen as the sole solution in cases of abuse.

that the organization is a welcoming and safe space for all. Where funds are available, they should create supportive structures such as professional family counseling and support groups. Where institutions do not have the means, they should ensure that they have an internal safeguarding lead who can both support them and direct them to the relevant external support and help they need.¹⁹

Part of creating systems of support for vulnerable groups, particularly women, is ensuring that institutions employ women as resident scholars and teachers. Having women scholars as part of an institution's framework demonstrates the community's prioritization of women seeking knowledge in protected, safe spaces.

However, women can at times be those who are the abusers or who perpetuate abuse. Therefore, there is a need for systems of accountability in all institutions, single-sex and otherwise, without exception. This cannot be understated.

We must also repudiate the role that some women have played in enabling the protection of abusers and perpetrating the silence of their crimes. These cycles of abuse must end, with all believers, men and women, playing active roles in supporting survivors of abuse and building preventative systems.

5. We call on imams, community leaders, teachers and Islamic institutes to provide education on building God-centered, healthy family dynamics.

With the advent of technology and social media, it is very easy to come across many different messages in relation to sex education and healthy relationships. It is therefore imperative that we teach our children and communities collectively what Allah ﷻ intended for gender dynamics and marital intimacy, with real examples of healthy relationships. This also includes education on boundaries, autonomy, and personal safety for young children and others. Such knowledge will empower individuals to better understand how to maintain personal safety from a holistic Islamic lens. This guidance is found within the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ), along with research from health professionals.

¹⁹[Guide to support options for abuse](#)

Call to Action: The community's role in protecting vulnerable individuals from predators:

Congregation members and the wider Muslim community should make demands of their institutions and use their collective power for positive change. Engage with *masajid* and institutions that do have the correct procedures in place, and do not engage with, send your children to, or donate your funds to institutions that refuse to make the changes necessary to keep our communities safe. Where institutions have explicitly violated safeguarding procedures, such as concealing the abuse of a minor, it is both a legal requirement and an Islamic obligation to report these institutions to the authorities, as Muslims have an obligation to uphold the religious mandate of safety and security, according to the principle of the shari'ah:

*When an obligation cannot be fulfilled without a means, then the means become obligatory.*²⁰

Whilst some are pressured not to report to authorities, we must emphasize that there is nothing wrong with doing so, and in fact, it can be obligatory to do so. No Islamic legal system exists without a government that establishes courts with the power to arrest, investigate, prosecute, and sentence those accused of crimes. Since, as minorities in many countries, Muslims do not have this, we have to depend on the governing jurisdiction to perform these functions.²¹ Otherwise, we live in anarchy, which Islam opposes.

As discussed above, the primary responsibility of preventing abuse falls on community leaders and institutions. However, it is important to remember that even if the precautionary measures are taken by institutions, there still may be predators who escape notice and are in a position to exploit people. For this reason, community members can take additional protective measures:

- Avoid glorifying teachers as though they are infallible, as this paves the way for predatory teachers to gain an easy following.
- Refuse private meetings or conversations. There should be no *khalwah* (seclusion) with teachers or students of the opposite gender, and online *khalwah* (private messaging) is not excluded from this. Private conversations

²⁰ *Maa laa yatimm al-wajib illa bihi fa huwa wajib*

²¹ We are aware that our legal and political institutions are compromised by racism and Islamophobia as well as other issues, but given the lack of an Islamic ruling body or any other avenues of legal authority, we must recognize that we still have to rely on them for cases of abuse, just as we rely on them for other legal matters.

with a scholar of the opposite gender are never acceptable, and community members must report scholars who insist on such privacy.

- Prevent all young children from being in a state of *khalwah* with teachers.^{22 23}
- Vet the environments that children are sent to, and do not assume that children will be safe just because a place is a Muslim institution.
- Remember that a scholar or religious leader should never ask you to do anything that is haram.
- Recognise red flags of abuse and bring them to the attention of leaders, authorities, and the community where necessary (see next section for more details on this).
- Look for green flags of safe Islamic leadership, such as:
 - Students being encouraged to use critical thinking skills, and to question with *adab*.
 - Teachers being able to say, “I don’t know” and being open to feedback and pushback
 - Leaders having good *adab* with everyone, especially their own families.
 - Institutions being transparent about finances, rules, and boundaries..
 - Teachers maintaining boundaries, especially in interactions with the opposite gender and with children.
 - Leaders being willing to listen to and learn from critique from community members without reacting angrily or defensively.
 - Leaders being clear about the structures of accountability that they are held to.

Too many of our elders have been secretly abused in the past, were unable to seek help, and have developed maladaptive coping mechanisms, including emotional suppression, denial, or moving away from religious practices. And hearing about recent cases of child abuse can open up old wounds.²⁴ It is never too late to get help for past instances of spiritual abuse.

²² Imam an-Nawawi writes: Likewise, it is forbidden for a man to look at a beardless youth if he has a handsome appearance, whether he looks with passion or not, whether he is safe from temptation or he fears it. [Sharh al-Nawawī ‘alá Sahīh Muslim, 4:31 #338](#)

²³ Preventing *khalwah* can include keeping classroom doors open, using security cameras, and other methods.

²⁴ [Dear Resilient Soul... – A Message To Survivors Of Childhood Sexual Trauma](#)

Abuse and the Misconception of Concealing the Faults of Others or Backbiting

Islam emphasizes the inherent dignity of human beings, particularly Muslims. This is why gossiping and backbiting are forbidden, and concealing people's private sins that do not cause harm to others or the community at large is encouraged.²⁵ These are general guidelines and are not applicable to individuals committing harm against others, especially when concealing harm is going to encourage impunity and further perpetuate that harm. Rather, reporting and even publicizing may be encouraged and even mandatory, depending on the case.²⁶

Allah tells us in the Quran: **{Allah does not like the public mention of evil except by one who has been wronged...}** (4:148).

According to the *mufassirin*, this verse indicates that it is permissible for the one wronged to pray against the one who wronged him *and* report him publicly, as long as it does not entail lying.²⁷ Moreover, the wronged person is permitted to publicly speak of the harm and complain about the oppression, even saying to the people, "He is an oppressor."²⁸ Hence, whether one is obligated to conceal and advise privately on the one hand, or to report and/or speak about the sin or crime on the other, depends on the people harmed, the potential for future harm, and the consequences of leaving that sin/crime unaddressed. Muslims are obligated to protect, preserve, and safeguard the religion, people's rights, and the principle of justice.

Imam al-Nawawi stated that backbiting is permitted for a legitimate purpose, and one of these purposes is seeking counsel.²⁹ When one is seeking help in therapy and

²⁵ The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever conceals the fault of a Muslim in this world, Allah will conceal his faults in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah will help a person so long as he is helping his brother." (Muslim). The Prophet ﷺ also explained backbiting and slander for us, defining the former as, "Saying something about your brother that he dislikes." It was said, "What if what I say about my brother is true?" He said, "If what you say is true then you have backbited about him, and if it is not true, then you have slandered him." [Muslim]

²⁶ [Shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen emphasized](#) that, "Concealing the sin of a person may be an ordainment and praiseworthy, and it may be forbidden." He further explained that, "What is meant by concealment is concealing the fault, but concealment cannot be praiseworthy unless it serves an interest and does not lead to any negative consequences.

²⁷ [Tafir al-Sa'di](#), and Tahir bin Ashur, [al-Tahrir wal-Tanwir](#)

²⁸ Tahir bin Ashur, [al-Tahrir wal-Tanwir](#)

²⁹ Imam al-Nawawi cites seeking an answer from a Mufti. See: [Riyad al-Salihin](#); see also: ["Discussing Intimate Details in Therapy Sessions" \(Seekers Guidance\)](#)

needs to talk about the abuse to heal, there is a clear benefit. The therapeutic setting is a private one between client and counselor, and comes with legal obligations, including confidentiality. A therapist cannot disclose anything a client says except in limited circumstances as required by law. A client's purpose in engaging with a therapist is to seek healing, not to simply gossip aimlessly. Thus, it is not considered backbiting or slander for someone to discuss abuse or abusers in the context of therapy.

Similarly, seeking counsel from elders or friends would not constitute backbiting, as the intention is not to gossip but to help bring oneself out of a harmful situation. Wider conversations about abuse and how it can impact victims need to continue, as abuse grows in silence. Perpetrators use isolation as a method of control, and a victim often feels alone in what they are dealing with. This isolation, in addition to feelings of shame that may come with being a victim of abuse, makes it very difficult to recognize the abuse and seek help. The less that abuse is discussed, the easier it is for abusers to continue with their behaviors unchecked. Alongside abusers feeling emboldened by the silence, victims also self-blame in that kind of environment, believing that the abuse is their own fault, and people come to regard signs of abuse as none of their business. Speaking about abuse in community, in classes, and in families will allow more people to recognise signs of abuse and help to end the culture of shame and silence that allows it to continue harming individuals and communities.

The Islamic Obligation to Report Abusers

{You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly—if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do.} (Qur'an 4:135)

Imam al-Nawawi recommends that cases of harm and corruption be brought to the authorities, “because concealing [the abuser] would encourage him to cause more harm and corruption, violate the prohibitions, and embolden others to do the same as him.”³⁰ This highlights the imperative of reporting such behavior not only to

³⁰Imam al-Nawawi, [Sharh Sahih Muslim](#)

restrict direct harm to victims, but also to restrict perpetrators' access to and influence on vulnerable individuals. In some cases, making the abuser known to the community to protect people and to deter others is also crucial in preventing further harm.³¹ Whether the abuse should be made public knowledge depends on a range of factors and requires Muslim leadership to take this matter seriously in order to develop an understanding of when it is appropriate and necessary to divulge such information to the community.

It is an Islamic obligation for anyone who witnesses a criminal act or knows of a criminal act that took place (with evidence), to report it to the legal authorities of their region. Furthermore, it is NOT a sin for a Muslim to call the police on another Muslim if that person has committed crimes (including sexual abuse, domestic abuse, financial crimes, etc.). In non-Muslim countries, we already rely on the legal structures for every other aspect of our lives; we should not hold a double standard and only use these institutions when they benefit us personally, but rather, we must acknowledge and understand that in the absence of an Islamic legal authority, we are bound to turn to these institutions for *any* criminal matter, even if it is against other Muslims.

Call to Action:

We call on Muslim families to model healthy gender interactions and healthy families:

It is imperative that we model healthy gender interactions to the next generation of young Muslim men and women, and the best example of that begins within the family home. This includes respectful interactions between spouses, between each spouse and all children, and between wider family members. Modeled behaviors should provide healthy examples of respect for each other's views (even when not in agreement), conflict resolution skills, and healthy boundaries within families.

For single parent homes or in the absence of a healthy father figure, there needs to be a collective effort from mahram men to act as role models to young people whenever possible.

³¹ The Maliki scholar [Abu Abbas al-Qurtubi stated](#) about such a person that it would be obligatory to report them, punish them, and "make it public so that others like him will be deterred" citing the fact that refraining from doing so, among other things, may violate people's rights.

Where children may have been exposed to traumas, we need to consider what resources and assistance parents and caregivers may need to support that child, alongside professional consultation. Where children or adults experience mental health difficulties, rather than exclusion and ostracisation, there needs to be a collective effort to include them and provide safe spaces that are accessible, friendly and welcoming. By modelling these healthy behaviors within families, we can then extend them into our communities.

We call on Muslim men to inculcate and model *futuwwa* (chivalry) in the true Prophetic sense:

The Prophet ﷺ was the best example of kind, respectful, and honorable interactions with men, women, and children. We know that there are many incredible Muslim men in our communities who seek to fulfill the Sunnah of RasulAllah in all ways. We understand that as *qawwaamoon*, Muslim men have an important leadership role in our communities. Brave and compassionate Muslim men who embody the characteristics of the Prophet ﷺ will hold themselves and other men accountable.³² It takes a special courage to call out injustice, especially when it is family members, friends, or colleagues perpetrating the oppression.

Muslim men must also model healthy behavior for the upcoming generation of young men and women. Abuse does not happen in a vacuum, and is often repeated from generation to generation. Contrary to many assumptions however, men who were abused as children are not doomed to repeat the cycle. Both spiritual healing and external resources online and in-person are often successful at breaking these generational patterns.³³ We believe in the strength of Muslim men to do what is right for the Sake of Allah and to protect the Ummah, knowing that the leadership they

³² Narrated 'Aisha:

The Quraish people became very worried about the Makhzumiya lady who had committed theft. They said, "Nobody can speak (in favor of the lady) to Allah's Apostle and nobody dares do that except Usama who is the favorite of Allah's Apostle. " When Usama spoke to Allah's Apostle about that matter, Allah's Apostle said, "Do you intercede (with me) to violate one of the legal punishments of Allah?" Then he got up and addressed the people, saying, "O people! The nations before you went astray because if a noble person committed theft, they used to leave him, but if a weak person among them committed theft, they used to inflict the legal punishment on him. By Allah, if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad committed theft, Muhammad will cut off her hand!" (Sahih Bukhari, Volume 8, Book 81, Number 779)

³³ [Khalil Center](#), [Canadian Muslim Counseling](#), [Ruh Care](#), and other Muslim mental health organizations are all examples of accessible resources. Please research for similar resources in your own locale.

have been entrusted with is a serious responsibility about which they will be asked on the Day of Judgement.

We call on Muslim women to support vulnerable groups, particularly other women:

We must acknowledge the role that women have also played in enabling the protection of abusers and perpetrating the silence of their crimes; indeed, we must recognize that even women can be abusers. This cycle must end, with Muslim women playing an active role in not just supporting survivors of abuse, but being actively involved in building preventative systems. Make space for survivors and help build them up instead of tearing them down.

Muslim women should seek out female scholars, teachers, and students of knowledge to learn from. We need to build strong networks of Islamically educated mothers, aunties, sisters, daughters who can empower each other with sacred knowledge, as God intended through the example of the Mothers of The Believers (may Allah be pleased with them all). We must demonstrate the care and nurturing of the Ummahaat al-Mu'mineen by serving as a source of safety and strength, empathy and resources for both our communities in general and for victims if abuse should occur.

Conclusion

This paper is more than just a statement of condemnation; it is a call to action to community leaders and community members alike. Spiritual abuse in all its forms is a hidden disease in our Ummah—one that believing men and believing women alike have an obligation to root out. It is time for us to set up checks and balances in our community institutions, *masajid*, and schools to protect our most vulnerable community members. It is part and parcel of our religious obligation to help one another by ending oppression and to enjoin good and forbid evil:

Allah's Messenger ﷺ said, "Help your brother whether he is an oppressor or an oppressed," A man said, "O Allah's Messenger ﷺ! I will help him if he is oppressed, but if he is an oppressor, how shall I help him?" The Prophet ﷺ said, "By preventing him from oppressing (others), for that is how to help him."³⁴

³⁴ [Sahih al-Bukhari](#)

It is with this spirit of standing determinedly against oppression that this paper has been issued. Standing against spiritual abuse in all its forms is a collective responsibility of both community leaders and community members alike. Part of fulfilling the Prophetic commandment of preventing an oppressor from oppressing others is an imperative to address risk factors that contribute to creating perpetrators in the first place. This is in order to protect them from sin, from harm, from their own violence, and crucially, the abuse of others.

After outlining our motivations for this paper, we started by laying out a well-accepted definition of spiritual abuse. Thereafter, we emphasized the fallibility of scholars, explaining that they are not immune to perpetuating abuse. We identified red flags associated with abusers and listed demographics vulnerable to abuse. Most importantly, we dedicated a large proportion of this paper to a call to action for all members of the Muslim community, first and foremost to its leaders, thereafter the wider community, families, men, and women. Within this section, we discussed misconceptions related to concealing sins and the Islamic obligation to report abusers. We detailed concrete steps for all members of the Muslim community to take in order to prevent abuse.

This paper is only the first step in raising awareness about the seriousness of spiritual abuse and what meaningful action our community needs to take in order to effectively deal with this disease. We pray that everyone, men and women, leaders and community members, understands the seriousness of the matter at hand and realizes that it is our communal responsibility to urgently address these issues.

May Allah make us amongst those who are sincere in our work, who seek His Pleasure above all else, who uphold the obligations of enjoining good and forbidding evil, and who are a source of benefit and safety to our brothers and sisters in this Ummah. May Allah forgive us for our shortcomings, purify us, and accept this from us, paving the way to removing abuse in our Ummah.